

MARGARET CRUMPTON

American Multiethnic Writing from 1890-1918: Mary Antin, Zitkala-Sa, Sutton E. Griggs, and Sui Sin Far

(Under the Direction of JAMES NAGEL)

An unprecedented number of immigrants and people of color were being published between 1890 and 1918, but their contributions to American literature have yet to be fully explored. Until very recently, most works by these writers were overlooked in the scholarship on American Literary Realism. *American Multiethnic Writing from 1890-1918* posits that the reason they have existed on the periphery of studies in this era is that for generations scholars were unable to recognize ethnicity as one of the central themes of the age. This examination of the theme of ethnicity in the age of Realism considers the works of four writers who represent distinct responses to race relations in the United States. Mary Antin, a Jewish American who emigrated from Russia, constructs a heartfelt and unselfconscious narrative of assimilation in her autobiography *The Promised Land* (1912). Antin's contemporary, Zitkala-Sa, a Dakota Sioux, expresses a marked ambivalence to Americanization in a series of stories and personal essays that appeared in major periodicals between 1900 and 1902. In five novels published between 1899 and 1908, Sutton E. Griggs depicts a revolutionary racial cohesion, advocating social and political unity among black Americans so that they may enter into American society as a whole and unified culture. Sui Sin Far, a biracial writer whose father was British and whose mother was Chinese, portrays the possibilities of a multicultural world in which individuals can occupy any number of identity positions in her short story collection *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* (1912). This dissertation explores these works in their historical context to show how national attitudes and government policies, represented by

the nativist movement, the Dawes Act, the Chinese Exclusion Act, Jim Crow, and disfranchisement, influenced these writers and helped shape their texts.

INDEX WORDS: American Literature, American Realism, Multiethnic Literature, African-American Literature, Asian-American Literature, Jewish-American Literature, Native-American Literature, Mary Antin, Sutton E. Griggs, Sui Sin Far, Zitkala-Sa, Ethnicity, Nationality, Identity

AMERICAN MULTIETHNIC WRITING FROM 1890-1918:
MARY ANTIN, ZITKALA-SA, SUTTON E. GRIGGS, AND SUI SIN FAR

by

MARGARET CRUMPTON

B.A., The University of California at Berkeley, 1991

M.A., The University of Georgia, 1996

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2002

© 2002

Margaret Crumpton

All Rights Reserved

AMERICAN MULTETHNIC WRITING FROM 1890-1918: MARY ANTIN,
ZITKALA-SA, SUTTON E. GRIGGS, AND SUI SIN FAR

by

MARGARET CRUMPTON

Approved:

Major Professor: James Nagel

Committee: Hubert McAlexander
Rosemary Franklin
R. Baxter Miller
Douglas Anderson

Electronic Version Approval

Gordhan L. Patel
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
August 2002

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to James Nagel for his advice, guidance, and support. I continue to be inspired by his rigorous standards and his kind words. I would also like to thank my committee, Hubert McAlexander, R. Baxter Miller, Rosemary Franklin, and Doug Anderson, who have each had a hand in my growth as a scholar.

I was fortunate to have a network of support at the University of Georgia, and I am thankful to all who found the time to work with me. Special thanks to Katie Smith and everyone in the Office of Instructional Support and Development, Paul Quick and the members of our writing group, and to my professors in the Department of English, in particular my mentors Barbara McCaskill and the incomparable Judith Ortiz Cofer. I am also deeply indebted to the UGA Graduate School for granting me the Final Doctoral Year Assistantship, which gave me time to dedicate my full attention to this dissertation.

Though writing is often a solitary project, I am strengthened by the love and emotional support I receive from my friends and family. I am endlessly grateful to my parents, Mickey and Mimi Crumpton, for all they have done for me. I would also like to thank my sister, Claire, and her family, David, Malcolm, and Michael Patrick, as well as Chrissy Grul, Gerry Martin, George Flath, Tiffany, Kevin, Pam, Tobie, Mike, the Winter family, and everyone else who helped me have a life outside the world of academics. Most of all, I would like to express my profound gratitude to my husband, Jarrod Winter, whose patience, encouragement, and cooking kept me going when things got rough.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION: DIVERSITY IN THE AGE OF REALISM.....	1
2 MARY ANTIN AND ASSIMILATION	53
3 IDENTITY AND AMBIGUITY: THE STORIES AND ESSAYS OF ZITKALA-SA.....	93
4 RACE AND NATION IN THE NOVELS OF SUTTON E. GRIGGS	140
5 THE MULTICULTURAL PERSPECTIVE OF SUI SIN FAR	184
6 CONCLUSION: AMERICAN NARRATIVES	232
APPENDIX: SELECTED LIST OF REALIST TEXTS THAT ADDRESS ISSUES OF IDENTITY	273
LIST OF WORKS CITED	278

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

DIVERSITY IN THE AGE OF REALISM

An unprecedented number of works by immigrants and people of color were being published between 1890 and 1918, but their contributions to American literature began to be fully recognized only in the late twentieth century. Most of the scholarship on these writers tends to focus on their relationship to their particular ethnic literary traditions, and only a few critical works have attempted to view them in relationship to each other. Though they wrote out of their particular cultures, they are also connected to American Realism, which was the principal literary movement of the age. Influenced both by this tradition, which sought to portray the moral dilemmas of people's everyday lives, and by the social and political forces that were affecting their respective communities, many of these authors tended to concentrate on ideas of ethnicity, identity, and nationality, issues of central concern to Native Americans, African Americans, and immigrants living in the United States. Four themes are prevalent in much of their writing: assimilation, ambivalence, racial cohesion, and multiculturalism. Although these concepts were vital to American literature at the turn into the twentieth century, they have not been examined in any systematic way in modern scholarship.

Four writers who clearly embody these themes in their works are Mary Antin, a Jewish-American immigrant from Russia; Zitkala-Sa, a Dakota Sioux; Sutton E. Griggs, an African American from the South; and Sui Sin Far, a biracial Chinese American who lived on the west coast. Though these authors in no way cover all the groups writing in America between 1890 and 1918, they represent a significant cross-section of ethnicities and perspectives. The group consists of three women and one man. Two of the artists were born in America, and two were born elsewhere. Their literary production includes autobiography, short stories, essays, and novels. Mary Antin wrote of the Russia of her early youth and of her experiences in Boston, where her family eventually settled after immigrating to America. Zitkala-Sa was born on the Yankton Reservation in South Dakota and wrote narratives that were set there and in boarding schools in Indiana and Pennsylvania. Sutton E. Griggs placed his novels primarily in the South, and Sui Sin Far's short stories most often depict the Chinatowns of the west coast. What unites these writers is their literary focus on how immigrants and people of color situate themselves in the American landscape.

The theme of assimilation has to do with the idea that there was an American model and that immigrants and native-born people of color could become American by conforming to this type. Sidonie Smith sees this proposal as deriving from the expectations of mainstream America: "The metaphor through which the country understood the process by which diverse inhabitants became a part of the corporate 'nation' called America was the metaphor of the 'melting pot' and its desired effect was 'assimilation.' To be truly American one had to assimilate by becoming the normative American subject, adopting the values, behaviors, dress, and point of view of the Anglo-

American middle-class and shedding differences of language, outlook dress, demeanor.”¹

Mary Antin, in her autobiography *The Promised Land*, interprets the American character to be hard-working, patriotic, and democratic, and in the course of her narrative demonstrates how she, and by association other immigrants, could embody these ideals through the process of Americanization.²

Another dimension of the mainstream conception of American identity that was problematic for many ethnic Americans was that it was inherently white. This perception complicates the quest for national identity in the works of many writers of color. Some express a sense of reluctance to sacrifice cultural particularity to conform to an American identity when the act of conforming was no guarantee that others would accept that construction. Sutton E. Griggs implies in his novels that the best way for black citizens to gain acceptance into American society is by racial cohesion. At the time, the only means for African Americans to assimilate was to pass as white, which meant the estrangement of those who make that decision from their community. Griggs’s novels suggest that in order for his race to enter into America as whole individuals and as an intact culture, they had to enter as a unified body. He depicts a dual affiliation that encompasses complete devotion to one’s race and unwavering insistence on American citizenship. Racial cohesion involves the conscious desire to claim allegiance to both race and nation without sacrificing one for the other.

Whereas Griggs depicts the desire of his African American characters for full acceptance into American life, Zitkala-Sa is wary of a nation that has never respected the rights and cultures of Native American peoples. In her autobiographical essays, she shows how, even as she becomes adept at the language and customs of American society,

her disdain for what she perceives to be white Christian values prevents her from claiming an American identity. The ambivalence of Zitkala-Sa is accentuated by her belief that, due to her education, that she can no longer claim her Indian identity because she was removed physically, and to some degree culturally, from her native society. Ambivalence and ambiguity signify an inability to claim either an inherited or an American identity. Multiculturalism, on the other hand, is the state by which the individual can selectively incorporate both an ethnic and national identity based on personal choice. In the short stories of Sui Sin Far, this concept is represented by Chinese, white, and biracial individuals who choose their own destinies, thereby creating a new America (at least in fiction) where individuality is not based on proscribed cultural or societal strictures.

Recent books that have examined the diversity of writers at the turn into the twentieth century have helped shape the understanding of ethnic-American texts in this era. Three excellent works that come to mind are *Conflicting Stories: American Women Writers at the Turn into the Twentieth Century* by Elizabeth Ammons, *American Realism and the Canon*, edited by Tom Quirk and Gary Scharnhorst, and *Tricksterism in Turn-of-the-Century American Literature*, edited by Elizabeth Ammons and Annette White-Parks.³ In *Conflicting Stories*, Ammons examines the implications of women's literature of the period, and in the process she reveals that diversity was one of the defining factors of this generation of writers. *American Realism and the Canon* is an important collection of essays that consider what American literary studies of this era comes to look like when women and writers of color are included. The emphasis is on how authors coming out of different cultural traditions were able to utilize the tenets of Realism to tell their stories.

Finally, each of the essays in *Tricksterism* explores this trope in the writings of authors from different ethnic backgrounds, revealing a common and unifying theme that can be traced through the works of a wide variety of writers. All of these books do a good work and have expanded the understanding of the era. The life and works of Sui Sin Far are examined in depth in all three of these studies, while Zitkala-Sa is covered in *Tricksterism* and *Realism*. Antin is mentioned in passing in two of these texts, and Griggs is not mentioned at all. Griggs gets his due, however, in books that deal specifically with African-American writing at the time, including *The “Hindered Hand”*: *Cultural Implications of Early African-American Fiction* by Arlene A. Elder and *Black American Writing from the Nadir* by Dickson D. Bruce, Jr.⁴

Another way to group this generation of writers is through their common focus on issues of ethnicity and nationality, which were explored through the themes of acculturation, ambiguity, racial unity, and diversity. As each of these concepts is found in the works of writers from different backgrounds, these methods of representing American citizenship were not culturally specific. That is, writers coming out of different traditions did not necessarily choose one depiction over another. Therefore, the works of Antin, Sui Sin Far, Griggs, and Zitkala-Sa are emblematic of specific ways of dramatizing cross-cultural experience in the United States; they are *not* representative of the respective groups to which the authors belonged. For example, Mary Antin, who is a Jewish American, wrote *The Promised Land*, which is a forthrightly assimilationist book. It does not follow, however, that acculturation is the preferred mode of other Jewish American authors or that writers of other ethnicities do not favor this model. In 1891, S. Alice Callahan, a Muscogee Indian, published *Wynema: A Child of the Forest* in which an

American Indian girl, after receiving a western education, acculturates easily into the white family with whom she goes to live.⁵ Similarly, many of the novels of Charles W. Chesnutt tend toward acculturation as his narratives demonstrate that there is little difference between black and white Americans except the arbitrary “color line.” On the other hand, the most of the stories by Jewish-American writer Abraham Cahan register a distrust of the Americanizing process. In tone and theme Cahan’s works are much more closely aligned with Zitkala-Sa; both express profound ambivalence about dual cultural heritage.

Social cohesion can be found in some very different texts, including *Observations by Mr. Dooley* (1902), by Irish-American satirist Finley Peter Dunne, which portrays individuals proud of their Irish heritage and comfortable in their American identities.⁶ The poems by various unnamed authors in *Songs from Gold Mountain* (1911) give voice to a strong allegiance among the Chinese in San Francisco that serves as a means of power and protection in the often-hostile American society.⁷ Several short story writers of the age created multicultural collections by including stories that depicted the diversity of America’s growing cities. Among these were Mary Kelly, a New York teacher who wrote intimate sketches of life in a racially mixed city school in *Little Citizens* (1904) and *Little Aliens* (1910).⁸ Jacob Riis, a Danish immigrant famous for his exposé of inner city slums, treats inhabitants of New York neighborhoods with great sympathy in *Out of Mulberry Street* (1897), and the tales of African-American writer Alice Dunbar-Nelson explore the various intersections of culture in New Orleans in *The Goodness of St. Rocque and Other Stories* (1899).⁹ The themes of acculturation, ambiguity, dual

citizenship, and diversity are representative of particular outlooks or solutions to social questions.

Though each of these writers can be considered under the rubric of American Realism, and, more specifically, ethnic-American literature, each is also a part of other literary traditions. Zitkala-Sa, as a Dakota Sioux, is an important link in the complex history of American-Indian literature. Each Indian nation has an oral heritage that reaches back thousands of years. In the nineteenth century, Native Americans began to publish biographies and histories of their people in English. This body of literature would blossom at the turn of the twentieth century as the first generation to attend Dawes Era boarding schools began to write their stories. Paula Gunn Allen explains that Native-American literature now encompasses two divisions: the traditional, which consists of ceremonial and popular oral discourse, and the contemporary, which includes the written western genres of fiction, poetry, autobiography, and also “as-told-to narratives and mixed genre works.”¹⁰ Far from being separate, these two forms, traditional oral and contemporary written, influence each other in intriguing ways. As Allen explains, “the whole body of American Indian literature, from its traditional, ceremonial aspects to its formal literary aspects, forms a field, or, we might say, a hoop dance, and as such is a dynamic, vital whole whose different expressions refer to a tradition that is unified and coherent on its own terms.”¹¹ This connection and interchange is apparent in the literary production of Zitkala-Sa. Not only did she publish a collection of Dakota legends, but her fiction and her autobiographical writing is also informed by the myths, stories, and spiritual worldview of her tribe. The diverse works of Zitkala-Sa and other American Indians who were publishing at this time served to stem the tide of racist, stereotypical, or

romantic depictions that shrouded the reality of Indian existence. Such writers as S. Alice Callahan, Alexander Posey, John Oskison, Charles Eastman, and Zitkala-Sa were able to negotiate their own space in American letters and to convey their personal and communal visions by writing within literary conventions popular at the time. Their works also indicate an attempt to make room for a new American-Indian identity next to, but not in place of, traditional tribal existence. Gerald Vizenor views this generation of writers, the first to graduate from Dawes Era boarding schools, as being at the forefront of a new age of Indian literary thought and achievement. In some cases their ambivalent positionality also marks the beginning of a complicated negotiation not only with mainstream America but also with the traditional cultures with which they were affiliated.

As with the American-Indian tradition, black-American literature comes out of a culture rich in storytelling. Scholars from W. E. B. Du Bois to Eric Sundquist have been able to detect an African presence in black-American folklore and song. The oral tradition was particularly strong because of laws in the ante-bellum South that prevented slaves from learning to read or write. Despite these prohibitions, the history of African-American literature written in English reaches back to colonial times and the poems of Phillis Wheatley. The fight for abolition before the Civil War brought about a surge of slave narratives and novels that developed themes and styles that would influence generations of writers. The turn of the twentieth century marks the next important era when a group of writers, including Charles W. Chesnutt, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Frances E. W. Harper, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Alice Dunbar-Nelson, wrote fiction, poetry, and essays that would find their way into the mainstream of America society. No less

important than these, though often overlooked by critics, was the novelist Sutton E. Griggs, who wrote about and for African Americans in the South.

Jewish-American literature written in English had its beginnings in the early nineteenth century with the plays of Mordecai Manuel Noah and the poetry of Penina Moïse. Others were to follow, but Jewish literary production was sparse until the immense immigration of Eastern European Jews at the end of the nineteenth century brought with it an electric cultural and intellectual climate that would foster the advent of “a coherent sense of Jewish American literature in English.”¹² The most important of those who wrote in English were Mary Antin and Abraham Cahan, but their writing existed alongside American poetry and plays being written in Yiddish that probably had more influence in the urban Jewish communities. Cahan, as editor of the Yiddish newspaper the *Jewish Daily Forward* (*Foverts*), was part of this trend; Antin was not. Nevertheless, the fact that stories from the Jewish religious tradition informed Antin’s work and her perception of America is evident in the title of her autobiography, *The Promised Land*. Antin and her generation, while expressing the condition of being Jewish in America, are also a part of another important literary tradition, the writing of Jews in the Diaspora, a trans-national tradition that Ruth R. Wisse delineates in *The Modern Jewish Canon: A Journey Through Language and Culture*.¹³

Like the Eastern European Jews on the east coast, Chinese immigrants on the west coast were quick to establish theatres and newspapers in their native language. Poetry, which was perhaps the most respected literary genre in China, continued to be written by immigrants, and, in fact, several hundred poems were collected in *Jinshan ge ji* (*Songs of Gold Mountain*), published in San Francisco in 1911.¹⁴ These poems offer a fascinating

look into the lives and aesthetics of the community. The tradition of Chinese American writing in English, however, probably begins with the autobiography *When I Was a Boy in China* (1887) by Lee Yan Phou.¹⁵ The short stories of Sui Sin Far mark the advent of Asian American fiction. She is a significant figure because she was the first to write in English about Chinese characters living in the United States. Sui Sin Far was able to represent the residents of North American Chinatowns in her stories because of her Asian heritage and western education. She came to America in a unique position in that she had intimate knowledge of Chinese life and culture but was also familiar with European forms and could write sophisticated prose in English. Though Sui Sin Far was raised in England and Canada, she learned Chinese stories, legends, and songs from her mother. These elements appear in her fiction and so connect her stories, albeit in a very tenuous way, to the oral tradition of mainland China.

Not only are these four writers important to their respective ethnic literary traditions, they are also part of an exciting time in American literary history in general. After the Civil War, people across America became interested in discovering who was living within their borders, which resulted in the rising popularity of Local Color and Regionalist writing. This fascination with the different regions of the country and the people who lived there, their customs, language, and history, eventually translated into a desire to know the African American and Native American, who had been there since before the nation was founded, and curiosity about the new immigrants coming to America. This curiosity is reflected in the unprecedented number of magazine articles and book publications by ethnic-Americans at the turn into the twentieth century. This increasing interest in works by immigrants and people of color coincided with a rise in

literacy that fueled the demand for reading materials. Not only were more books finding their way to print, but magazine publications grew at an enormous rate at the end of the nineteenth century. At the close of the Civil War, the number of magazines published in America numbered in the hundreds; by 1900 they numbered in the thousands. The cultural standard-bearers to which the educated classes subscribed, such as the *Atlantic* and *Harper's*, remained vital, but new magazines that relied on newsstand sales, such as *McClure's* and *The Ladies Home Journal*, served to diversify the types of writings that were being published. The interest directed at the non-traditional writer, combined with new publishing opportunities, opened the door for ethnic-American writing to enter into the public discourse as never before.

Though these writers were something new on the literary landscape, the kinds of stories that many of them wanted to tell were not out of synch with the dominant literary movement of the day, American Realism. Elizabeth Ammons describes this as “a time in American literary history especially distinguished by three things: topical issues frequently occupied a central position in the literature; formal experimentation was a primary focus for many writers; and women and black men can be seen as the majority, not the minority, of the most important authors.”¹⁶ Writers of American Realism, ethnic and white, male and female, wrote of the tensions of American society through the lens of individual characters and in the language of their everyday lives. In this sense Antin, Zitkala-Sa, Sutton E. Griggs, and Sui Sin Far can be connected to the tradition of American Realism, but a more comprehensive look at the individual writers reveals that each was also influenced by other literary conventions.

Even as American letters moved towards Realism, the reading public maintained the Victorian taste for the sentimental, the melodramatic, and the sensational.

Sentimental novels were written to induce emotions in the reader, often to lead them to a new way of thinking or to a specific plan of action. Melodrama relied on easily identifiable stock characters to represent good and evil, exciting physical scenarios, and the assurance that justice would be served in the end. Sensational novels were always based on a mystery, often having to do with family relationships. These Victorian modes of narrative were used very effectively in the abolitionist texts written by both black and white authors, such as Harriet Beecher Stowe and William Wells Brown, and so they were methods that became a part of the African-American literary tradition. It is little wonder, then, that Sutton E. Griggs utilized them: because he was trying to reach a wide cross-section of people, not the Eastern literary elite, it makes sense that he would gravitate towards popular and familiar forms. These conventions also served their purpose in his writing because they work to elicit emotional responses from the reader to sympathize with African Americans faced with injustice and violence, to give a clear moral picture of race relations in the country, and to highlight the connection between white and black America as issues of parentage and color often point to the familial relationship between the races. The Victorian use of sentimentalism can be found to some degree in all four writers. Most of their writings had a social dimension and in some sense a political purpose: they were each writing, in part, to educate the reading public about the reality of their respective ethnic groups and to garner support for the rights of those people. The history of protest literature in the nineteenth century had shown that sentimental forms were effective; if writers could gain sympathy for the

characters in their books, they could perhaps gain sympathy for the groups that those characters represented.

Another American tradition comes into play in *The Promised Land*. In her autobiography, Mary Antin reaches back to the Romantic period of the mid-nineteenth century, and in particular to Transcendentalism, to define her place in the world. According to James Nagel, the literature of this era was “based on a set of philosophic assumptions that regarded reality as fundamentally spiritual in nature” and that Transcendentalism “rested on the notion that physical facts were merely an indication of the more important spiritual facts behind them.”¹⁷ Antin’s Transcendentalism lays claim to both an American literary heritage and a form of spirituality that reiterates the universal rights that are at the heart of democracy:

If I had died before my first breath, my history would still be worth recording. For before I could lie on my mother’s breast, the earth had to be prepared, and the stars had to take their places; a million races had to die, testing the laws of life; and a boy and girl had to be bound for life to watch together for my coming. I was millions of years away, and I came through the seas of chance, over the fiery mountains of law, by the zigzag path of human possibility. . . . Such creatures of accident are we, liable to a thousand deaths before we are born. But once we are here, we may create our own world if we choose. Since I stood on my own feet, I have never met my master. . . . However I came here, it is mine to be.¹⁸

This meditation reflects the organic style of Henry David Thoreau, the cosmic citizenship of Walt Whitman, and the self-reliance of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Antin uses such

Transcendental passages sparingly but to great effect. In this example she portrays her own creation as emblematic in the divinity of each individual. She states that her right to be, and to be whatever she chooses, shall not be determined by anyone but herself. This confidence becomes crucial later in the book when what she decides to be is an American citizen.

The muckraking tradition that grew out of big city newsrooms in the late 1890s and early 1900s may have influenced Zitkala-Sa, Sutton E. Griggs, and Sui Sin Far, who worked as a journalist. According to John T. Flynn, “the eruption of denunciatory writing constituted a phenomenon in the life of the time and exercised a powerful effect on the public mood.”¹⁹ Though these muckraking writers, such as Jacob Riis, Ida M. Tarbell, and Upton Sinclair, were exploring the dynamics of wealth and labor, their methods of exposing corrupt economic systems work with the examination of institutional racism as well. The writers who took up the cause of their respective ethnic groups may have hoped that exposing the abuses Indian children suffer in federal boarding schools, the damage that Southern disfranchisement causes to black individuals and communities, or the biased immigration laws targeted at the Chinese would be the first step in national campaigns to enact change.

The most important movement of the day, however, was American Literary Realism. This movement itself was an innovation, a shift away from the highly symbolic and generic representations of life that marked the writings of a generation before, as well as a protest against the genteel, sentimental Victorian novels that were in vogue at the time. Mark Twain, Mary Wilkins Freeman, Henry James, Sarah Orne Jewett, William Dean Howells, and others who were writing novels and short stories inhabited by

convincing characters speaking natural language faced with moral dilemmas in their everyday lives were creating something new and powerful. Influenced as they were by other literary methods, writers such as Antin, Zitkala-Sa, Griggs, and Sui Sin Far did not always adhere as strictly as their contemporaries to the tenets of Realism. Still, instead of placing them outside the tradition of American Literary Realism, it may be more accurate to describe them as expanding the movement in different directions. Though they may employ different methods, Nagel said of other Realists in general could be said of these writers: “Their literature was fundamentally democratic, dealing with average characters in mundane situations, struggling with the social, racial, economic, and moral issues of terrestrial life.”²⁰ The writers who focused on the themes of ethnicity and identity in their texts comprise an important group within the larger paradigm of American Realism. In order to comprehend their commitment to social themes, it is necessary to understand the complicated and exciting age in which they wrote.

National political movements in the 1890s and the early twentieth century created a perception that average or working-class men and women were important, momentous, worth writing about. The early 1890s saw the rise of the Populist Party that gave voice to farmers, women, factory workers, and others who viewed themselves on the outside of national politics, which was perceived as the realm of educated Easterners. The mood of the Populists would again be felt in the early twentieth century when the Progressive movement, bolstered by Theodore Roosevelt’s “square deal” in 1910, incorporated the ideas of many reformers driven to improve the lives of workers, women, immigrants, and children. The power of the people was also evident in a series of major labor strikes from the 1890s through 1915 that were not always successful in themselves but which

eventually led to legislation to protect the rights of workers. The public was interested in the plight of the poor and working-class, which was being examined in newspapers and in books such as *How the Other Half Lives* (1890) by Jacob Riis.²¹ Americans were also fascinated by the rise to immense wealth by capitalists such as John D. Rockefeller, Andrew Carnegie, William Randolph Hearst, and J. P. Morgan. The fact that these figures both repelled and attracted the average reader is evident in the popularity of both the muckraking literature that sought to expose the corruption of such individuals and of the body of literature, represented best by the Horatio Alger novels, which advanced the notion that though pluck and luck any boy could aspire to such status. Realist and Naturalist writers of the day captured the national focus on the role of business and the conflict between the haves and have-nots in American life. Many books, including *Maggie, Girl of the Streets* (1893) by Stephen Crane, *Sister Carrie* (1900) by Theodore Dreiser, and *The Octopus* (1901) by Frank Norris, explored the centrality of economics in their age.²² The Realists who focused on issues of ethnicity also wrote of common characters who were outside the structures of power, but for them issues of race took precedence over issues of economics. The one writer who does address the plight of working-class characters, Sutton E. Griggs, often shows how bigotry limited African Americans in the workforce, as when a character is not allowed to join a labor union in *Overshadowed*. The events that influence or inform the works of these writers, however, are not primarily the battles between capital and labor but the struggles of their own respective ethnic groups.

The writings of Zitkala-Sa are inherently connected to the history of American-Indian peoples. Zitkala-Sa was born a Dakota Sioux on the Yankton Reservation in

South Dakota, and though this band never directly engaged in warfare against the United States, other Sioux, including those of the Dakota tribe, were participants in the last, and one of the bitterest, “Indian Wars” in American history. The Great Plains was one of the final areas on the continental United States to be settled by white Americans, and for this reason the conflict that began in 1862 and continued for nearly thirty years is still deeply rooted in American cultural memory. The attacks and counterattacks between Indians and whites on the Plains came to a head with the Battle of the Little Bighorn in 1876, the year that Zitkala-Sa was born. In this encounter a force of Sioux and Cheyenne warriors, led by Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull, killed General George Armstrong Custer and 225 of his men. The end of open warfare between the United States and Native Americans was the Massacre at Wounded Knee on the Pine Ridge Reservation in 1890. On that day, government troops, sent out to squelch the religious practice of the Ghost Dance among Plains Indians, murdered about 300 unarmed men, women, and children.

Perhaps even more devastating than the bloody conflicts on the Plains were the social and psychological changes that were affecting American Indians all over the country. In the early 1880s social reformers and government officials began to construct a policy that would profoundly shape the future of Native-American peoples. Claiming that reservations and tribal systems led to both savagery and dependence, “friends” of the Indian developed a comprehensive program that was intended to break up reservations, dissolve tribal loyalties, and indoctrinate Indians into the American way of life. The General Allotment Act of 1887, also called the Dawes Severalty Act after its designer Senator Henry Dawes, was the federal legislation around which this movement was founded. Under the Dawes Act, when a people on a reservation were considered

sufficiently civilized, each family would be allotted 160 acres of land and single adults would be allotted 80 acres of land. The idea was that individual ownership of property would encourage independence from the tribe. Lands that were not allotted were sold by the government to white settlers, whose close presence was supposed to further elevate American Indians. Even as this legislation was being enacted, there were some in Washington, including a minority report of the House of Indian Affairs Committee, who believed that the goal of acquiring Indian lands for white settlement was being hidden behind humanitarian rhetoric.²³ Despite these protests and the resistance of many Native Americans, the rush to sell off any unallotted land was swift, and many reservations were devastated. According to James Wilson, “in the first thirteen years of the Dawes Act alone, the government forced through 33,000 allotments and released some 28,500,000 acres of ‘surplus’ land.”²⁴ The Yankton Reservation, where Zitkala-Sa was born and raised, experienced an all too widespread fate. In a treaty made with the United States government in 1858, the Yankton Sioux agreed to cede over two million acres of their traditional lands on the condition that the remaining 435,000 acres be reserved for their use alone. The land, however, was allotted under the Dawes Act, and in 1895 the government opened up the reservation to homesteaders, who then took control of the majority of the reservation lands. Today the Yankton Reservation has less than 37,000 acres in trust.²⁵

The break up of the reservations was a crucial element in what Wilson calls “a breathtakingly ambitious experiment in social engineering.”²⁶ As part of this project, it was also national policy to Christianize the American Indians, and to this end reservations were divided up among various denominations that sent missionaries and clergy to

establish churches and schools. American Indians were discouraged from practicing their native religions, and in 1884 and 1904 religious crime codes were written making certain customs prohibited by law. The most effective means of Christianizing the Native-American population and disengaging them from their traditional life ways, however, was the system of boarding schools that removed Indian children from the influence of family and attempted to acculturate them into American society. The first of these was the Carlisle Indian School, which was founded by Captain Richard Henry Pratt in 1879. This school was run in a strict military style. Upon entering the institution, boys and girls were divested of their traditional clothing, their hair was cut, and they were forbidden from speaking their native languages. During the Dawes Era, numerous religious and government schools were established to educate and assimilate American- Indian children, and most were based on the Carlisle model. Over three hundred Indian schools were established by 1900, and about 18,000 children were boarding away from their families.²⁷ Zitkala-Sa was a student at one of these schools, White's Manual Institute in Indiana, which was run by Quakers. This institution was not as coercive or dogmatic as other Indian schools, but the demoralizing effects of Zitkala-Sa's experiences there are evident in her writings nonetheless.

In 1899, after over a decade of enforcing Dawes Era policies, some began to question if the harm done to Native Americans was not greater than the progress they had made. Henry Dawes himself responded to this criticism by claiming that America had only two choices with regard to the Indian: "Either he must be endured as a lawless savage, a constant menace to civilized life, or he must be fitted to become a part of that life and be absorbed into it."²⁸ Such rhetoric left little room for other alternatives that

would have been more respectful of Native American people and their cultures. The Dawes Era Indian boarding school system had both positive and negative results. The education of Indian children led to Native American doctors, educators, and government employees who came back to serve their communities. It also gave native peoples a powerful generation who could fight for their rights in English in the white world. However, the insensitivity of the boarding school system also left many psychologically scarred as everything they loved and believed in was devalued. Perhaps the most devastating policy of all, however, was the allotment that resulted in tremendous loss of land, for though many American Indians tribes have been able to preserve or recreate their traditional culture and community ties, most of the land that was lost during this period was never recovered.

The turn into the twentieth century was also a bleak time for most African Americans, especially those living in the South. The end of Reconstruction in 1877 signaled that the nation's sentiments had shifted. Where once Republican politicians strove to assure the rights of the freedmen, now the political focus was on reconciliation between the North and the South. Unfortunately for African Americans, the Southern states were increasingly trusted to work out race issues without intervention from the North or from the federal government. The Civil Rights Act of 1875, based on the Fourteenth Amendment, had forbidden the exclusion of African Americans from hotels, railroads, and other accommodations, but after Reconstruction, establishments that served the public began to systematically deny service to blacks or to segregate them from white customers. The provisions of the Civil Rights Act were successfully challenged several times, and in 1883 the Supreme Court finally invalidated the Act altogether by reasoning

that the Fourteenth Amendment declared that no *State* “shall make or enforce any laws which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States” or “deprive any person of life, liberty or property.” The Amendment, they noted, had nothing to say about *individuals* invading the rights of citizens. The Court, subsequently, came to the same conclusion regarding voting rights, thereby limiting the power of the Fifteenth Amendment. The Justices decided that states could not make laws restricting voting rights but that there was nothing that could be done if individuals prevented blacks from voting. It was up to the states themselves to enact laws preventing such abuses. The states, of course, had other things in mind. As Rayford W. Logan notes, the nullification of the 1875 Civil Rights Act “virtually assured the subsequent development of Jim Crow laws and other forms of race discrimination and the passivity of the Federal government in the face of this discrimination.”²⁹ The South, assured by the Supreme Court that the curtailing of both voting rights and “social” rights was acceptable, began to enact laws to disfranchise and segregate black citizens in direct violation of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. By 1900 segregation was a way of life, and virtually every state in the South had added poll taxes, literacy tests, property requirements, or grandfather clauses as amendments to their constitutions, which effectively denied suffrage to black citizens.

In terms of federal legislation, the landmark case of the era was *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896. In this case, an African-American man, Homer Plessy, was denied a seat in a white railroad car in Louisiana, where racial segregation on public transportation was required by law. Plessy sued the state of Louisiana, claiming that, by definition, mandatory segregation was discriminatory and hence prohibited under the Fourteenth

Amendment. In a stunning decision that would have repercussions for decades to come, the Supreme Court stated that it was fair for Louisiana to make laws according to their “established usages, customs, and traditions,” and, moreover, that segregation does not imply that either race is superior or inferior, but if blacks discern that they are separated because whites feel they are inferior, it is “solely because the colored race chooses to put that construction on it.”³⁰ Ultimately, the Court concluded, it is not the role of legislation to solve society’s ills. Justice Harlan, in his dissenting opinion, sharply cut through the disinterested naiveté expressed in the decision. Harlan plainly stated that he believed the Louisiana law to be unconstitutional and predicted that the Court’s decision would have long-lasting negative effects: “What can more certainly arouse race hate, what more certainly create and perpetuate a feeling of distrust between these races, than state enactments, which, in fact, proceed on the ground that colored citizens are so inferior and degraded that they cannot be allowed to sit in public coaches occupied by white citizens? That, as all will admit, is the real meaning of such legislation as was enacted in Louisiana.”³¹ This court sanctioned prejudice seemed to authorize both institutional and individual acts of cruelty. At the turn into the twentieth century, African Americans in the South were limited not only politically and socially, they were also subject to physical violence. It has been estimated that around one hundred lynchings a year occurred in the South during this period.³²

These conditions led Logan to label this era “the nadir” of African American life and history,³³ but despite the oppression black Americans faced, often in the North as well as the South, the age was not without its achievements. Schools that had been established during Reconstruction and institutes of higher learning such as the Tuskegee

Institute, which was founded in 1881 by Booker T. Washington, continued their mission to educate black Southerners. Statistics show that literacy rates of African Americans, which stood at 18.6% in 1870, rose to 42.9% in 1890.³⁴ The numbers of black professionals also rose during that era, which meant more doctors, teachers, and lawyers to serve their communities. Finally, writers such as Frances E. W. Harper, Charles W. Chesnutt, Paul Laurence Dunbar, and Sutton E. Griggs were publishing works that shed new light on African-American life and that ushered in a new era of black literary achievement.

Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe were facing their own challenges at the turn into the twentieth century. From 1890 to 1915, over ten million immigrants from southern and eastern Europe came to the United States; about one third of them were Jewish. Most came because America seemed to offer more opportunity and freedom than was available to them in their native countries. In 1881, Czar Alexander of Russia severely restricted the lives of Jewish citizens by levying discriminatory taxes, limiting their access to education, and restricting the types of jobs they could take and where they could live. The May Laws of 1882 drove Jews from the countryside and, later, in 1891, from Moscow and other Russian cities. The year 1881 also marked the beginning of government authorized pogroms against Jewish settlements throughout the Pale. Jewish residents in Austria-Hungary and Romania were not victims of the same type of organized violence as those in Russia, but they were subjected to deep-rooted anti-Semitism and similar restrictions on their livelihood. These conditions prompted the mass migration of Eastern European Jews who started to come to America in great numbers in the summer of 1881. Most of these immigrants settled in the big cities in the

Eastern United States, creating ethnic enclaves and finding work in factories, doing piecework for the garment industries, or selling goods and services in their neighborhoods. In 1905, after the failure of the first Russian Revolution, an increasing number of political activists, professionals, and intellectuals also began to arrive.

Some old stock Americans were unsettled by this influx of “new immigrants,” that is, newcomers from southern and eastern Europe, because of their great numbers and because they represented cultures unfamiliar to American society. Nativist attitudes began being expressed in the media, and in 1894 Henry Cabot Lodge and other young Boston Brahmins founded the Immigration Restriction League. This small but socially influential group argued that America should retain the white, Anglo-Protestant characteristics of its Revolutionary forbearers, that the descendants of these “real” Americans were losing the majority in the country due to immigration, and that the new arrivals (Italians, Jews, and Slavs) were mentally, socially, and culturally inferior and would therefore lead to the corruption of the nation.³⁵ Others, including those in government, shared the views of the Immigration Restriction League. Between 1894 and 1917 Congress passed four bills that would have subjected new arrivals to literacy tests before being allowed to enter the country. This legislation was vetoed by four presidents: Grover Cleveland, Woodrow Wilson, William Howard Taft, and Theodore Roosevelt.

Though Jewish immigrants were not welcomed by many Americans, there were some who took up their cause and attempted to ease their transition into the new culture. Jewish-American descendants of an earlier migration from Germany, who were more established in American society, set up associations to tend to the needs of the wave of Russian Jews. They created organizations that offered free medical care, relief services,

and classes to teach English and to prepare immigrants for citizenship. These established Jewish Americans were working both to give much needed aid to the newcomers and also to Americanize them so that others in society would not develop the negative impression that Jewish people were altogether alien and inassimilable. These early efforts were followed by the work of progressive reformers who sought to improve the lot of inner-city immigrants through a variety of programs. The education of their children became a matter of public policy and, as Glenn C. Altschuler notes, “most Americans insisted that immigrant pupils be taught the English language, Protestant prayers, and the catechism” in order to “ensure the transmission of American values.”³⁶ Assimilation became a priority in the national education policy, but another movement led to the discovery by some white Americans that close association with their international neighbors could be a mutually enriching experience.

Starting with Hull House, founded by Jane Addams in Chicago in 1889, the settlement house movement spread to big cities with large immigrant populations throughout the Eastern United States. These institutions were created not just to give aid to individuals but to create a sense of community and to offer classes and cultural experiences that would enrich the lives of the people they served. Many also came to support the rights of workers and became forums for political debate. The majority of workers in settlement houses were young, college-educated, white women who were able to move beyond their heretofore-limited spheres through social work. While it is true that these workers tended to impose their middle-class American values and expectations on the people they served, many, such as Jane Addams (who won a Nobel Peace Prize in 1931), learned to respect the cultures of their new associates. Though anti-Semitism was

always present in America at this time, through the support of their families, communities, teachers, and social workers, many children of inner-city immigrants were able to rise above difficult conditions and eventually found success in business and in the professions. According to Arthur Hertzberg, “by 1910 Jews were already roughly one-quarter of all the students in American medical schools,” and a great many young Jewish women were graduating with teaching degrees from college.³⁷ While those fearful of the new arrivals continued to defame their character and fight for a national closed-door policy, pro-immigration groups began to form, such as the multiethnic National Immigration League in 1906, and Mary Antin and other public figures began to speak out for the cause.

At about the same time that the Eastern European Jews began to immigrate to the United States in great numbers, the Chinese population in America was beginning to decline. This was because of federal legislation that banned the entry of all laborers. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 virtually halted a wave of immigration to the west coast of the United States that had been going on for over thirty years. In 1849, residents in Guangdong, in the southeast region of the country on the South China Sea, began to hear about the Gold Rush in northern California. Several hundred young men left that year to seek their fortune, and in the decades to come several thousand more would follow. As early as 1851, the Chinese in America had developed a highly organized society, setting up associations, known as tongs, which were alliances based on family and regional connections. These organizations were created as social and political entities that were meant to aid and protect the Chinese in an often-hostile environment, and the first were based in San Francisco’s Chinatown. The tongs also helped other Chinese nationals gain

passage to America. Because of this network, most Chinese immigrants came from just two regions on the Pearl Delta River, the Saamyup and the Seiyup. According to Marlon K. Hom, “Saamyup natives in America often engaged in mercantile and other business trades; Seiyup natives, mainly laborers, accounted for seventy percent of the total Chinese population in the United States.”³⁸ Many of these workers came because they were unable to make a living in China due to a combination of conditions that was making farming a losing proposition in the delta area. Ronald Takaki states that, “forced to pay large indemnities to Western imperialist powers, the Qing government imposed high taxes on peasant farmers; unable to pay these taxes, many of them lost their lands.”³⁹ Violent rebellions over fertile lands, dense population in some areas, and a massive flood in the delta in 1847 also affected peasants. These conditions, and the poverty they produced, led many to head for *Gam Saan*, or “Gold Mountain,” as California, and by extension, America was called.

In the 1850s most Chinese Americans worked in the gold fields of California, and by the mid 1860s the majority were building the transcontinental railroad, which was completed in 1869. All the while Chinatowns in the West grew as stores and service enterprises catering to the laborers were established. Though some Chinese in America prospered and many were able to support families back home with their wages, it was not an easy life. The United States was quick to establish double standards in points of law between the Chinese and white settlers in California. Some of the legislation targeting the Chinese in the West was based on a federal law, enacted in 1790, which stated that only “white” persons were eligible to become naturalized citizens. For example, in 1852 the California legislature established a Foreign Miner’s Tax that extracted a monthly fee

of three dollars from any foreign miner who was not seeking citizenship. As the Chinese in California were not able to become citizens, they were the main targets of this tax. In 1855 a San Francisco resident, Chan Yong, applied for citizenship but was denied based on the 1790 law. This bias reflects the fact that the conception of what constitutes an American was not broad enough to encompass Asian residents. There was a definite nativist attitude in California in relation to the Chinese during the Gold Rush, but their presence was more than welcome by the capitalists of the Central Pacific Railroad. However, in the 1870s, when this project was complete, there was an intense backlash against their presence in the west, which led to the 1882 Exclusion Act.⁴⁰

Despite their precarious position as residents in America ineligible for citizenship, the Chinese often worked together to protect the rights to which they were entitled. The Chinese Six Companies, an association of tongs in San Francisco, lobbied the Chinese and U.S. governments to include a clause in the Burlingame Treaty of 1868 protecting the rights of foreign residents to do business in America. The rights of non-citizens to do business, to travel, and to work in the United States was also assured by the Civil Rights Act of 1870. In 1886, in the case of *Yick Wo v. Hopkins*, a group of Chinese laundry workers in San Francisco successfully fought the discriminatory application of a city ordinance all the way to the Supreme Court, and they won. The Court ruled that the law, which required a permit to run a laundry in a wooden structure, was not in itself unfair, but the fact that the Board of Supervisors in San Francisco gave permits to eighty white applicants and denied them to two hundred Chinese applicants was blatantly biased and unjust.

Despite these victories in the world of commerce, Chinese Americans received little protection under the law when it came to their personal safety. Violent attacks on Chinese individuals and groups were common in the west, and perpetrators literally got away with murder time and again as crimes went unpunished. Andrew Gyrorecites a litany of riots against immigrants that left literally dozens dead, the most violent of which was the massacre of twenty-eight men in Rock Springs, Wyoming in 1885.⁴¹ In addition to these physical attacks, Chinese Americans were also subject to racial slurs and unfair treatment as they went among white Americans. It is little wonder that they sought protection in numbers in Chinatowns across the West. In certain extreme cases, as in Pendleton, Oregon, they literally went underground, building barracks, laundries, and other establishments beneath the city streets in order to avoid harassment from white citizens.

These conditions prompted many to return to China, but many more stayed and established themselves as residents, if not citizens, of the American West. It is estimated that the Chinese population in America was about 132,000 in 1882, the year the Chinese Exclusion Act was established. Census numbers put the population at less than 90,000 in 1900 and at 71,531 in 1910.⁴² Though the population fell after exclusion, Chinese-American culture thrived. At the turn into the twentieth century some Chinese Americans were helping to develop California agriculture, and others were working in the fishing industry in such coastal towns as Monterey. However, most lived in Chinatowns in Western cities where they worked as merchants and in the service industries. These Chinatowns, and especially the one in San Francisco, were cultural hubs where social, business, and literary organizations flourished. Though Chinese women did not come to

America in great numbers, many came as merchant's wives and constituted a small but important element in Chinese-American life. The proof that family life was taking hold is evident in the fact that there were 4,000 Chinese-American schoolchildren in California in the early 1900s. These children, unlike their parents, were officially citizens of the nation.⁴³

The narratives of, Zitkala-Sa, Sutton E. Griggs, Mary Antin and Sui Sin Far are very much imbedded in the histories of their respective ethnic groups in America. Though each has other stories to tell, all comment in some way on the racial atmosphere and government policy of the day. Just as they are influenced by the political history of their age, their works are shaped by their personal histories. In their writing and in their lives, these four artists demonstrated steadfast loyalty to their people. All worked outside the realm of literature to advance the causes of their respective ethnic groups, and all but one eventually abandoned narrative writing altogether to fight their battles in the public sphere. All four were involved in the political and social debates of a multiethnic society, and while they eventually became known for their literary production, in their own time each was known, to a greater or lesser extent, for their contributions to their particular ethnic communities and to the discussion of racial relations in America. Each was an activist with a different mission and a unique vision for modern society, and yet a common drive and a passion for communication and change unites them.

Mary Antin was born "Maryashe" Antin in Polotzk, a town in the Russian Pale of Settlement, in 1881. Jewish inhabitants of the Pale in the late nineteenth century still lived a very Orthodox religious existence. Because of the many restrictions Russian law placed on Jews, communities found strength and comfort in their religion and traditions,

which Antin describes in the early chapters of *The Promised Land*. When Antin was ten years old, her father immigrated to the United States, and in 1894 the rest of his family joined him in Boston. Needless to say, life changed dramatically for the young Antin. Where in Russia she had no consistent, formal education, in American she was enrolled in public schools and finished her elementary schooling in four years. Antin also took advantage of community programs that were established to aid the immigrant, like Hale House and the Hebrew Immigration Aid Society. Antin made many influential friends through these organizations, and after a few years she was supported in her studies and her literary endeavors by an impressive list of mentors and benefactors. Included among her friends and correspondents at this time were Edward Everett Hale, founder of Hale House; Josephine Lazarus, a well-known essayist and Transcendentalist; and the Anglo-Jewish playwright Israel Zangwill, whose popular play “The Melting Pot” influenced contemporary ideas on American citizenship. Antin’s early literary talents and the patronage of such individuals led to the publication of several short pieces in newspapers and journals and a small book portraying her migration story, *From Plotz to Boston*, in 1899.⁴⁴ They were also instrumental in her admittance into the prestigious Latin School for Girls in Boston.

While Mary Antin was enjoying academic and literary success, as well as privileges like concerts and vacations with her benefactors, her home was always with her family in overcrowded tenement houses in Boston’s immigrant neighborhoods. The stresses of poverty and the pressures to appease her sometimes controlling patrons may have led Antin to marry before she finished high school. In 1901 Antin became the wife of Dr. Amadeus Grabaau, a professor of geology, a German American, and a Lutheran.

That year they moved to New York where he took up a faculty position at Columbia University. For several years, Antin took classes at Columbia's Teaching College and Barnard College, but she never earned a degree. In 1907 she gave birth to her only child, Josephine, who was probably named for Antin's friend Josephine Lazarus, who encouraged Antin's writing and to whose memory she dedicated *The Promised Land*.

In 1911 Antin's literary life resumed with the serialization of articles in the *Atlantic Monthly* that would become *The Promised Land* in 1912. The autobiography, which tells of her life in Russia, her immigration, and her assimilation experience, was an immediate bestseller and remained a popular book for years. Between 1911 and 1912 Antin published three short stories in the *Atlantic Monthly* and two political essays in the *Outlook*. Antin's final book, the non-fiction *They Who Knock at Our Gates*, came out in 1914.⁴⁵ All of Antin's writings from this era share certain themes. She combines a glowing patriotism with a political stance that strongly favors public education and open immigration. In 1914 Antin also became an advocate of Zionism, reflecting a continuing commitment to Jewish peoples. Her career as a lecturer, which took off in 1912 due to the amazing popularity of *The Promised Land*, coincided with her active participation in politics. She considered herself a Progressive and campaigned for Theodore Roosevelt (whom she met in 1912), and in 1916 she became chairman of the Women's Committee of the National Hughes Alliance for Republican presidential candidate Charles Evans Hughes. From 1912 to 1917 Antin had a very successful and lucrative career as a public speaker, and she became one of the most recognized women in country. For six years a strong and compelling Jewish voice had the ear of the public and of important political figures, and she used that voice to protect the rights of her fellow immigrants.

Antin's life took a drastic turn with the advent of World War I. Her husband, Dr. Amadeus Grabau, expressed German sympathies and subsequently lost his professorship at Columbia. These views no doubt caused embarrassment to Antin, whose public persona was based on her devotion to America. The couple separated in 1917, and Grabau took a position at the National University in Peking, where he spent the rest of his life. Antin suffered a debilitating emotional breakdown, from which, it seems, she never fully recovered. After spending time in psychiatric care, Antin moved to Gould Farm, a residential community run by William Gould, a Protestant minister. This was her home, off and on, until her death in 1949. Although Antin continued to correspond and associate with interesting public figures, she was never again to enter the spotlight. Antin instead began a life-long spiritual journey that led her to explore Christian universalism, mysticism, and anthroposophy.⁴⁶ For several years in the 1930s she became a disciple of the mystic Meher Baba, and at the end of her life she was dedicated to the out-of-body-experience ideas of Rudolph Steiner. Antin's spiritual quest seemed to give her solace from the mental illness she battled for most of her adult life. Evelyn Salz, after reviewing her letters and interviewing family members, has come to the conclusion that Antin probably suffered from bi-polar disorder.⁴⁷

The direction that Antin's life took after World War I led her away from politics and the public eye, but it does not diminish her legacy. As a public speaker, Antin was able to give a face and a voice to the millions of immigrants in America, and *The Promised Land* remains an important book on many levels. It is the first text in English by a Jewish writer to describe both life in the Russian Pale and immigrant life in America. The book is also an effective vehicle for expressing the two causes that lay at

the heart of all Antin's efforts: public education and unrestricted immigration. Her portrayal of assimilation reflects her contemporary reality, as countless Jewish immigrants went through the process themselves.

Like Mary Antin, Zitkala-Sa's early childhood was radically different from the life she would eventually lead. Zitkala-Sa came into the world as Gertrude Simmons in 1876 on the Yankton Reservation in South Dakota. Her mother, Ellen or *Tate I Yohin Win* (She Reaches for the Wind), was a full-blooded Dakota Sioux who never learned to speak English. Zitkala-Sa's father was Ellen's third husband, a white man named Felker who abandoned the family before Zitkala-Sa was born. Ellen decided to retain the surname of her second husband, Simmons, and this name was also given to her daughter. Zitkala-Sa lived a traditional Dakota life on the reservation until the age of eight, when she went to the White's Manual Institution, an Indian boarding school run by Quakers in Wabash, Indiana. According to Dexter Fisher, the school "adhered to the policy of the Bureau of Indian Affairs that Indian children would more rapidly assimilate into American society if they were kept away from the reservation for long periods of time."⁴⁸ Zitkala-Sa stayed at the school for three years before returning to the reservation at age eleven. Once home, she found that the changes she had experienced at school made her unsuitable for reservation life. She felt profoundly different from her mother, with whom she was once so close, and she suffered a restlessness due to her new knowledge for which she had not outlet back on the reservation. She returned to White's Institute to finish her education, returning home to stay with her mother only during summer vacations.

After boarding school, Zitkala-Sa attended Earlham College in Indiana from 1895 to 1897, where she won awards as an orator and published poems and essays in the school

newspaper. She also studied voice and violin at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston. From 1898 to 1899 she was a teacher at the Carlisle Indian School, the flagship institution on which most other Indian boarding schools were modeled. She resigned after one year because she did not agree with their policies or the way that they treated the Native-American children. During this period Gertrude Simmons gave herself the name Zitkala-Sa (“Red Bird” in Lakota) after a dispute with her brother’s family, and she began publishing in mainstream American magazines. In her brief literary career, she gained a national audience for her autobiographical essays, short stories, articles on American-Indian issues, and a book of Sioux legends. Of all these works, three autobiographical pieces printed in the *Atlantic* in 1900 are the most overtly literary in that they incorporate tropes and forms identified with both western and American Indian literatures. In these essays, Zitkala-Sa invokes trickster ironies, uses natural metaphors, imbeds the history of removal, allotment, and government schools, recounts the importance and techniques of the oral storytelling tradition, evokes Judeo-Christian mythology, and portrays the ambivalence of living between worlds in the borderlands of a culture crossing from one reality to another. Taken together, the body of Zitkala-Sa’s work bridges the several worlds with which she was familiar and reveals the broad spiritual and physical terrain covered in her experience.

Zitkala-Sa’s early literary career ended when she married Raymond T. Bonnin in 1902. He was also a Sioux and an advocate for American Indians. They moved to the Uintah and Ouray reservation in Utah, where Raymond took up his position as a government employee for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and Zitkala-Sa, now Gertrude Bonnin, worked to improve the lives of women and children on the reservation. In 1903

she had a son, Raymond O. Bonnin. The family lived on the reservation for fourteen years. The only known Zitkala-Sa work from this period was an Indian opera, “Sun Dance,” on which she collaborated with William Hanson. No copy of the script or score has been located, but it is known that the production was staged many times in Utah, and it was also performed in New York City in 1937 after being selected by the New York Light Opera Guild as the American Opera for the Year.

In 1916 Gertrude Bonnin was elected secretary-treasurer of the Society of the American Indian, which, according to Fisher, “provided a collective forum for Indians who sought to redress the multitude of inequities they had suffered.”⁴⁹ This position prompted the Bonnins to move to Washington, D.C. and marked the advent of her life-long career as an Indian activist and advocate. From 1918 to 1919 she served as editor of the *American Indian Magazine*, and in this capacity wrote articles and editorials in support of Native-American rights. In 1921 she created the Indian Welfare Committee under the auspices of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs in Washington, D.C. through which she continued her crusade for Indian citizenship and the betterment of life for Native-Americans. In 1926 she founded the National Council of American Indians, an organization dedicated to fighting for the personal and property rights of Native Americans. She served as president of the NCAI until she died in 1938. Through her life and writings, Zitkala-Sa cleared new spaces from which to view both Native-American peoples and the nation itself.

Like Zitkala-Sa, Sutton Elbert Griggs continued his calling as a race advocate even after his early literary career ended. He was born in Chatfield, Texas in 1872. His father, Allen R. Griggs, who had been a slave in Georgia, subsequently became a Baptist

clergyman and in that capacity was instrumental in establishing churches and schools to serve African Americans in his adopted state. Sutton Griggs was raised in Dallas, where he attended public schools. He then went to Bishop College in Marshall, Texas, graduating in 1890. He studied for the ministry at Richmond Theological Seminary (now Virginia Union University), where he received a degree in 1893. After graduation he married Emma J. Williams and became pastor of his own congregation, the First Baptist Church in Berkeley, Virginia. During the time of his ministry there, Griggs published his first two novels, *Imperium in Imperio* (1899) and *Overshadowed* (1901).⁵⁰ In 1902 Griggs moved to Tennessee to assume the pastorate of the First Baptist Church in East Nashville, where he served for the next eleven years. During this time Griggs wrote his final three novels, *Unfettered* (1902), *The Hindered Hand* (1905), and *Pointing the Way* (1908).⁵¹ He also published the first two of the ten social theory books on race that he would write in his lifetime.

In 1913 Griggs became the pastor of the Tabernacle Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee. The next sixteen years were a period of energy as Griggs would continue to write books on social theory and endeavor to put these ideas into action to improve the lives of African Americans in his congregation, in the city of Memphis, and in the South. He may have hoped that, like the characters in his novels, his actions would eventually influence the nation as well. From the beginning of his pastorate, Griggs was determined to make the Tabernacle Baptist Church an institutional church that would serve its members in many capacities. Under his guidance, and with the financial aid of black and white patrons and the city government, the congregation constructed an elaborate new church and facilities, complete with a swimming pool, a gym, and an employment bureau.

Griggs's design was to serve the spiritual, physical, and everyday needs of the people. The facilities gave black citizens a place of recreation in a city where segregation kept them out of most parks and pools. Griggs also founded the Public Welfare League to serve the African Americans in Memphis. The goals of this organization were to foster the development of black talent and businesses, to promote cooperation within the community, to cultivate good feelings between black and white citizens, and to aid African Americans, individually and as a group, in any way possible. It was through this agency that Griggs published at least nine books: six on racial and social theory, a religious manual, a biography of John L. Webb, and his own autobiography. In 1919 he began publishing a weekly newspaper, *The Neighbor*, which reported on black achievements and issues in Memphis and nationwide and was meant to be distributed in cities with large African-American communities throughout the South.

Although Griggs never returned to writing fiction after *Pointing the Way* was published in 1908, some of the themes that he developed in his novels blended with his life as a community leader in Memphis. In his narratives he often showed how the work of a unified group and of dedicated individuals could change the nation. The core philosophy in his social theory was one of social efficiency, which Randolphe Meade Walker defines as simply "the ability of people to become socially collected into a whole."⁵² The achievements of his community in Memphis and his political tracts began to influence groups and individuals outside of his immediate region. According to Walker, in 1925 "the American Woodman, at the time America's strongest black fraternal organization, voted at a session held in Denver, Colorado to adopt the philosophy of racial advancement as worked out by Dr. Sutton E. Griggs in his books 'Guide to Racial

Greatness’ and ‘Stepping Stones to Higher Things’.”⁵³ In the 1920s he traveled to speak in Southern cities, which further aided the spread of his social philosophy. Griggs, always concerned about the spiritual welfare of his people, was also instrumental in the founding of the American Baptist Theological Seminary. He was elected president of the seminary in 1925, and he and his father have a building named after them on the campus.

The triumph of Griggs’s ideas and efforts came to a sudden halt with the Stock Market Crash in October 1929. Like many large black congregations at the time, the Tabernacle Baptist Church became insolvent, and it was sold at public auction a year after the crash. Griggs went to join his father in Texas, where he became the pastor of the Hopewell Baptist Church in Denison. In 1933 Griggs died in Houston, where he had recently moved to start a civic organization run by the Baptist church. To the end he worked tirelessly to advance the spiritual and secular lives of his people, but he was no doubt devastated when all that he had worked for in Memphis shattered in the first days of the Great Depression. However, his novels still stand as compelling works that incorporate a variety of literary styles and that depict a wide range of political reactions to the racial problems of the day. Though Griggs seems to have fallen out of favor with critics, he was a pioneering black novelist with a distinctive voice and was an important link between nineteenth century and twentieth century writers in the African-American literary tradition.

Whereas Sutton E. Griggs is a central author in the progression of African-American literature, Sui Sin Far stands at the beginning of a new literary tradition as the first writer of Asian-American fiction in English. Although scholars often describe Sui Sin Far as a Chinese-American writer, her actual national affiliations are much more

ambiguous. Sui Sin Far was born Edith Maude Eaton in England in 1865 to a British father, Edward Eaton, and a Chinese mother who was known to her family as Lotus Blossom but who appears as Grace in government records. The couple had met and married in Shanghai, where Eaton was a silk merchant and Lotus Blossom was training to be a missionary. The family moved back to Eaton's hometown of Macclesfield, England sometime between the birth of their first child, Charles, and their second, Edith. Over the years the couple would have twelve more children. During Edith's early childhood in rural England, her mother was the only Chinese resident, which made the biracial children objects of curiosity, and often cruelty, in the community.

When Edith was eight, the family moved to North America, finally settling in Montreal. The father eventually gave up the world of business to return to his first passion, art, and the ever-growing family seemed always to be in financial straights. After several years of formal education, Edith was taken from school at the age of eleven to sell her father's paintings, along with lace that she made herself, door to door. At eighteen she went to work as a typesetter at the *Montreal Daily Star* and taught herself stenography and typing. In the mid 1880s she had three articles published in small "radical U.S. newspapers,"⁵⁴ and in the late 1880s the *Dominion Illustrated* published two essays and six short stories, all dealing with white Canadian subjects. The early 1890s marked a turning point in her life and career as she began to go with her mother to visit wives of Chinese merchants who were beginning to settle in Montreal. In the mid 1890s Edith Eaton started to publish articles and stories on Chinese subjects under the pen name "Sui Seen Far" and then "Sui Sin Far," which in translation means "Water Lily."

In 1898 she moved to San Francisco where she once again befriended Chinese women in the community. During her three-year residence in San Francisco, she published six more stories. In 1900 Sui Sin Far relocated to Seattle where she again worked as a stenographer and became acquainted with the small community of Chinese living in the city. That year several more of her tales of immigrant life appeared in newspapers and magazines. She also spent time in Los Angeles and wrote a series of articles on Chinatown for the *Los Angeles Express*. Sometime between her last publication in 1905 and her next, which was to appear in 1909, a significant shift occurred in her writing. Sui Sin Far continued to write on Chinese-American subjects and to address the themes of identity and ethnicity that she had in her earlier stories, but there was a new emotional and aesthetic depth in everything she wrote after 1909. This is first evident in “Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian,” an engaging and insightful autobiographical essay that appeared in the *Independent* in January of that year. White-Parks describes the appearance of this essay as a type of rebirth; Sui Sin Far’s “voice came bursting forth—publicly, nationally—signaling unprecedented recognition and a cycle of writing and publishing energy.”⁵⁵ At about this time, Sui Sin Far moved to Boston, and in the following three years she would place thirteen stories and essays in major periodicals. The height of her literary career was her collection of short stories, many of them new, in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, which was published by McClurg in 1912.⁵⁶ Sometime after her last essay appeared in the *Independent* in July 1913, Sui Sin Far, probably because of her failing health, moved back to Montreal, where she died in 1914. Her grave is marked by a striking obelisk that was erected in her memory by the local Chinese-Canadian community.

In many ways Sui Sin Far's life was not an easy one. She suffered from ill health throughout her years, most likely due to an early bout with rheumatism. She was raised in poverty, and most of her adulthood she had to worry about making ends meet. It seems that when she was doing well, she would send money home to her always-struggling family. Finally, it was often difficult for her as a biracial individual in a society that often held prejudices against her mother's people. On the other hand, Sui Sin Far experienced a type of freedom that was not available to most women in her day. As an intelligent, articulate, and skilled person, she was able to make some sort of living wherever she lived, and as an unmarried woman she was free to move from place to place and to associate with whom she pleased. Sui Sin Far took advantage of this autonomy to live and work near Chinatowns where she could both learn about the people and their culture and help them through her writing. The downside to this independence was the necessity to fend for herself, and it seems as if making a living often took precedence over her true passion of writing. Nevertheless, what she did have time to produce stands as an important beginning to what would become the rich literary tradition of Asian-American literature.⁵⁷

Despite Sui Sin Far's acceptance into the American literary canon, her national affiliation is not at all clear. Most of her stories dealing with North American Chinese subjects are set in the United States, and almost all of them were published in America, as was her one book, and most of this writing was done during the fifteen years she lived in the United States. There is little doubt, however, that she considered Canada her home, for that is where she lived from age eight until age thirty-two. Even while she resided in America, whenever she had the time and money, she would go to Montreal to visit her

family, and that is where she is buried. In terms of nationality, she should probably be considered a British citizen, as that was the country of her birth. However, she did not choose to identify herself with any particular country: “I have no nationality and am not anxious to claim any.”⁵⁸ Despite her reluctance to claim a nation, America cannot but claim her, for the literature of the era would be incomplete without her compelling stories of Chinese-American life.

For several generations the literary productions of Mary Antin, Zitkala-Sa, Sutton E. Griggs, and Sui Sin Far were overlooked or forgotten by scholars. Their importance to American letters began to be recognized at the end of the twentieth century, and all but Griggs are back in print. With the renewed interest in early immigrant, Native-American, and African-American writers must come new and thoughtful criticism. Understanding how authors perceived their world can only come through close consideration of individual works. Raymond Hedin has noted that “literary theorists today have made the inside of texts uncomfortable for critics to investigate at length.”⁵⁹ However, in the writings of this group of authors representations of ethnic-American identity are inextricably connected to the portrayals of cross-cultural experience, and one cannot be examined without the other. What the authors (in the case of autobiography) and the characters (in the case of fiction) encounter and endure in the texts inevitably shape who they are, how they perceive themselves, and how they understand their place in American society. Without becoming familiar with “the inside” of these works, without examining scenes, characters, and recurring elements in depth, any conclusions made about the major themes of race and nationality would at best be cursory and at worst be disingenuous. Understanding the theme of ethnic-American identity in these narratives is

contingent upon the consideration of historical context, cultural particularity, and, above all, textual significance.

The turning of a century brings with it the promise of a new age, a fresh page on which to write an original story. At the turn into the twentieth century, many immigrant authors and writers of color took advantage of the period of change and innovation to raise their voices in print, to inform the nation of their existence, humanity, and talents. In their works, these artists moved into new, unexplored territory, generating ideas and establishing themes that would be revisited and explored throughout the twentieth century. Homi Bhabha describes the literary areas non-traditional writers create as “‘in-between’ spaces” that “provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself.”⁶⁰ In their attempts to redefine society, community, and self, ethnic-American authors found it necessary to accurately reflect their own new realities. As they established themselves and their respective groups in relationship to the nation, they also changed the definition of what it means to be an American. Though these artists were of different ethnicities, were born in different areas of the United States or even countries, and had never met each other, they were all participants in the dominant literary movement of the day, American Literary Realism. Mary Antin, Zitkala-Sa, Sutton E. Griggs, Sui Sin Far and other writers who focused on issues of race and identity can be considered a unified group within this larger tradition. The inclusion of their narratives into the consideration of the era of Realism serves to expand the understanding of the age and of the centrality of themes of ethnicity to the national literature. They can be viewed as a generation of writers who made

important contributions at the beginning of the rich and diverse history of twentieth-century American Literature.

Notes

¹ Sidonie Smith, "Cheesecakes, Nymphs, and 'We the People': Un/National Subjects about 1900," *Prose Studies: History, Theory, Criticism* 17, No. 1 (1994): 121.

² Mary Antin, *The Promised Land* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1912).

³ Elizabeth Ammons, *Conflicting Stories: American Women Writers at the Turn into the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992). Tom Quirk and Gary Scharnhorst, ed., *American Realism and the Canon* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1994). Elizabeth Ammons and Annette White-Parks, ed., *Tricksterism in Turn-of-the-Century American Literature: A Multicultural Perspective* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1994).

⁴ Arlene A. Elder, *The "Hindered Hand": Cultural Implications of Early African-American Fiction* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1978). Dickson D. Bruce, Jr., *Black American Writing from the Nadir: The Evolution of a Literary Tradition, 1877-1915* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989).

⁵ S. Alice Callahan, *Wynema: A Child of the Forest* (Chicago: H. J. Smith, 1891).

⁶ Finley Peter Dunne, *Observations by Mr. Dooley* (New York: Russell, 1902).

⁷ Marlon K. Hom, *Songs of Gold Mountain: Cantonese Rhymes from San Francisco Chinatown* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987). This collection is made up of poems translated from Chinese that were originally published in *Jinshan ge ji* (San Francisco: Tai Quong Company, 1911) and *Jinshan ge erji* (San Francisco: Tai Quong Company, 1915).

⁸ Myra Kelly, *Little Citizens: The Humours of School Life* (New York: McClure, Phillips, 1904); *Little Aliens* (New York: Scribners, 1910).

⁹ Jacob Riis, *Out of Mulberry Street: Stories of Tenement Life in New York* (New York: Century, 1897). Alice Dunbar-Nelson, *The Goodness of St. Rocque and Other Stories* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1899).

¹⁰ Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991), p. 4.

¹¹ Allen, p. 4.

¹² Jules Chametzky, John Felstiner, Hilene Flanzbaum, and Kathryn Hellerstien, introduction to *Jewish American Literature* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc), p. 111.

¹³ Ruth R. Wisse, *The Modern Jewish Canon: A Journey Through Language and Culture* (New York: The Free Press, 2000).

¹⁴ A second volume of new poems, *Jinshan ge erji* (*Songs of Gold Mountain*, volume 2), was published in 1915.

¹⁵ Lee Yan Phou, *When I Was a Boy in China* (Boston: D. Lothrop Co., 1887).

¹⁶ Elizabeth Ammons, "Men of Color, Women, and Uppity Art at Turn of the Century," in *American Realism and the Canon*, ed. Tom Quirck and Gary Scharnhorst (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1994), p. 24.

¹⁷ James Nagel, introduction to *The Portable American Realism Reader* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), pp. xx-xxi.

¹⁸ Mary Antin, *The Promised Land* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), pp. 48-49.

Originally published by Houghton Mifflin Company in 1912.

¹⁹ John T. Flynn, "The Muckrakers," in *John D. Rockefeller: Robber Baron or Industrial Statesman?* (Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1949), p. 1.

²⁰ Nagel, p. xxv.

²¹ Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1890).

²² Stephen Crane, *Maggie: Girl of the Streets* (New York: Appleton, 1896).

Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie* (New York: Doubleday, Page, 1900). Frank Norris, *The Octopus: A Story of California* (New York: Doubleday, Page, 1901).

²³ James Wilson, *The Earth Shall Weep: A History of Native America* (New York: Grove Press, 1998), pp. 301-02.

²⁴ Wilson, p. 308.

²⁵ "Yankton Sioux Tribe of South Dakota," Federal Emergency Agency Website, <http://fema.gov/reg-viii/tribal/yanktnbg.htm>.

²⁶ Wilson, p. xxv.

²⁷ Wilson, p. 316.

²⁸ Henry Dawes, "Have We Failed with the Indian?" *Atlantic Monthly* 84 (1899): 281.

²⁹ Rayford W. Logan, *The Betrayal of the Negro: From Rutherford B. Hayes to Woodrow Wilson* (New York: De Capo Press, 1997), p. 109. A version of this book, originally titled *The Negro in American Life and Thought: The Nadir, 1877-1901*, was

published in London by Dial Press in 1954. An expanded edition, *The Betrayal of the Negro: From Rutherford B. Hayes to Woodrow Wilson*, was published in New York by Collier Books in 1965. The work cited is an unabridged republication of the 1965 edition.

³⁰ *Plessy v. Ferguson* 163 U.S. 537 (1896) in *Documents of American Constitutional and Legal History*, vol. 2, ed. Melvin I. Urofsky (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), p. 246.

³¹ *Plessy v. Ferguson*, p. 248.

³² Joe William Trotter, Jr., *The African American Experience* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001), p. 336. Statistics can also be found in Logan, p. 192.

³³ Logan, p. 52.

³⁴ Logan, p. 58.

³⁵ Arthur Hertzberg, *The Jews In America: Four Centuries of an Uneasy Encounter* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997) p. 188.

³⁶ Glenn C. Altschuler, *Race, Ethnicity, and Class in American Social Thought, 1865-1919* (Wheeling: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1982), p. 47.

³⁷ Hertzberg, p. 188.

³⁸ Marlon K. Hom, introduction to *Songs of Gold Mountain: Cantonese Rhymes from San Francisco Chinatown* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p. 56.

³⁹ Ronald Takaki, *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1993), p. 192.

⁴⁰ Though the Chinese Exclusion Act banned the entry of most Chinese, merchants and students were exempt and so were allowed to come to America.

⁴¹ Andrew Gyory, *Closing the Gates: Race, Politics, and the Chinese Exclusion Act* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

⁴² Hom, pp. 12-13.

⁴³ Hom, p. 67.

⁴⁴ Mary Antin, *From Plotzk to Boston* (New York: Markus Weiner Publishing, 1899).

⁴⁵ Mary Antin, *They Who Knock at Our Gate: A Complete Gospel of Immigration* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1914).

⁴⁶ Anthroposophy is a spiritual movement founded in the early twentieth century by Rudolf Steiner. It entails using the mind, not faith, to get in touch with the spiritual world. The word comes from the combination of “anthropos” (humanity) and “Sophia” (wisdom).

⁴⁷ Evelyn Salz, “Illness and Gould Farm: 1917-1939” in *Selected Letters of Mary Antin* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), p. 88.

⁴⁸ Dexter Fisher, foreword to *American Indian Stories* by Zitkala-Sa (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), p. x.

⁴⁹ Fisher, xv.

⁵⁰ Sutton E Griggs, *Imperium in Imperio* (Cincinnati: Editor Publishing Co., 1899); *Overshadowed* (Nashville: Orion, 1901).

⁵¹ Sutton E. Griggs, *Unfettered* (Nashville: Orion, 1902); *The Hindered Hand; or, The Reign of the Repressionist* (Nashville: Orion, 1905); *Pointing the Way* (Nashville: Orion, 1908).

⁵² Randolphe Meade Walker, *The Metamorphosis of Sutton E. Griggs: The Transition from Black Radical to Conservative, 1913-1933* (Memphis: Walker Publishing, 1991), p. 61.

⁵³ Walker, pp. 29-30.

⁵⁴ Annette White Parks, *Sui Sin Far / Edith Maude Eaton: A Literary Biography* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), p. 26. According to White-Parks, these articles have yet to be located.

⁵⁵ White-Parks, p. 47.

⁵⁶ Sui Sin Far, *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1912).

⁵⁷ An interesting connection that reflects on Sui Sin Far's own struggles and triumphs is the literary career of her younger sister, Winifred Eaton. Winifred created a fictional identity and family history, claiming that she was the daughter of an Englishman and a Japanese noblewoman. She took the Japanese-sounding pen name of "Onoto Watanna" and wrote a series of very popular (and very lucrative) novels set in Japan. Though these books represent issues of gender and ethnicity in their own way, they do not have the power, immediacy, or relevancy that Sui Sin Far attained, especially in her later stories. Winifred's decision to falsely claim association with the admired Japanese instead of with the much maligned Chinese can be seen as a kind of disloyalty to her heritage. When Sui Sin far died in 1938, an obituary in the *New York Times* perpetuates

Winifred's version of their heritage. According to White-Parks, "scholars have generally held Winifred to be the author of this obituary" (p. 50).

⁵⁸ Sui Sin Far, "Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian" in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance and Other Writing*, ed. Amy Ling and Annette White Parks (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), p. 230. Originally published in the *Independent* (January 21, 1909), pp. 125-32.

⁵⁹ Raymond Hedin, "Probable Readers, Possible Stories: The Limits of Nineteenth-Century Black Narrative," in *Readers in History: Nineteenth-Century American Literature and the Contexts of Response*, ed. James L. Machor (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1993), p. 181.

⁶⁰ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 1-2.

CHAPTER 2

MARY ANTIN AND ASSIMILATION

Since the publication of her autobiography *The Promised Land* in 1912, Mary Antin has been both commended and disparaged for her adamant belief in the Americanization. However, the book itself contains a much more complex depiction of the process than critics and scholars have assumed. Although it is true that her pro-American rhetoric and the joy she expresses in regard to her own acculturation dominate the tone of the book, she is also careful to delineate her reasons for transforming herself into a U.S. citizen and to include some of the pressures and difficulties she experienced in her new country in the process. One contemporary connotation of assimilation is that it implies an allegiance to the new dominant culture and rejection of the traditional heritage. Antin's autobiography demonstrates that this perception does not necessarily reflect the truth. Antin expresses the desire to become an American and portrays herself as a completely acculturated citizen, but despite giving up many elements of her inherited culture, she never disconnects herself from other Jewish immigrants. It is important to understand this conception, for most immigrant families to the United States adjust to mainstream society within a few generations. To approach the subject of assimilation in American literature as an objectionable theme is to misunderstand one of the prevailing realities of immigrant American life. *The Promised Land* portrays the tension of

negotiating a path to citizenship in a society that often gave immigrants conflicting signals, and Antin's positive tone comes from her pride in having come through this process to gain success in her adopted country.

The sentiments of patriotism were perhaps strongest in the early twentieth century than in any other non-war era. The catchy showmanship of George M. Cohan, whose Broadway productions included fireworks, American flags, and many catchy pro-American songs such as "Yankee Doodle Dandy," played to sold-out audiences between 1904 and 1918. The flip side of this warm-hearted inclusiveness was the nativist movement, which grew in fervency as the number of immigrants to America rose. Between 1880 and 1920 more than two and a half million Eastern Europeans arrived on American soil, and there were some who feared and resented these newcomers, seeing in them something wholly foreign and incompatible with American society.

Antin, a Jewish émigré who moved from Polotsk, Russia to settle in Massachusetts in 1894, embodied for many the more inclusive ideals of democratic America. One reason for the overwhelming popularity of *The Promised Land* may have been the theme of national pride that reflected and echoed the patriotism popular at the time. Antin extols the superiority of the American way of life in response to the virulent anti-immigration sentiments that were being expressed in the media. The activities of the outspoken Boston-based Immigration Restriction League may have been especially motivating to the young Antin, who not only considered Boston her home but also aspired to become the type of educated person of letters that comprised this group.

The Promised Land posits complete assimilation as the model for ethnic-American identity and the key to entry into full American citizenship. The story of her

systematic, rapid Americanization can be clearly traced in the text, and its telling won Antin much admiration and acclaim. There are other dimensions to this narrative, however, that belie her claims that the process is ever easy or complete. These elements, hidden beneath the positive rhetoric, connect Antin's autobiography to other texts in the twentieth century in which the desire for acculturation is often countered by social, economic, and cultural barriers. The fact that Antin explores her ethnicity and the history of her people in the book also aligns it with multiethnic themes in literature later in the century. Antin was one of the first writers to portray the division that immigrants experience between the world of their past and their new American lives. She structures her autobiography in two parts. The first eight chapters depict life in the Settlement of the Pale in Russia, where she was born and where she lived until her family's immigration. The following twelve chapters chronicle her arrival in the United States and her life through to high school. Despite the fact that nearly half the book portrays her early years in Russia, and that even the sections of the book set in her new country reveal details that complicate her account of her steady rise, the text is centered on the story of her Americanization.

In *The Promised Land*, Antin tells the familiar and cherished story of becoming an American that has been a staple in the American literary tradition at least since Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur published his *Letters of an American Farmer* in the early days of the republic.¹ In its basic form, the story of the process of assimilation reaffirms the value of democracy and the potential inherent in a free country. Antin's autobiography embodies the unspoken contract that America makes with its newcomers: if they adopt its ways and values, they can enter into full citizenship with all its rights and privileges. Antin marvels

at such an offer: “I was an ignorant child of the ghetto, but I was admitted to the society of the best; I was given the freedom of all America” (92).² This sense of the limitless possibilities open to immigrants permeates the text.

The story of her successful assimilation begins with this promise of freedom, which is fulfilled by access to an education that serves both to satisfy her desire for learning and to acculturate her into the American way of life. Her new country offers liberation from traditional restraints as well as the possibility for advancement in society through the public school system. She tells her audience that “the public school has done best for us foreigners, and for the country, when it has made us into good Americans. . . . You should be glad to hear of it, you born Americans; for it is the story of the growth of your country; of the flocking of your brothers and sisters from the far ends of the earth to the flag you love; of the recruiting of your armies of workers, thinkers, and leaders” (175). Antin reinforces the progressive movement to foster assimilation through public education by attributing much of her success to the school system that welcomes the immigrant. Perhaps the most important gift that her American education bestows is the knowledge of English, which gives Antin the ability to communicate and access to opportunities. Antin is unequivocally proud of her English language skills and the circumstances that brought her to them. In her “public declaration of my love for the English language,” Antin exclaims, “I am glad that American history runs, chapter for chapter, the way it does; for thus America came to be the country I love so dearly. I am glad, most of all, that the Americans began by being Englishmen, for thus did I come to inherit this beautiful language in which I think” (164). English becomes a sign of Antin’s assimilation as she not only learns to read, write, and speak the language of the nation but

adopts it as her primary tongue. Once English is mastered, the way is paved to discover, among other things, the history and values of her new country. The young immigrant, hungry for knowledge and a sense of belonging, quickly adopts American ideals as her own. Antin is drawn especially to the quintessential American icon, George Washington. After she learns about him in school, she writes, “I could not pronounce the name of George Washington without pause. Never had I called upon the Most Holy, in such utter reverence and worship as I repeated the simple sentences of my child’s story of the patriot” (175). The narrator embraces Washington as her American cultural forebearer, for he is considered the father of the country in which she is now a citizen.

When the freedom, the language, and the ideals of the country are understood, the immigrant has the tools and the mindset to succeed in American society. In the story of her success, Antin aligns herself not only with George Washington but also with other icons such as Ben Franklin, the father of American autobiography, with Ralph Waldo Emerson, whose views on self-reliance and Transcendentalism echo throughout her text, and with Horatio Alger, whose books she read as a girl after coming to America. The narrator describes her attachment to the country and its values, icons, and symbols as inevitable in the course of her life. She had the right traits to be an American, and her new country offered her all the freedom and opportunity that she desired. She postulates that any immigrant child with her same sensibilities “who was set down in a land of outspoken patriotism . . . was likely to love her new country with a great love, and to embrace its heroes in a great worship. Naturalization, with us Russian Jews, may mean more than the adoption of the immigrant by America. It may mean the adoption of America by the immigrant” (179). This reciprocal relationship stands as the culmination

of the melting pot experience. The mutual acceptance of immigrant and America is the ideal outcome of the assimilation process.

Antin often positions herself as representative of other Russian Jews to show how their immigration stories were not so different from those of generations past. As with former settlers, there would be a time of hardship to be followed by complete acculturation and acceptance into America. The life before America would be important only as a signifier of what had been escaped, adding to the nation's glory by comparison. Antin's own experience of the relationship of her past and present is emblematic of this process: "When I passed as an American among Americans, if I was suddenly made aware of the past that lay forgotten. . . . I thought it miracle enough that I, Mashke, . . . born to a humble destiny, should be at home in an American metropolis, be free to fashion my own life, and should dream my dreams in English phrases" (156). Antin links her experience and that of her fellow immigrants to the life and history of America, thereby claiming kinship to all who live within its borders. Antin's text is appealing for the passionate way she claims her American identity: "For the country was for all the citizens, and *I was a Citizen*. And when we stood up to sing 'America,' I shouted the words with all my might. I was in very earnest proclaiming to the world my love for my new-found country" (177). Such affirmative declarations serve as powerful support for the Americanizing process.

When viewed as a story of unhindered assimilation where freedom, education, the English language, and American history and values are successively acquired, Antin's narrative reinforces the type of Americanization that had been celebrated in the nation's history and that was expected by the established population. The popularity of *The*

Promised Land attests to the fact that its reaffirmation of America's assimilationist ideals was appealing to both native-born and newer Americans. Antin's autobiography was the best-selling non-fiction book of 1912 and remained among the best sellers for years.³ In his introduction to the book, Werner Sollors writes of its positive reception, particularly in the libraries that served a variety of readers, including many immigrant patrons.

Ethnic-American interest in the book is also revealed in the way that it inspired immigrants from many groups to write their own autobiographies. Sollors also points out, as do several other critics and historians, that parts of Antin's text were included in textbooks for decades.⁴ She, obviously, struck a chord with America in the way that she described her new country and her experience in it, saying things that needed to be said and things that people wanted to hear about the immigrant experience.

Despite the overwhelming and sustained popularity of the *The Promised Land*, or perhaps because of it, the book has also been the target of criticism. Some Jewish reviewers at the time of its publication resented Antin's self-aggrandizing tone and secular message. Since then, scholars have taken issue with her choice to write in English, her portrayal of immigrants, and her failure to fully disclose the patronage she received. A dislike for the assimilationist message at the heart of the book seems to underlie the criticism published in the late twentieth century. Antin is faulted for the unquestioning acceptance of all things American and for her lack of loyalty to her Jewish heritage. The antagonism with which the text is occasionally regarded reveals some critics' resentment towards the idea that any aspect of culture should be sacrificed to claim a nationality that one rightfully holds as a native-born or naturalized citizen.⁵

The assimilated American seems to go against the new American grain that values diversity and seeks to preserve cultural heritage, yet it is important to read Antin in a pre-modern context. At the turn into the twentieth century, Antin was privy to two messages. One, coming from liberal social reformers, was that assimilation was the key to American citizenship, and the other, coming from nativists, was that newcomers from Eastern Europe had no rights to American citizenship and were, in fact, unassimilable. Pressure to limit entry into the country came from such outspoken groups as the Immigration Restriction League, which was formed in Boston in 1894, the very year Antin came from Russia to Massachusetts. In their efforts to convince the public that the new wave of arrivals were detrimental to the national character, this group and other nativists set out to “prove” and publicize the inferiority of peoples from Southern and Eastern Europe. The sustained vilifying of the new immigrant stretches from Francis Amasa’s 1896 essay in *The Atlantic* in which he repeatedly refers to this group as an “ignorant and brutalized peasantry”⁶ to the forty-two volume Dillingham Report that described their biological inferiority to the Senate in 1911. This document, which was a compilation of studies conducted throughout the United States, contained useful statistical information. Unfortunately, the bias of the report in general is obvious, as in the 1909 study of newly arrived schoolchildren that was conducted “as an effort to ascertain some of the causes of retardation or backwardness and the relation to the races.”⁷ From 1897 to 1917, the Immigration Restriction League was able to pass four bills through Congress that would have established an English literacy test for those wishing to move to the United States.⁸ As this nativist movement was directly targeting the ethnic group to which Antin belonged, it is little wonder that she chose not to emphasize difference in her text.

Considering the discourse of the day, the most persuasive argument against nativist accusations of inferiority would be proof of abilities and aptitudes valued by American society. An effective response to the claim that immigrants like her were unassimilable would be the evidence of her own successful acculturation in the first generation.

Another rhetorical move on the part of Antin to disprove inherent difference between the new immigrants and their native born critics is to link the journey and progress of her people with the history of the country. She places her story in the context of a nation that was founded by immigrants, making her heir to a tradition that goes back to the Pilgrims and that encompasses the ancestors of all Americans of European descent.⁹ Antin's transformation into an American is rapid, the text implies, because she had a head start. She was in the process of becoming an American even before she came to these shores. The narrative reiterates the ideal that there are certain personalities that are drawn to this country and that the country is built on and by these types: freethinkers, hard workers, tough individuals who love the nation and its values. These "true" Americans are willing to sacrifice anything, including language and culture, to become a part of the national way of life. Either consciously or intuitively, Antin answers the perennial complaint of nativists who fear that the newcomers are going to change, in some profound way, the essence of American society. Antin assures her readership that the most recent wave of arrivals from Eastern Europe are not so different from their American-born neighbors or from immigrants of generations past. She insists that they share the same values and are willing to make the same sacrifices for the nation. In short, they are both willing and able to discard "old world" ways to assimilate into mainstream American society.

Antin's autobiography stands as a counter-narrative to claims that Russian Jews were unassimilable. It is also a model of the type of wholesale assimilation that was being advocated by teachers, social workers, and politicians at the time. Theodore Roosevelt rejected the nativist project, but he was also against the idea of immigrants maintaining allegiance to their former lands and cultures.¹⁰ In *Jews in America*, Arthur Hertzberg notes that "Roosevelt thundered, again and again, against 'hyphenated Americans,' by which he meant anyone who did not sever ties with his past and assimilate into American society."¹¹ There was something suspect in newcomers who sought cultural syncretism in their new land. The dominant metaphor for ethnic-American identity at the time was the melting pot. In this conceit, the immigrants' old world ways would melt away, they would take on the flavor of their new surroundings and would emerge as new Americans. In the early twentieth century this was a compelling paradigm, the viability of which was advocated by Antin's teachers and mentors as well as by social reformers and politicians like Theodore Roosevelt. This was the theme of the popular play (first produced in 1908) *The Melting Pot* by Anglo-Jewish playwright Israel Zangwill, who had been a sort of friend and literary mentor to Antin since 1898.¹² In fact, many of her well-established patrons were American Jews whose ancestors came from Germany a half a century before. They were ready examples of the social and economic benefits that came with cultural assimilation.¹³

Though some writers at the time, including Sui Sin Far, were envisioning a multicultural society, the fact remains that the ideology of "cultural pluralism" would not become a staple of the American dialogue until at least 1915, when Horace Kallen, another Jewish American, would publish his insightful and controversial "Democracy

versus the Melting Pot” in *The Nation*.¹⁴ This essay, written three years after Antin’s autobiography, marks a shift in the assimilation debate to, as Glenn Altschuler puts it, “whether immigrants *should* Americanize, rather than whether they *could*.”¹⁵ In Antin’s text, she makes it clear that she can assimilate, and that she should goes without question. Michael Kramer is correct in his evaluation that “*The Promised Land* does not offer hybridity as an answer,” but the truth is that hybridity was not an option for Antin.¹⁶ Her American identity had been shaped by the public school system and the American traditions it espoused, by the Progressivist ideology of Theodore Roosevelt, and by the assimilated Jewish patrons who supported and encouraged her as a young woman. She had also been influenced by the nativist rhetoric that had disparaged immigrants and held that they could never be truly American.

In Antin’s narrative of the evolution of her American self, she first recreates the world from which she came and then depicts what elements of the past she chose to shed in order to conform to her own concept of an American citizen. Some facets of culture and religion that she rejects are easy for her to abandon, and more often than not she is glad to do so. Superficial trappings of the newly “old country,” such as clothing and Russian names, are changed so that she can begin her new life. The social pressure on Antin and her siblings to assimilate, and the rewards gained by doing so, become apparent with their first transformation, as she remembers: “We exchanged our hateful homemade European costumes, which pointed us out as ‘greenhorns’ to the children on the street, for real American machine-made garments, and issued forth glorified in each other’s eyes” (149). The shame of being a “greenhorn” and the excitement of encountering a new

culture were strong incentives, especially for younger immigrants, to fashion new American selves.

The Antin family's initiation into their new life is marked by another rite of passage when each member receives an "American" name: "With our despised immigrant clothing we shed also our impossible Hebrew names. . . . As for me, I was simply cheated. The name they gave me was hardly new. . . . My friends said that it would hold in English as *Mary*; which was very disappointing, as I longed to possess a strange-sounding American name like the others" (149-50). The pleasure she gains from abandoning her Russian name, "Mashke," is instantly replaced by her disappointment that "Mary" is so similar to the name she has just discarded. To throw off an identity marker that signifies association with one's origins indicates a rejection of the past. However, the eagerness with which she takes on a new American name, and even the regret that it was not more different from her former one, is really indicative of many common traditions with which Antin can be associated. On the one hand, a woman, in most cultures, is expected to change her name after marriage to indicate her new position in society and her new association with her husband's family. Although by the end of the twentieth century the feminist movement had made that more of a choice than an expectation, many women still mark this important passage of life by incorporating their husband's name into their own. The passage to America is, according to Antin, the most important transition in her life. This crossing, which divides her narrative, separates her former subjugated self as a woman and a Jew in Russia from her new "free" American self. To mark the beginning of a new identity with an adopted signifier is a part of the rite of passage common to many immigrants to America.

Another important name-changing convention is the *nom de plume*. In the American literary tradition, some writers, such as Mark Twain, have taken on pen names that reflect the culture and region from which they came and about which they wrote. This pattern of changing names to reflect cultural positionality is even more important in the history of ethnic-American women's writing. Both Zitkala-Sa and Sui Sin Far opted to write under names they invented for themselves. What is most telling about Mary Antin, however, is that while the other two women reject their western birth-names and choose new names that reflect the ethnic heritage with which they chose to identify, Antin identifies herself through life by her American name and uses it even after her marriage to German-American Amadeus Grabau. Perhaps the American name that was bestowed on her during her first few days in this country became symbolic of the new life she was determined to lead.

The taking of new clothes and names is common for immigrants, particularly for those who do not intend to return to their nation of origin. In other immigrant groups, such as the Chinese or the Italians, many saw themselves mainly as sojourners. Both these groups came primarily for economic reasons. The Chinese, who were barred from seeking citizenship, had a high rate of return home, but even many Italians, who were eligible to become citizens, chose to return after a period of labor. Russian Jews were both economic and political refugees; they were persecuted because of their ethnicity in the nation of their birth. Though the first half of *The Promised Land* contains some engaging memories of her homeland, Antin is not at all reluctant to abandon allegiance to Russia because, as she explains, it is a country that never claimed her. It is also a place where the Jewish residents (never really citizens) were disenfranchised both socially and

economically. Antin explains how the rejection of the Jews in Russia enables her to embrace her new country so quickly and so fully: “Where had been my country until now? What flag had I loved? What heroes had I worshipped? . . . Well I knew that Polotzk was not my country. It was *goluth*—exile” (178). The abandonment of Russia is not problematic for the author, considering the relationship of Russian Jews to their nation of origin at that period in history.

The issue of Antin’s relationship to her traditional religion is not as simple as her association to Russia. Antin’s apparent dismissal of Judaism, the faith that infused her childhood and that sustained her people for thousands of years, is not as easy or complete as some critics make it out to be. What complicates the exploration of this theme is the nature of Judaism itself, which is at once a religion, an ethnicity, a nationality, and a culture. Jewish American writers, including Antin’s contemporary Abraham Cahan, have depicted the loss of devotion and culture that results from Americanization and the void this loss leaves in the individual psyche, yet the rejection of elements of Judaism and Jewish folk culture do not necessarily mean that the immigrant becomes any “less Jewish.” Many different types of Jewish communities and ways of being Jewish exist in America, and, in fact, have always existed. Orthodox Judaism, which is the traditional belief system transplanted in the United States, has its place alongside Reform and Conservative Judaism (which were developed to fit the needs of American-born Jews), which in turn exist alongside a great number of people who consider themselves Jewish but who only practice their faith sporadically or not at all. The truth is that in America, unconfined by the Orthodox Jewish communities that existed in Eastern Europe, where

opportunities in education and business were closed to most Jews, many Jewish immigrants and their children gravitated to more secular ways of life.

Antin's description of the shift in her religious beliefs begins in the first section of the book set in Polotsk, so it is not accurate to attribute the evolution of her cultural and spiritual consciousness exclusively to the process of or desire for Americanization.

Despite the teachings of her family and community, Antin as a child begins formulating her own personal belief system. She recalls that "in those days my religion depended on my mood. I could believe anything I wanted to believe. I did believe, in all my moods, that there was a God who had made the world, in some fashion unexplained" (101).

Antin's young musings stand in contrast to the strict orthodoxy of her community that had a very structured belief system, one which did not depend on the mood of the believer.

As Antin begins challenging the tenets of her religion while still a girl in Russia, she sees her father doing the same. Her father, "never heartily devoted to the religious ideals of the Hebrew scholar," is attracted to the more lax religious attitudes he has observed in "the large cities" he visited on his business travels (62). As a child Antin is influenced by her father's attitude and actions, and she finds in them a validation for her own rejection of some of the more orthodox Jewish beliefs and practices.

One element of the Judaic system under which she had bridled in Polotsk, and which she was more than happy to do without in America, was the patriarchal culture that considered girls as inferior to boys and which circumscribed the lives of women. The narrator explains that "in the mediaeval position of the women of Polotzk education really had no place. A girl was 'finished' when she could read her prayers in Hebrew, following the meaning by the aid of the Yiddish translation especially prepared for

women. If she could sign her name in Russian, do a little figuring, and write in Yiddish to the parents of her betrothed, she was called *wohl gelehrent*—well educated” (90). Throughout the text, the narrator describes the development of herself as an American New Woman, which is clearly at odds with the Polotsk community’s expectation that she is destined to become a traditional Jewish wife and mother. Antin emphasizes her intelligence and portrays herself as hopelessly undomestic, a personality unsuited for a society where “woman’s only work was motherhood” (30). Most restricting of all for the bright and curious child in Russia is the limited education afforded to girls. This, perhaps above all else, contributed to her perception of “the narrowness, the stifling narrowness, of life in Polotzk” (128). Antin’s retreat from the Orthodox Judaism of her ancestors has much to do with the position of women within the religion.¹⁷

In Antin’s narrative the father embodies both the patriarchy of their inherited culture and the apostasy that gives her license to move away from their traditional religion. In America she sheds the trappings of her creed, more easily, perhaps, than other immigrants because her father has done the same thing. The father uses his conventional role of head of the family to encourage his children to cast off the conventions they learned in Polotsk: “He could do all the thinking for the family, he believed; and being convinced that to hold to the outward forms of orthodox Judaism was to be hampered in the race for Americanization, he did not hesitate to order our family life on unorthodox lines” (194). The father’s attitude, which affords Antin a great deal of freedom in their new country, was difficult for her mother, who, unlike her husband, found structure and comfort in their traditional faith and customs. Antin explains, “individual freedom, to him, was the only tolerable condition of life; to her it was

confusion” (194). Though the narrator recognizes that her father’s position on Judaism contributed to her own accelerated assimilation, she also admits that the process of becoming an American that she values is not viewed the same way by all who immigrate.

As the confusion of the mother demonstrates, the loss of religion and culture can pose a threat to a Jewish immigrant moving into a predominantly Christian culture, but the author of *The Promised Land* seems comfortable and not over-concerned with the decisions she makes in regard to her personal belief system. As she distances herself from the orthodox religion of Polotsk, she does not gravitate toward American institutions of organized religion, like Reform Judaism, that would be more in line with her secular tendencies. According to Norma Fain Pratt, there were few religious options for an immigrant Jewish woman of Antin’s generation if she chose not to practice the transplanted Orthodox Judaism. Fain Pratt states that “very few Eastern European women joined the Reform Temples” that had been established by the descendants of German Jews who had arrived in the middle of the nineteenth century. Antin was not dissimilar from many Russian Jewish women in America because “for nearly forty years, after 1880, Jews who were no longer orthodox and yet could not accept Reform Judaism had no form of Judaism through which to express their changing mode of behavior.”¹⁸ In some ways, Antin’s description of her move away from Jewish Orthodoxy represents a part of a larger social reality.

With the freedom to disassociate herself from the religious traditions of her ancestors, Antin at times seems to abandon Judaism as an identity marker altogether. However, though the narrative chronicles Antin’s rejection of the orthodox religion of her early youth, it also reveals how formative its teachings were to her development. The

way that Judaism informs her text throughout suggests how central it is to her worldview.

In fact, the sense of her American self that emerges in the text is firmly rooted in her traditional Jewish upbringing:

I was fed on dreams, instructed by means of prophecies, trained to hear and see mystical things that callous senses could not perceive. I was taught to call myself a princess, in memory of my forefathers who had ruled a nation. Though I went in the disguise of an outcast, I felt a halo resting on my brow. Sat upon by brutal enemies, unjustly hated, annihilated a hundred times, I yet arose and held my head high, sure that I should find my kingdom in the end, although I had lost my way in exile; for He who had brought my ancestors safe through a thousand perils was guiding my feet as well. God needed me and I needed him, for we two together had work to do, according to an ancient covenant between Him and my forefathers. (35)

Antin's confidence, her sense of destiny, and the construction of herself as a new kind of prophet in the new world all have their origin in the stories of her childhood. Michael Kramer also sees Antin's American identity as growing out of the Judaism of her youth. He explains "in evolutionary terms, to move from 'the heritage of the children of Jacob' to 'the full inheritance of American freedom and opportunity' is both abandonment and fulfillment. Fulfillment *through* abandonment."¹⁹ In the course of the narrative, Antin's new kingdom becomes America, and in the course of her life the work she does for her people is her writing and speaking in order to defend their right to be there.

Antin's history and heritage infuse the book with an ethnic particularity that is not completely replaced by the dominant American identity. She hopes at the beginning of

the book that she can abandon her old memories, to find “release from the folds of [her] clinging past,” but it is clear from the depth of emotion with which she writes about her early life that the old country stayed with her (3). Though Antin repeatedly defends her choice to dispense with the dogma of Judaism that she finds restricting, she also remembers rituals and celebrations that brought the family together in enriching ways. She recalls how “the year, in our pious house, was an endless song in many cantos of joy, lamentation, aspiration, and rhapsody” (61). One element that Antin portrays as being central to Jewish communities is reverence for education. The problem with this cultural principle as practiced in Polotsk was that the scholarship that was valued was religious in nature and girls were not welcome in the Talmudic schools. As a bright and dedicated student in America, she translates the traditional love of learning to encompass her secular education and then lives out this value that she sees as being an essential element of Jewish culture.

Antin claims that she remains faithful to the core beliefs of her religion, but the lack of religious alternatives for women who did not want to practice Orthodox Judaism explains her search for her own spiritual system. The form of spirituality that is expressed in the text is a personal form of American Transcendentalism, in the mode of Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman, that is connected to the “golden truth of Judaism” that stays with her (190). Transcendentalism may have been a way for Antin to enter into an American religion without converting to Christianity. She was friends with and dedicated the book to the well-known Transcendentalist Josephine Lazarus,²⁰ who may have served as a religious guide. Antin’s spiritual leanings in that direction, however, seem to come from an innate belief system that can be glimpsed in her first book, *From Plotsk to*

Boston, which was a translation of a letter written soon after she came to America at the age of thirteen.²¹ Antin's quest for new spiritual vistas would be the most prolonged journey of her life, as she explored forms of religion and mysticism for several decades after she retired from public life.

Another major cultural shift that Antin describes, and what might really be the heart of the book, is her adoption of the English language. To comprehend her relationship to her new language, it is important to understand that all of her success in America, and any approval and recognition she ever received in her life, came from her language skills. The narrator remembers with pride how she was praised while a child in Polotzk for demonstrating a remarkable aptitude in Hebrew, though working with inferior teachers, and for teaching herself Russian at a very young age. These early rewards for her language skills, however, are nothing compared to the benefits and acclaim she received after coming to America. In fact, Mary distinguishes herself in her family, school, and even her community because she learns to read and write English very quickly, and her writing arouses the interest of those around her. Her first publication was a short essay titled "Snow" that one of her teachers sent to an education journal to demonstrate the remarkable progress that is possible with immigrant students. For one who had been studying English for only four months, the essay is actually striking and the sentiments are indicative of an interesting young mind. It is no wonder that this girl captured the imagination of those around her and continued to captivate a wide audience for many years. This first publication was followed by two other literary successes unusual for one so young, and for one who was writing in a second language. A poem on George Washington appeared in the *Boston Herald*, and finally, to round out her early

literary career, her first autobiography, *From Plotz to Boston*, was published when Antin was only seventeen years old.²² This little book, which was a translation of a long letter she had written to her uncle in Russia shortly after she had emigrated, came out in 1899 with a preface from Israel Zangwill. The English language became Antin's ticket to legitimacy and success in America.

Antin admits to gladly abandoning her native tongue; when her success is assured and her assimilation complete, she says she learns to "think without an accent" (282). Because her language skills earn her praise, she never seems to consider the possibility of making her way in the world of Yiddish literature that was being written and published in America.²³ It is important, however, when evaluating Antin's relationship with her two languages, to consider her circumstances. She came to America as a child and was soon enrolled in English-only American schools, which accelerated her English language acquisition. Because of her young age, her attachment to Yiddish and to the community that language represented may not have been as strong as it was with adult immigrants. In her autobiography, Antin reveals two aspirations, one personal and one social, that were to influence her writing and guide her life. The personal goal was to find acceptance in the established American literary community. As Shavelson recognizes, Antin's aspiration was entrance into the Boston literary elite, and credit must be given to her drive and determination that, as a young immigrant girl, she was able to find friends among the class that she admired. In the book she begins by befriending her teachers and branches out to include businessmen, philanthropists, and writers in her circle of friends. Her social aim, inextricable from her personal ambition, was to act as mediator between native-born Americans and immigrants. From the publication of *The Promised Land* in

1912 to the eve of WWI, Antin lectured tirelessly against anti-immigration laws and nativist attitudes. Her final book, *They Who Knock at Our Gates* (1914), is both an emotional and a rational plea for American citizens to look at the newcomers as part of the nation's heritage and as a valuable resource.²⁴ If Antin used her adopted language to do her most important work, it was because the audience she sought was not the immigrant but the majority or established Americans. It is clear that through her books and lectures she succeeded in finding a wide audience: her autobiography became a best seller and she was one of the most famous lecturers in the country.²⁵

Though *The Promised Land* is overwhelmingly positive in its tone and optimistic in its message, a close look at the narrative reveals that assimilation is a much more individual and complicated process than Antin lets on in her optimistic rhetoric. In her story, she delineates the context and reasons for all of the changes and substitutions she makes on her journey to become an American, but one scene that represents her final shedding of tradition and initiation into her new culture is fraught with complications. The compromises that an immigrant must make to be recognized by society as an American, and to feel like a true citizen within herself, are often personal and subtle. She must constantly negotiate the benefits and consequences of her decisions.

The scene that brings all the elements of the narrator's newly-fashioned American self together is the one in which Antin goes to luncheon at the house of her favorite teacher, Mrs. Dillingham. The young Mary, because of her language skills and her sheer will, has entered the society of which she longed to be a part. She is finally a guest in the home of a friend and educator and is determined to fit in to this society of elite, educated, Anglo-Protestant company. Antin's presence at this table can be read metaphorically in

terms of her assimilation into American society. She has been invited to the table, and it is her desire to be there. However, it is obvious that she is uncomfortable and unsure of herself among this crowd. She is careful to follow others in the use of utensils and manners, just as she has been able, since coming to America, to pick up the language, values, and protocol from those around her. Things are going well until the customs of the Americans come into direct contradiction with the system of behavior in which she has been raised. In this instance, the conflict comes when Mrs. Dillingham serves pork.²⁶ Antin, both predictably and shockingly, makes the decision to eat the forbidden food: “I ate, but only a newly abnegated Jew can understand with what squirming, what protesting of the inner man, what exquisite abhorrence of myself” (196). Not only does she eat the ham, she makes it a point to devour as much of it as she can. The act is shocking because it is a direct rejection of one of the most clear and basic rules of the religion of her family and ancestors, to not partake of *Trefah*, that which is unclean. It is predicable because Antin’s path in the narrative has been leading toward a rejection of the rigid elements of Judaism. That the two paths of her life, the inherited and the self-determined, should converge in this one symbolic gesture is fitting and really becomes the climax of the book. The ham Antin is offered obviously represents the point at which the expectations of assimilation become invasive on the personal, inherited, and private. The immigrant at this point has a few options: she could decline the meat without explaining or drawing attention to herself; she could decline with a polite explanation; or she could eat. That Antin consumes a great deal of the meat shows the extent to which she is willing to go to prove her “Americaness.” This act most clearly marks *The Promised Land* as an assimilationist text.²⁷

Antin's narrative of Americanization delineates what was lost, abandoned, and left behind in the process, including elements of culture, language, and religion. It also depicts what was gained, including voice, recognition, and acceptance, as well as the legitimacy to act as spokesperson for immigrant issues. But there is conflict in the text as the narrator expresses both the triumph of her acculturation and reveals circumstances that seem to contradict the story of her steady rise. Though *The Promised Land* is assimilationist in tone and stated purpose, an examination of the structure and form show that Antin's patriotic rhetoric often obscures the reality of a less than perfect America and a less than satisfying acculturation experience. It is not accurate to say that things are repressed in the text, for, in fact, Antin includes some of her most distressing experiences in her narrative, but it would be fair to say that she diminishes their effect on herself and in some ways protects her audience from their negative implications. There are many moments where there is slippage in the façade of a fluid and benevolent transition, but the narrator is careful to describe more painful episodes in ways that both explain *and* minimize the impact that these experiences had on her. Despite the fact that Antin downplays the more painful elements of her life, their inclusion gives her narrative depth as they connect her to the difficulties with which most other immigrants were confronted.

One of the realities of American society that seems glaringly absent in Antin's text is anti-Semitism. The years depicted in the narrative, 1894 to 1899, were marked by increasing nativism, and the Boston-based Immigration Restriction League as a group was committed to protecting "their country" from growing Jewish influences. However, there are only a very few instances in the American section of the book that can be interpreted as revealing the prejudice of other Americans against the Jewish immigrants.

It may be that Antin, because of her gifts, gender, age, language skills or circumstances, was actually not a direct target of resentment. Her father, who never seemed to find success in his new country, or her sister, who did not have the opportunity to go to school but who went right into the factories as a teenager, may have had a different perspective on prejudice in America.

Though anti-Semitism is all but absent in the American section of *The Promised Land*, the first half of the narrative describes Russian persecution and its psychological effects on the Jews there. These chapters include depictions of injustice and the damage it does to both the individual and the community. The Polotzk chapters give Antin a chance to speak to her American readers on important subjects that they might be resistant to if the same topics were discussed in an American setting. Writing about prejudice at a remove, in Russia, allows Antin to show it in all its complexity and allows her audience to contemplate its implications without feeling their country is being criticized. As she shows, the forms of discrimination are many, from the social and governmental oppression that limited Jewish residents to life within the Pale of Settlement and barred them from all but a few professions, to the personal attack on a little Jewish girl (Antin) by a little Christian boy. When speaking of anti-Semitism from this remove, Antin is able to be direct and forceful with her criticism: “Perhaps it was wrong of us to think of our Gentile neighbors as a different species of beings from ourselves, but . . . it was easier to be friends with the beasts in the barn than with some of the Gentiles. The cow and the goat and the cat responded to kindness, and remembered which of the housemaids was generous and which was cross. The Gentiles made no distinctions. A Jew was a Jew, to be hated and spat upon and used spitefully” (21).

Antin demonstrates how prejudice separates the two groups and does not allow much room for communication. The author does not, however, depict all Christians as antagonistic towards their Jewish neighbors, for to do so would allow little hope for cross-cultural understanding in the latter part of her text. She remembers that “there were wise Gentiles who understood. Those were educated people”; however, “most of the Gentiles were ignorant and distrustful and spiteful” (15-16). Anti-Semitism, the narrative conveys, is the response of the stupid, the insecure, and the mean, not the enlightened individual, the American. To “understand” means to know and appreciate the history and customs of a people and to recognize that, despite their different traditions, all share a common humanity. Antin creates this conflict in microcosm as she recalls the abuse she suffered from a Christian Russian boy named Vanka, who caused her much anguish as a little girl. The narrator, however, cannot condemn the little boy because he was just as much a victim of the system as she was: “Vanka abused me only because *he did not understand*” (16). Just as the narrative of her American experiences serves as a mediation between the immigrant and mainstream America, so these early chapters depict the evils of anti-Semitism in a way that fosters understanding.

In the Polotsk section of the text, Antin portrays Christianity (like Judaism) as a religion that limits the perspective of its adherents. She remembers how “our enemies always held up the cross as the excuse of their cruelty to us” (10). To attack Christianity in her new country, or to expose American anti-Semitism would contradict the tone and premise of the second half of the book, which portrays America as the “promised land,” yet she can comment on intolerance through her earlier experiences. The actions of the government, the community, and the individual in Polotzk are poignantly rendered and

may have given American readers their first glimpse of a side of Christianity they had never considered before. The issue of anti-Semitism, and how it is harmful to families and to individuals, can be translated to the American setting. Antin posits her own life story as a testament to the fact that the United States really is a free country, and she hints that race hatred would be harmful because it impedes the goal of the nation to assimilate successfully all who come to her shores.

Another reality of American immigrant life that Antin includes but glosses over in her story is the debilitating poverty of the slums. Despite her own shining success, Antin's household is not spared from the economic difficulties that thousands of other immigrant families had to face. She quite plainly states that her father cannot sustain employment, that her sister is obligated to go to work in a factory shortly after their arrival, and that her mother continues to have children despite the family's poverty and cramped apartments. For the first few years in America, the author depicts her younger self as unaffected by economic concerns, but by the time she enters high school these things weigh heavily on her mind. The chapters that most vividly describe the family's condition, like "Manna" and "Dover Street,"²⁸ reveal an adolescent consciousness repulsed by the poverty surrounding her and embarrassed by the inhabitants of her neighborhood who are unable to rise out of it. Antin also remembers her longing to be removed from their misery. Buried in these chapters are troublesome episodes that balance the rosy assimilationist vision of much of the book.

In these chapters, Antin obscures the darker side of life as she isolates and to a great extent neutralizes descriptions of poverty in the structure of both the chapters and the book. One way she masks the more painful realities revealed in these sections is to

conclude them with an optimistic Transcendentalism that lifts the audience from the poor streets with the assurance that in the process of assimilation anxiety is merely transitory. In “Manna,” Antin describes the crowded and dirty life of Wheeler Street, the breakdown of the family (which she sees as “part of the process of Americanization”), and her own sense of her “shabbiness and lowliness” (213, 215). Yet in the last paragraph she attributes her perception of the sordid conditions of life to common adolescent angst. She explains in the last sentence that, as a teenager, “for some years . . . I must weep and laugh out of season, stand on tiptoe to pluck the stars from heaven, love and hate immoderately, propound theories of the destiny of man, and not know what is going on in my heart” (216). The chapter ends with the image of the girl reaching up in her dreams and out with her intellect, while the negative feelings she revealed earlier are attributed to the normal mood swings of puberty. However, the fact that she does not know what is going on in her own heart speaks to the confusion of a young woman who is growing away from her family and culture in the process of assimilation.

The chapter “Dover Street” contrasts her home in a tenement house with her schooling in the prestigious Latin School for Girls in Boston. The narrator describes filth, hunger, the inability of her father to find and hold jobs (sometimes because of his poor English skills or “Jewish appearance”), and “the familiarity of her vulgar neighbors” (229, 233). Antin finally reveals how close the conditions of life in the tenement touch the psyche when she says that “I felt myself defiled by the indecencies I was compelled to witness” (233). Yet even as this statement is uttered it is backed away from, isolated. A walk outside the neighborhood, a look at the sunset or the stars, lifts the narrator out of grim poverty. The chapter ends in another transcendent vision. This time she watches

the sunrise from the tenement rooftop and sees the “distant buildings . . . massed like palace walls with turrets and spires lost in a rosy cloud” and thinks “I love my beautiful city spreading all about me. I love the world. I love my place in the world” (236). Once more the confined conditions in which she and her family must live are diminished as she reaches out and beyond them, and so the painful realities and emotions revealed in the chapter fade as it closes.

The harsher realities of the sections describing the Antin family’s poverty are further buried by their position in the structure of the book. The chapter preceding this group is entitled “A Child’s Paradise” and lightly tells of her access to the Boston Public Library, her love of reading of all sorts, including American literature and Yiddish newspapers, and the sense of connection to her community that she felt as a child. The section after the exploration of her poverty is entitled “The Burning Bush” and discusses the Hale House, where she made influential friends, attended lectures, and developed a love for the natural sciences. In these frames to the revelation of her poverty, public institutions that provide opportunities for learning, growth, and escape limit the suffering the narrator expresses in the episodes between. The settlement house in “A Child’s Paradise” and the public library in “The Burning Bush” provide the narrator with an alternative to the slums and tenement houses and in a sense contain them in the narrative.

The uncompromising optimism of *The Promised Land* also masks an undercurrent of solitude and alienation. In America, the newcomer, the pioneer, has the opportunity to reinvent an identity with every relocation. The peril inherent in establishing a “new self” is that, if this persona is successful, its creator must be vigilant in not letting any inconsistencies appear in the façade. In Antin’s case, the outwardly simple progression of

her American success is occasionally interrupted by submerged realities. The cracks that appear in her otherwise smooth story of assimilation offer occasional glimpses of the disconnection she experiences in her quest for acceptance. Depictions of breaks with family, culture, and religion are familiar in immigrant narratives, but in *The Promised Land* the most profound disassociation comes with the elements that the narrator must deny about herself, including her isolation. Antin hints at the friendships she cultivates with older, influential people, but there is little mention of close relationships with boys or girls her own age. The only young person for whom Antin expresses any affection is her sister, Frieda. Circumstances and a very important decision their father makes, however, divide the lives of the two girls. Frieda, who is fifteen when they arrive in America, goes off to work in the factories and is soon married. Mary, always adept at her studies, goes to school. However, when her father filled out her school forms, he lied about her age in order to gain for her a few more years in the American school system. Antin is thirteen when she enters public school; her father tells authorities that she is eleven. This lie, told for the best of reasons, is not mentioned in the text.²⁹ It may seem unusual that such an interesting decision that would affect her life in profound ways should be omitted, but, in light of her letters, the reasons for this omission become clear. From the very beginning of her schooling in America, her teachers had taken her to be what she presented, a girl who was wise and talented beyond her young years. Her circle of influential friends broadened to the point where, in 1899, her first autobiography, *From Plotz to Boston*, was published with a preface written by the internationally famous Jewish-Anglo playwright Israel Zangwill, who gives her false age in his introduction. From that point on, Antin must have sensed that to reveal her real age would be

tantamount to exposing herself as a fraud and would embarrass all the people who had been kind enough to support, mentor, and promote her. In effect, she was forced into playing the role of adolescent as she entered womanhood. The conflict of her situation is revealed not in so many words but in the comparative loneliness that permeates the text. The one real confidant, the one girl who knows everything about Mary, her sister, is living in a completely different world. Antin's Latin School classmates, younger and more privileged than she, could not know her secret and did not share her history. Assimilation with her peers was all but impossible in Antin's high school years.

The picture that finally emerges is of a character who embodies all the promise of the new world but who experiences all the loneliness of the pioneer and the exile. In the chapter "Dover Street," Antin most clearly reveals the fissure between her academic and social life and the condition of living in the tenements among other immigrants. She explains that when "the confusion of the house" became too much for her, she would go at night to the South Boston Bridge, which overlooked a massive tangle of railroad tracks. She then goes home and sits up late into the night listening to the sounds of Dover Street. This moment of stillness reveals a glimpse of the troubled girl, alone in her thoughts, trying to decipher meaning in the world. With the coming of dawn the chapter ends with new platitudes, re-affirmations, and optimism, but in the shadows the adjustment of one sensitive girl to the pressure of "the promised land" are evident and reveal that even the most gifted, enthusiastic, hopeful of "new Americans" has doubts and worries about how to make her way. These dark moments, and the realities of life that are excluded from the texts, enrich the unabashed assimilationist message of the book.

Antin's narrative is a testimonial to Americanization, but it also a testament to the true complexity of assimilation. It is possible to go through the text and excerpt a narrative of the seamless progression from "greenhorn" to American, but there are elements of trial and doubt present in her story that give a more complex model of citizenship than the one the narrator explicitly advances. She believes wholeheartedly in the melting pot, and yet the end result of her own journey through the process of Americanization does not yield an uninflected American type, though she claims to have learned "to think without an accent." Even as she tries to depict her traditional culture as fully falling away as she steps into her new American identity, it does not work. As with all who come to the United States, her history, her past, and her religion still cling to her; the Jewish heritage and the Russian Pale history are indelibly imprinted upon her work and her life. In *The Promised Land* this inheritance and history informs her new life, whether she overtly acknowledges it or not. She emerges from her journey through the melting pot a Jewish and an American writer, one who represents her people's struggles in the Russian Pale and in the promised land.

The compromises and negotiations Antin makes in her narrative show how precarious a proposition assimilation can be, even for one who is able to take advantage of free public education, who attains English proficiency early and easily, and who accepts wholeheartedly America's history and ideals. This complexity, finally, may be the most valuable thing about *The Promised Land*. It may be the element that keeps the text alive. The book represents the broader reality of assimilation, not as Antin preaches it but as she depicted it and as it is practiced by millions of immigrants before and after her. Her story reveals that there is a transformation, but it is not as complete as she

proclaims it to be. Antin represents herself as the un-hyphenated American that was the ideal of teachers, social reformers, and politicians, but in fact the model of the assimilated ethnic American that emerges in her text is more useful. *The Promised Land* represents how the *desire* to shed cultural particularism and to become a mainstream American is often countered by a lingering connection to tradition and an indifferent new society. Although Antin hints at what was lost on her path to Americanization and alludes to some difficult passages in her life, overall the text is a celebration of what she gained by becoming a United States citizen. The concept of assimilation as the ideal model for ethnic-American identity found its highest expression in *The Promised Land*. In academic discourse the concept itself would fall out of favor as the twentieth century advanced and would be replaced with models that placed more value on traditional inheritance. Though later writers would tend to focus more on the psychological difficulties inherent in acculturation, the assimilationist drive that Antin depicts was to become a recurring theme in twentieth-century American literature.

Notes

¹ Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer* (New York: Penguin, 1986). Originally published in London by Thomas Davies in 1782. Crèvecoeur wrote, “*he is an American, who, leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds. He becomes an American by being received in the broad lap of our great Alma Mater. Here individuals are melted into a new race of men, whose labours and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world*” (p. 70).

² Mary Antin, *The Promised Land* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997). Originally published in Boston by Houghton Mifflin Company in 1912.

³ Gert Beulens, “The New Man and the Mediator: (Non-) Remembrance in Jewish-American Immigrant Narrative,” in *Memory, Narrative, and Identity: New Essays in Ethnic American Literature*, ed. Amiritjit Singh, Joseph T. Skerrett, Jr., and Robert E. Hogan (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1994), p. 91.

⁴ Werner Sollors, “Introduction,” *The Promised Land* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), pp. xxxi-xxxii.

⁵ Examples include Sarah Blacher Cohen, “Mary Antin’s *The Promised Land*: A Breach of Promise,” *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 3 (1977): 28-35, and Susanne A. Shavelson, “Anxieties of Authorship in the Autobiographies of Mary Antin and Aliza Greenblatt,” *Prooftexts* 18 (1998): 161-86.

⁶ Francis A. Walker, “Restriction of Immigration,” *The Atlantic Monthly* 77 (1896): 822-29. Francis Amasa Walker was a renowned economist whose various public roles as, among other things, Commissioner of Indian Affairs and director of the federal census, seemed to qualify him as an expert on ethnic-American issues. The ethnocentrism that he exhibits in this essay seems shocking to a twenty-first century reader but is really representative of the anti-immigration rhetoric circulating at the time. One of his assertions in this essay is that native-born (that is white, Protestant) Americans had fewer children because of the repulsive and intimidating nature of immigrants in their midst, which resulted in the “degradation of our citizenship” (p. 826). He believed the new wave of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe to be especially repugnant: “The entrance into our political, social, and industrial life of such vast masses of peasantry, degraded below our utmost conceptions, is a matter which no intelligent patriot can look upon without the gravest apprehension and alarm. . . . They are beaten men from beaten races; representing the worst failures in the struggle for existence. . . . They have none of the ideas and aptitudes which fit men to take up readily and easily the problem of self-care and self-government. . . . What effects must be produced upon our social standards, and upon the ambitions and aspirations of our people, by a contact so foul and loathsome?” (p. 828).

⁷ Immigration Commission, “Children of Immigrants in Schools” (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1911), pp. 1-6.

⁸ These bills were vetoed by four presidents, but the group finally prevailed with the establishment of the Immigration Restriction Act of 1924.

⁹ An excellent discussion of the typology that links Antin's text and other ethnic narratives to the American colonists can be found in Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). He shows how the ideology of a chosen people and a promised land resonates through American literature.

¹⁰ Antin was an admirer and supporter of Theodore Roosevelt, whom she met in 1912. Several friendly letters from Roosevelt can be found in *Selected Letters of Mary Antin*, ed. Evelyn Salz (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000). In one, Roosevelt tells Antin "you are an American in whom I so deeply believe" (pp. 151-52).

¹¹ Arthur Hertzberg, *The Jews in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 243.

¹² Zangwill wrote the introduction to Antin's first autobiography, *From Plotz to Boston*, in 1899.

¹³ This group, successful as they were, had their own struggles with the Boston Brahmin, as described in Herzberg's *The Jews in America*.

¹⁴ Horace M. Kallen, "Democracy versus the Melting Pot," in *Jewish American Literature*, ed. Jules Chametzky, John Felstiner, Hilene Flanzbaum, and Kathryn Hellerstein (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001). This article was originally published as "Democracy versus the Melting Pot: A Study of American Nationality" in *The Nation* 100 (February 18, 1915): 190-94 and (February 25, 1915): 217-20.

¹⁵ Glenn C. Altschuler, *Race, Ethnicity, and Class in American Social Thought 1865-1919* (Wheeling: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1982), p. 75.

¹⁶ Michael P. Kramer, "Assimilation in *The Promised Land*: Mary Antin and the Jewish Origins of the American Self," *Prooftexts* 18 (1998): 128.

¹⁷ In her exploration of cultural patriarchy, Antin stands at the beginning of a literary tradition that would be expanded in the feminist writing of the twentieth century. Just as Antin has been criticized for scorning Judaism when in fact she was rebelling against the position of women within her religion, later women of color have been reproached by men in their communities for disparaging their shared culture. Frank Chin denounced Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, and Ishmael Reed similarly criticized Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. The problem comes from the inability of these critics to distinguish between two closely related but not synonymous things, the male hegemony of a patriarchic culture and the culture itself.

¹⁸ Norma Fain Pratt, "Traditions in Judaism: The Jewish American Woman Through the 1930s," *American Quarterly* 30 (1978): 681-702.

¹⁹ Kramer, p. 143.

²⁰ Josephine Lazarus was the sister of Emma Lazarus, the Jewish-American poet who wrote the poem "The New Colossus," which is inscribed on the base of the Statue of Liberty.

²¹ Mary Antin, *From Plotzk to Boston* (New York: Markus Weiner Publishing, 1986). Originally published in Boston by W. B. Clark in 1899. One passage that is reminiscent of the Transcendentalism of Thoreau comes when the narrator looks out to

sea from the boat during her trans-Atlantic journey: “My mind and power would go on working, till I was overcome by the strength and power that was greater than myself. . . . I was conscious only of sea and sky and something I did not understand. And as I listened to its solemn voice, I felt as if I had found a friend, and I knew that I loved the ocean. It seemed as if it were within as well as without, a part of myself . . .” (pp. 70-71). Antin comes from Polotzk, which is in Russia, not Plotzk, which is in Poland. The publisher’s misspelling in the title of her first book caused some confusion early in her career.

²² Her friends, however, believe she is fifteen. It is also significant that the publication of *From Plotz to Boston* is not mentioned in *The Promised Land*. The narrative trails off after she enters the Latin School, but it may be that a scenario in which the narrator gets a book published as a teenager would mark her as too dissimilar from other immigrants, a group that she depicted herself as representing.

²³ Shavelson strongly criticizes Antin’s decision to write in English and regards this choice as a desire to “leave behind . . . the immigrant community and her own history” (p. 165). In the article, Antin is compared to Greenblatt, who wrote in Yiddish. Shavelson obviously favors Greenblatt, whom she sees as being more faithful to the Jewish community and religion. In her evaluation of these writers, Shavelson does not take into account important factors like their ages of immigration (Antin immigrates as a child, Greenblatt as a grown woman) or the audience or purpose of their writing.

²⁴ Mary Antin, *They Who knock at Our Gate: A Complete Gospel of Immigration* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1914).

²⁵ Despite her stated and obvious preference for English as a medium for her work, it is not quite accurate to say that Antin abandoned Yiddish completely. As Sollors points out in his introduction to *The Promised Land*, she included words from her native language in all of her writing. He posits that her knowledge of Yiddish is a source of power in that it gives her an authority in her work. On at least two occasions when Antin's editor asked her to eliminate foreign words from her texts, she insisted on leaving in a limited amount of Yiddish and Hebrew (*Selected Letters*, pp. 52, 58).

²⁶ The name of the teacher, and her insensitivity in serving pork to a student she knows to be Jewish, seems to connect Miss Dillingham to the notorious Dillingham Commission Report, a forty-two volume document "proving" that immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe were inferior, that was presented to the Senate in 1911 in support of anti-immigration legislation.

²⁷ After her initial strong reaction to eating the ham, the narrator quickly justifies the act with a vague Transcendental passage by which she seems to avoid any further examination of the implications of her decision: "And to think that so ridiculous a thing as a scrap of meat should be the symbol and test of a thing so august! To think that in the mental life of a half-grown child should be reflected the struggles and triumph of ages! Over and over and over again I discover that I am a wonderful thing, being human; that I am the image of the universe, being myself; that I am the repository of all the wisdom of the world, being alive and sane at the beginning of this twentieth century. The heir of the ages am I, and all that has been is in me and shall continue to be in my immortal self" (197).

²⁸ There are four chapters, chapters fourteen through seventeen, that touch on the hardships of Antin's late adolescence. They are "Manna," "Tarnished Laurels," "Dover Street," and "The Landlady."

²⁹ As Sollors points out in his introduction to *The Promised Land*, a version of this occurrence is found in an early draft but did not make it into her autobiography. The same situation and its moral implications are explored in the short story "The Lie," which was published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1913, though Antin makes the main character a boy instead of a girl. Mary Antin, "The Lie," *Atlantic Monthly* 112 (1913): 177-90.

CHAPTER 3

IDENTITY AND AMBIGUITY: THE STORIES AND ESSAYS OF ZITKALA-SA

In a series of essays and short stories that appeared in mainstream publications between 1900 and 1902, Dakota writer Zitkala-Sa explored issues of identity and nationality as she depicted Native-American life on and off the reservation. Written at a transitional moment in history, her works redefine the terms of American-Indian identity even as she expresses a belief that she has no right to claim that self. Although from a young age she chose to pursue a western education off the reservation, she uses her literary voice to register her resistance to mainstream American society and to champion the tribal life to which she feels she no longer belongs. What emerges in her short stories, and particularly in her autobiographical essays, is a compelling ambivalence of affiliation.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the American public had certain ideas about what Indians were and what their fate would be. Forecasts of ultimate doom predicted by the government, ethnologists, and writers of popular literature were responsible for the conception that Indians were an anachronistic and dying race. Though it was increasingly obvious to many, in particular to American Indians themselves, that this was not the case, it was true that a long history of battling diseases brought by Europeans, loss of traditional means of sustenance due to diminishing resources, and removals to

inhospitable lands had devastated the Indian population in the United States. The same events and policies had also served to weaken tribal cultures. The most momentous policy to be enacted in the late nineteenth century was the Dawes Severalty Act of 1887, which was designed to break up the reservation system. The United States government reasoned that reservations served to segregate Indians and postponed their inevitable assimilation. Under the Dawes Act individuals and families were to be given settlement allotments, thus doing away with communally held land on the reservations. In effect this paved the way for the large-scale transfer of property from Native American to white ownership. In the process of allocation, excess land was sold to white farmers by the government, which was to hold the proceeds in trust.¹ Often individual Indians in the grips of poverty would lease their allotments, often never to gain control of them again. According to James Wilson, “by 1891 the commissioner of Indian Affairs was able to report that more than twelve million acres—11.5 per cent of all reservation land—had been ‘restored to the public domain’ in just two years.”² By the time the Dawes Act was repealed in 1934, many reservations were a fraction of their pre-1887 size.³

Just as the allocation of land and the break up of reservations was supposed to mark the end of tribal culture and speed up assimilation of adults, governmental and private boarding schools were created to steer children away from traditional Indian ways of life and indoctrinate them into American society. The removal of children from their homes and the resulting division of families exacerbated the process of cultural loss, which is why the period between 1887 and 1934 is considered by some to be one of the darkest in Native-American history. Gerald Vizenor, while recognizing that this was a painful time, notes that it was also the beginning of a regeneration of American-Indian

cultural and political power. Vizenor describes this period to be a middle cycle of Native-American history. The children who attended the Dawes Era boarding schools and learned to read and write in English became the generation to fight for the rights of their tribes both locally and on a national level. As a result, despite the hardships these individuals may have faced, they became the locus for what Vizenor calls the “tribal enlightenment” at the turn into the twentieth century.⁴

One product of this era of was Zitkala-Sa, who was born Gertrude Simmons on the Yankton Reservation in South Dakota in 1876. She spent her first eight years living a traditional Sioux life and spoke no English before she went off to White’s Manual Institution in Indiana. By the time she was a teenager, she had become proficient in English and had decided to make her life off the reservation. Her early traditional experiences and the problems of her people stayed with her, however, and from her first job as a teacher at an Indian school to her last position as founder and president of the National Council of American Indians, her life was dedicated to educating and defending American-Indian people.

Though Zitkala-Sa had a rich and varied career as a Native-American advocate, she may be best known for her literary endeavors. These include *Old Indian Legends*, a collection based on Lakota stories she had heard as a child, which was published in 1901, and a series of essays and short stories that appeared in popular journals between January 1900 and December 1902, which were collected, along with a few additions, in *American Indian Stories* in 1921.⁵ *Old Indian Legends*, one of the first collections of folklore to be written by a Native-American woman, is an engaging work of literature and an important anthropological text. These Iktomi trickster tales, though written in English, are

otherwise free from western signification; the temporal and physical space is a purely Dakota world that exists in tribal memories and legends. Zitkala-Sa's essays and stories, on the other hand, speak to the condition of living an American-Indian existence at the turn into the twentieth century. Her national literary career began with a sequence of remarkable autobiographical essays that appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* in January, February, and March of 1900. These essays, "Impressions of an Indian Childhood," "The School Days of an Indian Girl," and "An Indian Teacher Among Indians," chronicle her life from her early youth on the reservation through her experiences at a Dawes Era boarding school to her short-lived career as a teacher at an Indian school. The following year she published two short stories in *Harper's Magazine*, "The Trial Path" and "The Soft-Hearted Sioux," that touch on the changes occurring on reservations. In 1902 another short story, "A Warrior's Daughter," appeared in *Everybody's Magazine*, and her final publication in a national mainstream periodical, "Why I am a Pagan," appeared later that year in the *Atlantic Monthly*.

These works mark the appearance of a new voice on the American literary landscape. Zitkala-Sa was female, Indian, and well educated, and her prose was critical, lyrical, and uncompromising. She offered the American public a glimpse inside a traditional culture that their government policy was attempting to eradicate as well as a view of some of the discouraging results of those policies. These works also reveal a complicated relationship with American identity. In one of the great ironies in history, Native Americans were not officially recognized as citizens until the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924. Before this act was passed, American Indians, unlike any other individuals born within the borders of the nation, had to take specified action before being considered

members of the United States. Citizenship was gained by receiving an allotment, officially separating from one's tribe, through special permission of the Secretary of the Interior, and later by service in WWI.⁶ However, in the works of Zitkala-Sa, the right of Indians to U.S. citizenship is not addressed as often as the value of entering into American society at all. The narratives are not so much concerned with society's willingness (or unwillingness) to accept Native Americans into its fold. What is at issue is whether Indians should want or seek such entry in the first place. In Zitkala-Sa's writings, a rejection of American identity coexists with a sense that a traditional Indian identity is no longer viable once the process of assimilation begins. What emerges is a profound ambivalence; the record of an individual who does not want to become an American but who does not feel that she can claim an Indian identity once she is separated from her tribe. This is different from the modern concept of a hybrid individual, described by Gloria Anzaldua as "*la consciencia de la mestiza*," which signifies a conscious acceptance and integration of all her cultures.⁷ Zitkala-Sa sees herself as alienated from both her native community and the nation in which she lives. The protagonists of her narratives do not embrace the borders and live in both worlds because they do not feel themselves a part of either.

Several of Zitkala-Sa's prose pieces are set in a purely Dakota world, exclusive of white America, and at first seem to have little bearing on issues of cross-cultural identity. Two short stories, "A Warrior's Daughter" and "The Trial Path," take place at a time before white contact, but when read in their historical context, and in relation to her other literary production during this period, the stories reveal an anxiety related to identity and culture. "A Warriors Daughter" begins with a father who is the "chieftain's bravest

warrior” teaching his eight year old daughter, Tussee, to dance (346).⁸ In this scene, two elements that become important to the plot are revealed. The first is the close relationship of the father and daughter and the second is the fact that the girl has learned the language of a neighboring rival tribe from a member of their household who came to them several years before when he was captured in warfare.

The action of the story involves Tussee as a young woman on the night her beloved goes into battle. The young man is taken prisoner, but Tussee, using her wit, her language skills, and the bravery she inherits from her father, is able to sneak into the enemy camp and rescue him. The plot of the Indian maiden acting bravely to save her lover is familiar. What is original, however, is the way that Tussee transforms in the narrative to embody several roles in her tribal culture. When the story begins she is the spirited and devoted daughter; next she is the beautiful maiden doing her traditional beadwork; as the warriors ride off to fight, she fulfills the duty of a wife as she takes the place of her mother among the “brave elderly women” who follow the war party with food and deerskins (349). Once the battle is over and she hears her beloved has been captured, she becomes the warrior, sneaking into the camp and killing her lover’s captor. Near the end of the night, she disguises herself as an old woman to avoid suspicion, and in this guise carries out the rescue. This portrayal of one female taking on many roles in her tribe can be interpreted to reflect Native-American anxiety. In the story, which seems to be set before European contact, the family and the tribe are intact. The girl has a mother and a father and there are tribal members of all ages fulfilling their traditional roles. By the early twentieth century, when this story was published, and particularly in Zitkala-Sa’s reservation and tribe, this societal wholeness was no longer the case. Her

own family had suffered loss due to illness and removal; her father had abandoned the family before she was born; and she and her siblings had been separated from their mother and each other by boarding schools. There was a sense at the time that traditional roles were disappearing, and “A Warrior’s Daughter” may reflect the individual desire to maintain these roles in some way. The pressure on the individual to sustain a culture is further exemplified by Tussee’s final action. Her lover is too weak to walk, so “Tussee lifts him upon her broad shoulders” and “with half-running triumphant steps she carries him away to the open night” (352). The emblematic task of carrying the culture into the future is not so much a burden but an act of triumph as the female Indian figure finds the strength to do the unexpected and the seemingly impossible. Because Tussee had learned the language of the rival tribe as a child, she is able to eavesdrop on the members of the band and to lure the young man who captured her lover away from camp to kill him. She learns the language of the enemy only to use it against them and to say to her foe “I am a Dakota woman!” right before she plunges the knife into his heart (350). It is significant that “A Warrior’s Daughter” was Zitkala-Sa’s last short story to be published at the turn into the twentieth century. The final image she leaves is a Dakota woman taking on any role necessary to rescue her tribe, carrying the future of her people triumphantly on her own shoulders, and using her enemy’s language against them in the process.

Another short story that seems to be set away from white influences is “The Trial Path.” This story opens in a tepee, as do all of Zitkala-Sa’s narratives that represent a tribal setting. Vizenor has noted that for thousands of years, many North American tribes lived in round, communal dwellings that inevitably shaped the worldview of the inhabitants.⁹ He connects the relatively sudden move from these circular homes to more

western style houses with a shift in perspective that served to distance American Indians from their traditional way of life. In this story the characters are “a maid of twenty years” and her grandmother, who are lying down to sleep for the night (741).¹⁰ The intervening generation, notably, is absent. As the old woman begins to tell of an important chain of events that occurred when she was a maiden, the story reaches back two more generations to a time very similar to that of “A Warrior’s Daughter.” The grandmother is recounting how, before she was married, the man that she loved had killed his best friend. Again, the plot of this story is not as important as the world the tale reveals. The grandmother’s narrative depicts the tribe as vital and intact, and a very structured and particular way of life emerges, with its material objects, customs, and values. The respect with which people are to treat each other is obvious in the way that the maiden’s father invites the messenger bearing bad news into their home as a guest. The system of justice that above all honors victims and their families is revealed in the fact that the slain man’s father is allowed to choose the penalty, and the importance of harmony and solidarity to the tribe is evident when the family adopts their son’s killer as their own son after he survives his punishment. The end of the grandmother’s tale imparts details about burial customs and, more importantly, beliefs about what happens in the Dakota afterlife.¹¹

After the grandmother shares this story of her youth, in which is imbedded the history, worldview, and spirituality of their community, she finds that her granddaughter has fallen asleep. Though some of the tale has been received, the young woman does not get the story in its entirety. The grandmother is frustrated at the end; she says to herself, “Hinnu! hinnu! Asleep! I have been talking in the dark, unheard. I did wish the girl would plant in her heart this sacred tale” (744). The frustration of the grandmother

reflects the precarious nature of culture and tradition. Every generation is crucial to continuance, and so a story or any part of a story that does not get conveyed to the younger generation is in danger of being lost. It is significant, however, that the granddaughter hears most of her grandmother's story, which is clear from her interruptions and questions that are interspersed in the text. But the grandmother calls her story "a sacred tale," and so, as with any ritual, all the elements are important to the whole. The part of the story that the young woman does not hear, having to do with the spirituality and afterlife of the tribe, is just as crucial as the values and customs she heard of in the earlier part of the tale. The end of the grandmother's story involves "the spirit-trail" to "the next camp-ground" that her husband and his pony traveled after death (744). This sacred information is lost this night, and so someday, after her own death, the granddaughter (theoretically) may not know where to go and may not be able to join all the generations of her tribe that have come together at "the next camp-ground." Metaphorically, if the young Dakota maiden does not receive the information her grandmother passes down in her stories, she may not know the traditional ways and someday may lose connection with her tribe's heritage. Although "The Trial Path" is set in a purely Dakota world and is infused with its customs, beliefs and traditions, including the centrality of storytelling, in the end it touches on the ramifications of the loss of American-Indian identity.

In "Soft-Hearted Sioux," the main character and narrator, this time a young man, represents the contemporary reality of Native-American existence. The story is his first-person recollection told in the moments before he meets his death. This narrative, too, opens in the circular dwelling of the tepee. Dakota customs and traditional roles are

portrayed in the conversation and actions of the dwelling's inhabitants. In the tepee the narrator at the age of sixteen, his parents, and his grandmother sit around the fire. Each member of the family has a vision for the future of the young man. The grandmother, perhaps conscious of generations, hopes the boy will marry soon. His mother suggests that he concentrate on developing his hunting skills and advises him to "learn to provide much buffalo meat and many buckskin" (505).¹² The father encourages him to become a warrior, as he himself became at sixteen. The older narrator, speaking in retrospect, remembers that "my heart was too much stirred by their words, and sorely troubled with a fear lest I should disappoint them" (505). The boy's fears prove prophetic, and the dreams of his relatives serve to highlight subsequent events. With these doubts in mind the young Dakota leaves the tent, the circle of his family, to "hobble his pony" for, as he tells them, "it is now late in the night" (505). This final line also foreshadows the outcome of the boy's life, for it is he that becomes hobbled by new ways of thinking, and, historically, it is late, a dark time for the tribe about to be divided.

When the story continues it is ten years later, and the narrator has been studying at "the mission school" for nine years (505). He admits that he "did not grow up to be the warrior, huntsman, and husband" that he would have been if he had stayed in his community. In fact, he has been taught that "it is wrong to kill" and has come back to the tribe as a missionary himself "to preach Christianity to them" (505-06). He sees himself as "a stranger" upon his return, wearing his western clothes and clutching "the white man's Bible" (506). His transformation is not merely external, for he also brings the "white man's tender heart in [his] breast" (506). Though the narrator depicts himself as drastically changed, there are at least two elements that connect him to his origins: he still

speaks the language of his tribe, and he still cares for his parents. He admits, however, that “he did not feel at home” even in his family’s tepee. Upon his return he finds that his grandmother has passed away and that his father is very ill.

The estrangement of the narrator is evident in the psychological differences between his grief and that of his mother. Even as the mother and son cry for the once brave warrior who now lies sick before them, the narrator recognizes that there is a divide between them even in their sorrow: “Far apart in spirit our ideas and our faiths separated us. My grief was for the soul unsaved; and I thought my mother wept to see a brave man’s body broken by sickness” (506). The son has become so involved in the religious concepts he has been studying that he does not empathize with the man in front of him. In fact, throughout his father’s illness, the narrator seems more concerned with his soul than his health. He is most anxious about the medicine man who visits frequently. The narrator finally becomes so frustrated that he cannot change his father’s “faith in the medicine man to the abstract power named God” that he bars the traditional healer from his father’s dwelling. After he leaves, the narrator remembers his father pleading, “my son, I cannot live without the medicine man!” (506). The narrator has one more encounter with the spiritual leader, and that is when he begins to proselytize to the tribe. His hopes that the men will “wash off their war-paints and follow” him are dashed when the medicine man stands up to declare him a traitor to the tribe and a poor son to his father (506). The medicine man also pronounces the ground where the Christian preached to be tainted, and the tribe packs up and moves on, leaving the narrator’s father to suffer away from the community that had always sustained him.

As the next scene opens, the narrator steps out of the isolated tepee to find that “the light of the new day is cold,” and this is a new beginning for him; he is starting to undergo another transformation (507). He becomes, in a sense, a born again Dakota as the teachings and trappings of his life in white America fall away. The cold of the morning is emblematic of the hardness of these changes, not easy for one who had developed the “soft heart of the white man.” Outside of the tepee, observing the “snow-covered land and the cloudless blue sky,” the narrator reflects on the space that separates him from his tribe and also “wonder[s] if the high sky likewise separated the soft-hearted Son of God from us” (507). Formerly so sure of his faith, this questioning marks an initial disconnection from the white culture he had adopted. His return to his native culture is further indicated by his hair, which “had grown long” in the traditional style. Still at this point the narrator continues to pray to his Christian god, despite the indifference of his father.

The son, who is unable to fulfill the family’s spiritual needs, is also unable to provide for them physically. It is the dead of winter and all three are starving. Distanced as they are from the tribe that would support them, they have no one but the “soft-hearted” son to hunt for them, who returns day after day empty handed. The narrator, in desperation, finally proceeds to kill one of “the white man’s cattle” (508). As he rushes home with his plunder he is apprehended, and he kills his pursuer in the struggle, only to find his father dead when he returns home. A sad irony permeates the story. Only when the narrator is separated from the tribe does he fulfill the traditional roles that would identify him as a valuable member of the tribe and a worthy son. His last acts as a free man are to provide meat for his family, to kill the enemy, and to return his mother to the

tribe before he gives himself up. In a way he has become the hunter, warrior, husband, and father that his relatives had wished for a decade before. He has proven that at heart his true allegiance lies with his family, as he violates the tenets of Christianity in his attempt to provide for them. Before where he referred to Euro-Americans as the “white man,” he calls the person he killed a “paleface” (508).

Though the narrator has proven his commitment to his family and traditions in spirit, intellectually he is unsure of where the truth really lies: “I wonder who shall come to welcome me in the realm of the strange sight. Will the loving Jesus grant me pardon and give my soul a soothing sleep? or will my father greet me and receive me as his son? Will my spirit fly upward to a happy heaven? or shall I sink into the bottomless pit, an outcast from a God of infinite love?” (508). Despite these doubts, the narrator goes to the gallows reflecting the image of a Dakota warrior: “Serene and brave, my soul awaits the men to perch me on the gallows for another flight. I go” (508). In this narrative, Zitkala-Sa writes of the ambiguous position of the Dakota individual who has become distanced from his own people but who ultimately cannot trust the mores of white America. Here the ambivalence of the narrator is accompanied by a calm that coincides with a new righteousness. Though he is never again to be reunited with his tribe in this world, he has at least freed himself from the Christian ideology that had fettered his mind, had “hobbled him” and disconnected him from his tribe. According to Jace Weaver, for American Indians “the closest approximation of ‘sin’ in the Christian lexicon is a failure to fulfill one’s responsibility to the community. Conversely there is no concept of ‘salvation’ beyond the continuance of the community.”¹³ The narrator of “The Soft-Hearted Sioux” has sacrificed himself while trying to fulfill his responsibility to his tribe,

and in the end he no longer rejects his traditional beliefs nor accepts without question his adopted religion. For him, ambivalence is a triumph.

In both the governmental and privately run Dawes Era Boarding schools, the education of Indians was an inherently Christian endeavor. Conversion of Native Americans had long been part of the nation's assimilating process. In "The Soft-Hearted Sioux," the narrator's questioning of the religious tenets he had learned at his mission school can be read as tantamount to a rejection of both the education he received and the American society that gave it to him. The fact that at the end he gives equal consideration to Christian and native views suggests that even nine years of western education were not sufficient to accomplish one the main goals of the national policy regarding Native Americans, which was to supplant the indigenous worldview with Christian-American values.

As Susan Bernadin notes, this story "questions the very core of the Euro-American values taught at Indian schools."¹⁴ Some of Zitkala-Sa's acquaintances saw "The Soft Hearted Sioux" as an affront that criticized their own endeavors to educate Indian children. The faculty at the Carlisle Indian School, where Zitkala-Sa had taught from 1898-1899, was especially offended. Their indignation is evident in an evaluation of her writing that appeared in the school's newspaper, *Red Man and Helper*: "All that Zitkala-Sa has in the way of literary ability and culture she owes to the good people who . . . have taken her into their homes and hearts and given her aid. Yet not a word of gratitude or allusion to such kindness on the part of her friends has ever escaped in any line of anything she has written for the public. By this course she injures herself and harms the educational work in progress for the race from which she sprang."¹⁵ This

statement demonstrates the ideological divide between some of the faculty at Indian schools and the population that they served. From the perspective of this editorial, criticism of the system threatens to hinder its progress. Zitkala-Sa, however, demonstrated that the institutions needed to be disrupted, examined, and reconsidered so that they could serve the children better in the future.

Zitkala-Sa's response to the criticism from her former employer is a short essay, "Why I Am a Pagan," which appeared in *The Atlantic* later that year. "The Soft-Hearted Sioux" is a fictional representation of a Dakota individual who first accepts and then turns away from Christianity; the autobiographical "Why I am A Pagan," on the other hand, is an unequivocal denunciation of the religious education she herself had encountered in boarding school and as an adult Indian living among white Americans. The essay opens with the narrator, this time Zitkala-Sa herself, alone in nature on her reservation experiencing "the loving mystery" that surrounds her.¹⁶ The landscape triggers meditation on inherited spiritual beliefs and legends that are associated with the natural environment. She imparts some information about her traditional spirituality, like the "subtle knowledge of the native folk which enables them to recognize a kinship to any and all parts of this vast universe" (802), but she does not reveal the meaning behind any of the specific traditional figures, such as Stone Boy and Invan, that she contemplates as she wanders. When she returns to her mother's cabin, she reflects on her relationship with other people, and she feels the same connection to them as to the rest of the natural world. She explains that "racial lines, which were once bitterly real, now serve nothing more than marking out a living mosaic of human beings," and so the equilibrium she experiences also comes from her balanced consideration of all of humanity (802).

The tranquility of the essay is disrupted when when the “solemn-faced ‘native preacher’” comes to visit. Zitkala-Sa “listen[s] with respect . . . though he mouth most strangely the jangling phrases of a bigoted creed” (803). The Christian visitor tells her, “Cousin, I was taught long years ago by kind missionaries to read the holy book. These godly men taught me also the folly of our old beliefs” (803). The preacher is associated with the young man in “The Soft-Hearted Sioux” who has an “honest heart” as he proselytizes among his people but who does not recognize his own role in cultural loss when he seeks to replace their native belief system with his new Euro-American Christianity. The success of the American missionary process on her reservation is perhaps most evident in the fact that her mother is also “now a follower of the new superstition” (803). It is no longer a matter of generation, with the older tribal members maintaining the traditional spirituality and the younger Indians following the path set by their boarding school education. The parents have been influenced by the changes their children experienced as well as by missionaries in their community. Zitkala-Sa, however, rejects Christianity outright though it seems to have now permeated her tribal world: “I prefer to their dogma my excursions into the natural gardens where the voice of the Great Spirit is heard in the twittering of birds, the rippling of mighty waters, and the sweet breathing of the flowers. If this is Paganism, then at present, at least, I am a Pagan” (803). In this personal essay, Zitkala-Sa takes a stand as a native individual who will determine her own system of beliefs regardless of whether it conflicts with mainstream American ideology or with the shifting associations of her home community. In the author’s defiance of contemporary opinion, she pointedly refers to her spirituality as “paganism,” a heretofore disparaging word used to describe non-Christian religions.

One line in the essay clearly positions it as a response to the criticism that had appeared in the Carlisle School newspaper several months before. The narrator mentions “a missionary paper . . . in which a ‘Christian’ pugilist commented upon a recent article of mine, grossly perverting the spirit of my pen” (803). To refer to a Carlisle School editor as a “Christian” (in quotation marks) and to call Christianity “a bigoted creed” and a “new superstition” stand as bold criticism of white Christianity, which many at the time considered to be the religion of the nation.¹⁷ In this essay Zitkala-Sa rejects this religion and by association the culture that attempts to impose it upon her. She reaffirms her devotion to her indigenous religion, but the tribal people that surround her, instead of supporting this commitment, seem to have gone over to the other side. The author once again seems to be at odds with her surroundings, unwilling to identify with America and more comfortable with a Dakota perspective, even as that worldview seems to be shifting for the people around her.

By far the best and most complex of Zitkala-Sa’s publications at the turn into the twentieth century are the three autobiographical essays that appeared in sequence in January, February, and March of 1900 in the *Atlantic Monthly*. These three works, “Impressions of an Indian Childhood,” “The School Days of an Indian Girl,” and “An Indian Teacher Among Indians,” trace her life through her childhood on the reservation, her experiences at a Quaker boarding school for Indian children, and her own brief stint as a teacher at a similar institution. These essays play on tropes and forms that are common to American autobiography. Familiar themes, such as education, literacy, introduction to the modern world, and the success of the author are included, but the questionable value of these elements to the writer interrupts and undermines the familiar

progressive narrative of steady rise from humble origins to mainstream American success. Even as Zitkala-Sa describes her apparently willing participation in the Americanizing process, she questions the worth of the American identity that the system is attempting to impose upon her. The depth of this questioning comes from the juxtaposition of the American society she enters at the age of eight with the values and way of life that she had lead on the reservation. One premise underlying this series of essays is that, while current U.S. policies were established, ostensibly, to give Indians a better life, it is her opinion that the cultures that children were removed from and that the educators were trying to eradicate were preferable to the life offered by mainstream society. Because Zitkala-Sa privileges the traditional Dakota culture that her teachers would wrest from her, she ultimately resists an American identity. As the essays progress, however, it is also clear that though she prefers to associate herself with her Dakota heritage, the drastic changes she undergoes at boarding school fill her with a profound sense of alienation from her origins and prevent her from viewing herself as fully Indian anymore. What emerges is a telling ambivalence, one that will become familiar in the works of writers of color throughout the twentieth century. The position of Zitkala-Sa is different from the tragic mulatto found in the works of both black and white American writers during this era. Although she expresses the anguish of living between two worlds, the pain she experiences does not come from the unwillingness of society to accept the ethnic individual. On the contrary, the anxiety is born from the inability of the Native American to return to the traditional culture combined with her antipathy towards the mainstream culture that she enters as an alternative.

“Impressions of an Indian Childhood” is immersed in a world removed from, but not untouched by, Euro-Americans. The narrative opens, as do Zitkala-Sa’s fictional stories, with the round dwelling, here called a wigwam. She depicts herself at seven years old as completely free and at one with her surroundings. This sense of unboundedness and peace is disrupted only by the sadness she senses in her mother, and while the girl finds enjoyment in their environment, her mother reminds her that they came from another place: “We were once very happy. But the paleface has stolen our lands and driven us hither. Having defrauded us of our lands, the paleface forced us away” (38).¹⁸ The removal meant more than the loss of ancestral lands and their cultural associations; many died as they were “driven like a herd of buffalo” to their present location (38). Among those who did not survive were the mother’s brother and her first-born daughter. From the very beginning, the essays are informed by tribal history and the knowledge of white American betrayal. But these events happened before the birth of the author, and so all she knows is the reservation and its community, and despite the tragic history of their displacement, the place and people are described as nurturing to the young child. As the story progresses, a compelling portrayal of life on the reservation emerges. Zitkala-Sa is able to recreate the rhythm of her younger days, and subtle details that are woven into the story give a sense of a particular world through the activities of work and play. The presence of humor, the importance of storytelling, and the close relationships between family members and between the individual and community are also vividly depicted. Through her portrayal of the customs of everyday life, Zitkala-Sa reveals the values of her tribe, which are, above all else, hospitality, respect, and sensitivity.¹⁹ These values are evident in the way the mother teaches her daughter to do

traditional beadwork, which, Zitkala-Sa says, “enabled me to feel strongly responsible and dependent on my own judgment” (40). As the child learns by observation, practice, and patient instruction, she is “treated . . . as a dignified little individual” (40). The lengths to which tribal members will go in order to preserve these values, and the manner in which children are instructed in them, is revealed in the scene where the little girl, in her mother’s absence, makes coffee for an old man of the tribe. She pours unheated muddy water over used coffee grounds. The old man politely sips the “coffee” (or pretends to) until the mother returns. Zitkala-Sa remembers “neither she nor the warrior . . . said anything to embarrass me. They treated my best judgment, poor as it was, with the utmost respect” (42-43). The adults encourage her attempt at hospitality and reinforce by their own actions the respect and sensitivity that are the tribe’s most valued virtues.

These moral imperatives, which Zitkala-Sa portrays as being central to the Dakota world-view, contrast sharply with the treatment the Sioux had endured at the hands of white America. The mother in the narrative had taught her daughter “no fear, save that of intruding myself upon others,” but she also warned her of “the paleface” who had perpetuated a most base intrusion by forcing their tribe from their land (37). The teachings, and more importantly, the actions of the mother also stand in sharp contrast to the treatment the girl will receive at the hands of whites when she later goes off to a missionary boarding school.

Until the last segment of the essay, white America is only present in the mother’s warnings and memories. However, the fact that Zitkala-Sa writes in English and chooses for her form the western genres of autobiography and essay signifies her connection with

the Euro-American education system. Her knowledge of western discourse is employed most effectively in allusions to the biblical story of the fall from grace and exile from the Garden of Eden. Zitkala-Sa's use of the familiar Genesis myth has multiple significations that inform her essay. To begin with, it is not evident that she is referencing Genesis at all until the last segment entitled "The Big Red Apples." In this section, the young Zitkala-Sa, now eight years old, is lured off the reservation to a missionary boarding school by the promise of unlimited access to red apples. This detail not only shapes the story of her departure from the reservation, but it also provides another interpretation for the work as a whole. If the red apples allude to the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, then the place where Zitkala-Sa has resided becomes equated with the Garden of Eden. Indeed, despite the mother's stories of how they came to be on this reservation, the world that the girl experiences there is portrayed as Edenic, a place where the inhabitants live in harmony with the natural world and with each other. Accepting the forbidden fruit, as she eventually does, also means initiation into knowledge that will broaden her perspective but which will come at a very high price.

In the construct of "The Big Red Apples," the figures stand in very clear relationship to each other as they correlate to figures in the biblical story. The narrator's little friend Judewin plays the role of Eve, who also desires to eat from the tree of knowledge: "Judewin had told me of the great tree where grew red, red apples; and how we could reach out our hands and pick all the red apples we could eat" (46). Judewin, like Eve, is motivated by her own desires and curiosity to tempt her companion into following her lead. Also like Eve, Judewin is yet an innocent with no way of knowing

what the consequences of her decision will be. In this reproduction of the Fall, the “missionaries” represent the serpent (45). The mother tries to warn her daughter against “the white men’s lies” (46). She tells her daughter, “don’t believe a word they say! Their words are sweet, but, my child, their deeds are bitter” (46). In fact, the missionaries are shrewd in their attempts to lure the children (45). One tells her that not only will she receive “nice red apples” but she will also get to ride on “the iron horse” if she goes with them. The author underscores the cunning of this temptation: “I had never seen a train, and he knew it” (46). This encounter with the missionaries marks the beginning of her exile from the Eden of her childhood, for even before her mother agrees to let her leave, the daughter’s desire to go East breaks the harmony of the home. This is the first time she has ever purposely imposed her will on her mother and “refused to hearken to [her] mother’s voice” (46). The young Zitkala-Sa gets her way, but as soon as the carriage she rides in separates her from her mother, she immediately becomes aware of her exile. She remembers “a sense of regret settled heavily upon me. I felt suddenly weak, as if I might fall limp to the ground. I was in the hands of strangers whom my mother did not fully trust. I no longer felt free to be myself, or to voice my own feelings” (47). This initial separation is portrayed as the beginning of the loss of a Dakota identity.

The allusions to Genesis at the end of the essay also shed light on a curious section in the middle of the text entitled “The Dead Man’s Plum Bush.” In this segment, there is another tale of forbidden fruit, which links it thematically to the one from the Bible. However, there are important differences between the legends that highlight the divergence between Christianity and the author’s native spirituality. The tribal legend is revealed to the young Zitkala-Sa as mother and daughter are walking together. The girl

begins to “pick some purple plums that grew on a small bush” but is prevented from doing so by her mother (44). When the child protests, her mother tells this story: “Never pluck a single plum from this bush, my child, for its roots are wrapped around an Indian’s skeleton. A brave is buried here. While he lived, he was so fond of playing the game of striped plum seeds that, at his death, his set of plum seeds were buried in his hands. From them sprang up this little bush” (44). The child’s reaction is as important as the story itself: “Eyeing the forbidden fruit, I trod lightly on the sacred ground. . . . After that time, I halted in my ramblings whenever I came in sight of the plum bush. I grew sober with awe, and was alert to hear a long-drawn-out whistle from the roots of it. Though I had never heard with my own ears this strange whistle of departed spirits, yet I had listened so frequently to hear the old folks describe it that I knew I should recognize it at once” (44). From the day her mother tells her the legend, the young Zitkala-Sa meditates on three things each time she encounters the plum bush: the tale her mother told her, the young man buried there, and the tribal belief in “the whistle of departed spirits” that she had learned from her Dakota elders.

Comparison of the “forbidden fruit” legends reveals some significant differences between Dakota spirituality and that of Christianity. The Genesis myth is one of separation and loss; it is set in a mythical location, which is lost to humankind. The story, by this point in history, exists in the Bible, for that is where it is recorded and how it gets disseminated. The plum bush tale, on the other hand, is one of connection and continuance and is embedded in the natural environment of the tribe. The brave’s life, represented by his favorite activity, becomes rooted in the earth but also reaches out to the living inhabitants of the tribe, who can look to the physical bush to remember. The

ground becomes sacred with association, and there is an eternal blooming from the bones. The child comes to understand the divinity of the place, and it triggers not only memories of the legend but also the associated information of the “whistle of departed spirits” that she had learned from listening to the older members of her tribe.

This simple story of connection, continuance, and remembrance is markedly different from the Christian tale of deception, accusations, and exile. In fact, Zitkala-Sa’s treatment of the Genesis legend turns the American Christianizing process on its ideological head. In the “Red Apples” section, the missionaries themselves become the serpent, otherwise known as the devil in Christian mythology. The removal of the children from the reservation is tantamount to their fall from grace, as they become exiled from their native religion and the things that sustain it, namely the natural world and their community. If the Genesis and the plum bush stories are viewed as synecdoche, each standing as representations for their respective religions, then Christianity comes across as a punitive religion, one that is grounded on separation and deceit. The chain of events in the Adam and Eve tale, when viewed from this perspective, seems to be based on everyone imposing their will on everyone else, the antithesis of the spiritual and cultural system revealed in Zitkala-Sa’s portrayal of tribal life.

Though “Impressions of an Indian Childhood” is informed by the Bible, the author does not privilege western discourse over that of the Indian. She may position herself as the original human in a prelapsarian environment, but the Genesis context only serves to underscore the sense of wholeness and harmony she felt before going to school. The impression of peace and connection to the natural world exists in the text before the introduction of the biblical allusion. Furthermore, though she includes allusions to

Genesis near the end of the essay, she most frequently depicts herself in relation to the natural world. In fact, the essay is framed by two images that come from nature. At the beginning of the narrative she describes herself as “free as the wind that blew my hair, and no less spirited than a bounding deer” (37). In the last sentence of the work she describes her young forlorn self in a train station, “frightened and bewildered as the captured young of a wild creature” (47). These depictions not only serve to connect her to the natural world, they also work together to express the great change she undergoes as soon as she leaves her home and community.

The next installment in the series of autobiographical essays, “The School Days of an Indian Girl,” begins where “Impressions” left off. The eight-year-old Zitkala-Sa, along with several other Dakota children, are on a train heading East to an Indian boarding school. The children had been looking forward to their trip on “the iron horse,” but the journey is spoiled as “the throngs of staring palefaces disturbed and troubled” them (185).²⁰ This is their introduction to mainstream America, which appears to the girl to have values that differ wildly from her own. She had learned from her mother and from her community to always observe the rules of compassion, courtesy, and respect. The greatest wrong one could do was to impose oneself upon others. For a child who had always been treated with consideration by both the young and the old, the rudeness and insensitivity of the white passengers is upsetting. Zitkala-Sa describes “fair women” who “stopped their haste and scrutinized the children of absent mothers” as well as “large men” who “halted nearby, and riveted their glassy blue eyes upon us” (185). The child tries to hide from their view by sinking into her seat, but, she says, “directly in front of me, children who were no larger than I hung themselves upon the backs of their seats,

with their bold white faces toward me. Sometimes they took their forefingers out of their mouths and pointed at my moccasined feet. Their mothers, instead of reproving such curiosity, looked closely at me, and attracted their children's further notice to my blanket. This embarrassed me, and kept me constantly on the verge of tears" (185). From the child's point of view, she has entered a culture very unlike her own, a culture that has no respect for her feelings and does not treat others with the dignity she was taught all deserved. Moreover, as the mothers with their children show, the core lesson she had learned from her own mother, to not intrude upon others, does not seem to be a part of the white Americans' value system. In fact, the mothers on the train reinforce their children's rude behavior by further embarrassing the Indian child. Another interpretation of their behavior, one unavailable to the uninitiated young Zitkala-Sa, is that the white passengers do have rules of etiquette that normally prevent them from staring at strangers and making them feel uncomfortable, but that these guiding principles do not apply when the object of curiosity is an Indian child. In this value system, because of her age and ethnicity, the Dakota girl is "odd" and so is not afforded the same sensitivity the white Americans would give one another. Jane Tompkins has described this attitude, which she identifies as being common in United States history, as "a certain colonial point of view, a point of view from which Indians, though present, do not finally matter."²¹ The girl who had once been so free and unselfconscious finds herself shamed by the combination of curiosity and indifference on the part of the passengers around her.

The young girl's dignity is further violated when she gets to the school. She is already confused when she is grabbed and "tossed high in midair" (186). Zitkala-Sa recalls that "a rosy-cheeked paleface woman caught me in her arms. I was both

frightened and insulted by such trifling. I stared into her eyes, wishing her to let me stand on my own feet, but she jumped me up and down with increasing enthusiasm. My mother had never made a plaything of her wee daughter” (186). This is her initiation into the white world inside the school; the white Americans do not treat her as an autonomous being as had the adults in her own culture. The portrayal of initial contact with this new society signifies that the girl has entered a culture not only different from her own but, from her perspective, quite inferior.

What Zitkala-Sa first portrays as cultural idiosyncrasy becomes a part of her everyday life as a lack of respect for her traditional background is depicted as deeply rooted in the educational system into which she enters. The author is aware that the goal of this system is wider than just scholastics; the enterprise is designed to strip the children of their native culture and replace it with a knowledge of and allegiance to the American way of life. She calls this system a “civilizing machine” and reports that “it was next to impossible to leave the iron routine” of this machine once it was started (190). A statement made by an agent on the Yankton Reservation at the very time Zitkala-Sa was in boarding school gives a clear picture of the ideology behind her education: “Education cuts the cord which binds them to a pagan life, places the Bible in their hands, and substitutes the true God for the false one, Christianity in place of idolatry, civilization in place of superstition, morality in place of vice, cleanliness in place of filth, industry in place of idleness, self-respect in place of servility, and, in a word, humanity in place of abject degradation.”²² The two main goals of Indian education, according to this agent on Zitkala-Sa’s reservation, are to convert and civilize the children, or, in other words, to Christianize and Americanize them. The repetition of the phrase “in place of” clearly

shows that another important goal was to obliterate traditional belief systems. As the agent expresses the desired transformations, he also indicates his opinion of the Indian children before they are introduced to American education: they are foolish, sinful, filthy, lazy, servile, and less than human. This is not to say that all who were involved with Indian education shared the same view, but it is an example of the kind of lack of respect for the Indian children as individuals described in “School Days of an Indian Girl.”

In fact, the world of boarding school seems in every way to be the antithesis of the life that Zitkala-Sa had led before. The round home of the tepee has been replaced with a room where “many narrow beds were in one straight line down the entire length of the wall” (186). The tranquil flow of the rhythm of life with her mother has been replaced by a day that is regulated by a series of “loud clamoring” bells that direct the children when to wake up, when to go to meals, and when to stand and sit. The “crashing” of the bells bothers the newly arrived children, as does the “annoying clatter of shoes on bare floors” and “the many voices murmuring an unknown tongue” (186). The biggest shock of the first day at boarding school, however, comes when the new students are to have their hair cut.

Part of the national project to fit Indian children for American society was the attempt to eradicate their cultural particularity, in the words of Carlisle Indian School founder Richard Henry Pratt, to “kill the Indian and save the man.”²³ In Zitkala-Sa’s experience this process begins with changing the appearance of the children so that they look less Indian. Though in the narrative the young Zitkala-Sa is at first embarrassed and uncomfortable in her western clothing, the moccasins and blanket that are taken from her do not hold as much significance as her long hair. It is perhaps because the long braids of

the Indian girls are a cultural marker that connects them to the traditions of their tribes that they are cut on the first day. The author remembers their sense of themselves was intimately connected to their long hair: “Our mothers had taught us that only unskilled warriors who were captured had their hair shingled by the enemy. Among our people, short hair was worn by mourners, and shingled hair by cowards!” (187). Instead of instilling in the children a sense of independence and self-respect, the system coerces them into capitulation and shame. When the adults first attempt to cut her hair, she declares “I will not submit!” and runs and hides, but they finally catch her, tie her to a chair, and cut her braids off. The effect on the girl is profound. She remembers: “Then I lost my spirit. Since the day I was taken from my mother I had suffered extreme indignities. People had stared at me. I had been tossed about in the air like a wooden puppet. And now my long hair was shingled like a coward’s! . . . Now I was only one of many little animals driven by a herder” (187).²⁴ The cutting of the children’s hair by the attendants at the school is emblematic of the mission to cut the children off from their cultural values. The indifference with which the act is performed points to an atmosphere of cultural supremacy. Because the faculty’s assumption that their ways are superior is so beyond question, these educators are unable to recognize the value of Indian traditions or their importance to the students.

The hair-cutting scene emphasizes both the cultural insensitivity of the white-American system at the school and the dehumanizing nature of practices and policies that did not consider the individual. As she remembers her years in this institution, Zitkala-Sa acknowledges at one point that the intentions of the people who ran the school were probably good, but that did not mitigate the sense of imposition and lack of respect the

children experienced. The author depicts a world in which the established regime and regulations are more important than the students, whose psychological pain and physical illnesses are often ignored or regarded as disruptions to the system. Martha J. Cutter describes “School Days” as “a scathing indictment of a dominant ideology which forces acculturation at the expense of self.”²⁵ The narrator depicts the educational process, the “civilizing machine,” to be overwhelming, and yet she remembers finding the willpower to resist its imperative to capitulate. Though separated from the family and community that would have normally reinforced her Dakota identity, still she steadfastly refuses to assume the new identity the school wishes to impose upon her.

Part of the cultural and personal struggle with which the little girl has to contend has to do with the issue of discourse. In “Impressions,” Zitkala-Sa recalls that when she left the reservation, “I knew but one language, and that was my mother’s native tongue” (45), but she quickly learns that knowledge of English is necessary in this foreign world. The impetus to learn the speech of the system is depicted as not desire for knowledge but fear of the repercussions of not learning it. This fear is illustrated in a scene where one of her little friends is physically punished for saying “no” to a woman in authority when she should have said “yes.” The problem is that the girl does not know English and so does not understand the woman’s questions. Zitkala-Sa recalls that “misunderstandings as ridiculous as this one . . . frequently took place, bringing unjustifiable frights and punishments into our little lives” (188). Again the educational system is shown to be punitive and insensitive in comparison to the methods of instruction she received from her mother and her tribe.²⁶

Faced with this negative incentive, Zitkala-Sa says that “within a year I was able to express myself somewhat in broken English” (188). As soon as she develops some mastery of the language of her perceived enemies, she, like the Dakota maiden in “Warrior’s Daughter,” contrives to use it against them. In a scene that demonstrates her ability to subvert the language of dominance, when she is told “to mash the turnips for dinner,” she proceeds to mash with all her weight and energy until she pounds through the bottom of the jar. Though she receives a scolding, she remembers that “I felt triumphant in my revenge” and that “I whooped in my heart for having once asserted the rebellion within me” (188). Through most of the story Zitkala-Sa expresses her defiance in silent resistance, and even in the turnip-mashing scene she does not say anything; still it is emblematic of her understanding that she can manipulate the English language to fight her battles. The assertion of defiance that she experiences on a small scale as a child is magnified in the publication of these essays criticizing the Indian education system, articles printed in *The Atlantic*, the foremost magazine of the day.

The manner in which American life and culture are introduced to Zitkala-Sa explain why she resists the assimilationist process and declines to embrace an American identity. The restrictive environment of the boarding school only motivates her to fight against her confinement, as she describes “actively testing the chains which tightly bound my individuality like a mummy for burial” (190). The longing for the freedom of her former life becomes complicated, however, when, after three years, she comes home to the reservation. The author conflates the summers at home from age eleven to age fifteen in the section “Four Strange Summers.” The title indicates that she is portraying four consecutive breaks from school, but the section reads as if she is describing just one

summer. In this segment she explores her emerging ambivalent identity, for though she identified as Indian at the boarding school, once she goes home she feels out of synch with her mother and the life of the tribe: “During this time I seemed to hang in the heart of chaos. . . . My mother had never gone inside of a schoolhouse, and so she was not capable of comforting a daughter who could read or write. . . . I was neither a wee girl nor a tall one; neither a wild Indian nor a tame one” (191). Though Zitkala-Sa has not lost her native language, her acquisition of English does differentiate her from her mother. The changes she encounters, however, are both internal and external, as the world on the reservation is transforming as well. Her mother has moved from the traditional round dwelling to a cabin, and the young men and women of the tribe “were no more young braves in blankets and eagle plumes, nor young Indian maidens with prettily painted cheeks” (192). They, too, had been to school and “become civilized,” and while Zitkala-Sa had returned to the traditional dress while at home, the others wore western-style clothes and at “gatherings they talked in English” (192). She describes “an unrest gnawing at my heart” that makes her angry and restless. The girl who had been so respectful of the natural world and the members of her tribe is depicted, as an adolescent, to be the cause of suffering to both a pony and a wolf by conducting an unnecessary chase and becoming annoyed with an “old warrior” who visits to tell of it.

Her four summers of “turmoil” on the reservation convince the teenaged Zitkala-Sa that she no longer belongs there, but the truth is that she is not happy anywhere (192). Against her mother’s wishes, she decides to go to college, and for the first time she disparages her own culture when she describes her mother’s objections as a desire for her daughter to “roam over the prairies and find my living upon wild roots” (193). Her entry

into college, which comes near the end of the essay, is depicted not as a great achievement but as a continuation of her fruitless encounter with white America, as she says “homeless and heavy-hearted, I began anew my life among strangers” (193). Zitkala-Sa still feels homesickness and longing for her mother but elects to live “among a cold race whose hearts were frozen hard with prejudice” (193). It is clear that even as she works for “the white man’s respect” through her scholarship, she does not consider herself assimilated into mainstream society.

She is friendless, though “several classmates were courteous to me at a safe distance” (193). Her peers are very supportive when she wins her school’s oratory contest, but when she goes to compete at another college, her perception of white Americans as cruel and insensitive is again reinforced when a banner is unveiled with a drawing of “a most forlorn Indian girl” and the word “squaw” drawn on it. She remembers, “such worse than barbarian rudeness embittered me. . . . I gleamed fiercely upon the throngs of palefaces” (194). In a way, she defeats the enemy again through her use of the English language by winning one of the two prizes awarded. But later, alone in her room, the ambivalence of her position reemerges: “The little taste of victory did not satisfy a hunger in my heart. In my mind I saw my mother far away on the Western plains, and she was holding a charge against me” (194). This is the final line in the essay, and so although her “school days” end with a seeming success story, entry into college and an award in a statewide collegiate oratory contest, these accomplishments are diminished by the way they are represented in the text. Though Zitkala-Sa fulfills a certain drive and ambition, one that is valorized in white America, she cannot escape the imperatives of family and culture. The “charge” her mother “holds against her” may be

her daughter's willful separation from tribe and family, or it may be the fact that Zitkala-Sa had her dignity publicly compromised at the hands of whites that night. The mother's charge itself is as ambiguous as the girl's position between the world of her mother and that of white achievement.

The final of the three essays to appear in the *Atlantic Monthly*, "An Indian Teacher Among Indians," is about the year she teaches at the Carlisle Indian School, which she refers to only as "an Eastern Indian School" (382). Half the essay, however, is set on the reservation. Through these two locations, Zitkala-Sa makes a connection between white encroachment onto reservation lands and the attitude towards American Indians that lie beneath the ideology of their education. The author returns to the reservation "to gather Indian pupils for the school," and when she arrives at her mother's cabin she learns of the changes that have taken place (383).²⁷ The story describes the year 1898-99, and by this time the policies of the General Allotment Act of 1887 have taken their toll. Her mother tells her how their land has become "a refuge for white robbers" and that her brother, Dawee, who was "a government clerk" on the reservation, had lost his job when he had "tried to secure justice for our tribe" (384). That night as mother and daughter sit out under the stars they can see lights all along the river of "a tribe of broad-footed white beggars [that] had rushed hither to make claims on those wild lands" (385). The mother stands up and curses the settlers in a powerful image of American-Indian resistance: "She sprang to her feet, and, standing firm beside her wigwam, she sent a curse upon those who sat around the hated white man's light. Raising her arm forcibly into line with her eye, she threw her whole might into her doubled fist as she shot it vehemently at the strangers" (385). That night the mother also

gives her daughter a warning that echoes and elaborates on the one she had given her when she was eight before she left home for the first time: “My daughter, beware of the paleface. It was the cruel paleface who caused the death of your sister and your uncle, my brave bother. It is this same paleface who offers in one palm the holy papers, and with the other gives a holy baptism of firewater. He is the hypocrite who reads with one eye, ‘Thou shalt not kill,’ and with the other gloats upon the suffering of the Indian race” (385). The mother’s words are reminders of a history that continues to affect the tribe and of a past that cannot be erased by the assimilation process.

The anger and resistance of the mother influences Zitkala-Sa when she goes back East: “I slowly comprehended that the large army of white teachers in Indian schools had a larger missionary creed than I had suspected” (385). This doctrine “included self-preservation quite as much as Indian education” (385). The author discovers that a variety of white degenerates are allowed to work at Indian schools as a sort of charity for them, regardless of how their presence affects the children the institutions are supposed to be serving. She mentions a teacher who is an opium addict, a drunken doctor whose “patients carried their ailments to untimely graves,” and a sadistic “teacher who tortured an ambitious Indian youth” by constantly calling him a “government pauper” (385). Zitkala-Sa admits to knowing of a “few rare ones who have worked nobly for my race,” but they have little effect on the overall “shameful” conditions she has observed (385). Bernadin notes that these revelations, coming directly after the scene of her mother’s curses and warnings, are significant: “Zitkala-Sa calls her eastern colleagues an ‘army of white teachers’ whose verbal and intellectual intimidation of students are implicitly linked with the territorial and physical subjugation of Indians by the U.S. military and

settlers in the West.”²⁸ In fact, the American program of Indian assimilation had many military overtones. From Pratt’s philosophy that it was necessary to kill the Indian within, to the very structure of the schools, the education system seemed to be at war with Native-American culture.

It is little wonder, considering all that Zitkala-Sa had experienced and observed regarding white America’s treatment of Indians, that she consistently resists an assimilated American identity in her narratives, even as she makes use of her education to find her way in the world off the reservation. Her disgust with the system of Indian education has turned her against the American society that supports it, but she admits that she has lost touch with those things that could connect her to her Dakota identity. She says that “in the process of my education I had lost all consciousness of the nature world around me. . . . I unknowingly turned away from my one salvation. . . . For the white man’s papers I had given up my faith in the Great Spirit. For these same papers I had forgotten the healing in trees and brooks. On account of my mother’s simple view of life, and my lack of any, I gave her up, also. I made no friends among the race of people I loathed” (386). In her despair, she feels that she has become disconnected from her original community and worldview, and she finds she does not like what she sees in mainstream America. In fact, she accuses white society and her attraction to it for her rift from her original identity. Even as she describes this profound experience of ambivalence, however, she associates her disconnected self with the Dakota world. She compares herself to a figure in a tribal legend: “I sat like the petrified Indian woman of whom my mother used to tell me,” and then depicts herself as an image connected to the natural world, “a slender tree” that has been “uprooted from my mother, nature, and God

. . . shorn of my branches, which had waved in sympathy and love for home and friends” (386). Zitkala-Sa portrays herself in this essay as an American-Indian woman at a crossroads, entering a new territory of identity that has not been explored in Native-American literature. Though her heart remains connected to her heritage and community, she believes that her physical distance from her tribe and the changes she has undergone in her American education have negated her claims to Dakota authenticity.

“An Indian Teacher among Indians” does not end with images from nature or the Dakota world but with a coming together of white and Native America with which she is very familiar. This meeting of two cultures is not representative of cultural clash or of common ground, but it shows the great silent divide between the two worlds, a rift that she cannot cross because of the colonial gaze of white America. Having been both a student and a teacher at institutions of Indian education, she recalls: “From morning to evening, many specimens of civilized peoples visited the Indian school. The city folks with canes and eyeglasses, the countrymen with sunburnt cheeks and clumsy feet, forgot their relative social ranks in an ignorant curiosity. Both sorts of these Christian palefaces were alike astounded at seeing the children of savage warriors so docile and industrious” (386). In setting up this everyday event, whites visiting Indian schools, Zitkala-Sa reveals the way in which the patrons used the image of the Indians to help define themselves. Here figures from very differing walks of life are unified in their status as “civilized,” Christian Americans. Zitkala-Sa’s ability to interpret and critique the visitors also suggests that her years in the educational system has given her insight into the workings of the white mind, while those who visit have no real notion of the reality of the individuals they come to observe. According to Weaver, “the Indian as subaltern knows

quite a bit about the mindset and psychological makeup of those in the dominant culture; only the reverse remains untrue.”²⁹ This inability or unwillingness of the visitors to get to know the children or the conditions of the schools they are in is self-serving and ultimately detrimental to the students, whom they think they are helping: “As to their shallow inquiries they received the students’ sample work to look upon. Examining the neatly figured pages, and gazing upon the Indian girls and boys bending over their books, the white visitors walked out of the schoolhouse well-satisfied: they were educating the children of the red man!” (386).³⁰ The scene is emblematic of the self-deception of the America that adheres to its assimilationist policies in order to advance the Indian race but which does not consider any damaging effect these policies may have on cultures and individuals. The final statement of the piece, and so the concluding word of the series of essays, resonates both on a personal and national level: “In this fashion many have passed idly through the Indian schools during the last decade, afterward to boast of their charity to the North American Indian. But there are few who have paused to question whether real life or long-lasting death lies beneath this semblance of civilization” (386). These last lines may stand as a challenge to her mainstream readership to look deeper into national policies and to try to see the world from the perspective of the Native American.

The final scene seems to mirror the purpose and possible outcomes of publishing these essays in the *Atlantic Monthly*, the nation’s premier magazine. Zitkala-Sa offers the audience a view of her world both on the reservation and in the schools, experiences that had never been portrayed in print before. In doing so, she presents a clear critique of the nation’s policy regarding Native Americans, particularly of its method of Indian education. In this last scene, where white Americans take a “shallow” look at the work

the children produce, Zitkala-Sa seems to anticipate a possible impression that may be gained from her own audience. From what she knows of American society, represented by the “ignorant” observers who pass through the schools, it is very possible that many will read her essays and come only to the conclusion that she writes very well and therefore that the Indian education system is a success.

Overall, the autobiographical essays of Zitkala-Sa suggest that, in terms of their spiritual lives and sense of themselves, the quality of life is diminished for Indians who enter into the Americanizing system. The self that she recreates in these works always seems to exist in the balance between “real life or long-lasting death” after she enters into “this semblance of civilization” (386). The characters that appear in Zitkala-Sa’s short stories also reflect this ambivalent status. Even the narratives that portray a purely Dakota world, as do “The Trial Path” and “Warrior’s Daughter,” reflect on the influence of historical change and a desire to preserve a Native-American identity in the face of it. The protagonist in “The Soft-Hearted Sioux” represents the boarding-school conversion experience that entails not only an acceptance of Christianity but also the conviction that Indianness must be sacrificed for the western ways that are inextricably connected to Christianity in the American education system. This character suffers and then dies because of his between-world status, but his death is not untriumphant for at least he relinquishes his allegiance to this transplanted worldview before he dies.

The ambivalent identity of a person of color who does not feel at home in her traditional culture but who refuses to accept assimilation into mainstream society is most fully explored in Zitkala-Sa’s three autobiographical essays published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1900. The lack of respect for Native-American children and their cultures

that she experienced in Dawes-era boarding schools precludes her adoption of the American identity the institutions sought to superimpose on the students. The inclusion in the essays of her tribe's recent history of removal as well as their ongoing loss of land further justifies the strong resistance to the Americanizing process that Zitkala-Sa expresses. She articulates a perspective from which the adoption of a mainstream identity would be nothing short of subjugation. However, because she no longer feels at home on the reservation, the narrator believes she must abdicate, to some measure, her Indian identity, and so she feels cut loose to make her way in the world without a national affiliation, for she leaves her tribe and cannot accept herself as a member of American society.

Zitkala-Sa's generation, coming from the boarding schools, had few models of Indians who had successfully integrated their American education with their tribal inheritance, so her expression of disconnection and isolation stands as an insightful examination of both personal and historical ambivalence. Weaver explains that in the American Indian religious worldview, spiritual wholeness is achieved when one is in harmony with one's place in the world, which "involves right relations not only between the human self and human others but between self and place."³¹ In her first three autobiographical essays, Zitkala-Sa depicts herself as out of synch with her world once she moves from her reservation to boarding school. Her decision to leave her mother, her community, and the land she grew up on is portrayed as a fall from grace. The fact that she has lost the "right relation . . . between human self and human others" is evident in the conflicts she has with her mother and her sustained antipathy for most of the white

people around her. The loss of the “right relation . . . between self and place” is evident in the fact that she feels she has no place in the world at all.

The short works that Zitkala-Sa published between 1900 and 1902 are also important antecedents to the American literature that would be produced throughout the twentieth century as other writers further explored the theme of ambivalence. Later authors, such as N. Scott Momaday, Louise Erdrich, and Sherman Alexie, would expand the theme of ambiguity to examine ways that Native Americans could become reconnected with an Indian identity despite the transformation of indigenous cultures. Weaver notes that “the self is where tribal values become concrete,” and in all of Zitkala-Sa’s autobiographical essays it is clear that she never abandons allegiance to her tribal values. Perhaps the most confident expression of this is found in “Why I Am A Pagan,” which was her last publication to appear in this era. Though the narrator still patiently derides Christianity and still expresses a feeling of disconnection from the life of the reservation, she is comfortable with her native spirituality and draws strength from it. Dexter Fisher sees Zitkala-Sa’s writing “as a model of ambivalences, of oscillations between two diametrically opposed worlds, but it is also a model of retrieved possibilities, a creative, human endeavor that stands at the beginning of many such endeavors eventually to culminate in the finely crafted work of contemporary American Indian writers.”³² Though she foregrounds the ambivalence of the Native-American individual at the crossroads of culture, her texts are informed with the elements of resistance, maintenance of core cultural values, and a continuing connection to the natural world that will help future generations construct a new American-Indian identity. The fact remains, however, that in the writings of Zitkala-Sa the figures who move between

the American world of the educational system and the Indian world of the reservation are both troubled by a sense of disconnection from their traditional culture and proud of their resistance to assimilation. The individuals in these narratives are not paralyzed by ambiguity, but they are disconnected because of it. In her writing Zitkala-Sa depicts American Indians who endure despite their ambivalence, who, strengthened by their cultural inheritance, go forward in isolation to insure the continuance of Native-American life.

Notes

¹ The government handling of this money is a matter of investigation and legislation to this day.

² James Wilson, *The Earth Shall Weep: A History of Native America* (New York: Grove Press, 1998), p. 304.

³ As Glenn C. Altschuler notes, the General Allotment Act “had given the Indians nothing—except a small portion of their own land” (p. 35). Glenn C. Altschuler, *Race, Ethnicity, and Class in American Social Thought, 1865-1919* (Wheeling: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1982). The Yankton Reservation, where Zitkala-Sa was born, went from possessing 435,000 acres to the 37,000 acres that make up the reservation today. “Yankton Sioux Tribe of South Dakota,” Federal Emergency Agency Website, <http://fema.gov/reg-viii/tribal/yanktnbg.htm>.

⁴ Gerald Vizenor, introduction to *Native American Literature: A Brief Introduction and Anthology*, ed. Gerald Vizenor (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), p. 5.

⁵ Zitkala-Sa, *Old Indian Legends* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985). Originally published in Boston by Ginn and Company in 1901. *American Indian Stories* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985). Originally published in Washington, D.C. by Hayworth Publishing House in 1921.

⁶ Even after 1924 many American Indians were still barred from the vote by some states because they did not pay taxes, were wards of the federal government, or resided on land not part of a state for voting purposes.

⁷ Gloria Anzaldua, *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Book Company, 1987), p. 77.

⁸ Zitkala-Sa, "A Warrior's Daughter" *Everybody's Magazine* 4 (1902): 346-52.

⁹ Gerald Vizenor, *The Everlasting Sky: New Voices From the People Named the Chippewa* (New York: Crowell-Collier Press, 1972), p. 12.

¹⁰ Zitkala-Sa, "The Trial Path," *Harper's Monthly* 103 (1901): 741-44.

¹¹ Vine Deloria, Jr., also a Dakota Sioux, describes the belief in the afterlife that was handed down in his tradition: "In the days of the wisest men, the 'Milky Way' was thought to be the high road of the Spirits, which led them either toward the happy hunting grounds to the right, or to the left and the abode of punishment" (p. 133). Vine Deloria, Jr., *Singing for a Spirit: A Portrait of the Dakota Sioux* (Santa Fe: Clear Light Publishers, 2000).

¹² Zitkala-Sa, "The Soft-Hearted Sioux," *Harper's Monthly* 102 (1901): 505-08.

¹³ Jace Weaver, *That the People Might Live: Native American Literatures and Native American Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 38-39.

¹⁴ Susan Bernadin, "The Lessons of a Sentimental Education: Zitkala-Sa's Autobiographical Narratives," *Western American Literature* 32, No 3 (1997): 217.

¹⁵ Quoted from Dexter Fisher, forward to *American Indian Stories*, p. viii. Originally published in *The Red Man and Helper* (April 12, 1901).

¹⁶ Zitkala-Sa, "Why I Am a Pagan," *Atlantic Monthly* 90 (1902): 801-03.

¹⁷ When Zitkala-Sa's stories and essays were collected in *American Indian Stories* in 1921, she seemed to back away from defining herself as a "pagan." "Why I Am a Pagan" is renamed "The Great Spirit," and the former ending, "if this is Paganism, then at present, at least, I am a Pagan," was rewritten. The new ending read, "here in a fleeting quiet, I am awakened by the fluttering robe of the Great Spirit. To my innermost

consciousness the phenomenal universe is a royal mantle, vibrating with his divine breath. Caught in its flowing fringes are the spangles and oscillating brilliants of sun, moon, and stars.” Zitkala-Sa does not soften her criticism of Christianity, however, as the references to it as a “bigoted creed” and a “new superstition” remain (p. 107).

¹⁸ Zitkala-Sa, “Impressions of an Indian Childhood,” *Atlantic Monthly* 85 (1900): 37-47.

¹⁹ According to Royal B. Hassrick, “the Sioux code proscribed that behavior between persons should be governed by the principles of familiarity and respect” in order to “ensure a cohesive, workable society wherein members endeavor to foster harmony and avoid conflict” (p. 107). Royal B Hassrick, *The Sioux: Life and Customs of a Warrior Society* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964).

²⁰ Zitkala-Sa, “The School Days of an Indian Girl,” *Atlantic Monthly* 85 (1900): 185-94.

²¹ Jane Tompkins, “Indians: Textualism, Morality, and the Problem of History,” in “Race,” *Writing, and Difference*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 63.

²² J. F. Kinney, Department of Interior and Indian Affairs, 1887 *Annual Report of the Department of the Interior*, p. 143. Quoted from Dorothea M, Susag, “Zitkala-Sa (Gertrude Simmons Bonnin): A Power(full) Literary Voice,” *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 5, No. 4 (1993): 16.

²³ Wilson, p. 312.

²⁴ The choice of metaphor at the end of the scene, when the narrator describes herself as “only one of many little animals driven by a herder,” echoes her mother’s

description in “Impressions” of their tribe’s removal when she told her daughter “we were driven like a herd of buffalos.” This mirroring connects the history of Dawes Era boarding schools with a larger history of dehumanizing national policy that served to disrupt tribal continuity.

²⁵ Martha J. Cutter, “Zitkala-Sa’s Autobiographical Writings: The Problems of a Canonical Search for Language and Identity,” *MELUS* 19, No. 1 (1994): 36.

²⁶ English acquisition, which was often a struggle for Indian children and their teachers, is discussed in David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience 1875-1928* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995). Adams reports that in order to accelerate English language skills, Indian schools were advised that “pupils must be compelled to converse with each other in English, and should be properly rebuked or punished for persistent violation of this rule” (p. 140). According to Adams, students as a whole made rapid progress in learning the new language. Several autobiographies by other Native Americans who attended Indian boarding schools also tell of painful misunderstandings having to do with language differences and English instruction. Even as these authors write in English, their memories reveal that they still associate these early negative experiences with the language. Two texts that contain such episodes are Luther Standing Bear, *My People, the Sioux* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1928) and Charles A. Eastman [Ohiyesa], *From Deep Woods to Civilization; Chapters in the Autobiography of an Indian* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1916).

²⁷ Zitkala-Sa, “An Indian Teacher Among Indians,” *Atlantic Monthly* 85 (1900): 381-86.

²⁸ Bernadin, p. 228.

²⁹ Weaver, p. 27.

³⁰ The last phrase is possibly a reference to the Carlisle Indian School, the newspaper for which was *The Red Man and Helper*.

³¹ Weaver, p. 31.

³² Dexter Fisher, "The Transformation of Tradition: A Study of Zitkala-Sa and Mourning Dove, Two Transitional American Indian Writers," in *Critical Essays on Native American Literature*, ed. Andrew Wiget (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1985), p. 206.

CHAPTER 4

RACE AND NATION IN THE NOVELS OF SUTTON E. GRIGGS

In the post-Reconstruction era, many African-American writers were calling for social justice in the face of widespread disfranchisement, increased lynching, and the creation of segregation laws throughout the country, but only one writer, Sutton E. Griggs, had the creative power to imagine alternatives to the status quo. His five novels (*Imperium in Imperio* [1899], *Overshadowed* [1901], *Unfettered* [1902], *The Hindered Hand* [1905], and *Pointing the Way* [1908]) stand as important critiques of a nation in profound conflict. Though writing at the height of American Realism and imbedded in the tensions of his own time, Griggs's texts move past the reality of his historical context to envision a scenario in what cultural critic Homi Bhabha calls "the beyond."¹ The novels, written in the interstices of American history and literature, serve to "innovate and interrupt the performance of the present" and insert new possibilities for black citizens and for the nation. In Griggs's fiction the realms of race and nation are addressed as new frontiers, full of possibility and potential danger, not as settled, uncontested areas. He offers innovative ways of defining both blackness and America as he struggles with the task of representing an African-American racial solidarity that can coincide with an American identity. In his novels, Griggs articulates a vision in which it is possible for individuals to have dual affiliations, with both their race and their nation.

In his narratives, only this model of racial cohesion serves to resist the forces that tear apart African-American communities, families, and individuals.

Working with the social realities of the day, Griggs used the genre of the novel to work out a multitude of scenarios that examine possible solutions to what was then being called “the Negro problem.” In this testing of ideas, ideologies, and theories, he seemed always to return to one approach to creating a better life for blacks in America. The form of citizenship that would best serve African Americans would be a kind of dual citizenship, one in which individuals would align themselves with their race first but would never give up the fight for full participation in the life of the nation. The narratives in all five novels indicate that African Americans would gain full equality in the United States when they stood together as a unified people, cooperating across lines of class and color. Yet Griggs’s themes are not separatist; the ultimate goal of his heroes and heroines is always complete acceptance into American society.

Griggs begins the exploration of this sort of racial cohesion in his first novel, *Imperium in Imperio*, which translates as “nation within a nation.”² In this book, the entire African-American population secretly unifies to become a complete underground federation, the Imperium in Imperio, with a government that parallels that of the United States.³ In a dramatic decision, the group decides to take Texas and Louisiana by stealth and by force, to establish their own nation in Texas, and to give Louisiana to the international powers that help them achieve their mission. This plan does not come to fruition because the narrator’s apocalyptic fears compel him to reveal the plot. This last minute turn of events, however, does not diminish the revolutionary nature of the narrative as a whole. The novel explores the idea of a black coalition within America

that negotiates with other countries and considers the possibility of military action against and separation from the United States. This was a highly imaginative response to the current racial and political climate, and it certainly did not reflect other ideas being considered in the public discourse of the time. Despite the fact that this was an exciting idea, the separatist plot is dissolved in the text, and the indication is that the powerful unity achieved by African Americans had not been put to the best use. By vowing to separate from the United States, the group had lost sight of its goal, which was to “secure . . . the full enjoyment and privileges due American citizens,” and had subsequently lost the moral force that had unified its members (183).

As the Imperium debates what actions should be taken to alleviate the current condition of black Americans, they present evidence of lynching, hypocrisy, and injustice against the nation that claims to be a democracy. One dissenting voice, that of Belton Piedmont, reveals patriotic sentiments and makes a claim for American citizenship despite the crimes of the nation. In this voices lies another notion of a “nation within a nation,” one in which black Americans can organize themselves in order to wrest their rights as Americans. To claim, fully, the identity as a black person and as an American citizen is represented as the achievement of wholeness and completeness. To divide into factions or to come into an American identity by denying an African-American identity is tantamount to defeat. Griggs often presents a unified racial resistance to all forces that would deny individuals full pride in either their black heritage or their U.S. citizenship. The achievement of this state of wholeness is not simple, however. There are many barriers to its realization that serve to fragment the nation, the community, the family, and the individual. The most overwhelming obstacle to the full realization of the ideal of

dual citizenship in all the novels is the political reality of the day. Central to the splintering of blacks from American society is the disfranchisement of the majority of African Americans. By 1899, when Griggs's first novel was published, most Southern states had found ways to deny the vote to black citizens. Their alienation from politics enabled the white electorate to pass or uphold other laws that denied justice to African Americans. Not only were blacks not allowed to vote, they were often not permitted to sit on juries or to testify in trials. This exclusion made them easy targets for unjust punishment and forced many into convict lease programs.

The relation of African Americans to the systems of justice in America is a central theme in all of Griggs's novels. As he delineates throughout his works, black Americans at the time were subjected to three kinds of judicature: mob law, the local courts, and the rulings of the Supreme Court, each with its own codes that effectively circumscribed their lives. The implication in Griggs's novels is that the current course of repression that the United States was on was destructive to the entire nation. Black participation, not segregation or disfranchisement, was crucial to America's future. As had been pointed out by Frederick Douglass and W. E. B. Du Bois, the very notion of America as a free and democratic nation was severely undermined by its treatment of the black citizens living within its borders.⁴ In Griggs's fiction the justice system, which excluded African Americans from its process and yet was a tool for their persecution, became representative of how perverted democracy had become in the United States.

The most immediate form of white control experienced by Southern blacks at the turn into the twentieth century was mob law, and this method of "justice" was primarily enacted in the form of lynching. It has been estimated that in the period leading up to the

publication of Grigg's first novel, there were over one hundred lynchings a year in the South,⁵ and Griggs's works, which reflect the anxiety of black Southerners, are laced with memories, threats, and brutally graphic descriptions of unlawful executions. While Griggs carefully mirrors the reality of mob law and its psychological effects on individuals, he also deconstructs white Southern justifications for racial violence. The myth perpetuated by the South was that there was a "one crime" rule for lynching a black man, and that was in retaliation for an assault on a white woman.⁶ Yet the circumstances behind most of the terrorism in the narratives have nothing to do with white women, reflecting that the "one crime" lie that the South telegraphed to the rest of the country was nothing but a smoke screen or pretext to outright barbarism. As one white participant explains after the mutilation and murder of a black couple in *The Hindered Hand*, "That's all rot about one crime. We lynch niggers down here for anything. We lynch them for being sassy and sometimes we lynch them on general principles. The truth of the matter is the real 'one crime' that paves the way for a lynching whenever we have the notion is the crime of being black" (136). In fact, the vulnerability of white women at the hands of black men is shown to be a complete inverse of reality. This is best demonstrated by a porter in the opening pages of *The Hindered Hand* who is slipped a note by a white woman on the train.⁷ This simple act terrifies the porter and triggers in him an immediate sense of danger. His knowledge of the way mob law works in the South, that even a fleeting communication with a white woman is a threat to his safety, is signaled by a simple gesture when "he put his hand on his collar as though it was already too tight" (16). The novels clearly emphasize that because of mob law, the most vulnerable segment of the population is black men.

Later in the novel, the same character is approached again by this woman, who threatens to accuse him of impropriety unless he follows her orders to stop the train: “The perturbed porter canvassed in his mind that stock of alleged facts circulated secretly among the Negroes setting forth the manner in which some white women used their unlimited power of life and death over Negro men, things that may in some age of the world’s history come to light” (84). Raymond Hedin, writing about black texts from this era, has said that “the power of established [white] stories or myths made it all the more essential for a black writer to try to preserve his own sense of story, at least to slip into print . . . the beginnings of a countermyth, in the hope that it would somehow begin to exercise its subversive power.”⁸ The porter’s meditation on mob law reflects the hypocrisy and brutality behind lynching. This is an example of how Griggs’s novels act as interventions, as he inserts another Southern voice, a black one, into the story of lynching.

The second system of justice that circumscribes the lives of black citizens is the local judicial system, which is represented in Griggs’s texts by the local trial. The courtroom scenes, which pit innocent black characters against hardhearted white juries, read like melodrama. The dramatic nature of these scenes seems to reflect the fact that local trials involving African Americans were little more than staged events. The results of the trials were scripted before they even began. There is no expectation that a white jury and judge will rule in favor of a black man, woman, or child. In the case of Belton Piedmont, who kills a man who sought his own death in *Imperium in Imperio*, the “men who were in the mob that attempted Belton’s murder were on the jury. In fact, the postmaster [the ringleader of the lynching] was the foreman” (159). In this case, the jury

sentences not only Belton but also the entire family he lives with to be hanged. In *Pointing the Way*, Baug Peppers, an African-American lawyer, tries to explain to a white colleague the nature of the local judicial system that offers no justice to black citizens:

Sheriffs sometimes connive at lynchings. Police often murder wantonly. . . .

If you knew the extent of the maltreatment of all classes of colored people by some members of the police force, it would amaze you. Brutal assaults, and wanton, wanton, wanton murder of man after man has been committed and yet not even a reprimand has ever been given to those who have done the killing, though witnesses of character, white and colored, have endeavored to bring the accused to trial. (120-21)⁹

Law at the local level is depicted as hopelessly biased and dramatically flawed, a place where those in control thoughtlessly act out, without variation, their roles as, in Griggs's word, "repressionists."

The third system of justice portrayed by Griggs is the highest court in the land, the Supreme Court. Griggs's treatment of this system is two-part. On the one hand his characters denounce the court, which is often described as being the source of all the injustice to which African Americans are subjected. Underlying these indictments are the decisions that effectively nullified the 1875 Civil Rights Act, chief among them being the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruling that legalized the concept of "separate but equal." It is also relevant to Griggs's texts that by 1900 virtually every Southern state in America had successfully disfranchised African Americans through new statutes or amendments to their constitutions. Though these codes were in direct violation of the Fifteenth Amendment to the federal Constitution, which clearly states that "the Right of citizens of

the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged . . . by any state on account of race, color, or previous condition,” the Supreme Court had taken no steps to rectify this widespread inequity and, in fact, had upheld prejudicial state suffrage laws in the 1898 *Williams vs. Mississippi* ruling. The politically-minded characters in Griggs’s texts find the Supreme Court inherently responsible for the perversion of law at the state and local level, as Belton Piedmont states in *Imperium in Imperio*: “Remember this, that the Court of last resort has set the example which the lower courts have followed. The Supreme Court of the United States, it seems, may be relied upon to sustain any law born of prejudice against the Negro and to demolish any law constructed in his interest. . . . If this court . . . sets such a terrible example of injustice, it is not surprising that its filthy waters corrupt the various streams of justice in all their ramifications” (237). By denying African Americans their rights to legal recourse, the Supreme Court not only splinters blacks from American citizenship but also separates the nation from its highest ideals.

Though in Griggs’s novels the Supreme Court is repeatedly held up to scrutiny in its relation to African-American rights and found culpable, the plots often culminate in a hearing before the this tribunal, and, in every case, the black litigants emerge victorious. Despite the acknowledgment that “the highest court in the land is the chief bulwark of caste prejudice in democratic America” (*Imperium* 213), the federal court is *imagined* in the narratives as a place divorced from local and even federal prejudices and politics, a place where justices weep at the truth and beauty of the words of African-American lawyers and acquit black defendants who have been accused and convicted in local courts. Here is where the “tragic mulatto,”¹⁰ so familiar in both black and white fiction

and often the victim in Griggs's lower courts, becomes the courageous trial lawyer who wins the case and saves not only his client but redeems the nation as well.

In Griggs's fiction, the Supreme Court is removed from the atrocities of mob rule and the chaos of the state courts and becomes a realm of reason and right emotion, a purified world Griggs cannot describe with any clarity (in fact, these trials are often glossed over in the texts) but which symbolizes hope and the potential for change. If, as Belton Piedmont states, the highest court in the land is the "filthy waters" that contaminate the "streams of justice," its purification can, in turn, wash clean the impure and corrupted system throughout the nation. In fact, the effects of the decision to rule against restrictive Southern suffrage laws in (the aptly named) *Pointing the Way* leads to the spread of a new "movement throughout the South." "The peaceful adjustment of the race question" that the characters devise in the novel gains national acclaim and becomes "a model of procedure for other communities" (231). In this instance, the high court's support of the unified black struggle leads to a new level of peace for all Americans.

Griggs depicts several scenarios in which justice prevails because of the coalition of African Americans from all walks of life and the participation of black lawyers in the legal process. Ultimately, it is only through cooperation between blacks and whites that a safe and peaceful society comes about. In the passages dealing with Supreme Court cases, Griggs envisions, through African-American intervention, a healing for both black and white America. In effect, his texts serve as a mediation of history, an attempt, through fiction, to demonstrate not only how defiled the systems of justice in the United States had become but how they could be cleansed, redeemed, and rectified. Imbedded in the texts are not only reflections of the present but a transformation of it into the future.

The writings of Griggs become, as Bhabha says of other writers who occupy literary space in the beyond, “a meditation on the disposition of space and time from which the narrative of the nation must *begin*.”¹¹ The true power of Griggs’s law motif comes not from the brutal representations of lynching and mob law, nor from the dramatization of the farce that local justice had been reduced to, but from his ability to reinvent the Supreme Court in his fiction. Griggs moves beyond the questioning of other contemporary texts and begins to supply answers, and his novels are notable for the way they depict a national healing through black inclusion.

In every novel, Griggs is highly critical of the restrictions placed on African Americans, of officially sanctioned violence, and of a Supreme Court that echoed and supported the most racist impulses of society, but he is also critical of black leadership that was not effectively addressing these problems. Just as he imaginatively heals the nation in his narratives, Griggs’s uses various methods to depict the inconsistencies of certain political positions held by African Americans. Although most of his rhetorical power is aimed at revealing the injustice of white America, he occasionally finds room to analyze the role of black complicity in this injustice. In almost every novel Griggs wrestles with the figure and ideas of Booker T. Washington, who had a virtual monopoly on the public stage when it came to African-American issues. The event that had propelled Washington into the center of the discussion of race relations was his speech at the Atlanta Exposition of 1895. This speech, known also as “The Atlanta Compromise,” reassured white Southerners and the nation that African Americans in the South were a loyal and patient citizenry that had nothing but respect for their white neighbors. Though the speech made some plea for the easing of economic restraints, it promised that social

equality was not on the minds of black Americans. Washington's position on race relations stands in obvious opposition to Griggs's central theme of black political unity leading to full American citizenship.

Griggs seems to parody this speech and white America's reaction to it in *Imperium in Imperio*. The book begins with the schoolboy days of the two main characters, Belton Piedmont, who is the dark-skinned son of an ex-slave, and the light-skinned Bernard Belgrave, who was born into a certain amount of privilege. The boys, though friends, compete in an oratory contest on the day of their high school graduation, and the speech given by Piedmont, entitled "The Contribution of the Anglo-Saxon to the Cause of Human Liberty," reaches many levels of irony and humor. That a black youth in the South whose own mother had been a slave would write and perform such a speech is ironic, but the humor comes in the description of how taken his white audience is with his words: "The white people who sat and listened to his speech looked upon it as a very revelation to them, they themselves not having had as clear a conception of the glory of their race as this Negro now revealed" (32-33). This "revelation" is evidence of a peculiar phenomenon that often accompanies ethnic-American and white-American interaction. In this phenomenon, which Dana Nelson has termed "the white gaze," Anglo Americans are unable to see or comprehend situations involving individuals of other ethnicities because their perception is clouded by assumptions they have about those groups.¹² Though the inability to know or recognize the reality of another is inherently damaging both to the viewer and the viewed, at times the person of color can use this inability to his or her advantage. Belton's audience is unconscious to any possible irony or manipulation because he is saying exactly what they want, and perhaps need, to hear.

The full range of the irony lies in the relationship between the speech, the speaker, and the audience. The white audience has come to witness the speech contest and commencement exercise at the sub-standard, black school in their town. They are given the front row seats, indicating that their presence is more valued than the black members of the community in attendance, including the families of the contestants and graduates. The black citizens, who live with segregation in every aspect of their lives, are now restricted to the back rows in one of their own institutions. Belton's speech reassures the white audience members that despite these seemingly unjust conditions and histories, they should be proud of themselves as purveyors of "human liberty." What the text suggests is that white America has always been more willing to listen to race rhetoric than to evaluate the complex and paradoxical race realities in the United States. The audience is able to disregard who they are and where they are, in terms of their white privilege, and accept the "glory of their race" as revealed by a black high school student.

The irony of the situation continues as the judges (all white) convene to discuss who should win the prize for best oratory. Though all were thrilled with Belton's subject and admired his presentation, they simply found it inconceivable that the prize would go to the darker contestant. Their deliberations include the assessment that the "black nigger has beat the yellow one all to pieces this time, but we don't like to see nigger blood triumph over any Anglo-Saxon blood" (35). And so the white judges, though they presume to recognize themselves as the "contributors to the cause of human liberty" described in Piedmont's speech, unblinkingly perpetuate an injustice against the young black contestant by declaring his rival the winner. There is an obvious parallel here to the nation's reaction to Washington's Atlanta Exposition speech. Though lauded far and

wide in 1895 as a reasonable answer to the racial strife in the American South, it was followed in 1896 by the *Plessy vs. Ferguson* decision that made “separate but equal” the law of the land.

Piedmont’s boyhood speech is only the first example of Griggs’s treatment of Washington’s political position and legacy.¹³ Though his novels advocate unity at all levels of black society, there is a strong indication that some responses will not serve to coalesce African Americans as a people or lead to their full participation as U. S. citizens. Just as he repeatedly depicts and rejects armed revolt, he also conjures up the Washington model of African-American citizenship to reveal its inefficacy. The problem with Washington’s metaphor for black and white relations, that “in all things purely social we can be as separate as the finger, yet one as the hand in all things essential to human progress,” is that alienation is antithetical to coalition building.¹⁴ In Griggs’s novels the ultimate goal of most of the plots is the twofold unity: cohesion among African Americans and cooperation between white and black citizens. In all his narratives separation breeds fear, contempt, and ignorance. Griggs is careful to point out that between African Americans and whites and within black America there are a host of social structures that prevent meaningful contact between peoples.

Griggs also shows that these barriers are not impenetrable, and the motif of crossing becomes a metaphor of the false boundaries the world creates. In most cases, the act of crossing is indicative of the fluid nature of racial and social constructions. There are many episodes of passing from one race to another and from one gender to another. These instances of traversing social categories are reminiscent of other passing novels at the time,¹⁵ but unlike these, in Griggs’s fiction the motivation to pass is rarely

the mere desire for an African American to escape racial oppression. In his novels blacks pass as white, whites as black, and men as women to gather information, to subvert the order of society, or to advance the cause of civil rights.

In *Imperium in Imperio*, for example, Belton Piedmont disguises himself as a woman and goes into domestic service to spy on whites. He finds that they have little knowledge of the discontent, intellectual activity, or aspirations of the African-American community as a whole. Conversely, Ramon Mansford, a white Northerner in *The Hindered Hand*, darkens his skin and passes into the black community to solve the mystery of his fiancé's murder. Not only does he discover the truth behind her death, but also his eyes are opened to the real injustices faced by blacks on a daily basis. In the same novel Earl Bluefield, a light-skinned African American, passes to join groups of racist Democrats in the South and encourage them to reveal their true position as race-haters to the nation, causing them to lose all political power. Another African American who is light enough to live as white in *Hindered Hand* is Mrs. Seabright. Her goal is to organize all who can pass to infiltrate white society and, as she puts it "to shake the Southern system to its very foundation" (236). However, Mrs. Seabright's plan ends in failure because it is ultimately divisive to the African-American community, as she believes that individuals who decide to cross into white life must, to protect their new identities, cut all ties with their visibly black friends and neighbors. In *Pointing the Way*, Eina, a dark-complected white woman from the North, chooses to associate herself with black society and to marry Baug Peppers, an African-American lawyer. This may be the only example in American literature of a white character passing as black to marry an African American.¹⁶ As these examples demonstrate, very few characters in Griggs's

fiction cross social boundaries as a means to escape race. Passing in these novels is a subversive tactic. The few characters who pass because they want to live in white society, like Eunice in *Hindered Hand*, are destined to cross into the realm of insanity because of their deeply divided psyches.

Perhaps the most significant instance of crossing racial barriers comes in *Overshadowed*. In this novel Horace Christian, a white politician, has an innocent black man lynched to further his career and callously impregnates and abandons a respectable young black girl. Lanier, another white politician, makes a vow to seek revenge in the name of this girl. He convinces Christian to paint himself black so that they can “go among the darky girls and have a good time” (156). After Christian drinks himself into unconsciousness, Lanier glues a wig on his head and puts him in a prison cell in place of a young African-American man who is condemned to die the next day. Christian, unsure of what is going on until the very end, acts the minstrel all the way to the gallows. The significance of this instance of crossing is multi-layered. On the very surface, Griggs is putting a white man in the shoes of a black man, making him the victim of an unjust execution. The act of hanging a white man in black face also acts as a symbolic punishment of minstrelsy, a condemnation of white appropriation of black identity in order to exploit. The scene also serves to subvert the Southern justification for lynching, that “one crime” lie that African-American men are only lynched for assaults on white women. In this case, the white man pays for the actual sexual exploitation of a black girl. Finally, the scene revolves around and plays on “the white gaze.” The fact that the guards and the gallery at the execution do not realize that they are hanging a white man in black face stems from their inability or unwillingness to “see” African Americans.

Lanier is able to pull off the switch because he is aware of the “species of contempt” that rendered whites “deficient in ability to readily distinguish” black men from one another (169). In this case, the insistence that “all blacks look alike” comes into play to the detriment of a white man. Like Captain Delano in Herman Melville’s “Benito Cereno,” the witnesses at the execution see only what they want or expect to see.¹⁷

Though each instance of passing has its own signification, the overarching motif of crossing points to the malleability of identity, race, and society. The various ways that people pass in these novels seem to indicate that in a world in flux, anything can change, anything can happen. By implication, if the reified realm of race can be breached, then other barriers can be crossed to bring about racial harmony in the nation. In several of the novels, for example, there are white characters who decide to join the cause for black civil rights despite possible opposition from their own race, as does Lanier in *Overshadowed*.¹⁸

Another stratification in society that must be crossed in Griggs’s fiction is the social hierarchy within the African-American community. In plot lines where African Americans of differing classes build coalitions, the old-school black characters, who are often ex-slaves or who have lived their lives in service to whites, prove to be powerful allies to the more educated black characters. The best example of this new activism among the older generation is Uncle Jack in *Pointing the Way*. When he is introduced, he seems to be a stock character of the Uncle Tom tradition. He is loyal to all he serves and is adept at winning the good graces of whites through presenting a humorous persona. His way of conducting himself since the days of slavery has been, to paraphrase Ralph Ellison, to “tell the joke and slip the yoke.”¹⁹ However, when the younger generation

comes to him with a proposal to help defeat disfranchisement laws throughout the country, Uncle Jack is willing to drop the comic veil and become a martyr to the cause. Through this character, Griggs addresses popular stereotypes and subverts the depictions of this “type” or class of African Americans found in white American literature.²⁰ Unlike Tom in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and Jim in *Huckleberry Finn*, Jack’s loyalty is to his own race, and in the end he sacrifices himself for the young generation of black Americans.²¹

It is significant that Griggs, who was one of the first writers to explore in fiction the reality of the “New Negro,” the class of educated African Americans who had never known slavery, is also one of the few writers to redeem the image of the “Old Negro.” He shows how many of the characteristics revered by white southerners and despised by the younger generation of blacks, such as humility and self-deprecation, often constituted a protective front that hid, out of necessity, an individual’s real intelligence and pain. This is the “veil” described by Du Bois in *Souls of Black Folk* and the disguise of Paul Laurence Dunbar’s “We Wear the Mask.”²² When Griggs lifts this façade in the character of Uncle Jack, he reveals the harsh facts of Jack’s life: that the Ku Klux Klan had killed his wife and children. Griggs shows that what others had interpreted as docility or contentment were actually fear and helplessness. Jack demonstrates to the younger characters that his generation has just as much, if not more, incentive to act. Uncle Jack plays his part in the plan to challenge suffrage laws in the South. On election day he insists on his right to vote, despite his condition as a landless, illiterate black man. His refusal to back down from the fight costs him his life. The sacrifice that Jack makes for his race, and really for his country, indicate the advantage of alliances across classes. Power is found not only in numbers but also in claiming all parts of the black experience

and community. These alliances suggest that the diverse population that comprises black America could be unified despite educational, generational, and color differences. The indication of narratives of black coalition is that African Americans must create a coherent and cooperative body, a nation unto themselves, in order to gain their full rights of American citizenship.

In this sense, Griggs has been identified as a Black Nationalist.²³ However, to label him as such is to miss the complexity of what his novels actually depict. Inherent in the ideology of Black Nationalism is racial separatism. It is at this point that Griggs's novels deviate from the type of Pan-African Black Nationalism that would be espoused by Marcus Garvey or the black separatist movements that would be explored later in the twentieth century by groups such as the Black Panthers. What Griggs seems to champion is a dual nationalism, one in which a black citizen can embrace both a racial solidarity and an American identity. This is not to say that Griggs does not depict separatist movements in his novels. In fact, the genre of the novel allows Griggs to explore the potential of a variety of political stances and their feasibility through the lives of his characters in the realm of fiction. Armed resistance or emigration to Africa are presented as undesirable alternatives to the present American condition, but they always lurk as possibilities for black citizens should the nation refuse to change its course. However, careful reading of his texts reveal that the term "Black Nationalist" does not accurately describe Griggs's fiction because whenever a true separatist, black national movement is depicted, it inevitably fails as in *Imperium in Imperio*. Ultimately, there is no true hope depicted for black separatism in the novels of Sutton E. Griggs. The subtext of most of the nationalist plots is that white and black America are irreversibly connected.

Just as characters transgress boundaries of class and race to build alliances and to work toward the good of race and nation, there are scenarios that indicate that many of these boundaries have already been crossed, are always being crossed in one way or another. In seeking to unify black and white America, Griggs points out the fact that the two are already connected in the most intimate way: by blood. The theme of miscegenation is not unique to Griggs. Since the days of abolitionist literature, writers had represented the relations between slave owners and their female slaves as a compelling argument against the institution of slavery. Post-bellum narratives often dealt with the fate of mixed-race individuals who were light enough to pass for white, pointing out the injustice of the American social system that discriminates based on the fact of black blood, even when that blood is not evident in any way. Though Griggs includes indictments of the rape that was perpetuated against slave women by white masters as well as instances where all-but-white characters suffer when their black roots are revealed, his use of the miscegenation theme is most compelling when it becomes metaphor for the hidden ties that bind white and black America.

There are several scenarios in which a mulatto character is revealed to be the progeny of a revered white politician. In *Imperium in Imperio*, Bernard Belgrave meets his father for the first time on the night of his graduation from Harvard. In this clandestine encounter, Belgrave learns that he is the son of a U.S. senator whose “name was a household word throughout the nation” and that his mother’s father was a governor (87). He is therefore descended from “a long line of heroes whose names are ornaments to our nation’s history” on both sides of his family (90). In *Overshadowed*, Erma Wyson, who has to work as a house servant because there are no decent jobs for

educated African-American women, turns out to be the “daughter of the Hon. Mr. Lawson, Ex-Governor of Virginia, and Ex-Minister to Germany” (120). In *Hindered Hand*, the light-skinned Eunice and her darker sister Tiara are descended from one of the founding fathers of the nation, as Tiara explains: “In revolutionary times one of your most illustrious men, whose fame has found lodgment in all quarters of the globe, was clandestinely married to a Negro woman” (234). Finally, in *Ponting the Way* no one can account for the enigmatic Baug Peppers. Everyone who meets him swears that they have seen him before but cannot tell where or when. The mystery of Peppers is solved when he goes to argue for the suffrage rights of African Americans before the Supreme Court. One of the Justices immediately sees that Peppers is, in appearance, the exact replica of a president of the United States.²⁴ This “American statesman” whose “name is indelibly written in the life of the nation,” whose “likeness adorns all our walls,” and whose “picture is in all of our school books” turns out to be Baug Peppers’s grandfather. Though Griggs uses this motif more extensively than any other writer, the trope of the mulatto with ancestral ties to important American politicians is familiar in African-American history and literature. The rumors of the affair between Thomas Jefferson and the slave Sally Hemings had been circulating through black oral history from the early days of the nation until 1853 when one of the first African-American novelists, William Wells Brown, wrote a fictional account of the fate of their progeny in his *Clotel; Or, The President’s Daughter*.²⁵ These oral and fictional accounts, as well as the very real DNA evidence that has recently linked the Jefferson and Hemings families, serve as powerful metonym of an American reality, representing how black and white America have always

been on intimate terms, that black America is by all rights an heir to America both by association and by blood.

In every novel, African-American and white-American characters collaborate in all sorts of ventures, positive and negative, belying the notion that there ever was or could ever be true separation of the races. Griggs suggests that the lives of blacks and whites in the United States are destined to be closely intertwined, and that for the health of individual, region, and nation, the nature of their cohabitation had better be a positive one. This entanglement of races is represented in a rather stunning image in *Overshadowed*. Horace Christian, the politician who has a black man lynched to win an election, feels compelled to go back under cover of night to view the body of the innocent man he has sacrificed. As Christian leans close to the victim to read a placard that has been placed around his neck (“Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap”) he loses his balance. Christian describes the scene: “I fell forward, and clutching at anything to keep from striking the ground, caught hold of the dead Negro. My weight, added to his, broke the rope, and we fell down together, my head getting caught under his mangled form” (134). This morbid physical entanglement is emblematic of the fate of the South and the nation. America has the choice of building democratic alliances, as in *Pointing the Way*, or of falling, like Horace Christian, under the weight of the injustice and violence of its national position.

In his fiction, Griggs makes it clear that the political suppression, social restrictions, and personal violence that circumscribed the lives of African Americans, especially in the South, had reached a critical state. As the heroes and heroines in his novels watch friends and relatives lose their lives, minds, and spirits to racial oppression,

they each make a positive decision to dedicate their lives to solving the race question. Griggs demonstrates how important this issue was by having many of his novels revolve around a recurring story line. In *Overshadowed*, *Unfettered*, *The Hindered Hand*, and *Pointing the Way* domestic happiness is impossible until racial harmony is achieved. In three of these novels, a female character cannot or will not marry her beloved until race relations are healed, and in *Hindered Hand* a husband is compelled to bring an end to racial antagonism so that his wife may regain her sanity.

These plot constructions, though seemingly peculiar, really speak to the heart of what was at stake for African Americans. Griggs, as a Baptist minister and a social theorist, believed marriage to be the central contract of civilization. As the foundation of a sound society depends on the stable relationship between a husband and wife, so the basis of a strong marriage depends on a stable society. The fact that Griggs's heroes and heroines cannot make a home until society has been healed of its racial tensions indicates that there was no hope for a stable African-American community without political and social equality, without full participation in American life. In every novel, characters take the decisive, irrevocable step of dedicating their lives to end the race problem and in so doing cross over from personal ambition to political action in order to obtain domestic stability.

The potential of race to cause fragmentation, which is evident in the marriage plots, is further delineated in the recurring depiction of insanity and suicide. All the characters who lose control of their faculties or decide to take their own lives in Griggs's novels do so because of the state of race relations in America. In his literary world, race drives people crazy. It is not the condition of being black (or white) that makes

individuals insane, it is the disturbing public attitudes about race that lead characters into schizophrenia or depression. These examples of madness can also be read as metaphors for a nation that is unstable and dangerous because of its inability to accept and integrate the parts of itself. Several black characters undergo transitions in their mental state because of racial matters. Their deterioration is obvious to their friends and lovers because their madness leads them into a state that separates them from those around them.

The first African-American character to succumb mentally to the confusion of race in American is the beautiful Miss Viola Martin in *Imperium in Imperio*. Viola's compelling characteristics are her intelligence, her devotion to her race, and her very dark complexion. She is the girlfriend of Bernard Belgrave, who shares all her traits except for the fact that he is light-skinned. Unfortunately for them both, Viola had read a book at the impressionable age of eighteen that had stayed with her and eventually lead to her bewilderment and suicide. The book, *White Supremacy and Negro Subordination*, convinced her that "the intermingling of the races in sexual relationships was sapping the vitality of the Negro race and, in fact, was slowly but surely exterminating the race" (173).²⁶ In order to save African Americans from extinction, Viola had dedicated her life to splitting up mulatto couples and convincing black prostitutes to "cease their criminal conduct with white men" (174). In order to prove to those she advised that she was sincere about her crusade, she had vowed "to never marry a mulatto man" (174). On the night that Belgrave proposes to her, she kills herself and explains her motives in a suicide letter. The irony is that a woman dedicated to the cause of equality is removed from the collective struggle because of an essentially racist text. Griggs's representation of the

fate of Viola is significant on another level. He shows how the prevalent racial theories of the day, when taken for truth by the American public in general, become ingrained in the psyche of black Americans and can become a part of their world view as well. This theme becomes central to African-American literature in the twentieth century and is explored in many of the century's most important novels, including *Native Son* by Richard Wright, *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison, and *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison,²⁷ in which the acceptance of racist cant by African Americans is depicted as essentially self-destructive.

Griggs also shows how well intentioned but wrong-minded agendas can be destructive to the cause of black unity and the African American inclusion into American political and social life. In Viola's case, for example, an intelligent, noble, and sympathetic character acts as a splintering force (by attempting to break up couples) before taking her own life. What is meant to be a sacrifice made for her race is really a waste of a powerful race-advocate. Her actions also lead Belgrave to make a vow to forever separate the races. It is as the eventual leader of the Imperium in Imperio that he adopts the plan for black Americans to split violently from their native country.

John Wysong in *Overshadowed* is so deeply affected by the racial milieu of his time and place that he too is led to extreme behavior. Wysong is a young black man who is depicted as an independent, hardworking, and compassionate citizen. When he is introduced in the novel, his goal is to make enough money to pay off the mortgage on his family home so that he can sell it and send his sister to college. At this point he does not regret foregoing college himself, for opportunities available to black men with "a literary education" are scarce (92). He is confident that he has made the right choice to learn a

trade and take care of his family financially. When he is called into his foreman's office, he is sure that he is about to be promoted. The foreman begins the meeting by praising the young employee's character and work ethic, telling him "you have been a good faithful workman and we have liked both you and your work, you have been so polite, industrious, punctual and painstaking" (92). Despite his industry and popularity in the shop, Wysong has been called in not for a promotion but for a pink slip. The Labor Union has ordered that he be discharged, declaring that no members will work with non-members and that colored men cannot join the Union. Therefore, Wysong is forced out of his job.

The young laborer's predicament is a comment on both the racial atmosphere of the time and on the position of the most visible black leader of the day, Booker T. Washington. John Wysong seems to follow all the advice put forward in Washington's *Up From Slavery*. He is industrious, faithful to his white southern employers, thrifty, and devoted to his family. He even takes up a useful trade, as Washington recommends, and forgoes a liberal education. In the end, however, all these traits and decisions amount to nothing in the society depicted in the novel, which disallows the advancement of a black man under any circumstances. John and his sister Erma, who had been on their way to accomplishing their modest dreams through thrift and hard work, find themselves "penniless and homeless" (96).

Wysong's dismissal from the shop is only the beginning of a very effective melodramatic episode that portrays the deep psychological effects of racism and disfranchisement on the psyche of the African-American male.²⁸ After he loses his job, Wysong's economic status and mental state are severely altered. Where once he was the

happy, confident, competent breadwinner in his family, after his dismissal, he finds himself “being shut out from all of the departments of skilled labor in account of his color, he had been forced to join the large army of unskilled laborers, grabbing here and there in a desultory manner at every little job of work that appeared, having no steady employment” (98). By coincidence (a major element in melodrama), Wysong is hired to drive the carriage of the Master Workman of the Labor Union of the United States in a big Labor Day celebration. As the carriage goes through the streets, the Mayor of the city proudly points out a church that represents the total dispossession of African Americans. The mayor tells his guest “that building is a potent example of how well we have the labor situation in hand in the South. That church edifice is one of the very finest in the city, and is being erected by a congregation of poor Negroes, and yet, not a brick is being laid, nor is a nail being driven by a Negro” (99). The fact that poor black citizens are barred from building their own house of worship so that white laborers are assured work gives Wysong insight as to how race and power operate in his community.

The Master Workman, who comes from the North, reveals that white supremacy and racial prejudice in the workplace are not limited to the Southern states. In his opinion, the difference between blacks and whites is that blacks have “an abnormal respect for authority,” while whites will “ignore all laws, defy all constituted authority, overthrow all government, violate all tradition” to get what they want (101). In the Master Workman’s final analysis, “the Negro, lacking this spirit, has no place in our ranks” and so will never be allowed equality in the workforce (102). As Wysong sits silently by and listens to this conversation, he slips into madness:

His mind could go no further. It was in a whirl. Over and over the words of the Master Workman rang in his ears: "If a foe stands in our way and nothing will dislodge him but death, then he must die." The clatter of the horses' hooves seemed to say this; the revolving wheels of the carriage seemed to repeat it over and over, and the hum and noise of the city seemed to be but a loud echo of the sentiment that had fallen into Wysong's already disordered brain. . . . His hands trembled with nervous excitement, and his eyes were red and wild-looking. (102)

As often happens in Griggs's novels, when the order of the world as it should be, or as it claims to be, is disrupted, characters cease to be able to make sense of things. Their madness is a reaction to an insane world, and in order to operate within the maxims of this new order as they understand it, they must often go against everything that they believe is right. This is what happens to John Wysong. He has already been a victim of a society that does not operate in accordance to its own rules. He had believed that hard work, loyalty, thrift, and compassion would result in advancement in the workplace. If the novel is examined in relation to Booker T. Washington's autobiography and his Atlanta Exposition speech, it is clear that this path was espoused by the leading African-American spokesman and that Southern whites had agreed that this was the course that would gain blacks a level of comfort and protection. Wysong, however, had gained nothing by his hard work and dedication, and, in fact, had lost everything simply because of the color of his skin. As he listens to the leader of the organization that had caused his downfall proclaim white supremacy to be the true nature of the world, Wysong snaps.

As he slips into insanity, he becomes, in fact, like the Anglo Saxon that the Master Workman describes, indicating where the true root of the insanity begins. As the Union leader and the city dignitaries look at the view from the city hall tower, “the seed of murder dropped into his heart,” and Wysong, who stands unnoticed behind the group, quickly shoves the Master Workman out of the window (103). One man grabs his coat, and for a suspenseful moment all look in horror at the dangling man. But the coat rips, and the Master Workman falls. Melodrama gives way, as it so often does in Griggs’s novels, to a vivid realism as the end of the Union leader is described: “Fifty feet from the top of the tower the body struck a protuberance, bounded outward, and fell plump upon the iron palings two hundred feet below, and they ran their narrow shaped heads through his body as unconcernedly as though they were stationed there from all eternity to receive him” (105). Wysong’s descent into madness and murder stems from his continued existence in a world that does not make sense. He has followed the rules set by God and man, has listened to the advice of the most revered black leader of the day, all to no avail. The fact of race complicates all truth, all reality, and some, like Wysong, eventually capitulate to the chaos.

Another personality fragmented by race matters is Eunice Seabright in *The Hindered Hand*. Eunice inherits a sort of racial ambiguity from her mother, Mrs. Arabelle Seabright, who had separated the family according to their color in order to follow a mad plan of racial inclusion. Mr. and Mrs. Seabright and their two oldest children, including Eunice, are light enough to pass, but their daughter Tiara is not. Mrs. Seabright compels the older two children to live as whites in high society and to cut ties with Tiara. Mrs. Seabright’s plan is to have all those who are light enough to pass

infiltrate white society and change public sentiment by championing the black race from the other side of the color line. She forces Eunice to marry a prominent judge, the Hon. Volrees, so that she may have influence over the judicial system. Eunice leaves Volrees shortly after the wedding and hides out with her sister until she is able to sneak off to another state and marry the man she really loves. Her husband is also an African American who is light enough to pass, and they change their names and live peacefully among the white community in Louisiana.

Eunice's peace is broken and her mind is shattered when she is called to trial for bigamy after her whereabouts are discovered. At the trial Tiara, as a reluctant witness, reveals her mother's plan and her sister's racial heritage to the court and to the large crowd in attendance. Eunice's reaction to her sister's testimony is to beg for a conviction. If she is considered "a Negro woman," then her marriage to the judge would be unlawful as there was no legal marriage between races. She therefore would prefer to be convicted as a bigamist and be considered white, and so she begs, "I implore you to convict me! Send me to prison! . . . Let my son know that his mother is a convict, but in the name of heaven I ask you, send not my child and me into Negro life. . . . My God! The thought of being called a Negro is awful, awful!" (242). There is some sympathy for the beautiful suffering girl, but in the end the jury and the public adhere to the warped notion of race relations that will "cast away" the offspring of its great men in order to "prevent a lapse that would taint our blood" (244). When the jury pronounces her not guilty, Eunice begins her shift into black life and eventually into madness. When she leaves the courthouse her world is immediately changed. She is moved to the back of a streetcar, is called "nigger," and is thrown out of the hotel in which she had been staying.

By the time her husband finds her she is ranting and raving and considering killing herself and her child.

Viola, Wyong, Eunice, and other characters who break apart spiritually and psychologically represent the devastating power of racism in America. The fate of these characters stands in relation to others who are lynched, several of whom are literally torn apart physically for souvenirs. These are depictions of fragmentation at the most personal level, but Griggs also shows how the divisive nature of racial antagonism can shatter stability at every layer of society. In the realm of the family, the intimate bond between man and woman is disrupted because the limitations racial repression places on the individual hinders the potential for an open, secure relationship. The black community is depicted as splintered because members make invidious and inherently prejudiced distinctions based on class and color. Communications between blacks and whites in the same society are often shown to be discordant because of the current racial milieu, and, finally, the nation itself is represented as sadly split, separated from its noblest ideals because it refuses justice to African Americans.

Though Griggs depicts the contemporary state of race in America that was serving to disrupt individuals, communities, and the nation itself, he did not limit himself to description of his present reality. While exploring many possible approaches to the problems of his day, Griggs returned again and again to the potential of black unity and African-American citizenship. Most of his characters express a sincere pride in their heritage. Those who do not, like Eunice, are destined to crack under the pressure of race. It is much healthier, Griggs implies, to fully accept this heritage than to deny it. Just as the individuals must accept their birthright to be strong and whole in Griggs's fiction, so

black America must accept all segments of its society to be a strong, unified group. Internal antagonism along lines of class, color, and generation must be overcome. It was clear to Griggs that many white Americans were resistant to welcoming any segment of the black community, no matter how wealthy or light-skinned, into the political or social life of the country. Therefore to abandon or reject anyone in the movement for equal rights was tantamount to a loss of strength, both in terms of numbers and moral relevance. His vision was for African Americans to enter into American life as a collective, as a nation within a nation. In some of his novels, America eventually welcomes this entry, recognizing in its black citizenry what Griggs saw in them: a rich and complex group devoted to both their race and their country.

If scholars have largely overlooked the works of Sutton E. Griggs, it is probably because some of his extreme and even contradictory answers to questions of race are problematic for modern-day readers. But it is the very independence of his writing that makes him worth studying, for he found room for a multiplicity of visions in the form of the novel. This genre gave him space to explore, through the diverse positions of his characters, through countless changing scenes, and through varied writing styles, the potential for fiction to enact change. His texts may not have altered the course of the nation, but they did, in a way, interrupt the national discourse on race because they are emblematic of the potential of African Americans to imagine the nation in creative ways through art. Through his meditations on social justice, Sutton E. Griggs offered the Supreme Court a new script, one based on the ideals of the country expressed in its Constitution, and he proposed alternatives to the cycle of violence and corruption that the legal system had spawned. Above all, he presented his audience a way out contemporary

modes of thinking that had limited the choices available not only to African Americans but to the nation as well.

In Griggs's fiction, the acts of every individual resonate in society. In fact, the plans laid by two or three people often have the power to change the country as local movements take on a national significance. If an African-American character writes an editorial in a Tennessee newspaper, it turns into a nationwide trend overnight; if a small Southern town finds a way to achieve racial harmony, it gains the attention of the president and becomes a model for the country. Griggs, working with ideas in the medium of the novel, does not have to consider how plausible these scenarios are at his historical moment. This failure to strictly adhere to the tenets of Realism and Naturalism, the dominant literary traditions of this period, may be one reason why Griggs is all but ignored by scholars.

It may also be that the same factors that make him an important literary and historical source also often serve to alienate a twenty-first century audience. His texts reveal a profound awareness of the social, philosophical, literary, and legal trends of his day. His novels often comment directly on legal decisions and allude to the works of other African-American writers, including Chesnut and Dubois. He argues, in fact, with Booker T. Washington's ideology in every novel. But it may be that Griggs crosses into areas of thought that have not panned out, into then popular speculations about race that are identified today as essentialist in nature. It is worth exploring, however, the moments where Griggs seems to succumb to the *Zeitgeist* of his day as well as the moments when he breaks free from contemporary conventions.

Griggs's creative imagination goes into theoretical and geographical territory unexplored by his contemporaries. There are instances in his novels where characters move beyond the borders of America, where he delves into the liberating and threatening possibilities of Pan-Africanism, and there is even a scene at the end of *Overshadowed* in which a character, convinced that there is no home in the world for an African American, becomes a "Citizen of the Sea," an expression of The Black Atlantic one hundred years before Paul Gilroy developed this theory.²⁹ Ultimately, however, Griggs's answer to the "race question" that was being discussed at the turn into the twentieth century was not the Black Atlantic, Pan-Africanism, or even Black Nationalism. The political position that played itself out to the most satisfactory ends in his narratives was a black racial solidarity that was not at odds with an American identity. There are obvious connections to Du Bois's idea of "double consciousness," but there are important differences. Whereas Du Bois is talking about fragmentation, Griggs depicts a healthy duality, one that is beneficial to African Americans.

In a political manifesto at the end of *Unfettered*, the protagonist writes, "when a society is in a transitional state, men of imagination are able through clear comprehension of the forces at work, to project themselves into the new era, and, seeing where the movement tends, place themselves at the head of the procession" (231). Sutton E. Griggs was one of these "men of imagination" who clearly wanted to help the nation cross over to a new era of civil rights. As things turned out, his works did not gain widespread attention and were not pivotal in the course of American history, but, nevertheless, these novels survive as a testimony to the dedication of a creative and pioneering artist. Though his writings may lack the literary polish of some of his contemporaries, they

contain imaginative energy and unbounded intellectual power. At a time when the lives of African Americans were so circumscribed, his novels achieved a kind of freedom not found in the works of any other African-American author of the day. This freedom may stem from the fact that, unlike the other great writers, such as Chesnutt, Du Bois, and Dunbar, Griggs was secure with his audience. While his contemporaries were doing the difficult and crucial work of opening the doors of white publishing houses and opening the minds of white readers, Griggs was writing for the African-American reader. Hugh M. Gloster contends that Griggs was more widely read among black Americans than either Dunbar or Chesnutt,³⁰ and so it may be that his novels registered at a level that may not be easy to quantify, on a “lower frequency” that did not transmit to literary centers but that resonated, at some level, within black society. At a time described by Rayford Logan as the “nadir” of the African-American struggle for justice and equality, Griggs was imagining possibilities that were as yet not being considered by the American public, such as coalitions between blacks of all walks of life who inspire white citizens to join their struggle, a vision that would become a reality half a century later with the rebellion of Rosa Parks and the leadership of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The five novels that Sutton E. Griggs published at the turn into the twentieth century, *Imperium in Imperio*, *Overshadowed*, *The Hindered Hand*, *Unfettered*, and *Pointing the Way*, occupy an important place in American literary history. While Dunbar was creating the poetry of the age, Du Bois the social theory, and Chesnutt the sophisticated Realistic fiction depicting black life, Griggs was projecting the present into the future, writing black utopian novels that always laid out a plan for a better tomorrow. He saw that the potential for African-American wholeness lay in individuals living lives

that fully embraced both their blackness and their Americaness. His fiction represents both the struggle and the possibility of an important era of African-American history and literature.

Notes

¹ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 7.

² Sutton E. Griggs, *Imperium in Imperio* (Miami: Mnemosyne Publishing, 1969).

Originally published in Cincinnati by the Editor Publishing Co. in 1899.

³ The nation within a nation that will unite and organize the black population of American to revolt and separate from the dominant culture and government meets at “Thomas Jefferson College.” The members gathered there both finds fault with the Constitution of the United States and uses it as a model for their own constitution. The forming of a new government because of the unjust rule enforced on a population directly parallels the history of the American Revolution. Perhaps Griggs has these revolutionaries meet at Thomas Jefferson College to underscore this parallel.

⁴ Frederick Douglass employed familiar national rhetoric and symbols in order to compel America to recognize and uphold its highest ideals when dealing with black Americans. Most biting, perhaps, is a speech delivered in 1852, “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?” in which he answers that “to him [the slave] your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty an unholy license. . . . All your religious parade and solemnity, are to him mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy—a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages.” Frederick Douglass, “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?” in *My Bondage and My Freedom* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1969), p. 445. Originally published in New York by Miller, Orton, and Mulligan in 1855. W. E. B. Du Bois, in *The Souls of Black Folk* published in 1903, reminds white and black Americans that the rights African Americans seek are the same

rights on which the country was founded: “By every civilized and peaceful method we must strive for the rights which the world accords to men, clinging unwaveringly to those great words which the sons of the Fathers would fain forget: ‘We hold these truths to be self evident: That all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.’” W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1994), p. 35. Originally published in Chicago by A. C. McClurg in 1903.

⁵ Rayford W. Logan, *The Betrayal of the Negro: From Rutherford B. Hayes to Woodrow Wilson* (New York: De Capo Press, 1997), p. 192. A version of this book, originally titled *The Negro in American Life and Thought: The Nadir, 1877-1901*, was published in London by Dial Press in 1954. An expanded edition, titled *The Betrayal of the Negro: From Rutherford B. Hayes to Woodrow Wilson*, was published in New York by Collier Books in 1965. The work cited is an unabridged republication of the 1965 edition.

⁶ Sutton E. Griggs, *The Hindered Hand; or, The Reign of the Repressionist* (Miami: Mnemosyne Publishing, 1969). Originally published in Nashville by Orion in 1905.

⁷ It is revealed later that this white woman is Eunice Seabright, who is also of African-American descent.

⁸ Raymond Hedin, “Probable Readers, Possible Stories: The Limits of Nineteenth-Century Black Narrative,” in *Readers in History: Nineteenth Century American Literature and the Contexts of Response*, ed. James A. Machor (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1993), p. 198.

⁹ Sutton E. Griggs, *Pointing the Way* (Nashville: The Orion Publishing Company, 1908).

¹⁰ The “tragic mulatto” is most often an all-but-white African American who suffers both psychologically and socially because of the combination of white skin and black heritage. Often the tragedy has to do with the angst that ensues when he or she discovers the truth about his or her ethnicity or when others discover the truth. An early discussion of this character in fiction by white writers can be found in Hugh M. Gloster, *Negro Voices in American Fiction* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1948). In *Black American Writing from the Nadir: The Evolution of a Literary Tradition 1877-1915* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989.), Dickson D. Bruce, Jr. explores how African-American writers incorporated this character into their fiction, often subverting, as Griggs does, the stereotypes on which the archetype is based.

¹¹ Bhabha, p. 155.

¹² Dana Nelson, *The World in Black and White: Reading “Race” in American Literature 1638-1867* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992). This concept is developed in the chapter “‘For the Gaze of Whites’: The Crisis of Subject in ‘Benito Cereno.’” Nelson’s evaluation of Captain Delano’s inability to interpret the slave revolt is helpful in understanding texts involving interracial interaction.

¹³ Griggs addresses Washington’s policies all five novels. In *Imperium in Imperio* Piedmont continues to mirror the life of Washington as he comes to represent the conservative African American who would “fondly kiss the smiting hand” of whites (262). In *Overshadowed* Erma Wysong goes to hear Washington speak, and his influence leads her to give her brother some poor advice. In *Unfettered*, a character

laments that African Americans “are being taught in certain high quarters that self-repression is the Negro’s chiefest virtues” (174), and in *The Hindered Hand* Earl Bluefield considers industrial training important but wonders “how great an army of carpenters can hammer the spirit of repression” out of national thought (260). Although Griggs resists much of Washington’s agenda, such as abandoning the fight for political and social equality, there are some points of agreement. Griggs mocks Washington’s conciliatory and apologist position in a speech that Piedmont gives at the end of *Imperium*, but Piedmont, despite his conservatism, is an energetic activist and educator devoted to his race, as was Washington. Griggs also seemed to agree with Washington’s policy of forming alliances with the class of educated liberal white Americans, which is part of the solution to racial antagonism in *Pointing the Way*. Sutton E. Griggs, *Overshadowed* (Freeport: Books for Libraries Press, 1971). Originally published in Nashville by Orion in 1901. Sutton E. Griggs, *Unfettered* (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1971). Originally published in Nashville by Orion in 1902.

¹⁴ Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery* (New York: Signet Classic, 2000), p. 154. Originally published in Garden City by Doubleday in 1901.

¹⁵ Most notable among these are Frances E. W. Harper, *Iola Leroy: Or, Shadows Uplifted* (Philadelphia: Garrigues Brothers, 1892) and Charles W. Chesnutt *The House Behind the Cedars* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1900). Whether the fair-skinned characters choose to pass (as in *House*), or they pass because they are unaware of their black ancestry (as in *Iola Leroy*), the implication is that the idea of race is a social construct, not an eradicable division.

¹⁶ It is also significant that Griggs chooses to have a white woman pass to marry a black man. The rhetoric of hysteria that was circulating in the South at the time warned that repression of African Americans was necessary to protect white womanhood, and a depiction of such a relationship carried the weight of these social implications. Griggs counters the racial connotations of such a union by making it a conscious, reasoned choice between two people. The black man does not pursue the white woman; instead the woman decides on her husband because he has the best qualities of any man in town.

¹⁷ Herman Melville, "Benito Cereno" in *The Piazza Tales* (New York: Dix & Edwards, 1856).

¹⁸ Griggs, however, often complicates white participation by revealing deep emotional prejudices that even these apparently liberal characters harbor. Lanier, for example, feels he is helping when he suggests that John Wysong go to Africa because he is "not fit for the rigors of civilized life in America" (172). Another example of well-intended but unconsciously prejudiced white attitudes is Belton Piedmont's college in *Imperium in Imperio*. Located in Nashville, Tennessee, "Stowe University" is named "in honor of Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of 'Uncle Tom's Cabin'" (48). The school may be a reflection of Stowe and her most famous work, and, in a broader sense, of the Northern approach to black Southerners in general. Founded on "Northern philanthropy" the school has only one black professor, who is an inspiration to the African-American students. The fact that the other faculty members do not eat at the same table with him is also significant to the student body. In order to secure social equality for this professor, the students "combine" and protest in a way that is totally unexpected by the well meaning, but still segregatory, white administrators.

¹⁹ This is a paraphrase of the title of a Ralph Ellison essay, “Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke,” in *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison* (New York: The Modern Library, 1995), pp. 100-12.

²⁰ Another plantation stereotype that is subverted is the figure of the mammy in the character of Aunt Catherine in *Unfettered*. Aunt Catherine is an ex-slave who was nurse to several generations of a white family before the last heir orders her off the estate. She ends up in Chicago where she finally has to sell her body to medicine in order to find comfort in the hospital in her dying days (p. 140). Although her friend Morlene explains that Aunt Catherine had been in service to others all her life and begs to take her body back to Tennessee so that she may rest in the land of her people, the white doctors deny this request, deciding instead to use the body for their own purposes, as she had been so used in her lifetime.

²¹ Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (Boston: John P. Jewett, 1852). Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (New York: Webster, 1885).

²² Paul Laurence Dunbar, “We Wear the Mask,” in *Lyrics of Lowly Life* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1896), p. 167.

²³ The debate over Griggs’s Black Nationalism began in 1948 with Hugh M. Gloster’s estimation in *Negro Voices in American Fiction* that Griggs was “militant” (56). In 1958 Robert A. Bone challenged the conception of Griggs as a militant political thinker. Because Bone could not reconcile the various movements depicted in Griggs’s novels, he misinterprets their complexity and labels Griggs not a militant but an “accommodationist.” Robert A. Bone, *The Negro Novel in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958), p. 35. Several articles published in *Phylon* in the 1970s made

important connections between Griggs's fiction and militant African-American movements. Among these are Robert E. Fleming, "Sutton E. Griggs: Militant Black Novelist" *Phylon* 34 (1973): 73-77, and Wilson J. Moses, "Literary Garveyism: Three Novels of Sutton E. Griggs" *Phylon* 40 (1979): 203-16. In a 1980 essay, Moses finally comes to the conclusion that "in all of Sutton Griggs's novels separation of the races finally wins in the end." Wilson J. Moses, "Literary Myth and Ethnic Assimilation: Israel Zangwill and Sutton E. Griggs," *New Hungarian Quarterly* 21 (1980): 134. Perhaps the best evaluation of Griggs's political stance is found in Arlene A. Elders, *The "Hindered Hand": Cultural Implications of Early African American Fiction* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1978). Elder contends, as I do, that Griggs posits many possibilities for black Americans, including immigration to Africa and military resistance, but does not actually espouse most of them.

²⁴ The text does not actually identify this statesman as president. The position of presidency is indicated by a series of lines; the justice talks of the man who "became ——— of our nation, and wrought well domestic and international affairs" (224).

²⁵ William Wells Brown, *Clotel; or, The President's Daughter: A Narrative of Slave Life in the United States* (London: Partridge and Oakey, 1853).

²⁶ This book may refer to Frederick L. Hoffman, *Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro*, American Economic Association Publication 11, No. 1-3 (New York, 1896). In this report Dr. Hoffman, a Prudential insurance statistician, predicts the eventual extinction of black peoples living in America.

²⁷ It should be noted that Griggs himself was not immune from this same phenomenon. Though he challenged many of the racial theories that were circulating at

the time, it is clear that Griggs accepted several predominate assumptions without question. For example, though he combated the idea of white superiority with his narratives and with his life, Griggs often resorted to the essentialist language of the day to describe racial differences. Richard Wright, *Native Son* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1940). Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Random House, 1952). Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1970).

²⁸ An interesting choice of names, related, either intentionally or thematically to the poem “Sympathy” (1899) by Griggs’s contemporary Paul Laurence Dunbar. The final stanza of the poem reads:

I know why the caged bird sings,

ah me,

When his wing is bruised and

his bosom sore,—

When he beats his bars and he

would be free;

It is not a carol of joy or glee,

But a prayer that he sends from

his heart’s deep core,

But a plea, that upward to Heaven

he flings—

I know why the caged bird sings!

Griggs’s Wysong may be a reference to “why sing.” That is, why should a black man strive and dream if he has no hope of attaining his dreams, being restrained and prevented

from doing so by all the powers that be in society, being “caged” as the bird in Dunbar’s poem. Paul Laurence Dunbar, “Sympathy,” in *Lyrics of the Hearthside* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1899).

²⁹ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

³⁰ Gloster, p. 57.

CHAPTER 5

THE MULTICULTURAL PERSPECTIVE OF SUI SIN FAR

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the majority of Asian men and women in the United States were still first-generation immigrants whose “lives were engulfed by the duties of childbearing, childcare, and the business of earning a living.”¹ Most Chinese in America, both laborers and those of the merchant class, worked hard not only to provide for themselves but also to support family members back in their native country. With such economic pressures and social barriers, very little literature came out of these immigrant communities during this time, and, of course, most of the first generation population would have acquired written English skills for the purpose of business, not for the pleasure of creative writing. Fortunately, Edith Maude Eaton, a half-Chinese half-English Canadian journalist who had always had an interest in her mother’s people, came to America and began writing stories from a Chinese-American perspective, and by all accounts she was the first to do so. Eaton wrote under the pseudonym Sui Sin Far and published her stories from 1896 to 1912 in several mainstream periodicals that had primarily white readerships, such as the *Good Housekeeping*, the *Century*, and *Overland Monthly*. In 1912 many of her stories were collected in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*.²

Sui Sin Far's short stories are significant contributions to American literature because of their early insights into the possibilities of diversity. Through the cross-cultural scenarios that she creates in her fiction, Sui Sin Far is able to explore how individuals from different backgrounds come to terms with one another, how interracial couples and biracial individuals make their way, and how immigrant Chinese deal with assimilation. An underlying theme of *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* is that there is room, or should be, for a variety of identity positions in America. Though Sui Sin Far only depicts characters who are white or Chinese or both, she still disrupts the "white and other" binary by showing the variety of personalities and subject positions that are inherent in the intersection of these two cultures. By exploring the diversity within both Chinese and white American communities, Sui Sin Far really nullifies the idea that there are insurmountable differences between Americans of different ethnicities.

Mrs. Spring Fragrance was not a best selling-book in its day, but it has become important as a seminal work of Asian-American literature. This collection is also important because it stands as an early exploration of the realities of American cultural pluralism. Writing from a mixed-race perspective, Sui Sin Far was in a unique position to see beyond racial binaries. While many journalists and writers of dime-store novels were profiting from the creation of stereotyped Asian characters,³ she was developing Chinese and biracial characters that were not limited to familiar one-dimensional roles. In her work, she does what good fiction writers should do: she attempts to see the lives of her subjects from the inside, to reveal their particular characteristics, their social conditions, their inmost desires and motivations, in short, their full humanity.

Sui Sin Far, a journalist with a western education raised in Canada by an English father and Chinese mother, was not the typical immigrant. She took her subject matter from neighborhoods she came to know as a reporter, and she was writing more about what she observed than what she experienced. It is also significant that she did not depict, and probably was not privy to, the lives of the laborers in the bachelor community, who comprised the majority of Chinese in America at the time.⁴ Instead, she primarily portrayed merchant-class families in her fiction. What she observed, however, was worthy of exploration. She depicted realities that were particular to her historical period when Chinese and white Americans were coming into close contact for the first time, not only through commerce but also in social situations.

Leslie Fiedler once wrote that “the best criticism can hope to do is to set the work in as many illuminating contexts as possible,”⁵ and few artists with such a small body of writing can be examined in as many contexts as Sui Sin Far, whose fiction can be studied as feminist, Chinese American, Pan-Asian, or multicultural North American texts and as part of the tradition of American Realism. The best of her stories are admirable examples of this tradition. Like many of the Realists who came before, including Mark Twain and W. D. Howells, she began her writing career as a journalist. Because of her bi-cultural background and interest in her Chinese heritage, she was assigned the Chinatown beats of the papers for which she wrote in Montreal, California, and Boston. Her background as a journalist is evident in the verisimilitude she achieves in her fiction, and her stories arise out of the complex scenes and events she witnessed as a newswoman in North American Chinatowns. Her careful examination of the complicated social dynamics that Chinese immigrants faced at the turn into the twentieth century is similar to the social analysis

central to the fiction of other American writers of her day. Realist works usually involve common, individualized characters caught in a moral conflict to show how ethical dilemmas are played out in the everyday lives of men and women. In contrast to the sensational depictions, typical at the time, of the Chinese as exotic heroines and opium-smoking white slave traders, Sui Sin Far's characters are carefully individualized. She writes of husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, parents and children, friends and young lovers. She places her characters in situations familiar to Chinese immigrants to show the pressures of acculturation as well as the personal and institutional racism with which they had to contend. Her stories suggest that prejudicial attitudes are not inevitable between races but that racial animosity and the laws that grow out of it are social constructs that can be eliminated by enlightened understanding.

Sui Sin Far's sensitive and detailed portrayal of Chinese communities stand in contrast to the stereotypical representations that were appearing in books and magazines. She noted that other writers of her time "seem to be so imbued with the same ideas that you scarcely ever read about a Chinese person who is not a wooden peg. There are a few exceptions, but the majority of writers on things Chinese echo those who enter before, which is a very foolish thing to do in these revolutionary days" (234).⁶ Her work was revolutionary in that it marked the beginning of a new tradition in American literature, and yet her stories, though concerned with the social atmosphere of the turn of the century, are grounded in the familiar setting of the home. In her stories, she clearly shows the effects of overt, institutional racism as well as subtle, sometimes even barely perceptible, prejudicial attitudes of the American public. The key to overcoming these attitudes and living under these conditions, both in her writing and in her life, was in

bridging the distances between individuals. These distances were not always a matter of ethnicity; she also wrote about the ways in which people of differing classes, genders, and generations could come together to find common ground. In her news articles about Chinese North American life and in her two autobiographical essays, Sui Sin Far reiterated time and again, with exasperation, that the idea that there were fundamental differences between races was absurd. She says more than once that “individuality is more than nationality.”⁷ Her works demonstrate this conviction by creating a diverse multicultural world to replace the homogenous image of Chinese Americans that had been perpetuated.

This is not to say, however, that Sui Sin Far saw no differences between people raised in disparate cultures. Her writing reveals a conviction that attitudes are in a large part determined by environment. According to Xiao-Huang Yin, “the idea that environment and association can significantly affect one’s ethnic consciousness was . . . firmly rooted in her mind and later became an important theme in her writing, especially in the stories that are her major efforts against racial prejudice.”⁸ However these are not Naturalistic stories, in which environment would determine fate, for she also believed that people were adaptable and that attitudes could change through relationships and understanding. As she said, “prejudice can be eradicated by association” (227). In her stories, Sui Sin Far depicts characters from different backgrounds learning about each other by association and coming to revelations about each other and themselves in the process. These stories may also have enabled a white readership to learn vicariously how prejudice can be eradicated, or, conversely, how bigotry that goes unchecked is damaging to both the victims of racism and to the narrow-minded persecutors.

Perhaps because of her own unique identity position, Sui Sin Far appreciated personal differences. Her stories contain engaging details of Chinese-American society, such as traditions that had been brought to America and the food, dress, and accouterments of everyday life, without sensationalizing these elements. In fact, her articles and stories show life in all its diversity, and she was accurate in her analysis of customs and translations of legends and poems. The body of her work emphasizes plurality and the fact that what all of humanity has in common is that each individual is unique. Her stories and essays indicate that she was proud of her heritage, angered by stereotypes, and wounded by prejudice. She describes herself as a sort of bridge: “I give my right hand to the Occidentals and my left hand to the Orientals, hoping that between them they will not utterly destroy the insignificant ‘connecting link.’ And that’s all” (230). As a person of both Western and Chinese ancestry, she indicates that not only is it her responsibility to facilitate unification between cultures, but that her own survival depended on it.

As a journalist, Sui Sin Far often wrote articles that defended the Chinese in North America against negative public opinion. In her fiction, the diversity she portrays within that community further served to subvert established stereotypes. According to Solberg, “fictional stereotypes for the Chinatown tales had been established, and it was difficult for anyone, even of a strongly independent mind, to ignore them.”⁹ Her fiction, however, is not that of a writer attempting to ignore stereotypes; instead she writes in full awareness of them and in fact uses them, juxtaposing them to the complex personalities she presents in her stories, challenging her audience to question previously held assumptions.

Much of the criticism of Sui Sin Far's fiction interprets her stories as tales of opposition between the Americanized and the tradition-oriented Chinese in the United States. However a closer examination reveals that there is a broad spectrum of personalities, some more or less Americanized, and that no one character corresponds exactly to another,¹⁰ and this can be said of her Asian, biracial, and white-American characters. The problem with stereotyping is that it gives one image or characteristic and applies this representation to everyone within the stereotyped group. By individualizing characters, the author challenges the notion that a cultural group can be represented by one personality or one attitude. She wrote in response to racist representations, and, according to Annette White-Parks, "one way to counteract such stereotypes is to stress a human essence that prevails across racial constructs. Sui Sin Far does this by individualizing her characters and their relationships with the world so readers of any racial descent can relate to them."¹¹ This diverse characterization establishes characters as individuals and not as representations of an entire race. When discussing the writings of Sui Sin Far, it is dangerous to talk in generalities because what may be said about one character will probably prove false if applied to another.

This diversity of characters is perhaps most apparent in stories where individuals, both Chinese and white, male and female, are confronted with the complexities that arise as immigrants begin to adjust themselves to a new society. The theme of acculturation, or Americanization, as Sui Sin Far calls it, runs throughout the stories, as Yin notes: "What really makes her stories attract critics' attention is her portrayal of the conflict caused by cultural barriers between tradition-oriented and Americanized Chinese—an underlying theme which appears in virtually every piece of her work. Indeed, it was her

exploration of the transformation of the Chinese-American community under the pressure of acculturation that impressed critics in her lifetime.”¹² Though it is true that the theme of acculturation is predominant in much of Sui Sin Far’s fiction, Yin and other critics fall short in their analysis when they discuss Americanized and traditional Chinese as homogenous, oppositional groups and when they interpret Americanization to be an all or nothing proposition. Sui Sin Far’s stories portray a wide variety of attitudes and positions regarding Chinese and American cultures. The degree to which characters have been “Americanized” depends on their age, whether they were born in America or China, how long they have been in their new country, and on what may be called personal preference; how much and what aspects of Chinese culture individuals want to retain and how much and what aspects of American culture they want to adopt is a matter of personal taste.

Two stories that exemplify this eclectic individualism are “Mrs. Spring Fragrance” and “The Inferior Woman,” which work as companion pieces.¹³ In these stories, Mr. and Mrs. Spring Fragrance are a young couple who have been in this country for five years, and they both speak English, the wife being even more adept at “the American language” than her husband (17). She has developed a taste for Western literature, especially poetry, but her husband prefers Chinese literature and has books sent periodically from Shanghai. The stylized syntax of their conversation indicates that they speak to each other in Chinese, but they have adopted the Western style of dress. He is a good businessman in the American sense, but his business transactions keep him closely connected to their home area in China. Their neighbors, the Chin Yuens, are older and have been in America longer. They “lived in a house furnished in the American style,

and wore American clothes, yet they religiously observed many Chinese customs, and their ideals in life were the ideals of their Chinese forefathers” (17). Their daughter has an American name, “Laura,” which even her parents call her. Her boyfriend was born in America, plays baseball, sings popular American songs with Laura at the piano, and is “as ruddy and stalwart as any young Westerner” (17). However, he goes by a Chinese name, Kai Tzu, which indicates that he maintains ties with his heritage despite his nationality. Another neighbor, Will Carman, is an American of Irish ancestry who shares Mr. Spring Fragrance’s interest in Chinese literature, and his mother is a close friend and confidant of Mrs. Spring Fragrance.

Through this broad spectrum of characters and the understanding that is achieved among them, Sui Sin Far explores the ways in which immigrants managed to find harmony in America despite the climate of prejudice that existed at that time. The plurality of personalities and the friendships between the white and Asian characters contradict Yin’s conclusion that in Sui Sin Far’s stories “one culture does not accept the other and the East and West are mutually exclusive. . . . Those who are recognized by American culture will be denied by the Chinese, and any attempt to bring Western values into the Eastern tradition will ultimately be crushed. As people are unable to synchronize the two different cultures, they will have to make a choice between them.”¹⁴ The characters in the first two stories demonstrate that this analysis is not necessarily true. What enables these characters to find common ground is an informed respect for each other as individuals. In stories where characters seem to be “crushed” under “the pressure of acculturation,” the true dynamics of the conflicts revolve around the decisions

individuals make. In Far's stories, acculturation is not a totalizing social force but something that happens within the context of a community.

Two parallel stories that deal directly with the issue of acculturation are "The Wisdom of the New" and "The Americanizing of Pau Tsu."¹⁵ Some critics have found in these stories an absolute proposition: that is, characters must align themselves with either China or America because there is no middle ground between Eastern and Western cultures. However, as White-Parks recognizes, "Sui Sin Far's identity was not either-or but existed on a continuum."¹⁶ In a way, Sui Sin Far's life depended on the finding of peace across cultures because this was the ground on which she stood. Instead of reifying cultural differences, she actually subverts binary oppositions in her fiction. Both of these stories are about Chinese men who have achieved success in America and send to China for their wives. Both wives become distressed in their new surroundings. In both stories the husbands have a young white female friend named Adah. However, the outcomes of the stories are quite different. While the end of "Americanizing" is optimistic and the indication is that things between the couple will be resolved, the wife in "Wisdom" kills their only child. Yin sees "Wisdom" in terms of mutual exclusivity. In his analysis the tragic ending is shocking, but it is Sui's deliberate design, since she points out at the beginning of the story that America is a place both of gain and loss. The loss of the son and the family's disintegration thus can be considered a price the husband has to pay for obtaining "The Wisdom of the New." While this story also dwells on the theme of cultural conflict, it is not made in the same mold as "Mrs. Spring Fragrance." Here Sui has a clear message to put forward through the tragedy: the price of Americanization may be so high that not

everyone can afford or is willing to pay it, and it is impossible for Oriental and occidental ideas to reach a compromise.¹⁷

Such analysis obscures the subtle nuances of Sui Sin Far's work; though the characters may be victims of institutional racism and prejudicial attitudes, they are not at the mercy of social forces, which would indicate the inevitability of circumstances and the inability to effect change. These stories, as works of Realism, examine instead the ethical choices the characters face. Much of the tragedy in cross-cultural relationships could be avoided if characters, both white and Asian, had a sincere interest in the welfare of those around them.

Xiao-Huang Yin is not the only critic to see this as a story of the dangers of acculturation. Amy Ling also interprets "Wisdom" to be a story of the mutual incompatibility of Chinese and American culture: "What is apparent and unambiguous . . . is that the two cultures are incompatible and mutually exclusive: the choice of one necessarily results in the rejection of the other."¹⁸ In the texts, however, it is the relationships between the husbands and wives and between the Chinese families and their white friends that are problematic. Sui Sin Far reveals that assimilation is often difficult for individuals not because there is some universal East-West dichotomy but because of people's unexamined attempts to impose their will on the newcomers. This is especially evident when "Wisdom" is considered in conjunction with "Americanizing." Though both stories address the same theme, there are subtle differences between the characters, both male and female, Chinese and white, that make these very different tales psychologically.

“The Wisdom of the New” opens in China, where Wou Sankwei is growing up in a very pampered and sheltered manner. Being the “only son of the man who had once been town magistrate,” he is not allowed by his mother to do manual labor, for that would cause the family to lose face (42). However, since the father has passed away, there is no money to send him to school. He is therefore idle, and his “mother and sister waited on him hand and foot” for “was he not the son of the house?” (42). The works of Sui Sin Far emphasize that environment plays a role in what people believe. Sankwei’s upbringing reveals his assumption of the position of Chinese women: they function as the servants in the background of his life. It is also significant that he started out in America as a laundry worker and only years later became a merchant. His background and history are quite different from those of Wan Lin Fo, the husband in “The Americanizing of Pau Tsu.” Wan Lin Fo was not the eldest son, which indicates that he did not hold the same position of privilege within his family that Wou Sankwei had. Furthermore, Lin Fo was “a well-educated Chinese youth” who came over to Seattle with his uncle to help him “start a branch of the merchant business which his firm had carried on so successfully in the different ports of China” (83). He therefore begins his life in America with some status.

The respective positions of the Chinese men when they come to America affect, in turn, their relationships with their white friends. In fact, the position of these friends is also important in the context of the stories. In “Wisdom,” Wou Sankwei began his life as a laundry worker. Mrs. Dean is a white American, who, in her widowhood, took on the task of educating immigrant Chinese men, and in this capacity became his teacher and friend. Adah Charlton is Mrs. Dean’s niece who is visiting from the east coast and is

therefore a sojourner, one who is merely participating in the lives of her aunt's students while on vacation. Their philanthropy, though well intended, is subtly patronizing. In "Americanizing," on the other hand, Adah Raymond and Wan Lin Fo socialize on a more equal footing. Wan Lin Fo is a junior partner in his uncle's firm, and she is the daughter of his firm's silent American partner. They are not in the position of benefactress and student. She acts, in fact, as an interested friend until the end. Adah Raymond lives in Seattle; she does not come into the community with any intent to improve Lin Fo's life, and finally, she is not just passing through. Her involvement will have consequences, as she will continue to be a part of the community after her confrontation with Wan Lin Fo. Adah Charlton,¹⁹ on the other hand, will return to her home back east at some point after her conversation with Wou Sankwei.

Though Adah Charlton is not overtly prejudiced, she and Mrs. Dean seem at times incapable of judging their Chinese friends fairly because of their insistence on maintaining previously held notions of "Chinese character." Their philanthropy is clouded by self-interest, which is revealed in their lack of respect for those who do not wish to be Americanized. When Adah Charlton attempts to guide Wan Lin Fo in regards to his conduct, the problem is not that she is giving bad advice; she is not. Rather, it is the position of superiority from which she speaks that is the problem. In her writings, Sui Sin Far frequently noted that there were a variety of attitudes towards the Chinese, and overt racism was only one of them. Her stories include a number of characters who associate with Chinese Americans and who have the best of intentions, but who still regard them from a position of superiority. A close look at the attitudes of Ada Charlton

and Mrs. Dean reveal the subtle discrimination inherent in their relationship with their immigrant friends.

Most critics have seen these women as wholly benevolent figures. White-Parks describes them as “white women characters whose lives are deeply entangled with those of a Chinese American family and who serve as guides, mentors, patrons, and friends of the family, as well as catalysts of its tragic destiny. Only Adah is sensitive to the cultural complexities.”²⁰ However, the selfless missionary who takes on the white man’s burden of civilizing the heathen Chinese is a stereotype that Sui Sin Far examines often in her stories. The women in “Wisdom” are not as destructive as some of the missionary characters who break up Chinese American homes, as do the women in “Pat and Pan” and “A Chinese Boy-Girl,” but their participation in the tragedy should not be overlooked. White-Parks notes that “regardless of the strategic roles they play, however, the perspectives of neither Adah nor Mrs. Dean become central in the text; their viewpoints function to assist the reader’s understanding of the positions of Pau Lin and little Yen and Sankwei but remain those of sympathetic outsiders.”²¹ However, the perspective of these women *is* central to the text; their conversations reveal that their sympathy is conditional, and that their viewpoints are suspect as well. The position of Mrs. Dean in the Chinese community is representative:

Since the days of her widowhood Mrs. Dean had devoted herself earnestly and whole-heartedly to the betterment of the condition and the uplifting of the young workingmen of Chinese race who came to America. Their appeal and need, as she had told her niece, was for closer acquaintance with the knowledge of the Western people, and *that* she had undertaken to give them, as far as she was

able. The rewards and satisfaction of her work had been rich in some cases.

Witness Wou Sankwei. (52)

It is clear that Mrs. Dean sees herself as the dispenser of Western knowledge to a race that needs uplifting. She also believes this role has given her insight into the “Chinese character.” When Adah tells her aunt that the couple’s long-distance marriage is dreadful to her, her aunt instructs her that “it is dreadful to our minds but not to theirs. Everything with them is a matter of duty” (45). This explanation, that Asian people are less prone to emotions than Americans, should be suspect because Sui Sin Far herself stated that she wrote to correct the stereotype that her mother’s people are “alien to all other races in that ‘they are placed and unfeeling, and so custom-bound that even their tears are mere waters of ceremony’” (234). There is no question that Mrs. Dean cares for Sankwei; what is questionable is the fact that she is unable to abandon the perception that the Chinese are guided by custom and not by feelings, despite her friendship with a man from that culture.

The real nature of Mrs. Dean’s discriminatory attitudes is further revealed when she hears rumors that Pau Lin is jealous of the time Sankwei spends with the Americans and that she does not want their son to go to the American school. Mrs. Dean thinks “such bigotry and narrow-mindedness! Here was a man who had benefited and profited by living in America, anxious to have his son receive the benefits of a Western education—and here was this man’s wife opposing him with her ignorance and hampering him with her unreasonable jealousy” (52-53). Her ruminations highlight the fact that Mrs. Dean is more than an outsider and less than sympathetic. Her consideration lies with Wou Sankwei, whom she believes she has succeeded in Americanizing, but not

with his wife, who desires to have no part of Mrs. Dean or her niece and what they represent. Mrs. Dean believes that the Chinese need “was for closer acquaintance with and knowledge of the Western people” and sees that as her mission. In Pau Tsu she sees her effort to Americanize the Chinese being rejected, and so she labels her an ignorant bigot. The problem is that Mrs. Dean cannot accept that a Chinese does not want to be Americanized. The more these immigrants are like her, the more acceptable they are. This is an attitude shared by many of the white characters in these stories. They try to fit those of other descent into their own realm of understanding instead of expanding their view of the world to include new perspectives. Mrs. Dean is not so much interested in the Chinese; she is interested in Americanizing them. She has, as White-Parks says of the mission woman in “Pat and Pan,” a “lack of authentic interest in Chinese culture.”²² For Mrs. Dean, the exchange of cultural knowledge was never meant to be reciprocal.

“And this little Pau Lin,” Mrs. Dean goes on to say, “has everything a Chinese woman can wish for” (53). This perception coincides with her belief that everything with the Chinese is a matter of duty. Mrs. Dean believes that since Wou Sankwei provides for his wife materially, she should be satisfied in doing her duty to him as a wife and expect no more from him. She will concede no claim that Pau Lin has on Wou Sankwei, since she believes that “there is no bond of interest or sympathy between them, save the boy” (53). She even resents Pau Lin’s intrusion into her relationship with Wou Sankwei, as she perceives his distance comes from her influence and not from the fact that he has taken on the responsibilities of a grown man. She laments: “Before the coming of Pau Lin, he would confide in me every little thing that worried him, as if he were my own son. Now he maintains absolute silence as to his private affairs” (53). This passage

reveals Mrs. Dean's patriarchal (or rather matriarchal) relationship with Wou Sankwei as well as her assumption that her role as friend and benefactress entitles her to have control of his family life.

In the midst of a discussion with her aunt, Adah Charlton has a revelation that Chinese women might have the same feelings as Americans. This epiphany serves to show how these women have felt all along. She sees as the problem Wou Sankwei's trying to "live two lives—that of a Chinese and that of an American." And Mrs. Dean replies, "Is it not what we teach these boys—to become Americans? And yet they are Chinese, and must, in a sense, remain so" (54). Their views on the relationship between East and West coincide with those circulating in society at the time; both Mrs. Dean and her niece believe there can be no common ground between the cultures. However in her lecture to Sankwei, Adah Charlton does have a new insight, and her advice for him to spend time with his wife is sympathetic to Pau Lin's position.

In "Americanizing" Wan Lin Fo has a similar confrontation with Adah Raymond, yet there are notable differences between this encounter and its parallel in "Wisdom." In contrast to Adah Charlton, the Adah in "Americanizing" had been sympathetic with the Chinese wife the entire time. Another difference is in the way the two men take the advice of their American friends. When Adah Charlton tells Wou Sankwei that he must spend time with his wife instead of with her, he feels himself being "exiled from Paradise" (59). But after being confronted by his American friend, Wan Lin Fo finds himself "wondering how he could ever have wished his gentle Pau Tsu to be like this angry woman" (91). In his comparison between his wife and his white American female friend, Wan Lin Fo's devotion and preference for his wife are clear.

Most critics have concluded that the conflict in these stories comes from the wives' unwillingness or inability to assimilate into American culture, as in James Doyle's cursory analysis: "'The Wisdom of the New' and 'The Americanizing of Pau Tsu' deal with Chinese wives who find it impossible to adapt to the free and easy social customs of Americans."²³ However, the conflict has more to do with human relationships than with cultural differences. What the Chinese wives object to is not American culture but the insensitive way in which their husbands introduce it to them: through the intrusion of single, white American women. Lin Fo wants Pau Tsu to become Americanized and sees Adah Raymond as a good role model for his wife, and so invites her to his home quite often. Adah comes to understand the suffering of Pau Tsu because she relates to her experience as a woman, despite their cultural differences. Wan Lin Fo, who had wanted his wife to participate *with* him in the American experience, finally sympathizes with his wife's position and a compromise is reached in light of his new understanding.

Wou Sankwei, on the other hand, has no interest in his wife becoming Americanized. He basically rejects her as a partner and spends his time away from home with Adah Charlton. Unlike Wan Lin Fo, who regards Adah Raymond as a family friend, there are some indications that Wou Sankwei's feelings for Adah Charlton go beyond platonic friendship. White-Parks also notes the strength of his regard: "Though Wou Sankwei's love for Adah Charlton is unacknowledged and undeclared, it is suggested in the respect Sankwei accords the young woman, in the time he continues to spend with her even after his family's arrival, in the American education he wants his son to have."²⁴ This relationship goes beyond "free and easy social customs" and becomes a sign of disrespect towards his wife, for a married man spending most of his free time with a

single woman is not an acceptable social custom in America. Pau Lin, in turn, feels the “humiliation and shame of bearing children to a man who looked up to another woman—and a woman of another race—as a being above the common use of women” (51). Because Wou Sankwei can only see his wife as a household servant, the story ends in tragedy.

In the final analysis, Pau Tsu thinks that her husband is trying to make her into something she is not. In his eagerness to have her participate fully in his American life, he becomes insensitive to her feelings. Pau Lin’s situation is much bleaker; she sees herself as being degraded. Her husband is using her as a housekeeper and child-bearer, while he seeks companionship with Adah Charlton. While Pau Tsu is denied her personality by her husband, Pau Lin is denied her humanity.

Both Pau Lin and Pau Tsu seem at first glance to be stereotypical passive Chinese wives, and both had been instructed by their mothers-in-law to maintain silence in the home. Nevertheless, Pau Lin expresses her displeasure at the position her husband has put her in by punishing their son for becoming American and by taunting her husband about his white friends. The killing of her son, however, indicates that Pau Lin is much more than a dissatisfied wife. Her shocking act at the end reflects the mind of a woman who has suffered not only countless acts of disrespect from her husband but also the loss of a two-week-old infant. Pau Tsu, on the other hand, rebels by leaving her husband and writing him a note explaining that her departure is motivated by his wish for her to be like the white woman. Pau Tsu’s act not only indicates her clear-headed intelligence, but also that she has been influenced by the independence of American women.

The actions of the women, and the men for that matter, demonstrate Sui Sin Far's motivation to show that Chinese people "are one with the other peoples of the earth. They think and act just as the white man does, according to the impulses that control them. They love those who love them; they hate those who hate; are kind, affectionate, cruel or selfish, as the case may be" (234). Sui Sin Far's characters make decisions that negatively affect those around them, but some also have revelations and try to make amends. Her writings focus on human possibilities and show by example how minds can be broadened and understanding between individuals can be reached. White-Parks sees in the writings of Sui Sin Far that "her aesthetics focus on a world vision that is largely communal in its insistence that humans and other living beings must exist in harmony to survive. In this sense, Sui sin Far's aesthetic is far ahead of her time and is startlingly contemporary. Appropriately, the underlying theme from her first work to her last is that people are not single-faceted."²⁵ The consistent point is not that it is impossible for two cultures to reach compromise, but that rapprochement comes from understanding between individuals. Harmony comes from paying attention to individual needs and differences. The husbands' fault was not in their assimilation or even the desire for their wives to be Americanized, but in not recognizing their wives' perspectives. The fault of Mrs. Dean and Adah Charlton, before her revelation, was in not seeing the Chinese as related to themselves. The theme of these stories is not that East and West are mutually exclusive but that it is necessary to step outside of prescribed views to gain a true understanding of others, between cultures as well as within them.

However, the relationships and communities in Sui Sin Far's stories obviously are not without conflict. Sui Sin Far was primarily a Realistic writer who used her art to

explore the implications of diversity; her work is not utopian. The good feelings shared by characters of differing backgrounds are often qualified by the admission that people living in the same country can have vastly different experiences. Even in stories where Chinese Americans have developed sincere relationships with white characters, the harmony they achieve in their circle of friends does not shield them from the nuances of prejudice that their neighbors are unaware of or simply dismiss as unimportant. This failure to acknowledge racial realities has been termed “the gaze of the whites” by Dana Nelson.²⁶ This is the uncanny ability of European Americans to see what they want or expect to see when they view people of color. This gaze, then, obscures reality and prevents the viewer from understanding the true implications of what it means to be ethnic American. An example of this myopia is found in a letter that Mrs. Spring Fragrance writes to her husband about a lecture she attended with a white friend. Her description of the evening, though seemingly lighthearted, is biting in its sarcasm:

The Subject was “America, the Protector of China!” It was most exhilarating, and the effect of so much expression of benevolence leads me to beg of you to forget to remember that the barber charges you one dollar for a shave while he humbly submits to the American man a bill of fifteen cents. And murmur no more because your honored elder brother, on a visit to this country, is detained under the roof-tree of this great Government instead of under your own humble roof. Console him with the reflection that he is protected under the wing of the Eagle, the emblem of Liberty. What is the loss of ten thousand years or ten thousand times ten dollars compared to the happiness of knowing oneself so securely sheltered? (210)

It is evident from this letter that Mr. and Mrs. Spring Fragrance have a certain understanding of the ways in which America does not live up to its own stated ideals. The others in the audience do not possess this same understanding, which is why only she is aware of the irony of the lecture. This technique of embedding serious criticism of social and legal injustices within the text indicates that Sui Sin Far was aware of discriminatory political realities, although she most often chose to examine prejudices on a personal level in her stories.

Later in the same story, a conversation between Mr. Spring Fragrance and Will Carmen reveals that even between close friends, white Americans often have little idea of how their government's decisions affect their Chinese neighbors. In this discussion, Will tells Mr. Spring Fragrance that "just as soon as a foreigner puts his foot upon our shores, he also becomes of the nobility" (23). Mr. Spring Fragrance "dryly" asks "What about my brother in the Detention Pen?" Will is obviously confused at having to confront the paradox of a nation that professes to be a free country but that is not equally free for all. He replies "now, you've got me. . . . Well, what a shame. . . . But understand, old fellow, we that are real Americans are up against it—even more than you. It is against our principles," making a distinction in his mind between himself and those who make and enforce discriminatory laws. As he obviously is considering detainment for the first time, he is only "really up against it" in principle, not in practice. However, Mr. Spring Fragrance does not let him distance himself from the actions of his government: "I offer the real Americans my consolations that they should be compelled to do that which is against their principles." Will, because he is young and because he cannot see that this matter has any relevance in his own life, dismisses the comment and the whole issue as

only an individual free of such cares could. He tells his friend, “Oh, well, it will all come right some day. We’re not a bad sort, you know” (23). This nonchalance and indifference indicates a rift in the relationship between the Chinese and white American friends, a rift of which the latter is unaware.

The fact that friends and neighbors can be so apathetic about governmental policies underscores how difficult it must be for Chinese Americans to deal with disinterested functionaries of the American government. Though most of her stories address legal and political matters only tangentially, there is one story, “In the Land of the Free,”²⁷ that deals directly with the Chinese Exclusion Act.²⁸ Even here, however, Sui Sin Far depicts a moment of indecision to show how the injuries inflicted on Chinese immigrants are often, if not always, the result of ethically questionable choices. The opening scene of a husband greeting the arrival of his wife and child from China is disrupted by two customs officials who debate on whether to follow the strict letter of the law and detain the child. The reflective nature of one official, who regards the couple “pityingly,” is in stark contrast to the officious nature of the other who insists on taking the child from his parents (94). The implication is that arbitrary laws have only the power given to them by individuals who choose to enforce them, or, as revealed in the conversation between Will and Mr. Spring Fragrance, by those who choose to ignore them altogether.

“Land of the Free” is political and emotional; it both addresses the national position regarding Chinese immigrants and shows the anguish of a mother over the fate of her infant son as the “law of the land” literally breaks her family apart. The promise of America, represented by the mother and child entering the country in perfect trust, is

ultimately disrupted by the forced separation. Even after the shock of having their child taken from them, the merchant couple still has faith in the American legal system to do the right thing; the husband says, “there cannot be any law that would keep a child from its mother” (96). The words of the father reflect a confidence that, though mistakes are occasionally made, at heart the United States is a free and just country that protects the most vulnerable within its borders. This trust is broken as time passes and the child is not returned to the family, and their faith in the system is further compromised when they are taken advantage of by a greedy lawyer. Sui Sin Far shows that behind the cold impersonal legal system, behind the laws that separate families, behind the confusing bureaucracy and paperwork, there are individuals who perpetuate injustice by their apathy, officiousness, or self-interest. If U.S. law regarding the Chinese is exploitative, Sui Sin Far seems to indicate, it is allowed to be so by the action or indifference of individual Americans.

Just as Sui Sin Far addressed racial issues in her stories, she also depicted other social realities that were helping shape a new, multicultural society. The dawn of a new century signified a time of change, and many women saw that Victorian mores, which had determined their conduct and roles in life, could give way to new modes of thinking. Ideas of female autonomy and independence were finding their way into American literature, and Sui Sin Far, herself a single workingwoman, incorporated the New Woman into many of her stories. As with all her methods of characterization, however, she never relied on one type to stand for a group. The liberated female characters in Sui Sin Far’s narratives come to represent the numerous possibilities for women in an age of change. In her stories, female independence does not necessarily mean trading in the roles of wife

and mother for a career. Instead, autonomy is achieved when a woman is able to make her own choices about her life. Sui Sin Far carefully delineates the many areas where a woman should be free to determine her own destiny. Sometimes the choice flows directly from the mainstream ideal of the liberated woman. That is, not only should a woman be free to work and be financially independent, but she should be able to earn her own living without being judged as unfeminine. Sui Sin Far's depiction of women's alternatives is broad enough, however, to include female characters who consider other options. If a woman is more comfortable as a wife and mother and her personality is not suited for the working world, then she should not be forced to work, and again, should not be shamed by her decision. The New Woman theme in Sui Sin Far's work is about honoring women's choices.

This theme of women's autonomy goes beyond the struggle between traditional gender roles and life in the business world. In many stories, female characters are faced with questions of culture that they must resolve according to what they feel is right or wrong. If the woman is an immigrant or biracial, then she must decide how much or which elements of Chinese culture she wants to retain. Often traditional life choices, like marriage, are complicated by issues of race. As Sui Sin Far portrays the dilemmas that women face, she shows how these personal decisions are subject to outside scrutiny. The individuals most likely to undermine or override women's personal decisions in her stories are men, most often husbands. Female characters are also subject to the criticism of the greater society, which has subtle influences over a woman's actions and which often judges her cruelly if she does not make the choice that conforms to the status quo.

While Sui Sin Far is careful to show how difficult it is for women to maintain their autonomy and integrity in a society designed to limit their potential, she also demonstrates that in a multicultural world there is room for change and new opportunities. Although there are husbands that never allow their wives freedom of choice, there are others who are more open to female independence. For example, in “The Americanizing of Pau Tsu,” Wan Lin Fo comes to the realization that his wife is capable of deciding when and how her own acculturation will take place. Pau Tsu’s very modern decision to leave her husband makes her an unlikely, yet decidedly, New Woman. The author depicts how the pressures of society can overwhelm a woman and negate her independence, but she also has stories in which women not only persevere but find satisfaction in their lives despite their decisions to go against the American grain.

The first liberated woman of the collection is young Mrs. Spring Fragrance. She is a dynamic and compelling character who acts always according to her best judgment and who manipulates all around her into coming to more modern, inclusive decisions in their relationships. The three marriages in “Mrs. Spring Fragrance” and “The Inferior Woman” are products of her behind-the-scene maneuvers; working within the role of the kind, obedient Chinese wife, she actually subverts passive stereotypes to bring about the happiness of everyone with whom she comes into contact. Through her caring intervention, the parents of both the Chinese-American daughter in “Mrs. Spring Fragrance” and the white American son in “The Inferior Woman” make ethical decisions to resist cultural and societal pressures regarding the marriage of their children.

Mrs. Spring Fragrance, as a successful merchant's wife, has the luxury of deciding where she will divert her energies. In “The Inferior Woman” Will Carman’s love

interest, Alice Winthrop, is another kind of New Woman. She is a careerist who has the admiration of all she works with but is perceived as under-class by Will Carman's mother. Alice will not consent to marry Will until his mother gives up her belief that she is beneath them. Mrs. Carman's view of Alice is clearly stated in a letter to the mother of the young woman she wishes Will to marry:

It is incomprehensible to me how a son of mine can find any pleasure whatever in the society of such a girl. I have traced her history, and find that . . . her environment, from childhood up, has been the sordid and demoralizing one of extreme poverty and ignorance. This girl, Alice, entered a law office at the age of fourteen. . . . Now, after seven years in business, through the friendship and influence of men far above her socially, she holds the position of private secretary to the most influential man in Washington—a position that by rights belongs only to a well-educated young woman of good family. (35)

The depiction of Alice and her counterpart, the more high-born and educated Miss Evebrook, highlights class differences and the ways that other women often play a part in devaluing and excluding females in society. However, Sui Sin Far does not create artificial oppositions, for Alice and Miss Evebrook are friends, and Miss Evebrook, unlike Mrs. Carman, recognizes the value of her friend's achievements. Miss Evebrook, also a New Woman, is a suffragist who has vowed to forgo marriage for ten years as she works for the cause.

Another story that examines female rights is "The Story of One White Woman Who Married a Chinese."²⁹ Though, as is apparent by the title, the main plot involves a cross-cultural relationship, the New Woman theme comes into play in a very interesting

way. The narrator, who was once a working girl, marries a man who considers himself a progressive thinker and advocate for equality between the sexes but who is in fact mentally abusive to his wife. The way that he denigrates her very existence proves him to be not only oppressive and patriarchal but a hypocrite as well. His main complaint, one that may have been viewed as ironic at the time, was that his wife was not liberated enough. As in the case of the husband in "Wisdom," James is always holding up other women as a standard for his wife. Like Wou Sankwei, it is his habit of bringing an outsider into their home that destroys the marriage. In this case, however, the females that James finds appealing are coldly independent businesswomen, such as his coworker Miss Moran.

In an effort to satisfy her husband's desire for a workingwoman, the narrator starts a new job when her newborn baby is only six weeks old. She denies her own impulses and personality in order to serve her husband's selfish demands but finds in the end that she was risking the health of her child and her own mental health for a man who was just plain no good. When the narrator overhears her husband making a pass at Miss Moran, she asserts her independence and leaves him, beginning her journey to self-fulfillment. She will not be like the New Woman that her husband admires, stiff, mathematical and businesslike, but she will take risks that go beyond the scope of the Women's Movement at the time. When the narrator meets her husband-to-be, Liu Kanghi, their relationship begins as a platonic friendship, as he and his family help her get on her feet. He gives her work to do for his business that does not take her away from her child, and in this way he "made her independent, not only of others, but of himself" (77). In this story Sui Sin Far creates another vision of female independence. The narrator, who never wanted to enter

the world of business, is still able to come to a place where she makes her own decisions based on her own free will.

As the story of “White Woman Who Married a Chinese” segues into its companion piece, “Her Chinese Husband,”³⁰ the theme shifts from the right of the narrator to determine her own future to her consideration of the fate of those around her. Once the narrator’s conflict of self is resolved, that is, once she is able to live her life on her own terms, she becomes concerned with the destiny of her family and particularly of her children, who will be raised biracial in a racist society. In her stories where Chinese and white Americans come together in one family, Sui Sin Far’s multiculturalism comes closest to the new frontiers of American diversity. In fact, “White Woman Who Married a Chinese,” and “Her Chinese Husband,” are preceded by another story, ““Its Wavering Image,””³¹ which also portrays interracial relationships. Whereas “White Woman” and “Chinese Husband” are about a white woman and a Chinese man, in “Wavering Image,” the relationship is between a young biracial woman and a white man. Through these relationships, Sui Sin Far portrays a range of subjects that have become central to multiethnic American literature, such as Orientalism, white reaction to mixed race relationships, and the status of bicultural individuals in both their communities and American society as a whole.

In ““Its Wavering Image,”” Mark Carson, a roving reporter who comes to Chinatown to see if he can uncover some good stories, seduces Pan, a biracial girl who is comfortable with herself and her life in the Chinese neighborhood. Like Mrs. Dean in “Wisdom,” Carson has no real interest in Chinese people or their culture. He is attracted to Pan, but his construct of reality divides the world into white and other, and he is unable

to get past his binary way of thinking. After he meets Pan for the first time, he asks his editor “is she Chinese or is she white?” indicating that he cannot conceive of an identity position anywhere in between (61). As their relationship develops from friendship to courtship, he must convince himself that she is not really Chinese at all, and he tries to make her deny it as well. The two grow close during the time that Pan introduces Carson into the world of her community. When he finally publishes his article on Chinatown, however, it is essentialist in nature and degrading to the Chinese of their city.

Carson’s actions reveal an attitude particular to East-West relations that Edward Said would term “Orientalism” some sixty years later. In Said’s interpretation, “anyone employing Orientalism, which is the habit for dealing with questions, objects, qualities and regions deemed Oriental, will designate, point to, fix what he is talking or thinking about, with a word or phrase, which then is considered either to have acquired, or more simply to be, reality.”³² Characters like Mrs. Dean in “Wisdom of the New” and Mark in “It’s Wavering Image” think that they “know” Chinese nature because of their association with individuals within that community. What they actually do, however, is come to conclusions based on preconceived notions of difference between East and West. In “Wavering Image,” Mark Carson enters Chinatown with an unquestioned conviction that their ways and character are inferior to Western ways and character. Though the story does not delineate the details of Carson’s article, the reaction of Pan’s father, of Pan, and of Carson himself indicate that what he has written demeans and ridicules their culture. He may have been representative of other journalists who perpetuated stereotypes of Asian character and fueled the idea of a “yellow peril” popular at the time. At the very least, Carson had repaid the openness and kindness of Pan and her

community with disrespect and with a lack of understanding. In his justification for writing the harmful article, Carson dismisses Chinese-American life with the ethnocentric comment “It is mere superstition anyway. These things have got to be exposed and done away with” (65). His motivation, then, was never to bring his white readership into a deeper understanding of the world of their neighbors. His intention was to overthrow this world by denigrating it in the mainstream press.

This is the very attitude Said describes in his analysis of Orientalism. In his seminal article on this theory, Said detects a Eurocentric approach to writing about Asia dating as far back as Napoleon’s *Description de l’Egyte*, which he sees as “the archetype of all further efforts to bring the Orient closer to Europe.” This book, and subsequently other Western texts that address Asian themes, are prone to the “Orientalist projection,” which tends “to divide, deploy, schematize, tabulate, index, and record everything in sight (and out of sight); to make out of every observable detail a generalization and out of every generalization an immutable law about the Oriental nature, temperament, mentality, custom, or type; and above all, to transmute living reality into the stuff of texts, to possess (or think one possesses) actuality mainly because as a European nothing in the Orient seems to resist one’s powers.”³³ For Mark Carson, the effortlessness with which he entered the Chinese-American community through Pan and the ease with which he won Pan’s affection reaffirmed the essentialist Western notion that “nothing in the Orient seems to resist one’s powers.” His article, a perpetuation of Orientalist discourse, adds to the misunderstanding and sinophobia in the white community and the distrust of whites in the Chinese community.

In her evaluation of early Chinese-American writing, Elaine Kim concludes that the few other Asian-American writers at the turn into the twentieth century were apologetic whenever they offered the slightest criticism of American culture.³⁴ Sui Sin Far, however, is often scathing in her portrayals of white Americans. As is typical in her writing, however, she does not stereotype all whites as villains. Again there is a spectrum of characters who exhibit a broad range of attitudes in their dealings with their Chinese or biracial acquaintances. Though she portrays sympathetic white male characters in other stories, Mark Carson is a scoundrel in the context of "Wavering Image." His character is an interesting variation on the popular Victorian theme of the "cad" who would sexually use a young woman if she allowed herself to fall into his seduction. In "Wavering Image," the love story is connected to the theme of race, and so the use and betrayal of Pan is based on Carson's disregard for her racial loyalty, not her virtue. The title, "'It's Wavering Image,'" holds several meanings in relation to the story. The title is in quotation marks because it is taken from a song in the story that Mark Carson sings to Pan. He sings of "the moon and its broken reflection, / And its shadows shall appear, / As the symbol of love in heaven, / And its wavering image here" (64). The song is a seduction, and it induces Pan to bestow her first kiss on Mark Carson. The lyrics, however, reveal what neither of them seems to understand: that what they see in each other is but a distorted image. Pan, in her innocence, believes that Carson is a good man who cares about her. Carson, on the other hand, seems to be playing with the Madame Butterfly scenario that has as its pretext in Orientalist essentialism.³⁵ He believes that the power of his attractiveness as a Westerner will compel Pan to become whatever he wants her to become. Carson's conviction that the weak and passive East will inevitably

capitulate to the strong and irresistible West is apparent in the way that he uses Pan's kindness. The very morning after their first kiss, Carson begins to write the article in which he betrays Pan's trust and portrays Chinatown through the fixed lens of Orientalism.

It is evident that, until she read Carson's article, Pan did not see Carson clearly. After the article is published, however, she considers his attitude towards her biracial identity and his indifference towards her devotion to the Chinese-American community: "None knew better than he that she, whom he had called 'a white girl, a white woman,' would rather that her own naked body and soul had been exposed, than that things, sacred and secret to those who loved her, should be cruelly unveiled and ruthlessly spread before the ridiculing and uncomprehending foreigner" (64-65). Obviously, however, Carson did not comprehend the depth of her loyalty to her Chinese neighbors and culture. As she begins to comprehend what Carson has done, she starts to make racial distinctions herself. Her demarcation of white America as the "foreigner" indicates that she has begun to incorporate oppositional racial categories in her own worldview.

"It's Wavering Image'" is an insightful depiction of how limited the world is when observed through the essentializing lens of Orientalism. Where Pan gives Carson room for growth through exposure to a rich and thriving community, he nullifies this opportunity by falling back on essentialist and racist assumptions. The idea that the feelings of the Chinese do not matter to Pan because she is (he thinks) white, reflects on how he lives his own whiteness. Other ethnicities are there for his amusement and exploitation. This arrogance and ignorance, which is deeply rooted in his own racial identity, is what she finds repugnant in the end. She associates it with being white and

so, in turn, rejects her own white heritage. Pan, who has lived into her early maturity with a comfortable acceptance of her biracial inheritance, is completely repelled by the utter lack of sensitivity she finds in Carson. When he comes to see her after a few months, he is surprised that she has not forgotten his betrayal, for “why should a white woman care about such things?” (65). He is surprised by her resolute declaration: “I am a Chinese woman” (65). In this narrative, the potential for the biracial character to act as a bridge between cultures is destroyed by blatant prejudice.

This simple story is really an insightful depiction of how differences become solidified and then oppositional. There is no racial animosity in the heart of Pan until she is confronted with it in the man who betrays her affection and her trust in the process of revealing his assumptions of white superiority. In this story, the white man’s incapability of seeing beyond the rigid twofold category of “white” and “Asian” compels the biracial Pan to accept that binary to protect her Chinese self from those who would destroy it. It does not follow, however, that East and West are incompatible, for she herself is the product of a happy union between a Chinese man and a white woman. The Chinese community, which seems to accept and love her, also welcomes Carson when she brings him to Chinatown. There is even an indication that not all whites are as caught up in the binary as he. When he asks his editor “what is she, white or Chinese?” the editor tells him, “she is an unusually bright girl” and a good storyteller, emphasizing her personal attributes not her racial background (61).

In the end, Pan retreats back into the Chinese community after her encounter with the racial realities represented by Carson. She is comforted not only by their willingness to accept her unquestioningly but also by the idea that she will someday have her own

family in the heart of this community. In other stories that depict the Chinese-American community from the inside, the richness of culture and family life is evident in the setting of home. In “White Woman” and “Chinese Husband,” the narrator’s life is enriched and fulfilled through her relationship with Lui Kanghi and through her contact with his Chinese family. With their help, the narrator finds the strength to make a decision that would have been very controversial in 1910 America: she decides to marry a Chinese man. The legal implications of this decision are noticeably absent; for the reality is that such a marriage would not have been lawful in California at the time.³⁶ However, the narrator moves away from the dictates of society and begins to see things with her own eyes. Her experience with Kanghi’s family reveals to her that “virtues do not all belong to the whites” (74). As she lived with her Chinese friends and became involved in their lives, she “lost altogether the prejudice against the foreigner in which [she] had been reared” (74). Close association leads to friendship, understanding, and eventually love.

After their marriage, Lui Kanghi is devoted to her “happiness, health and development,” and though the narrator is able to find fulfillment of her own personality, there is a price to pay from society that affects their relationship, as they are faced with “the constant irritation caused by the assumption of the white men that a white woman does not love her Chinese husband, and their actions accordingly; also sneers and offensive remarks” (81). Sui Sin Far examines how society’s judgment of the couple affects them emotionally, and what she depicts is the internalization of these assumptions by Lui Kanghi himself. The narrator becomes aware of her husband’s “acute consciousness that, though belonging to him as his wife, yet in a sense I was not his, but of the dominant race, which claimed, even while it professed to despise me” (81). The

narrator's concern is more for her husband's psyche and for their relationship than for what others may think of them. Her inward longing was for a life based on traditional gender roles, where a wife could freely nurture and care for her family and a husband could protect and support them. Kanghi's feelings of insecurity disrupt the structure of their marriage that the narrator desires. To equate his wife with the power of the national majority means to upset the balance of power within their marriage. Even in this evidently loving relationship, the reality of racial attitudes in the United States creates friction. The narrator laments, "in spite of all I could do or say, it was there between us: that strange, invisible—what? Was it the barrier of race—that consciousness?" (81). In her depiction of this marriage, Sui Sin Far creates a union in which the characters can look beyond cultural differences to find a place where they can meet based on common goals, interests, and desires. She is also careful to show, however, that racism can permeate even this intimate sphere.

The stories of "White Woman Who Married a Chinese" and "Chinese Husband" are about two adults who learn to move beyond social constructs and limitations of race to live their lives together as nurturing and supportive individuals. Another concern of theirs, however, is how societal influences will affect the lives of their children. There are two children in the stories. The first is the issue of the narrator's first marriage, the racially white daughter who will be raised in the Chinese community by the inter-racial couple, and the second child is the son that the narrator and Lui Kanghi have together. This child is of special concern to his parents because his experience will not be like anyone else's in his family. He will grow up biracial in America.

The end of “White Woman” expresses the mother’s apprehension for her biracial child in a prejudiced society; she perceives that as her son “stands between his father and myself, like yet unlike us both, so will he stand in after years between his father’s people and his mother’s people. And if there is no kindness nor understanding between them, what will my boy’s fate be?” (77). The anxiety is mainly on the part of the narrator, as her husband “could not see as could I, an American woman, the conflict before our boy” (83). The father has a much more positive outlook; his view is indicative of the possibilities of multiculturalism. He believes that if his son embraces all that he is, both Chinese and white, that no one can make him think less of himself, as he tells his wife “What is there to weep about? The child is beautiful! The feeling heart, the understanding mind is his. And we will bring him up to be proud that he is of Chinese blood; he will fear none, and, after him, the name of half-breed will no longer be one of contempt” (82). The father expresses the ideal relationship between individual and society in a multicultural world.

There is another story of a mixed-race family that shows inter-racial relationships from a different perspective. “Pat and Pan” is the story of a white child who is raised in a Chinese family.³⁷ His mother, who has no white friends, dies and leaves her infant son to the Lum Yooks, who had cared for her in her illness. The boy, Pat, grows up within the culture of his adoptive family. The couple also has a biological daughter, Pan, who is two years younger than Pat. The story begins with the closeness of the siblings, who are literally curled up together when they are sighted by a “Mission woman,” Anna Harrison, who will lead to the disruption and eventual end of their relationship. She makes it her mission to do something about the situation she stumbles upon, “for a white boy to grow

up Chinese is unthinkable” (161). Harrison first induces Pat’s adoptive parents to enter him into her school in Chinatown, and later she talks them into giving him up to a white American family. Thinking that it is in the best interest of the boy that they love, the Lum Yooks agree to give him up despite their “sense of injustice and outraged love” (164). When he learns of his fate, the boy, like Pan in “Wavering Image,” associates himself with the culture that had nurtured and sustained him. After Mr. Lum Yook tells Pat that he must leave them and be separated from Pan because “you are a white boy and Pan is Chinese,” Pat cries “I am Chinese too! I am Chinese too” (166)! At this point, Pat claims the culture that he loves, not the race that will soon claim him.

Despite these protests, over time Pat integrates into the American mainstream. The siblings meet only twice after their separation. In her brief descriptions of these two encounters, Sui Sin Far is able to show the process of prejudice as Pat distances himself from his former sibling. On their first chance meeting he begins to make distinctions between himself and his Chinese sister. He remarks on how little she is (compared to the white girls in his new school). On their second meeting, Pat pulls away from Pan completely, although she is happy to see him. As she leans in to talk to the boy she still loves as her brother, one of Pat’s schoolmates mocks Pan’s speech, which compels Pat to turn on his sister and yell, “get away from me!” (166). In their first encounter, Pat is beginning to recognize the physical differences of racial characteristics that had not been important to him before. By the second encounter he has apparently absorbed the racial prejudice of the white community in which he now lives. The story demonstrates one of Sui Sin Far’s prevalent themes, that ethnic differences are of no significance outside of racist contexts and that racial impulses are learned, not inherent. In that one brief

moment, the opinion of Pat's new white peers outweighs the previous years of love and devotion to his Chinese sister. The power of prejudice, the author indicates, can be that strong.

"Pat and Pan" is a simple story that nevertheless invokes the influence of society and institutions over individuals. It also depicts how races living in close proximity can enrich and sustain one another, and, conversely, how the separation of races breeds fear and animosity. This story may demonstrate better than any other the multicultural perspective of Sui Sin Far. Pat and Pan's childhood relationship becomes emblematic of the ways that prejudice and segregation are harmful both to the minority being excluded and to mainstream Americans, as they must deny themselves new knowledge and understanding and must harbor hate and the resulting guilt that hate inevitably breeds.

Sui Sin Far, writing in the tradition of Realism, shows how different the American landscape looks when viewed from a Chinese-American perspective. Her narratives portray how minds can be broadened and understanding between individuals can be reached; they also depict the consequences that occur when individuals are unwilling or unable to achieve such understanding. Her best stories, like the works of many other American Realists, trace the struggles of merchant class figures as they make their way through the complexities of American society. The decisions characters make directly affect those around them, demonstrating that the social forces of discrimination and oppression are not inevitably *imposed on* individuals from some outside entity, but are instead *created by* individuals in the familiar contexts of home and community. The ethical dilemmas delineated in her fiction gives her audience insight into the social

dynamics of immigrant life at the turn of the century; they also establish her body of work as a small but important contribution to the literary tradition of American Realism.

Though Sui Sin Far's stories are American narratives, her life and work has wider signification. She was never an American citizen, and according to the law of the land, never would have been allowed citizenship had she applied. The fact that the writings of individuals who were excluded from the centers of power and even from U.S. citizenship are now claimed as American literature may seem problematic, yet to continue to exclude them would be more so. The ambiguous national status of this writer, however, gives her life and works another dimension for consideration. Her biracial positionality takes on a global significance as her roots reach back to Europe and Asia, and her life was lived in the New World of North America. All of these cross-cultural connections point to a reality that is not new (the coming together of nations and peoples is as old as civilization) but that is just beginning to be understood. As Said put it "one of the great advances in modern cultural theory is the realization, almost universally acknowledged, that cultures are hybrid and heterogeneous and . . . that cultures and civilizations are so interrelated and interdependent as to beggar any unitary or simply delineated description of their individuality" (53). This hybrid and heterogeneous reality is becoming more and more familiar in an age of accelerated globalization, but it is important to remember that the turn into the twentieth century was an age of globalization as well. Immigration, telegraphs, steamships, railways, and the print media were bringing people into contact as never before. In her short stories, Sui Sin Far was able to explore this contact in detail through her portrayal of friendships and families.

At a time when American society was often inhospitable to Asians, Sui Sin Far depicts how Chinese immigrants went about making a home in the United States nevertheless. In her short stories, she creates varied individuals, relationships, and situations that reveals the true complexity, and possibility, of a multicultural society. She does in the world of fiction what Said was trying to do in his own analysis of Orientalism, which “was not so much to dissipate difference itself . . . but the notion that difference implied hostility, a frozen reified set of opposed essences” (57). Her fictional exploration of the problems and opportunities of diversity position her at the beginning of the multiethnic tradition of American literature in the twentieth century. Her emphasis on the individual as the locus of culture marked the advent of a new way of considering ethnic-American identity. Some of her characters identify as traditional, others as westernized, while still others define themselves outside of these obvious categories as they attempt to avoid being forced into an American identity or to be relegated to a purely Chinese one. Factors of gender and class further serve to individualize characters. Perhaps of all her characters, Mrs. Spring Fragrance epitomizes the multicultural ideal. She seeks to make her own choices about her culture and about her role as a woman, and she moves about her community in the friendship of Chinese, white, and biracial Americans. Though at times Mrs. Spring Fragrance may be misinterpreted by others, she never lets these interpretations define her, and though she retains the traditional traits of the gracious Chinese wife, she is subservient to no one. Mrs. Spring Fragrance is only one example of the how varied attributes are combined to create characters that are original and compelling. Sui Sin Far’s characters represent a synergistic model of acculturation as

they move past stereotypes to embody the varied and unpredictable ways that the diversity of cultures come together in America.

Notes

¹ Amy Ling, *Between Worlds: Women Writers of Chinese Ancestry* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1990), p. 13.

² Sui Sin Far, *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1912).

³ For a thorough discussion of the ways in which Chinese immigrants have been depicted, see William Wu, *The Yellow Peril: Chinese Americans in American Fiction 1850-1940* (Hamdon: Archon Books, 1982). There is also a good overview of the subject in “Images of Asians in Anglo-American Literature,” the first chapter in Elaine H. Kim, *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982).

⁴ The term “bachelor community” refers to male laborers who lived and worked together in North American Chinatowns. Many of these “bachelors” actually had wives in China.

⁵ Leslie A. Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (Normal: Dalkey Archive Press, 1997), p.10. Originally published by Stein and Day in 1966.

⁶ Sui Sin Far, “The Chinese in America by Sui Sin Far (Edith Eaton): Intimate Study of Chinese Life in America, Told in a Series of Short Sketches—An Interpretation of Chinese Life and Character,” in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance and Other Stories*, ed. Amy Ling and Annette White-Parks (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), pp. 233-57. Originally published in *Westerner*, 10-11 (May 1909): 24-26; (June, 1909): 36-38; (July, 1909):18-19; (August, 1909): 24-26. All citations of Sui Sin Far’s articles and stories in this chapter come from the collection edited by Ling and White-Parks.

⁷ Sui Sin Far, "A Plea for the Chinaman: A Correspondent's Argument in His Favor," p. 192. Originally published in *Montreal Daily Star* (September 21, 1896). "Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian," p. 230. Originally published in *Independent* 66 (January 21, 1909): 125-32.

⁸ Xiao-Huang Yin, "Between East and West: Sui Sin Far—the First Chinese American Woman Writer," *Arizona Quarterly* 47, No. 4 (1991): 55-56.

⁹ S. E. Solberg, "Sui Sin Far/Edith Eaton: First Chinese-American Fictionist," *MELUS* 8, No. 1 (1981): 33.

¹⁰ There are two pairs of stories that work as companion pieces, and in these stories the same set of characters appear in both. Mr. and Mrs. Spring Fragrance and their neighbors, the Carmans, appear in the first two stories in the collection, "Mrs. Spring Fragrance" and "The Inferior Woman." Later, "The Story of One White Woman Who Married a Chinese" is followed by "Her Chinese Husband." In the first story, the narrator tells how she came to marry her Chinese husband, and in the second she reflects on their life together after his death.

¹¹ Annette White Parks, *Sui Sin Far/Edith Maude Eaton: A Literary Biography* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), p. 118.

¹² Yin, p. 60.

¹³ "Mrs. Spring Fragrance" was originally published in *Hampton's* 24 (January 1910): 137-41. "The Inferior Woman" was originally published in *Hampton's* 24 (May 1910): 727-31.

¹⁴ Yin, p. 65.

¹⁵ Both “The Americanizing of Pau Tsu” and “The Wisdom of the New” were originally published in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*.

¹⁶ White-Parks, p. 3.

¹⁷ Yin, p. 64.

¹⁸ Ling, p. 143.

¹⁹ It is quite possible that the character of Adah Charlton in “Wisdom” is a subtle social satire. The name Charlton appears earlier in the writings of Sui Sin Far. As Edith Eaton, the journalist, she wrote an inflamed article for the *Montreal Daily Star* calling for the fair treatment of the Chinese in Canada and America. In “A Plea for the Chinaman” she states that “the people who are persecuting them send one of themselves, nay a dozen of themselves, men who are just as prejudiced as their constituents, just as worked up over fancied wrongs and just as incapable of judging fairly. They are all, Mr. Maxwell, Mr. Charlton, Mr. Mcinness, Mr. Smith, etc., etc., equipped with a self-interest which is the strongest of weapons” (192). It is revealing that the character of Adah Charlton has the same surname as a man to whom Sui Sin Far took such offense. There is also a possible reference to another historical figure in association with Adah Charlton. When Miss Charlton advises Wou Sankwei to go spend time with his wife, “he felt himself exiled from Paradise, yet it did not occur to him to question, as a white man would have done, whether *the angel with the flaming sword* had authority for her action” (59). At the time Sui Sin Far was writing, there was a figure in San Francisco’s Chinatown who was quite famous for her work with young Chinese prostitutes. Frank Chin wrote of “Donaldina Cameron, celebrated in Christian Chinatown history as ‘*Chinatown’s avenging Angel*.’” According to Chin, the doors of her home for girls were open only to

prostitutes who served Chinese men. Chinese women who did business with white men were not welcome. The purpose of the home was to convert them and send them back to China to “spread the Gospel and discourage Chinese migration to America.” He also points out that “the bars on the windows of the Cameron House’s girls’ dormitories were not to keep Chinese men out, but to keep the Chinese women from escaping.” The association of these two “avenging angels” may suggest that the motives of those who choose to intervene in the lives of Chinese immigrants should not go unquestioned. Frank Chin, “Come All Ye Asian Writers of the Real and the Fake,” in *The Big Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Chinese American and Japanese American Literature*, ed. Jeffrey Paul Chan, Frank Chin, Lawson Fusao Inada, and Shawn Wong (New York: Meridian, 1991), p. 16.

²⁰ White-Parks, p. 223.

²¹ White-Parks, p. 223.

²² White-Parks, p. 224.

²³ James Doyle, “Sui Sin Far and Onoto Watanna: Two Early Chinese-Canadian Authors,” *Canadian Literature* 140 (Spring 1994): 56.

²⁴ White-Parks, p. 142.

²⁵ White-Parks, p. 3.

²⁶ Dana Nelson, *The World in Black and White: Reading “Race” in American Literature 1638-1867* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 109.

²⁷ “In the Land of the Free” was originally published in the *Independent* 67 (September 2, 1909), pp. 504-08.

²⁸The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 restricted all Chinese “except scholars, diplomats, merchants and their wives from entering the United States.” It also barred Chinese immigrants from American citizenship.

²⁹ “The Story of One White Woman Who Married a Chinese” was originally published under the title “A White Woman Who Married a Chinaman” in the *Independent* 68 (March 10, 1910): 518-23.

³⁰ “Her Chinese Husband” was originally published in the *Independent* 69 (August 18, 1910): 358-61.

³¹ “‘It’s Wavering Image’” was originally published in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*.

³² Edward Said, “Orientalism,” *The Georgia Review* 31 (1977): 185-86.

³³ Said, p. 199.

³⁴ Kim, p. 30.

³⁵ “Madame Butterfly” was originally a short story written by John Luther Long and published in *Century* 55 (January, 1898): 274-92. Long and Broadway playwright David Belasco made the story into a play, which was seen by composer Giacomo Puccini in London in 1900. Puccini developed the play into his very popular *Madama Butterfly*, which premiered in Milan in 1904 and in New York in 1907. The center of the tale is Cio-Cio San, a Japanese woman who renounces her friends, family, and religion to marry Pinkerton, an American, who in turn abandons her for an American wife. In the end Cio-Cio San commits suicide, leaving the child she had with Pinkerton to the American couple. After the popularity of “Madame Butterfly,” the trope of the submissive Asian entered the public consciousness. This figure has been used and subverted in many Asian- American texts in the twentieth century. Sui Sin Far’s sister, Winifred Eaton,

took on the pen name Onoto Watanna and wrote several novels set in Japan that addressed this theme. More recently, playwright David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly* won a Tony Award in 1988.

³⁶ The California antimiscegenation law "prohibited marriages between a white person and a 'negro, mulatto, or Mongolian.'" Ronald Takaki, *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1993), p. 205.

³⁷ "Pat and Pan" was originally published in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*.

CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION
AMERICAN NARRATIVES

The turn into the twentieth century was a pivotal era in American literature because of the new wave of writing on ethnicity that was appearing as part of the development of Realism. At this time, the tradition of African-American narrative, which had its roots in the abolitionist literature of the nineteenth century, was expanding to new artistic heights. The Native American voice was gaining power in the writings of the first generation to graduate from missionary and government boarding schools, and recent immigrants or children of first generation émigrés were depicting life in their burgeoning communities. The works of all these authors are only now beginning to be evaluated for their contributions to the literature of the nation. Most were writing within the dominant literary movement at the time, American Realism, and their texts broadened the scope of the tradition by adding new perspectives and delineating new themes. These works, written primarily (but not exclusively) by immigrants and people of color, expanded the range and style of American Literature.

Until very recently, most ethnic Realist texts were overlooked in the scholarship on American Literary Realism. However, many of the works that are recognized as the most important of the era, such as the *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885) by William Dean

Howells, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1896) by Stephen Crane, *Sister Carrie* (1900) by Theodore Dreiser, *The Ambassadors* (1903) by Henry James, and *The House of Mirth* (1905) by Edith Wharton (as well as other works by these authors), have much in common with ethnic Realist texts.¹ All deal with contemporary life, explore social dynamics, and consider how individual identity is affected by and constructed within society. Those who founded the study of literature from this era did not give much thought to immigrant writers or authors of color; however, they did construct very inclusive paradigms that would help facilitate the eventual reintroduction of writers such as Mary Antin, Zitkala-Sa, Sutton E. Griggs, and Sui Sin Far.

In fact, though the early surveyors of Realism, such as Fred Lewis Pattee, Vernon Louis Parrington, and Van Wyck Brooks, do not consider issues of ethnicity or writers who addressed these themes, they must be credited with the broad diversity they do cover in their books. In *History of American Literature Since 1870* (1915) and *The New American Literature: 1890-1930* (1930), Pattee examines a variety of themes and includes both male and female writers from all over the United States.² In *Main Currents in American Thought* (1930), Parrington covers a similar diversity of authors and regions as well as genres, as does Brooks in *The Confident Years 1885-1915* (1952).³ In these four wide-reaching studies, Antin is included in a list of “Fifty Noteworthy Biographies and Autobiographies”; Paul Laurence Dunbar is mentioned once and dismissed; Abraham Cahan is named in passing; and Charles W. Chesnutt, the most well known African-American writer of Realism, is briefly discussed in a chapter devoted to Eugene O’Neill. Part of the reason for their cursory treatment of writers of color and immigrants authors may have been lack of access. Griggs sold his novels mainly in the South; Zitkala-Sa did

not collect her essays and stories into a book until 1921; and Sui Sin Far's short story collection did not have a wide distribution. Antin's autobiography, however, was a bestseller, as was *Iola Leroy* (1891) by Francis E. W. Harper, and the works of Cahan and Chesnutt were promoted by those within the literary establishment, most notably by William Dean Howells.⁴

A better explanation for this early neglect of immigrant authors and writers of color is that the scholars failed to identify one important theme of the era, that of ethnicity. All three agree that the literature of the age was unified by its exploration of contemporary America. As Pattee observes in his 1915 evaluation, the writers of the age "wrote without models save as they took life itself as their model. Coarse and uncouth some of their work might be, but teeming it always was with the freshness, the vitality, and the vigor of a new soil and newly awakened nation."⁵ These scholars also recognized that attendance to social themes was paramount, as Parrington wrote: "In the last decades of the century the problem novel spread swiftly, expanding the field of its inquiry, and seeking to understand the new ways. Making its first essays in the familiar field of the political, it soon turned to consider the economic problems arising out of the new industrialism. . . . The class passions of the time found reflection in its pages, and in consequence the sociological novel became increasingly a repository of the social ideas of a perplexed and troubled generation."⁶ None of these evaluations necessarily excludes the consideration of writers of ethnicity, and in fact most works addressing this theme could easily fit within their definitions. Immigrant writers and writers of color represented the contemporary reality of their respective groups, and the social themes that they explored in their works had to do with the state of race relations in the nation.

Despite their apparent oversight, Pattee, Parrington, and Brooks defined the Realist Era in such expansive terms that they left room for the inclusion of these authors that they themselves did not consider.

In *The Ferment of Realism* (1965), Warner Berthoff defines the era from 1884-1919 as the age of Realism, and he merely mentions but does not discuss Chesnutt, Cahan, and Du Bois, the better-known writers of ethnicity.⁷ Though Berthoff does not specifically consider themes of race, he expands the types of writing that can be considered Realism: “Documentary chronicles of city life and exotic legends of the remote and strange, horrific melodramas and placid genre sketches, works of social criticism and works of psychological analysis, novels written all in dialogue and novels in which the characters are barely capable of consecutive speech, prophecies of a transformed future and haunted daydreams of a visionary past . . . all could be identified as works of realism.”⁸ This definition paves the way for the addition of writers of ethnic Realism who did not necessarily adhere strictly to the tenets of the movement as defined by its early advocates such as William Dean Howells. Donald Pizer, in *Realism and Naturalism in Nineteenth Century American Literature* (1984), focuses on the works of seven of the most important writers of the era and does not include any authors of color. However, he too leaves the door open for inclusion as he writes that Realism, “in its ethical idealism and in its exploration of richly diverse experience . . . achieved both its vitality and its promise of future growth.”⁹ Eric J. Sundquist in *American Realism: New Essays* (1982) argues, as had Berthoff, that there was room for any number of texts and themes in the realm of American Realism.¹⁰ Like Pizer’s work, however, the essays in

Sundquist's collection focus on a limited selection of authors and do not address themes of ethnicity and nationality.

The close examination of a handful of authors can lead to important revelations that cannot be revealed in sweeping analysis of the era, but there is a danger in coming to conclusions based on a non-comprehensive cross-section of writers. In *The Social Construction of American Realism* (1988), Amy Kaplan conducts a very enlightening examination of the social and material influences on the writings of Howells, Wharton, and Dreiser, but her conclusion, based on these three authors, that Realism is "a strategy for imagining the threats of social change—not just to assert dominant power but often to assuage fears of powerlessness" simply does not make sense when applied to the works of immigrants or people of color.¹¹ She sees Realists as "constructing a cohesive social world to contain the threat of social change," but the writers of ethnicity clearly sought to facilitate change through their narratives, not contain it.¹²

More recent books that include the ethnic perspective in the consideration of American Realism are *Facts on File Bibliography of American Fiction 1866-1918* (1993) edited by James Nagel and Gwen Nagel, *American Realism and the Canon* (1994), edited by Tom Quirk and Gary Scharnhorst, *The Cambridge Companion to American Realism and Naturalism* (1995), edited by Donald Pizer, and *The Portable American Realism Reader*, edited by James Nagel and Tom Quirk.¹³ For perhaps the first time in the scholarship of Realism, texts by black, Indian, Asian-American, and immigrant writers are examined at length, and racial issues are considered as key themes of the period. The Nagel and Nagel *Bibliography* gives publishing information for many writers of color and is the only book surveying the Realistic era to include Sutton E. Griggs. Similarly,

the *American Realism Reader* reflects the true diversity of the era as it contains stories by Chesnutt, Sui Sin Far, Zitkala-Sa, and other immigrant and ethnic writers alongside narratives by those more established within the tradition, such as Howells, Wharton, and Crane. In *American Realism and the Canon*, ethnicity is viewed as a critical subject of the age, as Quirk and Scharnhorst state, “the realist mode was flexible enough and of sufficient range, the realist era hospitable enough, that a multitude of women writers and minority writers produced and published texts that, albeit at times covertly, gave voice to the most urgent concerns of race, ethnicity, gender, class, section, and region.”¹⁴ Their definition of Realism, like Berthoff’s, opens up the movement in ways that lead to the consideration of how previously overlooked writers of the era might fit into the tradition. The diverse essays in *The Cambridge Companion* also broaden the study of the movement, and perhaps the article that best addresses the multiethnic aspects of the age is “Expanding the Canon of American Realism” by Elizabeth Ammons, who incorporates Sui Sin Far and Zitkala-Sa into her evaluation of the era.¹⁵

There have always been writers of ethnicity who were included, at least in passing, in the discussion of American Literary Realism, but now that themes of race and ethnicity are recognized as essential elements in the literature of social analysis, it is important to take a new look at Mary Antin, Sutton E. Griggs, Zitkala-Sa, and Sui Sin Far. Recent scholars, Elizabeth Ammons, chief among them, have been successful in bringing the latter two authors into the discussion of American Realism. Thanks to the work of researchers like Ammons, Annette White-Parks, Dexter Fisher, and Werner Sollors, the books of Sui Sin Far, Zitkala-Sa, and Mary Antin are all back into print, and portions of them are included in numerous anthologies for classroom use. Works by

other long-neglected writers of the period, such as Cahan, Harper, Alexander Posey, Pauline Hopkins, and Onoto Watanna, have been reprinted and are available for critical consideration. Some, such as Sutton E. Griggs, are out of print, which hinders the chances of their study and precludes a full understanding of the true diversity of the era and how these multiethnic writers expanded the themes and stylistics of Realism. Now that these authors are beginning to be recognized for their contributions to the era and to American Literature in general, their availability and critical evaluation are crucial.

On the social level, these writers gave a more balanced picture of their respective cultures in response to the racist, stereotypical, or romantic depictions of immigrants and people of color found in the popular literature and in the press. The turn into the twentieth century was an age of social protest and progressive writing, and these artists portrayed the particular concerns of their communities as they faced legislation or public opinion that threatened to limit their potential and possibilities. Multiethnic writers, in their explorations of identity, also broadened the definition of what it means to be American and suggested ways, such as assimilation, racial cohesion, or multiculturalism, in which their respective ethnic groups could be incorporated into American society. Others, like Zitkala-Sa, chose to express an ambivalence that served to register discontent with the nation itself.¹⁶ The ethnic Realists incorporated their inherited myths, traditions, and values into their writing, which added dynamic cultural dimensions as well as depth and significance to their texts, a trend that would continue in American works in the twentieth century. This generation of authors also explored subjects that would become important in the years to come: themes of exile, generational conflict, and the role of memory and the past in the creation of individual identity.

The authors' representations of ethnic-American identity were influenced by the ways that their respective groups were being incorporated into or excluded from the life of the nation. Both Zitkala-Sa and Mary Antin were deeply affected by the national project of assimilation in the late nineteenth century. Mary V. Dearborn's evaluation of this movement in relation to immigrants could also reflect the experience of Native Americans: "In the Americanization process, the immigrant was confronted with an ideal type of American behavior: a model of patriotism bound up with legends of the founding fathers, flag saluting, and celebrations of national holidays. By adopting a new language, new rituals, new heroes, new founding fathers, and thus metaphorical fathers, the immigrant was both to be adopted by and to possess America. These attributes were to replace the immigrants' old values much like a new suit of clothes."¹⁷ Considering that both Antin and Zitkala-Sa were introduced to mainstream American customs, values, and expectations in a similar manner, through elementary education that had as one of its major goals their acculturation, the drastic difference in the representations of their experiences may at first seem surprising. However, when their texts are considered in historical context it is clear why Antin came through this process to portray assimilation in glowing terms while Zitkala-Sa's works seem to be haunted by it. For Mary Antin, America offered something her old country had not: the possibility of acceptance. In Russia, Jews were the perennial outsiders, and their lives were limited by anti-Semitism and government policies. In her new country, schoolteachers presented America's founding fathers as her own and assured her that she was now a member of the nation. Therefore she expresses a sense of belonging and freedom that she had not felt in Russia. Paradoxically, the adult Antin became aware that there were groups in America that

considered new immigrants like her unassimilable. To demonstrate that it was possible to assimilate in one generation, as she does in her autobiography, Antin disproves the notion that Eastern European Jews were utterly alien. In fact, in the course of her narrative she demonstrates how much they have in common with earlier immigrants.

In Zitkala-Sa's texts, however, there are references to the much longer and more complicated relationship between Native Americans and the United States. While Antin accepts America's values and history as a gift, Zitkala-Sa is aware that America's values and history have resulted in tremendous loss for her people. Antin seems to view the chance to shed elements of her culture as an opportunity to grow and change, while Zitkala-Sa writes of the pain of having her traditional culture stripped from her. In short, for Antin it was a great achievement to assimilate; for Zitkala-Sa it was a heroic effort not to assimilate.

Sutton E. Griggs does not deal with the educational system in the same manner as Antin or Zitkala-Sa because he primarily writes about adult characters. But his texts do address the dilemma of the limited opportunities for African Americans who achieve a higher education. When the works of all four writers are viewed in relationship to each other, Griggs's novels reveal that there were marked differences between African-American reality and that of other ethnicities. By the end of the nineteenth century, though there were elements that could be described as distinctly constituting African-American culture, to a great degree black and white American culture were the same thing. Both had shared the same nation, the same religion, and the same language for centuries. In some sense, African Americans did not need to be assimilated in the same way that immigrants or Indians did because they were already a part of American society

and had been for generations. By the turn into the twentieth century, many black Americans had reached the heights of western culture, such as W. E. B. Du Bois, who enrolled in graduate studies at the University of Berlin and earned a Ph.D. from Harvard in the early 1890s. Nevertheless, at that time, and for decades to come, the majority of black citizens would remain segregated from white society through Jim Crow laws in the South and through housing restrictions and hiring practices in the North. The question of African-American education was taken up by the great social theorists of the day. Booker T. Washington publicly advocated industrial education for blacks, but Du Bois, in *The Souls of Black Folks*, argued that the stability of the nation would be threatened by the attempt to create a permanent laboring class and that, furthermore, the aspiration for higher learning already existed in the black community.¹⁸ Through the educated characters in his novels, Griggs reiterated Du Bois's philosophy that the race needed knowledgeable and cultured individuals to lead the fight for equality. But Griggs also portrayed the reality that social restrictions limited the opportunities for college-educated black men and women.

Zitkala-Sa was also concerned about the issue of vocational education, for she perceived that institutions like the Carlisle Indian School were more interested in training Native American children for domestic service than for college.¹⁹ There was little controversy, on the other hand, of what the status of the Chinese in America would be. The fact that they were denied citizenship underscored the assumption that they would remain a cheap and efficient labor pool; there seemed to be no expectation that they would become members of the nation. In 1916 Randolph Bourne questioned the relationship between the United States and the new immigrants, and his conclusion also

holds true when applied to the national attitude towards African Americans and Native Americans: “If freedom means a democratic cooperation in determining the ideals and purposes and industrial and social institutions of a country, then the immigrant has not been free.”²⁰ As most immigrants and people of color were prevented, through laws or through social prejudice, from full participation in determining the course of the nation, America was not standing by its ideals of liberty, democracy, and equality. As a prescient thinker, Zitkala-Sa may have been right to doubt the motives of Indian education, for as the educated classes of African Americans demonstrated, acculturation was no guarantee of social acceptance, economic security, or political power.

There may have been many in the United States who hoped that the Americanization of immigrants, blacks, and American Indians would lead to a society in which all enjoyed the same rights and privileges, but it was clear that some who believed in educating and elevating these groups did not necessarily desire their complete independence or equality. *Sui Sin Far* represents this patronizing attitude in the “Wisdom of the New” when Mrs. Dean cannot accept that her pupil, Wou Sankwei, chooses to live his life without her direction and intervention. Mrs. Dean’s attitude reflects the fact that in the Americanizing project immigrants and ethnic Americans were often viewed as children, and she also mirrors the surprise some felt when former students or wards of the nation would assert themselves against the status quo. For some reformers, the underlying goal of the educational system with regard to immigrant and Indian students was to produce a certain type of citizen, one who rises to be a competent worker, identifies as an American, but who does not seek voice or power. It may have been assumed that those who had been offered the American way would respond with nothing

but gratitude, as does Mary Antin. This explains why those at Carlisle Indian School were so offended with the writings of Zitkala-Sa; she had taken the education they gave her and used it as a weapon against the system they represented and believed in. This is an example of what makes multiethnic American writing such an exciting tradition. Once writers from underrepresented groups find their voice, their artistic productions often contain unconventional perspectives that serve to expand both the literature and the conception of the nation.

One issue related to the education system that all four writers address in their text is the shame attached to ethnicity because of attitudes expressed in society. Stereotypes in the media, segregation, anti-miscegenation laws, restriction acts, prejudicial hiring policies, and racial slurs all suggested to immigrants and people of color that they were somehow less than or inferior to established white Americans. However, what is compelling about Antin, Zitkala-Sa, Griggs, Sui Sin Far, and almost all the ethnic Realists is how they represent this shame in their texts. Most of their narratives depict negative or dismissive public attitudes, such as the orientalist remarks of Mark Carson in “‘It’s Wavering Image’” by Sui Sin Far or Zitkala-Sa’s representation of the gawking white visitors in “An Indian Teacher among Indians.” But even as these writers portray the presence of assumptions of ethnic inferiority, they counter these ingrained beliefs with exemplary characters of their race and assertions of the value of their own cultural traditions.

The Realists who wrote on racial issues demonstrated how artistic expression could serve a social purpose. J. Hillis Miller describes two possible functions of narratives: they “can propose models of selfhood or ways of behaving that are then

imitated in the real world,” and they are also “a relatively safe or innocuous place in which the reigning assumptions of a given culture can be criticized.”²¹ The works of Griggs, Sui Sin Far Antin, and Zitkala-Sa, fulfill these two basic roles as they focus on the relationship of immigrants and people of color to American society. Each of their texts includes scenes that demonstrate how white Americans should and should not treat their diverse neighbors, and they also contain rhetoric that indicts the nation for not having yet learned these lessons. There are differences, however, in how the authors chose to tell their stories. Though three of the four writers wrote short stories, the fact is that all four excelled in separate literary forms. Mary Antin is best known for her autobiography; Zitkala-Sa for her personal essays; Sui Sin Far for her stories; and Griggs for his novels. Though there are connections between these genres, there are also differences in the ways that they shape a story and reach an audience. Each of these forms also represents a separate tradition within the history of American literature.

Mary Antin wrote three good stories that were published in major literary magazines, but her most thoughtful and sustained work is *The Promised Land*. In an age of social criticism and journalistic exposé, autobiography may have been appealing because it seemed to reveal the unmediated truth. However, because some facts of Antin’s life are concealed and others altered, the narrative is not objective history but the artistic and often pragmatic reconstruction of it. In many ways, as is demonstrated by the production of the book itself, Mary Antin was not the typical Jewish immigrant, and yet through her description of life in the Pale of Russia and her experiences in America she gives her audience a picture of immigrant life. Through her story, she fulfills the “affirmative culture-making function of narrative” by writing Eastern European Jews into

American life and the “critical or subversive function” by addressing prejudices against the new immigrant. Antin’s book is also an important link to three critical movements in American autobiography. This genre in American letters had its beginnings with the Puritan spiritual autobiography in which the writers examined the details of life to understand God’s plan and to chart their own path to salvation. By the early days of the republic, literary emphasis had shifted from the personal and spiritual to the civic and rational. The quintessential American narrative of the secular rise to prominence of this era, and perhaps the most well known personal transformation story, is *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (1791).²² In the mid-nineteenth century the abolitionist movement supported a wave of personal narratives written by former slaves that described the oppression of blacks under the system of slavery. These stories often included the moral and intellectual growth the authors experienced after gaining their freedom. The best of these is *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845).²³ Antin, writing in the early twentieth century, seems to incorporate the dominant tropes of all these movements in her own autobiography. She is reborn in a secular sense as an American, but a secondary motif in the text is her move from the religion of her youth to an all-encompassing Transcendentalism that connects her to the universe as well as to an American spiritual tradition. Antin’s autobiography encompasses a Franklinesque belief in diligence and self-sufficiency that leads to her rise above her humble beginnings. As Frederick Douglass did before her, Antin ascribes her success to first gaining her physical freedom (in her case from the limiting world of the Pale) and then attaining literacy and an education that lead to her complete liberation.

The life experiences of people of color and of immigrants are often new stories in the history of the nation and so do not need the mediating artistry of fiction to create interest. Autobiography is an exceptional medium for exploring the implications of ethnicity, identity, and nationality in that these elements intersect in the life of the individual. As with Antin, the supposedly direct relation of the author's experience gives the texts a certain relevancy, to the extent that they are considered non-fiction and so somehow more "real" to life than fictional forms. Three important autobiographies that deal with issues of ethnicity are *Black Boy* (1945) by Richard Wright, *Down These Mean Streets* (1967) by Piri Thomas, and *The Woman Warrior* (1976) by Maxine Hong Kingston.²⁴ These texts represent just a few of the memoirs that have introduced new ways of considering identity and nation through the analysis of personal experience. Another important contribution by these writers is the spirit of innovation they often bring to the genre. *The Woman Warrior*, with its transformation of Chinese legends and meditation on family stories that may or may not be true, marked an important transition in autobiographical writing. Personal narratives that move beyond what is empirically "true" have been called "creative non-fiction memoir" by Judith Ortiz Cofer, who incorporates this form into her multi-genre works, such as *The Latin Deli* (1993).²⁵ As genres are blurred, writers also have incorporated personal experience into lyric and narrative poetry. One of the most striking examples is the twenty-five-part poem "Legends from Camp" (1993) by Lawson Fusao Inada in which he recounts his experiences in a Japanese-American internment camp as a young boy.²⁶ More unexpectedly, memoir has found its way into cultural and literary theory, most notably in *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* by Paula

Gunn Allen, which was first published in 1986, and *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) by Gloria Anzaldúa.²⁷

Allen and Anzaldúa creatively explore issues of ethnicity and identity through personal essays, much as Zitkala-Sa had in her autobiographical pieces written generations before. While shorter works, like the essays Zitkala-Sa published in the *Atlantic Monthly*, cannot achieve the depth of detail and analysis found in full-length personal narratives, they have another sort of immediacy when they are disseminated to a wide audience simultaneously through the magazine. In this medium the messages and experiences in the texts are conveyed all at once, which has its advantages in a fast-paced world. Personal non-fiction prose has developed into a strong sub-genre in American literature as writers of color continue to shed light on American realities through the meditation on their own, or their family's, experience. In a way, essays are an ephemeral form, as they are popular in journals and magazines but often do not gain wide distribution when they are collected into books. Fortunately, editors of many contemporary literary anthologies recognize the importance of autobiographies and so have included articles such as "If I Could Write This in Fire, I would Write This in Fire" by Michelle Cliff, "Like Mexicans" by Gary Soto, and "Kubota" by Garret Hongo.²⁸ As with poetry and short stories, the anthologizing of essays in texts designed for literary studies gives them a wider audience and increases the potential for their critical consideration.

As do personal essays, short stories have the intellectual immediacy that comes with their appearance in periodicals. The magazine boom at the turn into the twentieth century resulted in the publication of a great number of these by writers from all walks of

life, but the contemporary American short story had its roots in the sketches of Washington Irving almost a hundred years before and later in the tales of Nathaniel Hawthorne and Edgar Allen Poe. It was Poe, in fact, who first developed a theory of the “the short prose narrative,” which he saw as having “a certain unique or single *effect*” because it can deliver “the fullest satisfaction” with few details and can be read in one sitting.²⁹ The brevity and selective detail in a story of Chinese-American life by Sui Sin Far had the potential to give the early twentieth century reader a glimpse of the world and art of a little-understood group. The appearance of such stories in magazines that covered other areas of national interest may have served, in a small way, to legitimize the Chinese presence in the country. Though the short story often explores the same themes as the autobiographical essay, the author is more free to vary characters, settings, and details and, perhaps more importantly, to design the work around a definite plot. In the tradition of Realism, plot most often involves a moral dilemma, and in their stories that portrayed a variety of characters faced with ethical questions, the Realists who wrote about ethnicity demonstrated that ethical codes often do not change across cultures. The audience would find that, despite superficial differences, the characters in tales by immigrants and people of color were not unlike themselves.

Though individual stories have an immediate, concentrated effect, when gathered in a collection they create a textual world that is even more complex in its variation. Each of Sui Sin Far’s short works in magazines served to introduce the audience to a new perspective, but when she assembled many tales of Chinese-American life in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, the impact of all the stories in relation to each other gave the work as a whole a broader significance. Periodically in the twentieth century, short story collections have

appeared that have given American literature new points of view; among these are *Gorilla My Love* (1972) by Toni Cade Bambara and *Seventeen Syllables* (1988) by Hisaye Yamamoto.³⁰ Though great story collections have always had their place in American literature, at the end of the twentieth century short prose narrative would have its greatest vitality and success in the short-story cycle. This form, which incorporates independent stories into a unified narrative, is particularly adapted to exploring the complexities of ethnic-American life and of depicting the interconnectedness of human relationships as individual stories within a collection often focus on different members of a family or community.³¹ A few short story cycles have also been best sellers, including *Love Medicine* (1984) by Louise Erdrich and *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) by Amy Tan.³²

The most popular form of American literature is the novel, Sutton E. Griggs's genre of choice. Although the novel cannot achieve the temporal immediacy of the short story, by its mere length it has the ability to delineate plot, theme, and character in more depth, to "tell the whole story" so to speak. This narrative form allowed Griggs to explore a variety of scenarios and possibilities for his African-American characters and to reflect in depth on the condition of American society. According to Miller, "in a novel, alternative assumptions can be entertained or experimented with—not as in the real world, where such experimentations might have dangerous consequences, but in the imaginary world where, it is easy to assume, 'nothing really happens' because it happens only in the feigned world of fiction."³³ Some of the situations that Griggs depicts, such as armed revolt, underground conspiracies, or even interracial relationships could not be openly contemplated in public discourse outside of fiction at the time due to the racial climate that was literally threatening to African Americans. In a society that was limiting

the possibilities of black citizens, Griggs used the form to experiment, to plan, and to dream of a new future. Another element of the genre that enabled Griggs to populate his narratives with an astonishing variety of points of view is its inherent multiplicity. Mikhail Bakhtin defined the novel as “a diversity of social speech types . . . and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized.”³⁴ Griggs and other writers of color use this multivocal space to portray the variation within their communities. Some of the most important novels in the twentieth century, such as *Native Son* (1940) by Richard Wright, *Invisible Man* (1952) by Ralph Ellison, *House Made of Dawn* (1968) by N. Scott Momaday, and the novels by Nobel Prize winners Saul Bellow and Toni Morrison represent the complexities of ethnicity, identity, and nationality.³⁵

Like the host of writers who were to follow, Antin, Zitkala-Sa, Sui Sin Far Griggs, and the other ethnic Realists explored the use of genre to represent American experience and cultural identity. These authors, in fact, can be categorized as a group because of their concentration on these themes at their particular era in American literary history. In some ways, however, it is difficult to maintain a sense of simultaneity when thinking about this group of writers and their works. When considering the disparate realities of Chinese living on the West coast, immigrants on the East coast, American Indians on the Plains, and black Americans in the South, any connection may seem at best subjective. Indeed it may be fair to say that each of these groups, concerned as they were with their own struggles, did not see themselves in relation to the others, and this is evident in their texts. Nevertheless, when considered in conjunction with each other, the links between their works are apparent. All were in some way portraying the ability or inability of immigrants and people of color to clear a space of existence and acceptance

in American society. Because of demographics, the varying cultures represented by these authors did not have much contact, but before the bridge could be gapped between ethnicities, an attempt had to be made to eradicate the artificial societal barriers separating each ethnicity from their white neighbors. These groups experienced both social and physical division from mainstream American society as they congregated into ethnic enclaves in the cities, as the Jewish and Chinese immigrants did; were segregated by law, as were the African Americans in the South; or lived far from the centers of mainstream American life, as did most Native American Indians. An ideological space between white and ethnic Americans was created also by the perpetuation of demeaning or misleading stereotypes in the press. The insistence that people of color and immigrants were not just different but were inferior to the majority of Americans served to separate groups and individuals.

These spaces reinforced racial and social stratifications to an extent that they have been historically difficult to overcome. The lives and works of these four writers, however, demonstrate the possibility that these walls were high but not insurmountable. Mary Antin, for example, found her way out of the Jewish ghettos of Boston into the parlors of her educated and philanthropic white neighbors, but, she acknowledges in her autobiography, none of her relatives or neighbors were able to do the same. In her literary writing, Zitkala-Sa is adamant in her depiction of the incompatibility of white and Native American cultures, yet she herself was able to negotiate successfully for Indian rights in Washington, D.C, demonstrating that she found paths to communication in her own life. Perhaps the most profound portrayal of the social barriers that prevent interaction and understanding among people is found in the novels of Sutton E. Griggs.

No other group in America faced the type of Jim Crow society that blacks confronted in the South. The fact that legislation was enacted to prevent the social contact between whites and blacks clearly shows how ingrained racial prejudice against African Americans was at the time. Yet even while presenting these realities in fiction, Griggs has some white characters who choose a common humanity over racial separatism and includes friendships between the races in almost every novel. The most optimistic portrayal of the possibilities of race relations, however, can be found in Sui Sin Far's short stories. Her ability to imagine and depict a multicultural world may stem from the locality about which she wrote. Much of her fiction is set in the Pacific States, a region that had been immediately diversified fifty years before during the Gold Rush era. The coming together of different ethnicities in the territory was rife with conflict, but that does not diminish the fact that the area, and California in particular, has always been a multicultural site. White hegemony, though it has periodically asserted itself in the politics of the state, has always been somewhat tenuous. As ethnic communities developed in cities and in rural areas, there are few places that have been exclusively white, and the state as a whole was never a homogenous place. The fact that these writers represented regional, historical, and cultural differences between ethnicities living in the United States at the turn into the twentieth century enabled them to give different perspectives on some of the pressing concerns of the day, like exclusion and prejudice, that affected all ethnic groups in some way. When viewed together, the works of these writers more fully represent the literary landscape at the turn into the twentieth century.

In many ways the works of writers such as Antin, Zitkala-Sa, Griggs, and Sui Sin Far laid the groundwork for the literary and social writing on ethnicity and nationality

that was to follow. By 1903, W. E. B. Du Bois already saw that “the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line.”³⁶ The writings of this group represent the first generation to explore race relations at length, and so their narratives constitute an important dimension in what was shaping to be a national conversation that would last a century and more. Their perspectives at the turn into the twentieth century were precursors to what would be a sea change in racial theory. Whereas late nineteenth-century conjecture on ethnicity published by white writers were often based on the premise of a hierarchy of cultures, early twentieth-century theorists began to look at race relations another way.

In 1915, Horace M. Kallen, a Jewish American who had emigrated with his family from Prussia at the age of five, and who had earned a Ph.D. in Philosophy from Harvard, wrote “Democracy versus the Melting Pot,” which was published in the *Nation*. This essay marked a shift in the way that U.S. diversity was viewed. Kallen questioned whether the current paradigm of American identity, in which others conformed to the Anglo-Saxon ideal, could not be replaced by a more inclusive model: “What do we 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 will be dominant, perhaps, among others, but one among many, not the only one?”³⁷ Kallen suggested that instead of pressuring those within the U.S. to conform to an Anglo-Saxon, Protestant type, the nation should foster cultural differences as something in and of itself American. Kallen would go on to develop this idea and to coin its defining term, “cultural pluralism,” in *Culture and Democracy in the United States: Studies in the Group Psychology of the American People* in 1924.³⁸ “Democracy versus the Melting-

Pot,” however, stands as Kallen’s first national call to respect other cultures on their own terms, a courtesy that Realist writers of ethnicity portrayed as more or less lacking among their fellow Americans.

Randolphe Bourne was another intellectual of the era to reconsider the implications of a multiethnic country. His “Trans-National America” (1916) is even more emphatic in his insistence that the melting-pot ideal is biased against descendents of non-English cultures and that its premise is in fact detrimental to the nation. He states that the “failure of the melting-pot” is evident in the many immigrant communities that insist on preserving their cultures and, moreover, that the nation would grow stronger if it gave up the idea of assimilation all together.³⁹ One limitation of both these articles is that they only consider European cultures in their analysis of American diversity. Still the publication of these essays ushered in a new stage in cultural discourse in the United States, which makes the works of the ethnic Realists important pioneers of racial theory as they explored the implications of multiethnic experience without being privy to the modern thought and terminology that were to come.

The Realists who explored issues of ethnicity were working at a time when no contemporary racial theory actually reflected or considered their experience, so while they often addressed and refuted common misrepresentations and stereotypes in their works, they were free to create a world in their literature unencumbered by ideas of what ethnic-American texts should be, do, or say. For example, there could never be a more heartfelt or unselfconscious narrative of assimilation as *The Promised Land* after Kallen, Bourne, and others began to examine and criticize the idea of Americanization. As each generation added to the discussion on race and nation, perspectives on the multiethnic

tradition of American literature changed. In the late 1980s, the idea of cultural hybridity, though not new in itself, took on fresh intellectual energy with the publication of *Borderlands/La Frontera* by Gloria Anzaldua. In this book, Anzaldua delineates, through her own life, scholarship, and creativity, the ways that the intersections of culture can be discovered and embraced. “Hybridity” became an exciting and useful term in cultural studies as it enabled scholarship to move beyond binary thinking about white and other, or dominant and subaltern, when evaluating multiethnic texts. Ironically, the limitation of borderland theory is that it can be so broadly applied. All four writers, Antin, Zitkala-Sa, Griggs, and Sui Sin Far are and write about hybrid individuals. What is more compelling than the fact of their cultural intersections, however, is how they each represent this cross-cultural experience differently in their texts through the themes of acculturation, ambiguity, dual cultural affiliation, and cultural pluralism.

As the century progressed, these themes would recur with countless variations in the works of other American writers, but they would become more complicated after the Modern era because of the growing national discourse on race. Though their representation continued to be central in the narratives of twentieth-century American writers, a growing awareness of the social pressure that complicate each of these propositions becomes evident in texts after World War I. Just as the subject of assimilation became more complex, the idea of racial cohesion, which involved the depiction of unified cultures in the face of social exclusion, was questioned in times of international conflict, as when any signs of loyalty by Japanese Americans to Japan or its traditions were seen as a threat to national security during World War II. Because of the heightened consciousness of the systems of injustice that persisted in the United States,

ambivalence continued to be a major theme throughout the twentieth century. This same consciousness, and the segregatory nature of American society, made the possibility of a truly multicultural society seem problematic.

The themes of ethnicity, identity, and nationality are so prevalent in twentieth-century American literature that a thorough examination of the subject would have to cover literally thousands of texts. The subject of acculturation, for example, became increasingly more complex as it was examined in countless works. The same year that Antin published *The Promised Land*, a book by James Weldon Johnson came out that explored the racial milieu of the nation and the idea of giving up affiliation to one's culture to enter white society. The light-skinned narrator in *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912) in the end decides to pass as white and live in Europe, and though he creates a nice life for himself free of many of the conflicts he experienced living as an African American in the United States, he still "cannot repress the thought that, after all, I have chosen the lesser part, that I have sold my birthright for a mess of pottage."⁴⁰ Perhaps the best contemporary text to represent assimilation is the short-story cycle *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) by Amy Tan. Through her exploration of the relationship between four Chinese immigrant women and their American-born daughters, Tan portrays both the inevitability that the younger generation will identify as American and the dismay of the older generation who wanted to give their daughters "American circumstances and Chinese character."⁴¹

Ambivalence continued to be a strong motif in twentieth-century American Indian fiction, such as *Love Medicine* (1984) by Louise Erdrich and *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (1993) by Sherman Alexie, but it is also the dominant theme in some

of the most important texts of the century by writers of other ethnicities.⁴² In *Invisible Man* (1952) by Ralph Ellison, the protagonist travels from South to North, from college to industry to the Socialist movement, and finds that there are very few people in America, black or white, who have his best interest in mind. The main character Ichiro in *No-no Boy* (1957) by John Okada had grown up never questioning the fact that he was both Japanese and American, but the events affecting Japanese Americans during World War II leave him in profound doubt as to what his cultural and national affiliations could or should be.⁴³

The pull to racial cohesion found form in twentieth century texts that portrayed communities from the inside to show how they hold together and persist in their customs and character despite problems within the community and pressures that seep in from the society at large. Two good examples of texts of racial cohesion are *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) by Zora Neale Hurston and *Bless Me, Ultima* (1972) by Rudolfo Anaya.⁴⁴ In these novels, like those of Griggs, the authors portray internal divisions such as materialism, class, colorism, misogyny, and change that tend to rupture the solidarity of cultural communities. But the unifying factors of a shared history and folk culture override these divisive forces to provide a sense of continuity and connectedness. In Hurston's novel, the main character, Janie, comes into herself as a whole person only when she removes the barriers between herself and those in her community, divisions constructed by her Nanny and her ex-husbands. In *Bless Me, Ultima*, which can be read as a Chicano Bildungsroman, Antonio Maréz is able to come to a transcendental unity of life, despite familial and community conflict, through a natural and folk belief system that defies western influence.

The theme of multiculturalism reemerged in the late twentieth century, and, as with Sui Sin Far's book, found its fullest expression in collections of short stories. *Seventeen Syllables* (1985) by Hisaye Yamamoto is comprised of stories written throughout her career, and so, in addition to the Filipino, Chicano, and white characters who appear in her tales of Japanese-American life, there are a variety of historical perspectives as stories set before World War II exist along side those that portray Japanese internment camps, which are in turn juxtaposed with sketches of late twentieth-century life. A more recent example of a multicultural short story collection is *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) by Jhumpa Lahiri.⁴⁵ The pluralism achieved in this book comes from the way the stories range from India to America and portray both South Asian and Indian-American characters of different generations and classes. One novelist who represents the surprising ways that Americans of different ethnicities come together is Gish Jen. Her unpredictable and humorous works, such as *Mona in the Promised Land* (1997), are often centered on a Chinese-American character who is not so concerned with her ancestral past but with making her way through America's diverse present.⁴⁶

These, of course, are only a few examples of how the themes of assimilation, ambiguity, racial unity, and diversity have been depicted in the works of American writers over the past several generations. In many late twentieth-century texts, as in the novels of Toni Morrison, several of these themes are explored within the same narrative. *The Bluest Eye* (1970), for example, examines the desire for assimilation experienced by many African Americans, the ambivalence of the young narrator who craves a society that would acknowledge black beauty, and the folk culture that holds African Americans together despite these destructive forces.⁴⁷ Morrison also explores the complexities of

several themes in what may be her best work, *Song of Solomon* (1977).⁴⁸ As the assimilated character Milkman, who initially has no interest in his culture or history, travels south through the nation and back in time through the memory of others and through myth and mystery, he moves through ambiguity to a racial consciousness that connects black Americans to Africa.

Issues of race, identity, and nationality are also found in works by authors who do not write out of a specific ethnic identity but whose texts, nevertheless, are involved with the question of what constitutes Americanness in light of class differences and regional diversity. In several texts written during the Realist era, the heritage of the characters are important elements of the narrative. In the muckraking novel *The Jungle* (1906) by Upton Sinclair, for example, it is significant that the family is from Lithuania. Their status as immigrants reinforces the powerlessness they experience in the stockyard neighborhoods of Chicago.⁴⁹ A keen understanding of and appreciation for multiculturalism is apparent in the novels of Willa Cather. In *My Ántonia* (1918), the seemingly harsh and empty landscape of Nebraska is home to the Russians, Pavel and Peter, the Bohemian Shimerda family, and the diverse group of immigrant girls who become friends as they work as servants in the town where they shine in comparison to the well-bred white girls with whom the narrator goes to school.⁵⁰ Ántonia, the poor but solid immigrant figure on the Nebraska plains, transcends her own simple story to become emblematic of the nation's identity. In *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927), Cather depicts the diversity of the Southwest at a transitional moment in history, and through the Indian presence in the text, she expands her interpretation of the nation to encompass an even more diverse, ancient, and spiritually infused past.⁵¹

Modern writers after World War I began to express their ambivalence in light of recent catastrophic events, and part of this ambiguity was revealed in texts that questioned American identity. Through the character of Daisy in *The Great Gatsby* (1925), F. Scott Fitzgerald portrays the potential emptiness of the type (wealthy, white, socially established) that was held to be the ideal by so many for so long. For this figure, exclusion of those outside her class has become a way of life, and materialism has become the dominant trait of the American personality. Ernest Hemingway, like Henry James before him, explores the theme of national identity by depicting characters in European settings, as in *The Sun Also Rises* (1926). Through recent scholarship, it has become clear that many writers, in their themes of American character, are really writing about white identity, though race had been concealed by the very universality of whiteness until it was recognized and examined in the late twentieth century. As Toni Morrison notes, the “racial ‘unconsciousness’ of race” in many works reveals a great deal about the experience of whites in America.⁵²

Another American literary tradition that continuously expresses an acute awareness of racial complexities comes out of the South. Writers from this region, including William Faulkner, Flannery O’Connor, and Alice Walker, represent the conflict as well as the deep interconnectedness between white and black citizens in the Southern states. Faulkner explores the loathing and longing associated with race relations in such books as *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Go Down, Moses*.⁵³ Flannery O’Connor represents the ways in which white Southerners are influenced and changed when they are forced to consider African Americans in the context of their lives. Two excellent stories that depict this type of psychological confrontation are “The Artificial Nigger” (1955) and

“Revelation” (1965).⁵⁴ Alice Walker, on the other hand, is one of a long line of writers, which includes Sutton E. Griggs, to depict race relations in the region from an African-American perspective. Through her best-selling novel *The Color Purple* (1982), she was able to introduce to a wide audience the manner in which the history of repression resonated throughout black Southern life.⁵⁵

One postmodernist author whose works are primarily written from a white perspective but who recognizes that the reality of the United States has always been diverse is Thomas Pynchon. Two of his novels that travel through the cultures and subcultures of California are *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966) and *Vineland* (1990).⁵⁶ *Mason and Dixon* (1997), set in the eighteenth-century, multiplies the notion of diversity not only through the inclusion of peoples of color but by also depicting the variety of those of European descent who populated the frontier. In the works of all these authors who explore ethnicity from a white perspective, characters find depth and meaning in cultures other than their own, traditions available to them because they live in pluralistic America.

These are only a small sampling of writers who take up the themes of race and nationality, of ambivalence and multiculturalism, in their art. In fact, the exploration of ethnic identity can be seen as a particularly American subject, one that is central to the national literature in the twentieth century. These themes are compelling because, like all good literary subjects, they speak to the human condition; they reflect the paradoxical human longings for independence and belonging, for both freedom and a sense of connectedness. As many authors demonstrate, one need not be a member of a historically oppressed group to be at odds with the values of the nation, and white Americans are an important part of the nation’s diversity. The United States can claim to be the first

national literature to explore the multiple sites of personal identification, as it has had to grapple from its inception with the reality of its multiethnic populace. In some ways it is the mere fact of difference that connects the nation at some level because, according to Mary V. Dearborn, “as Americans we partake of a national identity, a communally determined and accepted sense of self; at the same time, as Americans and ethnics all, we define ourselves ancestrally.”⁵⁷ It is the American divide between ethnicity and nationality that creates limitless space in terms of literary material.

As a society the United States has always been drawn to this space, and the interest in these issues has not abated since the Realist era, though the discourse has shifted several times in the last hundred years. Issues of ethnicity, identity, and nationality continue to be at the heart of a great deal of American literary production just as race matters continue to be the subject of debate and fascination in the news and entertainment media. Race does matter. Despite the advance of civil rights and the desire of some for the elimination of the consciousness of racial difference, that is, for a “colorblind society,” the fact is that cultural differences still matter in the lives of individuals and in the life of the nation as well. Race matters in the negative sense in that forms of personal and institutional discrimination continue to be revealed despite the progress towards equality that was achieved in the second half of the twentieth century. But race also matters in another, more positive way. An individual’s ethnic roots and cultural affiliations are significant, important, and should not be devalued. It is just such complexity, which parallels America’s paradoxical history of freedoms and repressions, that keeps the themes of ethnicity and identity compelling and new generation after generation.

In the simplest terms, ethnic Realist works represent the fact that America means different things to different people. Antin portrays it as almost a religion in which immigrants, like converts, can transcend their past and make a new life for themselves. Griggs, similarly, observes that the nation has its own moral codes of inclusion and justice. Within these principles, in his narratives, lies the hope of salvation if the United States can move beyond not its inherent differences but its prejudice of difference. Antin portrays that hope in the possibilities of assimilation, while Griggs, aware of the racism that prevents blacks from being incorporated into America society, depicts the power of racial cohesion. Zitkala-Sa, on the other hand, expresses suspicion of a nation that has not dealt fairly with her people and so her narratives waver between a traditional and national affiliation with a marked ambivalence. Sui Sin Far, who described herself as a bridge in her own autobiographical writing, creates connections, or at least the potential for them, in all of her stories. Those characters who take advantage of opportunities for mutual understanding demonstrate the possibility for growth and enlightenment inherent in a multicultural world. Eric J. Sunquist has said that coming to terms with the literary heritage of the United States “implies the necessity of living with the paradox that ‘American’ literature is both a single tradition of many parts *and* a series of winding, sometimes parallel traditions that have perforce been built in good part from their inherent conflicts.”⁵⁸ Mary Antin, Zitkala-Sa, Sutton E. Griggs, and Sui Sin Far represent a group whose writings coincided to produce an important tradition in American letters, a tradition that, in part, was based on their ability to make art out of conflict. The Realists who wrote on ethnic issues, as a generation of writers, are emblematic of a national literature that in many ways can be defined by its diversity. To comprehend this often

overlooked group and to recognize how the themes of ethnic identity and nationality were developed in their texts is really to come to a fuller understanding of the history of American literature.

Notes

¹ William Dean Howells, *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (Boston: Ticknor, 1885). Stephen Crane, *Maggie: Girl of the Streets* (New York: Appleton, 1896). Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie* (New York: Doubleday, Page, 1900). Henry James, *The Ambassadors* (New York: Harper, 1903). Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth* (New York: Scribners, 1905).

² Fred Lewis Pattee, *A History of American Literature Since 1870* (New York: The Century Co., 1915) and *The New American Literature 1890-1930* (New York: The Century Co., 1930).

³ Vernon Lewis Parrington, *The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America, 1860-1920*, vol. 3 of *Main Currents in American Thought* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1930). Van Wyck Brooks, *The Confident Years: 1885-1915* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1952).

⁴ Francis E. W. Harper, *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted* (Philadelphia: Garrigues Brothers, 1892).

⁵ Pattee, *History*, p. 18.

⁶ Parrington, p. 168.

⁷ Warner Berthoff, *The Ferment of Realism: American Literature, 1884-1919* (New York: The Free Press, 1965).

⁸ Berthoff, p. 3.

⁹ Donald Pizer, *Realism and Naturalism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, rev. ed. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), p. 8.

¹⁰ Eric J. Sundquist, *American Realism: New Essays* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1982).

¹¹ Amy Kaplan, *The Social Construction of American Realism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 10.

¹² Kaplan, p. 12.

¹³ James Nagel and Gwen L. Nagel, ed., *Fact in File: Bibliography of American Fiction 1866-1918* (New York: Manly, Inc. and Facts on File, Inc., 1993). Tom Quirk and Gary Scharnhorst, ed., *American Realism and the Canon* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1994). Donald Pizer, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to American Realism and Naturalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). James Nagel and Tom Quirk ed., *The Portable American Realism Reader* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997).

¹⁴ Quirk and Scharnhorst, p. 19.

¹⁵ Elizabeth Ammons, "Expanding the Canon of American Realism" in *The Cambridge Companion to American Realism and Naturalism*, ed. Donald Pizer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 95-114.

¹⁶ These four themes are the dominant modes of representing ethnic-American experience and identity in turn-into-the-twentieth-century literature, but there were texts published in the United States at the time that did not incorporate these themes. Some immigrant authors created narratives that were not set in America at all. For example, *Los de Abajo* (*Those from Below*), a novel by Mariano Azuela about La Revolución that was going on in his native Mexico, was written and published in the United States in 1915. After its publication, Azuela returned to Mexico where, by the time of his death,

he was considered one of the greatest men of Mexican letters. Lamed Shapiro, a Jewish immigrant who migrated to America as an adult, wrote a series of Yiddish narratives in the early twentieth century that describe pogroms in Eastern Europe, which include *Der kush* (*The Kiss*, 1907) and *In der toyter shtet* (*In The Dead Town*, 1910). Though he became a permanent resident of the United States, he did not take American life as the subject for his fiction. There were also some works by ethnic-American writers that primarily involve white characters, as does *The Uncalled* (1898) by Paul Laurence Dunbar. At least one writer, Onoto Watanna (Winnifred Eaton), created texts in which the main characters were of a different ethnicity from her own. In this case, the author, who was of Chinese and English descent, wrote many popular novels that were set in Japan and featured Japanese women as protagonists. Her first was *Miss Numè of Japan*, which was published in 1899. Mariano Azuela, *Los de abajo* (El Paso: El Paso del Norte, 1915). Paul Laurence Dunbar, *The Uncalled* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1898). Onoto Watanna, *Miss Numè of Japan* (New York: Rand, McNally & Co., 1899).

¹⁷ Mary V. Dearborn, *Pocahontas's Daughters: Gender and Ethnicity in American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 86.

¹⁸ In "Of the Training of Black Men" Du Bois states, "this is certain, no secure civilization can be built in the South with the Negro as an ignorant, turbulent proletariat. Suppose we seek to remedy this by making them laborers and nothing more: they are not fools, they have tasted the Tree of Life, and they will not cease to think, will not cease attempting to read the riddle of the world" (p. 64). W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1994), pp. 55-67. Originally published in Chicago by A. C. McClurg in 1903.

¹⁹ A discussion of Zitkala-Sa's reaction to the school's servant placement program can be found in Susan Bernadin, "The Lessons of a Sentimental Education: Zitkala-Sa's Autobiographical Narratives," *Western American Literature* 32, No. 3 (1997): 212-38.

²⁰ Randolph Bourne, "Trans-National America," *The Atlantic Monthly* 118 (1916): 90.

²¹ J. Hillis Miller, "Narrative," in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, second edition, ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 69.

²² Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin: A Genetic Text*, ed. J. A. Leo Lemay and P. M. Zall (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1981).

²³ Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (Boston: Anti-Slavery Office, 1845).

²⁴ Richard Wright, *Black Boy* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1945). Piri Thomas, *Down These Mean Streets* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1967). Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1976).

²⁵ Judith Ortiz Cofer, *The Latin Deli: Prose and Poetry* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1993).

²⁶ Lawson Fusao Inada, *Legends from Camp: Poems* (San Francisco: Coffee House Press, 1993).

²⁷ Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991). Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Book Company, 1987).

²⁸ Michelle Cliff, "If I Could Write This in Fire, I Would Write This in Fire," in *The Graywolf Annual Five: Multi-Cultural Literacy*, ed. Rick Simonson and Scott Walker (Saint Paul: Graywolf Press, 1988), pp. 63-81. Originally published in Michelle Cliff, *Good Woman: Poems and a Memoir 1969-1980* (Brockport: BOA Editions, Ltd., 1987). Gary Soto, "Like Mexicans," in *New Worlds of Literature: Writings from America's Many Cultures*, ed. Jerome Beaty and J. Paul Hunter (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989), pp. 695-99. Originally published in Gary Soto, *Small Faces* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1986). Garrett Hongo, "Kubota," in *American Mosaic: Multicultural Readings in Context*, ed. Barbara Roche Rico and Sandra Mano (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001), pp. 529-37. Originally published in Garret Hongo, *Volcano: A Memoir of Hawaii* (New York: Vintage, 1995).

²⁹ Edgar Allan Poe, Review of *Twice-Told Tales* by Nathaniel Hawthorne, in *The Complete Works of Edgar Allen Poe*, ed. James A. Harrison (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1902), p. 108. Originally published in *Graham's Magazine* 20 (May, 1842): 298-300.

³⁰ Toni Cade Bambara, *Gorilla, My Love* (New York: Random House, 1972). Hisaye Yamamoto, *Seventeen Syllables and Other Stories* (Latham: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1988).

³¹ For a comprehensive discussion of this genre, see James Nagel, *The Contemporary American Short-Story Cycle* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001).

³² Louise Erdrich, *Love Medicine* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1984). Amy Tan, *The Joy Luck Club* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1989).

³³ Miller, p. 69.

³⁴ Mikhail Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist and trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 262.

³⁵ Richard Wright, *Native Son* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1940). Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Random House, 1952). N. Scott Momaday, *House Made of Dawn* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968).

³⁶ Du Bois, p. 9.

³⁷ Horace M. Kallen, "Democracy versus the Melting Pot" in *Jewish American Literature*, ed. Jules Chametzky, John Felstiner, Hilene Flanzbaum, and Kathryn Hellerstein (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), p. 214. Originally published as "Democracy versus the Melting Pot: A Study of American Nationality" in *The Nation* 100 (February 18, 1915):190-94 and (February 25, 1915): 217-20.

³⁸ Horace M. Kallen, *Culture and Democracy in the United States: Studies in the Group Psychology of the American People* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1924).

³⁹ Bourne, p. 84.

⁴⁰ James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1927), p. 211. Originally published anonymously as *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* in Boston by Sherman, French and Company in 1912.

⁴¹ Amy Tan, p. 289.

⁴² Sherman Alexie, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (New York: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1993).

⁴³ John Okada, *No-no Boy* (Rutherford: Charles E. Tuttle, 1957).

⁴⁴ Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1937). Rudolfo Anaya, *Bless Me, Ultima* (Berkeley: TQS Publications, 1972).

⁴⁵ Jhumpa Lahiri, *Interpreter of Maladies* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999).

⁴⁶ Gish Jen, *Mona in the Promised Land* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1996).

⁴⁷ Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1970).

⁴⁸ Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon* (New York: Knopf, 1977).

⁴⁹ Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle* (New York, Doubleday, Page, 1906).

⁵⁰ Willa Cather, *My Ántonia* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1918).

⁵¹ Willa Cather, *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1927).

⁵² Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), p. xii.

⁵³ William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (New York: Random House, 1936) and *Go Down, Moses and Other Stories* (New York: Random House, 1942).

⁵⁴ Flannery O'Connor, "The Artificial Nigger," in *A Good Man is Hard to Find* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1955), pp. 98-126; "Revelation," in *Everything that Rises Must Converge* (New York: Noonday Press, 1965), pp. 91-218.

⁵⁵ Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982).

⁵⁶ Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1966), *Vineland* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1990), and *Mason and Dixon* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1997).

⁵⁷ Dearborn, p. 3.

⁵⁸ Eric J. Sunquist, *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1993), p. 18.

APPENDIX

SELECTED LIST OF REALIST TEXTS THAT ADDRESS ISSUES OF ETHNICITY (1890-1918)

- Antin, Mary. *From Plotz to Boston*. Boston: W. B. Clarke, 1899.
- . "Malinke's Atonement." *Atlantic Monthly* 108 (1911): 300-19.
- . *The Promised Land*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1912.
- . "The Amulet." *Atlantic Monthly* 111 (1913): 31-41.
- . "The Lie." *Atlantic Monthly* 112 (1913): 177-90.
- Boyesen, Hjalmar Hjorth. *Vagabond Tales*. Boston: Lothrop, 1889.
- Cahan, Abraham. *Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto*. New York: D. Appleton, 1896.
- . *The Imported Bridegroom and Other Stories*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1898.
- . *The Rise of David Levinsky*. New York: Harper, 1917.
- Callahan, S. Alice. *Wynema: A Child of the Forest*. Chicago: H. J. Smith, 1891.
- Cather, Willa. *My Ántonia*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1918.
- . *O Pioneers!* Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1913.
- Chesnutt, Charles W. *The Conjure Woman*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1899.
- . *The Wife of His Youth and Other Stories of the Color Line*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1899.
- . *The House Behind the Cedars*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1900.

- . *The Marrow of Tradition*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1901.
- . *The Colonel's Dream*. New York: Doubleday, Page, 1905.
- Cotter, Joseph. *Negro Tales*. New York: The Cosmopolitan Press, 1912.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. *The Quest of the Silver Fleece*. Chicago: A. C. Mclurg, 1911.
- . *The Souls of Black Folk*. Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1903.
- Dunbar, Paul Laurence. *The Sport of the Gods*. New York: Dodd, Mead, 1902.
- Dunbar-Nelson, Alice. *The Goodness of St. Rocque and Other Stories*. New York: Dodd, Mead, 1899.
- Dunne, Finley Peter. *Mr. Dooley in Peace and War*. Boston: Small, Maynard, 1898.
- . *Mr. Dooley in the Hearts of His Countrymen*. Boston: Small, Maynard, 1899.
- . *Mr. Dooley's Philosophy*. New York: Russell, 1900.
- . *Mr. Dooley's Opinions*. New York: Russell, 1901.
- . *Observations by Mr. Dooley*. New York: Russell, 1902.
- . *Dissertations by Mr. Dooley*. New York: Harper, 1906.
- . *Mr. Dooley Says*. New York: Scribners, 1910.
- Earle, Victoria. "Eugenie's Mistake: A Story." *A.M.E. Church Review*, 8 (1892): 262, 267.
- . "Aunt Lindy (A Story Founded on Real Life)." *A.M.E. Church Review*, 5 (1889): 246-50.
- Eastman, Charles A [Ohiyesa]. *From Deep Woods to Civilization: Chapters in the Autobiography of an Indian*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1916.
- Gillman, Nathaniel I. *Circumstantial Affection: A Realistic Romance of the New York Ghetto*. New York: F. T. Neely, 1900.

Griggs, Sutton E. *Imperium in Imperio*. Cincinnati: Editor Publishing Co., 1899.

———. *Overshadowed*. Nashville: Orion, 1901.

———. *Unfettered*. Nashville: Orion, 1902.

———. *The Hindered Hand; or, The Reign of the Repressionist*. Nashville: Orion, 1905.

———. *Pointing the Way*. Nashville: Orion, 1908.

Harper, Francis E. W. *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted*. Philadelphia: Garrigues Brothers, 1892.

Hopkins, Pauline E. *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South*. Boston: The Colored Co-operative Publishing Co., 1900).

———. [Sarah A. Allen]. "Hagar's Daughter, A Story of Southern Caste Prejudice." *Colored American Magazine*, 2 (1901): 337-52, 431-45; 3 (1901): 24-34, 117-28, 185-95, 262-72, 343-53, 425-35; 4 (1901): 23-33, 113-24; 4 (1902): 188-200, 281-91.

———. "Winona, A Tale of Negro Life in the South and Southwest." *Colored American Magazine*, 5 (1902): 29-41, 97-110, 177-87, 257-68, 348-58, 422-31.

———. [Sarah A. Allen]. "The Test of Manhood: A Christmas Story." *Colored American Magazine* 6 (1902): 113-19.

———. "Talma Gordon." *Colored American Magazine* 6 (1902): 271-90.

———. "Of One Blood: or, The Hidden Self." *Colored American Magazine* 6 (1902): 29-40, 102-13, 191-200, 264-72, 339-48, 423-32, 492-501, 580-86, 643-47, 726-31, 802-07.

Johnson, James Weldon. *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*. Boston: Sherman, French, 1912.

Jones, J. McHenry. *Hearts of Gold*. Wheeling: Daily Intelligencer Steam Job Press, 1896.

Kelly, Myra. *Little Citizens: The Humours of School Life*. New York: McClure, Phillips, 1904.

———. *Wards of Liberty*. New York: McClure, 1907.

———. *Little Aliens*. New York: Scribners, 1910.

McClellan, George Marion. *Old Greenbottom Inn and Other Stories*. Louisville: George M. McClellan, 1906.

McIntyre, John Thomas. *The Ragged Edge: A Tale of Ward Life and Politics*. New York: McClure, Phillips, 1902.

Micheaux, Oscar. *The Conquest*. Lincoln: The Woodruff Press, 1913.

———. *The Forged Note*. Lincoln: Western Book Supply Company, 1915.

———. *The Homesteader*. Sioux City: The Western Book Supply Company, 1917.

Oskison, John M. "Only the Master Shall Praise." *Century Magazine*, 59 (January 1900): 327-35.

———. "When the Grass Grew Long." *Century Magazine*, 62 (June 1901): 247-50.

———. "'The Quality of Mercy': A Story of the Indian Territory." *Century Magazine*, 68 (June 1904): 178-81

———. "The Problem of Old Harjo." *The Southern Workman* 36 (1907): 235-41.

Posey, Alexander. "Fus Fixico Letters." Articles appeared between 1902-1908 in *The Indian Journal*, published in Eufaula, Indian Territory.

- Riis, Jacob. *Out of Mulberry Street: Stories of Tenement Life in New York*. New York: Century, 1897.
- Sanda [W. H. Stowers and W. H. Anderson]. *Appointed: An American Novel*. Detroit: Detroit Law Printing, 1894.
- Shackelford, Otis M. *Lillian Simmons, or The Conflict of Sections*. Kansas City: Burton Publishing Company, 1915.
- Sinclair, Upton. *The Jungle*. New York, Doubleday, Page, 1906.
- Sui Sin Far. "Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian." *Independent* 66 (1909): 125-32.
- . *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*. Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1912.
- Walker, Thomas H. B. *Bebbly, or the Victorious Preacher*. Jacksonville: Pepper, 1910.
- Washington, Booker T. *Up From Slavery*. Garden City: Doubleday, 1901.
- Wing, Yung. *My Life in China and America*. New York: Henry Holt, 1909.
- Zitkala-Sa. "Impressions of an Indian Childhood." *Atlantic Monthly* 85 (1900): 37-47.
- . "The School days of an Indian Girl." *Atlantic Monthly* 85 (1900): 185-94.
- . "An Indian Teacher among Indians." *Atlantic Monthly* 85 (1900): 381-86.
- . "The Soft-Hearted Sioux." *Harper's Monthly Magazine* 102 (1901): 505-08.
- . "The Trial Path." *Harper's Monthly Magazine* 103 (1901): 741-44.
- . "A Warrior's Daughter." *Everybody's Magazine* 4 (1902): 346-52.

LIST OF WORKS CITED

- Adams, David Wallace. *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience 1875-1928*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995.
- Alexie, Sherman. *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. New York: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1993.
- Allen, Paula Gunn. *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1991.
- Altschuler, Glenn C. *Race, Ethnicity, and Class in American Social Thought, 1865-1919*. Wheeling: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1982.
- Ammons, Elizabeth. *Conflicting Stories: American Women Writers at the Turn into the Twentieth Century*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- . "Expanding the Canon of American Realism." *The Cambridge Companion to American Realism and Naturalism*, ed. Donald Pizer. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- . "Men of Color, Women, and Uppity Art at Turn of the Century." *American Realism and the Canon*, ed. Tom Quirk and Gary Scharnhorst. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1994, pp. 22-33.
- Ammons, Elizabeth and Annette White-Parks, eds. *Tricksterism in Turn-of-the-Century American Literature: A Multicultural Perspective*. Hanover: University Press of New England, 1994.
- Anaya, Rudolfo. *Bless Me, Ultima*. Berkeley: TQS Publications, 1972.

- Antin, Mary. *From Plotzk to Boston*. New York: Markus Weiner Publishing, 1986.
- . *From Plotzk to Boston*. New York: W. B. Clark, 1899.
- . “The Lie.” *Atlantic Monthly* 112 (1913): 177-90.
- . *The Promised Land*. New York: Penguin Books, 1997.
- . *The Promised Land*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1912.
- . *Selected Letters of Mary Antin*. Ed. Evelyn Salz. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000.
- . *They Who Knock at Our Gate: A Complete Gospel of Immigration*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1914.
- Anzaldua, Gloria. *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Book Company, 1987.
- Azuela, Mariano. *Los de abajo*. El Paso: El Paso del Norte, 1915.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*. Ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.
- Bambara, Toni Cade. *Gorilla, My Love*. New York: Random House, 1972.
- Bernadin, Susan. “The Lessons of a Sentimental Education: Zitkala-Sa’s Autobiographical Narratives.” *Western American Literature* 32, No. 3 (1997): 212-38.
- Berthoff, Warner. *The Ferment of Realism: American Literature, 1884-1919*. New York: The Free Press, 1965.
- Beulens, Gert. “The New Man and the Mediator: (Non-) Remembrance in Jewish-

- American Immigrant Narrative.” *Memory, Narrative, and Identity: New Essays in Ethnic American Literature*, ed. Amiritjit Singh, Joseph T. Skerrett, Jr., and Robert E. Hogan. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1994, pp. 89-113.
- Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Bone, Robert A. *The Negro Novel in America*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958.
- Bourne, Randolph. “Trans-National America.” *The Atlantic Monthly* 118 (1916): 86-97.
- Brooks, Van Wyck. *The Confident Years: 1885-1915*. New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1952.
- Brown, William Wells. *Clotel; or, The President’s Daughter: A Narrative of Slave Life in the United States*. London: Partridge and Oakey, 1853.
- Bruce, Dickson D. Jr. *Black American Writing from the Nadir: The Evolution of a Literary Tradition, 1877-1915*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989.
- Callahan, S. Alice. *Wynema: A Child of the Forest*. Chicago: H. J. Smith, 1891.
- Cather, Willa. *Death Comes for the Archbishop*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1927.
- . *My Ántonia*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1918.
- Chametzky, Jules, John Felstiner, Hilene Flanzbaum, and Kathryn Hellerstien, eds. *Jewish American Literature*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc, 2001.
- Chesnutt, Charles W. *The House Behind the Cedars*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1900.
- Chin, Frank. “Come All Ye Asian Writers of the Real and the Fake.” *The Big Aiiieeeee!*

- An Anthology of Chinese American and Japanese American Literature*, ed. Jeffrey Paul Chan, Frank Chin, Lawson Fusao Inada, and Shawn Wong. New York: Meridian, 1991, pp. 1-92.
- Cliff, Michelle. *Good Woman: Poems and a Memoir 1969-1980*. Brockport: BOA Editions, Ltd., 1987.
- . “If I Could Write This in Fire, I Would Write This in Fire.” *The Graywolf Annual Five: Multi-Cultural Literacy*, ed. Rick Simonson and Scott Walker. Saint Paul: Graywolf Press, 1988, pp. 63-81.
- Cofer, Judith Ortiz. *The Latin Deli: Prose and Poetry*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1993.
- Cohen, Sarah Blacher. “Mary Antin’s *The Promised Land*: A Breach of Promise.” *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 3 (1977): 28-35.
- Crane, Stephen. *Maggie: Girl of the Streets*. New York: Appleton, 1896.
- Crèvecoeur, J. Hector St. John de. *Letters from an American Farmer*. New York: Penguin, 1986.
- . *Letters from an American Farmer*. London: Thoomas Davies, 1782.
- Cutter, Martha J. “Zitkala-Sa’s Autobiographical Writings: The Problems of a Canonical Search for Language and Identity.” *MELUS* 19, No. 1 (1994): 31-44.
- Dawes, Henry. “Have We Failed with the Indian?” *Atlantic Monthly* 84 (1899): 280-85.
- Dearborn, Mary V. *Pocahontas’s Daughters: Gender and Ethnicity in American Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- Deloria, Vine Jr. *Singing for a Spirit: A Portrait of the Dakota Sioux*. Santa Fe: Clear Light Publishers, 2000.

- Douglass, Frederick. *My Bondage and My Freedom*. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1969.
- . *My Bondage and My Freedom*. New York: Miller, Orton, and Mulligan, 1855.
- . *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*. Boston: Anti-Slavery Office, 1845.
- Doyle, James. "Sui Sin Far and Onoto Watanna: Two Early Chinese-Canadian Authors." *Canadian Literature* 140 (Spring 1994): 50-58.
- Dreiser, Theodore. *Sister Carrie*. New York: Doubleday, Page, 1900.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1994.
- . *The Souls of Black Folk*. Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1903.
- Dunbar, Paul Laurence. *Lyrics of the Hearthside*. New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1896.
- . *Lyrics of Lowly Life*. New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1896.
- . *The Uncalled*. New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1898.
- Dunbar-Nelson, Alice. *The Goodness of St. Rocque and Other Stories*. New York: Dodd, Mead, 1899.
- Dunne, Finley Peter. *Observations by Mr. Dooley*. New York: Russell, 1902.
- Eastman, Charles A [Ohiyesa]. *From Deep Woods to Civilization: Chapters in the Autobiography of an Indian*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1916.
- Elder, Arlene A. *The "Hindered Hand": Cultural Implications of Early African-American Fiction*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1978.
- Ellison, Ralph. *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*. New York: The Modern Library, 1995.

- . *Invisible Man*. New York: Random House, 1952.
- Erdrich, Louise. *Love Medicine*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1984.
- Faulkner, William. *Absalom, Absalom!* New York: Random House, 1936.
- . *Go Down, Moses and Other Stories* (New York: Random House, 1942).
- Fiedler, Leslie A. *Love and Death in the American Novel*. Normal: Dalkey Archive Press, 1997.
- Fisher, Dexter, ed. *American Indian Stories* by Zitkala-Sa. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985.
- . "The Transformation of Tradition: A Study of Zitkala-Sa and Mourning Dove, Two Transitional American Indian Writers." *Critical Essays on Native American Literature*, ed. Andrew Wiget. Boston: G. K. Hall, 1985, pp. 202-11.
- Fleming, Robert E. "Sutton E. Griggs: Militant Black Novelist." *Phylon* 34 (1973): 73-77.
- Flynn, John T. "The Muckrakers." *John D. Rockefeller: Robber Baron or Industrial Statesman?* Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1949, pp. 1-6.
- Franklin, Benjamin. *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin: A Genetic Text*, ed. J. A. Leo Lemay and P. M. Zall. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1981.
- Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993.
- Gloster, Hugh M. *Negro Voices in American Fiction*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1948.
- Griggs, Sutton E. *The Hindered Hand; or, The Reign of the Repressionist*. Miami: Mnemosyne Publishing, 1969.

- . *The Hindered Hand; or, The Reign of the Repressionist*. Nashville: Orion, 1905.
- . *Imperium in Imperio*. Miami: Mnemosyne Publishing, 1969.
- . *Imperium in Imperio*. Cincinnati: Editor Publishing Co., 1899.
- . *Overshadowed*. Freeport: Books for Libraries Press, 1971.
- . *Overshadowed*. Nashville: The Orion Publishing Company, 1901.
- . *Pointing the Way*. Nashville: The Orion Publishing Company, 1908.
- . *Unfettered*. New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1971.
- . *Unfettered*. Nashville: The Orion Publishing Company, 1902.
- Gyory, Andrew. *Closing the Gates: Race, Politics, and the Chinese Exclusion Act*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998.
- Harper, Frances E. W. *Iola Leroy: Or, Shadows Uplifted*. Philadelphia: Garrigues Brothers, 1892.
- Hassrick, Royal B. *The Sioux: Life and Customs of a Warrior Society*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964.
- Hedin, Raymond. "Probable Readers, Possible Stories: The Limits of Nineteenth-Century Black Narrative." *Readers in History: Nineteenth-Century American Literature and the Contexts of Response*, ed. James L. Machor. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1993, pp. 180-206.
- Hertzberg, Arthur. *The Jews In America: Four Centuries of an Uneasy Encounter*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.
- Hoffman, Frederick L. *Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro*. American Economic Association Publication 11, No. 1-3 (New York, 1896).

- Hom, Marlon K., ed. *Songs of Gold Mountain: Cantonese Rhymes from San Francisco Chinatown*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987.
- Hongo, Garrett. "Kubota." *American Mosaic: Multicultural Readings in Context*, ed. Barbara Roche Rico and Sandra Mano. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001, pp. 529-37.
- . *Volcano: A Memoir of Hawaii* (New York: Vintage, 1995).
- Howells, William Dean. *The Rise of Silas Lapham*. Boston: Ticknor, 1885.
- Hurston, Zora Neale. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1937.
- Immigration Commission, "Children of Immigrants in Schools." Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1911.
- Inada, Lawson Fusao. *Legends from Camp: Poems*. San Francisco: Coffee House Press, 1993.
- James, Henry. *The Ambassadors* (New York: Harper, 1903).
- Jen, Gish. *Mona in the Promised Land*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1996.
- Jinshan ge erji*. San Francisco: Tai Quong Company, 1915.
- Jinshan ge ji*. San Francisco: Tai Quong Company, 1911.
- Johnson, James Weldon. *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1927.
- . *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*. Boston: Sherman, French and Company in 1912.
- Kallen, Horace M. *Culture and Democracy in the United States: Studies in the Group Psychology of the American People*. New York: Boni and Liveright, 1924.

- . “Democracy versus the Melting Pot,” in *Jewish American Literature*, ed. Jules Chametzky, John Felstiner, Hilene Flanzbaum, and Kathryn Hellerstein. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001, pp. 206-17.
- . “Democracy versus the Melting Pot: A Study of American Nationality.” *The Nation* 100 (February 18, 1915): 190-94 and (February 25, 1915): 217-20.
- Kaplan, Amy. *The Social Construction of American Realism*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988.
- Kelly, Myra. *Little Citizens: The Humours of School Life*. New York: McClure, Phillips, 1904.
- . *Little Aliens*. New York: Scribners, 1910.
- Kim, Elaine H. *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982.
- Kingston, Maxine Hong. *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1976.
- Kinney, J. F. Department of Interior and Indian Affairs, 1887 *Annual Report of the Department of the Interior*.
- Kramer, Michael P. “Assimilation in *The Promised Land*: Mary Antin and the Jewish Origins of the American Self.” *Prooftexts* 18 (1998): 121-48.
- Lahiri, Jhumpa. *Interpreter of Maladies*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999.
- Lee Yan Phou. *When I Was a Boy in China*. Boston: D. Lothrop, 1887.
- Ling, Amy. *Between Worlds: Women Writers of Chinese Ancestry*. New York: Pergamon Press, 1990.
- Logan, Rayford W. *The Betrayal of the Negro: From Rutherford B. Hayes to Woodrow*

- Wilson. New York: De Capo Press, 1997.
- Long, John Luther. "Madame Butterfly." *Century* 55 (January, 1898): 274-92.
- Melville, Herman. *The Piazza Tales*. New York: Dix and Edwards, 1856.
- Miller, J. Hillis. "Narrative." *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, second edition, ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995, pp. 66-79.
- Momaday, N. Scott. *House Made of Dawn*. New York: Harper & Row, 1968.
- Morrison, Toni. *The Bluest Eye*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston Inc., 1970.
- . *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. New York: Vintage Books, 1993.
- . *Song of Solomon*. New York: Knopf, 1977.
- Moses, Wilson J. "Literary Garveyism: Three Novels of Sutton E. Griggs." *Phylon* 40 (1979): 203-16.
- . "Literary Myth and Ethnic Assimilation: Israel Zangwill and Sutton E. Griggs." *New Hungarian Quarterly* 21 (1980): 131-36.
- Nagel, James. *The Contemporary American Short-Story Cycle*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001.
- Nagel, James and Gwen L. Nagel, eds. *Facts on File: Bibliography of American Fiction 1866-1918*. New York: Manly, Inc. and Facts on File, Inc., 1993.
- Nagel, James and Tom Quirk, eds. *The Portable American Realism Reader*. New York: Penguin Books, 1997.
- Nelson, Dana. *The World in Black and White: Reading "Race" in American Literature 1638-1867*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.

- Norris, Frank. *The Octopus: A Story of California*. New York: Doubleday, Page, 1901.
- O'Connor, Flannery. *Everything that Rises Must Converge*. New York: Noonday Press, 1965.
- . *A Good Man is Hard to Find*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1955.
- Okada, John. *No-no Boy*. Rutherford: Charles E. Tuttle, 1957.
- Parrington, Vernon Lewis. *The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America, 1860-1920*, vol. 3 of *Main Currents in American Thought*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1930.
- Pattee, Fred Lewis. *A History of American Literature Since 1870*. New York: The Century Co., 1915.
- . *The New American Literature 1890-1930*. New York: The Century Co., 1930.
- Pizer, Donald, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to American Realism and Naturalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- . *Realism and Naturalism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, rev. ed. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984.
- Plessy v. Ferguson* 163 U.S. 537 (1896). *Documents of American Constitutional and Legal History*, vol. 2, ed. Melvin I. Urofsky. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989, p. 244-48.
- Poe, Edgar Allan. Review of Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales*. *The Complete Works of Edgar Allen Poe*, ed. James A. Harrison. New York: AMS Press, 1902, pp. 104-13.
- Pratt, Norma Fain. "Traditions in Judaism: The Jewish American Woman Through the 1930s." *American Quarterly* 30 (1978): 681-702.

- Pynchon, Thomas. *The Crying of Lot 49*. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1966.
- . *Mason and Dixon*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1997.
- . *Vineland*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1990.
- Quirk, Tom and Gary Scharnhorst, eds. *American Realism and the Canon*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1994.
- Riis, Jacob. *How the Other Half Lives*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1890.
- . *Out of Mulberry Street: Stories of Tenement Life in New York*. New York: Century, 1897.
- Said, Edward. "Orientalism." *The Georgia Review* 31 (1977):162-206.
- Salz, Evelyn, ed. *Selected Letters of Mary Antin*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000.
- Shavelson, Susanne A. "Anxieties of Authorship in the Autobiographies of Mary Antin and Aliza Greenblatt." *Prooftexts* 18 (1998): 161-86.
- Sinclair, Upton. *The Jungle*. New York, Doubleday, Page, 1906.
- Smith, Sidonie. "Cheesecakes, Nymphs, and 'We the People': Un/National Subjects about 1900." *Prose Studies: History, Theory, Criticism* 17, No. 1 (1994): 120-40.
- Solberg, S. E. "Sui Sin Far/Edith Eaton: First Chinese-American Fictionist." *MELUS* 8, No. 1 (1981): 27-39.
- Sollors, Werner. *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- Soto, Gary. "Like Mexicans." *New Worlds of Literature: Writings from America's Many Cultures*, ed. Jerome Beaty and J. Paul Hunter. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989, pp. 695-99.

- . *Small Faces* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1986).
- Standing Bear, Luther. *My People the Sioux*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1928.
- . Introduction to *The Promised Land* by Mary Antin. New York: Penguin Books, 1997.
- Stowe, Harriet Beecher, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Boston: John P. Jewett, 1852.
- Sui Sin Far. *Mrs. Spring Fragrance and Other Writing*, ed. Amy Ling and Annette White Parks. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995.
- . *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*. Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1912.
- Sunquist, Eric J. *American Realism: New Essays*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1982.
- . *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature*. Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1993.
- Susag, Dorothea M. "Zitkala-Sa (Gertrude Simmons Bonnin): A Power(full) Literary Voice." *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 5, No. 4 (1993): 3-24.
- Takaki, Ronald. *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1993.
- Tan, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1989.
- Thomas, Piri. *Down These Mean Streets*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1967.
- Tompkins, Jane. "Indians: Textualism, Morality, and the Problem of History." *"Race," Writing, and Difference*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986, pp. 59-77.
- Trotter, Joe William Jr. *The African American Experience*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001.

- Twain, Mark. *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. New York: Webster, 1885.
- Vizenor, Gerald, ed. *Native American Literature: A Brief Introduction and Anthology* New York: HarperCollins, 1995.
- . *The Everlasting Sky: New Voices From the People Named the Chippewa*. New York: Crowell-Collier Press, 1972.
- Walker, Alice. *The Color Purple*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982.
- Walker, Francis A. "Restriction of Immigration," *The Atlantic Monthly* 77 (1896): 822-29.
- Walker, Randolph Meade. *The Metamorphosis of Sutton E. Griggs: The Transition from Black Radical to Conservative, 1913-1933*. Memphis: Walker Publishing, 1991.
- Washington, Booker T. *Up From Slavery*. New York: Signet Classic, 2000.
- . *Up From Slavery*. Garden City: Doubleday, 1901.
- Watanna, Onoto. *Miss Numè of Japan*. New York: Rand, McNally & Co., 1899.
- Wilson, James. *The Earth Shall Weep: A History of Native America*. New York: Grove Press, 1998.
- Wisse, Ruth R. *The Modern Jewish Canon: A Journey Through Language and Culture*. New York: The Free Press, 2000.
- Weaver, Jace. *That the People Might Live: Native American Literatures and Native American Community*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Wharton, Edith. *The House of Mirth*. New York: Scribners, 1905.
- White-Parks, Annette. *Sui Sin Far / Edith Maude Eaton: A Literary Biography*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995.
- Wright, Richard. *Black Boy*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1945.

———. *Native Son*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1940.

Wu, William. *The Yellow Peril: Chinese Americans in American Fiction 1850-1940*.

Hamdon: Archon Books, 1982.

Yamamoto, Hisaye. *Seventeen Syllables and Other Stories*. Latham: Kitchen Table:

Women of Color Press, 1988.

“Yankton Sioux Tribe of South Dakota.” Federal Emergency Agency Website.

<http://fema.gov/reg-viii/tribal/yanktnbg.htm>.

Yin, Xiao-Huang. “Between East and West: Sui Sin Far—the First Chinese American

Woman Writer.” *Arizona Quarterly* 47, No. 4 (1991): 49-84.

Zitkala-Sa. *American Indian Stories*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985.

———. *American Indian Stories*. Washington, D.C.: Hayworth Publishing House,

1921.

———. “Impressions of an Indian Childhood.” *Atlantic Monthly* 85 (1900): 37-47.

———. “An Indian Teacher Among Indians.” *Atlantic Monthly* 85 (1900): 381-86.

———. *Old Indian Legends*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985.

———. “The School Days of an Indian Girl.” *Atlantic Monthly* 85 (1900): 185-94.

———. “The Soft-Hearted Sioux.” *Harper’s Monthly* 102 (1901): 505-08.

———. “The Trial Path.” *Harper’s Monthly* 103 (1901): 741-44.

———. “A Warrior’s Daughter.” *Everybody’s Magazine* 4 (1902): 346-52.

———. “Why I Am a Pagan.” *Atlantic Monthly* 90 (1902): 801-03.