THE MAKINGS AND UNMAKINGS OF AMERICANS: INDIANS AND IMMIGRANTS IN AMERICAN LITERATURE AND CULTURE, 1880-1924

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DISSERTATION
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation argues that despite their coercion into the “making of Americans” discourses, New Immigrants and American Indians shared structurally connected roles in the drama of Americanization and assimilation. Recovering a genealogy of a combined cultural resistance to regimes of “making Americans” in a variety of literary genres and in silent film, this project shows how American Indian and Immigrant students of American democracy carved their own spaces in turn-of-the-twentieth-century American culture.
To Bogdan and Maya Margot Stanciu
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PART I
CHAPTER 1
THE MAKINGS AND UNMAKINGS OF AMERICANS

1.1 “You Can’t Come In!”

Months before the Indian Citizenship Act and the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act passed Congress in 1924, a *New York Times* article, unprecedented in theme and title, brought the Indian and immigrant “problems” to the American public’s attention, appealing to “the deeper sense of obligation [of] the new to the old American”:

With the problem on the one hand of the admission of the immigrant who has come *after us* and that of just dealing on the other with the aborigine who was here *before us*, the people who occupy as citizens a minor part of the American Hemisphere, but call themselves “Americans” have a delicate and difficult time of it. If the latter is to be encouraged in his primitive and distinctive crafts, what shall be said of those who come from other lands with ancient crafts in their hands and folksongs in their memories?¹ (my emphasis)

The *New York Times* article frames the perceived “problem” caused by new immigrants and Indians in terms of what Ali Behdad calls “national hospitality.” For Behdad, the myth of immigrant America as a narrative of hospitality depends on recuperating and challenging the national “historical amnesia” and hostility toward immigrants—and, I would add, toward American Indians.² More tellingly, the *New York Times* article envisions the dilemma the
American citizen faces as one of moral and civic responsibility toward the non-citizen Other, with an implied urge toward imminent naturalization. The article’s pseudo-rhetoric of inclusion also marks subtly the (co)incidence of xenophobic discourses and immigration restriction acts with the extension of citizenship to American Indians. (The Johnson-Reed Immigration Act passed in May 1924, and the Indian citizenship Act passed in June 1924.) A 1924 political cartoon by Hendrick Willem Van Loon rewrites both the scene of immigrant arrival and that of Native hospitality (Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1. Hendrick Willem Van Loon, “You Can’t Come In. The Quota for 1620 is Full.”
In its mimicry of conquest, the Indian character’s use of English in the cartoon transforms the narrative of conquest into a narrative of resistance: “You can’t come in.” Van Loon’s rewriting and redrawing of the colonial narrative of conquest places the Indian character in a position of power, with agency over both land and demographics. It also alludes to the quota scheme in effect since 1921, with its strict numeric laws (thus suggesting that the two pilgrims cannot be admitted, period).

***

This comparative study brings together American Indian and New Immigrant literary and cultural responses to Americanization, placing American Indian and immigrant writing and cultural work at the center of debates over national identity. Foregrounding the roles of tribal or diasporic identities and languages across cultures and geographies, I argue that American Indian and New Immigrant intellectuals not only “talked back to civilization” but also challenged the demands and promises of Americanization by re-writing themselves into American literary history, by manipulating, negotiating, and inventing their “making” as “Americans.” I show, for instance, that Yiddish poetry written in the first two decades of the twentieth century in the US rendered the tensions of the diasporic Jewish immigrant imagination through what I call new geographies of being and belonging in the “New World.” The immigrant subject’s choice to write in Yiddish, Slovenian, or Romanian—although from the vantage point of the American scene—becomes a political act of dissimulation (in Etienne Balibar’s model, vs. assimilation) or what I call throughout this project an “unmaking of Americans.” To this end, I also complicate Behdad’s productive analysis of US hospitality discourses vis-à-vis immigrant arrivals by expanding Behdad’s interpretive framework to include the state’s refusal to admit (non-native) racially different subjects to citizenship and call attention to its exclusion of (native) Indian
subjects. As I show throughout this study, as Immigrant and Indian writers navigate national, transnational, and inter-tribal spaces and temporalities, their Americanization story also emerges on their own terms.

In the American cultural imaginary, stories of American Indians and immigrants have often translated into the triumph of Manifest Destiny over barbarism, the victory of whiteness over so-called “polluting races,” and the hegemony of English over other national or tribal languages. Some of these stories still serve contemporary political agendas in creating what cultural historians have called the “historical amnesia toward immigration” of the US or perpetuating the image of “the white man’s Indian.” In the first two decades of the twentieth century, the crisis in national identity caused by the waves of new immigrants and their threat to “100 percent Americanism” produced an unexpected turn to the Indian who, in nationalist rhetoric, donned the robe of “savagery” and became, suddenly, “the first American.”

*The Makings and Unmakings of Americans* also reevaluates literary and legal definitions of US citizenship, especially as they animate innovative modes of representing an emergent civic identity—the naturalizable immigrant and indigenous subject—in print and visual culture at the turn of the twentieth century. I draw on Lisa Lowe’s productive argument that aesthetic representation in immigrant writing (through “immigrant acts” or other dialectical engagements with the racialized US national culture) is grounded in political representation. A visual text like Charlie Chaplin’s *The Immigrant* (1917), for instance, offers a biting rendition of the American legal system—which would go on to enlarge Chaplin’ FBI file. Drawing also on the work of immigration and citizenship historians, indigenous critics, historians of race, whiteness, and film, this project argues for reading Indians and immigrants as active participants in their own “making” as Americans. Whereas many European immigrants enjoyed the privileges of
naturalization, being (read as) “white on arrival,” Indians were legally excluded from American citizenship mainly because of racial difference. I join historians David Roediger, Frederick Hoxie, and Matthew Jacobson in moving race to the forefront of discourses and historiographies of European immigration and assimilation. My work is primarily concerned with the “new Immigrants,” whose massive removal to the US at the turn of the twentieth century from Southern and Eastern Europe threatened the primacy of the “great race.” The resulting racial panic, which I examine through readings of divergent perspectives on Americanization, triggered alarmist eugenicist fears that influenced anti-immigrant legislation, as well as the country’s racial make-up in the first half of the twentieth century.

1.2 New Americans in the Making

“I’m an American. My folks have some French blood, why

I have a nose like this. I’m an American, all right.”

“So am I,” I says. “Not many of us left.”

—Jason Compson in William Faulkner’s The Sound and the Fury

The “New American”—as “type,” “trope,” or “image” dominating turn-of-the-twentieth century nationalist, literary, or cultural discourses—is a convenient invention. It conflates new expectations of racial and ethnic homogeneity for the new century with old fears of losing the “old American stock” (where whiteness itself becomes a precious commodity). The “American type” William Faulkner’s Jason Compson refers to is an exclusive, racial, and national imagined community, a model promoted by nativist discourses Faulkner implicitly critiques. The Western
physiognomy in Jason’s words appeals to the public acceptability of certain racial and national features: “My folks have some French blood, why I have a nose like this” (suggesting a foreign affiliation but of a noble line of descent). As if to reinforce his own claim to Americanness, Jason reiterates: “I’m an American, all right.” This pronouncement invokes contemporaneous eugenicist fears of so-called “degenerate” races, gestures at a prophetic “Nordic type” (proposed by Madison Grant in his infamous study on the “passing of the great race”), and echoes the other character’s racist disposition: “Not many of us left.” This alarmist invocation reinforces a dominant line of racial thought in early twentieth-century race discourse—that of the “vanishing American.” A 1924 cartoon in *The Survey* engages with the trope of the vanishing American (as the Nordic, “old stock” American) by spelling immigration restriction laws in terms of privileged European geography: a non-Western man (a Jesus-figure) walks on the shore (of Ellis Island?), leaving behind a board sign that reads, “Only Nordics Need Apply” (331-33). The cartoon’s religious (Christian) undertones suggest the hypocrisy and paradox of restrictionist logic, which bars from admission the symbol of Western civilization in a country supposedly settled and conquered because of religious persecution (Figure 1.2). The cartoon also gestures toward the rigidity and inflexibility of immigrations laws: even if you’re Jesus, you aren’t good enough, and you can’t come in!
At the end of the nineteenth century, the distinction between the “old” and “new” immigrant was more trenchant in the American popular and legal imaginary than ever before (or after). The year 1883 marked the transition from the “old” to the “new” immigration, with the opening of the immigration “golden door” and the influx of new—Southern and Eastern European—immigrant laborers, and the closing of the door on Chinese immigration in 1882. While this transition to the “new” immigrant and potential citizen assumed an unproblematic assimilation of European new masses into American ways, a crisis in racial relations emerged at the end of the nineteenth-century to complicate notions of assimilation and to set the stage for what “Americanism” meant in the new century: the new “Babel of tongues” devoted to non-
Protestant religions (Catholic, Jewish, and Eastern Orthodox) could not be tamed into a uniform mass of Americanism. The concept of “American” itself attracted more and more scrutiny, and some of the optimists of immigrant assimilation in the early 1880s, hoping to turn the immigrant into an “ideal American,” became the skeptics and immigration restrictionists of the 1900s and beyond. American imperialism also heightened the sense of Anglo-Saxonism, nationalism, and nativism. What Hector St. Jean de Crèvecoeur had envisioned as an amiable “melting” of “individuals of all nations” into “a new race of men” during the Revolutionary era was no longer conceivable. Ultimately, what John Higham called American “abstract” faith in assimilation was replaced by “distrust” and “resistance.” At the turn into the twentieth century, the assimilation of New Immigrants became “a problem.” Instead of being transformed by America, New Immigrants were transforming it.

Whereas the Indian as the Vanishing American—a colonial invention to reinforce the powerful illusion of manifest destiny—dominates the nineteenth-century representational landscape (from literature to painting to salvage anthropology), the “old” American type as the Vanishing American dominates the early twentieth-century artistic and literary landscape. The Indian as the vanishing American is also immortalized in the dominant cultural imaginary as the “noble Indian” on the way to extinction. Joseph K. Dixon, author of *The Vanishing Race* (1913), renders the story of the “Last Great Indian Council” in images and captions pretending to present the story “as told by themselves,” albeit with an emphasis on “their solemn farewell”:

The door of the Indian’s yesterday opens to a new world—a world unpeopled with red Men, … vanquished before the ruthless tread of superior forces—we call them the agents of civilization. […] Forces that have in cruel fashion borne down upon the Indian until
he had to give up all that was his and all that was dear to him—to make himself over or
die. He would not yield. He died. [...] The white is the conquering race. (4)

To become American, in this logic, the Indian had to “vanish” as an Indian. Other forms of
homage to the “vanishing Indian” and the emerging new American were often performed and
imagined in grandiose proportions at the turn of the twentieth century. Pennsylvania entrepreneur
Rodman Wanamaker sponsored a project aimed at building a monument to the “Vanishing Red”
on Staten Island, a bronze Indian warrior taller than the Statue of Liberty, extending his hand in
welcome to the “huddled masses” of immigrants. This monument was envisioned as part of the
Philadelphia tycoon’s commemorative and patriotic project to memorialize the “vanishing
Indian” and celebrate the emergence of a new, “civilized” Indian, committed to American civic
values. The project failed in 1913 for lack of funds. Despite the representational problems of the
Vanishing Red project (reinforcing the vanishing Indian trope and diverting public attention from
the condition of real Indians), the possibility of competing entities for iconographic primacy in
the American imaginary is worth closer scrutiny, as immigration itself was on the way to
restriction. The memorialization of the “vanishing Indian” as the “first American” and its
potential to replace the Statue of Liberty and its iconography in the immigrant imaginary offer a
compelling site of inquiry into what makes the “New American.” If the Indian was the “first
American,” what was “the new American”? I argue that New Americans were forged
discursively at the intersection of “the old,” the “first,” and the “vanishing American.”

Walter Benn Michaels offers a compelling analysis of “the vanishing American”
concept. Michaels’s analysis offers a critique of nativist and nationalist anxieties vis-à-vis the
new immigrants, so-called harbingers of alien germs, whose massive occupation of the New
World threatens to lead to the disappearance of the “Nordic native American.” Building on Michaels’s interpretation, I argue that the concept of the “vanishing American” encapsulates what I interpret as a colonial desire for the vanishing Indian and a simultaneous Progressive faith in Americanizing the “first American.” As early as 1886, an article in *The New York Tribune* proposed that “we deal with the Indians as we deal with the foreigners.” Michaels has revisited his argument and offered a pertinent periodization of its nuances: “if identification with the Indian could function at the turn of the twentieth century as a refusal of American identity, it would come to function by early 1920s as an assertion of American identity.” What caused this shift in the dominant American cultural (and racial/racist) imaginary from the “vanishing Indian” to the “first American” in redefining what Michaels calls the “new cultural Americanism” in the years following World War I?

As Alan Trachtenberg suggests, the affirmation of the American Indian’s primacy in the cultural imaginary as “the first American” (with a reiteration of its “vanishing” as Indian) came “at a time when the U.S. was filled with alarm about the fate of the assumed Anglo-Saxon character of the nation” (212). This shift in the pro-Indian national rhetoric also grew out of the revival of old nativist fears of the new alien invasion. “Agitation” for immigration restriction was on the way, historian Robert Divine suggests, fuelled by both “emotional nativism” and “reasoned argument” (3). Therefore, the appeal to Indian iconography as a paradoxical reassertion of cultural American identity coincides—or so the story goes—with a dominant American disidentification from, nay a refusal in Michaels’ terms, of immigrant elements in the making of the modern American nation/empire.

The dominant culture’s reconceiving of the American Indian as “the first American” also coincides with the programmatic and scientific development of an anti-immigration agenda at
scientific, cultural, literary, and political levels. As immigration historians have shown, the 1920s was also a time of mounting anti-immigrant sentiment, where the more and more pronounced distinctions between the “old” and “new” immigrants led to tightening of immigration laws with the enforcement of the quota system for immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe and a temporary suspension of Asian immigration. More tellingly, Progressive America’s embrace of the unassimilable “races,” with the promise of making them into “good citizens” of the nation at the end of the nineteenth century, turned in the first two decades of the twentieth century into nativist America’s fear and disgust with “new immigrants.” At the same time, African Americans migrating from the rural South in search of economic and social opportunities in the North often supported immigration restriction, given the increasingly competitive job market and the economic and civil privileges denied to African Americans but granted to immigrants. Distinctions between “old stock” and “new stock” allegiances and fitness for American citizenship also shaped the lexicon of Americanization discourses, as the next sections and chapters will show.

1.3 Makings of Americans

The man of the old stock is being crowded out of many country districts by these foreigners [...]. These immigrants adopt the language of native Americans; they wear his clothes; they steal his name; and they are beginning to marry his women.

—F. Scott Fitzgerald The Great Gatsby
The old people in a new world, the new people made out of the old, that is the story that I mean to tell.

—Gertrude Stein, *The Making of Americans*

To be a writer in English in itself was an act of emigration.

—Marcus Klein, *Foreigners*

In 1902, as millions of European immigrants sought refuge in the New World from economic, political, or religious persecution in the Old World, American writer Gertrude Stein arrived in England to visit her brother Leo. A landscape different from the poverty-stricken villages or small towns of Eastern Europe, the English countryside offered many occasions for trans-Atlantic meditations and many consternating questions, such as brother Leo’s: “[W]hy in the name of all that’s reasonable do you think of going back to America?” Stein did go back to America—for a while, at least—before settling in Paris in 1903, where she was at the center of the modernist avant-garde and her salon attracted American expatriates. As if to answer her brother’s question, Stein opened her thousand-page work that she started after her British sojourn, *The Making of Americans* (1925)—a fictionalized account of immigrant grandparents and their descendants—with a puzzling line: “It has always seemed to me a rare privilege, this, of being an American, a real American, one whose tradition it has taken scarcely sixty years to create. The old people in a new world, the new people made out of the old, that is the story that I mean to tell” (3). From her chosen exile, away from exerting her “rare privilege” of being “a real American,” Stein’s attempt to tell the story of Americans and to write the great American novel in the process resulted, instead, in a disrupted narrative. The great American novel she envisioned and toiled at for more than a decade was finally published in 1925 to very little
critical acclaim. The Making of Americans defied conventional novelistic form in its aesthetic experimentation and pointed to the inadequacy of (the modernist) narrative to render the American experience, the immigrant experience, a prominent topic on the American scene during the first decades of the twentieth century and beyond. Just as immigrant writers were groping for a voice of their own in a new country and language, Stein’s work theorized, as Priscilla Wald has argued, “what is at stake in the making of Americans”: accommodating immigrants within a “familiar narrative of cultural identity” (239).

Stein fails to tell the story of the making of Americans either because the book is unreadable to the untrained eye of readers unaccustomed to high modernist linguistic experimentation, or because its abstract poetics does not—cannot—capture the immigrant drama unfolding on the American scene at the turn of the twentieth century. Fellow American exile to England Henry James returned home briefly in 1904 after twenty years, only to rediscover that there was “no escape from the ubiquitous alien” (The American Scene 87). James saw the Lower East Side mass of immigrants as “a great swarming, a swarming that had begun to thicken, … a Jewry that had burst all bounds” (131). In his travelogue, James directed his critique mainly at the “monstrous organism” of American capitalism, the alienating force of human subjectivity, of which immigrants were only a layer in the new industrial landscape. The aloofness of the inquisitive spectator glancing at immigrants passing through Ellis Island captures the tension of the Old American meeting the New American. James’s nuanced depiction of the immigrant invasion of New York has elicited contradictory critical responses. For the purposes of this analysis, James’ study of the “American scene” that he re-encounters as a stranger in his native land after an imposed exile sets the stage for reading the tension that
cultural, ethnic, and racial difference create on the American scene between “old-stock” citizens and non-Anglo-Saxon new immigrants.

James’s imperial gaze in *The American Scene* is characteristic of the reception of foreign subjectivity on American soil and in American letters. It also reflects a view of American national identity that took Anglo-Saxonism for granted and disregarded many other voices and traditions. As Desmond King has argued, “The suspicion of diversity in the decades leading up to and including the 1920s stemmed from the political dominance of one group’s conception of U.S. identity […] constituted by a white Anglo-American inheritance […] propagated in the Americanization movement.”

James’s superior gaze found an echo among contemporaneous nativist fellow writers, especially in approaching the relatively new “immigration problem.” Ralph Marvell, one of Edith Wharton’s characters in *The Custom of the Country* (1913), describes James’ dear Washington Square as a “reservation” of authentic Americanism, inhabited by his mother and grandfather—the “Aborigines” of a vanishing Anglo-Saxonism threatened with “rapid extinction” by the “advance of the invading race”: “Ralph sometimes called his mother and grandfather the Aborigines, and likened them to those vanishing denizens of the American continent doomed to rapid extinction with the advance of the invading race.”

Besides using the trope of “the vanishing American,” a remnant of the discourse of nineteenth-century total assimilation policy, Wharton’s character envisions the old American as the “vanishing American,” thus conflating two conflicting discourses—what D.H. Lawrence called “the desire to extirpate the Indian” and “the contradictory desire to glorify him”—sublimating xenophobia through a safer, imagined affiliation with the American Indian.

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This project starts (roughly) in the 1880s, in a post-Civil War U.S. landscape characterized by economic growth, corporate capitalism, increasing numbers of industrial workers of various national backgrounds, mounting nativist fears caused by local anxieties about non-Anglo-Saxons (such as immigrants from Asia), as well as the opening of the “golden door” of immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe in 1883. New social patterns characterized the urban landscapes of the country, where industrial capitalism threatened rural prosperity and the cult of individuality, and a growing sense of acquisitive subjectivity and racial superiority led to violence (such as lynchings of African Americans and foreigners in the South). As Robert Wiebe noted in a ground-breaking study, the years leading to World War I were characterized by a constant “search for order.” This search for order took many forms: from economic security, social status, and prestige to a heightened sense of the relationship between the citizens and the government, especially in how that government should shape the future of an industrial nation. Order became, paradoxically, the *raison d’être* of both Progressive organizations dedicated to “save” the individual and bring him back to civilized and Christian society (such as the Indian Rights Association) and of nativist and nationalist organizations (like the Immigration Restriction League). In defining this new sense of order, racial hierarchies (and barriers) often helped define and “make Americans.”

While eugenicist debates over the “original native stock” versus the new “immigrant stock” informed the country’s immigration policy as well as its future racial make-up, a new interest in the “native” or “first inhabitant” of the continent emerged in both popular and political venues. The Indian Citizenship Act, passed in the House of Representatives only a month after the immigration restriction bill, granted nominal citizenship to Indian people. But as historians have pointed out, two-thirds of the Indians in the US had already been “made” citizens. Why this
legislative haste? Why the renewed interest in the Indian at a time when discourses of the “vanishing Indian” proliferated through both popular and scientific venues? Historically, the racism toward native peoples and their perceived unassimilability into the fabric of Americanism, along with Indian tribes’ resistance to be incorporated, had made Indian sovereignty and American citizenship incompatible. As Alan Trachtenberg suggests, “In the early twentieth century it was much easier for white Americans to imagine a Pole or a Serb eventually qualifying as an equal American citizen than a Mohawk or an Arapaho.”20 As I will show, building on Trachtenberg’s work, the unexpected “turn to the native,” at a time when the meanings of “native” and “stranger” were strenuously revisited in the U.S. imaginary, forged not only Progressive initiatives to “civilize” and assimilate the Indian and the alien, but also indigenous and immigrant responses to these demands, on the one hand, and an emphasis on indigenous forms of knowledge, government, and sovereignty, on the other. American Indian intellectuals, along with their New Immigrant peers that this dissertation examines, not only “talked back to civilization,”21 but also challenged the demands and promises of Americanization for the twentieth century.

The 1880s-1920s also witnessed a negotiation, albeit on different terms, with the new demands of Americanization and assimilation for both the native peoples in the US and the immigrants seeking a providential “promised land.” One of the most acerbic advocates of Indian assimilation and citizenship, Carlisle Superintendent Richard Henry Pratt, whose theories of Indian assimilation were informed by those of immigrant Americanization, argued repeatedly and vocally for the termination of Indian reservations, envisioning a total “absorption” and complete education of American Indians:
The foreigners made Americans and citizens by being invited, urged and compelled to that consummation by their surroundings. The Indians remain Indians because they are walled in on reservations and compelled by every force we can apply even to the hedging about with guns, pistols, and sword, to remain Indians. Suppose the 5,246,613 foreigners who immigrated to the United States in ten years instead of having been distributed through our communities had been sent to reservations—each nationality by itself, would it be reasonable to anticipate that they would have made any material progress in becoming Anglicized and Americanized?22

The Progressive Era’s mission of “Anglicizing” and “Americanizing” New Immigrants and American Indians took as a given a monolithic model of American identity, something to be emulated, a prescriptive pattern the new American citizen had to be molded into. But while immigrant subjects gained access to federal and state citizenship though naturalization, American Indians who refused allotment of Indian lands and other forms of participation in state-sponsored missions maintained their status as wards of the federal government until 1924. The assumptions of US reformers and policy-makers, often publicized in public lectures or conferences (such as the Lake Mohonk Conferences of the “Friends of the Indian”), reflected popular beliefs and anxieties at the turn of the twentieth century about the “racial inferiority” of non-white, non-English-speaking groups residing in the US—such as the “savage” Indian, presumably condemned to cultural vanishing, or the uncouth alien, threatening the “old American stock.” “Civilization” was the answer to both the Indian and Immigrant “problems.” Moreover, the paternalism of reform organizations toward the Indian and Immigrant groups were often translated into an infantilizing vision of “our poor immigrants” or “the poor Indian.” Education
for “good” American citizenship and literacy was part of the civilizing mission of American progressive organizations, from the Women’s National Indian Association, to the Boston Indian Citizenship Committee, or the Indian Rights Association. Disseminated through specially-designed venues—such as the progressive settlement houses for immigrants or the so-called “outing” programs for Indian boarding school students—the new rhetoric of “making Americans” participated both in the late-nineteenth century US colonial project (of the new American Empire) and the resurgent early twentieth century nationalist and nativist project (“America for Americans”).

My project is also invested in the legal, racial, and cultural implications of the concept “the new American”—an ideological construct and an imagined civic model—emerging during a time of intense changes in US economic and political structures, as well as revised definitions and institutionalized practices of Americanization. At the end of the nineteenth century, the US census declared the “frontier” closed, monopoly capitalism and the influx of “undesirable” immigrants were on the rise, and the first off-reservation boarding schools promised to make Indian children into “good Americans.” Immigration historians usually locate 1883 as the year separating the “old” from the “new” immigrants, pointing to the decline of old immigration from Northern and Western Europe (England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Norway, Sweden, the Netherlands, and Switzerland) and the rise of new immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe (especially Austro-Hungary, Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Syria, and Turkey). At the same time, the idea of the “new Indian” received more public attention than even before. Progressive missionaries of Americanization invented the concept of “the New Indian,” the educated, English-speaking Indian whose culture, language, and history remained—for a while, at least—on hold.
But “new Indians” often refused, even contested, such designations. Oneida Indian and Society of American Indians founding member Laura Cornelius Kellogg responded unambiguously: “I am not the new Indian; I am the old Indian adjusted to new conditions.”

Moreover, public intellectual Indians like Arthur C. Parker saw the immigrant Americanization experience as a model to be emulated by Indians, a way of responding to the requirements of assimilation. Other American Indian intellectuals opposed this Americanization model because, they thought, it did not address the failure of US federal Indian policy and its marginalization and alienation of native peoples to the fringes of the republic. Consequently, while the “New Immigrant” appeared to threaten old values and the country’s racial make-up, the “New Indian” concept emerged as the dominant culture’s way to (re)present a nominal claim to the New World, resorting to its “first inhabitants” as an emblem of permanence and rootedness in the land. Despite its erasure of Indian people’s long history of colonialism, dislocation, and genocide on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the immigrants’ history of religious and economic persecution in the Old and New World(s) alike, the Americanization project of the New World was, eventually, in part successful.

This study brings together what has often been read in isolation and, often, in conflict: literary and cultural productions of American Indians and European new immigrants. Terms such as “New Immigrants” and “New Indians” share a historical, cultural, and ideological framework regulating the participation of these two cultural groups in the “making of Americans” at the turn of the twentieth century. Unlike their predecessors—the “old immigrants”—the “new immigrants” encountered both popular hostility and denigration. As the *Yale Review* editor noted in 1902, the southern and eastern European immigrants were less desirable than their “Nordic” peers because they were “alien in blood, in language, and in political and social tradition.”

In
the literary historical context, the distinction between “old” and “new” demarcates traditional forms of expression and subject matter from modernity and its permissive interests in both high and low culture; it also points to the high modernist credo, “Make it new,” introducing a programmatic new aesthetic responding to the representational practices and cultural poetics of late nineteenth-century American realism. As aesthetic high modernism in American culture developed its own credos and manifestos, a new category of writers was at work carving a new literary niche that later literary critics call “ethnic writing.” The separation of the “old” literary aesthetic from the “new,” more inclusive one is worth preliminary attention, as the legitimizing of the aesthetic qualities of African American, American Indian, or immigrant American writers paved the way for so-called “multicultural” texts later in the twentieth century. These writers and cultural critics bring to the literary table not only a different aesthetic text but also new imaginings and counter-narratives of concepts less explored in the literary market: from nation, civic identity, or peoplehood to sovereignty, community, or group affiliation. At the same time, I gesture beyond the ethnographic and sociological dimensions of these bodies of literatures to (re)claim turn-of-the-century ethnic literatures into the American literary canon not simply for their “documentary” value but primarily for their aesthetic value. Writers like Abraham Cahan or Luther Standing Bear not only “document” a difficult time in the immigrant or Indian group’s respective history; they also strive to engage in their works with the literary forms offered by English education, the English language, and the different cultural milieus they inhabited. But this is no easy task, as often the literary work of Indian or immigrant writers and intellectuals intertwines with their activist commitments.
1.3 Project Overview

In Part I, I consider the cultural implications of the concept of “the new American” and situate this study at a moment of economic and legal transformation, catalyzed by the closing of the frontier, the rising influx of “undesirable” immigrants, and the promise of off-reservation boarding schools to make Indian children into “good Americans.” Distinguishing between “old” and “new” immigrant and Indian cooptation into Americanization discourses, Chapter 2 foregrounds the legal constructions of “new Americans” by drawing attention to the complicity of immigration restriction laws and federal Indian policy with organized Americanization in legislating the desirable “new American.” I show, for instance, how “the Indian” occupies an anomalous position in the naturalization process, finalized with the passing of the Indian Citizenship Act in 1924, at a time when racist restriction quotas drastically limited the access of new immigrants, culminating in the 1924 Immigration Act. I conclude that the consensual model of American citizenship in new immigrant and Indian contexts was inadequate—with Indians slowly coerced into citizenship and new immigrants gradually barred from it.

In Part II, I locate indigenous responses to Progressive reform organizations and state-sponsored missions of “incorporating” the American Indian into the body of new American citizenry, foregrounding the role of native voices in “making Americans” through their contributions to the American Indian intellectual tradition. My two archives include the published work of Indian students at Carlisle Indian Industrial School (1879-1914) and the cultural work of the first indigenous organization of national reputation, the Society of American Indians (1911-1920). I read Carlisle students’ poems, letters, and articles in the Carlisle newspapers and propaganda venues as complicit with the ideological underpinnings of the institution’s ambitious goals of “making Americans” and yet critical of the very moves that the
institution demanded of its students. I argue that these rhetorically bold writings set the stage for reading the cultural work of the Society of American Indians, the first pan-Indian national organization with a clear agenda for the political and intellectual future of Native communities nationally. Reading both the activist and literary work of the SAI, I conclude that American Indian intellectuals manipulated, negotiated, and invented rhetorical practices to address their “making” as “Americans.”

Part III examines fictional “makings of Americans” in the work of two Jewish American writers: Abraham Cahan, author of the celebrated novel *The Rise of David Levinsky*, and Marcus Eli Ravage, author of the equally significant but forgotten autobiography, *An American in the Making*. Juxtaposing two Americanization stories—a fictionalized account and an autobiography, both published in 1917, by two first-generation immigrant writers of uneven literary fame and following—this chapter shows how a foundational moment in immigrant literary history engages with ideological and legislative discourses, such as the growing nativist concerns for the purity of the American racial make-up. I also look at how Yiddish poetry in the US, written at a time when discourses of Americanization reshaped notions of American identity, rendered the tensions of the diasporic Jewish immigrant imagination through what I call new geographies of being and belonging in the “New World.” The immigrant subject’s choice to write in Yiddish, Slovenian, or Romanian—although from the vantage point of the American scene—thus becomes a political act of dissimulation. Foregrounding the work of first-generation immigrant writers—marked by discursive tensions between English and native or ethnic languages, Old and New world, emigrant and immigrant, citizen and alien, insider and outsider—I show how these counter-narratives to Americanization are part of an incipient counter-hegemonic discourse, which I call the “unmaking of Americans.”
Part IV examines the visual contest over “making Americans” in one of the early twentieth century’s new media—the silent film. I argue that early American cinema was inextricably complicit with and critical of Americanization discourses and practices. I show how the rise of the moving image negotiates and complicates the institutionalization of Americanization. First, joining with the work of Richard Abel, Miriam Hansen, and Sabine Haenni, I reevaluate the role of immigrant spectatorship and the use of immigrant tropes to market the “New American” agenda in Charlie Chaplin’s *The Immigrant* (1917) and the documentary *The Making of an American* (1920). For instance, I juxtapose Chaplin’s unorthodox take on immigrant arrival (in the Little Tramp’s kicking the Immigration officer’s behind or the dramatization of immigrant survival in the mess hall scenes) with the studied “American” behavior promoted by the Connecticut-sponsored documentary. I also ask, what happens when the Indian becomes not only the object of representation but also its subject? I argue that the films of Indian director and actor James Young Deer (Winnebago) offer an alternative cinematic perspective to the trope of the “vanishing Indian” dominating the big studio Westerns. Mediating between the demands of the Western genre and the commitment to cultural specificity, Young Deer’s films, particularly *White Fawn’s Devotion* (1910)—one of the few silent films directed by an American Indian—challenge many misconceptions about Indian representation in the early and later twentieth-century American Western. Indeed, the “new American” Indian and immigrant emerges at an intersection of legislative, scientific, and cultural discourses.

Notes

1 “Aborigine and Immigrant,” 16.

2 Behdad, especially 14-21. Immigration history and historiography has yet to include American Indians to understand the stakes of the discourses of “hospitality” from another angle.
3 Hendrick W. Van Loon. “You Can’t Come In. The Quota for 1620 is full,” 666.

4 Higham uses the metaphor “Babel of tongues” in Send These to Me, 21.

5 Philip Gleason offers a persuasive refutation of the generally-accepted notion that Crèvecoeur was the “originator of the melting pot symbol,” offering other cases in point, from DeWitt Clinton, Emerson, Frederick Jackson Turner, and Israel Zangwill (“The Melting Pot,” 3-31).

6 For a detailed account of the “problem of assimilation” during the Progressive Era, see Higham, Send These to Me, 181 and 175-97.

7 Maddox, 17-53.


9 “Indians as Foreigners,” 4.


11 Jaret 14.

12 Stein went back to American and in 1903 started writing what would become The Making of Americans, which she resumed in 1906, finished in 1911, and published in 1925 in a limited edition in England.


14 James’ The American Scene was published in London in January 1907. In this chapter I refer to the 1968 edition, edited by Leon Edel.
Ross Posnock reads James as “neither an enemy nor a defender of immigrants.” While Posnock’s evidence is persuasive, I draw on Donald Weber’s work on Cahan and James to explore the moment of tension between the “old” and “new American.” Weber elucidates the unspoken xenophobia James’ *The American Scene* only alludes to, by examining one of James’s talks at Bryn Mawr—“The Question of Our Speech”—where James notes: “the thing they [the aliens] may best do is play, to their heart’s content, with the English language or, in other words, dump their mountain of promiscuous material into the foundations of the American” (42-43).


16 King, 14.

17 Wharton, 47.

18 Lawrence, 36.

19 According to King (207), of the 94,820,915 white people in the United States in 1920, almost 53,500,000 were of “immigrant stock” and 41,000,000 of “original native stock” (i.e. Anglo-Saxon).

20 Trachtenberg, xvii.

21 Hoxie, *Talking Back to Civilization*.

22 *The Red Man*, November 1899, 3.

23 For a comprehensive volume of progressive voices, “Friends of the Indian,” advocating the Americanization of American Indians, see Prucha, *Americanizing the American Indian*.

24 Jaret, 10-11.

25 Qtd. in Hertzberg, 65.
Many Progressive thinkers and administrators applied the immigrant model of Americanization to Indian nations, from Franz Boaz to members of the Society of American Indians, Richard Henry Pratt, and Indian “bad boy” activist Carlos Montezuma.

Qtd. in Zeidel, 4.
Distinguishing between “old” and “new” immigrant and Indian participation in Americanization discourses, this chapter considers the legal constructions of “new Americans” by locating key legislative moments in the history of immigration restriction and federal Indian policy. Although citizenship plays a minimal role in the American constitutional scheme, as legal historians have suggested, in the cultural fields it is more telling: teaching American citizenship to unassimilable aliens and tribal Indians becomes a public responsibility of “organized Americanization.” Historically seen as essentially “foreign” to American polity, I show how the Indian occupies an anomalous position in the naturalization process, finalized with the passing of the Indian Citizenship Act in 1924, at a time when racist restriction quotas limited drastically the access of foreign “undesirables” to American polity. This chapter also foregrounds the inadequacies of the consensual model of American citizenship in the new immigrant and Indian contexts, teasing out ideological implications of the state’s redefinitions of its relations with “unfit” subjects.

2.1 “Out by Law”¹: The American Indian,Foreigner at Home

We are robbing, pillaging, poisoning, murdering, starving, and exploiting the Indians because we are at heart still barbarians who would rather turn human souls and bodies into gold than treat them justly.
In 1944, legal historian Felix Cohen asked rhetorically: “Why, twenty years after the last non-citizen Indian was endowed with citizenship by act of Congress, do so many well-meaning people think that Indians are not citizens?” Cohen’s frustration with the majority citizenry’s misconception of Indian civic status, which often placed Indian people in a “second-class” or wardship status, foregrounds a common trend in the dominant public’s reading of Indian subjects as “incomplete citizens.” In this section I historicize and theorize comparatively the implications of American Indian and New Immigrant naturalization as envisioned before and during the Americanization and assimilation campaigns at the turn of the century. As I argue in my larger project, the American Indian occupies an anomalous position in the naturalization process, finalized with the Indian Citizenship Act in 1924, at a time when racist restriction quotas were drastically limiting the numbers of new immigrants. Whereas the immigrant has often been defined as someone who desires America (as Siobhan Somerville’s work has shown), the Indian was not desired into political membership. The United States has typically reproduced its citizenship in two ways: through birthright and through naturalization (i.e., the consensual model). The American Indian, however, was excluded from both birthright citizenship—although born on US territory, the Indian was not born a citizen—and from naturalization (until 1924). I conclude that the consensual model of American citizenship in new immigrant and Indian contexts was inadequate—with Indians slowly coerced into citizenship and new immigrants gradually barred from it.

The 1880s-1920s were characterized by what historian Robert Wiebe has called a “search for order,” from economic security, social status, and prestige, to a heightened sense of the
relationship between the citizens and the government.⁴ At the same time, while eugenicist debates over the “original native stock” versus the new “immigrant stock” informed the country’s immigration policy and its future racial make-up, a new interest in the “native” or “first inhabitant” of the continent resurfaced in both popular and legislative venues. The Indian Citizenship Act passed in the House of Representatives only a month after the immigration restriction bill, granting nominal citizenship to Indian people. But as historians have pointed out, two thirds of the Indians in the US were already citizens at that time (through various acts of Congress). Why this legislative haste? Why the renewed interest in the citizen Indian at a time when the trope of the “vanishing Indian” dominated both popular and scientific venues?

Historically, racism toward native peoples and their perceived unassimilability, along with Indian tribes’ own resistance to be incorporated, made American citizenship and Indian sovereignty incompatible. During the early hysteria for immigration restriction, a writer for the New York State Sun in 1886 compared the menace of foreign “savagery” and difference with its indigenous counterpart: “such foreign savages…[are] as much apart from the rest of the people of this country as the Apaches of the Plains are.”⁵ Nonetheless, one of the most acerbic advocates of Indian assimilation, Carlisle Superintendent Richard Henry Pratt based his theories and praxis of Indian assimilation on the immigrant Americanization model. Pratt argued repeatedly and vocally for the termination of Indian reservations, envisioning a total “absorption” of American Indians:

The foreigners made Americans and citizens by being invited, urged and compelled to that consummation by their surroundings. The Indians remain Indians because they are
walled in on reservations and compelled by every force we can apply […] to remain Indians. Suppose the 5,246,613 foreigners who immigrated to the United States in ten years instead of having been distributed through our communities had been sent to reservations—each nationality by itself, would it be reasonable to anticipate that they would have made any material progress in becoming Anglicized and Americanized?\textsuperscript{6}

The Progressive Era’s mission of what Richard Henry Pratt calls “Anglicizing” and “Americanizing” took as a given a monolithic model of American identity. However, whereas immigrant subjects gained access to federal and state citizenship though naturalization after five years of residence, American Indians who refused allotment (after the Dawes Allotment Act of 1887) maintained their status of wards of the federal government until 1924. Whereas Indian naturalization was enforced and enacted by various congressional acts responding to specific socio-economic and political circumstances (as Indian tribes were held under the jurisdiction of the War Department, the Department of the Interior, and later the Bureau of Indian Affairs), immigrant naturalization was a more centralized institution. The Department of Commerce and Labor established the US Bureau of Naturalization in 1906, thus bringing naturalization under the jurisdiction of federal courts. Whereas the provisions for the naturalization of immigrants in the US were established as early as 1790 (by the Naturalization Act, which also made whiteness a prerequisite for US citizenship), the only Indians considered citizens by birth under the Constitution had been “those not born into membership in a tribe or whose tribe no longer existed as a distinct entity” (Cohen 642). I argue that a missing segment in the forceful assimilation of Indian people was a concrete naturalization policy, which makes the hasty granting of US citizenship to Indians in 1924 even more questionable.
Progressive reformers sought to make Indians feel more “at home” in America.\textsuperscript{7} Paradoxical as it may seem, while it addresses the search for the inclusion of the Indian into the Americanized body of citizenry, this phrase also gestures toward Indian exclusion from the American polity and, more tellingly, American land. As legal historian Kenneth W. Johnson suggests, “The American Indian historically was perceived by white society as essentially foreign.” During the colonial period, the Indian nations’ “title of self-government” was recognized under the law of nations and treaties signed between Great Britain and the colonies in the New World. Indian nations established, therefore, what legal historians call “a relation of imperium in imperio,” or a sovereign within a sovereign nation (973-74).\textsuperscript{8} After the “discovery” of the American continent, the European “doctrine of discovery” granted the discovering European country title and ownership of the American land, turning Indian peoples into mere “tenants.” The Crown retained title to all lands occupied by Indian tribes, a limited sovereignty over the tribes, and an exclusive right to end the tribal right of occupancy (980). As David Wilkins and K. Tsianina Lomawaima have argued, the discovery doctrine perpetuated “a second-class national status for tribal nations and relegat[ed] individual Indians to a second-class citizenship status,” thus stripping “tribes and individuals of their complete property rights” (20). US relations with native nations were subsequently carried out through the treaty process. Many of these treaties, as legal documents, transferred “land titles from native nations to the United States,” although the federal government recognized tribal ownership of Indian land in the trade and intercourse acts (41, 51).\textsuperscript{9} The use of legal documents, Jill Norgren explains, was inherited from European colonial governments and provided “a legal façade for the denial of Indian rights” (28). One such document denying Indian rights is—not surprisingly—the US Constitution.
The extra-constitutional status of Indians is another early indication of their ascribed second-class citizenship status. One of the initial sources of federal power over Indians was their exclusion from constitutional provisions. The sources of extra-Constitutionalism can illuminate how we interpret the 1924 Indian Citizenship Act, which I argue, was a hasty legislative move toward coercive inclusion and naturalization of Indian people under threats of massive immigration waves and the naturalization privileges of foreigners in the U.S. The drafters of the US Constitution, following the tenets of revolutionary political theory, saw the document as a means of delegating governmental authority by the governed. The final draft of the Articles of Confederation provided that Congress had the only right and power to regulate the trade and management of “all affairs with Indians not members of any of the states.” The Federalist and the Constitutional Convention, for instance, made it clear that Indian tribes and their members were considered non-participating inhabitants of the US, living “outside the framework of the Constitution.”

The extra-Constitutional status of Indian people also presupposed that the internal affairs of Indian tribes were beyond the purview of the federal government. As legal historians have shown, the only Constitutional provision mentioning Indian tribes is the commerce clause, which treats Indian tribes as units distinct from the states: Congress is authorized to “regulate Commerce with foreign Nations, and among the several States, and with the Indian tribes.” Besides the commerce clause, the treaty clause was also considered a basis for federal authority over tribes, granting exclusive authority to the national government to “enter into treaties.” Furthermore, the Indians’ extra-Constitutional status was reinforced by the minimal mentions of Indians in the U.S. Constitution: “Indians not taxed” were excluded by Article I and the Fourteenth Amendment from representation and taxation, had no participatory rights (as they did
not “consent to be governed”), but were considered nonetheless “free persons,” to be distinguished from the slaves, who were subject to the internal laws of the US without their consent or participation. As Vine Deloria Jr. suggests, language in the Constitution “does not give any indication of the manner in which the Constitution was to be specifically applied to Indians.” However, as “independent sovereigns” at the time the Constitution was adopted, Indian tribes were free to “align themselves with any sovereign they wished or to remain nonaligned if they so chose” (26). Nevertheless, Indian sovereignty remained, at best, nominal.

Although special treaties were designed to conduct diplomatic affairs with foreign nations and with Indian tribes treated as foreign nations, the geographic proximity of Indian tribes could not be ignored. Therefore, although politically and legally “foreign” to the United States, Indian tribes became a matter of domestic concern when Congress discontinued the practice of treaty-making, thus prohibiting the recognition of Indian tribes as sovereign political entities in 1871. The Cherokee cases provide legal evidence about the Supreme Court’s reinterpretation of the status of Indian nations as foreign states, serving larger agendas of the government’s Indian Removal policy and the agenda of “manifest destiny” 1830s. For instance, the Cherokee Nation sued the state of Georgia in the Supreme Court in 1831, using its prerogatives as a “foreign state” to challenge the enforcement of Georgia’s jurisdiction within the Cherokee nation, but Chief Justice Marshall declined the Indian status as a “foreign nation” stipulated in the Constitution. After asking—“Is the Cherokee nation a foreign nation in the sense in which that term is used in the constitution?” —Chief Justice Marshall declined the Cherokee nation’s capability to sue, as a foreign nation, under the Court’s doctrine of original jurisdiction. Instead, Marshall concluded that the Cherokees were not a foreign nation, and therefore could not challenge state laws. The Cherokees, and by extension, all Indian nations,
were thus granted a new designation—“domestic dependent nations”; Marshall analogized their relation to the United States as “that of a ward to his guardian.” In a similarly paternalistic vein, Marshall continued: “They look to our government for protection; rely upon its kindness and its power; appeal to it for relief to their wants; and address the president as their great father.”

This Supreme Court decision came shortly after the Cherokee nation, one of the “five civilized tribes,” drafted its own constitution (modeled after that of the US) in 1827, trying to protect its fifteen million acres from President Monroe’s catastrophic “emigration” policy envisioned in 1825 and materialized in the removal bill signed by Andrew Jackson in 1829.

Whereas an immigrant naturalization policy was in effect as early as 1790, the federal government envisioned no similar naturalization policy for American Indians—especially during the intense campaign to assimilate Indians between 1880-1920—which makes the granting of US citizenship to Indians in 1924 even more questionable. Whereas provisions for the naturalization of immigrants in the US were established as early as 1790 (by the Naturalization Act), before the Allotment Act of 1884 the only Indians considered citizens by birth under the Constitution were “those not born into membership in a tribe or whose tribe no longer existed as a distinct entity” (Cohen 642). At the same time, Indians born outside the United States became eligible for naturalization only in 1940. Before the Fourteenth Amendment was adopted in 1868—thus making all persons born in the US citizens both of the United States and their state of residency—the Supreme Court declared that both free blacks and slaves were not citizens of the United States in the infamous Dred Scott v. Sanford case (1857). This court case brought debates over citizenship to the forefront of national debates over slavery. In its discussion of citizenship, the Court said that Indians were not originally citizens in the constitutional sense but that (unlike blacks) Congress had the power to naturalize them because they were aliens for that
purpose; therefore, Indians lacking any tribal relationship were treated at times as citizens without necessarily being naturalized (Cohen 641). The *Dred Scott* decision was overruled with the passing of the Civil Rights Act in 1868.

Supporters of Indian naturalization appealed to a racial (and racist) logic to foreground the inadequacy and shortcomings of the naturalization process in Indian country. Pro-Indian citizenship rhetoric sometimes took the form of racist diatribe, arguing that “descendants of the worst of all races are today worthy American citizens” and that “the superior red man deserved equal treatment” (Figure 2.1).

![Figure 2.1. Sketch by Thomas Nast, Harper’s Weekly, April 1871](image)

Shorty after the naturalization of African Americans through the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868, *Harper’s Weekly*, suggestively subtitled “Journal of Civilization,” published both a cartoon and a short editorial piece in 1871 arguing for the naturalization of the American Indian. The editorial reproduces the logic of the trope of the “vanishing Indian” informing the
late nineteenth-century white imaginary and is unimaginatively (yet predictably) titled, “Lo! The Poor Indian.” The editorial introduces cartoonist Thomas Nast—a “universal philanthropist” and “champion of this long suffering race”—whose plea for justice for Indian people the editor ventriloquizes: “While we welcome to the polls the representatives of every clime and nationality, from the Caucasian to the Hottentot, why […] should we exclude the original owners of the soil?” (363). While the progressive and liberal impulse of this question is well-directed, the editorial benevolence translates in the cartoon into a violent racial “fight” over citizenship privileges: in the foreground, a suited and bearded African American man threatens an imposing and statuesque Indian man with a stick, driving him away from the polls: “Move on!” reads the main caption; “has the Native American no rights that the naturalized American is bound to respect?” (361). The background is an animated scene at the polls: men of various ethnic and racial backgrounds (wearing different hats to suggest such differences) participate in an exaggerated ritual of presumed civic equality and male bonding. The voting scene on the left complements the scenic landscape to the right, with teepees looming in the distance, away from the voting site. Besides assuming an unproblematic enfranchisement of African Americans, this scenic separation is also emblematic of contemporaneous representations of Indians in cartoons and other media in the later nineteenth century, particularly in the sentimental eastern version of the “noble” Indian and the western, frontier “villain.” Moreover, the editorial comment draws attention to incongruities in voting and citizenship privileges among and across racial groups, appealing to the popular audience’s sense of civic arbitration (while reinforcing notions of racial group superiority and white supremacy, as the readership of Harper’s Weekly was predominantly white). A few years later, New York Governor Horatio Seymour would reinforce these views: “The cannibal from the islands of the Pacific, the worst criminals from Europe, Asia, or Africa,
can appeal to the law and courts for their rights of person and property—all, save our native Indians, who, above all, should be protected from wrong.”

Cartoons and sketches centered on ethnicity isolate readers from the social “reality” of the caricatured subjects (albeit objectified) and, as part of an emerging ethnic caricature trend in both new and older magazines in the growing print culture of late nineteenth-century, they appeal to a middle class readership and reinforce their values of both class and racial superiority. Furthermore, ethnic caricature helps sustain the stable margins of a growing sense of “American identity,” a trend more prominent in the early twentieth-century when the new racial make-up of the country calls for redefinitions of “American” identity in both visual and print forms. John Higham suggests that the new immigrants arriving in the New World in the 1880s “lived in the American imagination only in the form of a few vague ethnic stereotypes” (Strangers in the Land, 87). Nevertheless, ethnic caricature as a cultural and political device starts cultivating a trend that fixes the uni-dimensionality of ethnic identity in an already growing multiethnic society, and with long-term effects in the American imaginary.

With the Civil Rights Act of 1866, “All persons born […] in the United States and not subject to any foreign power, excluding Indians not taxed” were declared citizens of the US. The Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, passed in 1868, expanded the provisions of the Civil Rights Act but also maintained the initial wording of the Constitution—“excluding Indians not taxed” (Fourteenth Amendment, Section 2). Did the Fourteenth Amendment make Indians citizens? This question deserves further scrutiny. According to the Fourteenth Amendment,

All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction
thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws. (Fourteenth Amendment, Section 1)

Nevertheless, when John Elk, “a civilized Indian,” brought his case to the Supreme Court in 1884, his US citizen status was not recognized and he was declined suffrage privileges. Elk, born in an Oklahoma tribe, had moved to Omaha, Nebraska, purchased a home, become a member of the state militia, and paid taxes. His deliberate removal from his tribe and willingness to cast his vote in state elections were encouraged by Nebraska laws (state voting privileges were granted to men who intended to become citizens). In Elk v. Wilkins (1884), the Supreme Court declared that section 1 of the Fourteenth Amendment (quoted above) did not include an Indian born under tribal authority. The Court also held that Indians owed allegiance to their tribe and so did not acquire citizenship at birth (Cohen 283). The logic of the decision is dubious at best, and it contradicts contemporaneous campaigns of the “Friends of the Indian” and other Progressive organizations to “civilize” and “citizenize” Indians. As Deloria and Wilkins explain,

[T]he majority in Elk insisted that absent a specific naturalization law, naturalization provision in a treaty, or action in the federal court, an Individual Indian could not expatriate himself from a tribe and adopt the habits of civilized life and thereby become a citizen of the United States. He needed a specific act of the United States admitting him to membership and citizenship. (146)
A specific act granting this “privilege” was the 1924 Indian Citizenship Act, but it is fair to assume that the dubious nature of the Elk decision precipitated the inclusion of a citizenship clause prior to the 1924 Act—in the Dawes or Allotment Act of 1887.

The promise of citizenship, however, was used in the late nineteenth century as part of the “total assimilation” policy Anglo-Saxon reformers and legislators embraced. Frederick Hoxie documents several disagreements over Indian citizenship predating the passing of the Dawes Allotment Act in 1887: some reformers claimed that reservations should be abolished immediately; supporters of immediate citizenship (the Boston Indian Citizenship Committee, the Indian Rights Association) attributed some form of agency to Indians themselves, suggesting their fitness for citizenship once they have “demonstrated individually their readiness for the franchise.” Yet others held that citizenship should be granted to Indians gradually. Southern opponents, in particular, spoke against rapid allotment, unwilling to see the elimination of all federal protection for tribes.25

At the American Missionary Association Annual Meeting in 1892, Thomas J. Morgan, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, made citizenship “the key word to the present situation” of Indian people in his envisioned transformation of Indian subjects into self-supporting individuals. Morgan outlined five elements necessary in the work of individualizing and citizenizing the American Indian: “land, law, labor, learning, and love” (3).26 Morgan’s optimistic five-L scheme of Indian citizenship bore the idealistic stamp of progressivism and elitist reductionism of the “Indian question” to a unidirectional solution—complete assimilation—not accounting for Native people’s needs or desire to assimilate. A New York Times editorial in 1897 did not exclude the possibility that “Indians may emigrate” to Mexico and South America to
show their disagreement with the provisions of the Dawes Act—a convenient, albeit “chimerical or visionary” solution to settle “Indian unrest and disquietude.”27 Other national journals offered more jocular solutions to the “Indian problem” in 1897:

‘Well, said the Congressman from Owattamy, ‘I guess the Indian problem has been solved at last. We’ll soon be rid of the red men now.’

‘How so?’ Asked one of the constituents.

‘They’ve taken up football.’28

Both the Dawes-Coke Bill of 1884 and the final Dawes Act of 1887 opened a temporary sense of closure to these debates, making Indian allottees into American citizens. (The citizenship provisions of the Dawes Act were applicable to Indian allottees, while Indians who refused allotment maintained their status quo.)

The General Allotment Act, also known as the Dawes Act, offered a citizenship provision for Indian allottees but bluntly contradicted the previous ruling in Elk v. Wilkins. At best, it, could be read as a corrective to that ruling: “every Indian born within the territorial limits of the United States who has voluntarily taken up, within said limits, his residence separate and apart from any tribe of Indians herein, and has adopted the habits of civilized life, is hereby declared to be a citizen of the United States.”29 Therefore, the General Allotment Act “offered” citizenship to Indians in the US who were the beneficiary of allotment provisions, based on the scheme that tribal ties and federal protection would end twenty-five years later, at the end of a period when the land was “held in trust” by the federal government. This new policy applied the principle of severalty, tried previously with individuals and certain tribes, to all reservation Indians except
the so-called “five civilized tribes.” An 1890 statute permitted tribal Indians living in Indian Territory to become naturalized citizens without any change in tribal or federal ties. In 1901, citizenship was also granted to all members of the Five Civilized Nations in Indian Territory. Tribal lands were to be broken up and assimilation was to be performed gradually. Allotted Indians would acquire immediate US citizenship, and title to their allotments in twenty-five years. Indian women marrying US citizens became naturalizable in 1888, and Congress made World War I Indian veterans American citizens in 1919. Tom Holms argues that, by 1918 over 10,000 Native Americans had enrolled in the U.S. army, 85% as volunteers. However, the “promise of citizenship” offered by the Dawes Act was only temporary; the Burke Act, passed in 1906, amended section 6 of the Dawes Act (the citizenship proviso). Whereas the Dawes Act had granted citizenship to all Indian allottees, the 1906 Burke Act deferred the granting of citizenship for twenty-five years, also called “the trust period.” Even more suspically, the act allowed the Secretary of the Interior to grant “certificates of citizenship” to individual allotees if he found them “competent” enough to receive them. Although the Burke Act was signed into law by President Roosevelt, it did not “go gently” through Senate, as the opposition objected that such a measure would “create an aristocracy of citizenship.” Similarly, the Indian Rights Association protested against the Burke Act, criticizing the government’s interference with personal liberties. By 1906, 166,000 Indians had become citizens, 65,000 through the allotment process, and the rest as members of the Five Nations.

Finally, the Indian Citizenship Act, signed by President Coolidge into law on June 2, 1924, extended citizenship to all Indians, allowing for the retention of Indian tribal citizenship and rights:
Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress Assembled, That all non-citizen Indians born within the territorial limits of the United States be, and they are hereby, declared to be citizens of the United States:

Provided, That the granting of such citizenship shall not in any manner impair or otherwise affect the right of any Indian to tribal or other property. (Approved, June 2, 1924; H.R. 6355)³⁶

With the Indian Citizenship Act, an official naturalization law for Indian people in the US was thus in place. Although the act 1) “lessened the controversy among Indians by severing citizenship from questions of tribal membership and cultural assimilation” and 2) “helped Indians gain access to nonpolitical rights and entitlements normally available to all residents,” “citizenship for Indians signified the end of their exclusion from the American political community in a broader sense.” And although 3) Indians were believed “to have the rights of American citizens without having to renounce separate ties to their tribes (right to vote or hold office, travel abroad),³⁷ an important question remains: what did US citizenship mean for Indian people? Granted that the law acknowledges Indian triple citizenship—federal, state, and tribal—an undeniable tenet of naturalization law is the “consent of the governed.” Did Indian people, therefore, consent to become US citizens? A report submitted to a joint commission in Congress in 1915 by the Bureau of Municipal Research indicated that, “the Indian (except in rare Individual cases) does not desire citizenship.” Indian U.S. citizenship also offers the umbrella of a uniform membership and a civic identity that contradicted many tribal values and political allegiances. At the same time, and more cruelly, the Indian Citizenship Act did not affect the ward status of Indians who became citizens. The power to vote in state and federal elections
remained, for a long time, the only direct benefit of citizenship status, although many states declined Indians the right to vote in state elections until the 1950s.\textsuperscript{38} As an editorial in \textit{The Survey} put it in September 1924, “citizenship itself does not guarantee the ability to survive and to prosper, and quite possibly the immediate and concrete advantages of the new Indian health measures announced by the Department of the Interior may be greater than the change of legal status.”\textsuperscript{39} Under the Nationality Act of 1940, citizenship was finally bestowed on all persons born in the US, including members of “an Indian, Eskimo, Aleutian, or other aboriginal tribe,” in a first congressional attempt to include most racial minorities in the category of “citizen.”\textsuperscript{40}

2.2 Immigrant Naturalization

Once I thought to write a history of the immigrants in America. Then I discovered that immigrants were American history.

—Oscar Handlin, \textit{The Uprooted}

Claiming that “immigrants were American history,” immigration historians like Oscar Handlin fail to acknowledge the relevance of indigenous histories to “American history,” while demarcating a rigid and false dichotomy between two categories often taken for granted by many fields of inquiry today—the “Old World” and the “New World.” According to this logic—that many indigenous critics find fault with—when the “old” immigrants set foot on U.S. soil, they entered a liminal legal space of semi-belonging that could be claimed only after they occupied the adoptive country’s land for a defined period of time, thus becoming naturalizable. If we
follow the history of old immigration, we learn that the first legislation defining the immigrant relation to both US land and desired US civic identity was the 1790 Naturalization Act, designed to establish a “uniform rule of naturalization,” and setting the immigrant’s residence requirement at two years. The Constitution adopted in 1789 had already granted Congress the power to regulate naturalization. Article I of the Constitution adopted in 1789 granted Congress the power “to establish a uniform Rule of Naturalization.” The Naturalization Act of 1790 established, therefore, a contractual relation between the immigrant and the state:

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,* That any alien, being a free white person, who shall have resided within the limits of and under the jurisdiction of the United States for the term of two years, may be admitted to become citizen thereof [...]. And the children of such persons so naturalized, dwelling within the United States, being under the age of twenty-one years at the time of such naturalization, shall also be considered citizens of the United States. 

The Naturalization Act establishes that naturalizable aliens must be both “white” and “free,” thus making whiteness the racial prerequisite for citizenship and imposing the logic of white supremacy in the legal discourse of the country. As legal and literary theorists have noted, the 1790 Naturalization Act was “the first federally enacted law that referred to race explicitly.” Moreover, by restricting naturalization to “free white persons,” this act also established that neither African Americans nor Asian Americans or American Indians could become citizens, and thus that they were, consequently, unnaturalizable.
A new Naturalization Act was passed in 1795, which repealed the 1790 Act and raised the residence requirement from two to five years, requiring the prospective citizen to declare his intention to seek citizenship at least three years prior to naturalization. During the next several years, three pieces of anti-alien legislation set the tone for direct anti-alien sentiment and vigilance: The Naturalization Act (June 1798), The Aliens Act (June 1798), and the Alien Enemy Act (July 1798). The anti-alien laws were passed at a time of mounting fear of both European nations and aliens in the US and, as E.P. Hutchinson suggests, when “the Federalist party felt such legislation to be its political advantage” (46). The colonial period, however, encouraged immigration despite sporadic anti-alien laws, and Congress resisted pressures from emerging nativist organizations at the beginning of the nineteenth century (the Native American Party, the Order of United Americans, and the Know Nothings). Nevertheless, by the Civil War, several terms of future immigration restriction laws had been defined: the problem of undesirable classes of immigrants (spelled out first in racial tones, then in medicalized and scientific discourse), the problem of state vs. federal jurisdiction over immigration, and the controversy over Chinese coolie trade.45

Whereas Indian naturalization was enforced and enacted by various congressional acts responding to specific socio-economic and political circumstances (as Indian tribes were held either under the jurisdiction of the War Department, the Department of the Interior, and later the Bureau of Indian Affairs), immigrant naturalization grew more centralized between the opening of the immigration “golden door” in 1883 and the first severe immigration restriction steps in 1913. Two decades after the Civil War, the federal government assumed responsibility over immigration, passing legislation that would lead to the gradual restriction of immigration. A strong restrictionist agenda was already under way in the early1880s. The Page Act (1875) was
the first federal legislation that enumerated specific types of people who were excluded from entering the US (immigrants under contract for “lewd or immoral purposes” or “prostitution”; or persons guilty of felony). The Chinese Exclusion Act (1882) followed shortly thereafter, translating similar concerns with immigration from “any Oriental country” and restricting Chinese immigration to the US: “no state or court of the United States shall admit Chinese to citizenship.” At the same time, another act of Congress granted specific naturalization privileges to aliens of “African nativity” or “African descent,” and the people who were already citizens of Hawaii in 1898 were made US citizens in 1900. In 1882, Congress passed a law excluding convicts, lunatics, idiots, and paupers; the Contract Labor Law passed in 1885, as a response to lobbyists of organized labor, and prohibited employers from recruiting labor in Europe and from paying laborers’ passage across the Atlantic. Despite restrictions in these legislative acts, there was still no clearly defined immigration policy.

Unlike federal Indian policy, which overlooked Indian people’s desire or willingness to be included in the mass of U.S. citizenry, immigration policy was organized around the concept of “desirable” vs. “undesirable” aliens, a concept, as we shall see in later chapters, that immigrants in general and immigrant writers in particular started internalizing. More specifically, certain cultural and racial groups were privileged over others due to their potential for “assimilation.” Immigration narratives often foreground the trope of the immigrant as a desiring subject (desiring the feminized adopting nation, often dressed in Christian garb). In immigration policy, however, the desired object (i.e. the imagined nation) establishes its own desiring parameters, which include race, mental competence, and criminality. In this vision, the “new American” may not be an idiot, an epileptic, or a lunatic; for a country imagining its own
homogeneity of identity despite a growing racial and ethnic diversity, the new American must be a WASP (White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant).

Oscar Handlin’s contention that “immigrants were American history” foregrounds U.S. history as immigration history, failing to acknowledge that this history is also one of colonization, relocation, usurpation, and genocide of “Native peoples.” Higham calls the 1890s “the Nationalist Nineties,” which produced the Immigration Restriction Law of 1891, which places immigration under federal authority and establishes Ellis Island as a legitimate port of entry in the U.S. Ellis Island opened its doors officially on January 1, 1892, and between 1892 and 1924, over 70% of the new immigrants first encountered the US through the triage station of Ellis Island. A long-lasting model for the later Immigration and Naturalization Services or the more recent Homeland Security Department, Ellis Island—either as “island of tears” or “island of hope”—became the laboratory for distilling and applying immigration restriction policies. (Other federal immigration stations were established in other major ports, such as San Francisco, Boston, and Philadelphia.)

A growing repertoire of “excludable” characteristics also slowly overshadowed the promise of American citizenship. One of the first organizations specially designed with a view to restricting immigration was the American Protection Association, founded in 1887, arguing for the restriction of both “number” and “types” of immigrants. One of the first proposals of the newly-institutionalized restrictionists was a literacy requirement for immigrants, which would resurface intermittently in the legal arena before 1917, when the Literacy bill passed. (Congress had passed a Literacy Bill as early as 1897 but it was vetoed by President Cleveland.) The Immigration Restriction League (IRL), organized in Boston between in 1894 by Harvard graduates, followed in the footsteps of this association and took the “protection” work a few
steps further. The League gathered a distinguished membership, including Massachusetts Senator Henry Cabot Lodge and eugenicist Madison Grant, author of *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916). The term “eugenics,” from the Greek for “wellborn,” was coined by Francis Galton in 1904 and was soon widely accepted.) The Immigration Restriction League was active through the 1920s and left a legacy of what Barbara Solomon calls “an ideology of restriction.” The League Secretary, Prescott Hall, asked bluntly whether Americans wanted “this country to be peopled by British, German and Scandinavian stock, historically free, energetic, progressive, or by Slav, Latin, and Asiatic races, historically downtrodden, atavistic, stagnant.” The Restrictionists’ work was also influenced by Social Darwinism, which reinforced racial differences to account for social differences and promoted ideas embraced by eugenicists, themselves in search of racial degeneracy theories and advocates of “selective breeding.” The dangers of “racial mixing” were crudely extolled, and arguments about the inherent degeneracy of immigrant “races” or their “inborn tendencies” took center stage in eugenicist debates over immigration restriction. With the formation of the Dillingham Commission in the early 1900s, these restriction parameters and criteria resulted in legislative acts and direct statistical and cultural changes, leading to the “closing of the golden door” (the restriction of immigrant types and numbers and its consequences).

A unifying paradigm of naturalization, however, was missing. The immigration restriction steps were part of disparate efforts to “screen” various racial and ethnic groups admitted into the country. “Screening” is my preferred term for designating both inclusionary and exclusionary immigration practices. In this work I am not as interested in reasserting the outcomes or effects of restriction—they are well known—as in complicating what I will call “screening paradigms” and the intricate causes of immigration restriction. The Department of
Commerce and Labor established the U.S. Bureau of Naturalization in 1906, the first standardized (and standardizing) organ regulating immigration and naturalization. If, before 1906, state and local courts were in charge of naturalization and its practices, after 1906 naturalization came under the jurisdiction of federal courts. The Naturalization Act was also passed in 1906, making English a prerequisite for immigrant naturalization. In 1913, the Bureau was reorganized into two separate units—the Bureau of Immigration and the Bureau of Naturalization. Training the new citizens in “principles of Americanism” was not only part of progressive organizations’ mission to instill a sense of civic identity into immigrants’ foreign psyches and allegiances; it was also part of the government “citizenship training programs,” started in 1907, culminating in the Division of Citizenship Training in 1919, established to promote training for citizenship in the public schools. The year 1907 also saw an increase in the head tax on immigrants, and the 1907 Immigration Act added new categories to the exclusion list: TB-infected immigrants, as well as people with mental or physical defects. If the initial steps toward immigration restriction consisted of expanding the catalogue of physically and mentally “unfit” foreigners, the dominant pattern in immigration control after 1913 became a reduction of alien numbers altogether. The landmark of the first massive move toward the restriction of immigration from non-WASP countries is the proposed literacy test bill which, vetoed by President William Howard Taft in 1913, continued to fuel nativist, racist, and ethnocentric concerns. Although the Literacy Test was vetoed again in 1915, but a Literacy Test requirement was introduced in 1917, over President Woodrow Wilson’s veto, and it applied to all immigrants over sixteen.

The emergence of the Bureau of Naturalization as a free-standing regulating institution, along with a long series attempts at immigration restriction, suggest a turning point in
immigration policy: the growing number of “excludable” classes and mounting concerns with the protection of domestic labor forces and the growing numbers of immigrants admitted to the US. At the same time, the Bureau stood for an incipient form of institutionalized racism, as more and more exclusion criteria were determined racially. The Bureau also took shape during a time of intense and contradictory racist sentiments about immigrants’ racial or ethnic inferiority. For the purposes of this argument, the Bureau stood for the state power regulating fitness for citizenship, translated often into racial terms. For instance, one of the extensions of this newly-institutionalized ethos was the inclusion of eligibility for citizenship through naturalization in the Dillingham Bill of 1913 as a condition for immigrant admission. In the same year, Harvard Professor Prescott F. Hall offered an unambiguous analogy between the restrictionist practices used by the American Breeders’ Association in controlling “the immigration of animals and plants” and the immigration of “human beings” “below the average of both of our country and their own.”

The nationwide attack on immigration was also fueled by economic distress (the Panic of 1893), scientific racism, growing xenophobia, anti-Catholic sentiment, as well as an acerbic, growing nativist press. A 1903 immigration law added to the excluded list epileptics, beggars, anarchists, and all who believed in the forceful overthrow of the government. Another source of “panic” was the presumed political radicalism of new immigrant groups. The perception that fanatical “provocateurs” were involved in the Haymarket Square Bombing in 1886 also heightened nativist concerns about “imported conspiracy” by immigrants like “Red Emma” Goldman. Moreover, the growing foreign language press was perceived as a vehicle for the dissemination of anarchist propaganda. For instance, in 1922 there were 16 Romanian radical newspapers in the U.S., 15 Yiddish, 23 Hungarian, and 27 Italian, compared with 1 French and 4
Danish radical publications (Park, *The Immigrant Press* 436). In the eyes of restrictionists, these anarchist publications attacked not only the English-speaking communities, but also the growing sense of “national culture” and “national identity” at the junction of new conceptions about “the makings of Americans,” especially in the makings of “new Americans” out of “new immigrants.” In literature, as Higham documents, “the country’s foremost literary arbiters instigated a general critical assault on writers of alien blood and spirit for corrupting American literature.” As the next chapters will show, immigrant writers responded to these attacks and used the English language as a tool of resistance and to assert their control of and position in the new, adopted language. Marcus Klein sums up this act of rhetorical resistance cogently: “To be a writer (in English) in itself was an act of emigration, and therefore an act of hostility directed against a most peculiarly sensitive and imposing society.”

For some restrictionists national identity became synonymous with racial identity. As major restrictionist Lothrop Stoddard put it in his 1924 study, *Racial Realities in Europe*, “race is what people really are; nationality is what people politically think they are” (153). Therefore, race and nation are not synonymous. In this logic, if the presumed “whiteness” of the new immigrants facilitated their access through the “golden door” in the early 1880s, when non-white racial groups were suddenly excluded (e.g., Asian immigrants), it was a rethinking of whiteness itself that prompted the gradual denial of further European immigration to the US and major restriction legislation in the 1920s. This ideological tension, Matthew F. Jacobson has suggested, arose at the intersection of “established codes of whiteness as inclusive of all Europeans, and new, racialist revisions” (72). This redefinition of whiteness, I argue following Jacobson, was fuelled by both eugenicist revisions of national racial definitions and restriction parameters based on race. I take to heart Jacobson’s careful demarcations of the various dimensions of “race”: (1)
“race as an organizer of power whose vicissitudes track power relationships through time”; (2)
“race as a mode of perception contingent upon the circumstances of the moment”; and (3) “race
as the product of specific struggles for power at specific cultural sites” (11). While a
comprehensive discussion of the various (European) races scrutinized through this exclusionary
lens is beyond the purview of my study, I will use Jacobson’s third lens to read the implications
of the “struggles for power at specific cultural sites” in the cultural and literary work of the
immigrant and Indian authors I have chosen as case studies.

One of the most important institutions for legislating and implementing drastic
immigration policies before the passing of the Johnson-Reed Immigration (Quota) Act in 1924 is
the Dillingham Commission, named after Vermont Senator William P. Dillingham. Created by
the Immigration Act of 1907 as “the Immigration Commission,” the nine-member commission
was responsible for examining (and solving) a mounting “immigration problem.” While the
Dillingham Commission appeared during a time of intense nativist outbursts (it has been argued
that), not all restrictionists or all Dillingham Commission members thought the new immigrants’
“foreignness” was at odds with American values. As Robert Zeidel has shown, it seems that,
although it emerged from nativist concerns, the Commission ultimately made few derogatory
references to immigrants “on the basis of their physical, social, or cultural characteristics” (5).
To a certain extent, the Commission’s work could be read as an attempt to emulate the
Americanization movement’s dictum, “Many people, One Nation.” Yet, its findings decisively
contributed to major immigration restriction policies in the early twentieth century. Between
1907 and 1911, the Commission produced 41 volumes of reports, culminating in an influential
dictionary—Dictionary of Races of People—(volume 42) that offers “racial classifications”
whose meanings have been used and revised throughout the twentieth century.
To produce evidence about what I call the “makings of new Americans,” in 1907 the Dillingham Commissioners, armed with a large staff, launched a comprehensive trip to “document” the sources of immigration and their effects on US racial composition. Visiting “the lands whence immigrants came from,” all parts of the US where new immigrants settled, interviewing immigrants returning home—the “birds of passage”—the Commission asked whether the “immigration problem” was imported or caused by conditions at home. Moreover, the Dillingham Commission wanted to gather information about the causes of emigration, about the classes of immigrants, about the different national emigration policies, as well as about the effects of U.S. laws on emigrants’ departure. A first report on the major new immigrant nationalities—Emigration Conditions—included an in-depth analysis of Austro-Hungarian, Italian, Russian, and Greek communities in their countries of origin. Armed with a baggage of a xenophobic vocabulary describing Italian immigrants in the US, for instance, the Commission’s conclusions about Southern Italian immigrants—who made up the majority of Italian immigrants to the US—were unexpected. As Zeidel’s thorough analysis of the Commission’s reports shows, little evidence supported American xenophobia; other qualities, such as industriousness and good citizenship, despite Southern Italy’s poverty and high illiteracy rates, elicited the Commission’s admiration. Observing more prosperous Northern Italian regions, the commissioners recorded that “going to America seemed to have little attraction” for Northern Italians. The “European” report’s encouraging note about the new immigrants offered a surprising conclusion to the “immigration problem”: the European investigation suggested that, if indeed there was an immigration problem, its roots were in the U.S. rather than Europe.61

The gigantic report of the Dillingham Commission, presenting statistical and demographic data about immigrants’ old and new surroundings and conditions, is an
unprecedented attempt—funded with federal money—to document the “new immigrants” in the US. Searching for answers about the immigrants’ fitness for Americanization and “absorption,” the Commission examined patterns of immigration from Europe; conditions in the European countries “sending” these immigrants; the position and economic status of recent immigrants in the US, such as occupations, residential patterns, levels of assimilation, as well as the rate of incarceration for insanity, pauperism, and criminality; the reproduction of immigrant women; city life. The Commission obtained data from approximately 3,200,000 people (King 59). At the same time, the findings of the Dillingham Commission widened the gap between the “old” and the “new” immigration and called attention to a number of characteristics that fuelled and informed restrictionist agendas. First, the new immigrants, unlike the old, were unskilled laborers, who worked primarily in agrarian communities and live in condensed communities in large cities. Second, the Commission found the new immigrants intellectually inferior and less committed to remain in the US, therefore lacking a propensity for national improvement or a sense of nationalism:

[T]he new immigration as a class is far less intelligent than the old, approximately one-third of all those over 14 years of age when admitted being illiterate. Racially they are for the most part essentially unlike the British, German, and other peoples who came during the period prior to 1880, and generally speaking they are actuated in coming for different ideals, for the old immigration came to be a part of the country, while the new, in a large measure, comes with the intention of profiting, in a pecuniary way, by the superior advantages of the new world and then returning to the old country.62 [my emphasis]
Through a similar skewed logic, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs observed in his 1876 report: “we have within our midst two hundred and seventy-five thousand [Indian] people, the least intelligent portion of our population, for whom we provide no law, either for protection or for the punishment of crime committed among themselves.”

Third, besides the presumed intellectual inferiority of the new immigrants, their assimilability was also called into question, as their “different ideals” were perceived in terms of economic profit and immediate return to the “old country.” Whereas the old immigrant groups assimilated into the “native American” stock, the new immigrants were found more and more unsuited to become worthy American citizens. To test new immigrants’ assimilation, the Dillingham Commission considered three measures, all of which they ultimately found unsatisfactory: (1) learning English; (2) acquiring U.S. citizenship; and (3) abandoning native customs. Fourth, the Commission started meticulous research on the “racial composition” of new immigrants and produced a “dictionary of the races of people,” which used racial categories already used by the Bureau of Immigration.

More broadly, the Commission used the term “race” to distinguish between languages and geographies rather than color, subscribing to a common division of world’s races into five categories: Caucasian, Mongolian, Malay, Ethiopian, and American Indian.

The Commission also produced an anthropological study, Changes in Bodily Form of Descendants of Immigrants, by the most prominent anthropologist of the day, a German Jewish immigrant himself, Franz Boas. The anthropologist believed that measuring “changes in bodily form” would reveal the degree to which new immigrants have come to emulate the so-called “American type.” Although the idea of an “American type” was both embraced and shunned by Boas’s contemporaries, his emphasis on “environmental determinism” over racial determinism was revolutionary at the time. In short, Boas’s study focuses on the physical development of
“races” and suggests that, in a favorable environment, the form of the immigrant’s body improves. Using craniometric measurements to trace differences between American-born descendents of immigrants and European immigrants, Boas’s team pointed to the likelihood of physical changes in the immigrants’ descendents: “children born not more than a few years after the arrival of the immigrant parents in America [develop] in such a way that they differ in type essentially from their foreign-born parents.” Comparing the “American type” with the “home type” of the immigrant (abroad), Boas’s study yielded two conclusions: he found a greater “uniformity of type” among Americans (than among their counterparts in their country of origin) and an influence of environment on each racial type. Boas’s research refuted eugenicist arguments about hereditary factors informing national characteristics, temporarily challenging restrictionist assumptions about racial hierarchies and white supremacy. At the same time, although refuting contemporary anthropological beliefs in racially-determined physiology, as Zeidel has shown, Boas’s results also pointed to the beneficial effects of assimilation, noticeable immediately after arrival.

Despite promising conclusions about the solvability of the “immigrant problem,” the Dillingham Commission recommended that Congress enact restrictions on immigration based on what it found to be the “unassimilable character of recent immigrants,” and these recommendations affected regulating and restricting immigration in the coming decades. The Commission proposed several drastic measures for restricting immigration: a literacy test; a fixed quota by race; the exclusion of unskilled workers unaccompanied by dependents; annual limits on the number of immigrants admitted at each port; requirements for a fixed amount of money each immigrant was allowed on arrival; and an increase in the head tax, more lenient toward men with families. These recommendations represented a triumph for immigration restrictionists. As
immigration historians have suggested, the Dillingham Commission’s report accentuated the dichotomy between “old” and “new” immigration, thus helping establish long-lasting stereotypes about immigrants in the U.S. popular imaginary. In the process, the exclusive concern with new immigration from southern and Eastern Europe overlooked the potential for assimilation of African Americans, centering the debates over assimilation and Americanization primarily on whiteness. Last but not least, the Commission’s anxieties about the assimilability of new immigrants worked against the “melting pot” ideal of US assimilation, turning a page on the Crèvecoeurian model, and establishing the parameters for later waves of exclusion.

The exclusionary politics of two legislative acts passed in the 1920s had long-lasting effects on twentieth century immigration history and policy. The 1921 Emergency Quota Act restricted immigration from Europe by instituting a new quota system: it limited immigration to 3% per year of each European nationality already residing in the US, using the 1910 census for demographics. This restriction limited the total number of immigrants to 350,000 per year. Only 45% of the immigrants come from southeastern Europe, while 55% come from Northwestern Europe. Although adopted as temporary legislation, the law of 1921 represents a turning point in American immigration policy. The law imposed the first absolute numerical limits on European immigration; it established a nationality quota system based on the pre-existing composition of the American population, ensuring that new immigration “could not reach more than a small fraction of its prewar level.” The provisions of this act ended in June 1924, with the passing of the National Origins Law, popularly known as the Johnson-Reed Act. This act accentuated the initial restrictions even further, limiting immigration from non-Western European countries to 150,000 annually and using the 1890 Census (rather than the 1910 census) to restrict further the number of the nationalities already in the US to 2%. After several deferrals, a national origins
quota formula was implemented; quotas of new immigrants were determined on the basis of national origins for the white population in the US in the 1920 Census, excluding Canada and Mexico. The Johnson-Reed Act also provided that immigrants be processed abroad, under the supervision of U.S. consulates, rather than at US entry ports. Looking back at the effects of the Johnson-Reed Act in 1928, Edward R. Lewis called into question the applicability of the restrictions, yet for different reasons than his predecessors. Lewis’s analysis of “our immigration problems” decried that the quota law did not apply to the Mexican, “a more inassimilable alien,” and called for an expanded application of the quota system to include not only Europe and Asia, but also Mexico, Central and South America.68

Multiple forces and concerns informed and determined American immigration policy in the 1920s, such as growing racism, economic interests, eugenic discourses, and a revision of the concept of “difference”: the shift to “national origins” was rooted in issues of race and difference. As foreigners became more and more different from the previous generations of immigrants, previous concerns about the assimilability of old immigrants (over religion, moral values, etc.) turned into scientifically-justified propositions about new immigrants’ genetic inferiority. As Jacobson suggests, the logic of the exclusionary 1924 legislation showed not only a redefinition of race in American political culture, but also “a new refinement of how races were to be defined for the purposes of discussing good citizenship” (87). Good citizenship, however, was also redefined and rewritten in the American legislative and cultural imaginary.

2.3 Civis Americanus Sum

Citizenship is nothing else than the right to have rights.
—Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*

[...] let us nobly build him in,
Nor rest till ‘ward’ and ‘alien’ win
The rightful name of citizen!
—Edna D. Proctor, “Citizenship for the Red Man”

Although not always explicit, discourses of Americanization have often emphasized the exceptional and privileged status of the “new American” and the potential for acquiring U.S. citizenship. Both before and after being coerced into American citizenship by the series of legislative acts culminating in the 1924 Indian Citizenship Act, American Indians have continued to remain citizens of their tribes or nations, a federally-recognized status which ensured participation in tribal politics. At the same time, paradoxically, “citizen Indians” could remain Indian only by becoming American. This is perhaps a singular instance in the granting of US citizenship when “racial” parameters are not taken into account. Immigrant rapport to U.S. citizenship, while not at the opposite end, was, however, premised on whiteness or constant redefinitions of the naturalization law’s “free white persons” requirement. Nevertheless, whereas Indian people were “offered” U.S. citizenship in hopes they would become Americans, new immigrants had to become American first and then to demonstrate worthiness of American citizenship. As Mathew Jacobson persuasively argues, in the naturalization cases starting in the 1870s, “petitioners from around the globe laid claim not only to citizenship, but to whiteness of the sort specified by the 1790 naturalization law.” Therefore, between the 1870s and 1920s, Jacobson continues, the courts also “consolidated and defended the idea ‘Caucasian’” just as popular and congressional debates were producing the notion of “Anglo-Saxon supremacy and
Although many more sought to naturalize between 1907 and 1920, only one million immigrants gained citizenship under those “racially restrictive” naturalization laws. In his analysis of the prerequisites to citizenship cases since the Civil War, Ian López considers not only how race is constructed by scientific (and anthropological) discourses but also (and especially) how law itself constructs race. The legal construction of race, therefore, informs his study, where he examines legal constructions of race “through both coercion and ideology, with legal actors as both conscious and unwitting participants.” To be unfit for naturalization, in López’s model, is to be non-White, which implies “a certain degeneracy of intellect, morals, self-restraint, and political values.” To become a citizen, therefore, implies either to be or to become white. But whiteness itself is a socially-constructed category, and its main use in the naturalization courts was to identify who was “non-white: “no mixed-race applicant was naturalized as ‘white.’ Whites exist as a category of people subject to a double negative: they are those who are not non-White.”

So what does it mean to be(come) an American citizen?

In the ancient Roman and Greek city-states, citizenship referred specifically to men with a definable share in the political life of the polis, and did not include all the inhabitants of the city-state. Slaves, resident aliens, and women were not considered “true citizens” of the city-states. Rogers Smith shows that one of the declarations of independence of British colonists arriving in the New World was to call themselves “citizens” to disidentify from the British crown, and to create modern self-governing republics that recognized the equal rights of men. In reality, the denial of political rights (such as the colonists’ treatment of American Indians) has led to courts’ redefinitions of the concept and application of “citizen.” As Smith shows in his book on “conflicting visions of citizenship” in the U.S., courts have often legally divided
Americans into a wide range of categories including not only birthright (ascriptive) and naturalized (consensual) citizens and U.S. and state citizens, but also “nonvoting citizens, jurisdictional citizens, commercial citizens, citizens subject to incarceration and deportation without due process owing to their race, denizens, U.S. nationals, and even colonial subjects.” In short, American citizenship has always been a “legally confused and politically charged and contested status.” In this classification, the model of consensual citizenship rather than birthright citizenship informs the naturalization of both American Indians and New Immigrants in the US; but “consent” is an embattled term, as the “consent” of the consenting party is hard (if not impossible) to assess accurately.

According to Peter Schuck and Rogers Smith, national laws of citizenship are determined by two principles: jus solis (place of birth) or jus sanguinis (line of descent). At the same time, Anglo-American law also presupposes a more trenchant distinction between ascriptive and consensual membership in a political community. The principle of ascription maintains that political membership is determined by objective circumstances, such as birth in a particular jurisdiction; ascriptive citizenship, therefore, presupposes that human preferences do not determine or influence political membership. One is, consequently, born a citizen. The principle of consent, on the other hand, goes in the opposite direction, holding that political membership can be chosen freely, independent of the place of birth or line of descent. The model of consensual citizenship, although defining discourses of U.S. civic identity, is at the same time contested, in that the contract between the desiring subject and her desired political and civic status is constantly negotiated. Werner Sollors offers a similar model for reading of the birthright/consensual dichotomy of the definition of American citizenship, foregrounding the conflict between “heredity” (descent) and “contract” (consent), which clash to produce the
“central drama of American culture” (5). Although useful in emphasizing the consensual model of American identity (materialized through “law” or “marriage”), Sollors’s appeal to descent as heredity, or “old world hierarchies,” obscures rather than illuminates the intricacies of *consent* as the basis for American citizenship.\(^72\) As this analysis has suggested so far, consent is a missing segment in Indian naturalization and an embattled one in immigrant naturalization.

Although the genealogy of consent in the naturalization process is hard to ascertain, debates over naturalization were simultaneously a locus of control and coercion (by political or social forums, such as the Progressive organizations and other “friends of the Indian”) and a locus of search for voice and agency (by immigrant- and Indian-centered organizations). Non-Indian organizations such the Indian Rights Association, the Women’s National Indian Association, the American Missionary Association, the Society of Friends, or the Industrial Aid Society also lobbied for Indian citizenship—an element completing the Americanization circle.\(^73\) As F.P. Prucha explains, the mission of these reform organizations was threefold: to break up tribal relations and to individualize the Indian; to make the Indians citizens; to provide a universal government school system that would make good Americans. These “humanitarian” reformers and their governmental lobbyists worked together to “individualize” and “absolutely Americanize” the Indians, who were no longer to be treated as tribal entities: “The goal was patriotic American citizenship for the Indian no different from that envisioned for the Irishman, the Pole, and the Italian.”\(^74\) In his published work for the Indian Rights Association in 1884, Henry S. Pancoast raised public awareness about the position of “the Indian before the law,” calling Indian citizenship and Indian legal status “a fiction” and an “absurdity”: “our Executive rules him; our Naturalization Acts do not apply to him; if he offends against our people, he is tried in our courts; if our people offend against him, our courts are practically shut upon him.”
His solution is gradual citizenship: “make every Indian a man, the equal of every other man before the law”: “Let every graduate of Hampton, Carlisle, or any Government school be entitled to American citizenship.”

Besides the legal discourses of naturalization practices, the public performance of US citizenship offers a site for reading rituals of national patriotism (the government bestows citizenship on the Indian or Immigrant new subject) as well as what I call “rituals of silent acceptance” (as a self-imposed prerequisite for naturalization). More specifically, the conferral of citizenship on either the Indian or the Immigrant subject meets with a silent acceptance, a performative voicelessness that instates the new subject-citizen. Rodman Wanamaker’s 1913 “Expedition of Citizenship to the North American Indian” offers a case in point. Citizenship, as “gift” of the government to the new citizen Indians, is above all a public ritual: the Secretary of Interior calls each Indian applicant by his white name, asks him for his Indian name, hands him a bow, and instructs him to shoot his last arrow. Citizenship, then, becomes a site of abandoning traditional rituals. The Indian citizen-to-be is then asked to put his hand on a plow handle, the metonym of the new Indian farmer and a new work ethic he is forced into. Toward the end of this humiliating ritual, the Secretary of the Interior would offer the soon-to-be-citizen a leather purse (to save money), a small flag (to cultivate patriotism), and gold-colored badge with the inscription: “A Citizen of the United States.”

Progressive poetess Edna Dean Proctor read her poem “Citizenship for the Red Man” at Carlisle Indian school in March 1895 as part of Carlisle’s Commencement ceremonies. Proctor’s poem, also published twice in the Carlisle student magazine, The Indian Helper, was also read at the Lake Mohonk Conference the previous October, appealing to the progressive missionaries’ sense of civic duty for their “red brothers”: 
A mighty nation we have built
Of many a race, remote or kin,—
Briton or Teuton, Slav and Celt,
All Europe’s tribes are wrought therein;
And Asia’s children, and Afric’s hordes,
 Millions the world would crush or flout;
To each some help our rule affords,
And shall we bar the Red Man out?77

In its programmatic tone, which also assumes a superior collective and protective persona—
“And shall we bar the Red Man out?”—the poem appeals to civil politics of inclusion and
tolerance, at the foundation of the “mighty nation” and its diversity, “of many a race.” At the
same time, the collective persona’s inclusionary impulse is deceiving as it places emphasis on
the agency and desire of the “we” while overlooking the desire for inclusion of the “Red Man”
(singular), and offers an ahistorical image of the Indian “as the primal lord” of an imagined
nation perceived through property values as “our magnificent domain“ (lines 9-10). At the same
time, Proctor’s persona also appeals to the obligation of the old American to the new, echoed at
the beginning of this chapter by the article in the New York Times, “Aborigine and Immigrant.”
As if responding to the article’s contention, Proctor’s patriotic “song of America” places the
series of rhetorical questions about Indian exclusion from citizenship in relation to a
romanticized, unproblematic immigrant inclusion: “to bar the Red Man out, / Though welcoming
all other men?”
In preparation for naturalization, citizenship training programs for immigrants seeking naturalization were formed as early as 1907 through a collaboration between the Bureau of Naturalization and public schools, with a view to “educating” citizenship candidates. The Division of Citizenship Training, although short-lived (1919-1921), acted as a liaison between the Bureau and the public schools and ensured that candidates for U.S. citizenship received proper citizenship training (D.H. Smith 11-12). Independent of the Bureau of Naturalization, both state and federal courts could exercise naturalization jurisdiction. Smith sums up the work of naturalization in a useful way: “the court manufactures a product (citizens) the raw materials for which (alien applicants) is inspected and approved by the Bureau” (21). Immigrants are therefore “made into” US citizens from the “raw” alien material, through a careful legal and cultural alchemy that seeks a uniformization of the naturalized. “Making [oneself] over” is also a recurrent motif in immigrant literature of Americanization; Anzia Yezierska’s main character in Bread Givers, for instance, wants to “make herself for a person.” Marcus E. Ravage’s autobiographical narrator in An American in the Making leaves the Old World because he couldn’t make “anything of himself” there (4). As the third chapter will show, the immigrant character is often trapped between the demands of the naturalization process (new language, country, and legal identity) and the desire to preserve difference (of language, ethnicity, and civic identity).

The first generation of Indian students at Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania offer a useful preliminary case study for understanding Indian-centered—yet mediated and often censored—responses to Indian naturalization. Despite the difficulty of ascertaining the Indian student authorship of many poems and articles, such early exercises in English, as I show in the next chapter, exemplify the early effects of what historian David Adams
calls “education for extinction,” in its emphasis on 4 aspects: (1) English acquisition, (2) individualizing, (3) Christianity, and (4) training for citizenship. These lessons in patriotism and indoctrination, subject to various levels of mediation, are the product of “civilizing” institutions such as “Captain” Pratt’s Indian Industrial School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania (1879-1918), and other off-reservation boarding schools. As Michael Coleman has shown, at the beginning of the twentieth century, there were twenty-five off-reservation boarding schools in the US, with an average yearly attendance of over six thousand Indian students at Chilocco (OK), Phoenix (AZ), Santa Fe (NM), Flandreau (SD), Fort Lewis (CO), and Lawrence (KS). Whereas citizenship training for immigrants was a prerequisite for naturalization, embodied in formalized “education for citizenship,” the “fire of patriotism” was imparted to Carlisle Indian students from the beginning of their tenure at this infamous off-reservation boarding school. Both models of “education for citizenship,” however, were ideological, as were their publications. The Indian Citizen, an Indian school publication at Forest Grove, Oregon, opened its first issue with an unambiguous pro-Americanization tone: “All Indians must become citizens of the United States. We must learn to live, think, and act as members of this great Republic.”

Carlisle Indian School publications abound in similar patriotic outbursts, and their rhetoric deserves a book-length study. For the purposes of this analysis, such exercises exemplify a widespread internalized forced patriotism, reproducing the “lessons” of Americanization and assimilation and their main target: acquisition of US citizenship both de facto and de jure. The Carlisle student publication The Morning Star/Eadle Keatah Toh ran periodic columns expressing (allegedly) student views on the “citizenship issue.” The Indian Union Debating team, for instance, concluded an important meeting with the resolution that “the Indians should be admitted at once to citizenship.” The same issue of Morning Star printed student speeches
debating the citizenship issue, including both pros and cons. Cheyenne student William Fletcher argued pro citizenship: “Sir, the quickest way that I see of making him self-supporting is to compel him to come into citizenship and push him into manhood. […] give Indians the rights and protections of United States laws now.” Keechie student Percy Zadoka disagreed: “first, educate him, fit him to be a citizen and then admit him, but do not take him until he is able to do his part in the nation’s work.” A more vociferous student, Pawnee Samuel Townsend, ventriloquizes R.H. Pratt’s assimilationist (and often xenophobic) rhetoric quite eloquently, while also pleading for Indian self-determination:

We want the United States Government. As to his ignorance, it is true, but go to Castle Garden and see those low, down, filthy and degraded Arabs, Egyptians, and other foreign people, who come to this country every year, ignorant, block-headed as they can be, worse than the Indian, and yet within five years, they become citizens of this country. […] There should be no Senator Dawes; there should be no Senator Sherman nor any other man to talk for the Indian. He must be in Congress himself. He must represent his race. He must be of the Government. […] Open the doors for him and I tell you Mr. President, I shall be no more an Indian.

Similarly, the Carlisle Literary Society, “The Invincibles,” debated the issue of Indian citizenship, and students also referred to themselves in third person: “Resolved, That the right of full citizenship should be given to the Indian.” A prominent Society Member, “Miss Weekly,” related the national debate over Indian citizenship to both individual and collective decision-making, emphasizing that citizenship is “a priceless gift and should not be given to a person who
could not use it intelligently.” At the same time, Weekly’s pro-assimilation rhetoric voices institutional optimism, at odds with many Indian student views on citizenship: “there is no reason why the members of this society should not develop into true, strong men, and enter into full citizenship in the broadest, truest sense of the word.” 82 Citizenship was, therefore, a category that many Indians at Carlisle simply walked into, what historian Frederick Hoxie calls a “final promise” in the campaign to assimilate American Indians, a learned notion without immediate political consequences. The student’s declaration in the above paragraph—“I shall be no more an Indian”—is a declaration of institutional cooptation into desired new political categories, perceiving civic identity (and American citizenship in particular) completely at odds with the “Indian” category.

Although Carlisle publications were not literary venues (functioning more as vehicles of Americanization, assimilation, and propaganda than as dissemination of literary productions and cultural exchange)—as I suggest in the next chapter—Indian students at Carlisle read and often wrote poetry in their highly edited newspaper contributions. An early issue of Indian Helper reprinted the poem “A New Citizen” by Omaha student Elsie Fuller, which offered abstract praise to a notion remote from the students’ experience—citizenship:

Now I am a citizen!

They’ve given us new laws,

Just as were made

By Senator Dawes.

We need not live on rations,
Why? there is no cause,
For “Indians are citizens,”
Said Senator Dawes.

Just give us a chance,
We never will pause,
Till we are good citizens
Like Senator Dawes.

Now we are citizens,
We all give him applause—
So three cheers, my friends,
For Senator Dawes.\(^3\)

Fuller’s poem enthusiastically praises the Dawes Allotment Act. Or seemingly it does so. The poem’s opening line epitomizes the pro-assimilation rhetoric instilled in Indian students. At the same time, its rhetorical shifts, from the emphasis on the individual (“Now I’m a citizen!”) to the collective (“Now we are citizens!”) and the excessive praise of Henry Dawes, make the poem’s politicized message suspect as an object of possible editorial intervention. However, this declaration of patriotism—which also lends itself to a sarcastic reading of Indian citizenship as envisioned by the Dawes Allotment act and finalized by the 1924 act—veils the contradictions of Indian Citizenship and naturalization, as I’ve attempted to show. The poem also echoes the missing element of consent in Indian naturalization by marking the imposition of the new civic
status “They’ve given us new laws”—yet simultaneously glossing over the loss of land caused by the Allotment Act (new citizen Indians lost about 90 million acres of land). Ironically, the speaker praises economic subsistence: “We need not live on rations.” The poem is also potentially sarcastic in modeling Indian citizenship on that of “good” senator Dawes (in the third stanza), who was not a model of US citizenship.

Throughout the twentieth century, Indian lawyers, poets, and artists have revisited this topic, sometimes with a sense of humor. Robert Freedman, a contemporary Crow Creek and Sioux artist, meditates on American hospitality discourses, imagining Indian hospitality beyond the Indian Citizenship Act (Figure 2.2).

![Image](224x201 to 424x471)

**Figure 2.2. Robert Freeman, “Papers?”**
*For Indians Only, The Ayer Collection, Newberry Library*

Most tellingly, Freeman reimagines the scene of immigrant arrival, with an Indian presiding at the “Immigration” desk and demanding that two Pilgrims show him their “Papers.” This
encounter between the Indian and the old immigrants is not as hospitable as its cartoon counterpart from 1924, discussed in the previous chapter. The citizen Indian demands participation in the country’s political decisions, access to the “papers” that have prohibited the access of Native Americans to full citizenship, as well as a revision of American discourses of hospitality, as we shall see in the next chapter.

Notes

1 This is my tribute to Jim Jarmusch’s film Down by Law, which is meaningful to my work in so many ways.


3 Sommerville, 659-75.


5 New York State Sun, May 9, 1886.

6 The Red Man, November 1899, 3.

7 Prucha, Americanizing, 3.


9 Wilkins and Lomawaima, 19-63.

10 Johnson 984-85.

11 Qtd. in Cohen 207.

12 Wilkins and Lomawaima 103. Congress discontinued the practice of treaty-making in 1871. See also Cohen, especially 207-28. Cohen also calls attention to the Treaty Clause as a source of federal authority over Indian affairs. An important part of his analysis for my argument
is the idea that during the first century of the US, Indian affairs were “more an aspect of military and foreign policy than a subject of domestic or municipal law” (208).

13 Johnson, 985-86. See also Deloria and Wilkins, 25-26.

14 See Deloria and Wilkins 28, and Cohen 208.

15 Norgren offers ample commentary on the two landmark U.S. Supreme Court cases following the Removal Bill: *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* (1831) and *Worcester v. Georgia* (1832). The quoted passages from the first case are included in Appendix 2, 165-69.

16 Dippie, 56-78.

17 The Nationality Act of 1940, Ch. 876, 54 Stat. 1137, 1140 (1940).

18 Qtd. in Dippie, 192-93, n. 63, 383.


21 For a good analysis of ethnic caricature in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Wonham.

22 *Dred Scott v. Stanford*, 60 U.S. 393 (1857). According to Cohen, the Court’s decision in 1857 was based on equating the constitutional terms “the people” and “citizen,” ruling that blacks were not among “the people.” The Civil Rights Act, 14 Stat. 27 (1866).

23 See Deloria and Wilkins, 145-46; Hoxie, 75; Cohen, 86, 283-84, and 642-43.

24 Elk vs. Wilkins, 112 U.S. 94 (1884).


Rpt. from *Cleveland Leader* in *New York Times*, November 24, 1897, 6.

24 Stat. 388 (1887), section 6, 390.

Act of May 2, 1890, Ch 182, 26 Stat. 81, 99.

Dippie, 193.

Cohen shows how Congress’ authority to naturalize Indians has been constantly sustained by the courts. See Cohen, 643, and 643 n. 33-39. Indian veterans who fought in World War I were granted U.S. citizenship by the Act of November 6, 1919, Ch. 95, 41 Stat. 350.

Holm, *Great Confusion*, 178.


See Dippie, 193.


See Cohen for the “benefits” of the Indian Citizenship Act, 645.

Qtd. in Cohen 155. See also Deloria and Wilkins, 148, and 186-87 n33.

“The Common Welfare Section,” 615.

The Nationality Act of 1940, § 201 (b), 54 Stat. 1138.

See Hutchinson, 11-46. U.S. Const, Art. I, Sec. 8, Cl.4.

First Congress, Second Session (March 26,1790). *Congressional Record*, 103-104.

See Somerville 666 and 675 n 35. Lopez (227 n. 2) also notes that whiteness as a prerequisite to citizenship was finally terminated in 1952, when the Immigration and Naturalization Act was passed.

The first US census also appears in 1790, recording over 3 million US residents, 64% of British origin, 7% German, 18% enslaved black and 2% free black.
The Page Act (1875), 43rd Congress, Sess. II., Ch. 141, Chap. 141.

This law was still in effect in 1942, leaving Japanese immigrants and their descendants at the mercy of World War II hysteria and one of its most brutal anti-Asian immigrant policies—the internment camp. The Chinese Exclusion act was repealed in 1943, allowing for Chinese nationals to naturalize as US citizens. Immigration from China resumed after the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965.


Divine, 2.

Higham, Strangers in the Land, 68-105.

Pitkin offers a cogent history of Ellis Island. See also Yans-McLaughlin and Lightman.

Weiner reads Lodge as a “progressive exponent of American imperialism and student of the Teutonic origins thesis of American government (a school of thought that lay at the boundary of legal history and anthropology).” See Weiner, 2 and 51-80.

Solomon, viii.

Qtd. in King, 53.

See King, especially his analysis of the Papers of the Immigration Restriction League, 52-54, 61, 63, 75-76, 78, 169, 191, 199, 204, 206, 218, and 227.

For a brief history of the Bureau and its mission, see Darrell Smith, especially 1-20.

Prescott Hall, 751.

Zeidel 10-11.
In *Strangers in the Land*, Higham, 265 and 284 n. 5, refers to a prominent literary critic of the day, Stuart Sherman, and his xenophobic views in the *Saturday Evening Post*.

Klein, *Foreigners*, 20.

Zeidel, 51-68.


Rpt. on the title page in *The Indian before the Law*, Henry S. Pancoast, 1884.

They were: African (black); Armenian; Bohemian and Moravian; Bulgarian, Serbian, and Montenegrin; Chinese; Croatian and Slovenian; Cuban; Dalmatian, Bosnian, and Herzegovinian; Dutch and Flemish; East Indian; English; Finnish; French; German; Greek; Hebrew; Irish; Italian, North; Italian, South; Japanese; Korean; Lithuanian; Magyar; Mexican; Pacific Islander; Polish; Portuguese; Romanian; Russian; Ruthenian (Russniak); Scandinavian; Scotch; Slovak; Spanish; Spanish-American; Syrian; Turkish; Welsh; West-Indian (except Cuban); all other peoples.

U.S. Immigration Commission, Qtd in King, 66 and N. 69, 315.

See Zeidel, 86-100. Boas’s preliminary findings were published in the study, “Changes in Bodily Form of Descendants of Immigrants” (1912), which made direct reference to five immigrants groups: Jews, Southern Italians, Bohemians, Hungarians, and Scots. Boas’ study showed the results of his investigation “on the anthropometry of immigrants and their descendents, undertaken for the United States Immigration Commission” (530).


Ross, xiii.


López 1, 13, 16, 28.
Rogers Smith, 14.

Sollors (5) also maintains that: “consent relations describe those of ‘law’ or ‘marriage,’” although marriage (I argue) is a form of law. The unexplored legal aspect of Sollors’ argument (and terminology) yields an interesting but not very usable distinction between “consent” and “descent.”

Anna L. Dawes (daughter of Senator Dawes) offered one of the most bombastic patriotic speeches at the thirtieth anniversary of the Dawes Act in 1917, too painful to reproduce in full: ”Let the new wine fill the common cup of a citizen. Be not a red man alone, but beyond that, a citizen of the United States.” Quoting from the report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for 1912, she grew increasingly optimistic as she discussed Indian self-determination:” There are today 335,700 Indians in the United States, but the ‘Indians under Federal supervision’ are said to number only 312,654. Of these, 184,855 have already been allotted, 112,359 of whom already hold patents in fee simple for most or all of their land. Moreover, 78,985 are already citizens, and 26,290 of them vote. Still more encouraging are the reports of economic conditions, which show 59,773 Indians to be entirely self-supporting. See Anna L. Dawes, “An Address on Indian Citizenship Day, February 8, 1917,” Beinecke Rare Book Collections, Yale University. Autographed copy for General R.H. Pratt.

Prucha, American Indian Policy, 6, 3.

Pacoast, The Indian Before the Law, 14, 17, 25.

Dippie, 192-94. See also the Wanamaker Primer on the North American Indian, 1909.

There are at least three versions of this poem: the first one was presented at the Lake Mohonk Conference in October 1894 and published in Indian Helper in December 1894, and which I quote here; the second was read at the Commencement ceremonies at Carlisle in March
1895 and published in *Indian Helper* in March 1895; the third appeared in Proctor’s collection of poems, *Songs of America*, 1905.

78 Rogers Smith (21-22) also documents that, from 1917 until 1928, approximately 2100 state courts and approximately 217 federal courts exercised jurisdiction over naturalization.

79 Coleman, 44-45. He also documents that, by 1900, the federal government supported eighty-one on-reservation boarding schools.

80 J. Walker, 3-4.


82 *Red Man and Helper*, October 4, 1901, 3.

83 *The Indian Helper*, May 6, 1887, 1.
CHAPTER 3

WRITING INDIANS, MAKING AMERICANS: INDIAN INTELLECTUALS FROM
CARLISLE TO THE SOCIETY OF AMERICAN INDIANS

3.1 “There is a New Indian in the Land”

There is a New Indian in the land. [...] [He] is a person just
realizing his personality, a possible citizen newly endowed with
the possibility. [...] The New Indian is young.

—“The New Indian,” Red Man and Helper, 1903

Progressive beliefs in the potential of the “new Indian” to become fully Americanized
were initially optimistic about the “complete” assimilation of American Indians. This optimism
permeated the long history of Indian removal and forced acculturation, the popularization of
ethnographic writing on “the vanishing Indian” or what I call elsewhere the dissemination of
“the last Indian’ syndrome.” The trope of the “New Indian” emerges almost simultaneously with
its “new Immigrant” counterpart in the 1880s (especially in the aftermath of the Dawes Act
(which I discuss in the previous chapter), and reflects, above all, the reformers’—and, by
extension, the dominant culture’s—blind faith in the immediate transformation of the Indian into
what a PBS documentary from 1991 called “the white man’s image.” As Robert F. Berkhofer,
Jr. reminds us, the term “Indian” itself is a White invention, a stereotype, hence a simplification
(3). But the concept of “new Indian,” like its immigrant counterpart, emerges as a reaction to the
“old,” to the presumed or actual status quo. Popular magazines like The Forum lamented yet
somehow bizarrely celebrated “The Disappearance of the Old American Indian” in the early
1900s; in “The Passing of the American Indian” (1903), Thomas Millard wrote about the inevitability of Indian’s “absorption by the white race,” leading to his “elimination”:

After four centuries, during which he fiercely resisted, sullenly resented, and at last passively acquiesced in the gradual encroachments of civilization, the American Indian now finds himself face to face with the always inevitable, but long-deferred, absorption by the white race. The hour of his elimination is at hand.

Discourses about (old) Indian elimination and absorption complement celebratory discourses about the birth of the “New Indian” as the economically self-sufficient and individualized new American citizen—even though citizenship is often only a nominal category. The “New Indian” thus envisioned is a post-Allotment Indian who develops a sense of property and control over his own independence, who can lease his land for profit, yet who aspires “to live his life as the white man does.” As an article in The Nation (1904), suggestively titled “The New Indian,” intimates, “step by step, the new Indian has been engaged on to strike for his emancipation. […] His dream is of the time when every man can wave a last farewell to his Federal guardians and live his own life as the white man does.” With the caveat that “all Indians are not new Indians” (47) gesturing towards the “generation of Indians now passing away,” the article in The Nation concedes that the New Indian is “a contingent worth saving” despite the risk of losing those “who fall by the wayside” (48). The New Indian was also the title of a publication of morally uplifting material from the Carson Indian Training School in Stewart, Nevada, which ran from 1903 till 1908. As these examples start to suggest, “the New Indian” was a desired, imagined new identity that Indians and non-Indians alike envisioned as Indians entered modernity.
Indeed, complete elimination and absorption was the mission of one of the most vocal forums advocating Indian rights from a non-Indian perspective—the Indian Rights Association. Started in Philadelphia in December 1882, the IRA sought to protect the interests and general welfare of Indians and to initiate, support, or oppose government legislation and policies designed to “civilize” the American Indian. In 1884, Herbert Welsh, the IRA Executive Secretary, mused:

When this work shall have been completed, the Indian will cease to exist as a man, apart from other men, a stumbling block in the pathway of civilization; his empty pride of separate nationality will have been destroyed, and in its place the greater blessings […] will be his—an honorable absorption into the common life of the people of the United States. [my emphasis]

In the IRA model—despite the organization’s presumably good intentions—the Indian’s sense of nationality (or sovereignty) is erased, along with a sense of humanity and self-worth. Perceived as a “block in the pathway of civilization,” the IRA views the old Indian as a representative of “savagism,” in direct opposition to “civilization,” two embattled concepts that cultural historians have struggled with. Roy Harvey Pearce, a student of these concepts, makes an argument about the perception of “the savage” by the English colonizers which resonates with turn of the twentieth-century uses of the savage-civilized dichotomy. More precisely, Pearce suggests that “[t]he Indian became important for the English mind not for what he was in and of himself, but rather for what he showed civilized men they were not and must not be” (5) [my emphasis].
In the same logic, the IRA and other pro-Indian reform organizations reproduced similar arguments championed by colonial discourse on the “American savages,” for example that the Indian stands in the path of civilization, challenging its order and reason. In both Pearce’s acute interpretation and the IRA’s lived mission, the Indian “in and of himself” was irrelevant to the process of civilization. What is at stake, in both examples—and eras—is the way that, to perpetuate itself, civilization (as used in this context) defines itself as a binary opposite to savagery. As Philip J. Deloria puts it, “Savage Indians” served Americans as oppositional figures against whom one might imagine a civilized national Self.”11 Identifying the disastrous effect of constructions of American Indians in the colonial imaginary over the last four centuries, Berkhofer insists on the consistency of the hegemonic discourse (the bad vs. the good Indian, the noble vs. the ignoble savage) in perpetuating the idea of the “White man’s Indian.”

It is beyond the purpose of this project to trace these tomes and refute their notion of representational casualties; instead, I am interested in moments when representational hegemony is challenged, how the subaltern (the represented) disrupts the hegemonic discourse, and what those ruptures do. Focusing my attention on the work of Indian students of American democracy (voluntary or coerced)—Carlisle students and members of the SAI committed to similar cultural and political projects as Indian intellectuals—I hope to show how American Indians engaged both hegemony and representation, thus contributing to the growth of the “American Indian intellectual tradition” (Warrior). Building on the recent work of Lucy Maddox, I am also interested in how American Indian intellectuals manipulated, negotiated, and invented discursive practices to address non-Indian audiences.12

In my analysis of the “New Indian” who presumably walks a fine line between “savagism” and “civilization,” I distinguish between two categories: (a) The imagined New
Indian, and b) The embodied New Indian. The imagined new Indian is the ideal model and embodiment of national virtues, the “Indian” as defined by the dominant culture, such as the “before” and “after” photographs popularized by Carlisle Indian school as a way of proving the success of its Americanization, and the imagined Indian of both highbrow and lowbrow literature. The embodied New Indian is the politically active Indian, fluent in English, educated in both colonial and indigenous traditions, who appropriates the imagined New Indian model and uses it to negotiate his own representation and to embody a multiplicity of cultural allegiances for the Western world he is forced into—by education, birth, or accident. The first nationally-known embodied New Indian group was formed by the SAI members or “the Red Progressives,” the first generation of professional Indian writers who shared similar political projects and an interest in building an American Indian intellectual tradition, and were attuned to both the writers’ communities and the demands of the Euro-American market and readership. I use the example of the SAI as a cultural arena where most of these writers and activists voiced their beliefs for the future of the “Indian race,” despite the factionalism in internal SAI debates. Therefore, I am interested in the potential of the SAI to offer a meeting ground of Indian voices whose common goal was redefining Native participation in the nationalist project of making Americans.

At the same time that the binary logic of savagery vs. civilization permeated American popular and scientific discourses during the Progressive Era (1900-1920), white artists, writers, reformers, bohemians, and entrepreneurs found a renewed interest in the “Indian” as object of desire. The “Indian” becomes, in this context, a usable, even therapeutic object, revered for his “primitivism” which resonated with both modernist angst and its search for “retreats” where the immersion in the landscape brings a new sense of spirituality and community. Critics refer to this
process as “Indianizing,” which is a pertinent extension, with a twist, of Phillip Deloria’s concept of “playing Indian.” While “playing Indian” reinforces white superiority and dominance, Indianizing is a less harmful practice but harmful nonetheless: based on modernist mimetic practices, Indianizing refers primarily to an appropriation of the “Other” through one’s body, male or female, which produces the transient illusion of evading the modern only to return to it.\textsuperscript{16} While also based in mimetic practices and reflecting similar concerns about “American identity” in crisis, I read Deloria’s concept of “playing Indian” as a trans-historical, primarily male-centered phenomenon, with ideological representational consequences. Americans turn to “Indian” iconography in moments of crisis (such as the Immigration crisis at the beginning of the twentieth century), and the use of this disguise calls into question the fixity of identity. Philip Deloria suggests:

At the turn of the twentieth century, the thoroughly modern children of angst-ridden upper-and middle-class parents wore feathers and slept in tipis and wigwams at camps with multisyllabic Indian names. Their equally nervous post World War II descendants made Indian dress and pow-wow going into a hobby. […] Over the past thirty years, the counterculture, the New Age, the men’s movement, and a host of other performance options have given meaning to Americans lost in a (post)modern freefall.\textsuperscript{17}

In line with Deloria’s argument, the September 1924 cover of \textit{Literary Digest} introduced readers to an intriguing representation of the “Indian” facing modernity (Figure 3.1).
Three separate visual planes suggest the encounter of the “old Indian” with modernity, epitomized by a racing car, in contrast with his immobility and fixity. In the first plane, at the
center of the painting, a man dressed as a traditional Indian, in regalia, sitting on horseback at the top of a hill, looks down on an automobile at the bottom of the hill. The Indian man faces East in an immobile pose, reminiscent of Edward Curtis’s photographs, presenting a static image of the presumed “vanishing Indian.” On the second plane of the painting, to the right, another Indian character on horseback, this time in motion, faces (1) the character in the first plane, (2) the viewers, and (3) the automobile rushing through a cloud of dust in the third plane below. To the far right of the painting, the automobile suggests the inevitability of modernity’s corruption of “pure” landscapes that modernist escapists often sought in the Southwest. At the same time, given the reversal of conventional techniques of representation of Indian figures in nineteenth-century landscape paintings. If in George Catlin’s nineteenth-century paintings the Indian characters face “the West” as the only possible direction of refuge in the age of Indian Removal West of the Mississippi, the image in the Literary Digest points to the coexistence of two traditions and cultures. Placing this image in the post-Indian Citizenship Act era (post-June 1924), the magazine, geared primarily at white audiences, places the new “Citizen Indian”—the new identity imagined for the Indian in the painting—in modernity’s proximity rather than away from it.

The therapeutic “Indian”—which the image above gestures toward—inhabits the modern mind rather than the modern space, and it is a fabrication, a projection that fascinates the imagination rather than calls for social justice. The failure of the “Vanishing Indian” policy, a staple of nineteenth-century Assimilation campaigns, called into question the possibility of making Indian people into Americans. Although removed from the eastern landscape—a process started with President Andrew Jackson’s removal policy in the 1830s—and granted limited sovereignty in their relations with the Federal Government through the three (in)famous “Cherokee cases” discussed in the previous chapter, Indian
people did not vanish and certainly did not stop writing. To a certain extent, “the Indian problem” remained unsolved in the new century. But the attraction to things Indian as exotic objects of fantasy reflects the dominant culture’s hegemonic attempt to invent a new type of American that, on the one hand, sought fleeting refuge in touristic escapes (into “primitive” spaces) only to return to the noise of the capital and modern life soon thereafter, on the other. As the invention of the “American Primitive” is intricately connected with the consolidation of American imperialism and whiteness (as the color of the American Empire), the reinvention of the American Indian as both Indian and American at the same time, as both the Carlisle and SAI examples will show, is no easy task.

“All I know is what I read in the papers,” Indian comedian and political commentator Will Rogers used to say. The “papers” often offered unflattering depictions of American Indians that many American Indian intellectuals had to fight (and still do). This awareness of dominant inventions of Indians became a landmark of Indian publications, starting with the Carlisle Indian school’s reprints from U.S. publications (many praising Indian success in becoming American) and continuing with the Society of American Indians journal. Besides reprinting essays by famous Americans on Indian people—Theodore Roosevelt’s “Impressions about Indians” or Walt Whitman’s “An Indian Bureau Reminiscence”—the SAI’s American Indian Magazine kept an eye on the national “papers” (and sometimes international ones). The journal ran a column, “What the Papers Say about the American Indians,” reprinting papers, articles, photos, and addresses on the topics of assimilation and Americanization. Granted that the journal did not necessarily endorse the views expressed in these national and local newspapers and periodicals, the editorial choices are telling in a journal issue from 1917: news that a “Sioux Indian Wins Intercollegiate Contest” (Greenville Exchange), an account of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs’ advice that Indians “Increase Food Supplies” (Hampton Institute Press Service), news about the “First Indian to be Wounded in Action” (London, Ont., Free Press in Canada),
a brief account of the importance of “Tribal Law” (*Case and Comment*), and a dear subject to many SAI members, “Educating Indians for Citizenship” (*Case and Comment*).\(^{18}\) Why did Indian publications keep an eye on the “papers”? Carlisle magazines, as we will see, were propagandistic and used such pieces as crutches, tools to show the students and the world that the assimilation of Indians can be achieved through education and can be complete. The “before and after” photos of Carlisle Indian students, disseminated widely, testified to a presumably successful Carlisle experiment: the Indian student in “citizen’s clothes” was not “going back to the blanket.” The SAI publications and their relation with dominant U.S. publications is more complex, given the all-Indian editorship of the SAI’s journals and the members’ interest in (re)writing an honest image of the “new,” “modern,” or progressive Indian against the stagnant representations of the “vanishing Indian.” In an editorial published in the SAI magazine in 1916, Arthur C. Parker commented on the importance of such representations: “It matters a great deal what the world thinks of us, for the place the Indian is to occupy depends on this.” In the same issue, Parker optimistically envisions a time when national magazines will “publish special Indian numbers, not on the old Indian of the past, but upon the modern Indian of today.”\(^{19}\) Self-representation in *The Quarterly Journal of American Indians* and *The American Indian Magazine* responded to distorted images of Indian peoples and urged respect for the multiplicity of American Indian traditions; it also disseminated the work of white “allies” (members of reform organizations or dutiful citizens) in redressing misrepresentations of Indians. To reach such editorial, linguistic, and ideological freedom to represent “New Indians” as an integral part of modernity, however, took time. It also took many years of adaptation to the demands of the new century, of the “vanishing policy,” and one of its most disturbing materializations—the boarding school, where I turn next.\(^{20}\)
3.2 “That Is Why I Sent You to Carlisle”

[...] So keep to the English,

Help others to rise,

Leave the Indian behind you

If you wish to grow wise.

—“English Speaking,” 1886

Rhetorically bold, some of the student-written poems in Carlisle Indian School Publications, along with student letters and articles, add their aesthetic value to neglected turn of the twentieth century Indian literature and set the stage for reading the cultural work of one of the most militant Indian organizations, the Society of American Indians (1911-1920), when Indian authorship and voice become more distinctly marked entities. Despite the difficulty of ascertaining Indian authorship—or merely authorship—of many of these poems, such early exercises in poetry emerging from the most famous Indian boarding school offer palpable evidence about turn of the twentieth-century Indian writing and its engagement with one of the literary genres many Indians were already proficient in.

First, I will consider the work of the schoolhouse (as an Americanization scene) in the presumed unfailing Americanization and assimilation of Indian students in off-reservation boarding schools, taking the example of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School as a case in point. I am interested in the specific manifestations of the schoolhouse as a hegemonic agent of assimilation and a reflection of contemporaneous progressive organizations’ beliefs and agendas. Next, I will look at the contributions and documented responses of Indian students—specifically Carlisle students—to the institutional practices and the new cultural guidelines envisioned for
them. I read poems, letters, and articles published in the Carlisle papers as both complicit with the ideological underpinnings of the institution’s ambitious goals of making Indian students into Americans and critical of the very moves (rhetorical, political, linguistic, ideological, etc.) that the institution demanded of its students. Last but not least, I read “Carlisle poetry” (that is poetry published in Carlisle newspapers and magazines but not necessarily by Indian students only) as a coherent body of work, emphasizing its historical, documentary significance, but also its aesthetic and literary value. Building on the recent work of Amelia V. Katanski, I am interested in the artistry of the texts Indian students produced, and especially the ways in which they used both Euro-American literary forms (built in their curriculum) and tribal knowledge and expressive forms to write themselves into some of the most repressive and ideologically-controlled publications devised to suppress both meaning and representation. To study the ways Indian students are represented and represent themselves (the line between the two is always blurry) in a space like Carlisle, where meaning is always already controlled, I draw on the work of cultural studies critic Stuart Hall, which helps me complicate reading the ways that meaning is produced by Carlisle texts rather than simply “found” in them. I am interested in both approaches proposed by Hall to study “representation”: (a) the semiotic approach, which emphasizes “the how of representation,” how language produces meaning (its poetics); and (b) the discursive approach, “concerned with the effects and consequences of representation” (its politics). In other words, I’m interested in how Indian students use English language to construct their texts (in poems, letters, articles, debates, etc.), i.e., their poetics, and what discursive consequences these texts have, i.e., their politics.

The most difficult aspect of this task is the concept of authorship itself. Many of these poems, as we shall see, are attributed to Indian students, but an even greater number are authored
by Indian school personnel, “friends” of Carlisle, anonymous writers, or well-established American authors (and presented as models for either their craft or their message). I suggest that not only did Indian students write amid the daily chores and drillings that regimented their lives in service of “civilization” in an “industrial” school, but they also wrote (and read) poetry at a time when the genre itself became more and more accessible to modern non-elitist audiences.

I place the body of poetry emerging from Carlisle in the intellectual tradition starting with William Apess and Samson Occom, who were among the first known Indian leaders to publish in English. Not surprisingly, some poems in Carlisle newspapers are mistakenly attributed to Apess. They are offered either as examples of craft or lessons in Christianity or comraderie. In “Indian Hymn,” a poem misattributed to Apess (1889; [1798]), the speaker emphasizes salvation and redemption, but his choice of language is reminiscent more of minstrel shows than of the pulpit: “God lub poor Indian in de wood; / So me lub God, and dat be good; / Me’ll praise him two times more.” In the tradition of African American spirituals, the speaker envisions a harmonious meeting of the races in another world: “Den take me up to shinee place, / See white man, red man, black man face, / All happy like on high.” Another “Indian Hymn” (1897; [1798]), also misattributed to Apess, is an elegiac hymn about leaving Dartmouth college and two dear friends: “When shall we three meet again?” This is a poem about comraderie and school bonds that probably resonated with Carlisle graduates, or soon-to-be graduates, preparing to take the leap into the world. As in the previous poem, where the three races can only meet in “heaben’s” “shinee place,” this poem’s speaker foresees a reunion of the Dartmouth students in memory—“in fancy’s wide domain”—rather than in life:

Though in distant lands we sigh,
Parch’d beneath the hostile sky;
Though the deep between us rolls,
Friendship shall unite our souls:
Still in fancy’s wide domain
Oft shall we three meet again.29

Carlisle-produced writing is a rich archive for exploring how the first generation of Indians educated in Euro-American schools expressed, in writing, both their enthusiasm at and frustrations with the new demands of Americanization. Like most Indian students in off-reservation boarding schools across the country, they used the print medium to record their attempts at negotiating new identities in a new language. They did so (often) in candid ways while at Carlisle, and more vividly and critically after they came of age as writers in their own right.

Sioux student Luther Standing Bear is a case in point: while he didn’t have a gift for poetry or printed patriotic outbursts, he was a musician in the Carlisle band and reported for the school newspaper from different parts of the country where his band traveled. As one of Carlisle’s first Indian students and Richard Henry Pratt’s model Indian boy, Standing Bear wrote enthusiastically to his family in 1881 about his passion for Carlisle and desire to improve his English:

Dear father, […] I am always fond of at Carlisle. Because I am be glad I try to get knowledge, and Capt. Pratt what he says I listen, and I do it. And my teachers too. I try anything anywhere, in the school, or in the workshop, or in the band. This is all I have to
say because I know only a few English words. Good bye at present. From your son,

LUTHER STANDING BEAR.\textsuperscript{30}

A year later, in February 1882, Luther confesses to his father that he is “of two minds” about the use of “English only”—one of Pratt’s methods of Americanization which forbade and punished the use of any tribal language. Standing Bear’s determination to “try both” [English and Lakota] stems from his desire to improve his English but also marks his act of civil disobedience to Pratt: “I am not to Captain Pratt what tells me one time. He asked us who wanted to speak only English every day. […] But I did not do it. […] When I forgot it one word then I asked somebody in my language and I get it, that is reason I want try both.”\textsuperscript{31} In April 1882, Standing Bear writes home about his changing relationship with the English language: “We are trying to speak only English nothing talk Sioux. But English. I have tried. But I could not do it at first. But I tried hard every day. So now I have found out how to speak only English. I have been speaking only English about 14 weeks now I have not said any Indian words at all.”\textsuperscript{32} As if extending Pratt’s pro-assimilation wing from the East to the West, Luther’s letter, written after the death of one of his fellow Sioux students, also urges his father to embrace Christianity and to “try to walk in the right way”: “I want you must give up Indian way. I know you have given it up a little. But I want you to do more than that and I told you so before this. But I will say it again you must believe God, obey him and pray to Him. Dear father I know it is very hard for you to do that out there.”\textsuperscript{33}

Imitation becomes a key strategy for Standing Bear’s poetics and political choices; while reproducing almost verbatim the lessons of Americanization instilled in him, a practice reflected in the poetics of his letter, Luther doesn’t seem to reflect on its politics, i.e., representational consequences. Considering the newspaper’s editorial control, it seems fair to assume that
Standing Bear was more interested in the poetics of his letters at this time—how meaning was constructed through his newly-acquired language—than their politics.

Only a year later, Standing Bear’s message to his father sounds more contained, grammatically correct, and bursting a programmatic tone reminiscent of Captain Pratt’s, which Luther once again reproduces verbatim:

MY DEAR FATHER—[…]I want you must give up the Indian ways, you must turn to the good way and try to walk in it, the way of which is God love. Try to be civilized while we try to get a good education. I hope you have determined to do this. Don’t think just your children shall be civilized and you just keep on the Indian way, because you are too old now. But you must go with us in the whites road. […] I shall be very glad to know if you try to do in this way which I told you to do. Now this is all. We are all very well and happy. From Your Son, LUTHER S. BEAR. 34

In these letters published in the early issues of The Morning Star, the school’s first publication, Luther Standing Bear’s voice is that of a teen (he was born in the 1860s), unaware of the complexities of meaning-making. In one of his autobiographies, My People, the Sioux (1928), he reflects back on these practices of imitation—what he calls parroting—and the impossibility of meaning-making in Carlisle’s English-acquisition pedagogy:

The Indian children should have been taught how to translate the Sioux tongue into English properly; but the English teachers only taught them the English language, like a bunch of parrots. While they could read all the words placed before them, they did not
know the proper use of them; *their meaning was a puzzle.* (239)

One of the manuals used to teach Indian students English—or at least suggested in the Office of Indian Affairs’ “Rules for Indian Schools with Course of Study, List of Textbooks, and Civil Service Rules” from 1897—reinforces Standing Bear’s later observation on the rigidity of second-language acquisition. The school manual *Practical Lessons in the Use of English* (1896) emphasized dictation, copying (exact reproduction of text), memorization, and repetition. In Luther Standing Bear’s words—parroting. Standing Bear’s case exemplifies the dramatic changes in Indian students’ engagement with the English language and the process of meaning-making. First immersed in the new language at the superficial level, in brute meaning-making through linguistic signs, the model student later challenged his own and the institution’s politics in establishing such rigid learning paradigms. But Indian students’ proficiency in English (which many of them achieved sooner or later) did not necessarily entail complete and blind agreement with the ideological underpinnings of the institution modeling them into new Americans or with the schoolhouse as a site of ultimate student control.

One of the most effective instruments of turning Indian youth toward American values and an American ethos was the schoolhouse—and the boarding school in particular. Advocates of assimilation and Americanization saw the schoolhouse as “a seedbed of republican virtues” and believed that such an institution could “civilize” in record times, preparing Indians for material self-sufficiency. Three types of schools operated in Indian country and beyond with a view to changing the Indian child forever: (a) the reservation day school (with both academic and industrial training); (b) the reservation boarding school (with a curriculum divided between English and the basic academic subjects and industrial training); and (c) the off-reservation
boarding school (the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, modeled on Hampton Institute, and model for other off-reservation schools at the end of the nineteenth century). In 1819 Congress established a “civilization fund” of $10,000 per year. Administered primarily by missionary societies, these educational institutions (both on and off Indian land) became sites for disseminating Christianity. Only in 1871 did Congress consider the vocational and literacy education of Native people, as federal Indian policy itself was changing its course toward the complete assimilation of Indians into American society.

Perhaps the most prominent Americanization mill at the end of the nineteenth century—and the word choice here reflects my reading of the school as complicit with federal Indian policy in reproducing the country’s labor force through vocational training—Carlisle Indian Industrial School left a troubling legacy for the students’ families and for the history of Indian writing in the United States. Established in 1879 by former army officer Richard Henry Pratt, the school advocated the total assimilation policy envisioned by Progressive reformers. There is also enough evidence in Carlisle publications to speculate that pro-assimilation reformers envisioned the students’ education as a tool of parental and community “education” about the values of American language and culture, at large, once they returned home. This institution’s many ideological ramifications left a permanent mark in most Carlisle students’ encounters with other disciplinary spaces and in some students’ writings.

Pratt cultivated his disciplinary practices in the U.S. Army, where he was entrusted with the “civilization” and Americanization of Kiowa, Comanche, Cheyenne, and Arapahoe prisoners at Fort Marion after the Civil War. The “success” of his rehabilitation program began one of the fiercest educational campaigns to Americanize Indian children in off-reservation boarding schools starting in the early 1880s. Pratt also worked at Hampton Normal and Industrial Institute,
committed to prepare African American and Indian students for “civilization,” but he was determined to build an autonomous school for Indian students. Pratt’s opposition to “educating the two races together” reflected his racial bias toward the “exclusively race schools” in vogue at the end of the nineteenth century (Hampton, Tuskegee etc.). At the same time, it signaled a specific moment in the country’s racial and educational history when the educational segregation of minority groups amplified the cultural and racial divides at large. Surprisingly, however, Pratt favored the model of immigrant assimilation and acculturation over the Hampton model: “All immigrants were accepted and naturalized into our citizenship by that route and thus had a full fair chance to become assimilated with our people and our industries. Why not the Indian?”

Living by the immigrant Americanization model—an ethos he also instilled in his friend Carlos Montezuma—Pratt envisioned a distribution of Indian children across the country, as David W. Adams has documented, “with some 70,000 white families each taking in one child.” Pratt’s larger-than-life scheme, materialized eventually in his “outing program,” where Indian children lived with white families during the summer, presumably to be immersed in “civilized” ways, never reached the magnitude of his envisioned distribution of children. Carlisle students served more as semi-domestics working for meager incomes than equal partners in the game of “civilization.” After the Office of Indian Affairs and Congress approved the funds for a first Indian Industrial school in the former military barracks of Carlisle, Pennsylvania, Lieutenant Pratt’s experiment in recruiting and training Indian students for American democracy began. Pratt’s martial style and his unwavering convictions in the total “absorption” of Indians through education are landmarks of Carlisle ideology: “I believe in the total annihilation of the Indians, as Indians and tribes. I believe in their entire unification with, and incorporation into the other masses of our country; and in accomplishing this in the quickest way possible.”

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Besides taking Indian children away from their homes, stripping them of native garb, language, name, and identity, and drilling them into the lexicon of American democracy and the English language, the Carlisle experiment left an impressive legacy of school publications which offer a glimpse, albeit limited, into students’ daily lives. Less than three months after Carlisle opened its doors to the first contingent of (primarily Plains) Indian students, the school’s first publication appeared in English but with a Lakota name—Eadle Keatah Toh/Big Morning Star—off a small press located in a converted stable. This monthly periodical saw several name changes over the years but was published almost continuously during the school’s existence (1879-1914). *Eadle Keatah Toh* published articles on Indian “civilization,” the progress of students at Carlisle, non-reservation education, Indian labor, and the Indians’ potential for citizenship. James Parins and Daniel Littlefield Jr. suggest that the staff of this publication is uncertain because no editor’s name appeared on the paper, but regardless of her or his name, the editor was undoubtedly under Pratt’s direct supervision and control.43

*The Indian Helper* ran parallel with *Eadle Keatah Toh* in 1884, and its subtitle—“For Our Indian Boys and Girls”—suggests a primarily student readership (students still in school; students placed in the institution’s famous “outing” program, living with families in Philadelphia to learn Americanization hands-on; and students returning to their reservation homes). *The Indian Helper* (later *Red Man* and *Red Man and Helper*) was “PRINTED by Indian boys, but EDITED by The-Man-on-the-Band-Stand, who is not an Indian.” When another Carlisle pamphlet appeared in 1885 as *The Carlisle Indian Boys’ and Girls’ Friend*, it boasted a similarly all-knowing editorial persona, Mr. See All. (I will turn to the role of the editorial persona in relation to that of student voices at the end of this section.) In 1900, Carlisle’s two publications, *The Indian Helper* and *The Red Man*, merged into a larger, single weekly, *The Red Man and
Helper. After Pratt’s dismissal as Carlisle’s superintendent in 1904, *The Red Man and Helper* resumed its publication as *The Arrow*, a largely commercial paper.\(^{44}\)

Of all Carlisle publications, *School News* probably suffered the least editorial intervention—or at least was marketed as “edited and printed by Indian students”\(^{45}\)—but its pro-assimilation stamp is very much in line with the other Carlisle publications. This four-page monthly bulletin was published from 1880 till 1883, when it merged with *The Morning Star*. It targeted mainly Carlisle students and prospective students, offered school news, editorials praising industriousness, sobriety, the use of English, and student writing. The bulletin’s motto is sententious yet different from most other Carlisle publications in that it emphasizes the life of the mind: “A pebble cast into the sea is felt from shore to shore. A thought from the mind set free will echo on forever more.” Nevertheless, religion, education, civilization, and assimilation were the bulletin’s main ideological directions in both its editorials and its student articles: “If every Indian boy and girl were in school it would not take long to civilize all the Indians,” read an editorial in the first volume.\(^{46}\) Samuel Townsend—“a Pawnee Indian boy”—the paper’s first editor, exhorted: “Sometime the Indians will become entirely civilized people just as good white people. If the boys and girls want to be the rulers among their people they must get the best education and learn how to work too.”\(^{47}\) *School News* ran a column titled “Talk English” which reproduced student letters; their writers’ awkward use of English as a second (or even third) language indicates their struggle to master the form they were praising so dearly in their letters home. Sophie Rachel (no tribal affiliation given) writes to her brother about the importance of speaking only English: “[W]e must teach our own people I want to talk English every day not to talk old Sioux. Now I don’t want to talk Indian anymore because I like English every day.”\(^{48}\)
Besides exposing Carlisle student readers to the work of their peers, these examples serve Carlisle’s ideological agenda in a non-threatening way by valuing student work yet subtly permeating the attempt to promote good English with an ideological bent. Through Stuart Hall’s interpretive model we can see an uncontested distance between the poetics and politics of the Indian student letters. A new language produces new dissonant meanings: does the student not want to “talk Indian” anymore because she really likes English or because she is forced to speak “English only” every day? The poem prefacing this section also suggests that the mastery of English ensures not only wisdom but also social mobility and success:

So keep to the English,
Help Others to rise,
Leave the Indian behind you
If you wish to grow wise.49

One example in the bulletin’s third year offers a first attempt at student engagement with the paper’s (and the country’s) Indian politics. An editorial comment following the celebratory poem “America” offers a seemingly Indian-centered response to patriotic invocations of the “land of the free”: “Are we Indians free, can we go wherever we please? No! We are on a reservation like cattle in a pen. This land is the land of the noble free to every body [sic] but the Indians.” But, what starts as a potential instance of student disobedience is immediately followed by a Pratt-esque critique of the reservation system, encouraging Indian assimilation: “So we have no right to sing until we Indians are scattered all over this country and know enough to go anywhere, then we can sing ‘This land of the noble free.’”50
Although Carlisle publications were vehicles of Americanization, assimilation, and propaganda rather than venues for disseminating literary productions and cultural exchange, American Indians throughout the United States were involved in the production of several literary periodicals preceding Carlisle magazines and newspapers: Henry Rowe Schoolcraft’s *The Muzzinyegun* (1826), the first known literary (albeit not published) periodical; George Copway’s *American Indian* (1851); *A Wreath of Cherokee Rose Buds* (1854); *The Sequoyah Memorial* (1855); *Fort Smith Picayune* (1860); *Twin Territories* (1898); and *The Osage Magazine* (1909). Between 1826 and 1924, over two hundred newspapers and periodicals were published. As early as the beginning of the nineteenth century, Indians wrote for publication with an acute sense of their audience.

The “search for order” of progressive organizations and federal agencies at the end of the nineteenth century sought the uniformization of the education system that would bring Indian and immigrant students closer to American republican values and instill a sense of responsibility for cultivating their own “makings” as Americans. However, while the public school system undertook the “civilization” of immigrant children and adults alike—through day and evening Americanization classes—federal Indian policy and its acerbic lobbyists concocted an education policy for Indians resonant with the country’s Indian policy at large, which emphasized not only the acquisition of English but also Christianity, vocational training, and the nuclear family model. As the following resolution adopted at the 1884 Lake Mohonk conference of the “Friends of the Indian” held:

> [E]ducation is essential to civilization. The Indian must have knowledge of the English language, that he may associate with his white neighbors and transact business as
they do. He must have practical industrial training to fit him to compete with others in the struggle for life. He must have a Christian education to enable him to perform the duties of the family, the State, and the Church. Such an education can be best acquired apart from his reservation and amid the influences of Christian and civilized society.\(^{53}\)

In this strict regime of making Americans, formal education “away from home” became the main instrument of assimilation and Americanization.\(^ {54}\) The goal of this education initiative—a combination of vocational training with reading, writing, and arithmetic—was primarily to make Indian people into self-supporting individuals. As Joel Pfister has persuasively argued, “[a]ssimilationist reformers used the category of individuality to reencode relations of dependence […]. [T]hey saw the ideological importance of making cultural, sentimental, and romantic individualism seem like the solution to […] the anxieties and alienation caused by competitive economic individualism.”\(^ {55}\) In this logic, the transformation of the Indian into an “individual” landowner and participant in the new labor market created by the Allotment Act (1887)—which provided for transforming communal property into individual plots and alienated the rest of Indian land as “surplus” land sold to new settlers—coincided with a presumed transformation of the Indian into a student of American democracy through a rigid educational system, both on and off-reservation. Education also made economic sense: in the callous estimation of Secretary of the Interior Carl Schurz, it cost “nearly a million dollars to kill an Indian in warfare, whereas it cost only $1,200 to give an Indian child eight years of schooling.”\(^ {56}\)

The enthusiasm of reformers and educators, however, was short-lived; the impossibility of the “total assimilation” in record time envisioned in the early 1880s was confirmed by the turn of the twentieth century. When a group of Navajo students was invited to write a poem about
their school, they responded with a poem that translates a general resentment against the boarding school system other Indian students throughout the country would have expressed if only they could—and sometimes they did:

If I do not believe you
The things you say,
Maybe I will not tell you
That is my way.

Maybe you think I believe you
That thing you say,
But always my thoughts stay with me
My own way.57

This declaration of Indian student independence, through an emphasis on “my way” and “my own way,” offers a mere glimpse into the other side of the story Indian reformers and the reading public failed to account for—student responses to hegemonic attacks on cultural identity that this section foregrounds. In many ways, given the editorial control of Carlisle materials and their marketing purposes—the successfully Americanized and self-sufficient Indian student—it is intriguing that poetry found a place at all in the Carlisle newspapers and magazines. In 1889, Carlisle’s Indian Helper published a four-stanza song, “The Students of Carlisle,” whose optimism and hope for the future contrast sharply with “real” Navajo students’ views of Carlisle and themselves. As historians of education point out, although Carlisle opened its doors in the
fall of 1879, by the time this song was published ten years later, “after some 3,800 students had attended Carlisle, only 209 had actually graduated.” The tone of the song, however, is optimistic and forward-looking, ventriloquizing an idea dear to Pratt and to the progressive reformers alike: “The ‘Indian Problem’ we will solve / We students of Carlisle”:

Indians large and Indians small,
   Indians short and Indians tall,
You now see before you all
   The students of Carlisle.
Boys and girls from way out West,
   We will try to do our best,
Only put us to the test—
   We’re students of Carlisle.

Chorus
Carlisle! dear old Carlisle!
   The “Indian Problem” we will solve
We students of Carlisle.59

I offer a preliminary taxonomy of the poetry published (usually) on the paper’s first page to show the breadth of student exposure to this literary genre: student poems (usually accompanied by student names and tribal affiliation); poems by Indian students without tribal affiliation, such as “Arbor Day at the Carlisle Indian Industrial School” by Samuel Smith);60 poems by former students (war poems, patriotic poems) promoting an image of success and
praising Carlisle’s role in shaping that student’s future (Thomas Slinker’s “Our Side of It,” a poem about Indian soldiers serving in World War I); poems dedicated to Pratt (Pratt Papers, “Souvenir Song”); poems by Indian converts (William Apess); poems by school employees (“U.S.I.D.” by E.G., Carlisle Barracks); poems by “Friends of the Indian,” such as Elaine Goodale Eastman’s “Song of the Carlisle Indians”; reprinted poems by consecrated contemporary Indian poets like Chinnubie Harjo/Alex Posey, the “poet of the Territory” (“My Hermitage,” “The Decree”); poems reproduced from other publications and periodicals (Dunbar, Elaine G. Eastman), and many more. Poetry occupied, however, one of the sparsest spaces in Carlisle publications. Most of the space was taken by reprinted articles from national magazines; Pratt’s various addresses and speeches; letters from students to their parents and from parents to students; columns by the Man-on-the-Stand (trivia, news about former students, announcements for current students, changes of staff, etc.); reprinted articles about former or current Carlisle students from the regional or national press; editorials, letters to the editor; photographs—especially in the last few years of the journal’s publication; student debates (e.g., debates on Indian citizenship), with both pro and con sides; subscription ads; news about former students; wedding announcements; news about other Indian schools; and many more.

Despite the presumably meager attention to poetry as a formative genre in Indian students’ education, students had a chance to read a variety of poems in (almost) every issue of Indian Helper (and later The Red Man and The Red Man and Helper or The Carlisle Arrow and the Red Man). The poems usually took center stage. They were printed on the left-hand side of the journals’ first page, thus privileging a genre, while at the same time neglecting it as only one poem was usually published per issue. While the effect of the poems on the young readers is hard to ascertain, some poems can illuminate the degrees of the students’ exposure to Americanization
practices through (presumably) artistic media. Kate W. Hamilton’s poem, “America,” published in a July 1903 issue of the *The Red Man*, preceded by an image of an eagle flanked on all four sides by the word “America,” is a blunt expression of patriotism occasioned by 4th of July celebrations:

O LAND that standest fair and free,
Serene, and safe from sea to sea.
America!
Thy snow-capped mountains kiss the sky.
Thy plains in endless beauty lie
O’er golden sands thy rivers shine
Forest and rock and lake are thine;
All countries and all climes compete
To lay their treasure at thy feet,
America.⁶⁵

Similar patriotic hymns abounded in Americanization manuals that immigrants (children and adults alike) were using to immerse themselves into the adoptive culture.⁶⁶ The reproduction of Hamilton’s poem is ironic in its use of images that may not have resonated with potential Indian student readers (a land that “standest fair and free, / Serene, and safe from sea to sea”). Fourteen years later Gertrude Bonnin’s poem, “The Red Man’s America” (1917), published in *The American Indian Magazine*, challenged some of these imposed symbols of national patriotism and pointed to the possibility that indigenous readers might not identify with them:
“My native country, thee / Thy Red man is not free, / Knows not thy love.” Instead of offering generic praise to “America” (an invocation offered in two separate lines in Hamilton’s poem), at the end of the poem Bonnin’s speaker turns her initial pleas to “my native country” into a final prayer to “the Great Mystery,” the ultimate grantor of all things the abstract “Sweet Land of Liberty” cannot:

Grant our home-land be bright,
Grant us just human right,
Protect us by Thy Might,
Great God, our king.  

The patriotic outbursts of Carlisle magazines contrast sharply with students’ classroom helplessness when confronted with Americanization devices and rituals, most notably the use of English. Cora Folsom, a teacher at Hampton—Carlisle’s elder brother—described the classroom scene in a way that Carlisle editors would never allow in their publications. Her description is worth reproducing in full because it speaks to similar student reactions in other Indian boarding schools, notably Carlisle:

A class of boys and girls from eight to twenty-five years of age, ignorant of every rule of school and society sits mute before you. The sad, homesick faces do not look encouraging. Everything is new and strange to them. The boys’ heads feel bare without long braids. The new clothes are not easy and homelike. They do not understand one word of your language, nor you of theirs, perhaps, but they are watching your every look
and motion. You smile and say “Good morning:” they return the smile in a hopeless kind of way, but not the “good morning.” By a series of homemade signs, which they are quick to interpret, they are made to understand that they are to repeat your greeting, and you are rewarded with a gruff or timid “Good Mornink,” and thus another gate is opened to the “white man’s road.”

Carlisle students also read a good many religious or nature poems. The religious poems project a sense of peace, compliance, and ease with an otherwise repressive school environment. David A. Wasson’s “All’s Well” deflects readerly attention from the recent loss of Indian land while emphasizing “divine” wealth:

My wealth is common; I possess
No petty province, but the whole;
What’s mine alone is mine far less
Than treasure shared by every soul.

Talk not of store,
Millions or more,—
Of values which the purse may hold,
But this divine!
I own the mine
Whose grains outweigh a planet’s gold.
Although seldom literary triumphs, some poems are exercises in prosody and the use of English as a second language. Indian students prepared a collage of “original verses” for the 1895 Arbor Day celebrations at Carlisle, as *The Red Man* announced. Indian student James Wheelock wrote: “The long dreary winter weather / With all its bitterness / And all its faults together / Have come to the days of loveliness.” Indian student Leander Gansworth paid a hearty homage to spring: “Come now, thou bright and sunny Spring, / While all the birds are on the wing; / They too are coming now to sing / And try to make the anthem ring.” Indian student Frank Hudson summed up the significance of the occasion by paying tribute to “Arbor Day”: “’Tis not strong in limb as yonder oak / This my little infant tree. / That stands covered by nature’s cloak. / Under the light that is free.” While the literary accomplishments of these poems are not stellar, they point to the students’ ability to produce rhyming and metered verses on a theme both familiar and unthreatening. At the same time, these are poems written for certain occasions, like the imminence of spring or Arbor Day, and they reflect the students’ dedication to produce their best work (some perhaps to get it published in the school paper), perhaps more or less based on imitating work they read in the classroom or the school paper.

Of the Carlisle publications, *The Indian Helper* was the first federally-funded boarding school newspaper, published weekly between 1885 and 1900. Whereas most of the other Carlisle publications enjoyed a wider readership, the *Indian Helper*, a more modest publication than its peers, was geared primarily at Indian children—still in school and students returned to reservations. In Marianna Burgess/Embe’s memoir *Stiya*—fictionally attributed to a Pueblo Indian girl and foregrounding the inadequacies of returned Indian students at coping with reservation life, and abounding in vivid and racist images—the returned student treasures the several issues of *The Helper* she has brought along from Carlisle on her return to her Pueblo
village. Printed “Every Friday at the Indian Industrial School, Carlisle, PA, by Indian Boys” but edited by “The Man-on-the-Band-Stand, who is NOT an Indian,” *Indian Helper* (whose subtitle read *For Our Indian Boys and Girls*) recounted campus events, printed letters, praise and admonitions. Concocted as an apparition, a regulatory and paternal figure towering over the students from his physical and ideological space of power and privilege—the bandstand, i.e., the equivalent of an inspection tower—The Man-on-the-Band-Stand spies, eavesdrops, praises, admonishes, and recruits his accolades. Above all, he has both territorial and editorial control: “This anonymous, invisible, white male persona brazenly located himself on the school bandstand, claiming it as both his home and editorial site.”

The Man-on-the-Band-Stand was popular not only with Carlisle students; readers of the Dakota language newspaper *The Word Carrier/Iapi Oaye* read in the September 1884 bilingual issue that the Man-on-the-Band-Stand is, in fact, “a stranger” [from Australia], which somehow legitimized his desire to scrutinize and “see everything” in his attempt “to learn something about the Indians”:

> I came here all the way from Australia, to learn something about the Indians. I have heard many things about you girls and boys but I wanted to see you myself. They told me to stand on the band-stand and I could see everything. I think it is a cold place to send a stranger, but if I can see and hear everything about you, here is where I shall stay, for six months if necessary. So: Look out!73

Reminiscent of the regulatory voice of the Panopticon, the Man-on-the-Band-Stand has the discursive power to remain engraved deeply in Carlisle students’ imaginary. As Amelia Katanski
has suggested, *The Indian Helper* itself “acted as a rhetorical panopticon encouraging student colonization through writing” (16). An emblem of white spectatorship of Indian students, the editorial persona reminds Indian students they were under constant scrutiny from the outside (read white) world and that their studied behavior within Carlisle’s confines should continue once students escape the Man-on-the-Band-Stand’s physical gaze.

The Indian student within and beyond the Carlisle confines often took on a performative persona whose navigation of two worlds, languages, and cultures—closely scrutinized through unseen binoculars or magnifying glasses—depended on attributes of exteriority, on the presentation of the Indian self for a particular audience with certain spectatorial exigencies. In his many fabricated attributes, the Man-on-the-Band-Stand was also a putative foreigner (as he claims to be from Australia!), an outsider, an observer, who wanted to learn about Indians just as Indian students learn about the non-Indian world. But whereas the Man-on-the-Band-Stand’s endeavor is voluntary, the students’ is not.

A similar apparition is “Mr. See All,” the omniscient and omnipotent eye of another (albeit short-lived) Carlisle publication, *The Indian Boys’ and Girls’ Friend*, started also in 1885 (Figure 3.2). Reminiscent of the pro-Indian “Friends of the Indian” organizations, Mr. See All is a precursor of the Man-on-the-Band-Stand, a creature of puny stature, adjusting his sight, height, and décor with three pairs of binoculars. Seeking to sharpen his sight while adjusting his stature, Mr. See All, along with his older friend, are reminders to the boarding students of institutionalized surveillance they are likely to encounter in a post-Carlisle world. Or so Pratt wants them to believe.
Carlisle’s printing office was a micro-space of surveillance. A space for “Indian boys,” the printing office was designed for manual work, for engaging with the material conditions of production rather than an artifact expressing Indian students’ thoughts and feelings. *The Red Man and Helper* ran a picture of the Printing Office in a 1904 issue on the first page. In a large, relatively well-lit room, at least twenty “boys” are at work. The picture is taken from the back of the room, so we see the little “apprentices” bent over their desks and performing a multitude of tasks, from setting type to printing the final product. The scene is studied: the students perform their daily work for the camera, engaging the viewer’s attention through a silent, mechanical pose of their trade. Few students face the camera. But the manager’s office, separated from the scene of labor by glass windows, in the center of the image, faces the viewer. From her space of control and surveillance of student labor, the editor and manager (possibly Marianna Burgess, in her last year as Carlisle’s business manager and superintendent of publication) has continuous access to the printing process and spectatorial control over her apprentices. The apprentices, however, Littlefield and Parins note, “received a full course in composition and as much experience as possible in the job, stone, and press work, […] layout, operation, and management of the equipment […] and the steam engine. […] Such training […] prepared a number of students for the printing trade” (320). While the success in the printing profession of a handful of
Indian students is documentable (Samuel Townsend became printer for the Chippewa Herald), the future was not bright for Carlisle-trained printers because of their primary exposure to the journal’s form/poetics rather than its content/politics. Technological changes also decreased the demand for printers, making their Carlisle-acquired training impracticable.

Figure 3.3. “Interior of Our Printing Office.” The Red Man and Helper, 1904

Carlisle’s editorial and ideological control reflected not only the orchestrations of Pratt’s mind but also how it intertwined with contemporaneous loci of control and federal Indian policy. In an article published in Charities and Commons several years after Pratt left the Carlisle helm—when Carlisle had lost its martial allure, moving toward a more pluralistic vision championed by the Office of Indian Affairs—Commissioner of Indian Affairs Francis E. Leupp explained that he [as the representative of the government] controlled the meaning of “the little papers and magazines” published by Indian students:

In the little papers and magazines published at some of the schools, also, I am trying to arouse among the children a love of printing the stories which their own people have told
them—sometimes animal fables as good as those of Aesop or Uncle Remus; sometimes narratives of acts of prowess which would be used as epics if the Indians had any literature; sometimes simple descriptions of life at home, showing what the domestic and social customs are among the tribe to which the writer belongs. These little contributions are used as “compositions” in the classroom, and then the best of them, or those which are most characteristic, are printed in the school paper. 77 [my emphasis]

Granted that Leupp’s position gestures toward some sort of compromise—incorporating students’ lives and experiences into their school writings—his trenchant declaration not only misinterprets what Indian literature is (as Commissioner of Indian Affairs, albeit literate, his conclusions were only amateurish) but also casts doubt on whether Indians have any literature at all. If they do, his logic follows, it is “narratives of acts of prowess,” thus excluding poetry or other genres Indian students and staff at Carlisle were already prolific in.

Ultimately, after twenty years of emphasis on off-reservation boarding school education and severance of ties with native communities, from the 1880s to the 1900s, the appeal of the public school and reservation boarding school grew more tangible to reformers, and the new policies of gradual assimilation in the mid-1920s reflected these changing ideas. Carlisle closed its doors in 1914, after thirty-five years. A shift in the rhetoric of boarding school newspapers also points to the constant work of negotiation between the preached values of assimilation (English language acquisition, individualizing, Christianizing, and citizenizing) and the students’ own cultural values. Nevertheless, Carlisle student work (literary and otherwise) sometimes engaged with difficult political issues of the day, such as Indian citizenship. In 1886, The Morning Star/Eadle Keatah Toh ran periodic columns expressing (presumably but always
already questionably) student views on the issue of citizenship. The use of the third person singular and a certain distancing from assuming an Indian identity is carefully sustained in all these statements. At the same time, besides reading this rhetorical strategy as an editorial intervention—which is likely—I argue that this calculated use of the impersonal mode and distancing, which deflects attention from an individual concern to a collective reference, was perfected decades later in the writings of the “Red Progressives,” when we see a shift in interest from poetics to politics, as I examine in the next chapter.

Notes

1 Harsha, 1.

2 In the White Man’s Image. A more recent documentary about the Indian boarding school experience from an indigenous perspective is Our Spirits Don’t Speak English: Indian Boarding School.

3 Members of various tribes called themselves “the people” or “the people of” certain territories or deities.


5 See also John Milton Oskison, 723-33. Oskison (Cherokee) calls for “a new series of Indian portraits” that would replace those depicting “the noble red man.” In his view, the pictures “that are to represent the new Indians will include a short-haired, dark-faced man dressed in black slouch hat, dingy white cotton shirt, blue overalls, and hobnailed shoes” (723).


7 This was a monthly publication with a suggestive motto: “Showing his Capabilities and Accomplishments.” Like many school publications, The New Indian printed “prose and verse that were […] morally inspiring and uplifting.” Littlefield and Parins, 271-74.
By “civilize,” Ericson explains, “the IRA in 1882 meant measures designed to educate, Christianize, make economically independent, and absorb the Indians as Individuals into American society.” See “The History of the IRA” 1. For an early description of the organization’s mission see Prucha, *Americanizing the American Indian*, 42-43.


10 For a comprehensive analysis of these two concepts, see Pearce, especially 1, 6, 11.

11 Philip Deloria, 3. My intention is not to reinforce the use of these binaries but, rather, to show their use for cultural hierarchies in their historical moment. For a critique of this binarizing logic vis-à-vis racial hierarchies, see Delgado and Stefancic, 67-79.

12 See Maddox, 16 and 57. Maddox’s work is useful also for reading the reform work of the SAI in a larger national context, such as African American “uplift organizations” at the end of the nineteenth century—especially in reading the treatment of “the Indian question” alongside “the Negro question” in progressive discourse—and in opening up the analysis for a wider, American Studies audience.

13 Cases in point are Marianna Burgess’ *Stiya* and Zane Grey’s *The Vanishing American* (adapted also into the film *The Vanishing American*, 1925, which I discuss in the last chapter). The imagined new Indian is a product of white imagination and has no agency over her fate or representational consequences.

14 Unlike the imagined Indian, the embodied Indian was politically active and used his public performance of Indianness to assert sovereignty and to fight for Indian rights. Some of these writers, like Laura Cornelius Kellogg, Charles A. Eastman, or Gertrude Bonnin started publishing a decade before the formation of the SAI, and the invitation to join the Society relied—in some cases—on their already established stature as Indian spokespersons. Others, like
Luther Standing Bear or Carlos Montezuma, were only briefly affiliated with the SAI. Carlos Montezuma, SAI’s bad boy, was the Society’s best supporter and detractor, especially when the Society’s leadership was in some way associated with the Office of Indian Affairs, Montezuma’s life-long nemesis. See Iverson, 63-74.

15 Sherry Smith (5) shows how popular anthropologists, including Walter McClintock, George Bird Grinnell, and Mabel Dodge Luhan joined academically-trained anthropologists to give Indians “a fresh look”: “Lawyers, judges, journalists, educators, assimilationists, professional anthropologists, and this more amorphous collection of popularizers of ethnography, essayists, and poets,” along with the writers mentioned above, competed “for the right, in the late-19th and early 20th centuries, to construct identities for Indians.”


17 Philip Deloria, 7.

18 The reprinted snippets of articles were prefaced by the following disclaimer “Note: Our intention is here to record certain items of news interest clipped from newspapers and periodicals. We do not vouch for the truth of the statements given, though so far as possible we do not allow extravagant stories to appear. These news clippings may or may not reflect the opinion of the American Indian Magazine or of the Society [of American Indians]. Our aim is merely to reflect the records and the opinions of the press of the country whether we approve or not the subject matter,” 54.


20 The American Indian Magazine praised the July 1919 issue of Literary Digest for using “a splendid picture of Indians greeting their returned soldier,” a picture titled “The Warrior’s return.” The editor of “Chatter,” where this snippet appears, continues: “We appreciate very
highly this recognition of the American Indian’s sacrifice of the best and last hope of its race upon our country’s altar of patriotism. We thank the Literary Digest for this courtesy. “Chatter,” 118.

21 This sentence is attributed to a Pawnee father, writing to his son, Edward Myers, a Carlisle student in 1881. The excerpt below, dated October 21st, 1881, was printed in School News in 1881 with the Title “Letter to One of The Boys by His Father,” Pawnee Agency, Indian Territory.

My Dear Son Edward Myers:--I was very glad to receive your letter dated September 27, and also to get such a good account of you as your ticket shows. I have shown it to a number of your friends here at Pawnee and they feel glad too. It makes me proud to have my boy do so well. I want to tell you that two of your friends are dead, their names are Ke-wah-koo-lay-sah and La-lis-tah-sah-kih. The rest of your friends are well. I hope you will study hard and learn all you can, mind your teachers, and be a well-behaved boy, that is why I sent you to Carlisle for. [my emphasis] I hope our Heavenly Father will spare your life so I can see you again. I hope you will be a credit to the Pawnee Indian tribe. Write to me often and tell me how you get along, and I will write to you.

My son, I hope you will go right ahead and not stop. Do not give up, and do not get discouraged, and when you get to be a man, you will be glad, and people will respect you, and you will be an important man in the world, because you have knowledge.

Any time when you want to write to me be sure and do so, and I will answer your letter. Your brother and sisters are well.

Your affectionate father,

GEORGE (KIT-KA-HOC)
LA-LU-LAY-SERH-RU-KA-SAH.”

22 “English Speaking,” 1.

23 See Parker’s “Introduction” to his forthcoming anthology, Changing Is Not Vanishing.

24 One of Carlisle superintendent Richard Henry Pratt’s mantras, often reproduced in his many speeches and published work, held in The Carlisle Arrow that: “The way to civilize an Indian is to get him into civilization. The way to keep him civilized is to let him stay” (1).

25 The following scholars have approached Indian student writing from a documentary perspective, i.e. emphasizing its documentary quality: Adams, Coleman, Lomawaima, Child, and Katanski.

26 Katanski, 2-19. Like Katanski, I am interested in de-centering “the critical fascination with authenticity in Indian autobiography” by examining how the emerging writers produced by Carlisle (and other boarding schools in the country) used a variety of literary genres (especially poetry) “to suit their rhetorical and political ends and not to reveal uncritically their degree of Indianness” (17-18). Building on Katanski’s model, I am also interested in how the texts Indian students produced negotiated both language and discourse, how they used language and to what ends to show the interplay of culture, meaning, and representation.

27 Stuart Hall, 1-11 and 15-64.

28 I base my findings of Indian authorship on Linda Witmer’s study, especially the list of Indian students and staff members at Carlisle she provides at the end of her book. The book also offers rare Carlisle photographs worth a book-length study.

29 “Indian Hymn” is attributed to William Apess, “Mass. 1798,” reprinted in the June issue of The Red Man, 1. Although the poem was included in Apess’s 1831 edition of A Son of the Forrest, Barry O’Connell believes that it may have been inserted by the earlier edition’s
editor, Elias Boudinot (97). The poem has attracted recent critical attention. Eric Sundquist, for instance, notes that it “makes the Indian into a crude minstrel figure” (102). The other “Indian Hymn” is reprinted in the February 1897 issue of The Indian Helper, with the following introduction: “In the early days of New England before the Indian Missions had been brought to an end by the sweeping away of the tribes, several fine hymns were composed by Indians and were used in the churches. The following one is the best known. It was composed by William Opes, a converted Indian born in Massachusetts in 1798 and sung by him and two other Indians at the planting of a memorial pine on leaving Dartmouth College, where they had been receiving a Christian education” (1).


33 Idem.


35 Hyde’s manual is a case in point.

36 Adams 18, 28.

37 Spack, 4.

38 Marianna Burgess’s propagandistic Stiya: A Carlisle Indian Girl at Home, published under the pseudonym Embe in 1891, describes the eagerness of a returned Pueblo student to
reform her community and turn it in the path of “civilization.” Written in the form of an autobiography, Burgess’s attempt at ventriloquizing Indian students is filled with clichés and stereotypical images of imagined Indians.

39 Pratt, *Battlefield and the Classroom*, 213.

40 Pratt, *Battlefield and the Classroom* 214.

41 Adams, 54.

42 Pratt Papers, Box 19, File 649, p. 4, Beinecke Rare Book Collection, Yale University. For his educational philosophy and vision, see Pratt’s *Battlefield and the Classroom* and Elaine Goodale Eastman’s *Pratt, The Red Man’s Moses*.


44 For a good discussion of the newspapers’ trajectory and, especially, editorial control (embodied in the persona of The-Man-on-the-Band-Stand), see Jacqueline Fear-Segal, “Eyes in the Text: Marianna Burgess and the Indian Helper” 123-43. See also Fear-Segal, *White Man’s Club*, especially 159-254.

45 The first editor of *School News* was Samuel Townsend, Pawnee.


49 *Indian Helper*, August 13, 1886, 1.

50 *School News*, April 1883, 2.

51 They include: (a) American Indian and Alaska Native Press (centered on tribal and non-tribal newspapers, literary periodicals, as well as intertribal newspapers and periodicals), (b) nonsectarian and sectarian presses played a part in bringing reform periodicals, and (c)
independent newspapers and periodicals to both Native and English-speaking public’s attention. Last but not least, the government sponsored (d) the Indian school press, which publicized the “success” of the Indian policy in action. See Littlefield and Parins, 11.

52 I borrow this concept from Wiebe, The Search for Order, 1877-1920.

53 Lake Mohonk offered a public forum for the country’s declared “new Reformers” such as the Indian Rights Association (IRA), the Boston Indian Citizenship Association, and the Women’s National Indian Association. For more on these organizations, see Crunden and, especially, Prucha, Americanizing the American Indian. See also, Prucha, American Indian Policy in Crisis, 265.

54 This phrase echoes the title of a book on boarding school experience edited by MArchuleta, Child, and Lomawaima.

55 Pfister, Individuality Incorporated, 12-13. For an individual study of an Indian individual, see Pfister, The Yale Indian.

56 Adams, 20.

57 Untitled poem. Qted. in Adams, 231.

58 Adams, 63.

59 The poem is prefaced by the following context: “A few Saturday evenings ago the choir of the Carlisle school surprised Capt. Pratt and the audience assembled by the following song excellently rendered. The Indian pupils had enjoyed keeping the secret, and when the time came to speak they uttered it—in music—with zest.” “The Students of Carlisle,” 1.

60 “Arbor Day at the Carlisle Indian Industrial School,” 5.

61 “Our Side of It,” 27.

63 “Song of the Carlisle Indians,” 2.

64 “My Hermitage,” 1-2; “The Decree,” 6.

65 Kate W. Hamilton, “America,” 1.


67 Davidson and Norris, eds. 173-74. The poem reprinted in Davidson and Norris (64), “The Red Man’s America,” was initially published in the Society’s American Indian Magazine.

68 Rpt. in Adams, 136.

69 David A. Wasson, “All’s Well,” 1.

70 “Arbor Day at the Carlisle Indian Industrial School,” 5. All poems cited in this paragraph appeared in this issue of The Red Man.

71 In 1898, the newspaper had 12,000 subscriptions at an annual rate of 25 cents. Jacqueline Fear-Segal estimates that approximately 5,000 Indian students passed through Carlisle Indian School between 1885-1900, while the newspaper was in print.


74 “Mr. See All” in The Indian Boys’ and Girls’ Friend, August 7, 1885, 2.
Marianna Burgess was Carlisle chief clerk, business manager, occasional co-editor, and superintendent of printing from the 1880s until 1904, when she after Pratt’s dismissal from his position of Superintendent. Burgess learned the printing trade as a child, “setting type for her father who edited the Belvidere, New Jersey, Apollo.” Littlefield and Parins, 320.


CHAPTER 4

“WE ARE RED MEN STILL”: WRITING INDIANS, MAKING AMERICANS, AND THE POLITICAL AND LITERARY RESISTANCE OF EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY NATIVE ACTIVISM

We are red men still, even though we have plucked the feathers from our war bonnets and are using them for pens.

—Arthur C. Parker to Elias M. Ammons, March 28, 1913

You and all the rest of the educated Indian leaders are GENERALS without an ARMY.

—August Breuninger, Ojibwa, to Carlos Montezuma

4.1 The Society of American Indians and the Demands of Americanization

Many early twentieth-century American Indian writers and public figures, “instead of becoming everyday white Americans,” stayed “American Indians, who, despite their clothing, speech and religion continued to orient themselves toward Native American communities.”¹ In addition to debating Indian rights and Indian futures in organized national conferences, for instance, Carlos Montezuma (Yavapai) also traveled to Fort McDowell in Arizona, home of the Yavapais, and fought for the preservation of his tribe’s reservation. Gertrude Bonnin, Yankton Sioux and American Indian “New woman” extraordinaire, performed on the national stage championing Indian rights. Besides resisting Pratt’s model of assimilation, Bonnin joined Pratt in
an anti-peyote campaign and ultimately praised the power of education. While public intellectuals like Charles A. Eastman were interested in a “race ethos” that could define American Indians in relation to American society, other “New Indians” searched for different forms of defining Native communities (and themselves) that defied racial categories. Tom Holm proposes the “peoplehood” matrix to define the New Indians’ relation with themselves, their communities, and American society at large: “Peoplehood really belonged to the individual tribes, with their distinct languages, ceremonies, territories, and histories.” For New Indians, he argues, Indianness becomes “a state of mind combined with a tribal identity.” Although not all New Indians maintained ties with their communities, their common mission was to advocate for “causes, philosophies, arts, and values that could be immediately identified with Native Americans.”

Reading this transformation of early twentieth-century “new Indians”—Charles A. Eastman, Laura Cornelius Kellogg, Gertrude Bonnin, and Carlos Montezuma—into spokespersons for their communities adds a new dimension to the perceived uni-dimensional practices that the dominant culture used for “making Americans.” Instead of silently accepting the federally-sponsored campaign to assimilate American Indians, “New Indians” found ways to debunk Indian myths and to instruct the dominant culture about their people’s cultures, epistemologies, philosophies and—especially—rights. Acting in this sense as cultural brokers between the imposed and the suppressed, the center and the margin, “New Indians” carved their own discursive places—through public lectures, speeches, conference presentations, newspaper articles and editorials, book-length studies, etc.—to advocate for the survival of indigenous cultures in the twentieth century. They embarked on a campaign to “speak back” to a culture that condemned them to “vanishing,” voicelessness, and invisibility. In this context, the “New
Indian” became a necessary mask that Indian intellectuals started wearing to participate, discursively and otherwise, in their own “making” as “Americans.” Becoming what contemporary Native critic Dale Turner calls “word warriors,” these early twentieth century “New Indians” offered an engaged, militant negotiation with Progressive dominant representations of Indianness—residues of colonial discourse and nineteenth century policies of total assimilation—simply by bringing their voices into the dominant intellectual community and reconciling “the forms of knowledge rooted in indigenous communities with the legal and political discourses of the state” (Turner 8). What emerges is not only an activist movement placing indigenous sovereignty and indigeneity at its core, but also an activist literary moment where aesthetics and politics meet in the work of Indian “word warriors” to define the “new Indian” and his entry into modernity.

Not all “New Indians,” however, resisted Americanization; political and communitist allegiances, educational and familial backgrounds influenced different types of responses to and participation in various stages of making Americans. More often than not, new Indian participation in both written and unwritten stages of making Americans was contradictory, paradoxical, and divisive. Montezuma, perhaps the most radical of the “New Indians,” was a vocal supporter of Americanization, of the off-reservation boarding school education championed by Richard Henry Pratt, and advocate for the disappearance of the reservation. At the same time, he fought vigorously against the Office of Indian Affairs, a major apparatus of Americanization, and against its corrupt employees. He helped start the Society of American Indians (1911-1920) but was not shy about criticizing its members and their interactions with the federal government (especially Arthur C. Parker, the editor of the SAI magazine, the Society’s secretary and, later, president). When the Society no longer met his criteria, he started his own
newspaper/newsletter, *Wassaja*, which he published weekly from 1916 until 1922, a year before his death.

The Society of American Indians (SAI), 1911-1920, was the first pan-Indian national organization with exclusive Indian membership, a platform, and high hopes for both the political and intellectual future of Indian communities nationally. The Society of American Indians (SAI), 1911-1920, was the first pan-Indian national organization with exclusive Indian membership, a platform, and high hopes for both the political and intellectual future of Indian communities nationally. It was not, however, the first attempt at a national Indian political organization. Organized on the anniversary of the “discovery of America” at Ohio State University in 1911, the Society gathered an exceptional Indian membership from various professions and tribal backgrounds: Sherman Coolidge (Arapaho), Charles Eastman/Ohiyesa (Sioux), Carlos Montezuma/Wassaja (Yavapai), Charles Daganett (Peoria), Thomas L. Sloan (Omaha), Laura (Minnie) Cornelius Kellogg (Oneida), Arthur C. Parker (Seneca), Gertrude Bonnin/Zitkala-Sa (Yankton Sioux), Henry Standing Bear (Lakota Sioux), Henry Roe Cloud (Winnebago) and others. Sherman Coolidge, the Society’s president, explained that, “the aim and scope of the new race movement as embodied in the Society of American Indians is the revival of the natural pride of origin, the pride of the race.” The Society had a series of clearly defined goals: to promote Indian “enlightenment”; to provide a forum for addressing the welfare of Indian people through conferences; “to present in a just light the true history of the race”; to promote and fight for citizenship and the rights of citizen Indians; to establish a legal department to investigate Indian problems; “to exercise the right to oppose any movement that may be detrimental to the race”; and to devote itself to “general principles and universal interests” rather than personal interest. Less programmatically, the Society wanted to show to the dominant culture that Indian values, epistemologies, and philosophies were as complex as those of people of European ancestry. At the center of these views was the idea of
community, in opposition to the American ideal of individuality, as well as a lived relationship with the land. \(^8\)

In the Preface to the *Proceedings* of the first SAI conference, the organization placed itself in a historical context and called for Indians to “act as a unit” (3) to fight dependence, wardship, poverty, and dissatisfaction: “Thus he is held in the grip of false conditions, […] unable to adjust himself to the normal conditions of modern society” (4). Furthermore, in this manifesto by a collective activist Indian voice, “the thinking Indian of today” asks that “he be treated as an *American*” to be able to rise “to positions of the highest honor and responsibility that the entire race may be given the freedom […] to develop normally as an American people in America” (5). \(^9\) As Lucy Maddox has argued, “the effort of Native Progressive Era intellectuals to insert Indian history and local Indian issues into a universal framework anticipated the kind of questions scholars of American Indian histories and cultures are still asking about the American
public’s resistance to taking American Indian intellectualism seriously” (14) What Oneida activist Laura Cornelia Kellogg called “adjusted to new conditions” became a key concept for understanding the political and cultural work of the SAI as the embodiment of the “New Indian.” Moreover, the emphasis on being “treated as an American people in America” pointed to legal concerns rather than pro-assimilation propaganda; it suggests the responsibilities but also the rights associated with the citizen status. The Society also published legal pamphlets offering “legal aid for Indians” and urged the national readership to acknowledge and support legal measures to redress the paucity of legal aid for Indian people. The SAI published and distributed widely a pamphlet in 1913, “An Appeal to the Nation,” which reproduced the text of and glossed on the Stephens bill, proposing to open the U.S. court of claims to “suits against the United States by Indian tribes, nations, and bands” (5). The Society made “its appeal to the American people” to support a bill aimed at preventing further scheming and fraud of Indian people. A 1913 editorial in the SAI’s Quarterly Journal of the American Indians, “Are You Content to Be a Cigar Store Indian?,“ called for the opening of the Court of Claims to Indians to prevent further fraud.

At the second national conference in 1912 the SAI resolved to publish a journal devoted to presenting the history of American Indian peoples, dispelling myths offering facts and theories about Indian participation in American culture and history. The journal’s main function was to publish news of the SAI, the proceedings of its meetings, and reviews of publications, as well as to reprint articles from other, non-Indian publications. The journal’s motto was: “The honor of the race and the good of the country shall be paramount.” Initially titled The Quarterly Journal of American Indians (1913-1916), the journal changed its name in 1916, to The American Indian Magazine (1916-1920), to reflect the Society’s engagement with a larger (and non-Indian)
readership. Edited by three prominent Society members—Arthur C. Parker (1913-1918), Gertrude S. Bonnin (1918-1919), and Thomas L. Sloan (1919-1920)—and devoted to the “immediate needs relating to the advancement of the Indian race in enlightenment,” the journal was not to engage in personal matters, “controversy, or to promote private enterprise.” It was also not to publish fiction or historical accounts “unless there shall be sufficient space.”

Like Carlisle publications, the SAI journal made literature a secondary—or even tertiary—interest, although many of its members were published writers. Some literature, however, made its way into the SAI publications. As correctives, articles by Indian writers of various backgrounds offered Indian-centered views of Indian cultures: the 1913 editorial, “Are You Content to be a Cigar Store Indian?,” appealed to open the Court of Claims to Indian people; Chauncey Yellow Robe’s “The Menace of the Wild West Show” (1914) decried the artificial, offensive representations of Indians in a popular, and low-brow form of entertainment. Poems and short fiction also made their way in after 1916, when the journal grew more eclectic in both vision and politics. This interest in new genres showed readers another facet of (New) Indian writers the journal had heretofore neglected: the literary. Arthur C. Parker meditated in 1916 on the importance of both the SAI and its journal to the formation of the “modern Indian”: “The very fact that we exist as a Society and that we publish a periodical is an answer to the question of what the modern Indian is.” Defining the “modern Indian” for the modern American readership was vital, in Parker’s view, to garner the support of an even larger “ally”; it was also essential for the Society’s mission as a progressive organization to show its forward-looking agenda, which included, besides recognition by the dominant press and truthful representation of the “new Indian,” pressing issues like “race ethos,” wardship, education, citizenship, autonomy, and an assertion of Native leadership and agency.
A common strategy in the SAI’s argument for Indian “racial” difference, as coded in early twentieth-century discourse, was the comparison of Indian civic and racial status with that of European immigrants. This idea did not, however, originate with the SAI members; it found its most acerbic advocate and supporter in Carlisle’s mastermind, Richard Henry Pratt. In his many published and public addresses, Pratt insisted ceaselessly that the “Indian problem” and its solution—total assimilation—could be addressed by adopting the model of immigrant assimilation and Americanization. In a talk given before the Women’s New Century Club, “The Indian: No Problem,” Pratt invoked the success of “Anglicizing” and “citizenizing” African Americans and European immigrants, calling for an immediate subjection of “our Indians” to the same treatment in his patronizing and paternalistic voice:

Encouraging foreigners of all lands to come and settle among us has in every instance, where we have avoided the congesting of them in separate and large communities, led them to abandon their past and become thoroughly American. […] On the contrary, our Indian schools on the reservations, weak and inefficient because lacking in the essential elements of practical experience, association and competition, are not calculated to lift the Indian into the courage and ability to struggle and compete.15

Pratt’s argument for the transformation of the Indian into a self-supporting individual American, ready to engage with the competitive market and capital—as proved by the immigrant model—became a favorite topic for at least two SAI members: Carlos Montezuma and Arthur C. Parker. Montezuma, himself adopted by an immigrant (Carlos Gentile) and married to an immigrant (Maria Keller, a Romanian American), often used the immigrant analogy, suggesting that Indian
people learn to speak English, attend public schools, and be exposed to “civilization.”

Montezuma’s use of the argument about civilization was not, however, uncritical. In a poem he wrote and published in Wassaja in 1917, Montezuma decried the hypocrisy and artificiality of the “civilizing” discourse:

Civilization! Civilization! […]
Thy knowledge and wisdom thou hast turned into greed.
Thou wantest the land, thou wantest the sea;
Thou forgettest God, thou forgettest thy brother.

Civilization, thou hast lost thy soul,
While carrying the cross to the heathen.
The temptations to satisfy thy greed have been too great.
Thy greed has blinded thy vision for the right.

Arthur C. Parker also illustrates his interest in the immigrant analogy in an essay he published in the SAI journal in 1916: “Problems of Race Assimilation in America; With Special Reference to the American Indian.” To address the central question of his essay, “[W]hy has the Indian not been absorbed?”, Parker compares the difficulties of assimilating Indians to those faced by African Americans and European immigrants, suggesting that the “conditions of assimilation” of the three groups “are unequal” (285). After examining several preconditions for assimilating immigrants (moral energy, capital, similar values, “good stock”) Parker concludes that “The European immigrant is a white man from a civilized country,” hence changing one kind of
civilization for another (290). Parker’s references to the assimilability of “the American Negro” reflect contemporaneous race discourses and prejudice, to say the least. (His racist descriptions of black servility and imitativeness, separatism and unwillingness to assimilate resemble contemporaneous eugenicist discourse worthy of Lothrop Stoddard’s pen as well as Parker’s own sense of [Indian] racial superiority.) To foreground the different conditions of assimilation for American Indians, Parker shows that the Indian was landholder and sovereign before his “discovery,” when “civilization came to the Indian” (294). Parker also insists that “the Indian is conservative in his racial make-up” and is determined to remain Indian: “Indians are proud of their racial extraction and count it no virtue to imitate other races” (295, 296). Other elements affecting assimilation in Parker’s analysis include economic dependence, segregation into reservations, a “rapid diminution in the number of the full blood Indians due to intermarriage” (296-99), and “the problem of the ignorant and the weak” (299-300). Parker’s views on the different levels of assimilation for different racial backgrounds are in indirect conversation with the theories of race emerging at the beginning of the twentieth century: “In this great melting pot of nations, the races that are poured in will not all melt at the same degree of temperature” (302). He distinguishes between assimilation and amalgamation in the making of the New American, who belongs to a new brand of Americanism which is “of Anglo-Saxon origin” but whose “flavor is no longer European” (302). It is to this new brand of Americanism, in Parker’s view, that the New Indian—like his new American peers, “Teutonic” or “Asiatic”—belongs, sharing similar social habits, education, and aspirations. Parker calls attention to the disparities of assimilation, but believes that the process is inevitable if certain criteria are met (he offers a checklist of factors that affect assimilation but does not dwell on their implications or consequences). Parker’s conclusion is optimistic: unlike some “foreign bloods” who encounter
an even greater prejudice in the process of becoming American, “the assimilated and amalgamated” Indians constitute “no grave social or racial problem” because “their aims and methods of thought are thoroughly American” (299). Parker’s presumption of distance in analyzing the problem of racial assimilation objectively places him, rhetorically, on a par with other fellow Indian “word warriors”; writing the article from the position of the assimilated Indian, he often reverses the “us” vs. “them” dichotomy, embodying the majority voice yet showing his critical distance from it:

To the European immigrant we say, “Come, we want you in this free country. In many respects you are like us. […]” To the Negro we say, “In many respects you are unlike us. […] However, we will tolerate you for after all you are a convenient laborer. […]” To the Chinaman we say, “Stay away, we don’t want you. You are vastly different from the rest of us and we dislike your looks. […]” To the Indians we say, “You were here first, that is true, and although we tried we could not kill you entirely. You must be segregated until you can understand us.”

As “word warriors,” it is the New Indians’ responsibility to advocate for Indian causes, philosophies, and values. While Parker worked at the macro level of the perceived “Indian problem,” the word warrior challenges dominant assumptions about the “vanishing race” and Indian people’s own acceptance of their “fate.” Montezuma is a case in point. A doctor by training (a University of Illinois graduate), Montezuma expressed his antipathy for the Office of Indian Affairs throughout his career as a public Indian intellectual. At the same time, while speaking vociferously on Indian issues on the national scene, Montezuma became involved in
local and regional community debates, such as the debate over water rights on the Fort McDowell reservation of his people, the Yavapais (where he went to die in 1923). Nevertheless, under the strong influence of Richard Henry Pratt in the 1890s, Montezuma initially believed strongly in the abolition of Indian reservations, which he viewed as veritable “prisons” for Indian progress, as the speech he gave to a regional meeting of the SAI in 1914 suggests “The Reservation is Fatal to the Development of Good Citizenship.”19 An advocate of “Americanizing” American Indians,20 Montezuma perceived the “making of Americans” process as both inevitable and valuable to both Native cultures and American culture at large. In Montezuma’s logic/philosophy, freedom (including freedom from the constraints of the BIA) was the answer to the “Indian question.”21 Formed at the Americanization school of thought championed by Richard Henry Pratt, Montezuma’s ideas on the matter often coincided with his teacher’s and friend’s. In a letter to Montezuma in 1909, Pratt assumes an Indian voice to show Montezuma how he might approach a member of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs to influence the passage of the Indian Bill. Pratt’s desire to speak through Montezuma, hence to speak for the Indian, had long-lasting consequences for Montezuma’s rhetoric, as Montezuma appropriated some of these ideas as his own in many speeches and articles. Thus wrote Pratt to Montezuma, in his characteristic style, abounding in xenophobic and racist remarks and underlining the sentences he wants Montezuma to reproduce verbatim in his own letters and speeches:

Give us a real chance to learn how and to become real citizens. Treat us as well as you do the foreign immigrant. Deliver us from slavery to the Bureau under its prison systems of reservating [sic] us in masses away from the other people. […] Save us from the
peonage enforced on us by the Bureau gang methods of leading us into contact with low Chinese Japs and other foreigners and the scum of our own race in the beet fields [...] and other massed labor projects. 

Raised at Pratt’s school of xenophobic thought—although not a student at Carlisle—Montezuma disseminated his teacher’s ideas as his own. In hindsight, Montezuma’s racist comments, read alongside his other cultural work, are an odd exception to his vocabulary as a “word warrior.” Nevertheless, Pratt’s influence emerged especially in the last lines cited above, when he refers to the “low Chinese Japs and other foreigners.” This critical stance on Americanization, which suggests the contradiction between removing Indian people to remote reservations and the government’s attempt to Americanize them from a comfortable distance, was one of Pratt’s favorite arguments, as we have seen earlier in the chapter. At the same time, this unmasked racism toward Asian immigrants and “other foreigners” renders Montezuma, while ventriloquizing Pratt, as complicit with contemporaneous discourses of racial hierarchies, espoused by Arthur C. Parker (as previously noted), and positioning Indians closer to whites as potentially more assimilable than “other foreigners.”

Hazel Hertzberg, although generally critical of Montezuma, describes him in memorable terms: “Montezuma was by temperament and conviction a factionalist. He helped to found the Society of American Indians and then spent most of the rest of his life attacking it” (44). But Montezuma was more than a factionalist and imitator of Pratt. In a celebrated address to the Society of American Indians Conference in Lawrence, Kansas, in 1915—“Let My People Go”—Montezuma expressed his dissatisfaction with the Indian Bureau, asking in a prophetic tone that Indian people be freed from “Bureauism,” advocating for Indian economic and political
sovereignty. The result, Montezuma intimates, will “stop making paupers and useless beings [of Indian people], and start the making of producers and workers.” For Montezuma, therefore, freedom from the Indian Bureau and its corruption results in the Americanization of Indians as self-sustaining “producers” and “workers,” away from the reservation, where “Indians are prisoners.” Montezuma’s radicalism in his indictment as both SAI member and public Indian intellectual voice is not surprising to students of Indian history. His rhetoric, often using biblical invocations—after all, he was a devout Baptist—is as powerful as it is sometimes contradictory:

We must act as one. Our hearts must throb with love, —our souls must reach to God to guide us, —and our bodies and souls must be used to gain our people’s freedom. In behalf of our people, with the spirit of Moses, I ask this—THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,—LET MY PEOPLE GO.23 (13)

Carlos Montezuma’s larger-than-life persona, reflected in the words above, where he takes on Moses’ prophetic tone as a leader of his people, could not be contained in one organization (like the SAI, as Hertzberg suggested) or one genre. Montezuma’s political speeches, his articles in Wassaja, his letters and poems point to a subtler radical than his peers, detractors, or critics made him to be.24 His poem, “I Have Stood Up for You” (1919), expresses some of these tensions in a genre Montezuma was not well versed in. Making himself the spokesperson for an imagined national Indian community, Montezuma asks the US, “in behalf of our people,” for the ultimate freedom possible—freedom from the Indian Bureau. His crusade against and dissatisfaction with the Office of Indian Affairs led him to approach a new genre, poetry. The repetitive invocations
in free verse offered a fresh medium of expression for Montezuma’s assumption of a messianic persona:

Being of your blood,
Through thick and thin,
I have stood up for you. […]
As the Indian Bureau, like an octopus,
Sucked your very life blood,
I have stood up for you. […]
When you were judged “incompetent”
For freedom and citizenship by the Indian Bureau—
I have stood up for you. 25

“I Have Stood Up for You” was not Montezuma’s first stab at poetry. 26 Published in one of the first issues of the journal he edited, Wassaja, Montezuma’s poem “Changing Is Not Vanishing” sums up his belief in a future for Indian people, or what he calls “the Indian race,” 27 where the element of “change” has favorable attributes. The tone of the poem itself changes gradually from a direct question—“Who says the Indian race is vanishing?”—to a series of answers repeatedly (and almost ritualistically) underlining Indian permanence and survival (using future tense three times, “the Indian will not vanish” and present perfect tense three times in the second half of the poem, “he has not vanished”):

Who says the Indian race is vanishing?
The Indians will not vanish.
The feathers, paint and moccasin will vanish, but the Indians,—never!
Just as long as there is a drop of human blood in America, the Indians will not vanish.
His spirit is everywhere; the American Indian will not vanish.
He has changed externally but he has not vanished.
He is an industrial and commercial man, competing with the world; he has not vanished.
Wherever you see an Indian upholding the standard of his race, there you see the Indian man—he has not vanished.
The man part of the Indian is here, there and everywhere.
The Indian race vanishing? No, never! The race will live on and prosper forever.28

Accounting for the “Indian spirit everywhere” in the country, the speaker concedes that the elements associated in dominant imaginary with the “old Indian” “will vanish” (such as “feathers, paint, and moccasin”—markers of exteriority and often reason for stereotyping in what Gerald Vizenor calls “literature of dominance”). The “new Indian” Montezuma envisions does not wear “picturesque feathers and warpaint but sober citizen dress,” as Hertzberg puts it in her ground-breaking study of modern pan-Indian movements (59). The emphasis on exteriority continues in the poem’s next line: “He has changed externally but has not vanished.” The exterior change, suggesting the preservation of immutable internal values, also marks the American Indian’s encounter with capital and the competitive market, which makes such a change inevitable for Montezuma’s speaker: “He is an industrial and commercial man, competing with the world.” Montezuma’s poem addresses a white audience that supported his publication and advocacy of New Indian matters. “Change,” his poem intimates, is not
synonymous with disappearance but instead is symptomatic of adaptation, progress, adjustment, and self-determination.

At the same time, one cannot overlook the essentialist undertones of lines like “Wherever you see an Indian upholding the standard of his race, there you see the Indian man,” where manliness and Indianness coalesce into a unity that stands the test of “vanishing.” But as Peter Iverson suggests, “Being a man would be a favorite theme of Montezuma” (11). With subtle irony, the speaker zooms in on “the standard of his race,” sanctioning perhaps the compliance of “the Indian man” to exterior preexisting categories that dictate both his racial and the gender “standard.” By the time Montezuma wrote this poem, the “vanishing” policy was already under attack: “Red Progressives” attacked it by demanding rights for Indian people in national arenas; Indian people on reservations fought to retain their spiritual connections with the land; scientists were challenging the myth of the “vanishing Indian.” Unlike some of his SAI peers, Montezuma did not believe in living in the past but focused on the Indian present. When his public speeches and published pamphlets and talks could not contain his larger-than-life vision for an Indian future—relying primarily in the abolition of the Office of Indian Affairs, for which he had worked for a few years—Montezuma changed the status quo. He created his own weekly newspaper, Wassaja, where he led by example and showed both his peers and his (many) enemies that change was possible:

Fennimore Cooper’s Indians do not exist today. We are their children’s children. Things have changed and we have changed with them. We do not see things as our forefathers saw them nor do we live as they did. Let it be known that within the breast of every Indian there is a heart which throbs with the same yearnings that throb in all human
Montezuma’s plea for Indians’ humanity reflects the creed of his generation of “progressive Indians” that American and Native cultures can coexist, but argues for the recognition of this coexistence. As Frederick Hoxie suggests, Montezuma’s generation of Indian public intellectuals “articulated a vision of Native culture that inspired persistence in Indian communities across the nation while laying the foundations for cultural revivals that would take place in the ensuing decades.” Hoxie’s—and Montezuma’s—emphasis on Indian permanence established through Red Progressives’ respective strategies of “talking back to civilization,” a rhetorical practice Montezuma and his generation used to in a variety of genres.32

One of Montezuma’s fellow SAI colleagues (and briefly his fiancée), New Indian Gertrude Simmons Bonnin / Zitkala-Sa expressed similar progressive views in her essays, poetry, pamphlets and speeches written in the late 1910s and early 1920s. Bonnin studied music at the New England Conservatory of Music, co-wrote the opera The Sun Dance, and served as the SAI’s secretary-treasurer and later editor of its American Indian Magazine. Like Montezuma, Bonnin often wrote critical speeches, poems, and political bits on contested issues such as the assimilation and Americanization of Indian people. Like Montezuma and Laura Corneius Kellogg, Bonnin was critical of the role of the Indian office in withholding the teachings of American democracy from reservation Indians. A passage from her reaction to the Indian Bureau’s refusal to let SAI members speak on an Indian reservation urns into a critique of unchecked immigration, reminiscent of Montezuma’s and Pratt’s xenophobic logic:
Though the riffraff of the people from the four corners of the earth may enter Indian lands and homestead them, thus permitting daily contact with the very scum of other races, the educated, refined, and patriotic Indian, teaching the highest ideals of democracy is forbidden to meet with his own race, even for a day. 33

Like many of her word warrior peers, Bonnin assumed a calculated third person narrator (and speaker in her poems) that distanced itself from the topic of the address. Referring to Indian fellow men in the third person allowed Bonnin to relate to a primarily white audience and capture their attention: “the American Indian is our fellow man.” 34 Many of Bonnin’s New Indian contemporaries used this rhetorical strategy to deflect attention from an individual concern to a collective reference. Bonnin’s “The Red Man’s America,” a poem published in 1917, parodies “My Country ’Tis of Thee,” laments Indian disenfranchisement—“Land where OUR fathers died, / Whose offsprings are denied / The franchise given wide”—and ultimately sanctions the “native” country’s treatment of “the Red Man”: “My native country, thee, / Thy Red man is not free, / Knows not thy love.” 35 Bonnin establishes a double audience in the poem’s first two stanzas by addressing first “My country” and second “My native country,” bringing her “pleas” to appeal for enfranchisement to the first, and moral rectitude and responsibility to the second (especially in her sanction of the use of peyote in Native communities): “Political bred ills / Peyote in temple hills.” Bonnin’s rewriting of the American anthem with an indigenous-centric appropriation of the song’s main iconic symbols—“my country,” which becomes “my native country” in the second stanza—becomes a political appeal for Indian enfranchisement. This poem also appears at an opportune political moment, as the US enters World War I in 1917, and many Indian soldiers will enlist to fight as “American
soldiers.” In the last two stanzas of the poem, the speaker invokes two recent pieces of legislation: “Lane’s Bill,” proposing the abolition of the Indian Bureau and “Gandy’s Bill,” a law to prohibit the use of peyote: “Let Lane’s Bill swell the breeze,” and “Let Gandy’s Bill awake / All people till they quake.” Using the meter of America’s most patriotic song, with its reassuring cadences, Bonnin’s poem becomes an appeal to the “Sweet land of Liberty” to recognize Indian humanity and rights.

Bonnin’s speech “Americanize the First American” (1921), written after the SAI dissolved, shows her ongoing beliefs in discourses of the “makings of Americans,” as long as they entail the granting of citizenship to the American Indian. In this pamphlet, Bonnin pleads with the “womanhood of America” on behalf of “the Red man and his children” to advocate for Indian citizenship and the termination of Indian wardship: “Revoke the tyrannical powers of Government superintendents over a voiceless people and extend American opportunities to the first American—the Red Man.” When this pamphlet was first published, its coversheet included a picture of Bonnin framed by American flags. Bonnin’s biting critique of federal Indian policy and the misdirection of Indian naturalization through the perpetuation of the status quo—where Indians are “wards” of the federal government”—echoes the views and tone of fellow Indian activist, Laura Cornelius Kellogg, whom I turn to next.
4.2 “I’m Not a New Indian, I’m an Old Indian Adjusted to New Conditions”: Laura Cornelius Kellogg’s Embattled Search for an Indigenous Voice

She is a woman who would shine in any society: it is said that she is destined to take the place in literature Zitkala-Sa seemed about to achieve.  

—LA Times, March 1904

‘The time has come when the Indian has to go. But when they have gone, there will be a good deal less poetry in the world. The Indian, in this money-grubbing age, has the remnant of true poetry that is left,’ she said.  

—LA Times, December 1904

This section zooms in on the cultural work of Laura Cornelius Kellogg, one of the Society of American Indians’ founding members, activist, orator, linguist, reformer of Indian policy, and author of Our Democracy and the American Indian: A Comprehensive Presentation of the Indian Situation as It Is Today (1920). A Wisconsin Oneida and a public speaker who was often stereotyped as an “Indian Princess” in the popular press, Kellogg drew on native and non-Indian traditions and discourses to support the transformation of reservations into cooperative, self-governing communities, and to offer practical solutions for achieving indigenous autonomy. Reading her surviving literary work alongside competing representations of Kellogg in the popular press, her public speeches, and internal SAI tensions about Indian participation in the “makings of Americans” I argue that through her cultural work, this public Indian intellectual
contested public and political discourses of American citizenship, fought for Indian self-
determination, and invented an acerbic response to regimes of “making of Americans” on—and
mainly off—the Oneida reservation. Her published literary work, with her public speeches and
addresses to Congress and the SAI meetings, offer a useful archive for beginning to understand
one of the most controversial “citizen Indians” at the beginning of the twentieth century, for
whom the daring enterprise of both “making” and “unmaking” New Indians for the twentieth-
century came at an enormous personal cost. Her surviving political work and her carefully
crafted speeches “to the American people” point to the degree of her investment in the power of
the English language to negotiate across cultures, at the same time that she seeks to envision a
future for the Oneidas as New Americans.

As white America was growing more interested in the “vanishing Indians” that
Hollywood silent films helped disseminate as the industry took off (and as I show in the last
chapter), “New Indians” like Montezuma, Bonnin, and Kellogg became not only brokers
between cultures but also promoters of Native cultures and expressive traditions.41 Such acts of
cultural brokerage—in search of what Richard White would call a “middle ground”42 between
the dominant and the Indian culture—often met with both indigenous and white American
skepticism and were often misread. Kellogg in particular, whom Laurence Hauptman considers
“one of the most important and tragic figures in recent American Indian history,” has a
controversial legacy despite her recognized accomplishments on the Oneida reservation and on
the national political and cultural scenes.43 Despite the many controversies surrounding her
public persona, as we shall see, Kellogg was recognized for being the best native speaker of her
generation and a linguist who spoke Oneida, Mohawk, and English equally well. As the first
epigraph above suggests, she was read in the company of her more famous New Indian peer
writer and activist Zitkala-Sa, and earned a well-deserved description in 1904 as “one of the most interesting Indian women in the United States,” praise that brought Kellogg as a public Indian woman intellectual to national attention. All this happened before she even published her work of consequence, Our Democracy and the American Indian (1920)—where she offers an innovative model of tribal economic self-determination in the form of a visionary Indian industrial village, an attempt at “tribal socialism”—and before she was publicly recognized for her oratorical skills.

There is much to admire in Bonnin and Kellogg’s work as indigenous women activists promoting (and producing) native culture in the United States at a time when women’s rights and citizenship were prominent issues on the national scene. Kellogg, however, shares more with Montezuma in both her radicalism and political work. Like Montezuma, she helped found the Society of American Indians (serving on the executive committee in 1911 and as vice-president for the Education Division of the SAI from 1912 to 1913); like Montezuma, Kellogg was a fervent and acerbic advocate for indigenous rights, was often at odds with the Office of Indian Affairs, and served as one of the original members of the Society of American Indians. She repeatedly testified before the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs in appropriation hearings and tried to put into practice her economic model of self-sufficiency. And, like Montezuma, Kellogg was controversial, exoticized and misinterpreted in the popular press, and thrice arrested, tried, and found not guilty. Her legacy for indigenous self-representation and sovereignty are better served if we consider her work as an aspiring writer in the context of her other cultural work for Indian self-determination in the first decades of the twentieth century. Against all odds, Kellogg voiced her frustrations with both American capitalism and the widespread misrepresentation of American Indians.\textsuperscript{45}
Laura “Minnie” [Miriam] Cornelius Kellogg was born on the Oneida reservation in Wisconsin in 1880 and came from a long line of Indian tribal leaders; her grandfather, Daniel Bread (Dehowyadilou, “Great Eagle”), was a famous Oneida leader—friend of Henry Clay and Daniel Webster—who helped find land for the Oneidas as the tribe was forcibly removed from New York state to Wisconsin in the early nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{46} The Oneidas were part of the Six Nations or Iroquois Confederacy, or the Haudenosaunee (“people building a long house” or “people of the long house”), an old democratic confederacy in North America.\textsuperscript{47} Most importantly, Kellogg comes from a long line of strong Iroquois women; among Six Nations’ peoples, women held great political and social powers, not only providing tribal subsistence but also choosing the representatives of the league’s council. The Oneidas’ uprooting from New York to Wisconsin in 1820s and 1830s, along with internal tribal factionalism, led to severe changes in Oneida politics (such as the dwindling importance of clan affiliation and the transformation of the Oneida social structure into a patrilineal one, evolving from a traditional Iroquois matrilineal model). The enormous loss of land caused by relocation and, later, by the Dawes Act (1887), shrunk the Oneida land base to less than ninety acres by 1934, meaning that when the Indian Reorganization Act passed (1934), the Oneidas had lost more than 95 percent of their lands in Wisconsin.\textsuperscript{48}

Kellogg’s genealogy is important for understanding her political and aesthetic views; like Daniel Bread’s activism, her political action and later work on the Oneida land claims were informed by traditional tribal values and a favoring view of adaptation to economic and political changes, often misread as pro-Americanization discourse. In the second epigraph earlier in this section, Kellogg is probably misquoted saying that “the Indian has got to go,” an assertion contradicting her political views on Indian adaptation rather than assimilation. Such
misattributions often fulfilled the general readership’s interest in the trope of the vanishing Indian, and led to popular misinterpretation, which marked Cornelius’ life and activist career.

Like Charles A. Eastman and Gertrude Bonnin, Kellogg did not attend reservation schools; instead, she attended several prominent national institutions, from Grafton Hall (a private boarding school in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, where she graduated in 1898) to Stanford University, Barnard College, the New York School of Philanthropy (Columbia University of Social Work), Cornell University, and the University of Wisconsin. Although she never graduated with an academic degree from any of these prestigious schools during her twelve years of peregrinations (including a two-year sojourn in Europe), her early interest in social work left a lasting mark on her future work as an advocate for the Oneidas, a fighter to preserve the Oneida land and language, a reformer of Indian policy, and a writer. Many of Kellogg’s writings have been lost or are waiting to be discovered in remote archives. Nevertheless, her surviving works suggest what an accomplished writer she may have been.

Before Kellogg received national attention, she published in an Oneida-based publication. Her stories “The Legend of the Bean” and “The Sacrifice of the White Dog” appeared in the Church’s Mission to the Oneidas in 1902, accompanied by a photograph with her name underneath: Laura Miriam Cornelius. An editorial note introduces the two stories: “We are indebted to Miss Cornelius’ graphic pen for the following Oneida Legends.” Although the editor refers to her stories as “legends,” he recognizes Cornelius’ talent as a writer in his praise of her “graphic pen,” which makes one hope other similar materials—if discovered—will offer further testimony to her literary talent. “The Legend of the Bean” is an etiological story, explaining the emergence of the new plant among the Oneidas. Told in the first person, the story recounts an old oral story the writer “begged” of her grandmother, who had carried the story through many
generations. It begins formulaically in the “long ago.” After learning how a “pretty green vine” emerged to create this “strange product,” it tells of an old woman who tasted it, risking her life “for the benefit of my friends, my home, my race” (56). The community adopts this new product, and the narrator’s grandmother ends the story praising the old woman’s act of courage: “This brave old woman lived to see her six sons grow in wisdom and virtue and become great Chiefs of the tribe” (56). These multiple levels of mediation, rendered through the voices of Oneida women of several generations, suggest that the story from “the long ago” survives as it is passed on through many generations. The story also points to the meeting ground of the Oneida oral tradition and the translation and rendition of the story into English, which facilitates the meeting of old and new epistemologies and story-telling strategies.

“The Sacrifice of the White Dog” shows the emerging writer’s increasing awareness of her imagined audience: “Oh that the expanse of time were less, and the camp fire burning, to make my story glow with interest to the reader” (57). As she elicits her audience’s attention, Cornelius uses a literary device reminiscent of Anne Bradstreet’s “Prologue” to the first published volume of poetry by an American woman writer: “To sing of wars, of captains, and of kings / Of cities founded, commonwealth begun, / For my mean pen are too superior things” (lines 1-3). Through a similar, faux-apologetic rhetorical device, Cornelius prefaces her story with a limitation: “But my pen paints poorly.” This lack, however, appears to signal the expected reader’s inability to decipher the cultural landscape of the story, because of translingual difference and the generic reader’s inability to understand what the writer calls “the old Oneida vocabulary which so well my tale would tell.” Cornelius, therefore, turns the seeming apology into an occasion for cross-cultural translation of an old Iroquois sacrificial ritual (of a white dog, described as “the emblem of innocence”), which ends with an intriguing spectrum of colors: “the
white dog, the emblem of innocence; the red, of victory over enemy; and the blue, heaven’s color, the sign mark of the Divine Spirit, which guided them to the worship of the Great Spirit.”

Cornelius’ early writings, therefore, combine her interest in Oneida storytelling with her wider exposure to literature in English (in which she was well read). Although she writes in English, with a clear sense of literary conventions, her writings combine dramatically her grounding in the Oneida past and present with a view to an American future that will not erase her sense of being and belonging simultaneously in two cultural spaces. The Church’s Mission to the Oneidas also mentions Cornelius’ other accomplishments, which add to our knowledge of her interest in literature. We learn that she graduated with honors from the classical course at Grafton Hall (a private Diocesan School for girls in Fond Du Lac, Wisconsin) and that her graduation address was an essay entitled “The Romans of America.” According to the editor of the Church’s Mission, Cornelius “traced the analogy between the Iroquois Confederacy, or Six Nations, and the ancient Roman Empire.” Her interest in this analogy as a marker of indigenous sovereignty, notwithstanding military conquest, also informs her only surviving poem.

Cornelius wrote the poem “A Tribute to the Future of My Race” (1903) while teaching at the Sherman Institute—an Indian boarding school in Riverside, California—and published it in the Riverside Daily Press in Riverside. “A Tribute” was reprinted for a potentially much larger and different readership in The Red Man and Helper, the magazine published by Carlisle Indian Industrial School, accompanied by this note: “The following was read at the Sherman Institute, Riverside, California, recently by the author, a talented Indian maiden, well known to many at Carlisle. The occasion was the graduating exercises of the Indian school, where Miss Cornelius is instructor.” As it happens in other instances noted in my earlier section on Carlisle poetry,
Carlisle editors’ attributions and fact-checking were questionable; this is another occasion for historical inaccuracy as Sherman Institute opened its doors to students in 1902, had an “official” opening in 1903, and graduated its first (small) class in 1904. Cornelius’ poem was read most likely at the institute’s opening ceremonies in March 1903, which may determine how we interpret her address to the Sherman students, especially the speaker’s optimism about boarding school education for “ye sons of Tonner hall / And all ye daughters, true” (lines 119-120). As I noted in my discussion of Carlisle poetry (a term I use to suggest poetry published in Carlisle magazines, both by Indian students and other Indian and non-Indian writers), poems were usually published on the magazines’ first page. Despite the meager attention poetry received at Carlisle, poems usually took center stage, appearing on the magazines’ first pages. In this introduction of Cornelius as “an Indian maiden” we see an editorial attempt at connecting student readership (and general readership outside Carlisle) to an Indian author. At the same time, for contemporary readers, the term is also gendered; in its emphasis on gender and race, it deemphasizes the category of writer (or poet, in this case), for whom all three attributes or categories—woman, Indian, author—were equally important. Such introductions, however, would follow Cornelius throughout her life, as she was repeatedly dubbed “the Battling Indian Princess” or “the Joan of Arc of Indians.” Similarly, when Cornelius enrolled at Stanford University to study law, The Los Angeles Times published an article on the first page in December 1907, banking on the sensationalism of the story, and calling her “the first Indian girl lawyer.” Cornelius never became a lawyer, but instead married one (Orrin Kellogg, in 1912), who became her most acerbic supporter and advocate.

Cornelius’s “A Tribute to the Future of My Race” (1903), a nod to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s The Song of Hiawatha—from which she borrows not only the meter but also full
lines—is an intriguing and surprising poem. The title is forward-looking, suggestive of continuity, survival, and “the future.” Read in the context of the poem’s initial address—the opening of Sherman Institute, which may also account for the speaker’s effusive optimism—the poem celebrates the “future of the [Indian] race” represented by the graduating class of 1904, and all future graduating classes, supporting thus the idea that boarding school education—with its consequences in “making” Americans of Indian students—is, after all, benign. Nonetheless, there is more to Kellogg’s poem than a reductive endorsement of federal Indian policy and Americanization discourses of the day. Cornelius’ views on education differed tellingly from those promoted by Carlisle and other off-reservation boarding schools, as her activist and political work show: “There are old Indians who have never seen the inside of a class room whom I consider far [sic] educated than the young Indian with his knowledge of Latin or Algebra.” How do we reconcile these differences? How do we read the speaker’s incantation in mid-poem that “our glorious America / Be the world’s salvation—haven” (82-83) when we know the dramatic (and traumatic) consequences similar messianic lines that her poem invokes may have had—and often had—on boarding school students? How do we read her celebratory lines devoted to “the noblest offspring / Of our dear, great land, / Such as Smiley, Pratt, and Garrett” (131-33)? Ultimately, what are the implications of Cornelius’ surmise toward the end of the poem, “Yea, the hearts’ right hand we give them, / Blue-eyed Royalty American” (143-44)?

One way to begin to answer these questions is to consider that the celebratory and patriotic images are a necessary part of Cornelius’ poem, given the poem’s occasion; at the same time, the speaker’s direct address to Indian students—in well-crafted lines—lies at the heart of the poem, conveying the idea of necessary adaptation and survival through education. The poem begins with a negation, meanders through historic images of colonization and dispossession, and
culminates in an unpredictable ending on a note of loss, necessary adaptation (including assimilationist practices like education), and survival: “Theirs, our native land forever, / Ours their presence and their teachings. / Ours the noblest and the best” (145-47). The poem starts with a negation, defining what the poem is not:

Not a song of golden “Greek,”
Wafted from Aegian shores,
Not from an Olympian height
Come my simple syllables. (1-4)

The opening lines continue Cornelius’ apologetic literary beginnings in her invocation of authorial shyness, expressed a year earlier in the stories published in the Church’s Mission to the Oneidas, and conveyed here by the adjective “simple” and her substitution of the minute “syllables” for the more predictable phrasings “lines” or “words.” Considering Cornelius’ indebtedness to Longfellow’s introduction to The Song of Hiawatha, crafting syllables for her chosen meter might have been a laborious task. At the same time, she follows this opening with her identification as an Oneida orator greeting her audience:

But from the Northern of Wisconsin,
From the land of the Oneidas,
From the Chieftain clan Cornelius,
From the friendly Iroquois
Comes the greeting of the wampum
And a tribute, humble, simple. (5-10)

The emphasis on the “humble” and “simple” “tribute” the speaker prepares to deliver supposes a friendly relation with the audience—both at the ceremonies at Sherman Institute and with the larger, non-Indian readership—which, with an awareness of good oratory, the speaker reestablishes later in the poem: “Stay ye, hear this rude-put story / of the future of a nation” (46-47).

But to know the story “of the future of a nation,” the speaker has to descend into a troubled past of an “infant, warrior people,” when they had “a whole continent their own!” (54-55), thus reminding the students that the land they lost was once theirs. The speaker later moves swiftly from a series of questions about the students’ ancestors and suggestive images of traditional education—“And who were they? All barbarians? Were they men / Without legend or tradition” (56-57)—to a more pressing question about the future, which she approaches through “beauteous enlightenment” (78). The future she paints for the Indian students at Sherman is first about past heroic deeds that will sustain those now facing “all the hardships of the mountainside” with “patience” (112, 113). Then Cornelius ends by reminding the Indian students that they “spring from noble warrior blood, / As brave as Saxon, Roman, Greek” and by suggesting reconciliation, extending “the wampum strand,” a symbol of “friendship” and “gratitude” (123-24, 139-40):

Yea, the hearts’ right hand we give them,

Blue-eyed Royalty American

_Their, our native land forever,_
Ours, their presence and their teachings.

Ours, the noblest and the best. (143-47; my emphasis)

“A Tribute to the Future of My Race” ends in an apparent surrender of “hearts’ right hand” to the “blue-eyed Royalty American,” but the key image of the lost Indian land lingers after the poem’s last lines. In its emphasis on the possessive adjective “ours” in the last two lines of the poem, following the line about loss of land, the speaker reclaims ownership of Indian agency particularly in the poem’s last line, a direct address to Indian students across the country: “Ours, the noblest and the best.” This optimistic view is part of Cornelius’ performative public persona, which often negotiated competing demands from her audiences. At the same time, it might have been excruciatingly hard to write a poem ending on an optimistic tone when only several years later, Cornelius would argue for abolishing the government boarding school system in her book, Our Democracy and the American Indian (1920), as we shall see next.

If poetry allows Cornelius the rare occasion to meditate on an optimistic future for her “race,” her political and activist writing open another window into Cornelius’ concern with how that future could take shape. Cornelius had an opportunity to present her views on Indian Education at the Society of American Indians’ second meeting, in a talk later published in the first issue of Society’s journal and titled “Some Facts and Figures on Indian Education.”

Looking back on over twenty-five years of federally-funded Indian education, Kellogg explores the meanings of education to “our race,” tracing the contradictions of misused government funds and their consequences for Indian children. She points out the importance of Indian self-determination in the process of education and sees the future of Indian education as a meeting ground of tribal knowledges and epistemologies with “Caucasian” education. Kellogg
expounds: “We want education, yes, we want to know all the educated Caucasian knows but we want our self-respect while we are getting his knowledge.” Invoking Franz Boas, whose work she encountered while studying at Columbia, Kellogg invokes the “power of abstraction in the Indian mind” and describes the merits of Indian oratory in its “profound thought, literary merit and logic.” Ultimately, she criticizes the irresponsibility of Indian Office personnel in handling resources appropriately and suggests future directions for Congressional appropriations, which she says should include funds for Indian students’ health care, a transition from off-reservation schools to local public schools “where feasible,” and appropriations for Indian students pursuing higher education:

Our future is in the hands of the educational system of today. Those of us who have come thus far know how our youth have longed to reach the summit of the mountain. Let us not forget our own yearnings and the prayers of our ambitious young for opportunity. Let us climb the highest mountain, without looking back till we have reached the top.  

Kellogg ends her speech on an optimistic note but reminds the audience members how crucial education is for Indian self-determination.

The publisher of Our Democracy and the American Indian introduces her on the title page as “author of ‘The Lost Empire,’ ‘The Trail of the Morning Star,’ ‘Eagle Eye’” as well as “lecturer and playwright.” The introduction, signed by the “Publishers,” also presents Kellogg as “a real daughter of the race” who “loves to champion a helpless people.” The publishers’ seemingly well-meant emphasis on Kellogg’s “authenticity” as an Indian writer does not escape romanticization. In showcasing Kellogg’s “real” Indian identity, they characterize “the Indian”
as “the tall lithe figure of the forest type, whose quickness of body and mind never deserted him in the hour of need” (9). We don’t know whether Kellogg approved, but she was accustomed to such public introductions. Nine years earlier, at the unveiling of Lorado Taft’s statue “Black Hawk” at Eagles’ Nest Bluff in Oregon, Illinois (July 1 1911), two Indian speakers responded to the designated orator Edgar A. Bancroft’s speech: Charles A. Eastman and Kellogg. Bancroft’s speech is a direct rendition of the nineteenth-century rhetoric of the “vanishing Indian” when he describes “the primitive peoples” and the “American Indian, a true child of nature,” in opposition to “our great Christian Anglo-Saxon Race.”

Kellogg and Eastman had a daunting task responding publicly to the white supremacist relegation of “the Indian” to an everlasting bronze statue, but respond they did. Eastman started by acknowledging the virtues of “civilization” but went on to point out the greater influence his “untutored” tribe had on him, conceding: “I have not once lost my head and forgotten that which was put into my very soul by an untutored woman, with the help of nature. I have known what is beauty. I have known what is justice” (55). Eastman addressed directly the issue of Indian savagery saying that he “was not a heathen” and sanctioning the civilizing work that Bancroft extolled in his speech: “They knew no other, until the white man came to Christianize the Indians, and butchered them in the woods.” Eastman criticizes directly the work of the missionaries, although later he concedes: “we understood—we had human hearts” (58-59). Eastman ends his speech urging posterity to see the sense of brotherhood between the white man and the red: “So may this monument stand in silent prayer, proclaiming to generations to come, that after all we are children of the same Maker, and we are all brothers” (70). Eastman therefore deflects public attention away from the Indian as a child of nature (resonant in Bancroft’s
speech) and opens a path, at least rhetorically, for racial equality in his optimistic ending on a note of “brotherhood.”

Like Eastman, Cornelius starts her speech by lamenting the disappearance of Indian people who were killed before they could commemorate what they could have celebrated if still alive: “The race is not here to-day. The race is not here, to rejoice with me for this great moment” (73). She thus turns to the absence of Indian leaders and orators to rewrite the trope of the “vanishing Indian”—which her audiences and readers at the time would have been familiar with—with a sense of permanence. I see a telling difference in her choice of words: whereas the trope of the “vanishing” Indian offers no hope for the future and paints a romanticized past which relegates Indian people to myth, Cornelius’ implied notion of “absence” calls to mind the causes of that unspoken absence. Like her poem, “A Tribute to the Future of My Race,” her speech is also heavily punctuated by lines from Longfellow’s epic *The Song of Hiawatha* (1855), which, in turn, has generated a series of similar immortalizations in stone. Well-read in European Fine Arts (she probably visited museums during her two-year stay in Europe), Cornelius glosses over the long-term implications of the statue but takes the time to speak about American art: “To-day I have come to feel as I never before felt, that the American people may enter a large claim for worldly recognition in that art which is the hardest of the Fine Arts to attain, Sculpture” (76). Admittedly, she is aware of the aesthetic implications the statue will carry throughout time:

Rightly is its subject the American Indian. He who knows the throes of Gethsemane. He who knows the blood-sweat of anguish. He who has sounded the very depths of a national tragedy. […] He who, like the Greek, belonged to a hero age they could not comprehend. Yet when all is done, calmly he draws his simple robe about him and stands
there mute and upright, looking boldly back upon it all, even as the eagle faces the glaring sun. Looking back to the East. (79)

Cornelius’ sarcasm and implied criticism of Indian removal—especially as she describes the American Indian “looking back to the East,” to the lost homes—are telling especially as she ponders the American Indian as the subject of this new American art form. Her appreciation of the new artistic medium collides with her implied critique of colonialism and her call for justice: “today it is to the mind of the artist we must turn to for justice to the American Indian” (81). This momentary sliding into her activist persona—an opposite persona to her public performer persona—creates the momentum for further evaluation and self-evaluation: “But I am not here to unearth the long story of infamies. […] Rather I have come here to thank you for the Indian” (81). The statue’s muteness and isolation mark the end of her speech, as she moves from thanking the audience to concluding that the statue—though mute—may be a lesson in history rather than an object of passive admiration: “Perhaps it is worth a national tragedy to go down to posterity an inspiration to all men” (82). The sense of national tragedy that Cornelius describes at the end of her speech on the unveiling of the “Black Statue” in Illinois in 1911 will influence her work as both active SAI member starting in 1911 and as a writer and promoter of an ingenious plan of indigenous economic subsistence, which historians of native communities view as anticipating the New Deal era in Indian affairs.69

Before she published her ideas on indigenous economic self-determination in book form, in 1920, Kellogg presented her preliminary ideas at the first SAI meeting in a 1911 talk she gave before her SAI peers.70 In the published conference proceedings Cornelius’ talk is preceded by a portrait of “Miss Laura Cornelius Kellogg” dressed in an elegant suit and an imposing hat. She
holds a paper in her hands and looks toward the camera, on her left, with determination and self-confidence (Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2. Photo of Laura Cornelius, 1911.
In her talk “Industrial Organization for the Indian,” Kellogg proposes a radical transformation of Indian reservations into “industrial villages” that would withstand the encroachments of the market economy and would use local, tribal resources that would also provide employment for returned Indian students by developing industrial tribal economies. This vision appealed to Kellogg as it placed tribal economies at the center of Indigenous self-governing; at the same time, tribal economies in her vision were no longer static, isolated in remote parts of the country, but active players in modernity’s new industrial demands. At the center of her vision is Indian labor for the Indian: “He must labor—and he must labor to the best advantage for himself and not the exploiter.” To this end, she starts by accepting that the Indian “cannot copy everything the white man does,” acknowledging the limits of such imitations; she suggests that through cooperation, reservation resources can strengthen the ties between community members and those estranged (i.e., students attending off-reservation boarding schools), which in turn can “reorganize the opportunities of the Indian at home.” Kellogg’s plan is also an endorsement of corporate capitalism and industrialization in her emphasis on Indian competition and struggle: “I believe in struggle and in competition with the outside world. I am one who knows at first hand what the knocks in it are.” More to the point, her vision of the Indian industrial village relies on a combination of the “foreign Garden City” (an industrial experiment in New York) with “the Mormon idea of communitistic cooperation”: “In this institution every man draws his proportion performed. Each man in it shall own lands, but the work and the advantages are communitistic. The Mormons to-day are the richest people per capita in the world.” Kellogg specifies that each tribe would make the best of its available local resources (either farming, dairy, arts or crafts, etc.). Reversing the significance of capital in the competitive market, she suggests that Indian villages could follow “the Mormon idea of making
men the capital of the community.” Kellogg sums up her short speech by suggesting how the model of the Indian “Industrial village” may, in fact, “teach the white man.” Kellogg’s speech did not generate much interest among SAI members at the Second SAI meeting. But her vision of the industrial village was just beginning to take shape.

Kellogg’s vision of an Indian industrial organization that could withstand the pressures of the American industrial capital sustained her interest over the next decade, and ultimately took shape in her only published book, Our Democracy and the American Indian: A Presentation of the Indian Situation as It Is Today (1920). She structures the book around four interconnected strands of argument that come together in her revised model of the “Lolomi Program of Self-Government,” which theorizes a democratic model of Indian self-governance for "modern times." In the first two sections, the writer-orator addresses her two imagined audiences, “The American People” and “The American Indian.” The opening chapter offers a history lesson to her non-Native readers about the Haudenosaunee confederacy: “The idea of the League of Nations and Democracy originated on the American Continent about 600 years ago. It came from an American Indian.” Next, she invokes Benjamin Franklin’s view on the Iroquois Confederacy (as scripted in the Iroquois Constitution): “Tradition says Franklin brought his hand down on the table and said, ‘That’s the greatest wisdom I have heard among nations of men.’” Her address to “the American people” ends with a series of excruciating questions:

But what shall I say to you now, America of my Americans? […] Shall I fawn upon you with nauseating flattery, because you are rich and powerful? […] Have
you not pauperized and debauched a whole people? […] Have you not overcome with your foul diseases that physical excellence in the race which even the Greek did not surpass? Have not 98 per cent of your treaties with the Indian been ‘scraps of paper’? […] Shall the American Indian who first conceived the democracy of this continent call for liberty in vain?76

Kellogg’s radicalism, mildly veiled in her previous addresses to American audiences (such as her speech at the unveiling of the Blackhawk statue), explodes at the end of the first chapter, where she calls on her (mainly) white readership to acknowledge the contradictions between American democratic principles (which she attributes to the Iroquois Constitution) and their enactment toward American Indians.

In her second chapter, “To the American Indian,” Kellogg addresses her fellow Indians, calling on their responsibility “to wake up” and “refuse to allow” white Americans to represent them: “There comes a time when men must measure themselves by the things they have not done.” She urges her “Red brothers” to cast off their indifference and to act as responsible members of Indian communities: “Our aged starve, while the young generation is intimidated into cowardice and vice, and we are ‘dubbed’ a race of beggars before the world. […] What a spectacle we are—we of this generation!”

Kellogg’s acerbic criticism of Indian employees of the federal government is unambiguous in her targeting “the Indian Bureau School of Sycophants” or “warehouse Indians” who contribute to nothing more than tribal factionalism and misrepresentation of Indian needs and rights. She ends her address to her Indian peers by invoking a “fraternity” of Indian people coming together to withstand government control,
demoralization, and “a reign of terror,” a radical “fraternity” whose “spirit cannot be broken by a million years of persecution” and “to whom death is sweet if that is the price.” Envisioning a collective resistance of Indian nations against both misrepresentation and poverty, Kellogg thus prepares her readers for the collective model of economic self-determination which she offers in the last two chapters, where she describes the “Lolomi program of self-government.”

Kellogg theorizes and exemplifies a democratic model of Indian self-governance which enables Indian participation in modern economic self-determination, thus resisting a future of poverty. The "Lolomi" economic program encapsulates Kellogg's vision of an Indian industrial village premised on both Indigenous and non-Indigenous worldviews that sought adaptation and self-determination of Indian nations facing the encroachments of capitalism, what Kellogg calls "the commercial age." Noting both the corruption of U.S. government officials responsible for implementing Indian policy and the indifference of the American people to Indian nations as participants in modernity, Kellogg sets her model of Indian self-government against the policy and practice of the Office of Indian Affairs, calling the mission of the Lolomi "an order of protected self-government by means of a Federal incorporation into industrial communities."

Moreover, grounding the Lolomi in her training in social service, she argues for the protection of Indian economic and social interest. The Lolomi is, therefore, a democratic political and economic model: in the industrial Indian village, each member has only one vote regardless of his shares; the Lolomi does away with both the "indefiniteness of taxation" and the semi-citizenship status imposed on Indian people; it recognizes the Indians' lack of credit and promotes the notion of using Indian property economically, on
a co-operative basis; the system of salaries is fixed for all community work and community members are held accountable for their actions.\textsuperscript{79}

Kellogg’s closing chapter of \textit{Our Democracy and the American Indian}, “How the Lolomi Handles the Social Side of the Problem,” considers the interdependence of the economic and the social to make the Lolomi a viable model. Taking a sociological approach to the environment of the Indian reservation ("lack of sanitation, of proper educational facilities, organized effort, means of transportation, proper shelter, proper food, knowledge, incentive and reward for effort"), Kellogg sees one of the Lolomi's immediate tasks as creating a "new environment and a real home." To this end, she acknowledges the crucial role of Indian women, "the most responsible element of the Indian population." At the same time, she sees the future of the Indian industrial village resting on good housing, good sanitation systems, modern hospitals supervised by the Public Health Service, elimination of distance, as well as local Indian control of educational facilities. Two of the most radical arguments Kellogg makes in this chapter plead for the elimination of the U.S. government boarding schools and the Office of Indian Affairs. Expressing unwavering confidence in the future of Indian education and self-government, Kellogg’s \textit{Our Democracy} concludes on an optimistic yet sarcastic note, collapsing the distance between American capitalism and Indian economic self-determination: “It looks like a long way between Wall Street and the Reservations, but it is not very far.”\textsuperscript{80}

Kellogg’s optimism in “the Lolomi” stemmed from her belief that it could, in fact, offer Indian people across the United States a tangible way out of poverty and reliance on federal aid, while at the same time reinforcing tribal notions of cooperation and appropriate use of natural
resources. Kellogg also believed that, with a real chance at economic self-sufficiency, Indian nations could revive and cultivate belief in tribal values. Reviving tribal social structures, which implied considering the role of kinship ties in tribal and federal politics for the individual and the community, also made room for applying tribal epistemology (often referred to as “tribal ways”) to contemporaneous social and economic problems, as well as problems of the representation of Indian people. Kellogg’s optimistic and radical rhetoric in Our Democracy—which many of her New Indian peers did not share in the 1920s—is a marker of her advocacy for indigenous rights “to the American people,” her imagined audience in the near and remote future.

Notes

1 Holm, 52.

2 Hafen, xi.

3 Holm, 65.

4 The SAI limited membership to people with at least one sixteenth “Indian blood,” a problematic use of the blood quantum concept, but a necessary measure in the organization’s view, in an attempt to preserve an all-Indian membership.

5 The National Indian Republican Association, for instance, was organized by a Carlisle Graduate, Luzura Choteau in 1904. Clark, 14-15.

6 Other prominent members of the General Committee of the SAI included Hiram Chase, William Holmes, Marie Baldwin, Frank Wright, Howard E. Gansworth, Dennison Wheelock, J.E. Shields, Emma J. Goulette, Rosa B. LaFlesche.

7 Coolidge, 187.
Holm, 53-56. For a good history of the SAI (albeit perhaps centered too much on Arthur C. Parker), see Hertzberg, 59-193. Clark situates the SAI in a different tradition than Hertzberg, and reads its cultural work as “a new cultural authority […] located in Native culture and power” (23).


“Preface.” Report of the Executive Council on the Proceedings of the First Annual Conference of the Society of American Indians, 3-5. The first SAI conference met in Columbus, Ohio, in October 1911. Initially envisioned as “the American Indian Association” at the preliminary meeting in April 1911, under the coordination of Ohio State University Sociology Professor and SAI enthusiast, Fayette Avery McKenzie, the association adopted a preliminary platform, an executive committee, and sent out invitations for the first national conference.

SAI Constitution and By-Laws, 17.

The SAI journal started publishing poems in its fourth year, after it underwent a change of vision and name (to American Indian Magazine in 1916). The first poem published was Gertrude Simmons Bonnin’s “The Indian’s Awakening.” Later poems included “The Red Man’s America,” “A Sioux Woman’s Love for Her Grandchild,” and “The Indian’s Awakening” by Bonnin; “The Indian’s Salute to His Country” by William J. Kershaw (Menominee); “Pay your Freight” by Roland A. Nichols (Potawatomi); and “The Mighty River, Vales, and Templed Hills” by DeWitt Hare. The journal occasionally published short fiction of Bertha Couch Baker, “The Red Horse Family.”

Arthur C. Parker also published poems in the SAI journal under pennames. As Gawasa Wanneh, he published the poem “Faith”; as Alnoba Wabunaki, Parker published “My Race Shall
Live Anew” and “The Robin’s Song.” Parker’s poems are also collected in Rober Dale Parker’s forthcoming anthology, Changing Is Not Vanishing. Arthur C. Parker’s essays in the SAI journal include: “The Indian as a Warrior” and “The Red Man’s Love of Mother Earth.”


18 Arthur C. Parker, “Problems of Race Assimilation in America; With Special Reference to the American Indian,” 285-326.

19 Idem 69-74.

20 I must confess a tension in my own use of the term “American Indian,” in a preferred contemporary use to “Native American,” and my reading of “making Americans” of Indian people as a hegemonic, invasive practice, particularly in a turn of the twentieth century context.

21 Holm, 67.

22 Pratt to Carlos Montezuma, February 17, 1909, Montezuma Papers, Ayer Collection, Newberry Library, Chicago, IL.


24 See the Carlos Montezuma Papers, Ayer Collection, Newberry Library, Chicago.
“I Have Stood Up for You,” 2-3.

Besides “Changing Is Not Vanishing,” which I analyze next, Montezuma published other poems in *Wassaja*: “I Have Stood Up for You,” “Civilization,” “Steady, Indians, Steady!”—which I discuss in this section—as well as “Indian Office” and “Indians Playing the Game.” Thanks to Robert Dale Parker for letting me know about these last two poems, which I did not come across in my own research. For a section of these and other recovered poems by Montezuma, see Parker’s forthcoming anthology.

Hertzberg contends that Society of Indians members used the terms “Indian,” “our people,” “the Indian people,” “the Indian race” or “the race”: “If membership in the tribe tended to divide them, membership in the race united them” (73). I suggest that Montezuma’s use of the term reflected critically contemporaneous uses of the term, which often incorporated both biological and cultural characteristics. The term “Red Progressives” or “Indian progressives” calls attention to its oppositional term, “the non-progressives” or the “traditionals.” I submit that the SAI appropriated this name from contemporaneous discourses (in the social sciences) to show their affinity with other national progressive organizations in vogue at the time and to incorporate “progress” into their platform.


“The Red Progressives” represented 51 different Indian nations located in 19 states. See Clark, 66.

Iverson calls *Wassaja* Montezuma’s “newsletter.” He also explains that, following the SAI’s fourth meeting in Wisconsin in 1914, Arthur C. Parker published Montezuma’s SAI address with serious emendations. Parker’s censorship was primarily geared towards
Montezuma’s views on the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. Upset by Parker’s practice, Iverson suggests, Montezuma decided then to start his own journal. See Iverson, 67, 101.

31 Wassaja, September 1916, 1.

32 Hoxie, Talking Back to Civilization, 4-5.

33 Qtd. in Iverson, 149.

34 “Americanize the First American,” Davidson and Norris, 243.

35 Bonnin, “The Red Man’s America,” Davidson and Norris, 173-74. The original patriotic song has thirteen stanzas whereas Bonnin’s poem has only four.

36 For accounts of Indian men’s participation in the Great War, see Britten and Krouse.

37 Bonnin, “Americanize the First American.” The pamphlet’s complete title was “Americanize the First American: A Plan of Regeneration.” The cover sheet of the pamphlet included a picture of Bonnin framed by a number of American flags. Davidson and Norris, 267 n3.

38 Some of my thoughts on Kellogg have also improved considerably by conversations with Kristina Ackley and Tony Clark during the spring and summer of 2007 in the American Indian Studies Program at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. See Kristina Lyn Ackley, “We Are Oneida Yet.” Throughout this section I will refer to her interchangeably as Laura Kellogg or Laura Cornelius.

39 The rest of the sentence reads “when she swapped fame for a husband.” I have deliberately excised this from the epigraph as it is not relevant to my analysis of Kellogg’s work, and because it is such a reductive statement about Zitkala-Sa’ work and legacy. See “Salt Lake’s Merry Morn in Riverside,” 7.

40 “Will Be the First Indian Girl Lawyer,” A 1.
Richard White defines the “middle ground” as a “realm of constant invention,” where “members of two cultures established an alliance that they both thought furthered interests generated within their own societies” (52, 93).


According to Hauptman, Kellogg was arrested at least four times (but was never convicted of a felony). Hauptman believes that these episodes added to the sense of tragedy enveloping her life, which is consistent with his argument about the “tragic” Indian woman who “wanted to use her extraordinary skills to help her people but ended up being accused by them as a common outlaw” and who “is blamed today for all that went wrong in Iroquois history during the interwar period from 1919 to 1941” (“Designing Woman” 162, 161). Although my reading of Kellogg departs from Hauptman, as I am less inclined to see her as a “tragic” Indian woman who died in obscurity, overburdened by tragic flaws. Instead, my interest in her work lies in her ability to overcome personal and community tragedy and to envision a future for her community that looks at tribal resources for survival and economic self-determination (especially her “Lolomi” plan for an Indian industrial village, at the center of Our Democracy and the American Indian). Her activist work in particular positions Kellogg as a fierce advocate for Oneida and Haudenaune rights.

She was born Laura Minnie Cornelius and added the last name “Kellogg” after her marriage in 1912 to Orrin Joseph Kellogg, a white attorney from Minneapolis. Holm, 75. On Kellogg’s involvement in the Oneida land claims, see Ackley, “Renewing Haudenosaunee Ties,” 57-81.
The Iroquois Confederacy originated in the Northeast of North America. The other five nations in the Iroquois/Six Nations Confederacy are the Mohawk, the Onondaga, the Cayuga, the Seneca, and the Tuscarora.

Hauptman also shows that, after the Dawes General Allotment Act, the Oneidas faced “uncontrolled timber stripping of their lands, serious soil erosion, low leasing arrangements, and increased consumption of alcohol.” After the 65,000-acre Oneida reservation was allotted in 1892, a federal “competency” commission was formed in 1918, which “began issuing fee patents to Oneidas of less than one-half Indian blood in order to quicken the process of assimilation.” “Designing Woman,” 162-63.

Cornelius published a story in the Barnard Bear in 1907, “Overalls and Tenderfoot,” about Manzinita, a “Western girl” who travels out West to Yosemite without a chaperone and is repeatedly scrutinized by middle-class white women who find her behavior outrageous. “Overalls,” as the girls names herself for the public, defies middle class and Victorian conventions as she wears overalls, travels by herself, rides a wild bronco. The story also sets sharp contrasts between Eastern and Western behaviors and senses of propriety, painting an ideal image of the frontier, especially in the story’s happy ending as Overalls falls in love with an Easterner, Tenderfoot. At Barnard, Cornelius was an active member of the student body and was elected to the Undergraduate Election Committee in 1906.

As Hauptman notes, although Kellogg was recognized in the 1920s for her merit as a “writer, linguist, and reformer of Indian policy, no study of her remarkable career exists in print” (160). Although I share Hauptman’s concern about Kellogg’s legacy, I do not share his reading of Kellogg as a case in “tragedy,” and if we distance ourselves from the many scandals
tarnishing her memory (she was never found guilty of any accusation, but she was a woman of quick temper), we can start to understand her life and work in more constructive terms.

51 Hauptman also notes that, “the Oneida tribe of Wisconsin has for many years searched for her historical, legal, and linguistic papers which were apparently destroyed.” See Hauptman, “Essays on Sources” in “Designing Woman,” 187. Kellogg’s work was also published (in original or reprint) in The Quarterly Journal of the SAI as well as the SAI’s Proceedings.

52 She is not dressed in tribal regalia but in Western clothing, a choice that may reflect editorial preference. See Cornelius, “The Legend of the Bean” and “The Sacrifice of the White Dog,” 55-57.


55 Idem, 55, 54.

56 The Red Man and Helper, March 20, 1903, 1. Cornelius’s name appears often in Carlisle publications, and her name serves as an example of Indian achievement (which is ironic since Cornelius never attended boarding schools).

57 Although the first students entered Sherman Institute in 1902 (coming from Perris Indian School), the “official” opening of Sherman Institute took place on March 3, 1903 and Cornelius’ poem was published in the March 20 issue of The Red Man and Helper. For a brief history of Sherman Institute, see <http://www.shermanindianmuseum.org/history3.htm> January 24, 2010. Tonner Hall was one of the buildings at Sherman Institute.

58 Holm, 74.

59 The article “Will Be the First Indian Girl Lawyer” also drastically misreads her vision of Indian progress, quoting her advocacy for Indian change in “this money-grubbing age.” A
similar article appeared two years later in *The Sun* about Cornelius enrolling at Barnard College to study law: “An Indian Girl and Glad of It: Miss Cornelius Here to Study Law at Barnard,” 7.

60 The first American Indian woman lawyer argued her first case in the Supreme Court in 1909, around the time Laura Corelius Kellogg was contemplating a career as a lawyer. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lyda_Conley January 25, 2010.

61 The poem is written in 147 trochaic tetrameter lines. The title uses the word “race” in the sense of “people,” and reflects early twentieth-century evolutionary thinking and terminology about the various “races of people” (what we would usually call ethnicities today) living in the United States. “A Tribute” is reprinted and annotated in Parker’s forthcoming anthology of Indian poetry, where he also notes Kellogg’s reproduction of full lines from Longfellow’s introduction to *The Song of Hiawatha*, especially lines 12 and 19-46. See Parker, *Changing Is Not Vanishing*.


63 Idem. Cornelius served as the SAI’s vice-president on education in 1912.

64 Her report on “figures” includes the following: “There are altogether 357 government schools; 70 of these reservation boarding schools, 35 non-reservation boarding schools, and 223 day schools. The enrollment in these schools totals 24,500 children. Besides these, there are 4,300 children in the mission schools and 11,000 in public, of the 11,000, the Five Civilized Tribes of Oklahoma have 6,900. The number of the children of the race in school in the country then is 39,800. The last report shows an increase of nearly 2,000 in attendance over the year before” (40).

65 Most SAI members used the term “the Indian” most frequently, but they often referred to “the Indian race” or the “race,” as Hertzberg observes. Besides these designations, SAI
members and Indian public intellectuals used the phrases “our people” or “the Indian people,” with the words “people” and “tribe” being synonymous occasionally. See Hertzberg, 71.


67 Our Democracy and the American Indian. The publishers presented Kellogg’s other literary works and qualifications on the title page.

68 Lorado Taft’s Indian Statue “Black Hawk,” 33, 34, 44.

69 Holm, 74 and Hertzberg, 60.


71 Source of the photo: Proceedings of the First Annual Conference of the Society of American Indians, 43. The photo was taken at the first SAI conference in 1911.

72 Idem, 43, 44, 44-45, 45.

73 Idem, 50, 54, 55.

74 Hertzberg (61) attributes this silence to “scheduling pressures,” which made impossible the discussion of “most papers on industrial problems.”

75 Our Democracy and the American Indian, 17, 22

76 Idem, 23-25.

77 Idem, 29, 30, 28-29, 31.

78 “Lolomi” reflects Kellogg’s understanding of a Hopi term to mean "perfect goodness be upon you,” 34-35.

79 Idem, 41, 63-64, 65-81.

80 Idem, 82-83, 89, 90, 103.
PART III
CHAPTER 5

SING, STRANGERS!: IMMIGRANT LITERATURE AND THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION

The question of aesthetic representation is also a debate about political representation.

—Lisa Lowe, Immigrant Acts

From J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur’s highly-anthologized question in Letters from an American Farmer (1782)—“What then is this American, this new Man?”—to Henry James’s and Gertrude Stein’s efforts to make sense of the new “American Scene” and the new “Making of Americans” in the early 1900s, to contemporary assessments of the U.S. as a post-nation operating under new conceptions of locality and identity—several strands of thought have emerged as part of what I call in this project the discourses of “making” and “unmaking of Americans”: how Americans imagine themselves; how Americans imagine the racially, ethnically, and nationally different others (both these categories are subsumed into the discourse of “making of Americans”); how Americans are imagined, re-imagined, and translated by the Others for whom the “promised land” becomes the country of adoption or refuge (the “unmaking of Americans”); and how new immigrants imagine themselves as “Americans in the Making.”

The emerging discourse of “Americans in the Making”—largely the focus of this chapter—made popular by immigrant writers, challenged the overwhelming uni-directionality of Americanization discourse. At the same time, immigrant writers became active participants in their own “making” as “Americans,” thus offering revisionist takes on the Americanization story,
an “unmaking” of the official story of becoming an American scripted in Americanization manuals and enacted in the public sphere. I argue that the dominant discourse of “making Americans”—the credo of Americanization campaigns and an unfailing popular belief in the total “absorption” of the alien—was troubled and, to a certain extent, rewritten and re-imagined by the emerging immigrant literary world.

Although some could read the praxis and theory of “Americans in the Making” as reinscribing the myth of the self-made American, where the immigrant “makes himself over” by refashioning himself in a new language and geography, fictional accounts of and by “Americans in the Making” redefined what the self-made American was at a time thought to be marked primarily by a racially homogenous configuration (i.e. white). Crèvecoeur largely agreed that Americans were not transplanted Englishmen, but a mixture of European peoples, “a nation of immigrants.” President John F. Kennedy’s posthumous book, A Nation of Immigrants, reissued in 2008, brought immigration back to the center of American experience and law. The policing of the US border in the last decades of the twentieth century (physical and legal, with countless ideological ramifications), the history of immigration restriction laws responding to both national economic and racial politics, along with the constant criminalization of the racially different Others continue to reshape our understanding of the US as a “nation of immigrants” in the twenty-first century.

One of the most respected U.S. immigration historians, Oscar Handlin, admitted in his ground-breaking study, “Once I thought to write a history of the immigrants in America. Then I discovered that the immigrants were American history.” If we work from Handlin’s premise, that immigrants are indeed American history—as reductive as this assertion is in its erasure of slavery, colonialism, and the massacre of many Indian tribes—then the history of immigration as
central to the construction of U.S. nation invites a reassessment of the story of immigration and its role in the U.S. national culture. Although Handlin made this striking statement half a century ago, and his legacy has produced a major shift in historical and sociological studies of immigration, literary historians are yet to take to heart the centrality of immigrant literature to American literary history. Immigrants are not yet American (literary) history, to paraphrase Handlin, partly because the literariness of immigrant texts has always been questioned (the autobiography, the social science treatise, and realist fiction were often subsumed genres of immigrant representation) and partly because immigrant writings have been read in other overarching literary contexts (American realism, naturalism, modernism, or postmodernism). Thomas Ferraro shows how earlier literary and cultural critics like Leslie Fiedler, whom he calls “the progenitor of immigrant literary studies,” and Irving Howe dismissed immigrant or ethnic writing as “a version of regionalism”: “When identified as regional, writing by and about immigrants is labeled parochial, transient, and delusive simultaneously: self-congratulation and public relations masquerading, just barely, as literary art.”

My interest lies particularly in the writing of first-generation immigrant writers, whose work, I argue—by constantly marking the tension between English and their native or ethnic language, between Old and New worlds, emigrant and immigrant, citizen and alien, insider and outsider—reveals new ways of writing and rewriting the immigrant subject. At the same time, these writers challenge the discourses of the “making of Americans” that sought the uniformization of the American “national culture” at the turn of the twentieth century in response to an imminent crisis in the country’s racial make-up and a threatening “balkanization.” While immigrant writers were carving their niche of the literary market, sociologists and progressive reformers had a lot to say about “our immigrants,” from Jacob Riis’ How the Other Half Lives
(1890) to Hutchins Hapgood’s *The Spirit of the Ghetto* (1902), or Jane Addams’ *Twenty Years at Hull House* (1910). “The immigrant experience” has been the subject of many genres of American Literature.⁹ Established American writers like Willa Cather (*O, Pioneers!* 1913, *My Antonia*, 1918) or Upton Sinclair (*The Jungle*, 1906) also incorporated tropes and themes of the immigrant experience in their work, from alienation and poverty, to second-language acquisition and the costs of Americanization. Others went so far as to pass as immigrant writers, from Sidney Luska, a.k.a. Henry Harland, who posed as a German Jewish American writer (*The Yoke of the Thorah*, 1896) to Broughton Brandenburg, who posed as an Italian immigrant (*Imported Americans*, 1904). The literary market itself started opening up to immigrant writers and intellectuals—many of them with publications in Europe or already publishing in the immigrant press in the U.S.—to offer “representative narratives that either countermanded or contextualized stereotypes […] and to introduce the public to the debate within ethnic homes over alternative American dreams.”¹⁰ In her recent study on the emergence of “multicultural America” during 1865-1915, largely overlapping several major decades that my project considers, Suzan L. Mizruchi argues that “writers themselves assumed an unparalleled cultural authority,” considering the high levels of literacy achieved through the increasing readership of both literary bestsellers and magazines, as well as the growing immigrant press (3). Mizruchi offers a provocative and原创的 argument, especially as she locates a key moment in the emergence of the US as a multicultural modern capitalist society and analyzes the way “American capitalism operated in relation to racial-ethnic others” (2). But the “racial-ethnic others” as literary producers in their own right, particularly immigrant writers, remain, for the most part, at the periphery of her argument.¹¹
Although clear distinctions between the assumptions and the effects of Americanization and assimilation on either immigrant or Indian “American dreams” emerge in specific group or individual studies, Americanization and assimilation are usually read as coterminous concepts, referring specifically to the popular movement in the first two decades of the twentieth century that sought to assist immigrants in their adjustment and, especially, to Americanize the foreign elements threatening to jeopardize national character. But, as Russel L. Barsh notes, “[a]ssimilating the waves of ‘new’ immigrants from southern and eastern Europe was a more pressing issue than the assimilation of American Indians. More than a million immigrants arrived in 1910 alone […] compared with the total Indian population of fewer than 300,000.”

And, in many ways, as Oneida writer and activist Laura Cornelius Kellogg put it, the road from Hester Street to Wall Street was shorter than from reservations to Wall Street.

Subtler chronological demarcations of the Americanization era also mark the movement’s intensity. First, from the turn of the century to 1914, with notable patriotic outbursts from groups such as the Daughters of the American revolution (DAR) and the North American Civil League for Immigrants. Second, from 1914 to the end of World War I, marked by the emergence of ethnic nationalism(s) and its counterpoint, the “100 percent Americanism,” soon the goal of most Americanization campaigns; third, the postwar years, marked by antiradicalism, antiunionism, and a movement toward the “English only” campaign, materialized in the Literacy test requirement (introduced in 1895, enacted into law in 1917, over President Wilson’s veto). As Philip Gleason aptly put it, “[t]he major legacy of the movement was to make Americanization a bad word.”

But the new form of Americanism, created by war hysteria and intolerance to difference (racial, cultural, and especially national and political), also marked a step forward in the institutionalized Americanization campaign, marked by what Gary Gerstle calls “coercive
Americanism.” Like Gleason, Gerstle suggests that the “very word ‘Americanization’ acquired such a bad, nativist odor that many liberal reformers and social scientists stopped using it altogether.”

Despite the bad reputation of Americanization, its emergence during the Progressive era also established the tone and lexicon for “the first demands for cultural pluralism—or what we now call multiculturalism.” But the campaign to incorporate undesirable immigrants and turn them into good citizens remained, above all, an Americanization campaign. The campaign to assimilate American Indians was largely different from the larger national effort of Americanization—which included the Americanization of immigrants. But the premises and purposes of both “campaigns” were similar: de-balkanization, de-tribalization, American citizenship, English only, civilization, education, and Christianity. The unwritten assumption of both campaigns was that full Americanization was attainable—and in the shortest possible time—and would culminate in the (imagined) complete erasure of either indigenous or ethnic backgrounds, beliefs, and voices. The linguistic preference—Americanization, for immigrants; assimilation, for Indians—also reflects an unwritten cultural assumption that Indians were already American citizens (or that, if they weren’t, they strongly desired to become American citizens); they only had to be assimilated. In fact, as I argue Chapter 2, many Indians were American citizens before the Indian citizenship Act passed in 1924, and even after Indians became American citizens de jure, they were mainly nominal citizens (often at the discretion of state laws in matters of voting). I thus approach immigrant writing in the early decades of the twentieth century and the nationalist rhetoric of “the making of Americans” and Progressive discourse to explore its consequences for redefining American national culture and, more narrowly, the emerging moment of multicultural modern literature. As a counterpoint to
Progressive rhetoric, I call this emerging discourse of dissimilation embraced by many (not all!) immigrant writers the “Americans in the making” rhetoric, and argue that its proliferation played a major part in challenging the idea(l) of an American national culture.

Lisa Lowe defines American national culture as “the collectively forged images, histories, and narratives that place, displace, and replace individuals in relation to national polity,” a culture which shapes who the citizens of the nation are, where they live, what they remember, and what they forget. It is especially important for the purposes of this project to situate immigrant narratives within what Lowe defines as American national culture—with Oscar Handlin’s assertion in mind, that immigrants are (central to) American history. These narratives, however, as different as the individual immigrant groups writing in this country, operate in the zone of tension between official and unofficial stories, between legal and cultural citizenship, between the canonical and the marginal or non-canonical in their contributions to American national culture. Lowe also notes the relation between national culture and the political formation of the American citizen: “It is through the terrain of national culture that the individual subject is politically formed as the American citizen: a terrain introduced by the Statue of Liberty, discovered by the immigrant, dreamed in a common language.”

Situating immigrant narratives in conversation with American national culture, as well as at the center of American literary history, requires not only a redefinition of the immigrant canon but also a more historicized analysis of immigrant writing as a category in its own right. First-generation immigrant writers imagined a different America than second- or third-generation immigrants—the immigrants’ “children”—whose linguistic, temporal, and cultural distance from their immigrant ancestors led them either to identify with or to rebel against the immigrant experience.
But first, let’s see how American national culture sees its imagined immigrant—after all, “They ain’t folks, they’re nothing but a parcel of images.”

5.1 “Parcels of Images”: The New Immigrant Meets the American Imagination

Through veins that drew their life from Western Earth
Two hundred years and more my blood hath run
In no polluted course from sire to son.

—James Russell Lowell

There is no claim to brotherhood with aliens in the first grossness of their alienism.

—Henry James

In his 1917 memoir, Romanian immigrant writer Marcus E. Ravage captures the telling moment of the encounter between the immigrant and the native-born imagination as something “fit for a farce”:

The average American, when he thinks of immigrants at all, thinks, I’m afraid, of something rather comical. He thinks of bundles—funny, picturesque bundles of every shape and size and color. […] And always he carries more bundles… Later on, in his peculiar, transplanted life, he sells nondescript merchandise in fantastic vehicles, does violence to the American’s language, and sits down on the curb to eat fragrant cheese and unimaginable sausages. He is, for certain, a character fit for farce.
Besides suspicion of countless “bundles” and “unimaginable sausages,” along with fears of linguistic and cultural difference, racial slurs also welcomed new immigrants to the New World. “Guinea,” “greaser,” “hunkie,” and “Dago” are just a few terms that immigrant groups themselves started to internalize and soon use critically in their creative work. In a pro-Americanization immigrant narrative, From Alien to Citizen, as Slovak American writer Edwards Steiner passes through “a small, desolate mining village,” in search of work and a fresh start, a fellow traveler on the train tests his sense of (presumed) racial superiority: “Well, you don’t mean to say that we are not superior to these Dagoes, these Black Hand murderers?” (144). Steiner does not endorse these racial slurs but includes them to show that rural, isolated villages that immigrants passed through were often far from welcoming. Sensing the dangers that the proliferation of such racial slurs entailed, the first volume of the Americanization Bulletin in 1918 reprinted a “proposed addition to the boy scouts’ code” that condemned the use of ethnic or racial slurs: “We pledge our service never to use, and to discourage everywhere, the use of such words as Dago, Dutchy, Froggy, Ginny, Greaser, Heiny, Horwat, Hunky, Kike, Mick, Paddy, Sheeny, Spaghetti, Wop, as applied to any foreign-born resident in the United States of America.” But this ample repertoire of anti-immigrant slurs, only perpetuates xenophobia while purporting to condone it. A few years later, Italian poet Rosina Vieni gave these racist terms tragic proportions in a sonnet on immigration, labor, and death:

[… ] but who cares about the greenhorns, the paesani

Struck dead, without the sacraments?

What’s it worth, if by misfortune or by accident

your body falls and smashes to the floor below—

poor Guinea, poor Dago? 

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Besides a growing anti-immigrant vocabulary, the early 1880s also witnessed the proliferation of ethnic caricature in new forms of print culture, such as the illustrated magazines (like *Scribner’s, Harper’s* or *Century Magazine*). Still, since caricature was viewed as “the crudest form of arts,” literary periodicals used it to a certain extent, although caricature *per se* “played almost no part in the rise of the major literary periodicals.” Cartoonists launched a new brand of humor magazines at the end of the nineteenth century to respond to the public’s growing appetite for lowbrow humor, where many jokes about immigrants and other racially different objectified Others found a home. The growing genre of ethnic caricature—legitimized by publications such as *Puck* and *Judge*—took the new genre of ethnic humor to new dimensions. As Henry B. Wonham has shown in his study of ethnic caricature and American literary realism, “ethnic caricature typically reduces its subject to some inflexible attribute of type, fixing the margins of ethnic identity by exaggerating physiognomic and cultural indicators of origin.” These exaggerated images also served, Wonham suggests, “to delineate the boundaries of legitimate citizenship for a culture unsure of its claims to authority.” A cartoon from an 1884 issue of *Puck* inspires the title of his study—“playing the races”—and offers the critic the opportunity to speculate on what he calls the “cultural fictions” that such cartoons perpetuate. Specifically, Wonham considers an illustration where three actors are dressed as human advertisements to depict the representatives of “three purportedly savage races, an Indian, an Irishman, and an African American.” Wonham continues: “Ridiculous ethnic costumes accentuate the ample facial evidence that all three savages are unfit for existence on this side of the frontier.” Ethnic caricature, as this particular image implies, “is a losing game for the subject whose origin and destiny can be quickly sketched in thick lines and blotches of ink.”
Many of the exaggerated visual representations of immigrants ridiculed their exteriority, their uncanny clothes, hairstyles, or eating habits. The ethnic costume that, in hindsight, has become a landmark of immigrant iconography, is a marker of difference, an object of ridicule. Such ritualized differences (or rhetorical surfaces), written on the immigrant body and consumed by the reading public discovering a new brand of newspapers in sensational journalism, guard the entrance of the immigrant into the legitimate market of literary production. Immigrant identity, already consumed by the reading American public, and the immigrant body in particular, became contested sites defining the racial and ethnic surface rather than the ethnic self. Drawing on Judith Butler’s work, I ask: how does the immigrant body “figure on its surface the very invisibility of its hidden depth?”²⁹ It is on the “surface” of the immigrant body, nonetheless, that the immigrant story is written over and over, with a tacit ignorance of its “hidden depth” and the complicated baggage—or “bundle”—of immigrant identity.

In 1880 Puck, the weekly magazine of graphic humor and political satire, published the cartoon “Welcome to all!,” where a benevolent Uncle Sam extends his hands to welcome the newcomers to the “U.S. Ark of Refuge”³⁰ (Figure 5.1). Uncle Sam’s Ark is a utopian space, reminiscent of Noah’s ark, yet a secular space, as the sign at the entrance to the ark suggests: “no oppressive taxes, no expensive kings, no compulsory military service, no knouts or dungeons.” To his right, another welcoming sign mesmerizes the newcomers with the promise of absolute freedom: “Free education, free land, free speech, free ballot, free lunch.”³¹ These early new immigrants carry modest bundles and light luggage, suggesting that Uncle Sam’s suspicion of fragrant cheeses and unimaginable sausages has not yet crept into the American lexicon of immigrant representation. The image also establishes a heteronormative rhetoric for becoming American as only heterosexual couples line up in front of the American ark.
Figure 5.1. “Welcome to All! Puck April 28, 1880

The image of the welcoming Uncle Sam undergoes subtle changes in the next two decades, from (1) the affable, all-embracing grandfatherly figure in the image above, to (2) the stern embodiment of a “new American” composite face in 1888 (Figure 5.2), reflecting recent changes in the country’s racial and ethnic make-up, to the disciplinarian who brings “the truant [immigrant] boy to the Little Red, White, and Blue Schoolhouse” in 1901 (Figure 5.3). This visual iconography of what “makes” an American worthy of Uncle Sam’s ark already establishes a sense of exceptionalism and desirability; when the Filipino and Mexican boys in Figure 5.3, stray away, Uncle Sam is sure to bring them back to Miss Columbia’s schoolhouse by force, suggesting the multi-faceted coercion that later entrances into the “ark” will entail before the ark closes its doors almost completely in 1924.32
A man of “strong features” (Figure 5.2), Uncle Sam becomes the poster image of the “New American,” a distorted face signaling the inevitability of physiognomic change. The image dramatizes a stark contrast between Uncle Sam’s white hair, beard, collar and his wrinkled and stern face, marked by the contours of immigrant features of multiple racial and ethnic backgrounds. Uncle Sam’s face contains the Whitmanesque multitudes of both old and new immigrants contorting on his chin, forehead and ears, sustained at the center by an almost crucified Christ-like Native American, who stretches his arms to touch the new immigrants’ heads. The merit of the cartoon—besides capturing perhaps nativist fears over threats to Anglo-Saxonism and including the Native American at the center of this representation of Uncle Sam—
is that it signals a popular anxiety over the “visible” elements of difference brought by new immigrants and written on their bodies. The racial scrutiny of new immigrant bodies’ “fit for America” was soon accompanied by medical examinations (in public places of inspection, in ports of entry such as Ellis Island or Angel Island) as early as the 1890s. The often unsympathetically-conducted medical examinations, along with the growing number of “excludable diseases” putatively spoiling immigrant bodies and preventing them from entering the U.S., started making access to Uncle Sam’s ark more difficult than the first of these cartoons suggested almost a decade before.

Figure 5.3. “The American Policy,” Judge April 20, 1901
These cartoons reflect the changing lexicon of U.S. hospitality discourses, from the biblical imagery of the welcoming “ark of refuge,” to the sign of imminent change written on Uncle Sam’s distorted face, to the alarmist and forceful redirecting of the “truant” immigrant boy to Miss Columbia’s “Liberty School.” In Figure 5.3, Uncle Sam violently takes a little Filipino boy by the ear to bring him to Miss Columbia’s little school, where other Hawaiian, Puerto Rican, Cuban, and American Indian children—avatars of Uncle Sam’s imperialism and colonialism—share in the common experience of “American education.” The imminent deterioration of the “Anglo-Saxon stock” (the fear of which which Barbara Solomon has aptly termed “the Anglo-Saxon complex”), visible in Uncle Sam’s newly-distorted face in Figure 5.2 signals the end of an era when the economic advantages of immigration labor no longer sufficed to justify the perceived “threats” to American democracy and racial make-up. The urge toward Americanization is implicit in all these cartoons; the unruly immigrant students are no longer “free” to roam Uncle Sam’s ark and are violently dragged to school by the ear. Mirroring the campaigns to assimilate American Indians at the end of the nineteenth century, the national campaign to educate immigrants intertwined with debates about “Americanism” and the politics of representing America.

Barbara Solomon captures the moment of public prejudice against new immigrants, resting equally on stereotypes about both old and new immigrants:

The Irishman, the German, the Scandinavian, the Italian and the Jew were, like the Yankee, recognizable according to physical appearance, outward costume, and visible habits. […] So the Italian murdered, the Irishman drank, or the Jew bargained; one group was gayest, another most political, another most intellectual. […] In the development of a
living xenophobia, outsiders were “figures merely. ‘They ain’t folks, they’re nothing but a parcel of images.”’

The phrase “parcel of images” captures the crux of immigrant representation in the popular press, addressing a visual audience that relies on the power of the image to stand in for the real “folks.” This frightening conclusion uttered by nativist readers of both the popular and the social text repeatedly makes invisible the “hidden depth” of the immigrant body and self, for whom attaining personhood and a recognized immigrant identity in the nativist imaginary requires transcending the power of these images.

In 1914, prominent sociologist Edward A. Ross also offered an ample repertoire of old and new visual immigrant characteristics in his study, *The Old World in the New*. He surveyed the new immigrant groups in relation to the old immigrants “of an inferior type” (like the Celtic Irish) the Irish who came “straight from the hoe” (27, 30), to the Scandinavians with high literacy rates but also with a “tendency toward insanity” (70). To these unflattering descriptions he added the “fraud” of Northern and “crime” of Southern Italians (98), who also “hate study, make slow progress, and quit school at the first opportunity” (114). He also described the “temperate Rumanians” as a counterpoint to “thirsty Germans and Scotch Irish” (105), and referred to the Slavs as “Bacchus worshipper[8]” (127), people of “brutality and reckless fecundity” (129). (He also called the South Slavs “those Comanches of Asia” [123].) Although impressed with East European Jews’ “humane and sensitive temper” (149), Ross emphasizes their “inborn love for money-making” (145), a characteristic he also attributes to the Greeks (183), their “tribal spirit” (154), as well their “wonderful adaptability” to new environments (160). The “lesser immigrant groups” he describes at the end of his study refer to the Finns, Magyars, Bulgarians, and Turks—or “the loaded Finn” and “the drunken Magyar” (169).
Ross’s racist lexicon, while thorough in its depth and breadth, had early predecessors in New England poets’ lamenting what Madison Grant would later call “the passing of the Great Race.” Thomas Bailey Aldrich, former editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, responded to Emma Lazarus’s famous poem “The New Colossus” with a poem he titled “The Unguarded Gates.” Lazarus, author of the famous lines of welcome to “the huddled masses” and “wretched refuse” in one of the most (partially) quoted poems in immigration history, has been recognized for her “monumental relation to Atlantic liberalism.” Aldrich’s poem, the product of a moment of economic panic and growing nativism and xenophobia, rewrites this iconic welcoming hymn written in bronze on the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty:

Wide open and unguarded stand our gates,
And through them passes a wild motley throng—
Men from the Volga and the Tartar steppes,
Featureless figures from the Hoang-Ho,
Malayan, Scythian, Teuton, Kelt, and Slav,
Flying the old world’s poverty and scorn;
These bringing with them unknown scorn and rites,
Those, tiger passions, here to stretch their claws.
In street and alley what strange tongues are these,
Accents of menace alien to our air,
Voices that once the Tower of Babel knew!
By drawing attention to the uncanny difference of the “wild motley throng” of new immigrants standing at “our gates,” the speaker laments the violence of images and gives language the “featureless figures” that immigrants bring forth from the “old world,” violating the country’s sense of propriety (with “tiger passions”), proper language (with “accents of menace alien to our air”), and decorum (as they “stretch their claws”).

These images—and many others, even less flattering—welcomed the new immigrants to American soil and the American popular imagination (some of them also translated into other media, like the silent films, as I show in Chapters 7 and 8). This is the backdrop against which immigrant writing emerges forcefully not simply as a response to the many distortions and exaggerated phenotypical and behavioral traits, but also as a category in its own right, informed by its own historical and socio-economic milieu, but nonetheless determined to “set the record straight.” Not surprisingly, therefore, some of the most successful immigrant writers in the first two decades of the twentieth-century made the themes of Americanization central to their work, as they started viewing themselves as “Americans in the making.”

5.2 “Americans in the Making”: An Emerging Immigrant Literary Canon

It became increasingly clear to me that I owed it to my adoptive country to give the story to the public.

—Constantine Panunzio, The Soul of an Immigrant [1921]

How much does immigrant writing emerge as a reaction to the misrepresentations and stereotypes of immigrants as “parcels of images”? How much is it a conformist response to the demands of the literary market seeking successful Americanization stories? Is the
conventionality of immigrant (and ethnic) writing—which most critics seem to agree on, especially in terms of the genres that immigrant writing privileges—and its “dependence on stereotypes,” therefore the very engine driving immigrant writing? Does it, then, depart from stereotype, to offer the immigrant and especially the larger non-immigrant readership a counterpoint, an alternative that moves the spectatorial gaze of the American scene away from the immigrant’s body (where clothes and other “different” accoutrements define immigrants as inherently excludable, carriers of invisible germs and visible “bundles”) and into the immigrant’s mind? By invoking this mind/body binarizing logic of looking relations in the spectacle of Americanization at the turn of the twentieth century, rather than reinforcing it, I situate my analysis in that specific contextual moment where such a logic was the norm to suggest the enormity of both cultural and representational obstacles immigrant writers had to overcome. 

At the turn of the twentieth century, the tide of new immigrants—and their various responses to discourses and practices of Americanization—changed not only the country’s racial and ethnic make-up but also expressions of American identity in both new and old artistic forms: from the foreign language press and its popular audiences, to literature in other languages than English (such as the work of the Introspectivists, the Yiddish poets circle in New York, as we will see later in this chapter), to more familiar Anglo-American genres such as poetry, the autobiography, the short-story, and the novel written and published in English. Writing in English may be perceived as the ultimate capitulation to the demands of Americanization—after all, the immigrant writer par excellence, Abraham Cahan, who guided thousands of new immigrants through the sinuous paths of becoming Americans in his daily Forverts/The Jewish Daily Forward column, “A Bintel Brief” (“A Bundle of Letters”), returned to writing in Yiddish after publishing his novel The Rise of David Levinsky (1917) in English to critical acclaim. 

At
the same time, English became a way of escaping the confines of the immigrant ghetto, where “the other half”—as shown in Jacob Riis’s pseudo-sympathetic photojournalistic work on the Lower East Side—lived in squalor, in crowded tenements, trying to replicate the comforts of what Edward A. Ross, called “the old world in the new.” In mastering English, immigrant writers also started mastering literary genres, thus founding an immigrant literary canon.

Writing in English also became a way of telling the immigrant story to a larger audience whose popular representations of immigrants relied on caricatures and stereotypical images engraved in the national(ist) imaginary, especially after the tide of new immigration exceeded the expected magnitude. Writing in English “in itself was an act of emigration,” suggests Marcus Klein, an emigration from the rigors of the conservative ghetto, which “obliged honor to the old ways” that were “conspicuously non-American.” Not only does the aspiring immigrant writer leave the “old home” behind by crossing the Atlantic but also the “new home” in the ghetto, with the Old World language and memories, New World racial and ethnic stereotypes like “fragrant cheese and unimaginable sausages” to find new meaning in the New World and language. This double renunciation of the old world in the new informs Ravage’s and his fellow immigrant writers’ negotiation of an identity in the making, legitimized through a new linguistic persona that, paradoxically, seemingly overlooks the linguistic demands. The vehicle of conversion to the new gospel of American democracy fades in comparison with the purpose of the journey itself: the successful Americanization of the new immigrant. However fast immigrant writers gloss over new language acquisition (Ravage, Yiezierska, Cahan) or the sometimes humorous encounters with English, the seemingly happy linguistic assimilation is a superficial attempt to prove ownership of the national text. Early immigrant writers in the US attempted, therefore, to write different versions of the national text and national story centered preeminently on the
immigration experience. They invented their own national text by inventing America. As Klein aptly points out in his discussion of immigrant children’s work, “having no culture in which to be at home, writers made one—or, rather, they fabricated many versions of a culture depending on their various kinds of knowledge of what they had been dispossessed from.” If children of the Mayflower “tended to invent Western culture,” Klein suggests, “children of immigrants […] tended to invent America.”

The demands of the literary market, discourses of Americanization, and the limitations they posed in the form and politics of representation, along with the expectations and literary habits of the reading public largely shaped the literary genres of early new immigrant writing in English. If all immigrants, old and new, navigated (at least) two mental and physical landscapes at once, settling into a perpetual in-betweenness and biculturalism, many of the new immigrant writers writing in English overcame the language and cultural barriers with gusto. Popular newspapers, public lectures, informal tutorials, and an overwhelming thirst for knowledge drove the first attempts at Americanization. For Jewish immigrants in particular, the “restlessness for learning” took many forms, as Irving Howe suggests, including visits to cafés, a passion for lectures, self-teaching, as well as inter-generational conflicts.

Perhaps the most shocking aspect of early immigrant writing—especially immigrant autobiography—as Gordon Hutner has suggested, is that immigrant writers “made little impact on the American reading public, if only because those who had the leisure to read were already ‘in.’” As we look back on the variety of immigrant voices and reassess their impact on future narratives of becoming an American—especially works whose non-celebratory tone makes us question the mold of the success stories many immigrant writings emulated, like Ravage’s autobiography, as we’ll see later in this chapter—we get a glimpse of the circumstantial lack of
popularity these writings had in their moment, which may not be, necessarily, a sign of their aesthetic demerit.

Long before new immigrants became writers in their own right after finding a home in Manhattan, Harlem, Brooklyn, Bronx or the Lower East side, the American public was interested in the exoticism and mystery of immigrant enclaves, mainly after following sensational stories circulating in major newspapers. After Riis published *How the Other Half Lives* (1890)—emphasizing the alien features of the immigrants, thus alienating and “othering” them even more for the readers—American realist writers took literary interest in immigrants’ ill-famed ghetto. William Dean Howells wrote about the Lower East side in *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1890); Stephen Crane set his popular novel, *Maggie, A Girl of the Streets* (1893), in the notorious Bowery, and Theodore Dreiser partially set *Sister Carrie* (1900) in the same ill-fated milieu, populated with criminals, drug addicts, and prostitutes. “Slumming” on the Lower East side became not only a way of getting acquainted with an imagined promiscuity of immigrant life (as drugs, prostitution, and crime fuelled outsiders’ imagination about New York’s dangerous new inhabitants), but it was also an attempt to capture the rawness of immigrant behavior, language, customs etc. before the grip of Americanization would putatively transform these “savages” into respectable American citizens. The fascination of the slum world, for both watchers and readers, as Mark Seltzer suggests, rests partly on “its charismatic self-absorption: the irresistible attraction of a certain narcissism” (98). In part fuelled by sensational journalism and a genuine interest of social reformers in turning the slums into more welcoming outposts of Americanization, “slumming” into the immigrants’ world resembles contemporaneous popular “Indianizing” forages into the lands of the “first Americans” or salvage anthropology’s scientific attempts to capture the “last” of a presumably “vanishing race.” But, while the settlement house
movement believed that social reformers could remodel the poor (and the immigrants, many of whom were poor) “in their own image and neutralize their unsettling difference,” salvage anthropology and scientific ethnography was interested, as Michael Elliott has shown, in preserving and documenting difference, with an emphasis on the preservation of a “vanishing” culture.  

At the other end of the spectrum, early new immigrant writers also told, among many other stories, what Sanford Sternlicht calls “the tenement saga” in a variety of literary genres. Abraham Cahan, the best known chronicler of the Lower East Side, started his literary career in English with the publication of his first novel, *Yekl, A Tale of the New York Ghetto* (1896), and a collection of stories, *The Imported Bridegroom and Other Stories of the New York Ghetto* (1896), culminating in his major novel and last attempt at fiction in English, *The Rise of David Levinsky* (1917). Other Jewish American writers contributed to the writing of the tenement saga, including Anzia Yiezierska’s *Salome of the Tenements* (1923) and *Bread Givers* (1925), Rose Cohen’s *Out of the Shadow* (a fictionalized account of her life in both Europe and on the Lower East Side) (1918), and Marcus E. Ravage’s recounting of episodes from his ghetto life in *An American in the Making: The Life Story of an Immigrant* (1917).

Early immigrant writing can also be understood in relation to print culture at the end of the nineteenth century, a context illuminating both the social and cultural contexts surrounding immigrant writing and the literary genres many immigrants adopted—mainly in English but also in native languages—from poetry, short-story, to autobiography, the novel, and non-fiction. But when and how does new immigrant writing begin? While cautioning against the pitfalls of looking for the first immigrant novel—“It would be futile to select the first immigrant novel no matter how loosely one ventured to define them”—John T. Flanagan ventures Hjalmar H.  

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Boyensen’s *Falconberg* (1879) as a possible beginning of the immigrant novel, about a Norwegian settlement in Minnesota (81). Norwegian—and “Nordic”—writers in general are beyond the purview of my study, but Flanagan’s thesis is useful in placing the emergence of the immigrant novel as a legitimate genre at the beginning of the “new” immigration era. If immigrant writers most often chose the tell their story in the form of autobiography it wasn’t necessarily because they were all inclined to confess and share the most intimate details of their lives in both worlds with an incredulous public, but mainly because the public expected to read successful Americanization stories, and in a familiar autobiographical format.

A preliminary perusal of new immigrant memoirs illustrates the demands of the literary market on the emerging immigrant writer with an uncertain literary future: Henry Holt’s 1906 edition of *The Life Stories of Undistinguished Americans* (as *Told by Themselves*) tells the story of twenty “undistinguished Americans,” both immigrant and indigenous, representing “the five great races of mankind, the white, the yellow, red, brown, and black,” including immigrants from Lithuania, Poland, Sweden, Ireland, France, Germany, Italy, Greece, Syria, and Japan. Jacob Riis’ *The Making of an American* (1901), as the title implies, pays close attention to the process of becoming an American; Mary Antin’s *The Promised Land* (1912) builds on a cherished metaphor of diasporic Jewish new immigrants to bring the New World new biblical meanings; Edward Steiner’s *From Alien to Citizen: The Story of My Life in America* (1914) is a story of transformation and upward mobility, as well as conversion from Judaism to Christianity in the process of becoming an American citizen; Ravage’s *An American in the Making: The Life Story of an Immigrant* (1917), as I have noted, records the double alienation of an immigrant intellectual, from his country of birth and from his ethnic enclave in New York’s Lower East Side; Edward Bok’s *The Americanization of Edward Bok: The Autobiography of a Dutch Boy*
Fifty Years After (1920), winner of the Pulitzer Prize in 1921, records (in the third person) the struggles and success of one of the most widely-read immigrant writers; Constantine Panunzio’s The Soul of an Immigrant (1921) is conceived as the story of an average immigrant who writes his life story as an homage and duty, as the epigraph above suggests; Angelo Patri, the first Italian-born American to become a school principal in the US, wrote The Spirit of America (1924), a children’s book about the experience of becoming an American and episodes in American history and culture; Serbian Mihajlo Idvorsky Pupin/Michael Pupin’s From Immigrant to Inventor (1923), winner of the Pulitzer Prize in 1924 and now available as a film, recounts his life story as an immigrant and aspiring scientist. It becomes clear, therefore, that texts written by first-generation immigrant writers are autobiographical if not autobiographies, but I suggest that this genre predilection is a result of constraints from the literary market rather than immigrant writers’ dispositions or choice of genre.

The competing discourses of the American racial and ethnic make-up in the first decades of the twentieth century also led to changes in the narrative of American national identity. Immigrant writers, fluent in English and self-taught about Americanization debates, became an integral part of this revisionist discourse, which I call the discourse of “Americans in the Making.” From autobiography, poetry, drama, short story to novel, the immigrant “text” became a staple of the American narrative. But what is an immigrant text? In his analysis of the immigrant novel as a legitimate genre, William Boelhower argues that it “introduces into American literary history a new pluricultural worldview” (10). Tom Ferraro also uses the term “immigrant novel” to refer to the early twentieth-century genre about the “depiction of immigration and mobility,” which “gave way after World War II to ‘ethnic literature,’ a term now being replaced by ‘multicultural representation.’ The immigrant novel incorporates the
autobiographical element in its depiction of the immigrant protagonist, who leaves the Old World to come to the New, and goes through a series of trials to become American or simply to “make it” in economic terms, undergoing major linguistic and psychological changes. But in the immigrant autobiography, the tension of the “double self,” along with the rhetoric of displacement and Americanization, are mores forcefully articulated.

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In one of the first published narratives of Americans in the making, Jacob Riis’s 1901 The Making of an American, the uprooted Danish American writer imagines an American scene populated with “buffalos and red Indians charging up and down Broadway.” In retrospect, the old Dane admits his own romanticization of an imagined land, setting a key strand in early immigrant writing: the new immigrant fantasizes about a country he knows primarily from nineteenth-century Euro-American popular narratives, populated with exotic and unreal “red Indians,” charging up the European imagination at a time when popular novelists like the German Karl May invented their own version of “cowboys and Indians.” Riis’s narrator surmises: “America was America to us. We knew no distinction of West and East” (38).

Similarly, Slovak writer Edward Steiner’s mother cautions him against the “wild” dangers of America: “‘This [land],’ she said, ‘will be yours, my son, and you will get a good, pious wife right here, rather than to go among the Indians and marry a wild woman’” (From Alien to Citizen 20). With seeming innocence, Steiner later describes the “thoroughly mixed” community he inhabits for a while in Mississippi, retelling an episode of striking racist and sexist proportions with the “innocence” of the newcomer: “Our farm was joined on one side by that of a Frenchman who had come into the possession of land by marrying a squaw, whom he divorced, but who at that time was taking care of the children of the Frenchwoman whom he had married” (183).
These are learning episodes in the new immigrant’s immersion into New World racial politics, not in the least exonerating for their racist and sexist impulses, but recounted critically by the (now) seasoned writer, whose adaptation to the new culture, history, and language has offered him both the distance and the vocabulary to write his “American” story.

Although striving to adapt to the new environment, serializing his work in publications such as *The Outlook, The Churchman,* and *The Century Magazine,* Riis, as an aspiring writer, struggles to tell his story in *The Making of an American:* “I lacked words. […] My English outpourings never reached the publishers” (90). At the end of a successful career as a journalist and writer, Riis claims to be as much a Dane as he was when he reached the U.S. “Alas! I am afraid that thirty years in the land of my children’s birth have left me as much of a Dane as ever” (7). Nevertheless, this is not the picture of Riis that Theodore Roosevelt offers in the introduction to Riis’s autobiography. Calling him “a doer of the word” and “a white soul,” Teddy Roosevelt offers perhaps the most iconic reading of an immigrant writer to date: “[I]f I were asked to name a fellowman who came nearest to being the ideal American citizen, I should name Jacob Riis.”59 Whereas Riis’s “Nordic” whiteness and a privileged cultural capital in early twentieth-century racial politics make him an ideal American citizen, one who also scrutinizes less fortunate fellow immigrants in his photo-documentary *How the Other Half Lives* (1890), most of his non-Nordic peers have to prove their worth as the less legitimate “half” and work toward their making as Americans. Steiner secretly wishes for

the careless American citizen, who holds his franchise cheap, an experience like my own, that he might know the value of a freeman’s birthright. It would be a glorious experience, I am sure, to feel that transition from subject to citizen, from scarcely being
permitted to say “I” to those great collective words “We, Fellow-citizens.” (249-50)

The stories of first-generation new immigrants oscillate between critique and adulation, allegiance and distance, official and unofficial stories. Most relevantly, they seemingly offer an acceptance of the discourses and practices of Americanization, an unquestioning imitation, obedient in their rituals of silent acceptance of the new culture. This is the official story constituting American immigrants. As Priscilla Wald notes, “official stories constitute Americans. […] They determine the status of an individual in the community. Neither static nor monolithic, they change the competing narratives of the nation that must be engaged, absorbed, and retold.” I suggest that unofficial stories, too, constitute Americans.

Unofficial stories constituting Americans in this analysis also refer to stories that are not driven by success, accumulation of capital, and compliance to the narrative of success and upward mobility. Granted that the comfortable, middle-class reading public potentially interested in these stories at the turn of the twentieth-century may not have wanted to read about losers or failures —especially when they are nationally or racially different, threatening the stability of the New World—these stories exist as part of the less frequently told narrative of Americanization. Upward mobility and success, in the service of the American dream and market capitalism, abound in the “official” stories that “make” Americans in immigration fiction. Granted that many of the immigrants who “made it” were successful writers, editors, and professionals, their stories of “being made over” are never complete, absolute, as they are never completely “made over” into new Americans. Whereas American national culture (in the sense Lowe proposes and Wald implies) imagines a certain brand of immigrants, immigrants—in turn—imagine how American national culture imagines them.
5.3. Strangers in the Language: Yiddish Poetry and New Immigrant Geographies of Being and Belonging

We shall seek the wonders of the land
And sing our last song
To the earth,
Not our earth.
We shall sing our swan song,
To the home,
Not our home.
Stranger,
Our own
Stranger—

Ruven Ludvig, “Sing, Stranger,” 1924

Like many immigrants in the US, the Yiddish poets in New York at the turn of the twentieth century sought “the wonders of the land” in a strange new geography, with the comfort of a familiar old language. Unlike immigrant writers who sometimes capitulated to the demands of English to gain literary prominence and a wider readership, Yiddish poets discovered new—often local, “American”—themes in an old language they adapted to new physical and mental landscapes, with Yiddish thus mapping what in this section I will call their new immigrant geography of being and belonging. The US seen through the eyes of the Yiddish
poets in New York is, in many ways, similar to that seen by their non-Jewish immigrant peers or American Indians transplanted to other urban spaces. At the same time, their deliberate choice of Yiddish, the language of the secular, the home, and the street offered a productive grounding in several cultural landscapes, trans-nationally, and offered an innovative body of immigrant poetry. First, by writing in Yiddish, Jewish immigrants could easily continue to connect with modern European Yiddish writing, which, in turn, reacted against the confines of traditional Hebrew teachings, as was visible in the active roles European Jews started taking in education, politics, and religion before migrating to the United States. Second, Yiddish was also the language spoken at home and in the streets, the language of the “here and now,” an ever-changing language (a composite of Hebrew, Aramaic, and German), lending itself to introspection and confession. Third, Yiddish writing brought together a self-reflexive group of immigrants, a nation without a territory. As historians document, between the assassination of Alexander II in Russia in 1881 and World War I, a third of Eastern European Jews sought exile abroad. For these immigrants, language became their territory, the “Yiddishland” or “Yiddishkeit.” Last but certainly not least, Yiddish poets also became pioneers of language, innovators, like Sholem Aleichem, who used and created Yiddish anew.

Although the choice of Yiddish for personal, artistic, or political reasons meant a smaller, more specialized, and often more biased audience than the larger English-speaking audience, the Yiddish poets made not only political statements about being and belonging as immigrants through their choice to preserve their ethnic culture in the “New World” (where the Yiddish immigrant press had already gathered a readership among immigrant Jews), but also a secular gesture to distance themselves from the religious rigors imposed by Hebrew and the practices of Judaism. In the process, they also invented an esthetic tradition, which now places their poetry
Yiddish offered not only the cryptic new medium that appealed to the initiated (those who “belonged” culturally) but also generated the opportunity for an “intense poetic world, based on its unusual ‘Old-New,’ extraterritorial language and culture.” Ruven Ludvig’s poem in the epigraph above sums up the commitment of Yiddish poets to make Yiddish poetry endure despite physical alienation (“to the earth / Not our earth”) and personal tragedy (“stranger / Our own / Stranger”), two immigrant sites of physical and psychic displacement, transposed into an unwavering desire to map a new geography of being and belonging: “We shall seek the wonders of the land / And sing our last song.” Ludvig’s “Sing, Stranger” was published in 1924, when the new immigration restriction laws limited the number of future Jewish “strangers” entering the US, primarily because they were “strange” (racially and ethnically undesirable). Read in this context, the poem becomes a plea for Yiddish writing to endure in the new diasporic space, against all odds—“We shall sing our swan song.” Yiddish thus becomes the land of the Yiddish poet (Yiddishland) in the ‘home / not our home,” and poetry the way to find the way home.

Written in a language formed at the intersection of several languages and cultures, Yiddish poetry in the United States remains nonetheless—to this day—an autonomous realm, albeit influenced by Anglo-American and European poetic traditions. Critic and translator Benjamin Harshav laments the “tragedy of Yiddish poetry,” which “tried to promote an autonomous ethnic culture—and in a separate language, at that—at a time when the idea of the melting pot reigned supreme and exerted pressure on Jewish immigrants and their own children.” Although the use of Yiddish limited the poems’ audience and, therefore, deferred aesthetic recognition of this under-studied body of poetry, this choice to write in Yiddish ultimately rendered a simultaneous desire of the Yiddish poets to become American (in subject
matter as well as in the adaptation of Yiddish verse to modern prosodic and aesthetic conventions) and to resist the pressure of the melting pot precisely by writing in an inaccessible language, in an act of what Etienne Balibar calls “dissimilation” and what I call throughout this project an “unmaking of Americans.”70 The American literature scholar with no (or little) knowledge of Yiddish resorts to translations to put these works into conversation with contemporaneous American literatures asking similar aesthetic and political questions.71 If we work under the assumption of translation theorists’ dilemma, “traduttore tradditore” (i.e., that the translator necessarily betrays the text in the interpretive act of translation), how do we even start to imagine this growing corpus of work in conversation with other “ethnic” or immigrant writing, or with American literature and culture at large? Like all writing in national languages published in the US either by the immigrant or mainstream press, Yiddish poetry poses challenges for the literary and cultural critic and teacher. Do we relegate this work to the periphery of our scholarly and teacherly interests primarily because of the language barrier? If so, what do we lose? What do we gain?

In what follows, I attempt to explore the stakes of Yiddish poetry (in translation) in rendering the “strangeness” of unfamiliar New World landscapes in an equally strange language (strange to the “native” spectators of the American scene). I argue that the linguistic and esthetic choices of Yiddish poetry in America bring the immigrant poet closer to the world he inhabits physically and the world he inhabits culturally, bridging not only the distance between two distant geographic spaces (the Old and New Worlds), but also forging a cultural scene for connection to both through what I’d like to call here immigrant geographies of being and belonging.72 I consider the work of several Yiddish poets associated with the New York literary circles of modernist poets Di Yunge (“The Young”) and In Zikh (“The Introspectivists”), thus
focusing my attention on the cultural work of the groups rather than individual writers (most of them male). The work of one woman poet writing in Yiddish also interests me toward the end of this section—Anna Margolin (1887-1952)—in that she shares many of the poetic concerns of her male peers (by direct or indirect affiliation with these two aesthetic movements) but also because, unlike the male Yiddish poets, she makes gender a main site of negotiating immigrant identity through poetry, which is rare in immigrant literary history. Her poetry fills a gap in immigrant women’s writing in general and in Jewish women’s writing in particular. Written at a time when discourses of Americanization reshaped notions of American nationality and particularly American citizenship legally, racially, and more broadly—culturally—Yiddish poetry in New York sought to render the tensions of how the Jewish immigrant imagined new geographies of being and belonging in the New World with the linguistic comfort of the Old World.

5.4 Yiddish Poetry in American Begins: Di Yunge and In Zikh

Although the beginnings of Yiddish writing in the US, as Irving Howe suggests, were “prosaic in circumstance, utilitarian in prose, and often crude in tone” (430), given the first Yiddish writers’ working-class background, the Yiddish poets wrote about a variety of American topics in many poetic registers on several Yiddish scenes: from the sweatshop writers, to the first organized group of Yiddish poets, playwrights, and novelists, Di Yunge (“The Young”), and later to their rivals, the modernist group In Zikh (“The Introspectivists”). The first waves of Jewish immigrants, particularly those working in sweatshops and laboring for a living, including those devoted to socialist or anarchist causes, found little time to devote to learning English. These early Yiddish poets were therefore confined to the language of their homes, given the meager
exposure to things “American” in the immigrant ghetto. A brief history of Yiddish poetry in the context of what Howe calls “The Yiddish Word” may be a useful starting point for understanding the genealogy of Yiddish poetry in the United States. The early 1880s mark the beginning of the wave of mass immigration from Eastern Europe, when the immigrant diasporic sense of alienation was still emerging. (A more acute sense of alienation and search for identity would mark the lives and work of later waves of Jewish immigrants, particularly those leaving Eastern Europe after the pogroms at the turn into the twentieth century.) Nevertheless, as Alan Trachtenberg suggests in his recent work on the “Yiddish Hiawatha,” Yiddish was “both a product and a symptom of the diaspora,” which represented “the experience of dispersion” but ultimately became a “universal cosmopolitan tongue capable of making itself seem at home (however precariously) anywhere.” The Yiddish poets in New York captured this experience of dispersal and precarious being and belonging on the American scene.

Although Yiddish was the spoken language at home and in the street, early Yiddish writers could not be educated formally in Yiddish because Yiddish-language schools did not appear until after World War I in the United States. As Irving Howe notes, “There were Yiddish readers in America before there were Yiddish writers” (although the first volume of Yiddish poetry was published in the United States in 1877, probably to a small readership). The sweatshop poets, in their “raw” poetry, “never found a secure place between folk expression and sophisticated writing,” nor could they “break past the nagging dilemmas of propagandist art” (436). This seeming naiveté of the early Yiddish “raw literature” (by poets such as Abraham Reisen, one of the first Yiddish poets in the US) paved the way for newer generations of poets, while at the same time establishing a series of unsystematic albeit foundational poetic and prosodic conventions that the future generations of Yiddish poets could rebel against.
Benjamin Harshav argues in an anthology of Yiddish poetry translated into English (2006), lending an attentive ear both to poetic and to historical trends, “Yiddish American poetry developed its own autonomous, even closed, culture, with its own internal history, separate from what was going on in the neighboring English as well as in their own language in Europe and the Soviet Union.” At the same time, because most of the literary work in Yiddish was still published in Europe at the time immigrant poets started writing in the US, the writers of the three aesthetic groups mentioned above forged, in fact, a new tradition in a new world: American Yiddish poetry.

Written in a language inaccessible to most American audiences, Yiddish poetry is nonetheless markedly American in subject matter. As we recover this rarely-read poetry from the beginning of the twentieth century through new translations, its importance becomes more visible especially as it speaks both to immigrant concerns (local and transnational) and to interconnected Americanization tropes of belonging physically and culturally and being, both ontologically and, especially, legally. The poems of Di Yunge (The Young) and In Zikh (The Introspectivists) often rendered the challenges of the industrial city, the streets, the diversity and multitudes of people in the streets, the landscapes of California, Arizona, and New York, the trial of Sacco and Vanzetti, and many more American-based themes. One of the most fascinating Yiddish poets for his thematic range, for instance, Ruven Ludvig (Ukraine), was acutely aware of American race relations and wrote poems about the lynchings of African Americans in the South, about Mexican “shacks” and old Jewish pioneers, as well as about American Indian dispossession. In “Indian Motifs,” Ludvig’s speaker takes on the voice of a Pima Indian who chastises the “palefaces” for seeking the Indian desert village of a Pima tribe out of mere touristy curiosity, “Do not aim / Your curiosity at us”:  

213
Oh you palefaces,
Oh, paleskins,
Do not wake the wounds in our hearts.
Do not bring the grief of mourners.\textsuperscript{80}

The identification with and performance of the Indian man’s message to the white man offers a glimpse into a moment of potential connection between immigrant displacement and Indian dispossession and grief—in Yiddish.

Poets Mani Leib, Zisha Landau, Reuben Ayzland, Joseph Rolnick, and Moshe Leib Halpern (of \textit{Di Yunge}) tried to free Yiddish poetry from the confines of the religious and the mundane by finding their poetic voices in a poetry that blends romantic expression with the cultivation of conventional forms (like the sonnet). Moreover, \textit{Di Yunge} were acerbic enemies of journalistic conventions, a difficult enterprise especially considering that many Jewish immigrants in New York were already avid readers of the daily Yiddish press. As one of the articles published by Jacob Glatshteyn in the Introspectivists’ main publication (also named \textit{In Zikh}) argues, the Yiddish poet, while an acute observer of the political scene, of the “millions slaughtered” in the Russian pogroms, of “science dumbfounded,” should nonetheless “turn to himself if he wants to extract some answer from life.”\textsuperscript{81}

The immigrant artistic circle \textit{Di Yunge} formed in New York in 1907, a year which also marked the beginnings of Yiddish modern poetry in the United States.\textsuperscript{82} Although most writers were shopworkers, with little or no formal education or exposure to writers in other languages than Yiddish (and often Hebrew), \textit{Di Yunge} breathed fresh poetic air into both traditional
Yiddish poetry and immigrant Jewish life, and their magazine *Yugend* ("Youth") published some of their early work. At the same time, precisely because they shared the plight of millions of Jewish immigrants, the poets of *Di Yunge* did not “detach themselves from the preoccupations of the immigrant world,” as Howe suggests; they lived, “when they were most free imaginatively, in the lofty spaces of European poetry” (*The World of Our Fathers* 441). Mani Leyb, Zishe Landau, Reuven Ayzland (Anna Margolin’s partner and artistic supporter, as we will see), Moyshe–Leyb Halpern, and H. Leyvik created a cultural space dedicated to artistic freedom and aesthetic innovation, even though immigrant attempts to imagine new forms of belonging in a strange land and language often returned to the trope of the home(land). This imaginary return, over and over, to an imagined and lost home confirms many Yiddish critics’ view that Yiddish poetry was ultimately about dislocation and homelessness. In “In the Golden Land,” Halpern creates a poetic dialogue between the immigrant son (in the US) and the mother (in the Old World):

Would you, mama, believe me if I told
That everything here is changed into gold,
That gold is made from iron and blood,
Day and night, from iron and blood.
—My son, from a mother you cannot hide—
A mother can see, she is at your side.
I can feel from here, you have not enough bread—
In the Golden Land you aren’t properly fed.83
This adjective is ironic here, he suggests, because it contrasts sharply with the European image of America as a “Golden Land,” where “gold was rolling in the streets.” I suggest that it is also an acerbic indictment of the “golden door” presumably opening immigration to Eastern European Jews, only half open by the time the poem is written. The imagined dialogue between the mother and son, the Old World and the New, offers a nuanced reading of the “Golden Land.” The poem suggests the disparities between the imagined New World as a “Golden Land” in the immigrant speaker’s imaginary and the harsh reality of the “golden chain” wrought into the “iron chain,” a transformation the son witnesses only after the transatlantic passage. The American dream becomes what he later in the poem calls “a gallows for me,” and the new geography of being—which the mother’s intuition alludes to in the second stanza above—is one of toil, intense labor, but not of belonging.

Although “The Young” were not as programmatic (or dogmatic) as their successors, “The Introspectivists,” *Di Yunge* drew from a range of artistic freedom and criteria, including freedom from traditional constraints or social obligations; freedom from the perceived duty to write for and about a collective (Jewish) audience; freedom from high rhetoric and flowery linguistic choices; and preference for the little magazines instead of the larger Yiddish press. Sholem Aleichem, usually considered the greatest Yiddish writer at the turn of the century and famous for his comic prose and memorable characters like Tevye the Dairyman or Motl the Cantor’s Son, could never escape an over-simplified and colloquial prose in Yiddish particularly because he always considered the limits of his audience’s literary skills. Unlike him, the *Di Yunge* poets were determined to provide a select, even elite reading public while preserving higher esthetic standards. *Di Yunge*’s formal creed was aestheticism and a poetry of the “small” experiences of life, the commonplace, the everyday, in sum the secular—a creed very much at odds with
traditional Judaism. Their embrace of sensibility forged a new poetry but at the same time removed some of the Yiddish poets from their communities, which were unwilling or aesthetically and emotionally unprepared to read this kind of poetry. This self-imposed artistic removal, while drawing the Yiddish poets away from their Jewish communities, strengthened their commitment to work in Yiddish and to write about individual concerns and themes, which often included the subjects of belonging, immigration, and the American landscape. The self-imposed exile in the Yiddish language and the search for a poetic and often personal “individuality” and identity of the Yiddish poets, therefore, differs tellingly from the marketing of American identity in Americanization narratives. The difference lies in the assumed, often sought-after “individuality” that helps the modern Yiddish poet “make” his poetry “new.”

The poetry of Di Yunge, regardless of its themes and poetic choices, was one of rebellion against immigrant tropes and experiences and a search for personal and aesthetic autonomy—which the later group, The Introspectivists would achieve mainly because their peers of Di Yunge had already laid the foundations for this rebellion. In 1918, responding to a demand that immigrant writers produce a predictable body of immigrant-themed work, Yiddish poet H. Leivik exploded: “I am sick to my stomach of… the diaspora themes, the shoyfer peals and the shtetl stories. I am bored by Hassidic tunes, folksy sing-songs, clerical sonnets.” Di Yunge could not—would not—replicate the impact previous Yiddish writers had on their audiences, many of them in the United States, and the very emergence of the group marks the beginning of what Howe, Wisse, and Shmeruk call “a minority culture in Yiddish.” Although, unlike their In Zikh followers, the poets of Di Yunge did not take an interest in free verse poetry, they took an interest in Walt Whitman and other “minority” cultures of both the United States and the world. Di Yunge’s magazine, Shriftn, published Whitman’s Salut au Monde in 1912 (translated into
Yiddish by I. J. Schwarts), and Morris Rosenfeld wrote an ode to the American Bard in Yiddish. Other poets of *Di Yunge* also published translations into Yiddish of Japanese, Chinese, Egyptian, and Arabic poetry, showing a range of interest in other non-American artistic traditions, but with a constant interest in poetry. Like many of their American contemporaries, Yiddish poets were also interested in American Indian cultures. In the 1920s, Yiddish poets translated into Yiddish some American Indian “chants.”

Like many diasporic communities, the poets of *Di Yunge* were also never at home in American culture or the English language. Their work illustrates the immigrant writers’ search for aesthetic autonomy and the impossibility of inhabiting a “real” home, or what Ludvig’s “Sing Stranger” in the epigraph above calls “the home / Not our home”—except maybe in poetic language. Yiddish poetry therefore becomes a new “home” away from “home.” This double displacement appears most vividly in their constant habitation of their invented geographies of being and belonging, aesthetic spaces created at the interstices between the warmth of the old world and the impersonal cosmopolitanism of the new world. Sometimes, the very thought of themselves as Yiddish poets distresses and anguishes Yiddish poets. H. Leyvik’s “Yiddish Poets” captures the tension between the work of art and its display in an unfamiliar, cold milieu (New York City), as well as the futility of finding a voice in a deaf urban environment:

> Sometimes, like frazzled cats, dragging
> Their kittens around, distraught,
> We drag our poems between our teeth
> By the neck through the streets of New York
> When I think of us, Yiddish poets,
A sorrow grabs me—sharp, acute;
I want to shout to a brother, to pray—
And just then the words grow mute.⁸⁷

The disillusionment of the Yiddish poets dragging their “poems between our teeth” and
the impossibility of shouting “to a brother,” of sharing the esthetic thrill with another immigrant
poet, defines the beginning of the new Yiddish poetry in the United States, a self-isolated and
self-isolating enterprise marked by difference from both the emerging “tradition” of modern
American poetry in the dominant language (English) and the “individual talents” contributing to
and legitimizing the immigrant literary tradition.⁸⁸ Similarly, Mani Leib’s poem, “To the Gentile
Poet,” illustrates the contrast between the perceived legitimate poetry (embodied by the “heir of
Shakespeare”) and the Yiddish poet chanting “under alien stars”:

Heir of Shakespeare, shepherds and cavaliers,
Bard of the gentiles, lucky you are indeed. […]

But I, a poet of the Jews—who needs it!—
A folk of wild grass grown on foreign earth,
Dust-bearded nomads, grandfathers of dearth—
The dust of fairs and texts is all that feeds it;
I chant, amid the alien corn, the tears
Of desert wanderers under alien stars.⁸⁹
Leib acknowledges the frustrations of the “poet of the Jews” at the imagined hostile readership; nonetheless, as a Di Yunge fervent practitioner, his poetry sought the “purification and stabilization of the language as a literary medium,” freed from journalistic conventions and rigors, as well as from the disabling Germanisms that the earlier Yiddish poets had embraced. To this end, Leib’s poems rely on evocative symbols (rather than explicit descriptions), cultivate musical effects, personal feeling and subjectivity (the “I” starts to appear in Yiddish poetry with the Di Yunge), and metrical conventions in his later oeuvre (particularly in his sonnets, marked by sophisticated verbal refinement and linguistic complexity). This poetry remained, nonetheless, formally rigid. The next generation of Yiddish poets in New York, Di Yunge’s epigones, sanctioned this very conventionality, “making it new”—as we shall see—in forms their predecessors would not have conceived of.

Modern Yiddish literature (and poetry in particular) began at the start of World War I, both in vision and style, and encompassed a wide array of trans-national productions as a massive Jewish relocation followed the pogroms in Europe. Yiddish modern and modernist poetry flourished not only in New York, but also in Warsaw, Kiev, and Moscow, collapsing other European-isms, from symbolism, to expressionism, to futurism and surrealism. This type of artistic influence sometimes lent itself to collaborations between Yiddish poets of the two continents; one such collaboration led to the publication of the literary journal Literatur und Lebn (Literature and Life), published before World War I and edited by Yiddish writers in the United States and Warsaw. A poetry of contradiction and displacement, with major and emerging Yiddish poets dispersed throughout the world, Yiddish modern poetry in the United States mirrors its European counterparts in its lyricism, nostalgia for the lost shtetl, and a mixture of “oaths and imprecations, unbelief and obscurity, and eroticism.” At the same time, Yiddish
poetry in New York is also a poetry of growing artistic awareness, as well as an awareness of the local, the national, and the international.

*Di Yunge’s* followers, *In Zikh* (*The Introspectivists*; literal translation “Inside the Self”) formed as a group in New York in the early 1920s and openly rebelled against what they saw as the formulaic and over-romanticized poetic conventions of their predecessors. At the same time they believed strongly in a certain “introspective manner,” the poem’s “individual rhythm,” free verse, optional rhyme, and the centrality of the “Introspective I.” Their 1919 literary manifesto set the standards of their poetics bluntly: “Individuality is everything and introspection is everything—this is what we seek, this is what we want to achieve.”92 With a wider, English-speaking and bi-lingual membership, *In Zikh*’s mission was “to launch a particular trend in Yiddish poetry,” whose members “look into themselves and create poetry drawn from their own soul and from the world as reflected in it,” as the 1919 Introspectivist “Manifesto” announces.93 Unlike earlier generations of Yiddish poets (the Sweatshop poets and the *Di Yunge* poets), the Introspectivists were students and intellectuals, some of them well read in both British and American modernist poetry. With leaders such as Jacob Glatstein, N. Minkov, and Aaron Glants-Leyeles, the *In Zikh* wrote personal poems. They were committed to writing about the harshness of the Jewish immigration experience (which the poets of *Di Yunge* often repressed in order to find their voices as writers), but they also wanted to secure a place for Yiddish poetry in the United States, which no other Yiddish literary group had attempted before. At the same time, poets such as Glatstein and Glants-Leyeles were also well read in contemporary American literature—given their English-language proficiency—and were thus heavily influenced by imagism and new, experimental forms in poetry. Whereas earlier generations of Yiddish poets in America did not rely on the local literary tradition to build their own poetics and esthetics, the
Introspectivists were aware of and attuned to the work of modernist American poets, reading (and probably imitating) Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, Marianne Moore, and Wallace Stevens.\textsuperscript{94} In fact, as I’d like to suggest, the Introspectivists’ 1919 literary “Manifesto” owed a great debt to the Imagist Manifesto in setting certain “principles” (as Ezra Pound called them) or “poetic aspirations” (as the Introspectivists suggest).\textsuperscript{95}

In the 1912 Imagist Manifesto, the Euro-American document establishing the poetic principles of a literary movement with practitioners such as Ezra Pound, H.D. (Hilda Doolittle), and Richard Aldington, the Imagists agreed to the following major conventions: “(1) a direct treatment of the ‘thing’ (or poetic subject); (2) to use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation; and (3) in terms of rhythm—to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome.” By the time the Introspectivists emerged on the American (Yiddish) literary scene, American Imagism was a thing of the past (ending roughly in 1917), but its impact on the Yiddish Introspectivists’ poetry lived on. If the Introspectivists agreed with the Imagists’ ideas about directness, internal rhythm, and economy of words, they diverged in their views on the use of free verse. Pound cautioned poets to use “\textit{vers libre only when one must.”}\textsuperscript{96} The Introspectivists, however, cultivated free verse to help break from the prosodic formal conventions of \textit{Di Yunge}, and Yiddish women poets in particular (Celia Dropkin and Anna Margolin among them) cultivated free verse. As the 1919 Manifesto of \textit{In Zikh} held, “We Introspectivists believe that free verse is best suited to the individuality of the rhythm and of the poem as a whole; […] free verse, intended primarily for individual rhythm, demands an intense effort, a genuine sounding of the inner depths. Therefore, free verse more easily betrays the non-poet, revealing the internal vacuum.”\textsuperscript{97}
Experimenting with new modes of expression, including expression in a foreign language, became the Yiddish poets’ way of finding their place in American modernity, in the same way that similar cultural, social, and ontological doubts and contradictions marked the American-born poets’ formal encounters with modernism and modernity. Theorizing Yiddish poetics also led to a more astute sense of the politics of Yiddish poetry and the assertion of Jewish identity not merely through Jewish “themes” but also through the use of Yiddish as a poetic (and political) tool: “He who mocks Yiddish, who complains that Yiddish is a poor and shabby language, he who is merely indifferent to Yiddish” does not belong with the Yiddish poets, the introspectivist manifesto held (780). Furthermore, the Introspectivists set out to make the language of their poems “as close as possible to the spoken language in its structure and flow” (783). Berish Vaynshteyn’s meditation in “On Your Soil, America” exemplifies larger existential concerns about immigrant rootlessness and alienation, with an acute sense of imminent death:

On your soil I was destined to sing the song of your land.
So many people, so many ships I saw in your broad harbors,
And from tongues of your nations I learned how to be a stranger
And began to understand that though Rayshe, Galicia is my home,
My city is New York—my streets: Delancey, Ridge, and Pitt;
And you became more homey to me since that mournful day
When I saw my father-mother die on your soil.98

The poem’s eight stanzas follow the theme of displacement and utter sadness—“So many sad streets on your soil, America”—only to reconnect the theme of death with that of a
rediscovered sense of home and (be)longing shared by “strangers” from other lands or other parts of the country: “God, what a longing looks out of faces, Jewish, Negro, Italian.” The poem ends with the image of New York as a democratizing space of death, shared by many, a paradoxical reconciliation of racial, ethnic, national, and linguistic differences: “And when a man dies on your great wide soil, America, / It is as if he died in many countries at once!” This surprising rhetorical turn of the bard who purports “to sing the song of your land” by learning to be at home in a strange new land connects concerns of Yiddish poets with those of Americans inhabiting a racially-changing world in the first decades of the twentieth century.

The Yiddish poets in New York were also attuned to conversations and debates published in US periodicals about the state of American poetry. This idea is important if we are to understand their work in a coherent context of literary production, dissemination, and reception—albeit in a foreign language. This particular context shows the Yiddish poets not simply as producers of poetry in a vacuum, but also as consumers of poetry and poetic discourses. In an article titled “Poetry—A National American Art,” published in the March issue of In Zikh, the editor draws on an article in the Dial by James Oppenheim.99 A Jewish-American poet, Oppenheim claims that “poetry is becoming more and more the characteristic national art of America,” whereas fiction, the novel, and the short story are part and parcel of Russian “national art.” He goes on to suggest that, “in America this place is occupied by the half-lyrical, half-narrative poetry.” In its implication that poetry may become the new medium of expression for Jewish immigrants in the New World—and not the immigrant autobiography, as the demands of the literary market seem to imply—this argument is compelling, particularly given discussions surrounding ethnic writing of “local color” and its recognized (often mis-recognized) sociological merits, to the detriment of aesthetic merits.100 Drawing on Walt Whitman’s recasting
of American poetic language to reframe the conventions of British prosody and to make his poetry preeminently American, the Yiddish poets adapted an old literary genre for new immigrant artistic expression. As Howe summed up, “Proletarian aesthetes, Parnassians of the sweatshop—this was the paradox and the glory of Di Yunge.”

5.5 Anna Margolin and the Limits of Being and Belonging

I now turn to the work of Anna Margolin (1887-1952), one of the first women Yiddish poets in the United States, whose unconventionality (of verse and ethos) place her on a par with many of her male peers, who at times dismissed her work because “a woman can’t write like that.”

Chaim N. Bialik, the famous modern Hebrew poet (who later reviewed her book of poems favorably), wrote to her: “Dear Madamme, Thank you for your book of poems. Who are you? It seems that until now I have not come across your name.” Like Bialik, twenty-first century readers are likely to ask the same question. Who is Anna Margolin?

Margolin was born Rosa Lebensboim in Brisk (Brest-Litovsk), White Russia (Belarus/Byelorussia). In 1906 she visited the United States, where she settled eventually in 1913. Her career and life are somewhat atypical compared to the rest of the Yiddish poets, not only given the gender difference but also those of class and aesthetic ideals. Unlike most of her Jewish immigrant peers, who came to American to escape religious or political persecution, often from depths of poverty, Margolin came from a wealthy family that sent her abroad to stop the tempestuous daughter’s latest love affair. Margolin’s unconventionality and exuberance left a mark on her poetry, which she published under one pseudonym—Anna Margolin—after many searches for an appropriate pen name for the American scene. After her return to New York in
1913 at the age of twenty-six, following several peregrinations and life-changing episodes in Europe (which included, among others, one son and former husband, both left behind), she wrote for the women’s section of the Yiddish daily newspaper Der Tog (The Day). There she wrote a weekly column “In the Woman’s World” under her real name.\textsuperscript{106} In 1920 she began publishing under the name Anna Margolin, a name she used for the rest of her life. Although Margolin’s reputation rests on one volume, \textit{Lider (Poems)}, published in New York in 1929 (in Yiddish)—where she explores, among other things, common immigrant themes, like loneliness and displacement, as well as the poetic tension between image and text—Margolin wrote extensively throughout her life.\textsuperscript{107} A volume of Yiddish women writers appeared only a year earlier, in 1928 in Chicago, publishing women’s verse in Yiddish from the previous two centuries, thus legitimating the genre and opening the way for a long tradition of women’s writing in Yiddish.\textsuperscript{108}

As Shirley Kumove’s recent study of Margolin’s poetry suggests, despite the paucity of women writers in Yiddish before World War I, the post-war years saw an increase in women’s writing in Yiddish, particularly poetry. Like their male peers, many Jewish women poets immigrated to new countries at the beginning of the twentieth century, which made artistic enterprises both easier and more acceptable. Whether women “fit easily into this trend” of writing poetry in Yiddish because of the high demands on their time, or because “poetry lent itself more readily to the expression of long-suppressed emotions too intense for prose,” as Kumove suggests, is beside the scope of my analysis. It is useful to remember, however, that during the early decades of the twentieth century, “Yiddish women writers in America considered themselves emancipated. […] They were the first generation of immigrant women, part of the emerging female intelligentsia, who experienced the profound contradictions faced by many women living in North America.”\textsuperscript{109} Nevertheless, despite Margolin’s short career as a
poet, her literary work coincided with “the most intensive decade in the course of modern Yiddish poetry”; it also coincided with the beginning of American women’s poetry in Yiddish.\footnote{110}

This context surrounding the publication of Margolin’s volume of poems shows that not only was there a tradition of women’s writing in Yiddish beginning at this time (in North and South America and in Europe), but also that women wrote Yiddish poetry, both in the Americas and in Europe. Despite her writing in other genres, Margolin is mainly remembered today for her poetry. The choice of poetry for Yiddish women poets was not only more daring in its search for new forms of expression, but poetry also offered them a chance to write in the present, to become part of their contemporary literary moment as not only avid readers but also as writers in their own right. The choice of free verse can also be seen as a liberatory practice, although Margolin sometimes uses conventional tropes (especially in poems about biblical themes, particularly the “Mary Cycle”). Her most thematically Jewish poems appear strategically at the beginning of her 1929 volume of poems and include titles such as “My Ancestors Speak,” “Drunk from the Bitter Truth,” the “Mary Cycle,” and “Forgotten Gods.” Although she is a secular poet, religious undertones mark her poetry, often in stunning existential moments, such as the direct address to God in “A Human Being”: “God, I forgive You, You hear? / I forgive You, God.”\footnote{111} Like many immigrant women, Margolin felt the multiple dislocations created by New York landscape, whether real or imagined. At the same time, the trans-national life of the imagination afforded her by her early cosmopolitanism—she was an avid reader of French, German, Hebrew, Russian, and English poetry—grounded her Yiddish work in several geographies of belonging as she inhabited new geographies of being in the New World. This tension between the visual and the textual, the seen and the unseen, or the image and the text—a modernist tension, as well—dominates Margolin’s poetry.\footnote{112} In her poem “To Franz Werfel,”
Margolin defines her difficult poetic mission as “a grieving statue in an empty space,” returning, over and over, to the question of belonging in a cold space peopled with statuesque beings:

My wings lifted me too high
above people, above life.
I am a grieving statue in an empty space,
a singing stone
as from a hostile star.\textsuperscript{113}

Margolin’s identification with Icarus is telling in that she dares too much, “above life,” and the fall is commensurate with her perceived defiance, “a grieving statue in an empty space.” A representative of what one critic calls “Jewish imagism,” Margolin’s poetry brings together not only Anglo-American imagism but also Russian acmeism (a poetic movement in Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century, invested in the craft of poetry) and German expressionism.\textsuperscript{114} This is to suggest that, although not widely published (or read), Margolin’s poetry was written with an acute sensibility to both the contemporary literary scene and the more traditional forms of expression (emerging primarily from her secular education, but always with a nod to Jewish history and tradition).

Margolin’s poems are secular, confessional, written in the first person, and sometimes resort to mask-wearing speakers, contemporary or ancient. As Kathryn Hellerstein argues, “as secularists, the modernist women poets had broken out of the binding of Jewish tradition, which, while restricting women’s lives and choices, had provided a clear place from which the few who wrote could speak.”\textsuperscript{115} The search for a poetic voice is one of Margolin’s central artistic
concerns, which frustrates any attempt to see behind the “mask.” There is no indication that Margolin knew Paul Laurence Dunbar’s poem, “We Wear the Mask” (1896), but she used the trope of the mask to similar ends. Dunbar takes to task the racial performance of complicity with the dominant script of white supremacy and black submission in a post-Civil War US landscape: “We wear the mask that grins and lies / [...] We sing, but oh the clay is vile/ Beneath our feet, and long the mile.” For Margolin, wearing the mask does not merely suggest playing the game (of race or ethnicity), but also the playful and calculated game of poetry, the artist’s work. “In the Café” starts with the literal mask of the café smoke enveloping the bohemian artists and ends with the figurative mask of assumed coldness (cerebral tension?) that Margolin’s circle of writers most likely put on more than once:

    With smoke, like masks, we cover up our faces. [...]  
    We all keep vile, cold masks upon our faces,  
    spout irony to cloak the fever, wear  
    a thousand smiles, guffawings, and grimaces.  
    Have I offended you, my dear?¹¹⁶

The turn to her imagined audience in the last line breaks the confessional fluidity of the stanza and returns the speaker to self-referentiality and, perhaps, a powerful, gendered poetic stance, with a poetic voice not assuming its transgressions and instead embracing them unapologetically as the speaker distances herself from the poem’s powerful images—“Have I offended you, my dear?”
The image of the cold, often mute and statuesque woman is central to Margolin’s poetry, from the woman “with cold, marble breasts” who squanders her life “on garbage, on nothing” to the women of “my race,” who “grow like statues” in one of her finest poems, “Mayn shtam redt” (“My Race Speaks”). Whereas “My Race Speaks” suggests a self-imposed distance from the past, Old World, tradition conceived broadly, other poems are more daring in imagery. “On a Balcony” is about a lesbian couple, a risqué topic in Yiddish literature, but it ends on a patriarchal note of surveillance. The first stanza introduces the couple through sound and sight:

From distant summer flies to me the hot laughter
Of two small tender women.
They leaf through a picture book.
Their hands meet in longing.

Although daring in subject matter, the poem keeps the lesbian couple at a distance, “on a balcony,” scrutinized not only by the speaker (and reader) but also by a male gazer, whose “towering” presence distances the couple, as he “Over them powerfully towers […] / Like a splendid ornament out of place.”

A similarly out-of-place character, one of the few male characters in Margolin’s poems, the Gangster emerging through the tenement door is another authoritative figure, albeit this time objectified and almost out of this world, keenly related to early silent film apparitions: “In the tenement door, where down the flight of stairs / the darkness explodes a streetlamp’s eye, / his head, as if in a halo, appears.” The analogy between the Gangster and characters on the silver screen seems plausible, given the popularity of the gangster genre in the silent film preceding the
publication of Margolin’s volume in 1929. *Underworld* (1927), the first modern gangster film may have inspired Margolin’s poem. A poem of the secular, like most of Margolin’s poems, “The Gangster” is also about a geographically-contained, preeminently American character, loved and feared, who, with “eyes of metal on his stony face” and “devoid of memories,” awaits the next provocation of the tenement “street.”119

The Poem “My Race Speaks” is emblematic of Margolin’s search for poetic voice, daring in its defiance of traditional norms and received gender roles. The poem appeared in the first section of Margolin’s 1929 volume, under the rubric “Roots,” suggesting a beckoning to Old World tropes and landscapes which she also explores in poems such as “Odessa,” “Brisk (Brest-Litovsk),” or “My Home” (19). But the poem only seemingly traces her Old World-New World genealogy; instead, it collapses gendered roles and transgresses in the description of both men and women of “my race,” with men dressed in satin and velvet and statuesque women unleashing an “awesome desire” through their “twilight eyes.” “My race” is a mixture of unexpected inherited traits—including “a few / I am ashamed of”—and includes effeminate “men in damask and velvet” with “long, pale-silken faces” and “lusty, languishing lips”; “women like idols bedecked with diamonds” whose frail bodies of “weeping willows” and “withering veiled eyes” suggest an inevitable “dead desire;” and the “grand dames in chintz and linen” who “at dusk,” standing in the windows, “grow like statues” and, with renewed desire, they cast through “twilight eyes.”120

All of them, my race,
Blood of my blood,
Flame of my flame
Dead and living blended together,

Gloomy, grotesque, great,

Trample through me as through a dark house.

Trample with prayers and curses and wailing,

Rattle my heart like a copper bell,

My tongue clatters,

My own voice is a stranger—

My race speaks.

This stanza, a summation of the poem’s search for a dialogue between generations, does not offer any redeeming reconciliation, but accentuates the distance between generations and a redeeming dialogue never takes shape. The impossibility of inter-generational dialogue is the legacy the speaker receives as she tries to piece together a new poetic voice from fragments of Old and New World alike, in an attempt to find a voice of her own, as a stranger in her own language.

Notes

1 Arjun Appadurai, in his emphasis on alternative spaces (or “scapes”) for understanding the new global cultural economy beyond the center-periphery paradigm, offers a useful model for my own analysis of immigrant writing as an alternative space for the production of what I call, following Priscilla Wald, “unofficial stories” that constitute Americans. Appadurai also extends Benedict Anderson’s idea of the nation state as an imagined community in his idea of “diasporic public spheres.”

The Immigration and Nationality Act passed in 1965. Written in 1958 and initially published in 1964, after his assassination in 1963; John F. Kennedy’s *A Nation of Immigrants* was reissued in 2008, with an introduction by Edward M. Kennedy, who used this opportunity to address contemporary issues in Immigration reform and policy.

Handlin, 3.

The following historical studies have influenced my own reading of immigrant writing in the US. I will cite the more specialized works as my discussion unfolds. As my study as a whole makes clear, I have to limit my analysis to works by immigrants from Eastern and Southern European countries during the “Great Migration,” 1880s-1920s. See Guglielmo, Higham, and Jacobson. See also Ferraro, “Ethnicity and the Marketplace,” 380-406.

Recent Studies of American “Ethnic Modernism,” from Sollors to Konzett, have read the literature of “immigrant and ethnics” in the context of American modernism at large, but insufficiently solely in the context of immigrant literature, culture, and law. See Sollors, “Ethnic Modernism, 1910-1950” and Konzett. More trenchantly, Ferraro’s work, from *Ethnic Passages* to *Feeling Italian*, explores fictional depictions of immigration and mobility in the work of both first and second generation immigrant writers. Building on Sollors’s contributions to the study of ethnic literatures in the US, in *Ethnic Passages* Ferraro claims that “works of ethnic literature are more than exercises in group documentation and self-analysis” (6).


Higham calls this period “the tribal twenties.” *Strangers in the Land*, 264-99.

Roberta Simon.

11 Mizruchi’s study joins the work of Trachtenberg, Pfister, and Ferrarro in theorizing the emergence of the American “multicultural moment” at the turn of the twentieth century rather than in the ‘real’ multi-cultural moment of the 1960s.

12 See Barsh, 1-17.

13 At the end of Our Democracy and the American Indian, Laura Cornelius Kellogg makes a more optimistic claim: “It looks like a long way between Wall Street and the Reservations, but it is not very far” (103).


18 Lowe, 2.

19 Solomon, 175.

20 Lowell quotes his sonnet in a letter to George W. Smalley, April 17, 1882. See Howe, New Letters of James Russell Lowell, 266.

21 James, The American Scene, 117.

22 Ravage, An American in the Making, ii. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations are from the 1917 edition.

23 For a useful account of the “racial language” emerging as a response to New Immigration, see Roediger, 35-54.

La Sorte, 95.

Wonham, *Playing the Races*, 16.

*Judge* was *Puck*’s rival, founded in 1881. *Life* was founded in 1883.

Wonham, 141-42, 31, 33, and 34-35.

Butler, 171.

“*Puck* started as a German-language weekly, with an English version following in March, 1877. The sixteen-page magazine sold for ten cents. For several years the English language magazine operated at a loss and was subsidized by the German version. However, circulation gradually increased and by the early 1880s Keppler was selling over 80,000 copies a week.”


Keppler, “Welcome to All!”

The quota system was instituted in May 1921, when President Harding signed the first bill explicitly restricting European immigration and establishing a quota system for immigrant groups. Immigration was thus confined to 3% of the number of foreign born of each European nationality residing in the U S in 1910. Divine, 5-6.

Kraut makes a persuasive case for the relation between immigration restriction and public health concerns. For a government-sponsored study of excludable categories, see also *Medical Inspection of Immigrants* (1903). As Kraut’s analysis of the successive books of instructions for medical inspection shows, more categories emerged soon to amplify the number of “excludables.”
New hospitality discourses are embodied in the restriction acts starting with the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and culminating in the quota acts of 1921, 1924, and 1929. Ali Behdad, who considers the relation between hospitality discourses and the U.S. attitude toward immigrants, has argued that “[h]istorical amnesia toward immigration is paramount in the founding of the United States as a nation.” Behdad, 3.

John J. Appel and Selma Appel underscore the “symbolic duties” both Uncle Sam and Miss Columbia shared during the last decades of the nineteenth century, attributes assumed today by the Statue of Liberty: “Like other characters personifying nation-states, the lanky rural Yankee farmer, Uncle Sam, representing the government and its powers, evolved over a period of decades, winning the honor of personifying the United States only after a close struggle with Brother Jonathan, a tall, shrewd, impudent, rural New Englander. Unlike Uncle Sam, who personified legal, formal aspects of government, Miss Columbia, who had developed from a combination of Indian princess and classical goddess, stood for liberty, democracy, honesty, equality, and respect for human dignity” (19). Appel and Appel, 17-30.

Solomon, 152 and 175.

The other groups Ross mentions (190) include “the Levantines” (Syrians, Armenians, Arabs, and Turks), whose immigration numbers are not as threatening as those of Southern and East European. To Ross, the Levantines are, consequently, “thrifty, acquisitive, self-supportive.” About the Greeks he notes: “Money is the keynote of Greek immigration” (183). Besides calling the Portuguese “idle” and “thriftless,” Ross also charges that “No immigrants care so little for citizenship as the Portuguese” (181).

Aldrich, 57.


41 Here I echo similar concerns about African American representational politics expressed by Langston Hughes in “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” Hughes’ conclusion is especially relevant for my argument in its emphasis on resistance and endurance: “We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the mountain, free within ourselves” (694).

42 *The Education of Abraham Cahan*. Cahan did not publish anything else in English after his 1917 novel, but returned to his journalistic work in Yiddish, editing the *Forverts/Jewish Daily Forward* from 1903 until 1904. Between 1926 and 1931, Cahan wrote his memoirs in Yiddish, *Blätter von Mein Leben*. Cahan’s English-language journalism appears in Rischin.

43 What is really striking about Riis’s work, besides the sensationalism of its account and accompanying stories, is his distance from his subjects. Although a Dutch immigrant himself (but of “Nordic” fabric, for the purposes of his analysis), Riis transforms the subjects of his analysis into objectified characters, into types. The studied poses render the immigrants of the Lower East Side as rigid, frozen images that represent the whole population of the tenements. For reassessments of Riis’s superior gaze, see Orvell, *The Real Thing*, 95-97 and Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues*, 123.

44 See Klein 20 and 23.


46 Klein, *Foreigners*, x.

47 Barbara Solomon refers to immigrants as “between two worlds” whereas David Roediger refers to immigrants as “in betweens.” See Solomon, *Ancestors and Immigrants* and Roediger, *Working toward Whiteness.*

49 Hutner, ed. *Immigrant Voices*, xiv. This is a comprehensive collection of excerpts from representative narratives sharing the “becoming an American” theme, including both “old” and “new” immigrants from Europe, Central America, and Asia. See also Stavans, *Becoming American: Four Centuries of Immigrant Writing*.

50 See Crapsey, Brace, and Sternlicht.

51 See Kaplan 46 and Elliott.

52 Sanford Sternlicht, *The Tenement Saga: The Lower East Saga and Early Jewish American Writers*. Sternlicht offers introductory biographical and bibliographic references. Second generation Jewish writers whose literary work brought the Lower East Side to the American public’s attention (beyond the scope of my work) include: Samuel Ornitz, Marie Ganz Ben Hecht, Michael Gold, Samson Raphaelson, Maria Zaturenska, Louis Zukofsky, Sydney Taylor (writer of children’s books), Henry Roth, and Harry Roskolenko.

53 One of the early critics who wrote about early immigrant writing of consequence is John T. Flanagan, who singled out the following: O.E. Rolvaag, H.H. Boyesen, Waldemar Ager, Martha Ostenso (all Norwegian-born); Sophus K. Winther (Danish); David de Jong (Dutch); Louis Adamic (Slovenian); Stoyan Christowe (Macedonian); Ludwig Lewisohn (German); and Jewish writers such as Anzia Yiezierska (Polish) and Elias Tobenkin, Sholem Ash, Charles Angoff, and Abraham Cahan (Russian). See John T. Flanagan, “The Immigrant in Western Fiction,” 79-95.

54 Holt, xxix. As editor of *The Independent*, Holt also published around seventy-five autobiographies of “undistinguished Americans” from 1902 to 1906. As he explains in the same Note, “the aim of each autobiography was to typify the life of the average worker in some
particular vocation, and to make each story the genuine experience of a real person” (xxix).

Whereas writers from Southern and Eastern Europe are at the center of this dissertation, in the book project I would expand my analysis to other ethnic groups coming to the US during the Great Migration. Syrian American writer Abraham Rihbany—who, like Steiner, became a Christian minister—presents his memoir as “the story not of an individual but if a type. [...] A testimony to the unparalleled opportunities in America." Rihbany, viii.


56 As Hutner notes (255), Pupin’s book sold widely and was reprinted eleven times between 1923-1926. An Undergraduate at Columbia, Pupin returned there to teach and develop some of his major inventions in the fields of X-ray photography and long-distance communication.

57 Ferraro, Ethnic Passages, 1.

58 Karl May’s story of Winnetou (an Apache Indian character, modeled on the trope of the “noble savage” that fulfilled white imagination’s sense of difference and superiority) was popular in continental Europe and was translated into many languages.


60 I offer a working definition of “rituals of silent acceptance” in a previous chapter.

61 In defining the official stories of the “making of Americans” discourse, I draw from Priscilla Wald’s working definition of official stories as “narratives that surface in the rhetoric of nationalist movements and initiatives—legal, political, and literary” (2).
As Liptzin (89) observes, “although individual Yiddish-speaking Jews had found their way across the Atlantic ever since the Colonial Era, it was only in New York that they formed a significant group” even prior to the Civil War.

Until the nineteenth century, Hebrew was the only medium of scholarship and writing for the intellectual members of the Jewish communities (most of them in Europe). Yiddish poetry, however, is not a new genre. Historians document that Yiddish poetry began to appear as early as the 14th century in the form of poems retelling biblical tales. Modern Yiddish poetry, unlike its Hebrew counterpart, attempts to create a literary language “out of a common idiom and several dialects seen as excessively fluid.” The use of Yiddish—the language of the streets for many—and its transformation into a legitimate literary language preoccupied early Yiddish writers, as Howe, Wisse and Shmeruk suggest: “Early modern Hebrew poetry written in Eastern Europe at this time tends to be overloaded with grandiose rhetoric, whereas the Yiddish work of Mendele and Sholem Aleichem is rich with earthy flavors, the street aromas of common speech.” See Howe, Wisse, and Shmeruk, 11, 13.

Benjamin Harshav attributes this idea to Chaim Zhitovsky, a famous Yiddish author and theoretician of Jewish nationalism. See Harshav, Yiddish author and theoretician of Jewish nationalism. See Harshav, ed. Sing, Stranger! xxiv.

Sholem Aleichem is typically recognized for his pioneering use of Yiddish for aesthetic effects. Although famous mainly for his prose, he “raises colloquial Yiddish to a high level of stylization, comparable to what Mark Twain does for nineteenth-century American speech.” See Howe, Wisse, and Shmeruk, 14.

The Introspectivists in particular, as we shall see, had a clearly-formulated aesthetic program and manifesto defining their poetic and literary parameters. Signed by the movement’s
main literatti (Jacob Glatshteyn, A. Leyeles, and N. Minkov), the manifesto, “Introspectivism [Manifesto of 1919],” is reprinted in Harshav and Harshav, 774-84.


68 Ludvig, “Sing, Stranger” [1924]. Sing, Stranger, 5-6.

69 Harshav, “Introduction.” Sing, Stranger, xxix.

70 I quote the term “dissimilation” from Balibar’s public lecture at the University of Illinois, "'Biopolitics': The New Behemoth?” sponsored by The Unit for Criticism and Interpretive Theory, October 13, 2009.

71 In the last two decades, the work of the Longfellow Institute at Harvard University has promoted non-English writing in the US, through both bi-lingual editions and critical studies (http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~lowinus/). The translations I use in this section are from two volumes of Yiddish poetry translated by Benjamin and Barbara Harshav: American Yiddish Poetry: A Bilingual Anthology and Sing, Stranger! A Century of American Yiddish Poetry: A Historical Anthology. I also rely on The Penguin Book of Modern Yiddish Verse, eds. Irving Howe, Ruth R. Wisse, and Khone Shmeruk, the work of Yiddish translators and theorists working in Comparative Literature, as well as translations of individual volumes of poetry, such as Drunk from the Bitter Truth: The Poems of Anna Margolin, translated by Kumove.

72 My choice of the male pronoun (“he”) is deliberate, to signal the overwhelmingly male authorship of Yiddish poetry, with a few exceptions (Anna Margolin and Celia Dropkin) I discuss later in the section. Hellerstein suggests that women poets “wrote in the margins of Yiddish culture.” See “From ‘Ich’ to ‘Zikh’: A Journey from ‘I’ to ‘Self’ in Yiddish Poems by Women,” 115.

73 Idem, 113-43.
74 Howe, *The World of Our Fathers*.

75 Trachtenberg, 141.

76 The first book of Yiddish verse in the US was written by a reform rabbi, Jacob Sobel. Howe, *The World of Our Fathers*, 431.

77 Howe (439) also shows how Reisen’s poetry bridges the Eastern European Yiddish tradition to an emerging (new) tradition in America: “The anti-heroism, the anti-Prometheanism of Yiddishkeit, as it arose in eastern Europe and persisted in the immigrant world of America, found in Reisen’s poems its classical expression. The sanctity of the poor, the celebration of dos kleine meshele (the little man), the urgency and pathos of revolt, the transience of beauty, the shy flowering of a puritan romanticism, the ingathering familiar—these are Reisen’s themes.”

78 Harshav, “Preface,” *Sing, Stranger!*, xxx.

79 Ruven Ludvig/Reuben Ludwig, who first published poems with Di Yunge and then joined The Introspectivists, died very young (1895-1926), after battling tuberculosis since high school. In 1918 he moved from New York to Arizona, then lived in New Mexico, California, and Colorado. His *Collected Poems* appeared posthumously in 1927.


81 Glatshteyn, 788.

82 1907-1909 marked a turning point in the history of Yiddish poetry in general. A notable, albeit short-lived literary magazine, *Literarishe monatsfrītn*, was published in Vilnius, Lithuania, calling attention to the production of literary works in Yiddish, independent of any political formations. See the “Introduction” to *The Penguin Book of Modern Yiddish Verse*, 27.

83 “In the Golden Land.” Harshav, *Sing, Stranger!*, 264. Harshav explains that “Golden” means “endearing, warm and good.”
This new embrace of sensibility in poetry is somewhat at odds with novelistic disdain for sentimentality (and high modernism’s own repudiation of sentimentality). Howe quotes Yiddish novelist Opatashu, who believed that sentimentality “had to be smoked out. Among our Yiddish writers, the trees swayed too often in afternoon prayer, the sky was too often enveloped in a prayer shawl.” See Howe, *The World of Our Fathers*, 443.


Howe, *The World of Our Fathers*, 442. See also Trachtenberg.

H. Leyvik, 7.

I allude here to T.S. Eliot’s famous modernist essay, “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (1919). I do not know yet whether any of the Yiddish poets read Eliot’s pronouncements on American modernism, though they probably did; but even if they did, Eliot’s unmasked anti-Semitism was probably better known to them. In his published lectures at the University of Virginia, *After Strange Gods*, Eliot talks about the dangers of the “free-thinking Jews.” See Blair, “Modernism and the Politics of Culture,” 160.

Mani Leib, 138.

Idem, 30-31.

Idem, 33.


Ibid., 774


Qtd. in Harshav, *Sing Stranger* 781.

97 Sing Stranger, 777.


100 I discuss this idea at length in Chapter 6, where I build on the recent work of Susan K. Harris.


102 Novershtern attributes these words to Yiddish poet Reuven Ayzland, who would later become Margolin’s lifelong partner in the United States, and who enthusiastically supported her literary work. In this sentence he expresses the reception of Margolin’s poetry by her male peers, pointing out that the “experienced hand” writing them was thought to be masculine. The correspondence between Margolin and Ayzland is qtd. in Kumove, xvi.

103 Qtd. in Mann, 501.

104 One of the best well-known aspects of her personal life, which would later influence her poetry, was her abandonment of an infant son in Palestine with husband Moshe Stavski-Stavi, a Yiddish and Hebrew writer.

105 She signed her fiction with Khave Gros or Khane Barut, and her journalistic work with Sofia Brandt and Clara Levin. The source of her poetic pen name is unclear. Idem, 435.

106 Kumove’s study is useful for understanding Margolin’s politics, which influenced her later work, especially her poetry: “She never saw the child again and never wrote about him. Reuven Ayzland [her partner] notes in his memoir that she kept a hidden photograph of herself
with her infant son in her lap; he relates an incident in which she became hysterical and physically ill when she chanced upon this photograph” (xv). I do not want to speculate on the relevance of this personal episode for her poetry; I merely want to suggest that other layers of displacement and tragedy marked Yiddish women’s work—much like their male peers’—as they tried to build artistic careers. Margolin is perhaps a radical example, but useful nonetheless in complicating and broadening our understanding of Yiddish poetry in New York.

107 A critical edition of this volume appeared in Jerusalem in 1991, along with a few unpublished poems, in an edition prepared by Novershtern. As Kumove suggests, “most of what we know about her comes from a memoir by Ayzland, From Our Springtime (fun undzer friling) and more than 200 letters at Yivo” (xiv). Margolin also wrote short stories, which she published under many pseudonyms, hence the difficulty of collecting her entire work.

108 Ezra Korman edited Yiddishe Dichterin: Anthologye, an anthology of Yiddish women writers, in 1928. For excerpts from the original edition see the page from The National Yiddish Book Center at http://www.yiddishbookcenter.org/+10358 January 6, 2009. Katherine Hellerstein is very critical of this anthology and notes that it was “the only collection of Yiddish poems by women,” but which is “hardly complete or representative of what had been published in the subsequent decades.” See Hellerstein, “Translating as a Feminist,” 194.

109 Kumove, xix-xx.


112 Mann offers a useful discussion of Margolin’s “visual poetics,” 501-36.


114 Mann, 502.

Trans. Novershtern, 443-44.

The first poem also serves as the poet’s epitaph, on Margolin’s gravestone in the Workmen’s Circle Cemetery in Carmel, New York. The first stanza reads:

She with the cold and marble breasts

and the narrow light hands,

she squandered her life

on garbage, on nothing. (Transl. Mann, 505)

Novershtern translates the poem as “My Ancestors Speak” whereas Harshav and Harshav translate it as “My Race Speaks.” The differences in the translations make for an interesting comparison, which is beyond the scope of this section. See Abraham Novershtern, 454-55 and Harshav, Sing, Stranger, 651-52. Kumove also translates the poem as “My Ancestors Speak,” 13.


Idem, 450-51.

I am using Harshav and Harshav’s translation of “My Race Speaks” but there are subtle differences in their translation from Novershtern’s translation. “My Race Speaks,” Harshav, Sing Stranger, 651-52.
CHAPTER 6

“BUNDLES, FRAGRANT CHEESE, AND UNIMAGINABLE SAUSAGES”: IMMIGRANT REPRESENTATION IN M. E. RAVAGE’S AN AMERICAN IN THE MAKING AND ABRAHAM CAHAN’S THE RISE OF DAVID LEVINSKY

6.1. An American in the Making: M.E. Ravage and a New Immigrant’s Quest of Cultural Citizenship

The adoptive American has always been and will always remain a composite American.


An American in the Making: The Life Story of an Immigrant (1917), Marcus E. Ravage’s memoir, is an unconventional autobiography about becoming an American. It shows the tension between the Old and New Worlds, the alien and the citizen, the diasporic and the local, and the centrifugal and centripetal forces defining migration and immigrant subjectivity. It is also a well-written autobiography and a representative piece of new immigrant writing; its introspection, social critique and self-reflexivity share more with early twenty-first-century immigrant autobiographies than its early twentieth-century counterparts. Well received when it was published, it brought Ravage, according to family legend, an invitation to breakfast with President Wilson at the White House. Renowned sociologist Robert E. Park, who reviewed the book for the American Journal of Sociology in 1918, praised it not only for being “a valuable source-book on the subject of the immigrant” but also for the “self-assertion” suggestive of “a
dawning racial consciousness.”

Ravage’s interest in U.S. racial politics was not accidental and certainly not limited to his memoir. Other reviews of the book praised its indebtedness to Ravage’s “actual” experience, which the publishers were ready to endorse: “The publishers assure us that the tale is true,” concludes the reviewer in The American Review of Reviews.

Although some of the early reviews of An American in the Making tended to address the public’s appetite for “real” stories, responding to the market’s and its readership’s demand for real life stories—a genre, as I argue throughout this chapter, the immigrant writer was more or less coerced into—others did not shy away from noting its esthetic merits. A writer for The Unpopular Review, for instance, concluded his assessment by saying: “As moving as the best of novels, this story of actual experience is something more than a mere personal narrative.” Similarly, another reviewer placed Ravage’s work in the company of fellow Jewish immigrant writer Mary Antin—only with a twist: “This book is as fascinating as any novel I have read in five years. It has a vitality that most biography lacks. Its sociological sidelights upon the life of our newer population even Miss Antin never was able so vividly to give.”

This enthusiastic early reception establishes Ravage’s memoir as both responding to contemporaneous sociological studies of immigration and offering esthetic delights beyond the slumming impulse of middle-class tourism in search of the ghetto’s thrilling danger, tempered by the safety of a middle-class tourism economy. In fact, Ravage’s introduction addresses potential recreational slummers directly—“you fortunate ones who have never had to come to America.” Ravage ridicules their spectatorial delight and fleeting sympathy, reimagining the tragic impulse and aura surrounding the passive slummers’ gaze: “No doubt when you go slumming, you reflect sympathetically on the drudgery and the misery of the immigrant’s life. But poverty and hard toil are not tragic things” (ii).
In four central episodes, *An American in the Making* recreates the immigrant’s journey from a *shtetl* in Vaslui, Romania, to New York’s Lower East Side, the American Midwest (Missouri and Illinois), and the return to New York. The first two sections introduce “the alien at home” and the “alien abroad” in a neatly calculated contrast positioning the greenhorn between physical and mental landscapes, with their “ventures and adventures” and “purifications.” The last two sections, “The Education of an American” and “America of the Americans,” establish a telling (and, I argue, deliberate) contrast between “alien” and “American,” offering a subtle (albeit forced) rhetorical transition from “the tragedy of readjustment” to “the romance of readjustment” in the immigrant’s transformation into an American. Specifically, this rhetorical move to collapse strategically the distance between “tragedy” and “romance” (in just a few pages) suggests both the limits of the immigrant autobiographical genre and its predictable conventionality. As in Mary Antin’s *The Promised Land* (1912), set at first in Polotzsk, Russia, Ravage begins his story in the Old World, positioning Vaslui as the *axis mundi*, the center of family, communal, Jewish, and national life. Unlike Antin, whose narrative is consistently read as a story of assimilation and successful Americanization—“I was born, I have lived, and I have been made over” (1)—Ravage critically assesses the cost of assimilation and the impossibility of ever being “made over.” At the end of his memoir, when he “becomes one of them” (266) nominally (a legal citizen but a culturally distant citizen), Ravage’s conclusion is similar to fellow Jewish writer and journalist Abraham Cahan’s. At the end of Cahan’s popular novel, *The Rise of David Levinsky* (1917), Levinsky muses: “I cannot escape from my old self. My past and my present do not comport well” (518). Like Cahan’s Levinsky, Ravage concedes—“I was indeed a man without a country” (264)—expressing one of the greatest sorrows of the
transplanted experience, a rootlessness that makes possible the constant crossings of many mental landscapes in the immigrant’s search for cultural citizenship.8

Cultural citizenship is a useful concept to use in the new immigrant context, especially when manual and intellectual labor are clearly divorced in the American imaginary. Intellectual labor and thus participation in the adoptive country’s cultural field(s) are simply at odds with the imagined work of assimilated and Americanized immigrants. As a political scientist put it as early as 1906, and as many well-meaning citizens perhaps understood this concept in the first two decades of last century, “‘Americanization’ is assimilation in the United States. It is the process by which immigrants are transformed into Americans. It is not the mere adoption of American citizenship, but the actual raising of the immigrant to the American economic, social, and moral standard of life.”9 The process of “total” transformation, the early assumption of the Americanization campaign, dictates the adoption of American economic, social, and moral values. Cultural citizenship and cultural capital, on the other hand, are missing terms in the Americanization lexicon. (Unless, of course, they are subsumed to the “moral standard of life,” in which case immigrant didacticism or religious discourse would be the norm.)

As a “man without a country,” although an American citizen de jure by the end of his Americanization journey, Ravage yearns for an American cultural citizenship he can only access—like Cahan’s David Levinsky—through study and imitation. Only toward the end of his memoir does Ravage declare an end to his rootlessness—“I had become one of them. I was no longer a man without a country. I was an American” (266). This sudden transformation reveals, rather, the immigrant’s negotiation of the legal and social text with the demands of the literary market. Even a forced happy ending, as the logic of immigrant narrative goes, is better than a pessimistic closure to the Americanization journey. Who would read a loser’s story, and a
foreign loser’s story at that? Ravage’s autobiographer yearns for cultural citizenship while professing his naturalization and legal citizenship—“I had become one of them”—and while deploying immigrant autobiographical conventions, where the unwritten norms assume a complete transformation into an American. In fact, legal citizenship is not necessarily a prerequisite for cultural citizenship, as Ravage concedes early in his story. It is the search for cultural belonging in a new landscape where his otherness and physical and linguistic difference are the main markers of his identity. This search propels the immigrant narrative beyond the conventionality of its genre (that usually assumes a fast and unproblematic adjustment to New World orders). Ravage subtly repositions the immigrant’s discursive power by unmaking himself from an “alien” into a subject, whose “inherited identity” does not melt (or “blend”) into the “soul of an alien people”:

I am not talking about taking out citizen’s papers. It cannot be too often repeated that the shedding of one nationality and the assumption of another is something more than a matter of perfunctory formalities and solemn oaths to a flag and a constitution. Vowing allegiance to the state is one thing. But renouncing your priceless inherited identity and blending your individual soul with the soul of an alien people is quite another affair.

(200) [my emphasis]

Ravage’s conclusion differs tellingly from other contemporaneous immigrant autobiographies in that his search for cultural citizenship takes primacy over legal citizenship, especially considering the major steps toward laws restricting immigration in 1917 and the accentuation of American nativism with the US entering the Great War. At the same time, whereas the
immigrant is often seen in his “alienism” in Americanization discourses, through the stigma of his visible, audible, and physical markers, Ravage’s reversal of subject positions (alien vs. native) suggests the possibility of access to cultural citizenship against the odds.

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Although readily and easily interpreted as a story of a “thoroughly Americanized” immigrant by Ravage’s contemporaries, 11 An American in the Making defies the conventions of the immigrant genre (as I discuss the genre in the previous chapter) by drawing attention to the process of assimilation as always already incomplete, the impossibility of total absorption and erasure of racial and ethnic difference, the pain and “tragedy” of the migrant subject (200), and the constant negotiation of the various registers and languages that ground him in a perpetual rhyzomatic stasis-in-motion, a rhetorical characteristic of the immigrant narrative.

At the same time, Ravage’s memoir introduces a crucial and innovative concept in immigrant literary history—“Americans in the making”—a productive paradigm that helps us understand the multi-directionality of various trajectories of subjectivity in immigrant literature, particularly in Americanization narratives. Specifically, Ravage’s concept challenges the hermeneutics of Americanization discourses and practices, the immigrant rituals of silent acceptance, and shows how an immigrant writer can become an active participant in his own “making” as an American. At the same time, Ravage’s paradigm offers a revisionist take on the Americanization story, “unmaking” the official story of becoming American. Challenging dominant discourses and regimes of “making Americans,” as well as the expectations and conventions of immigrant narratives, Ravage rewrites the immigrant story with irreverence, becomes an American on his own terms, and draws attention to the limits of the immigrant’s coveted legal citizenship and his imminent displacement. He offers an alternative space of
immigrant belonging by embracing, instead, the promises of American cultural citizenship. In the process, Ravage’s “making” and “unmaking” as an American becomes a “battle for America” (258), a “spiritual adventure of the most volcanic variety” (200).

6.1.1 The Alien Abroad

Marcus Eli Ravage (1884-1965) was one of the best-known Romanian Jewish immigrant writers in the US at the turn of the twentieth century. Born Marcus Eli Revici in Barlad, Romania on June 13, 1884, son of Jehuda Loeb and Bella Rosenthal, Ravage emigrated to the US in 1900, following a massive wave of immigration to North America, and settled in New York City: “in the year of my departure from Vaslui America had become, as it were, the fashionable place to go” (5). Many odd jobs later, he won a fellowship in English at the University of Missouri, where he graduated with a bachelor’s degree in 1909. In 1910 he graduated with an A.M. in English from the University of Illinois (where he matriculated as Max Ravitch). He attended Columbia University from 1910-1911 and again from 1912-1913 (after a short intermezzo as instructor at the Kansas State Agricultural College). In his alumnus records at the University of Illinois, his occupation is listed as that of “author” (his father’s occupation is “merchant”); according to his ledger, he averaged 90 (out of 100 points) in most subjects. Although he would become a successful journalist and writer in France, his lowest grades at Illinois came in Old French Readings. Besides An American in the Making (1917), his major publication in the US, which has already seen four later editions, Ravage wrote historical and political studies, including The Malady of Europe (1923), a study of European politics after World War I; The Story of Teapot Dome (1924), a book about the Harding administration.
political scandal; *Five Men of Frankfort* (1929), the story of the Rothschilds, well received and translated into half a dozen languages; and *Empress Innocence* (1931), a biography of French Empress Marie Louise. While a European contributor for *The Nation*, Ravage wrote both fiction and non-fiction for an array of magazines, including *Harper’s*, *The New Republic*, *Century Illustrated Magazine*, and *Puck*. He died in 1965 in Grasse, Southern France, at the age of 81, after a brief illness. His *New York Times* obituary described him as a “Romanian-born American author” who “came to New York’s Lower East Side at the age of sixteen, and worked as a peddler, bartender and in a sweatshop as he struggled to learn English in night school. His story of his experiences as an immigrant, *An American in the Making*, was widely used in high schools.”

6.1.2 The Exodus

Young Max Ravage arrived in the U.S. in 1900, at age sixteen, coming into an insignificant immigrant group, Romanian Americans (old spelling Rumanian), and finding a home among the Jewish fellow immigrants in New York’s Lower East Side. Immigration from Romania is an under-written chapter in the history of immigration to the US mainly because, numerically, Romanian immigrants were fewer than many other nationalities from Eastern Europe—fewer than 300,000 immigrated before 1924—but also because until 1898 they were lumped together with “people from other countries” at the ports of entry into the US. Similarly, the English ports and the Board of Trade did not classify Romanian immigrants—many of them Jews—to England separately, listing them alongside Poles and Russians. The anti-semitism meeting Jewish settlers in London’s East End (at a time when British borders were still open for
immigration) was in many ways similar to its American counterpart. Ravage’s memoir suggests, besides the economic reasons that motivated Romanian immigrants to leave their country, that they also responded to the lure of an imagined new continent, nurtured by the aggrandizing stories of the returned and the utopian letters of those writing to their families back home. Couza, “the prophet from America,” a presumed millionaire, “more revered than a king,” who returns briefly to his hometown, inspires young Ravage’s departure: “I had caught a glorious vision of America where any man might be a millionaire, an ambassador, or a President.”

Besides the lure of the new continent and the economic opportunities it promised, Romanians also migrated to the US for religious and political reasons (to escape persecution and military service). Parts of the country were still under Austro-Hungarian occupation until the reunification of the three Romanian provinces in 1918 (a year after Ravage’s memoir saw print). Before World War I, most immigrants first headed toward German ports like Hamburg and Bremen, sometimes literally walking to get to Germany, as they could not afford other means of transportation, then boarding third class and paying around 300-500 crowns. (One of Ravage’s chapters in his memoir, previously published as a story in Harper’s, was suggestively titled “To America on Foot,” thus introducing American readers to a different version of immigrant mobility.) Abraham Cahan describes these “walking parties” of immigrants to America in a piece for The New York Commercial Advertiser as “a demonstration calculated to attract the attention of the civilized world to the anti-Jewish policy of Rumania.” At the same time, this collective migration and parading through both Romanian and other European towns and villages also elicited the sympathy and (often) assistance of fellow Jews in the US, including the United Hebrew Charities and the Rumanian Immigrant Society. One of the Jewish immigrants whom
Cahan interviewed for his portrayal of the “Rumanian Exodus” in Lincoln Steffens’ Commercial Advertiser concludes his spirited account of the persecution of the Romanian Jews with a commitment to help, in turn, those left behind, “to be faithful and devoted to one another and to our unhappy brethren in Rumania till they, too, have shaken from their feet the dust of our beloved mother land, which has become worse than a stepmother to us” (132).

Jewish immigration from Romania is a chapter in American immigration and Jewish immigration history that is still dramatically missing from U.S. immigration history. Jewish immigrants from Romania contributed to the intellectual history of European Jewish new immigrants, and, like immigrants from other countries, many of them became prolific writers and public intellectuals who wrote persuasively and courageously about their adventures in Americanization. Deprived of civic and economic rights, Jews lived on Romanian territory long before it became a country. Although the Romanian Constitution of 1866 excluded Jewish civic and political rights, many Romanian Jews fought in the War of Independence of 1877, to little public recognition. Furthermore, although Romania, along with other European countries, signed the Treaty of Berlin in 1878—which granted Jews full civil and political rights—the Romanian government constantly violated the treaty, bringing Romanian Jews to deep poverty (e.g., in 1884 a decree passed that prohibited Jewish entrepreneurs from peddling in the cities). This type of persecution was followed by more acts of brutality and genocide, such as the 1899 pogrom organized in the city of Iassy (where I went to college in the late 1990s).

Other local atrocities included the expulsion of Jewish people from entire districts and violent tirades against Jews in the Romanian parliament. Under these circumstances, Irving Howe concludes, there “followed a remarkable episode in which Jews, acting through improvised committees, began to leave the country as fusgeyer (walkers, wayfarers) who
tramped hundreds of miles across the country” (34). Ravage’s memoir also recounts “the organizing committee, affiliated with organizations in Vienna, Berlin, Paris, London,” which helped those going “to America on foot.” Ravage casts his retrospective glance on “the marching group which had started out as an almost grotesque, childish fancy of merely local scope,” but which “in short time evolved into a world movement, with agencies in the principal capitals of Europe and even in New York itself.” And so, “one fine morning, Rumania awoke to hear the startling news that the Walking Movement had begun” (An American in the Making 41, 32). The Barlad fussgeyer—which Ravage became part of in 1900—“met with fervent receptions in town after town; Jewish communities greeted them as pioneers, and ordinary Romanian folk were often friendly, too” (Howe 35). This public display of immigrant bodies on the way to the New World—on foot—not only imposed itself on the anti-semitic Romanian public sphere at the beginning of the twentieth century but also pointed to the physical and economic distance between the Old World and the New, and the immigrant’s determination to traverse this distance, if necessary, “on foot.” Studies of immigrant literature usually point to the “trauma” of the immigrant’s journey, a subject that has received due critical attention;25 but I’d like to suggest that the fussgeyer movement offers the immigrants unprecedented agency over their own migration. As the title of Ravage’s memoir suggests, the immigrant becomes an “American in the making,” a subject aware of the costs and transformations of Americanization but at the same time an active participant in his own making into an American. “Walking” to America is only part of this incomplete transformation.

The Annual Reports of the Commissioner General of Immigration list 1881 as the starting year of immigration from Romania, with a grand total of 11 immigrants, although the first wave of Jewish immigration from Romania to the US was recorded in 1872.26 Romanians
continued their exodus to the United States in small numbers before 1890. In the nineteenth-century, two Romanian immigrants were fairly known to the American newspaper-reading public: Nicolae Dunca, a soldier who fought for the Union and died in the Civil War, and George Pomutz, who served in the 15th Volunteer Regiment of Iowa during the Civil War and was promoted to Brigadier-General at the end of the war. (President Andrew Johnson appointed him Consul General of the United States to Petrograd, where he died in 1882.) Between 1881 and World War I, 75,043 Romanian Jews were admitted into the US, almost thirty percent of the Jewish population of Romania. Romanian immigration increased after 1901, reaching its peak during the decade 1901-1910. These immigrants settled primarily in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Detroit, Cleveland, Pittsburgh and smaller cities. Ravage records this moment of increasing immigration he became part of as a form of hyperbolic national exodus but concedes that the fashionable New York [“Nev York,” in the immigrant lexicon] was one of the main targets for immigrants: “[A]bout the year 1900 there was what, to my eyes appeared to be a national migration from Rumania to New York, a migration which seemed literally to include well-nigh the whole Romanian race.”

Romanian Jews immigrated to the US earlier than their fellow Christian nationals for reasons more pressing than mere economic motivation, including freedom and naturalization privileges (which granted them civic and political rights). Becoming an American citizen was a real possibility, and it took five years from the time of arrival. The Romanian government did not oppose or interfere with this wave of Jewish migration to the US, as Ravage records:

It stood by idly while the caravans kept moving on, apparently only too happy to be rid of an element of its population for which it had always entertained a quite frank antipathy.
In the messianic year of 1900 the bars were unaccountably let down, and every person not of military age who made an application for a passport was cheerfully sped on his way by the officials and granted the document with the minimum of cost and almost no trouble at all. (*An American in the Making* 28-29)

6.1.3 The Immigrant Press and the Immigrant Imaginary

As one of main institutions forging a sense of immigrant (imagined and real) community in the U.S. at the turn of the twentieth century, the immigrant press helped preserve a sense of belonging and what sociologist Robert E. Park calls “the national feeling” of the many immigrant groups (55), in a familiar language, and with a familiar imagined readership: “In America as in Europe, it is language and tradition, rather than political allegiance that unites the foreign populations” (5). According to Park, in 1919 the immigrant peoples in the US spoke at least forty-three languages and dialects (3), responding to what he calls “a human desire for expression in [the immigrant’s] mother tongue” (11). The *Cambridge History of American Literature* of 1917-1921 dedicated a good portion of its pages to “non-English writings.” The recent recovery of immigrant writers in the US, writing and (sometimes) publishing in a variety of national languages, expands the corpus of American literatures and raises questions about what constitutes “American” and “American literature” during the decades that this project studies. On the other hand, the transatlantic circulation of US immigrant publications and their dissemination in the country of origin made the lure of the promised land more accessible to potential immigrants in their very homes, in a language they could read or understand (literacy varied with each immigrant group). The American publications in national languages available to
new immigrants before their departure for the New World functioned as a reassuring compass, a promise that the unknown new continent could become accessible in the old language.

The popularity and wide circulation of Yiddish newspapers often facilitated the encounter of Jewish immigrants with American topics in the old country, before their departure. Ravage captures this moment of the immigrant’s puzzling encounter with the immigrant press at home: “The American newspapers puzzled us considerably. We had expected that they would naturally be in English, but we discovered with surprise that for the most part they were printed in our own familiar Yiddish.”

On the other hand, the letters that Couza, “the Prophet from America,” sends home to Vaslui, recounting his adventures in the US, become “in the truest sense” the Vaslui community’s “first newspaper, for they contained the only intelligence we cared to hear about” (7). Besides this second-hand journalism, as Ravage records, the Jewish Romanian regional newspaper also emerged at the time when the movement “To America on Foot” gained prominence. One of the main goals of the regional newspaper was, therefore, to keep citizens informed about new developments in the immigration to the US: “Hitherto Vaslui had been content to get its news second-hand. Journalism was a thing unknown [in 1900], not only in Vaslui, but in all other cities of Romania except Bucharest. […] The mere thought of New York had somehow in a moment of time raised us to the level of Western civilization” (41). The excitement of emigration generated new creative energies, appealing to both highbrow and lowbrow readers, who “eagerly devoured every issue from the first word to the last” (42). Before leaving his home country, Ravage witnessed also the emergence of an “immense burst of literary and artistic fire” (43), a fire that would sustain his literary disposition despite the obstacles of hard labor, adaptation, and survival.
Along with addressing the urgency of acquiring new information in the US and responding to basic survival needs, the burgeoning immigrant press in the US offered a balance between the spoken and the written language, making information more accessible to the immigrants, who often faced new literacy challenges in both native and English languages. The immigrant press itself became, therefore, “an organ of speech” (12). Romanian newspapers were published in the US as early as 1905. (The Romanian and America were the most influential Romanian newspapers, with large readerships and prominent literary contributors from the old country). Different immigrant readerships demanded different agendas from their publications. For instance, the first volume of the Americanization Bulletin, published in October 1918, was optimistic that the many foreign “almanachs” published in the US “will soon include Americanization propaganda in their texts.” Before the institutionalization of this vehicle of Americanization, the foreign immigrant “almanachs” aimed at connecting the immigrant with old world memories, working more as physical and emotional compasses and resources than propaganda for Americanization. One of the foreign language “almanachs” in the US, The Romanian, appeared in Cleveland, Ohio, home to many Romanian immigrants. A 1912 poem in The Romanian, “D’Ale Noastre din America/Our American Stories” by Vaida Raceanul, captures the “tragedy of readjustment” that Ravage sketches in his narrative. The amateur worker-poet starts by paying homage to his adoptive country, where he is treated “like a gentleman” (first stanza); after enumerating the long list of New World accomplishments and privations, the speaker ends by lamenting his transplanted life, rootlessness, lack of friends and family, as well as personal worthlessness: “Wretched America / I used to be somebody / Till your road I took.”
The Yiddish press was perhaps more successful in connecting the Old World with the New than any other foreign-language press in the U.S., thus offering an alternative space where immigrants could feel “at home.” At the same time, new immigrant writers (like Ravage) often viewed the reliance on Yiddish as a drawback to Americanization, as many immigrants reading the Forverts/The Jewish Daily Forward, published in Yiddish, for instance, learned to become Americans—but in a language that to Americans was a foreign language. The largest immigrant community in the 1920s, the Jewish immigrant readership included a wide range of people, from the village artisan, the city merchant, the peddler, to the intellectual.” For many Jewish immigrants, the Yiddish newspaper provided “their only education.” But the Yiddish newspaper was also “a literary journal, printing short stories, novels, articles on popular science, theology, and politics” (Park 92-93). From 1872 to 1917, when Ravage’s memoir was published, at least one hundred and fifty Yiddish publications circulated in New York City alone (Park 89). Yet, for Ravage, Yiddish is both liberating and constraining.

While the new immigrant found solace in the comfort of the Old World language, the reliance on Yiddish (the language of the Jewish ghetto and Old World memories) often precluded the acquisition of English and the access to “real” American stories, but nonetheless remained the Jewish immigrant’s unseen link with a culture and a way of life impossible to replicate in the New World ghetto. English acquisition, on the other hand, became coterminous with overcoming greenhorn-ess. Donald Weber calls this “the out-greening” (an oish-greening, a “washing out”) of the immigrant character in his/her attempt to repress Old World memories, an interpretation I will follow in the next section devoted to the immigrant novel. This is a necessary step in the immigrant’s liberation from the burden of public ridicule—or the stigma of “bundles” and “unimaginable sausages”—as I point out in the previous section. For Ravage, “A
greenhorn on Rivington Street did not dare open his mouth in English unless he wanted to bring down upon himself a whole torrent of ridicule and critical assistance” (102). But the greenhorn often picked up the pen and, armed with a growing English vocabulary (and often Harkavy’s dictionary), started inventing his own making as an American.

6.1.4 The Immigrant’s America and the Challenges of (Literary) Genre

I have argued at the beginning of this section that An American in the Making is an unconventional autobiography. To sustain this line of reasoning, I would like to turn now to the conventions of “typical” immigrant autobiography to show how the coercion of the immigrant literary genre functioned like the coercive demands of Americanization as a whole. And like the demands of assimilation, the demands of the relatively new genre of immigrant life stories in the first decades of the twentieth century reshaped not only the genre as such but also readerly expectations of immigrant writing (and often public dismissiveness). I hope that this analysis will point to the conventionality of a literary genre informed by both its historical and its literary historical moment (turn of the twentieth-century realist writing and an emerging immigrant genre) and the tradition of American autobiography, and move the analysis of immigrant autobiography beyond the structuralist moment (initiated by the groundwork of William Q. Boelhower). For the purposes of this section, I restrict my analysis to Ravage’s memoir (which belongs to the immigrant autobiography corpus I have discussed in this chapter so far), but I also acknowledge the variety of genres immigrant writing produced in both English and national languages. I hope to draw attention to the necessary critical intervention in mapping out immigrant writing as not only (1) complicit with but also (2) a counter-narrative to
Americanization discourses disseminated through both the immigrant and the American popular press.

According to Boelhower, immigrant autobiography “must organize two cultural systems: a culture of the present and the future and a culture of memory, into a single model.” These temporal dimensions structure the macrotext of immigrant autobiography, which, according to Boelhower and other structuralist critics, tells “the single story”—or what Russian formalists call the *fabula*—of immigration. Moreover, the immigrant protagonist has a major function: “to conjure up the new world” (8) while inhabiting two “selves” and “worlds” (12). As the immigrant wanders in the New World, “he learns its rules” and thus learns the new “cultural grammar” of the “host culture” (15). But the immigrant actant, cautions Boelhower, is also a trickster: “welcomed in on the basis of his appeal to a mythic language, [he] […] smuggles into the house of American autobiography a Pandora’s box of uncontrollable textual variants” (19).

While this interpretation assumes a collective narrative logic and similarity of immigrant experience and ethnic and racial background, reminiscent of the post-World War II decades of immigration scholarship, it places immigrant autobiography in the legitimate “house of American autobiography.” Here Boelhower’s point is well taken, and his taxonomy productively calls attention to the similarities immigrant autobiographies share formally: Old World and New World protagonist; dream and reality; anticipation and memory; journey and contact; separation and contrast, etc. At the same time, Boelhower’s categories are too confining in trapping the immigrant story within a single mold—albeit with “textual variations” (which could stand for different ethnicities of immigrants). Calling attention to the “textual” variations of immigrant autobiography, Boelhower’s method reinscribes a paradigmatic immigrant story or *fabula*, thus suggesting a universal (and therefore unifying) immigrant experience. This unity paradoxically
resembles the uniformity mapped through discourses of Americanization, thus veiling various national, ethnic, racial, gender, class, and linguistic variables.

I suggest that Boelhower’s model could be more productive if we collapse the distance between his binaries and make the immigrant story into a more fluid and representative narrative rather than a *fabula of the* immigrant experience. A good point of departure is to acknowledge the unpredictability of the immigrant autobiography, its historical and cultural variations, and the many other forces shaping it (immigrants’ gender, age, socio-economic background, writerly potential, marketability in the New World, social networking skills, degree of English-speaking proficiency—and many more). Frank Thistlewaite, for instance, offers a European perspective on American immigration story, suggesting that *emigration* (and Europe as the point of departure) could be read as a key element in Americanization stories. The pairing of *immigration* (with an emphasis on the place of arrival) with *emigration* (in its emphasis on departure), thus making both worlds equally constitutive of the immigrant’s experience, also calls attention to the incomplete transformations of immigrants into Americans. Many returned home willingly, others were forced to return, amounting to a repatriation of a third of all immigrants entering US territory between 1880 and 1924. Furthermore, not all immigrants wanted to become American, but we hardly ever read this explicitly in immigrant narratives, mainly because of the genre’s limiting conventions. Ravage’s confession of the immigrant’s disappointment in America is unique to the corpus of immigrant memoirs I discuss in this chapter (*An American in the Making* 59-60). Furthermore, the maintenance of Old World religions, political allegiances, rituals, languages, etc. and the cultivation of cultural institutions (churches, synagogues, schools, clubs, societies, etc.) offered alternative spaces for forging an alternate “American” cultural citizenship, where the immigrant found a “home.”
In Ravage’s case, rhetorical resistance to Americanization becomes his main ally in *An American in the Making*, where he addresses his audience directly, often in less than flattering ways, from “you, fortunate ones who have never had to come to America” (iii) to “the self-complacent native” (59). As his autobiographical narrator navigates through myriad spaces and temporalities, reflective of both his new language and the story it translates to an English-reading audience, he pretends to concede in the introduction that he is merely “transcribing” his life story (9). This allusion to the tradition of “as told to” American autobiographies, with an emphasis that he is both the originator and the mediator of the story, in its self-referentiality is a direct nod to his control of his rhetorical strategies while acknowledging their conventionality. Ravage’s task as cultural translator is not only to acquaint his American readership with his Old World adventures—his story is perhaps unique but also in some ways typical of the challenges the immigrant faces in the New World—but also to show, by example, that many elements were “lost in translation” in dominant representations of immigrants. His autobiography, albeit ending on a rather discordantly happy note, is critical of Americanization, seeing it not only as a false finality but also as a constant struggle with in-betweerness, a constant making and unmaking.

Several rhetorical strategies help the autobiographer’s task of simultaneously educating the reader as Ravage becomes acquainted with the country’s new language and culture. Ravage forges a new rhetoric for immigrant expression by—paradoxically—embracing and rejecting the rhetoric of rejection, mental inferiority, and coercion that discourses of Americanization were promoting. Addressing his readers directly, he calls for Americanization as a two-way process, where the immigrant has a role in influencing his/her transformation: “Your self-complacent native takes stock of the Americanized alien and cries, delightedly, ‘See how America has changed him!’ But I suppose he would be greatly astonished if the immigrant were to answer,
‘Look how I’ve changed America!’” (138). Whereas organized Americanization offered clear guidelines for becoming an American, which often included structured instruction, the ghetto becomes Ravage’s most-lasting encounter with things American: “I had not realized that this grimy, toil-worn, airless ghetto had a soul and a mind under its shabby exterior. It knew everything and talked about everything” (147). With its exchange of books in Yiddish, Russian, German, and English among the “intelligentsia of the slums,” the evening lectures, and the East Side theatre, the ghetto becomes Ravage’s “first university” (147, 146). In retrospect, the ghetto remains the immigrant’s center of inspiration and uplift, where Old World memories are not “washed out” as Americanization discourse prescribed: “Never in all my experience since, though I have been in colleges and learned societies, have I seen such earnest, responsive audiences as were those collarless men and hatless girls of the sweat-shops” (148). Ravage’s literacy and his English and Yiddish proficiency, along with his dedication to study and self-improvement, and his constant scrutiny and self-scrutiny of the effects of Americanization, made him critical of his peers’ uncritical navigation of Americanization practices. In a section suggestively titled “How do you like America?” Ravage distances himself from his fellow countrymen whose silent transformation into Americans he sees as a form of “degeneration”: “The first step toward Americanization was to fall into one or the other of the two great tribes of Rosies and Annies” (78). The critical observer, in his distancing from the object of his study of Americanization, does not shy away from taking the moralist’s stance, while noting the generational gap that the new environment creates among his fellow Romanian immigrants:

Cut adrift suddenly from their ancient moorings, they were floundering in a sort of moral void. Good manners and good conduct, reverence and religion, had all gone by the board,
and the reason was that these things were not American. A grossness of behavior, a loudness of speech, a certain repellent ‘American’ smartness in intercourse, were thought necessary, if one did not want to be taken for a greenhorn or a boor. (79)

Ravage’s seemingly moralist narrator directly dismisses the fellow immigrant’s internalized practices of imitating perceived “American” behavior. These exaggerations, almost Rabelasian, offer a telling counterpoint to the iconic visual representations of immigrant “greenhornness,” which I discuss at the beginning of this chapter. But as he critiques fellow immigrants’ loudness and exaggerated performance of their new “American” identities, resonant with the “tribes of Rosies and Annies” he critiques earlier (78), Ravage also targets Americanization attempts to erase every “greenhorn” and “boor” from the new, buzzing American scene.

6.1.5 The Education of an American: English, Yiddish, and Americanization

Ravage’s understanding of practices and rituals of Americanization may also be understood in light of recent studies of new immigration that refute the so-called original myth of Americanization envisioned by Crèvecoeur in 1782 (that immigrants wanted to become Americans and that Americanization was quick and easy).42 In this regard, I follow historian Gary Gerstle’s paradigmatic reading of Americanization as a non-linear process, constrained by social and historical forces, including race, class, and gender.43 Most tellingly, Gerstle argues that coercion played a key role in the making of Americans. I argue, following Gerstle, that rhetorical coercion also drove the immigrant autobiography genre that Ravage both endorses and critiques: “the alien who comes here from Europe is not the raw material the Americans suppose
him to be. He is not a blank sheet to be written on as you see fit” (60). Ravage’s metaphor of the “blank sheet” encapsulates the idea of rhetorical coercion, alluding to the effects of molding the immigrant story unto a unique pattern, while simultaneously resisting this impulse. Ravage, therefore, invents his own lexicon of assimilation, a non-binary yet color-coded hierarchy that mocks the black and white binary logic of racist immigration restriction laws. The immigrants of the ghetto he describes fall into two distinct categories: the greens and the yellows. They are “not stationary castes,” but are constantly in flux and change: “every yellow had once been a green and every green was striving and hoping to become a yellow some day” (112). Ravage’s invention of a new color-coding system is more telling in class than in racial terms: the new arrival, or greenhorn, undergoes his “purification” or “bleaching out” before becoming “yellow.” (113)

If immigrant autobiography often served the larger political goals of promoting Americanization and appeasing nativist and xenophobic fears of racially different others—such as in Theodore Roosevelt’s favorable reception of Jacob Riis’s The Making of an American (1901)—it also functioned as a pivotal archive in the emergence of immigrant literature. Because of the role these narratives played in the American identitary project during the first two decades of the twentieth century, they served a dual purpose: they created a reading public for these narratives and they “educated” the public about the immigrant “difference.” At the same time, immigrant autobiographical stories responded to the way the cultural and social demographics were changing drastically as a result of massive waves of immigration. Desmond King has shown how the presumption of a single American national identity both brought about anti-immigrant sentiment and built a strong vocabulary for restrictionist rhetoric, as I discuss in Chapter 2.44 Ravage and his peers were writing about this search for immigrant cultural
citizenship and autonomy at a time marked by growing xenophobia and an increasing vocabulary of immigration excludable categories. As these laws were making immigrants more and more excludable, their memoirs attempted to make them includable. While restrictionists looked for ways to define immigrants as excludable, immigrant writers showed how their perceived “difference” was not threatening.

6.1.6 “This Was America”

Ravage starts his memoir by placing his narrative in the larger national project of understanding what “making Americans” means. At the same time, shying away from didacticism, he delineates the immigrant’s own narrative of what “makes” and “unmakes” Americans: “It is the free American who needs to be instructed by the benighted races in the uplifting word that American [sic] speaks to all the world. Only from the humble immigrant, it appears to me, can he learn just what American [sic] stands for in the family of nations” (An American in the Making i). What distinguishes Ravage’s memoir from most of his contemporaries’ accounts of immigration is his constant awareness of the audience he addresses and his direct challenging of the incredulous and dull reader. As critics of immigrant autobiography have noted, the two selves and two worlds the immigrant inhabits are constant sites of negotiation as the writer tries to come to terms with both the emigrant and immigrant selves. Boelhower, for instance, claims that typical immigrant autobiographies must “organize two culture systems”: a culture of the present and future and a culture of memory. Ravage renders the impossibility of reconciling these “systems,” for the Old World and New World selves, while not completely disconnected from each other, are irreconcilable: “We are not what
we were when you saw us landing from the Ellis Island ferry. Our own kinsfolk do not know us when they come over. We sometimes hardly know ourselves” (iv). But this sense of rootlessness grows even more unmappable as the new immigrant tries to escape the confines of his/her own ethnic enclave to adjust to the American scene. For Ravage, the challenge comes from the confines of the ghetto itself, not necessarily as a drawback to Americanization but as a drawback to personal progress and English proficiency: “my problem was to fit myself in with the people of Vaslui and Rumania, my erstwhile fellow-townsmen and my fellow-countrymen. […] It was not America but the East Side Ghetto that upset my calculations” (61). As he grows more familiar with the East Side Ghetto, “a theater within a theater” (87), the autobiographer discovers that “Litte Rumania” becomes the center of his New World: “This was America, […] a gay Rumanian city framed in the stench and the squalor of and the oppressive, noisy tenements of New York’s dingiest slums” (88). Unlike most other immigrant accounts, oscillating between the worlds separated by the Atlantic or Pacific oceans, Ravage’s autobiography moves “in two separate worlds”—both in the New World. He struggles to escape the confines of “Little Rumania” (and the oppressive demands of the Old World kinship system) and his identity as “Max the Sleever,” the sweatshop worker in the ghetto. At the same time, Max the Sleever is “unpardonably slow in getting Americanized” (152, 160). Irreverently, Ravage deliberately skips the conventions of captatio audientiae and sums up the crux of his life story: “the truth remains that the immigrant is almost invariably disappointed in America” (59-60). Unlike fellow immigrant writers Steiner, Pupin, Antin, Panunzio and many others, Ravage’s confession as “the other half” does not trigger or invoke middle-class sympathy. But he addresses his imagined audience in a language and genre he has mastered.
Ravage’s encounters with the English language, although not as humorous as those of the fictional Hyman Kaplan recounted by fellow Jewish American written Leo Rosten, were certainly arduous and exhausting. Facing “the abominations of English orthography” and struggling to memorize every single word from Harkavy’s English Dictionary (102, 104), the immigrant peddler Ravage goes to evening preparatory schools on East Broadway, attends programs at the Educational League, and studies English by reading Shakespeare with a dictionary. After graduating from City College, Ravage goes to the University of Missouri, the land of “real Americans” (193). There he discovers that, although he excels in English composition, he fails to make friends because he does not “speak their language” despite his studied efforts: “I fell into the habit of studying out my sentences before entrusting them to the ears of my critical friends” but “they turned out more stilted than ever” (221). This is a revelatory moment for the writer-to-be, an awareness that his search for cultural citizenship will not cease as he is “fighting” his “battle for America” (258). If writing in English “in itself was an act of emigration,” as we have seen that Marcus Klein suggests (20), an emigration from the rigors of the conservative ghetto, and possibly an ultimate capitulation to the demands of Americanization, it can also be a culturally liberatory act. Writing in English, ultimately, becomes for Ravage a way of accessing the American literary market, and a way of becoming American on his own terms—as a writer.

We are all actors, more or less. The question is only what our aim is, and whether we are capable of a convincing personation.

—David, in Abraham Cahan, *The Rise of David Levinsky* 188

It is an event to find writers like these [Ravage and Cahan], with such candor, and realism, used with artistic sense and social insight, and so just an understanding of the organic place of the immigrant in the searching and troubled American future.

— R.B. [Randolph Bourne], *The New Republic*, February 1918

6.2.1 Americans in the Making

Although the legacy of Ravage’s memoir on contemporaneous readers is yet to be assessed, the trope of “Americans in the making” was central to many Americanization stories, often in unexpected ways. Whereas Ravage called attention to the limits of legal citizenship in the intellectual immigrant’s search for cultural citizenship in *An American in the Making: The Life Story of an Immigrant*, the more established writer and cultural arbiter Abraham Cahan rendered the enormous costs of the immigrant capitalist’s Americanization in arguably one of the best immigrant novels or what David M. Fine calls, “the most important novel written by a Jewish immigrant,” and in H. L. Menken’s view, “one of the best American novels ever
written.” The Rise of David Levinsky, a nod to William Dean Howells’s The Rise of Silas Lapham (1885), earned the praise of the dean of American letters, who hailed Cahan as “the new star of American realism.” Whether the immigrant as “intellectual” and “capitalist” are “the two main goals of immigrant ambition,” as Randolph Bourne suggested in his compelling review of both books for The New Republic in 1918, or not, they are useful categories to conceptualize immigrant representation particularly in the rare instance when the representors are themselves immigrants. The immigrant as intellectual and the immigrant as capitalist facilitate the entrance of the immigrant writer into the legitimate market of representing American(ized) experiences as subject and object rather than merely as material for ridicule and stereotype, as the beginning of this chapter has shown.

Ravage and Cahan, as the second epigraph above suggests, offer counter-narratives to the popular optimistic Americanization story that show, as Bourne put it, “step by step, how very grim a process this passage from the ‘greenhorn’ to the citizen is.” For Ravage, it is the story of the American in the making, a never-ending transformation: “The American that was made in this slow and half-unconscious process as an individual, not an imitation” (31). For Cahan’s David Levinsky, Bourne suggests, it is the story of the “undesirable American on the make,” the successful businessman whose turn from exploited into exploiter of fellow immigrant workers offers Cahan a productive opportunity for social criticism. Bourne concedes: “Mr. Cahan makes a subtle back-fire of criticism more deadly than the most melodramatic socialist fiction,” offering “a corroding criticism of the whole field of ambitions and ideals of this pushing, primitive society, more telling than any caricature or railing.” While it is surprising to see Bourne refer to Jewish immigrants as “this […] primitive society,” his assessment addresses widely-held views on racial primitivism, a term often associated with both “native” American Indians and the
“foreign” immigrants. For Bourne, it is also a way to draw a wider audience into his essay and appeal to their interest in “primitivism” by reviewing two fictional works by Jewish writers. Although it is not clear that Cahan and Ravage ever crossed paths on New York City’s Lower East side beyond the world of letters, Cahan was well acquainted with Romanian immigration issues, both Jewish and non-Jewish. In a story Cahan published in *Cosmopolitan* in 1901, “Dumitru and Sigrid,” he rendered the language barrier and difficulties of communication (involving a stubborn English dictionary) between a Romanian and Swedish immigrant couple in America, neither of whom speaks English. If for Ravage becoming an American coincided with becoming a scholar (Slovak immigrant Edward Steiner had a similar experience), for Cahan’s David Levinsky becoming American is coterminous with becoming an entrepreneur who employs and exploits other, lesser fortunate immigrants, who uses capital and its multifaceted social ramifications to achieve and sustain a transplanted immigrant persona, yet who yearns for the pre-lapsarian life before immigration.

In this section I argue that the most highly-acclaimed immigrant novel, Abraham Cahan’s *The Rise of David Levinsky*, stages several instances of performed Americanization in David’s formation as a split immigrant subject, torn between the burden of his drive to succeed as a businessman and the personal loss resulting from the struggle to become an American. David Levinsky’s story of success and failure has fascinated generations of critics who have read his “rise” and “fall” as a critique of capitalism and loss of spirituality in the New World, a rags-to-riches story—a *bildungsroman*—Abraham Cahan’s own autobiographical account, “a classic of American literature”, or “the first American Jewish novel of consequence.” The reception of *The Rise of David Levinsky* as a genre piece has oscillated between seeing it as an example of realism, ghetto realism, or naturalism. Since studies of the novel so far have focused on the
main character’s “inner self,” his trauma, and the psychological demands of the New World, my purpose here is to examine immigrant Levinsky’s exteriority or “outer self” and the ways Cahan presents his Americanized character to the world through what I call the poses, postures, and promises of the dominant script of Americanization.\(^{55}\)

First, I examine the context preceding and surrounding the publication of the novel in 1917 and argue that David’s social performance stages Cahan’s own response to nativism and anti-Semitism, pervasive both in ideological and popular culture venues “selling culture” at the turn of the century (such as McClure’s, the magazine where the germ for the story first took shape in four installments in 1913). Then I look at specific ways that David Levinsky fashions his public self (or his Americanized persona) to survive and adapt in the new, urban environment—sheltering and feeding off the culture of consumption—which becomes the stage and audience for his performance. Ultimately, Levinsky’s determination to make himself “for a person”\(^ {56}\) results in series of unfulfilled, deferred desires—such as his desire for a college education and the desire to enter heteronormativity through marriage—which amplify his sense of loss and position him as an unsettled “undistinguished American.” Consistent with my argument throughout this project, I argue here that Levinsky’s unmaking of the self coincides with his entrance into modernity, a social and cultural scene that leaves a lasting mark on his immigrant persona, just as the immigrant, to a great extent, transforms modernity.\(^ {57}\) I end with a discussion of the immigrant novel as a legitimate genre in 1917 and beyond, and suggest several ways that what critics call “problems of representation” could be negotiated in the growing immigrant canon. I draw attention to The Rise of David Levinsky as a compelling immigrant novel that paves the way for a rich tradition of (both) immigrant (and Jewish) writing in the US in the last century and beyond.
Throughout the novel, the character-narrator is fascinated with “appearance,” examining and imitating what he sees as “real” American gestures, demeanor, and inflections of voice: “‘Doing business on a gigantic scale is not always an advantage, Mr. Gans,’ I sang out, with an affected Yankee twang” (314, my emphasis). David also learns quickly about the American “unsmiling smile” from Bender, his English instructor (126), and is fascinated by Meyer Nodelman’s “credit face” which he soon starts to imitate (203). Levinsky’s success and failure ultimately emerge from his negotiation with and ambivalence toward integrating and reconciling an ethnic past with an American present, which remain at odds throughout the novel. Formally, Cahan renders this inner conflict in the first person narrative, which both precludes and amplifies the intensity of the “real” immigrant story. The Rise of David Levinsky thus stages the stakes of subjectivity and its iteration in the New World through a deliberate, self-conscious performance—both for the reading audience and for the immigrant subject himself—which, through a “convincing personation” (188), creates both the subject and the object of the story.

David Levinsky speaks himself into being and, throughout his “making” as a fictional American, makes distinctions about his own positionality as he acts it out, the chosen world and the new language he fashions himself into, and the part(s) he plays in his drama of Americanization. Although by the end of the novel he is a successful clothes manufacturer, Levinsky still imitates what he believes a proper American would do and say—in words, postures, and poses—but ultimately sees his difference as a lack, so that becoming an American becomes a continuously deferred dream: “That I was not born in America was something like a physical defect that asserted itself in many disagreeable ways—a physical defect which, alas! No surgeon in the world was capable of removing” (284). While he studies English in an evening school, David dreams of becoming a scholar and of attending City College; after his business
takes off, education becomes another deferred dream: “Once I am to be an educated man I want to be the genuine article” (164). But he never becomes a “genuine article”; instead, he manufactures and sells genuine articles in his clothing business. At fifty-two, casting a retrospective glance on his life after thirty years in the U.S., David faces a classic immigrant identity crisis: “My past and my present do not comport well” (518). Levinsky’s inability to negotiate between his “selves”—“David, the poor lad swinging over a Talmud volume” as a charity scholar in the Antomir of his childhood and “David Levinsky, the well-known cloak manufacturer” (518)—stems also from his (lost) sense of place, which accentuates the identity-in-displacement of the immigrant subject and troubles his relation with the new locality and spatiality.58 David’s sense of displacement circularly opens and closes the novel, leaving the narrator to ponder the use of accumulated capital and the loss of the greenhorn’s innocence:

I was born and reared in the lowest depths of poverty and I arrived in America—in 1885—with four cents in my pocket. I am now worth more than two million dollars […] And yet when I take a look at my inner identity it impresses me as being precisely the same as it was thirty or forty years ago. […] I can never forget the days of my misery. I cannot escape from my old self. My past and my present do not comport well. (3, 518) [my emphasis]

David’s sense of displacement circularly opens and closes the novel, leaving the narrator to ponder the gains of accumulated capital and the loss of the greenhorn’s presumed innocence.
6.2.2 “I Discover America”

The migrants, the minorities, the diasporic come to change the history of the nation.

—Homi K. Bhabha *The Location of Culture*, 169-70

If one had to select a single person to stand for East European Jews in America, it would be Abraham Cahan, the editor of the *Jewish Daily Forward*.

—Nathan Glazer, *American Judaism*, 68

Before Cahan earned his fame for writing the first immigrant novel of consequence, he was an established journalist and the editor of *The Jewish Daily Forward/Forverts*, the most influential Yiddish newspaper, with the highest circulation of all immigrant papers in the U.S., a journal Cahan also helped found in 1897. When the Johnson-Reed Immigration Restriction Act passed in 1924, the *Forverts* had a daily readership of a quarter million when New York City’s Jewish population was around a million and a half (Chametzky xiv, 20). In his journalistic work Cahan helped many Americans find the humanity of immigrants that the journalistic work of Jacob A. Riis’s photojournalistic *How the Other Half Lives* (1890) had reduced to mere types or specimens. Cahan first worked for the American metropolitan daily press and later for four Yiddish journals: two weeklies, one monthly, and the *Jewish Daily Forward*. Most importantly, Cahan helped fellow Jewish immigrants “discover” America long before he conjured the memorable David Levinsky; he wrote a history of the U.S. in Yiddish, making the history of the adopted country available to a Jewish readership. As the *Forward’s* senior editor, he often
printed Yiddish translations of the U.S. Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. He was a cultural critic and cultural mediator before he was a novelist.\textsuperscript{61} \textit{The Forward} promoted and cultivated a taste for Yiddish literature—at a time when the Jewish intelligentsia disdained Yiddish “jargon” as plebeian—by publishing the work of Sholem Aleichem, Sholem Ash, I. J. Singer, and Isaac Bashevis Singer.\textsuperscript{62} Many other categories than “novelist” also claimed Cahan: intellectual; midwife to Jewish-American literature; socialist, Jew, Realist, immigrant; and many more.\textsuperscript{63} Jules Chametzky nicely summarizes the in-betweenness of Cahan’s role as cultural mediator: “Cahan was conscious of his position as a bridge between disparate worlds of experience. Among the Yankees, a Jew; among the Jews, an expert on the American scene; in capitalist America a radical socialist, among radicals a moderate; an intellectual and a popularizer; a Russian soul and education jostling alongside a Jewish and American one.”\textsuperscript{64}

Unlike Ravage, whose American literary reputation rests mainly on his autobiography and his journalism, Cahan published short stories and two novels before \textit{The Rise of David Levinsky}. He published his first collection of stories, \textit{The Imported bridegroom and Other Stories}, in 1898, followed by the novels \textit{Yekl, A Tale of the New York Ghetto} (1896) and \textit{The White Terror and the Red: A Novel of Revolutionary Russia} (1905). Cahan was planning to write another novel, which he never completed, titled \textit{The Chasm}.\textsuperscript{65} Before he became a well-known writer, Cahan contributed stories and sketches to the \textit{Post} and the \textit{New York Sun}, exercises in realist fiction that trained him for his future work, supplemented by his journalism for the \textit{Commercial Advertiser}.\textsuperscript{66} Cahan became an American journalist at a pivotal moment in the industry’s history: two decades before other media of mass communication competed for the public’s interest (movies, radio, or the phonograph). As Moses Rischin points out, “Scanning, canvassing, and exploring an ever more startling universe, the newspapers alone gave graphic
concreteness to the quotidian deluge of events, experiences, and perceptions that assaulted the consciousness of every city inhabitant.” In 1926, Cahan started working on his five-volume autobiography in Yiddish, *Bleter fun Mein Leben*, concluded in 1931. Cahan’s first story in English, “A Providential Match” (1895), attracted the attention of William Dean Howells and later became the germ for *Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto*. These early fictional exercises in English contained the germs of his future stories, both in style and subject matter, especially in the effects of Americanization on East European immigrants. At the height of his career, Cahan described himself as “the best foreign language editor in the United States,” “an important American novelist,” and “a former feature writer for various English language newspapers.”

Imagining himself “not as a mere epigone of American letters but as an agent of literature’s increasing self-consciousness,” Sarah Blair suggests, Cahan was aware of literature’s “social stakes within emerging modernity.” As a mediator between cultures and languages, emerging realist writer Cahan also positioned himself in dialogue with emerging American modernity, writing about and for a group that became one of modernity’s main challenges: urban immigrants.

Cahan was born in a small Lithuanian village, Podberezy, near Vilna, in 1860. He left for the US with a false passport, shortly after the assassination of czar Alexander II in 1881 and the ensuing massive pogroms, and arrived in the New World on June 6, 1882, eighteen years before Ravage. Whereas Ravage left behind a loving (and somewhat prosperous yet persecuted) Jewish family in Vaslui, Romania, Cahan’s orphan Levinsky witnessed the death of his mother at Gentiles’ hands shortly before his departure from Antomir to America, when massive anti-Jewish violence marked the Russian-occupied Lithuanian scene in the early 1880s. Besides, both “in Russia and Rumania, poverty and governmental anti-Semitism led many thousands
every year to decide to go to America.” We have seen how Ravage’s protagonist is determined to go to America on foot; similarly, the cry “To America” inspires David Levinsky: “It spread like wild-fire, even over those parts of the Pale or Jewish Settlement which lay outside the riot zone” (60). What connects both stories, besides the immigrant theme that generates them, is the anti-Semitism that both characters witness at home, resurfacing gradually in the New World as new fears of alienism, along with “new hierarchies of difference,” fuel old and new nativism and xenophobia. Cahan became an advocate for social justice through his work as a journalist and a socialist. When he raised the “Jewish Question” to the International Socialist Congress in Brussels in 1891, he spoke forcefully about a subject he cared deeply about:

The Jews are persecuted. Pogroms are made upon them. They are insulted, they are oppressed. Exceptional laws are made for them. They have been made into a separate class of people with no rights. [...] Push back anti-Semitism! Declare before the world that you condemn every form of Jewish persecution!

Long before David Levinsky and the American Jewish Question took shape, therefore, Cahan made a strong plea against anti-Semitism that he would follow through on in his literary and political work later in his long career.

6.2.3 “The Autobiography of an American Jew”

Cahan published the story that generated The Rise of David Levinsky under the title “The Autobiography of an American Jew: The Rise of David Levinsky” in McClure’s magazine, in
four installments, from April till July 1913. What is less widely known is that the March issue of *McClure’s*—a month before the serialization of Cahan’s story began—published a lengthy article on the Jewish presence in America, setting a certain tone for the reception of Cahan’s fictional account. In this article, alarmingly titled “The Jewish Invasion of America,” Burton J. Hendrick approaches the “Jewish question” from a completely different angle than Cahan’s fictional account. Hendrick quotes the prediction of a Berlin professor (possibly of Eugenics) who estimates that “in another hundred years the United States will be peopled chiefly by Slavs, negroes, and Jews” (125). While Hendrick seemingly considers such assertions “extravagant” and “absurd” (125), he organizes his essay’s structure and rhetoric around the imminence of “the Jewish invasion” in the United States. Hendrick’s premise ignores any cultural history of Jewish immigration, lumping together Jewish immigrants in a mass “of eastern European Jews that had developed into a people ignorant, illiterate, unaccustomed to sanitation and ventilation, fearful, obsequious and dependent.” There is also a sense of entitled writerly superiority, as the writer-observer, while acknowledging the imminent Jewish “conquest of the clothing trade, calls the Russian and Polish Jews “the most pitiable and helpless immigrants that ever landed at Castle Garden.”

Hendrick’s rhetoric is deceptive, however. He also praises Jewish accomplishments in a variety of fields (the clothing industry and department stores, the whiskey and tobacco industries, land ownership and real estate, civil service, education, finance, theatre, railroads, etc. On the other hand, Anglo-Saxonism and xenophobia resurface in the comparisons he makes between the people of “native Anglo-Saxon stock” who own many of these businesses and the alarmingly successful Jewish enterprise which seems to take over pretty much everything: “in the last few years we have witnessed the encroachment of Jewish influence in a field that for more than
seventy years had been the peculiar province of the native Anglo-Saxon stock, that of ownership and finance” (160). Economic fears, therefore, complement nativist fears, masked throughout Hendrick’s piece. His goal of “chiefly recording facts” and only “incidentally [touching] upon the racial traits” fails, especially if we were to look at the only Jewish “types” chronicled in the various photographs accompanying the article (Figure 6.1). These images bring racial difference, inscribed on the Jewish immigrant’s body, to contrast sharply with an ostensibly laudatory essay on Jewish accomplishment, bursting with racist and xenophbic undertones. In the end, announcing Cahan’s forthcoming piece on “this […] subject,” Hendrick enthusiastically endorses the story that will make clear why “the Jews so easily surpass or crowd out, at least in business and finance, the other great immigrating races—Irish, Germans, Scandinavians, and Italians—and why, in the next hundred years, the Semitic influence is likely to be almost preponderating in the United States.”

Hendrick concludes with a remark that both veils and betrays his anti-Semitism, inscribing the Jewish presence in American as superior to other “invading races.” In privileging one racial group over others, Hendrick sets the tone for reading Cahan’s story in the magazine’s following issue. Cahan’s long-anticipated story, however, was already written in the American imaginary.
As Hendrick implies, a certain “demand” for a Jewish success story builds the popular readership’s expectations. But as Sanford E. Marovitz suggests, Cahan probably did not know about this “set up” for the story that became the germ of the novel The Rise of David Levinsky. But Cahan was well aware of the pressures of ethnic representation that the literary market—where he had recently ascended, courtesy of Howells—was making on the author of Yekl; A Tale
of the New York Ghetto (1896) and “The Imported Bridegroom” (1898). The blurb introducing the story (with arguably racist illustrations by Jay Hambidge) reads Levinsky as “an actual type” taken from “real life,” thus fulfilling realism’s new promise—of extending literary representation to social groups “formerly neglected or idealized in literature.”84 Moreover, the McClure’s editor adds that Levinsky’s story “reproduces actual characters, occurrences and situations taken from real life. And his intense and complicated struggle shows, as no invention could do, the traits of mind and character by which the Jew has made his sensationally rapid progress in the business world of America”85 [my emphasis]. The editor’s distinction between a “real life” account and a distorted “invention” calls into question the fictionality of Cahan’s story and reduces its aesthetic value to a mere sociological or ethnographic account, more consistent with investigative journalism than literary realism, thus denying that a Jewish writer could have imagination. But the readers are in for a treat. In the novel, Cahan’s “American Jew” negotiates continually between this “real life” equivalent (that Levinsky is supposed to “represent”—dos pintele yid, the contested notion of the “quintessence of the Jew” that the public wants to read about) and Cahan’s fictional and artistic mastery that allows a higher degree of unreadability in the character and a greater potential for Cahan’s “invention.”86 Ultimately Cahan takes this “invention” farther than his editor might have anticipated.

Hendrick’s and the McClure’s editor’s pronouncement on the “Jewish invasion in America” not only set the tone for the reception of Abraham Cahan’s story but also expressed growing nativist fears of the ethnically and racially different others threatening American Anglo-Saxonism and whiteness in the first decades of the twentieth century. As historical studies of social mobility suggest, Jewish culture—as read by the American audience at the turn of the century—put a heavy emphasis on accomplishment. The tradition and respect for learning
continued in the New World. In an aptly-titled study, *Natives and Strangers*, Dinnerstein et al. document that a 1911 survey of New York City revealed that “16% of the Jewish children were finishing high school” at a time when “practically no Italians finished high school,” and that Jewish enrollment at Columbia University was 13%. Moreover, as rigid as these statistics may sound, “75% of the children of Eastern European Jewish immigrants entered the middle class after starting out in the working class.”87 New York also held the largest Jewish community in America between the end of the Civil War and 1924.

6.2.4 English, Yiddish: Cahan and New Immigrant Linguistic Identity

Immigration, particularly Jewish immigration, attracted considerable attention from gentile American writers, whether they wrote about successful or stalled Americanization experiences. Much of this attention was not flattering. Philip Barish notes that Henry James and Edith Wharton were “at least arguably anti-Semitic.”88 Henry James’s return to the “American scene” in 1904 proved an uneasy encounter with “the New Jerusalem” (James’s preferred term for the East Side Jews), whose crowdedness and “multiplication with a vengeance” threatened or at least disturbed the realist celebrity’s bourgeois dispositions: “There is no swarming like that of Israel when once Israel has got a start. […] It was as if we had been thus, in the crowded, hustled roadway, where multiplication, multiplication of everything, was the dominant note…. The children swarmed above all—here was multiplication with a vengeance.89

Henry James’s distaste for Jews and other immigrants in the Lower East Side, as also discussed in an earlier chapter, establishes a complicated relation between high realism and the more democratized realist enterprise proposed by Howells in what he called “the aesthetic of the
common” (or, perhaps, what one may call highbrow and lowbrow realism). As Amy Kaplan explains, “the common’ refers to “distinct and often contradictory entities: to the lower classes […]], to a shared human identity—‘our common humanity’; and to ordinary life—‘the commonplace’” (21). “The New [though ‘common’] Americans” were thus a hot commodity on the literary market, read between adulation and resentment, as the cult of the “old American” was starting to dissipate. At the same time, as New York’s population was growing, the “commonplace” was amplified. In her study of the “three New Yorks,” Martha Banta argues that, by 1909, New York had become “a battleground, as thousands of bodies fought over their territorial rights.” Mary Esteve also dramatizes what Levinsky will experience as a subject acting in a “crowd culture,” suggesting that the urban crowds “embodied a modern polity’s democratic populace, which, as discursive figures, “made visible the idea of a categorically separate sphere,” engaged in “non-political” but “arguably humanly essential activity.” In Cahan’s novel, David Levinsky’s boss introduces him not only to urban etiquette but also to nativism and racism: “Where were you brought up? Among Indians?” (182), he asks, commenting on David’s uncouth manners. This question translates both urban and national anxiety over Indian and immigrant “savagery.” It marks nativism’s widely-disseminated fear of racial and ethnic difference and the threats it poses to “real Americans” (i.e., Anglo-Saxons). Levinsky’s boss during his greenhorn days associates Levinsky’s lack of manners—or his difference of manners—with racial difference, thus conflating cultural difference with a biological understanding of racial difference. David Levinsky is, therefore, constantly policed and surveilled both by America’s anxiety toward foreign “invaders”—and toward its own position as an invader—and by realism itself as a mode of surveillance.91
One of the modes of surveillance (and sometimes self-surveillance) Levinsky most often encounters is the policing (and self-policing) of his linguistic persona. Competing forces shape Levinsky’s linguistic identity, staging an ongoing struggle between the pull of Yiddish (the language of home and family) and the desire for English (the language of the “New World”), resulting in a linguistic quest consistent with the immigrant’s identity quest in the adoptive country. Unaccustomed to English pronunciation, David first scoffs at the idea of linguistic difference: “English impressed me as the language of a people afflicted with defective organs of speech” (126). Unlike Ravage, who tries to memorize the entire English vocabulary from Harkavy’s dictionary, Levinsky—like many immigrants and natives before and after him—hires a native speaker as a language tutor, who can teach him both the language and how to perform the new language for maximum social profit. Like Ravage, David Levinsky realizes that imitation is key to his acquisition of both linguistic and cultural capital: “I would hang on his lips, striving to memorize every English word I could catch and watching intently, not only his enunciation, but also his gestures, manner, and mannerisms, and accepting it all as part and parcel of the American way of speaking” (135). As much as he tries throughout the novel, his linguistic sense of inferiority precludes his complete Americanization (one of his goals in the New World, consistent with the early stages of the Americanization campaigns). To Levinsky, “[p]eople who were born to speak English were superior beings. Even among fallen women I would seek those who were real Americans” (171). “Real Americanism,” Cahan signals in the nativist undertones he implicitly critiques, will always distinguish Levinsky from his native peers, an essence (racial) his imitation practices (cultural) can never attain. Levinsky’s impossible assimilation and Americanization, Cahan’s subtle way of rewriting the narrative of successful immigrants that permeated the literary market, is especially relevant if we read the
novel in the context of its date of publication. Like Ravage’s autobiography, Cahan’s novel saw print in 1917, the year that the United States entered the Great War, a year marked by an exacerbated nationalism and growing nativism.92 Shortly thereafter, the political and legislative arenas witnessed an unprecedented hostility towards immigrants and witnessed, as well, heightened Americanization discourses and practices, culminating in the publication of The Americanization Bulletin (first issued in 1918) and leading to unprecedented legislation restricting immigration restriction.93 The Americanization bulletin included a regular section on “Industrial Americanization” about ways to Americanize foreign-born employees in factories. In 1918 a National Americanization committee was established in New York. Organizations such as the YMCA, the League of Women Voters’ local organizations, the Kiwanis Clubs, and various Chambers of Commerce also promoted Americanization. By 1919, over 800,000 industrial plants had some sort of Americanization program. The post-World War I years also saw a more systematic program of Americanization especially in the public school system.

Neither Ravage’s memoir nor Cahan’s novel, in their explicit critiques of Americanization rituals, would have been appealing publications for many readers after the entrance of the US into World War I. Therefore, 1917 was a propitious time for both these works to see print; otherwise, the trajectory of immigrant writing in the US—particularly of the immigrant novel—would have been different.

Levinsky’s linguistic incompetence (in the Chomskian sense) is complemented by his constant anxiety about his social performance, resulting in his constant policing of his clothing, gestures, and inflections of language. Reading The Rise of David Levinsky alongside Henry James’s The American, Donald Weber shows how Cahan’s novel charts, above all, “the growth of shame, repression, self-hatred, and denial in the immigrant psyche.”94 Weber shows that
while Christopher Newman, James’ protagonist, is “at ease with his American manners,”
Levinsky “remains forever anxious about his social position” (734). Indeed, Levinsky tries to
mask the clues of his Orthodox past, especially his Talmudic gesticulations. When he befriends
Loeb, “an American by birth” (317), his friend makes fun of his supposedly excessive
gesticulations, “a habit that worried me like a physical defect.” Levinsky tries to control these
gesticulations, particularly since his habit “was so distressingly un-American. I struggled hard
against it. I had made efforts to speak with my hands in my pockets” (318). I diverge here from
Weber’s astute reading by suggesting that Levinsky’s policing of his “un-American” gestures
can be read not necessarily as “shame, repression, self-hatred and denial in the immigrant
psyche” but as an instance of adaptation through imitation, a cunning reproduction of
“American” gestures, which enables the immigrant to control his gestures and speech acts,
performing an imagined identity where he can “belong.” This learned habit of imitation becomes
deeply engrained in the immigrant psyche, but the “repression” and “shame” that Weber sees in
Levinsky (734-45) is not at all disabling, but part of the necessary ritual that enables Levinsky’s
social performance and control over it in his adoptive country: “I still gesticulate a great deal,
though much less than I used to” (318). By constantly policing his gestures, just as he constantly
polishes his English, Levinsky gains more and more control over his public persona, which is at
all times under public scrutiny and surveillance. Therefore, he does not suppress or repress the
markers of his Jewishness (in the sense that both gestures and iterations of his birth culture are
easily accessible); he simply acquires a new repertoire (of gestures and words) that assists in his
performance of Americanization. And, if we were to invoke Horace Kallen’s optimistic and
ground-breaking argument in his 1915 “Democracy vs. Melting Pot—“On the whole,
Americanization has not repressed nationality,” “Americanization has liberated nationality,”
95
then Levinsky’s professed Jewish secularism becomes an even more distinctive mark of his immigrant persona rather than his failed attempt to out-green himself.

6.2.5 The Immigrant Novel and the Politics of Representations

It is hard to ignore Cahan’s own linguistic wars, so to speak, when we consider David Levinsky’s linguistic battles. To be precise, it is not that Levinsky stages the linguistic debates informing Cahan’s own writing as a journalist and writer in both Yiddish and English, or only those. Rather, its larger linguistic concern informing Levinsky’s struggle to become American through mastery of English (among other venues) stages similar linguistic encounters many new immigrants shared as they entered both the US landscape and the literary market as consumers (and later producers) of literature. As Jules Chametzky has shown, writing in English for Cahan was not a matter of choice as much as of necessity. At the same time, unlike many of his fellow middle-class Jewish contemporaries, who viewed Yiddish as “a sub-literary jargon, incapable of rich and subtle literature,” Cahan realized that his Yiddish audience in America, though small, would get even smaller if the language were not preserved through some means, including literature and journalism.\(^96\) Moreover, as Matthew F. Jacobson suggests, the Yiddish community, whose literary producers were also political activists (like Cahan), “quickly developed its own, distinctly American themes and styles.”\(^97\) The enormous popularity of the foreign language press, and the Yiddish press in particular, supports Jacobson’s hypothesis. Furthermore, Robert E. Park has shown, ethnic enclaves, like the Yiddish community that Jacobson describes, tried to preserve a sense of belonging, or “the national feeling,” in a familiar language and with a
familiar imagined readership: “In America as in Europe, it is language and tradition, rather than political allegiance that unites the foreign populations.”

*The Rise of David Levinsky* was also Cahan’s last work of fiction in Yiddish or English. Whereas previous critics see writing in English as either as “an act of assimilation, an affirmation of one’s commitment to the New World,” or as an “act of emigration” from the rigors of the conservative ghetto, which “obliged honor to the old ways” that were “conspicuously non-American,” I suggest that Cahan’s writing reflects both the immigrant character’s desire to assimilate and his reluctance, usually expressed through an assertion of bi-cultural identity. His English writing draws the English-speaking audience to the immigrant and Jewish ghetto, and his Yiddish writing teaches Jewish immigrants what it means to be(come) an American. At the same time, Sara Blair’s recent work has repositioned Cahan’s Yiddish-fiction within the legitimate boundaries of modernist fiction. She argues that Cahan “explores the paradox not merely of the recent immigrant but of the immigrant Jewish intellectual whose engagements with American modernity are both socially transformative and invisible” (259). Notwithstanding, it was Cahan’s English fiction that built his reputation as a literary producer; *The Rise of David Levinsky*, for example, was the first immigrant novel to receive national attention and recognition on the first page of the *New York Times Book Review*.

In the previous section I suggested a critical intervention in mapping out immigrant writing as not only complicit with but also as a counter-narrative to discourses of Americanization (legal, political, cultural, popular, etc.) disseminated through both the immigrant and the American popular press. With the immigrant novel in particular, we see the legitimation of the immigrant genre and the recognition of its aesthetics beyond the superficial immigrant “theme” and its sociological appeal. Although most early reviewers of the novel
found ways to read it in autobiographical terms, later studies devoted to the novel and Cahan have focused on its literary appeal, its craft, and the difference between Cahan and his protagonist. The craft of Cahan’s novel is worth further attention as both an immigrant novel and an American novel. Thomas Ferraro captures the crux of the immigrant writer in America: “An aspiring writer from an immigrant background feels damned on the one side for becoming too American and damned on the other side for not being able to become American enough.” The problem of becoming American (or not), therefore, challenges both representational (genre) choices and group allegiances. By self-distancing from the group, the immigrant writer can achieve the critical and individual distance to write about it, and especially to write in English. At the same time, the pull of the ghetto is often too strong and, as with Cahan, more tempting and urgent than a literary future in English. For first generation immigrant writers, like Cahan and Ravage, the commitment to the Lower East side was still strong (stronger for Cahan, in particular, given his activist and socialist work). Given this baggage and Cahan’s and Ravage’s demonstrated familiarity with American literature (as in their early publications in national literary magazines, as we have seen in this chapter), several questions remain for further inquiry: What is the task of the immigrant novel? How does it deploy and eschew conventions? What are its politics of representation and what political work does it do? What does it bring to the American world of letters to warrant entrance into circulation and, later, canonization?

Susan K. Harris has shown the “problems of representation” in turn-of-the-twentieth-century immigrant fiction, stemming from both political and formal or esthetic factors. These “problems,” she suggests, persist “until the advent of modernism,” when immigrant writers “break through the strictures of American narrative forms and create immigrant characters who speak for themselves.” Much like my argument at the beginning of this chapter, Harris’s
intervention suggests that, “though sociologically compelling, these stories are often problematic in their aesthetic and ideological constructions of their ethnic characters, often recreating stereotypes […] rather than representing ethnic characters’ subjectivity” (128). Calling attention to the politics of immigrant representation and self-representation is a necessary critical gesture in bringing immigrant writing to the center of American studies. At the same time, I would like to supplement Harris’s argument and suggest that it is the advent of modernity, not necessarily of modernism, that gives immigrant writers a voice and a stake in writing their stories as “Americans in the making.” This particular confluence of the discourses of modernity and Americanization—an attempt, in a way, to withstand one of modernity’s challenges in dealing with unrestricted immigration and its resulting socio-economic and cultural changes—facilitates the entrance of the immigrant writer and the immigrant fictionalized character on the American literary scene, thus far abundant in “bundles, fragrant cheese, and unimaginable sausages” (Ravage ii). Cahan’s literary work also establishes the new direction of immigrant fiction in the US, which moves beyond the conventional dialect tales of nineteenth century American literature and opens an entire immigrant tradition that will flourish throughout the twentieth century and beyond.

Notes

1 Clausen, Growing Up Rootless, 11.


These are sub-chapters in the book’s parts III and IV, and “The Romance of Readjustment” is also the 1917 memoir’s final chapter. In the 1971 edition, Ravage revisits his autobiography almost twenty years later, adding a few chapters that trace his later life in New York and Paris. These sections are a poor addition to an autobiography informed by its own time; had Ravage rewritten a new version rather than merely adding a coda to his 1917 memoir, he would have better served his literary legacy. The mix of voices, registers, filters of memory, and a certain degree of bitterness (he added these chapters after his separation from his family, who moved back to New York while he remained in France) cloud this edition in nostalgic episodes. This addition also takes the emphasis away from an immigrant’s autobiography to merely a biography, offering an unnecessary degree of closure.

Historian John Bodnar’s reading of immigration as “transplantation” rewrites Oscar Handlin’s previous metaphor of immigration as “uprootedness” over thirty years later. Rather than seeing immigration as a loss, Bodnar theorizes it as a transplantation that allows for the retention of immigrant cultural values.

Qtd. in King, 124.

I trace the relation between nativism and the laws restricting European immigration in Chapter 2.

Stauffer, 150. See also the Review of An American in the Making in The Booklist, 93.

Partly in homage to Ravage’s book, and partly because I want to draw attention to the relevance of his work in the context of discourses of Americanization and immigration restriction, I title my sub-sections with titles of chapters and sub-chapters in An American in the Making.
Ravage’s name (né Revici) appears in some records as Max Ravitch. In his autobiography he self-deprecatingly confesses that he published under the pseudonym “Max the Sleever” while working in a sweatshop and learning English. I submit that Ravage did not change his name from Max to Marcus until at least his graduation from college, and little before the publication of his autobiography. The University of Illinois Directory at the university’s archives lists his name “Max Ravitch,” as “first recorded at the University” he graduated from in 1910. Therefore, the transformation from Revici (Romanian) to Ravitch (English phonetic equivalent) must have occurred at his arrival in the US in 1900, with the first Anglicization of his name possibly taking place at Ellis Island, while the later transformation from Ravitch to the Anglicized Ravage occurred sometime between 1910 and 1917.

The University of Illinois at Urbana Archives keep an alumnus file for Marcus Eli Ravage, or Max Ravitch. The miscellaneous documents include a brief biographical sketch, reviews and advertisements of his publications (in the US and France), an entry for a University of Illinois Directory, and a 1925 article he published in *The Elks Magazine*, “Where Is the Culture of America? The Cities Claim It—But Do They Monopolize It?”


Clausen, *Growing Up Rootless*, 16.

Like fellow Jewish immigrant Abraham Cahan from Lithuania, Ravage first published excerpts from his book in a major national journal. From December 1916 through November

18 Obituary, 47. Suzanne Ravage Clausen’s memoir, Growing Up Rootless, offers an unflattering yet moving account of the father and family man Ravage. Suzanne Clausen’s son Christopher Clausen also wrote an autobiographical piece where he includes his reflections on his immigrant grandfather. See “Grandfathers” in My Life with President Kennedy. For a useful chronology and other biographical details, see Kellman’s “Introduction” to the 2009 edition of An American in the Making.

19 Romanian immigration to the US is still a missing in U.S. immigration history and literary history despite fairly known contributions to US history and American literature (particularly in representations of immigrant life and immigrant and diasporic identity, more recently in the works of Nobel-Prize winner Elie Wiesel, University of Chicago Professor and renowned historian of religions and writer Mircea Eliade, and National Public Radio contributor and writer Andrei Codrescu. For the first (and to date only) comprehensive account of Romanian immigrants in the US, see Drutzu and Popovici. The other useful study, the first of its kind published in the US, albeit limited to non-Jewish immigrants settling in Chicago, is Galitzi’s. For more recent studies on Romanian immigration in North America, see Diamond, Wertsman (1975) and Wertsman (1980). The translations from Romanian are mine unless otherwise noted.

20 Evans-Gordon, 4-5.
Idem. Evans-Gordon also notes: “Many English people living in the neighborhood have summed up the situation to me in a phrase: ‘We are living in a foreign country’” (9).

Ravage, An American in the Making, 4, 12, and 27.


Drutzu 233-34.

Esteve, especially 172-99.

Between 1882 and 1894, around 12,000 Romanian Jews immigrated to the US. The economic and financial crisis of 1899-1900, which Ravage records in the paragraph cited earlier, led to a peak in immigration in 1900 and a massive arrival in New York Harbor (more than 9,000 people with the average number of immigrants from Romania usually amounting to 800 per year. Drutzu and Popovici suggest that the General U.S. consul to Romania in 1872, Benjamin F. Peixotto, facilitated the first wave of Jewish immigration. See Drutzu, 234-35.

Howe, The World of Our Fathers, 36.

Galitzi, 19-25 and 5-6. Romanians also immigrated to Canada, albeit in much smaller numbers, and they settled mainly in rural areas.

Qtd. in Sollors, “Introduction,” Multilingual America, 5.


Some of the most accomplished Romanian writers and historians contributed to America from across the Atlantic Ocean: Nicolae Iorga, Liviu Rebreanu, Cezar Petrescu, Ioan Slavici, Victor Eftimiu, Lucian Blaga and others (Drutzu n. 1, 231). Other Romanian newspapers in the US, published after 1912, included: Desteapta-te, Romane; Glasul Vremii; Steaua Noastra; Unirea; Santinela; Progresul; Transilvania, and Dreptatea. Humorous magazines were also
published in Romanian: Allright (1908), Calicul Roman/The Romanian Miser (1909; lasted for 7 years); Urzica/The Nettle (1914); Vagabondul/The Tramp (1922); Sageata/The Arrow (1922) (Sageata’s/The Arrow’s pornographic character hastened its demise; only 5 issues appeared). See Drutzu and Popovici, 220-29.


34 Vaida Raceanul, “D’Ale Noastre Din America” (Our Stories in America”. The Romanian Cleveland Almanach, 1912. The Historical Society of Philadelphia Archives.

35 Although widely used terms in immigration history and literature, “Old World” and “New World” are highly-contested terms in the field of American Indian Studies given the erasure of the “New” continent’s history before the conquest by the “Old.” I am using these terms critically in this chapter to reflect the vocabulary immigrant writers themselves used in describing their new and old homes.

36 Park shows that the circulation of the Yiddish daily press reached its peak in 1916, when 532,787 copies of papers were circulated in the New York City area. The Jewish Daily Forward/Forverts had a circulation of 143,716 in 1916. Park, The Immigrant Press and Its Control, 91.


40 Wyman, Round-Trip to America: The Immigrants Return to Europe, 1880-1930.

41 About 1,000, 000 immigrants enrolled in formal public school Americanization classes, but fewer actually completed them. Aneta Pavlenko documents the low attendance of Americanization classes and the coercion of non-English speaking immigrants to attend public
schools: “More than 30 states passed Americanization laws which obligated aliens unable to speak or read English to attend public evening schools […] . Thirty-four states also passed official English-language policies which declared English the only language of instruction and effectively closed most bilingual and native language programs.” See Pavlenko, “‘Ask Each Pupil About Her Methods of Cleaning,’” 279, 289.

42 The Crèvecoeurian myth of Americanization has undergone critical reassessments by several generations of immigration scholars. Most recently, Garry Gerstle has summed up the four main challenges brought to this Americanization myth by new radical historians of immigration, challenges that my project builds on: (1) that European immigrants wanted to exchange radically their Old World ways and to be Americanized; (2) that Americanization was a quick process, with few obstacles in its way; (3) that Americanization “melted” immigrants into a new “race” or culture or nation; and (4) that immigrants experienced Americanization as emancipation from Old World servitude. Gerstle, “Liberty, Coercion, and the Making of Americans,” 524-58.

43 Howe, The World of Our Fathers.

44 King, especially 11-49.


46 Russian immigrant Gleb Blotkin, for instance, published his Americanization story in 1930, borrowing Ravage’s title and prefacing it with the following summary: “The son of the personal physician to the late Tsar Nicholas tells of his conversion to United States citizenship.” Gleb Blotkin, “An American in the Making.”

47 Qtd. in Lipsky, “Introduction,” xi-xix and xviii. See also Fine, 16.
Howells’ enthusiasm for *The Rise of David Levinsky* was less intense than his praise of Cahan’s previous work. Jules Chametzky hypothesizes that it was because of “the focus on sensual matters” (68). Howells was, however, enthusiastic about Cahan’s earlier novels and short stories: “I cannot help thinking that we have in him a writer of foreign birth who will do honor to American letters, as Boyesen did. He is already thoroughly naturalized to our point of view; he sees things with American eyes, and he brings in aid of his vision the far and rich perception of his Hebraic race” (qtd. in Chametzky 68-69).

See R. B. [Randolph Bourne], “Americans in the Making” 30.

Idem.

“Dumitru and Sigrid” was initially published in the March 1901 issue of *Cosmopolitan*. Rpt. in *Grandma Never Lived in America*, 191-201.

Sanders 420 and Harap 518 and 524.

Chametzky viii and Engel 37.

The current bibliography on the reception of Cahan’s novel is too lengthy to comprise in a note. The emphasis is either on David’s “inner experience” or the multiple losses he experiences (Weinstein 47). On Levinsky’s loneliness as allegorizing the “emptiness at the heart of the American Dream,” see Engel, 38. On David’s multiple self-divisions—whereby Levinsky’s productions of the structure of self-difference “assist both his economic and cultural rise,” see Barish, 643. For a lengthier discussion of the novel’s autobiographical readings, see Marovitz, 153-56. My reading of the novel resonates more with Pressman’s historicized analysis and Chametzky’s.

For similar readings, see Barrish, Olster, Von Rosk and Weinstein.
This is Muhmenkeh’s advice to Sarah Smolinsky in Anzia Yezierska’s novel, *Bread Givers*: “Good luck on you, little heart! […] Go make yourself for a person. Pick yourself out twenty-five herring at a penny apiece. You can easy [sic] sell them at two cents” (21) [my emphasis]. Sarah escapes from Hester Street and “makes herself for a person,” just as David makes himself “for a person” by becoming a successful entrepreneur.

My reading of David Levinsky as a modern (if not modernist) character has also been influenced by David Engel’s “The ‘Discrepancies’ of the Modern.”

Kandiyoti suggests that the trajectory of immigrant identity, and especially Jewish identity at the turn of the century, is recreated “through space and spatial discourse” (78). Kandiyoti also considers Michel Rogin’s essay on the “Indian question,” arguing that whites projected mobility onto the Indian, which became “the wandering savage” in Andrew Jackson’s formulation. In this respect, her reading of Cahan’s work against “nativist localism that seeks to avoid contamination by outsiders” (85-86) suggests the alternative of the immigrant tales of otherness—in my reading—as alternative narratives of resisting assimilation.

This is the title of the novel’s book five, 83-110. Levinsky is continuously preoccupied with his discovery of America, before and after becoming a successful entrepreneur. Many episodes later in the novel he confesses, “The United States was still full of surprises for me. I was still discovering America” (321).

Chametzsky (vii) argues that Cahan played an important role in the “acculturation of the Jewish immigrant masses” especially through the pages of the *Forverts*: “in his own voice, in his introduction of human interest and popular features of mass appeal […] [and] in the very rise of an Americanized Yiddish that he encouraged.” Blair also poses that as Cahan aspired “to mediate Yiddish- and English-language genres and cultural forms, he embodies the problem for

61 Diner (99) shows how Cahan’s editorials in the Forward “criticized America’s failure to live up to the country’s ideals of liberty and democracy in its treatment of workers and black Americans.” He also documents that almost 250,000 students used [Cahan’s] English Teacher, published in 1891.” Cahan taught English in a night school at first and later was certified by the New York City Board of Education.

62 Besides Cahan, other recently-transplanted Jewish writers mediated some of these issues to the new and old American public, including Jacob Gordin, Leon Korbin, Morris Rosenfeld, and many others.

63 Chametzsky, From the Ghetto, 34, 21, 54,

64 Idem, 115.

65 Chametzky (75) speculates that Cahan never completed The Chasm because he found it difficult to reconcile his old and new experiences in literary form: “[T]he chasm was wider than Cahan had sometimes thought and to bridge it more difficult than he expected.”

66 Chametzky, 33-36. For a collection of Cahan’s journalism for Lincoln Steffens’ Commercial Advertiser, see Rischin, Grandma Never Lived in America.

67 Rischin, xix.

68 Only two volumes of his autobiography have been translated into English as The Education of Abraham Cahan.

69 Qtd. in Rischin, “Introduction,” Grandma Never Lived in America, xvii. Rischin also points out that “the automatic identification of the Forward’s editor with a Yiddish-speaking public dimmed perceptions of Cahan’s remarkable pioneer role as an important American
novelist” (xviii). In my conversations with international Jewish scholars at the Vilnius Yiddish Institute in the summer of 2007, I learned about a unanimous acceptance of the role of Cahan in the Yiddish-speaking world, and his lesser recognition as an American novelist.


71 “Urban Jewish Immigrants” would be a more precise category, albeit more limiting. And since Cahan’s literary and activist work reached immigrants of other ethnicities, “urban immigrants” seems a more appropriate category. In her incisive article, Sara Blair writes about Cahan’s cultural identity as “son of the shtetl and bearer of the avant-garde.” Her article is timely for recovering Cahan’s Yiddish-language fiction in a context of competing American modernisms: “Yiddish and English, high and low, idealist and naturalist, individualist and collective.” Blair’s study opens useful comparative vistas for conceiving cultural production “across linguistic, ethnic, and social boundaries.” Blair, “Whose Modernism Is It?,” 261, 259.

72 The recent PBS documentary, *The Jewish Americans: They Came to Stay/A World of Their Own* (2008), allots Cahan a good portion of airtime and offers a nice balance of archival material, scholarly interpretation, and public appeal. Of particular interest is the segment on the Yiddish theatre.

73 Zeidel (61), documenting the work of the Dilligham Commission, which led to racist immigration restriction criteria in the early 1920s, suggests that from October 1905 to the end of 1906, “pogroms had devastated 661 towns, killed 985 people, widowed 387 women, and orphaned 177 children.”

74 Glazer 61.

75 Ngai, 3. Ngai persuasively argues that “a new sense of hypernationalism governed particularly Americanization discourses after the war and the enactment of the Johnson-Reed
Immigration Act, This incidence fuelled both unprecedented patriotism and remapped the promises of citizenship. [...] In this period, the concept of race itself also changed, from late 19th-century race science, which centered on physiognomic difference and hierarchy, to 20th c. racial ideas that linked race to both physiognomy and nationality. Modern racial ideology depended increasingly on the idea of complex cultural, national, and physical difference more than on simple biological hierarchy” (8).

76 Qtd. in Jacobson, Special Sorrows, 50. Jacobson cites this passage from Cahan’s Bleter Fun Mein Leibn, vol. III, 158-174, where Cahan reprinted his speech from the Brussels Congress.

77 McClure’s initially announced this forthcoming story as “The Confessions of an American Jew,” a title changed later to “The Autobiography of an American Jew” by Cahan: “A notable McClure’s article by Burton J. Hendrick, describing the marvelous recent growth and extension of Jewish power in America, will be followed by “Confessions of an American Jew—an autobiography by one of the successful Hebrews of the country which to many will explain why there is a Jewish Invasion—an illuminating and strikingly unusual personal document.” The story was first published in the April issue of McClure’s, 92-106.

78 The essay was published in the same issue where the first pages of Cahan’s story also appeared.

79 Consider a few sub-chapter titles of this lengthy article: “The Conquest of the Clothing Trades,” “Business Completely Transformed by the Jews,” “Intensity of Jewish Competition,” “Jews: The Greatest Owners of Land,” “Jews in the Civil Service” or “Protestant and Catholic Children Now Taught by Jewesses, Jewish Policeman, and Firemen.” Toward the end of the essay, the emphasis is on the Jewish success story, the domination and “control” of certain
commercial enterprises and his imminent progress: “Jewish Control of the Theatres,” “Jews in Control of the Big Department Store,” “Jews Control the Whiskey Business,” “Jews Control the Trade in Leaf Tobacco” or “Jews: A Great Power in American Railroads.”

Hendrik is careful to show the difference between German and Russian Jews in the American labor market, 127-130.

Hendrick, 165.


Marovitz, 136.

Kaplan, 21-22.


Jacobson shows how this notion of a “quintessential Jew,” with its political implications worldwide, was also of great interest and dispute to the Jewish intelligentsia in the US. Special Sorrows, 96.

Dinnerstein et al., 139-40.

Barish, 73-96 and 73 n 1. Barish also invokes recent arguments by Ross Posnock and Sara Blair, who have defended James against critical accusations of his “elitist distaste” for Jews and immigrants in his Lower East Side visit recounted in The American Scene (178). Marovitz reads James’s “grotesque representation of ‘a Jewry that had burst all bounds’” as “ambivalent” (108). I read James’ anti-Semitism as emblematic not necessarily of James’s own anti-Semitism but of the “American scene” he sees and describes through both nativist and expatriate eyes.

James, The American Scene, 131.

Banta, 42 and Esteve, 3.
91 See also Haenni, “Visual and Theatrical Culture, Tenement Fiction, and the Immigrant Subject in Abraham Cahan’s Yekl,” 495.

92 A useful study about immigrant participation in World War I and the unprecedented opportunities the war offered immigrants to participate in American public life is Sterba’s Good Americans.

93 King, 90-126.

94 Weber, 734.

95 Kallen, “Democracy vs. the Melting Pot,” 220.

96 Chametzky, 54.

97 Jacobson, Special Sorrows, 95-96.


99 Fine, 16-17 and Klein, 20-23.

100 Marovitz 162.


102 Ferraro, Ethnic Passages, 10.

103 Harris, 127-42.
PART IV
CHAPTER 7

IMMIGRANTS ON THE SILVER SCREEN: THE MAKINGS AND UNMAKINGS OF AMERICANS AT THE PICTURE SHOW

7.1. Immigrants, Indians, Cinema, and Modernity

The phonograph is a marvel sure,
With a charm that’s all its own;
And it’s hard to overrate the lure
Of the mystic telephone.
The telegraph, with its mighty range,
Is a wonder, as we know,
But nothing yet is half as strange
As the Moving Picture Show.

—“The Moving Picture Show” 1908

“The moving picture show” arrived in the United States as the “golden door” opened to New Immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe, as the Western frontier closed, as the American Indian seemed to become the “Vanishing Indian,” and as the “New American” was born at the intersection of legal, racial, and cultural crossroads. Like the immigrants, cinema in America was “foreign”—mostly French—and threatened the stability of the local emerging cinema industry in the first decade of the twentieth century. As the poem in the epigraph above suggests, the new medium is an emblem of modernity, along with the phonograph, the telephone, and the telegraph, yet it is also “strange,” a site of “wonder and surprise.” In the United States
and in Europe, cinema became coterminous with modernity—a new technology “of perception, reproduction, and representation; a new cultural commodity of mass production and consumption; a new space of social congregation.”3 As Miriam Hansen also suggests, “The diversion experienced by viewers of early cinema was thus predicated on an excessive supply of visual sensations, at once modernist bricolage and ideological mirage.”4 Cinema became the vehicle for feeding American mass culture’s new interest in the visual, especially since the racialization of American “others” or their racial signification also took place increasingly at the visual level. The fetishization of native American regalia and other markers of “Indian” identity (feathers, moccasins, long hair etc.) in early silent film set the tone for the industry’s later cultivation of tropes of the “vanishing” Indian as well as for the dissemination of stereotypes through the new medium of both leisure and mass education. To this end, early films reflected Americans’ desires, anxieties, and beliefs, but also helped form and nurture them.

Because early silent films were a force of socialization and instruction,5 they also introduced immigrant and American audiences to xenophobia and racism, portraying the Chinese as an exotic threat, the Japanese as sexual aggressors, the Jews as money-grabbing and criminal, and the Italians as the epitome of crime.6 These movies also painted American Indians—a great topic of fascination for many immigrants—as savages or noble Indians doomed to an unquestioned vanishing. Given that early films were produced for working class and immigrant audiences, the film industry assumed that it could “teach” these audiences how to be or become “good” Americans. Furthermore, the birth of the cinematic Indian and immigrant coincides with the birth of the American spectator—in many instances, an urban immigrant or working class spectator whose class or ethnic distinctions temporarily dissolve in the darkness of the movie theatre. The silent film was, in many ways, a welcoming public forum where racial, ethnic, and
linguistic differences were temporarily suspended by the immersion into the silent film. To this end, it is tempting to believe—following Miriam Hansen—that early cinema was an alternative public sphere for immigrants (and women, Hansen notes) in the US, where “they could negotiate the specific displacements and discrepancies of their existence.” At the same time, it is worth adding that this seemingly democratic (and democratizing) new public sphere was also a meeting ground for ideological formations vis-à-vis racial and ethnic difference, bringing audiences together yet also alienating them from each other, as we shall see in the following sections.

7.2 “To Land or Not to Land”: Emigrants Landing at Ellis Island

Emigrants Landing at Ellis Island (1903), filmed shortly after the arrival of Marcus E. Ravage in the US, captures a pivotal moment in the immigrant’s encounter with the New World: the scene of arrival. It also tells the story of one of the most contested sites in the immigrant imaginary, Ellis Island, the island of hope or the island of tears, the port of triage where immigrants were “sorted” and examined before entering the US. Opened in 1892, it admitted almost 70% of immigrants landing in the US until 1924. Ellis Island admitted most of the transatlantic passengers in 1903, most of whom (particularly third-class passengers) were towed from the transatlantic steamers to Ellis Island in open barges. The film dramatizes the entrance of lower-class passengers into the US through their arrival at Ellis Island in a ferry. (Customarily, first and second-class passengers were questioned by immigration officers on board, and therefore did not have to undergo the entrance Ellis Island-style.) At the same time, as Scott Simon and Richard Abel suggest, the film was also an advertisement for the William Myers Excursion and Transportation company, whose name we see in large letters on the ferry, a
company that prided itself on offering a more humane method of transporting immigrants from their transatlantic steamers (which usually docked elsewhere, mainly in New Jersey) to Ellis Island.¹¹

Figure 7.1. Emigrants Landing at Ellis Island: The Scene of Arrival

*Emigrants Landing at Ellis Island* opens with a wide shot of the ferry docking at Ellis Island, making visible the name of the transportation company as the ferry slowly enters the frame: “Myers Excursion and Transportation.” As the camera rests on the ferry and a solemn music accompanies its slow entrance, we glimpse the two-deck ferry and its busy yet crammed customers, who lean on the railings as they await their grand entrance. Compared to the rest of the film, whose tempo heightens as the passengers trot in front of the camera toward the
Inspection offices at Ellis Island, the first shots of this film seem composed, with an air of calm demeanor emanating from the expectant crowd. On their way to Ellis Island, passing New York Bay, the immigrants on the ferry would have glanced at the Statue of Liberty, and their calm demeanor may be a short-term effect of their hopeful musings on this iconic “Mother of Exiles.” But the Statue of Liberty is missing from this film on immigrant arrival, perhaps largely because the goal of the film was primarily commercial. At the same time, this oversight is striking because also in 1903, two months before the film was shot, the Statue of Liberty was embellished with a new bronze plaque bearing an inscription from Emma Lazarus’ 1883 sonnet, “The New Colossus:”

Give me your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses, yearning to be free;  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore—  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me—  
I lift my lamp before the golden door!”

The absence of the Statue of Liberty from the scene of arrival removes the focus from immigrant agency—minuscule as it is—to the transportation company’s role in helping the immigrants land safely, collapsing American imperialism and capitalism in a few seconds of film. Granted that safe arrival is a desirable end to a long transatlantic journey, the short film erases the immigrants’ story before their arrival, taking away the accomplishment of completing the taxing journey in the film’s emphasis on the transportation company’s successful delivery of immigrants to the “island of hope.”
While a temporary wooden bridge connects the ferry with Ellis Island, the “landing” of the “wretched refuse” is accompanied by a fast-paced version of the song “America” (“My Country ’Tis of Thee”), a welcome anthem and an optimistic musical accompaniment of the “tired” and the “poor.” The emerging anonymous crowd is probably unaware of the role it is playing in this extremely rare footage of immigrant arrival. The first to emerge from the crowd on the right is an old woman, who looks surprised yet determined, and who is guided by the hand by an Immigration officer, and taken to the left of the frame. This gesture also establishes the direction of the crowd entrance—to the left—also guiding the audiences’ glances. The rest of the crowd follows: women of different social classes (wearing different hats and hairdos suggestive of their country of origin, mostly from Eastern Europe), most of them carrying babies and children along with luggage and accompanying bundles. Just as the entrance’s grim tone is established, despite the cheerful music rhythm, we see a group of older women and children entering the frame, one of them slightly glancing at the camera. They pause for a second, as if to regain their composure and take in the new surroundings for a second, as they all talk, gesticulate, and smile at each other. Dressed in the best clothes, hats and hair-dresses they can afford, the women look confident, if slightly burdened by the weight of their luggage and children.
This short tableau is emblematic of the hope the film wants to sell: the women smile at each other and their children despite the grim elements in the tableau, like the immigration officers and the boat personnel scrutinizing their entrance. The lower middle class passengers are easy to spot as their luggage is considerably smaller, they are better dressed, and fewer of them carry children. Fewer men than women emerge from the ferry—which could signal the gendered advertising message of safety, as even women and children are shown to arrive safely—but they carry similar bundles and more luggage. The children look impeccable and well fed, a testament to the humane side of the transportation company, a fabricated marketing strand that seems to ignore the toil of the transatlantic trip on the immigrants’ most vulnerable demographics. The
film also ignores the emotional toil of the transatlantic steamer, partly because the goal of the film was different and partly because it is still early in the history of representing immigration to witness such episodes. (We will get short glimpses of that passage in one of the following sections on Charlie Chaplin’s *The Immigrant* from 1917.) One of the most appealing parts of this short film is the sense of brotherhood among the anonymous passengers. As they enter the frame (and the land of Ellis Island), they look timidly ahead. Most of them do not face the camera, but most of them look back. This backward glance, nostalgic or simply reassuring (families locating their various members), connects the New World with the Old, and establishes once more the travelers’ identity as “emigrants,” people coming from a definite past, with strong connections across space, time, and generations.

Although *Emigrants Landing at Ellis Island* tells a story, the short film fits the genre of *actualité*, a precursor of the documentary, and a genre usually associated with early French cinema. The French *actualités*, started by the Lumière Brothers and used by studios like Méliès, Gaumont, and Pathé Frères, covered a range of current events, from military parades to travelogues to foreign countries and shots of daily French life. The genre of *actualité* was popular because it “participated in the industrial production of images associated with travel and tourism” and because it was cheap to produce, serving often as a “novel form of publicity for the more enterprising exhibitors.” It is not surprising that companies like William Myers’ transportation enterprise would seize the opportunity to use a new medium of publicity that could reach a growing number of cinematic audiences, many of whom were immigrants. As film scholars have shown, in 1903 American cinema audiences were exposed to foreign films (especially French films), which would have made them familiar with the genre of *actualité*, but also to “native” films inspired by American topics (especially Westerns), and films moving
toward narrative. Director Edwin S. Porter, Thomas Edison’s son, also shot two of his most important silents in 1903: *The Life of an American Fireman* and the influential *The Great Train Robbery*, drawing largely on editing techniques of the French cineastes. Nevertheless, by 1904, “fictional narratives had displaced actualities and scenics as the dominant product of American companies,” according to Miriam Hansen.17

A two-minute film like *Emigrants Landing at Ellis Island* would have been shown during a vaudeville program in 1903, Richard Abel claims in the audio film notes accompanying this silent. Shortly before this film was made, American audiences were still viewing films in vaudeville houses, dime museums, summer amusement parks, tent shows, church halls, and theatres. Most of those films were foreign, especially reputable French films produced by Pathé Frères, a company marketing its films globally in the first decade of the twentieth century. The release of this short *actualité* also coincides with the expansion of the American cinema market during 1903-1904, reaching not only a wider audience but a more diverse audience than before. With the boom of the nickelodeon market in 1905, reaching its peak years from 1906 till 1908, the composition of the audiences also changed. Audiences also varied as much as the contexts in which early silent films were shown. Considering that more and more immigrants in 1903 were becoming cultural consumers rather than objects of consumption (the consumed), it is certainly worth speculating on the effects of a short film like *Emigrants Landing at Ellis Island* on silent film audiences who frequented the vaudeville houses and other early screening spaces.18 Such an enterprise is also particularly difficult given the impossibility of recreating such an audience or reconstructing its reactions based on newspaper and magazine accounts.

At the same time, a film like *Emigrants* could perhaps best be read through Tom Gunning’s useful framework of the “cinema of attractions” dominating early cinema before
1908, an era when the desire to display (and the fascination with technology) competed with the desire to tell a story. As Gunning explains, the term “cinema of attractions” denoted “early cinema’s fascination with novelty and its foregrounding of the act of display.” Attraction, notes Gunning, is the key element of the structure of early film. And as a new way of approaching cinema, attractions foreground the role of the spectator: “The attraction directly addresses the spectator, acknowledging the viewer’s presence and seeking to quickly satisfy curiosity.”

Rather than delaying the resolution of the conflict through a series of suspense-building devices, as in the classical cinema of the 1910s, the early cinema took an interest in novelty. *Emigrants Landing at Ellis Island* addresses a relatively novel subject, that of immigration, and presents a display of immigrant bodies marching in front of the camera for spectatorial scrutiny and observation. Whereas the film does not make a direct statement about Americanization practices that immigrants are subjected to aside from the tune of “America” accompanying their more or less triumphant landing at Ellis Island, cameraman Alfred Abadie captured a series of looking relations that help us understand the various strands of objectifying the immigrant subject in visual representations at the beginning of the twentieth century. As the new arrivals face the camera, few of them actually gazing at it, their entrance is also mediated by the gazes of the immigration officers and the ferry personnel who scrutinize their entrance.
Two officers stand out at the beginning of the landing, looking superior and distant, one of them defiant with arms akimbo. Like the camera, which is fixed, the officers and personnel are fixed on the left side of the frame. As the film progresses, other officers mingle with the crowd, the ferry personnel bring on more ropes and transportation machinery, and these human filtering devices become more mobile. At one point, for instance, realizing that it may take a while before the long convoy lands, the two standing officers (wearing hats) find a place to sit down but remain in the frame, watching the arrivals. Large transatlantic ships would pack around 1,500 passengers at a time. It is fair to assume from this footage that ferries could also pack hundreds, although the quality of the two trips differed greatly, as the early audiences of the film
would have noticed, as would twenty-first century audiences, whose landing experiences are different. As early cinema moves away from representing unnamed masses to a more individualized story—especially the story of what it means to be(come) an American—the nuclear family becomes the prototypical pattern of “good” American citizenship. At the same time, with the emergence of the first women film directors, an interest in immigrants and gender emerges to complicate both the immigrant and the Americanization story on the silver screen, as we shall see next.

7.3 Alice Guy Blaché *Making an American Citizen* (1912), or How to Turn an Alien Brute into a Good American Husband

*Making an American Citizen*, a fifteen-minute, one-reel silent film, was directed and produced by an immigrant woman, Alice Guy Blaché, in 1912. A pioneer director in the US, Blaché is also arguably the first female director in the history of cinema. Blaché made *Making an American Citizen* for her own film company in the US, Solax, which she and her husband, cameraman Herbert Blaché, founded in 1910, after their move from France in 1907. In France, Alice Blaché was a director at Gaumont. Her pioneering work earned her the French government’s Legion of Honor in 1953. Solax is credited for producing films of quality, despite their didacticism and their sometimes pedantic undertones, which also permeate the melodrama *Making an American Citizen*. As I argue throughout this chapter, American cinema was inextricably complicit with and critical of Americanization, especially in the first decade of the twentieth century, when the quick assimilation of immigrants was expected, and *Making an American Citizen* is no exception. Drawing attention to the gender barriers limiting access to
American citizenship, the film shows the prescriptiveness of American behavior through a series of “lessons in Americanism” that the visible alien has to learn. The film makes the family and the domestic sphere the primary sites for teaching “lessons in Americanism,” yet the film maintains a critical stance toward quick Americanization and almost over-night reformation. Whether appealing to immigrant or American audiences in the 1910s, especially in its erasure of many typical immigrant scenes and topos—Making an American Citizen is, in fact, about the impossibility of “making” an American citizen.

The plot of the film is perhaps too straightforward: a Russian couple (possibly although not explicitly Jewish) immigrates to America and, in the process, the boorish brute of a husband—a suggestive generalization of the Eastern European male “type”—learns a series of “lessons in Americanism” and becomes “completely Americanized” by the end of this fifteen-minute film, as the last intertitle tells the viewer. The film begins in Russia, where the main character (soon-to-be-reformed) Ivan Orloff and his wife encounter a few fellow emigrants on a Russian dust road. After a brief chat, the peasants “invite [them] to share their journey to America,” as the intertitle reads, and the couple is persuaded to follow them. Like Ravage’s fellow countrymen in his 1917 memoir, An American in the Making, the immigrants start their journey to America first by going on foot. As the group of peasants passes by, the unnamed wife and a skinny horse draw Ivan’s cart, while the chubby husband whips them nonchalantly yet fiercely. To the contemporaneous viewer—or most viewers, for that matter—this kind of behavior is not acceptable but The Making of an American Citizen sanctions the acceptability of such behavior as un-American. To become an American citizen and a good husband, Ivan thus has to unlearn Old World behaviors (which the movie implies are savage) and emerge anew.
The lessons in Americanism start once the couple lands at Ellis Island—an episode less enthusiastic in the passengers’ weariness than the optimistic short, *Emigrants Landing at Ellis Island*. As they land at Ellis Island, Ivan pokes and pushes his wife with a cane. Exhausted from the voyage and the weight of the family bundle she carries, the woman falls as Ivan continues to poke her. This memorable tableau frames the film’s many poignant contradictions about what “makes” an American citizen. Just as Ivan prepares to administer another series of blows, a middle-class American citizen stops him and teaches him his first lesson in Americanism; he instructs Ivan to carry the luggage, and he gives the woman the stick and poking authority. The
couple leaves the frame as the American man lingers in front of the camera, smiling at his accomplishment.

![Image](image_url)

**Figure 7.5. The Making of an American Citizen: Ivan Learns his First “Lesson”**

The next “lesson” takes place in the couple’s tenement apartment in a Russian ghetto in New York City, where the husband’s continuing abuse of his wife triggers a neighbor’s ire. As Ivan throws his wife on the floor, a neighbor enters the room and instructs Ivan to pick up his wife and put her on a cot to rest. The neighborly lesson teaches Ivan that a woman should also be comfortable in her American home and lie on the bed rather than sit on the floor or stand by her husband, subtly suggesting a myth of gender equality. After Ivan reluctantly complies—interestingly, he never protests much—the neighbor, in turn, sends him violently to the floor,
leaving the room but not without threatening the (now) somewhat obeying Ivan. Next, we see the couple in their New Jersey country home, the wife hard at work in the garden while Ivan sits on the porch, smoking his pipe contentedly. As she pauses to rest, he tries to force her to resume work just as a farmer neighbor walks by, intervening, and instructing him to seat his wife in a chair and to start working the land himself. As the scene comes to an end, we see Ivan mumbling and threatening his wife as he reluctantly tills the garden.

The next scene takes us into one of the most important sites of domesticity—the family kitchen, here devoid of warmth, with brutish Ivan smashing plates and hitting his wife again. An intertitle announces the silent wife’s transition to an American life—“Ivan’s wife begins to live in the American Way.” Her attempts, however, do not shield her from Ivan’s brutality. Most of these violent scenes, while melodramatic and highly exaggerated, are still hard to watch. Another intervention from two well-meaning American men ensues. It seems Ivan’s actions are under his neighbors’ constant scrutiny, just as the immigrant subject is always surveilled by the demands of Americanization, all this shortly after his body is closely scrutinized at the US port of entry. This time the citizens’ intervention is drastic: they take Ivan to prison and, after a brief trial scene—where his wife, finally liberated from his violent streaks, stands up and accuses him—Ivan is sentenced to “six months of penal servitude, “ as the intertitle informs us. All’s well that ends well: predictably, Ivan repents and reforms. One of the last intertitles explains his sudden change as “Ivan begins to profit from all the good advice he has received.” He returns home a changed man, and they both sit down at the dinner table, dressed in citizen’s clothes (translating into lower-middle class respectability), and say a prayer to bless the food. As the intertitle proclaims, he is now “Completely Americanized!”
As an immigrant director who relocated to the U.S. only five years before making this film, Alice Guy Blaché was aware of the demands of the discourses and practices of Americanization, which targeted primarily the millions of immigrants coming from Southern and Eastern Europe and had one goal: “making” them into respectable American citizens. It is fair to assume that she was also sensitive to the irony of this discursive constructedness, embedded especially in progressive Americanization discourses in the 1910s, and perhaps chose the melodramatic form partly to point to the absurdity of the “making of Americans.” In choosing a violent husband as a main character and an abused wife who becomes the agent of her husband’s (miraculous and implausible) reformation at the hands of well-meaning American citizens and
American law, Blaché also draws attention to the gender imbalance in “making” an American citizen, gendering the wife’s voicelessness, and the troubling, visible, yet little-represented topic of the immigrant woman. The film suggests that American citizenship is attainable after a series of moral reformations and depends on the preservation of the heterosexual couple. The film also insists that American citizenship in 1912 is a male privilege (the Russian woman does not have a name in the film and, as we know in hindsight, it took eight more years after the film was made for American women to gain the right to vote). Her choice of Lee Beggs to portray the violent Russian immigrant is also relevant, especially since he played many Jewish characters in the films he did for Solax. The unidimensionality of the male character and his brutishness, supposedly acceptable in the Old Country, are at odds with the demands of good citizenship in the US. The character’s complete reformation and shedding of his immigrant (i.e., brutal) behavior is also an ironic critique of the progressive blind faith in the complete assimilation of the most resistant East European immigrant, epitomized in the naturalistic character of Ivan. Once the East European Brute has reformed, the silent film is ready to teach him a thing or two about labor, capital, and Americanization, as we shall see in the next section.
7.4 *An American in the Making* (1913): Labor, Safety, and the Immigrant on the Silver Screen

*An American in the Making*, a one-reel short silent film (15 minutes), was made only a few months after Alice Guy Blaché’s *Making an American Citizen*, and was filmed by Carl L. Gregory of the Thanhouser Film Corporation. The film was sponsored by the United States Steel Corporation to respond to growing national concerns about industrial safety and cheap immigrant labor. The movie title’s promises—to tell the story of an immigrant’s Americanization—are mainly a useful marketing campaign, as we will see, serving as a safety promotion for US Steel rather than representing “the immigrant problem” in a meaningful way. As the president of Thanhouser explained, the film was commissioned to present “the human side of this great company.” It was distributed widely by the National Association of Manufacturers and was often accompanied by this blurb: “Every European liner that steams into New York Harbor brings in its steerage, Americans in the Making.” *An American in the Making* was produced by the Thanhouser Film Corporation in 1913 at the request of US Steel Corporation. According to Scott Simmon, a congressional investigation in 1910 found that “40,000 US Steel workers (almost half its employees) earned less than 18 cents an hour, with some 20,000 putting in 12-hour shifts. President Taft initiated an antitrust suit in 1911, which the company was still fighting. US Steel thus had reasons to dramatize on film its safety measures and its concern for workmen.”

The film tells the story of a Hungarian immigrant, Bela Tokaji, who, by learning the safety instructions of the US Steel Corporation and becoming a good laborer, achieves the American Dream (as envisioned by corporate capitalism and progressive discourses of Americanization), and in six years is “made over.” Like Blaché’s *Making an American Citizen*,
An American in the Making relies on the model of the nuclear family for the domestic success of the immigrant (who marries his American teacher and becomes the parent of a boy who attends the “model school” in Gary, Indiana, US Steel’s industrial utopian city). The film also makes industrial safety its pivotal message and leaves all other types of immigrant safety (emotional and physical trauma) at its periphery. The immigrant’s departure, the trip itself, the complications of arrival and the multiple interpellations at Ellis Island are completely elided. The last film tableau shows the protagonist’s family sitting at the dinner table in a comfortable dining room, appealing to both lower and middle class audiences interested in preserving the cult of domesticity. The last scene fades out as the optimistic “Yankee Doodle” that opens the film also closes it, in an upbeat tempo.

Like Blaché’s film about the lessons in the Americanization of an Eastern European man, An American in the Making starts in a rural setting in Europe and quickly collapses the distance between the continents with the male protagonist’s seemingly quick arrival in the United States and the erasure of his landing. The film was shot on location at Ellis Island, in Gary, Indiana, and at two other Midwestern steel companies in Illinois and Ohio. The protagonist’s old parents hand him the letter and passage money they have received from his brother in America. The letter is written in a version of Czech, as we learn from Richard Abel’s audio commentary, but the immigrant is Hungarian. This confusion, amplified by the occasional advertisements that make Bela into an Italian immigrant, may have been an effort to extend the film’s appeal to a wider range of Southern and Eastern European ethnicities or simply to ignore such ethnic differences in the film’s message of complete Americanization. After all, for a non-unionized industrial conglomerate like US Steel, the laborers’ racial and ethnic difference probably made very little difference, if any, and while labor unions lobbied for restricting immigration numbers
due to a surplus of unprotected immigrant hands, corporations like US Steel were ready to welcome immigrants like Bela Tokaji for minimum wage. The letter Bela receives is straightforward, if devoid of much brotherly affection: “I am sending the money. Take care and come immediately. Your brother.” We see a similar lack of affect in the brothers’ encounter and the professional demeanor of the brother in America as he takes his brother around, showing him the “workingman’s model” (third intertitle). The message is clear: the new immigrant is to be a worker and a worker only, a key to his “making” as an American, and his new individuality and success in industrial America will not depend on kinship ties. Although the film does not address the discourse of the melting pot directly, it implicitly endorses the melting pot ideology. We get a glimpse of a literal melting pot in the laborer’s encounter with an industrial steel melting pot on a factory floor, boiling to its brim, as Bela learns about a great number of safety devices used by the steel companies in the United States.
As a film that shares its title with the immigrant memoir Marcus E. Ravage published four years later, *An American in the Making* follows Bela’s journey from rural Eastern Europe to industrial America, excluding key chapters from the immigrant’s journey. This is a typical elision in early films about immigrants. We see a first (incomplete) attempt to render the immigrant journey only four years later, in Charlie Chaplin’s *The Immigrant*, which I discuss in the next section. As Bela Tokaji leaves his home, a jolly “Yankee Doodle” accompanies the preparations for his trip, and in the next shot we see him already looking at the Statue of Liberty from an Ellis Island ferry. Unlike his fellow Southern and Eastern European travelers, he carries a modest suitcase—not a bundle!—which may be read as an indication of his dreams of class
mobility before he even enters the labor market, or his attempt to imitate his Americanized brother. The scene of arrival looks studied and lightly orchestrated; we see a few extras who trot in front of the camera and furtively glance at it (unlike the 1903 *Immigrants Landing at Ellis Island*, where new immigrants seem unaware of the new device in front of them, recording their moves). This distance between the two silent films also marks a subtle change in both performance (with actors and extras no longer intimidated by the camera in the later film) and complexity, addressing an audience more and more comfortable with the film medium. Their daring glances at the camera are not as “green” as many of the greenorns’ captured in many photographic records that tell the pictorial history of immigration. 

At the same time, the film also offers a mix of genres—the fictional film meets the *actualité* scenes, the precursors of modern documentary—along with intricate editing and a large number of intertitles filling in the gaps of the visual story (thirty in *An American in the Making* as opposed to only eight in *The Making of an American Citizen* and no intertitles in *Emigrants Landing at Ellis Island*). The story itself becomes more narrative, structured around clear episodes, following a teleological logic and resolving the immigrant’s searches in the last scenes of domestic life.

The immigrant telos frames this film, as Bela leaves his old family in Hungary (we never see them again) and finds a new comfortable home in an industrial city. But the rest of the film (about two-thirds or so) offers images and intertitles translating the safety demonstration of diverse industrial equipment but ultimately showing the new immigrant comfortable in his new surroundings, both domestic and industrial. Intertitles seven through twenty-six describe many pieces of machinery, and Bela witnesses and often demonstrates “how the lives of the workers are safeguarded.” 

This type of human advertisement is suspect to say the least: Bela is a fast learner, but, still a greenhorn, he is too inexperienced to master handling all the new equipment.
Even though his employment shows that even the most inexperienced greenhorn could perform all these industrial tasks safely, the verisimilitude of the greenhorn’s demonstrations remains questionable. The immigrant character, therefore, is used only as an example of a successful prototype for Americanization. He is an obedient son, but ready to leave his old family behind; he is a good brother, but ready to join the unskilled laborers, learn the ropes of industrial safety, become an American, i.e., a trained but unskilled worker whose obedience will prevent him from joining workers’ unions and whose life as a new American citizen will depend on a giant industry. He also smiles throughout the film, even as he wears an identification tag pinned to his jacket, bearing his name and final destination, Gary, Indiana—spelling out his alienism and, simultaneously, his illiteracy.

The deployment of the happy immigrant character (played by a white American actor) as the face of the US Steel’s safety campaign and his success story raise questions about contemporaneous appropriations of immigrant “faces” or “types” to market certain types of desirable subjects. Bela’s whiteness makes him a “safe” character. The hostility to so-called “economic immigrants” (who, like Bela, often returned home with the accumulated capital) was often subsumed into a larger fear of alien groups, particularly non-white immigrant groups, as Desmond King has shown. Bela’s whiteness and obedience make him into a safe, model immigrant, who becomes a model laborer in a “model” industrial city, marries a model American woman—his English teacher—and has a son who goes to a progressive “model school” in Gary, Indiana. Bela confidently demonstrates the use of the “safe” equipment at a time when the immigration-restriction policies are already in place and fewer and fewer East European immigrants are welcomed into the US every year. He is, therefore, demonstrating safety scenarios for a predominantly American audience. As Richard Abel suggests in the audio notes
accompanying *An American in the Making*, one of the goals of the early industrial films was to educate audiences about technology and to demystify the industrial process. At the same time, Bela’s Americanization, the movie suggests, depends on US Steel: he takes the company-sponsored English classes for immigrants, learns to dress appropriately, starts dating his teacher, and settles into a comfortable home after six years. These episodes are all collapsed into a brief succession of images in the film’s last four minutes. Like the initial erasure of the immigrant’s trip to America, the episodes of Americanization filling Bela’s six years’ sojourn toward U.S. citizenship (which was legally attainable in five years) are succinct. This second condensation shows again the film’s ideological investment in the final outcome (or product) of Americanization, not the process itself, just as the steel industry Bela works for is interested in the outcome of immigrant labor (final products), not the processes leading up to them, which were often perilous and deadly for the immigrant laborer. 29
The conflation of early Americanization lessons with industrial safety and later Americanization lessons with domesticity and the nuclear family are safe ideological choices, if only too obvious, used by corporations or state institutions to disseminate particular behaviors. As I have noted, film historians are still divided in terms of early assumptions in film history about immigrants as spectators. But what roles did early silent film audiences play in embodying and disseminating such behaviors? Were new immigrants both subjects and objects of the silent film or were they doubly-exploited in the popular images aiming to “represent” them and in their own uncritical reception of such films, duped by the illusion of the medium? Miriam Hansen sees early cinema, for instance, as an alternative public sphere where immigrants could negotiate...
their new identities, an argument I find productive in reconceiving the immigrant film consumer as an active participant rather than a passive observer. Hansen also writes against a long-held assumption in American cinema history that the first motion picture audiences were mainly immigrant and working class, suggesting instead that they were middle class or more prosperous working class (61). Other critics also challenge the assumption of early cinema scholarship about immigrant audiences as passive receptacles of ideology, suggesting instead that, when the audiences were indeed immigrants, they weren’t necessarily innocent viewers, readily impressionable.30

By the same token, the work of Judith Thissen on Jewish immigrant audiences in New York City is especially provocative in offering an unprecedented understanding of the Jewish ghetto nickelodeon as “a symbol for the close affinity between the ‘melting pot’ ideology of early American cinema and the upwardly mobile aspirations of its working-class and immigrant audiences” (16). Looking at the history of exhibition practices in nickel-and-dime theatres on the Lower East Side as chronicled in The Jewish Daily Forward, Thissen concludes that, like other forms of entertainment, the movies were emblematic of the “Americanization” of Jewish culture. Not only did Jewish exhibitors respond to the national movement to make American cinema more “American” (as Richard Abel also suggests) by including more “ethnic” material in their programs, but they also subdued the effects of Americanization by preserving live performances (in Yiddish) during breaks between films.31

On the other hand, Giorgio Bertellini’s work on Italian American audiences’ role in shaping their “convergent sets of cultural imageries”—through memory and through the Italian cinema imported into the US—shows the influence of silent films on immigrants’ ethnic or national identity. Whereas Thissen finds early silent films complicit with the Americanization of
their Jewish audiences, Bertellini suggests that Italian immigrant audiences in the US became, in fact, more Italian. The second largest group of new immigrants (after the Jews), Italians watched Italian films in their United States neighborhoods, on historical Italian themes, and thus, rather than becoming more “American,” they became more “Italian” (31). While it is difficult—if not impossible—to reconstruct the make-up of the “original” immigrant audiences, it is fair to infer that early immigrant viewers, while influenced by what they saw, were critical receptors rather than empty vessels waiting to be filled with “lessons” on how to become American. Charles Chaplin’s *The Immigrant* is a case in point.

### 7.5 Charles Chaplin’s *The Immigrant* (1917): What’s in a Name, What’s in a Bundle?

By the time Mutual released Charlie Chaplin’s *The Immigrant*, a silent short film he wrote and directed, Chaplin had already starred in sixty American silent films during his four-year sojourn in the US. Released in 1917, *The Immigrant* hit the American scene the same year Jewish immigrant writers Marcus E. Ravage and Abraham Cahan offered the literary scene accomplished stories about the stakes of becoming American. Starring Chaplin, Edna Purviance, Eric Campbell, Albert Austin, and Henry Bergman (all of Anglo-Saxon ancestry, all working for Chaplin’s team at Mutual), the film assumes Americanization as part of the immigrant’s adaptation to the new world after a long and difficult voyage but does not make it central to the immigrant’s new life.

*The Immigrant* tells the story of an unnamed immigrant—a synecdoche for the mass of many unnamed immigrants we see (and don’t see) aboard the steamer in the film. Played by Chaplin in his inimitable Tramp character, the film tells the story of his adventures on the
transatlantic trip surrounded by fellow immigrants—boorish and composed, filthy and clean—and his troubles and luck in the New World. Immigration also offers Chaplin a productive opportunity for comic relief. The two recognized landmarks of his method—humor and humanity—combine in this early film to show a rarely seen version of the immigrant story, where laughter and tears, joy and sorrow, life and death place the anonymous immigrant at the center of the journey and make the humanity of the “mass” a key component of the immigrant story.

Charles Spencer Chaplin, the comic genius, “the man who has made more people laugh than any other man who ever lived,” was himself an immigrant. Born into a family of musical hall entertainers in London, England, he had a busy career before moving to the US in 1913, after a successful US tour between 1910-1913. Perhaps relevant to this analysis is Chaplin’s decision to keep his British citizenship and never to become an American citizen, which made easier his barring from the US in 1952 under accusations of communist sympathies. The FBI has a voluminous file on Chaplin, started by J. Edgar Hoover himself, which includes investigations into Chaplin’s political views and personal life (both prolific). He died in Switzerland in 1977.

Chaplin’s leftist sympathies and political views, along with the daring topics he approached in his later films, earned him Hoover’s early description as one of Hollywood's "parlor Bolsheviki." It is not surprising, therefore, that Chaplin would approach as delicate a theme as immigration and offer his artistic interpretation on a subject of national and international concern in 1917. But Chaplin’s critique of the representation of immigrants—and especially, the dissemination of such representation in early silent film and visual culture—is only somewhat unusual. In his unmistakable comedic style, Chaplin shows an ample repertoire
of exaggerated features to suggest the limited and constrained public and private environment the immigrant entered once he stepped onto a transatlantic steamer. These memorable exaggerations recreate familiar scenes that appeal to the public’s encounters with real, imagined, or filmed immigrants; at the same time, the grotesqueness of the scene of voyage (including a rocking mess hall and the “dangerous” immigrant gamblers), the exaggerated physical features of the Russian immigrants (especially men), and the ruthlessness of immigration officers who rope in the new immigrants like cattle challenge the viewing public’s notions of difference, racial and ethnic homogeneity, and foundational myths about American immigration.38

Figure 7.9. The Immigrant: Immigrants Arriving by Ship
Chaplin’s use of the immigrant trope and many iconic images in the immigrant imaginary—from the crowded decks and the seasick, third class passengers to the encounter with the Statue of Liberty and memorable Ellis Island immigration officers—offers an unprecedented cinematic representation of the immigrant subject. Compared with *Emigrants Landing at Ellis Island* (1903), *The Immigrant* does not simply observe the immigrants entering the United States as a new subject of movie “attractions,” which coincided also with the larger American public’s exposure to spectacles of immigrant arrival and attraction (or repulsion). Instead, cinema, as a new medium of attractions (as Tom Gunning proposed), along with the novelty of the immigrant crowd on the rocking ocean liner, complement each other critically in this film. Just as he critiques the commercial use of “the immigrant” as an image readily available for consumption and profit, Chaplin offers an acerbic parody of the “immigrant problem” and a sympathetic treatment of the immigrant subject, poking fun at the regimentation of immigrant travel and arrival “in the land of liberty,” as one of the intertitles puts it. The series of tragicomic episodes of the immigrant voyage—nauseated passengers, the rocking deck, annoying passengers with bouts of unstoppable hiccups that Charlie is ready to imitate, the dingy mess hall, the danger of thieves and little crooks, and the constant surveillance by immigration personnel—reveal a version of the immigrant story rarely told in cinema or fiction.
Despite the meager attention scenes of trans-Atlantic travel receive in immigrant narratives or films, they dominate the first part of Chaplin’s film. The “silent filmmaker supreme,” Chaplin had complete artistic autonomy at Mutual, a studio that hired him in 1916 to produce fifteen comedies for an annual salary of 670,000. The artistic autonomy that Mutual offered Chaplin, at the time the highest-paid actor in the world, helped Chaplin make The Immigrant a stronger film in its social commentary and criticism of the immigrant images, often uncritically appropriated for profit and ridicule in other popular media, particularly the newspaper. The film opens with the still of a crowded steamer full of immigrants heading to America. The next image transitions to a deck where immigrants lie on the floor, lean on each other, tired and ill, trying to cope with the sea-sickness and hopelessness of the long voyage. In
the middle of the filth and the crowded atmosphere on the third class deck, Charlie meets his future wife (played by Edna Purviance) as he offers her his seat in the rocking dining hall. A good gambler, he earns the money Edna’s mother loses to a thief, and thus assists the helpless women who travel together, easy pray to fellow travelers’ greed. Edna’s mother’s ghostly face is a foreshadowing of her imminent death, we guess, shortly after the landing. Like many immigrants in the American imaginary, the other travelers, Edna, and her mother carry visible bundles. Charlie’s bundle is perhaps the tiniest one in immigration visual history and representation, but he carries the small bundle with gusto as he lines up for the inspection at Ellis Island. The Little Tramp’s round-tipped shoes, his cane, and his unmistakable hat, his talent (as gambler) and survival skills (he can overcome the most cunning obstacles) substitute for any worldly possessions. Reunited with Edna in a New York City artists’ café, Charlie marries her shortly after a painter offers them both jobs as models.

_The Immigrant_ ends with Charlie and Edna stepping into an office labeled “Marriage License,” making both immigrants’ future and success depend on the family model and the generosity of an American painter. Edna is too coy to follow Charlie into the office, so he puts the cane prop to good use to bring her in. Edna’s shyness and propriety, even while wearing her new “American” clothes (with the hat replacing the head scarf she wore during the voyage), show her in that liminal space toward Americanization, before her life is completely transformed by the demands of the new “job” as a model. Somehow the happy ending, with the prospect of matrimony, seems to be in the distant future for the immigrant couple. The film deliberately makes ambiguous what Charlie and Edna will model for the American painter, whose _deus ex machina_ intervention offers a happy ending to the immigrant story. On the one hand, the immigrants are readily employable, but the film suggests that their objectification will continue,
if only in a new artistic medium this time, as they will continue to “pose.” This ingenious conclusion of *The Immigrant* suggests, on the one hand, the entrance of the immigrant into a new, possibly more rewarding labor market than typical lower-class immigrants; on the other, it points to the limits of the immigrant body, doomed to public consumption, public scrutiny, and constant objectification—even though channeled through a medium that allows for some degree of self-representation. Like *The Making of an American Citizen* (1912) and *An American in the Making* (1913), *The Immigrant* ends with the promise of the nuclear family; nonetheless, whereas Bela acquires social mobility in *The Making of an American Citizen* (by working for US Steel and marrying his “native” English teacher), and the Russian immigrant is already married before immigrating in Blaché’s *The Making of an American Citizen*, Charlie marries a fellow immigrant, thus establishing some form of connection with the past and tradition he has removed himself from through immigration, as if to unmake or defer his imminent assimilation.
Besides the scenes of irreverent humor and the unexpected turns of events in the immigrants’ games of chance in the New World, *The Immigrant*’s most memorable scene remains, perhaps, the scene of “arrival in the land of liberty,” particularly in its critique of what Ali Behdad calls American “hospitality discourses” toward immigrants. The scene starts with a tableau vividly reminiscent of similar scenes of arrival recorded in immigration pictorial history (Figure 7.11). We see Charlie, Edna and her mother in the foreground; the rest of the immigrant passengers, with their bundles, appear in the background. They are all statuesque and their faces express new hope as they pass by the Statue of Liberty, alerted by Charlie’s earlier sidekick (the heavy hiccupy man), all smiling with renewed hope. This is an iconic scene we first see through the aloof eyes of the camera, then later through the camera’s funnelling of the immigrants’ eyes.
The tableau they all form as they lean against each other and glance hopefully at the statue is the central scene in the film. The actors’ facial expressions, smiles, frowns, and grimaces express the joy and hope of arrival, the weariness of the trip but also the hope for the future. Edna has a protective hand on her mother’s head, a suggestive scene in terms of immigrants’ support for each other across generations and kinship. An uplifting song also marks the entrance into the land of liberty, although noticeably not Yankee doodle, which marks Bela’s entrance in *The Making of an American*. This scene of fleeting optimism and hope is soon over, as a rope starts separating these immigrants from the rest of the immigrants on deck, roping them in like cattle, as they clutch their bundles. An improvised immigration office is set up on the left of the tableau. Charlie sees a golden opportunity as he furtively kicks an immigration officer’s behind—a scene that caused considerable uproar, especially when Chaplin was accused of anti-American activities. Like Bela Tokaji in *An American in the Making*, all immigrants wear tags with their names and final destination (but we don’t get a close-up this time). Edna and her mother go first through the improvised “customs” and the two bid farewell, holding hands and smiling. Edna’s mother looks sad and ailing, an indication perhaps that we won’t see her again in the next scenes. Her sadness and paleness speak volumes. Gallantly, Charlie kisses Edna’s hand and says “Goodbye.” He goes through customs next, and the immigration officer kicks him back. The Little Tramp is silenced, receives an entrance ticket, and leaves the scene.

Unlike contemporaneous films on immigration or Americanization, *The Immigrant* is irreverent and pokes fun at its subject matter and its medium, often with similar degrees of intensity. Rather than laughing at immigrants’ idiosyncrasies, Chaplin laughs with them. His unmistakable improvisation and use of every prop for maximum comic effect contribute to the film’s simultaneous rendering of thematic tension and comic relief. As the movie starts, we see
Charlie bends over the edge of the steamer and can’t help but commiserate with him and other nauseated passengers. But we don’t see his face; we only see his back as he leans over the edge. As the scene progresses, Charlie finally shows his smiling face, victorious after catching a fish in the previous scene. But the fish suddenly slips and lands on the floor, facing an immigrant man who is trying to rest and grins at the unexpected intruder. This slapstick humor, along with the improvisational quality of the entire film, make a simple scene of immigrant voyage into a ripe opportunity for social commentary. Yes, most immigrants were sick, but some had a sense of humor and welcomed the unexpected, even if that were a fish (perhaps another allusion to the stench associated with lower-class deck passengers), and made the best of it. The rocking dining hall is ripe with props and movements conducive to comedy, including a great scene where Charlie and his partner in the previous hiccupping episode share a meal from the same bowl, as the bowl rocks up and down the table. To achieve the rocking effect, Chaplin used a pendulum fit into the camera that enables it to swing as soon as the boat itself began to rock. But the mess hall also offers the opportunity for social commentary, as nauseated third class passengers crowd into small dining halls, sharing food, and rocking violently back and forth. The immigrants share food, friendship, and fate.

Fate also reunites Edna and Charlie—in another dining hall, this time in an artists’ café in New York. Charlie is still uncouth and clumsy, and he is visibly afraid of an intimidating waiter who throws out a customer ten cents short on his bill. After inviting Edna to join him for a meal, Charlie realizes he lost his money (he had found it accidentally in the street), and he is visibly hard pressed. Just as he gambled his way through the transatlantic trip relying on good fortune, Charlie’s and Edna’s chance is quick to emerge: the painter offers them not only jobs, but leaves a generous tip which Charlie can use to pay for his and Edna’s meals. The recurring
metaphors of gambling and of games of chance also point to immigration itself as a game of chance, where good luck and good disposition (rather than national, racial, or ethnic background) “make” the new immigrants into Americans.

7.6 “Can’t He Talk English?”: The Making of an American (1920) and the Lessons of Immigrant (Il)literacy

Like Immigrants Landing at Ellis Island (1903), The Making of an American (1920) has a clear marketing agenda. Unlike the 1903 short silent, targeting new waves of immigrants for better transportation to Ellis Island, the lengthier 1920 silent sells something better: the recipe for successful Americanization. Endorsing the ideology of Americanization, The Making of an American promotes the image of the well-rounded immigrant man whose success relies heavily on English proficiency and attendance at local evening schools. Despite the film’s programmatic polemic and predictable fictionalized plot, it is a useful historic document on film about the many “lessons” in Americanization immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe had to learn. But while a film like Blaché’s The Making of an American Citizen (1912) zoomed in on domestic lessons the Russian immigrant man had to learn to become an American, The Making of an American makes English acquisition its primary target, often dismissing other, more human concerns. Poverty, meager living conditions, and immigrant disillusionment in the American dream are summed up in one intertitle: “The dream of a beautiful home has vanished. The day’s toil ends in a sordid tenement, amid noise and dirt.” English becomes this film’s metonymy for Americanism, an idea already written into immigration restriction laws by the Literacy Bill.

Like the US Steel’s 1913 *An American in the Making*, about immigrant reliance on the US Steel Corporation for success and fulfillment of the so-called American dream, *The Making of an American*—which might well have borrowed the title from its predecessor—was partly filmed on location at the Hartford Rubber Works Company in Connecticut. *The Making of an American* exceeded initial expectations, with 112,500 viewers during 1920 and many copies sold to other states.  

In one six-month period, 63 factories in Connecticut established Americanization classes, a movement stimulated by stipends paid to factory directors by a Connecticut industrial association.

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Figure 7.12. The First Frame of *The Making of an American*
The story of Peter Bruno, an Italian immigrant with a large moustache and an uncouth appearance, revolves around his inability to speak English (which, in turn, makes finding a job suitable to his version of the American Dream impossible), his attendance at night school (where he learns English from a female teacher in the company of fellow immigrants), and his rise in social and leadership status. Except for a brief domestic scene later in the film, where Pete and his wife admire their grapes, perhaps reminiscent of Italian vineyards, Pete’s immigrant story revolves around his identity as a laborer. The film starts in medias res, with “An appeal to all foreigners to learn English,” not even glossing over Pete’s life before he starts looking for work in the United States. Italian immigrants formed the second largest immigrant group in the US at the turn of the twentieth century, so the choice of an Italian immigrant as a metonymy for illiterate Southern and Eastern European immigrants is not surprising. At the same time, the film is careful to show similar “appeals to all foreigners,” including safety warnings, in other Southeast European languages, thus extending both the target audience and the demographics that Pete embodies.
Like many immigrant-themed films in the 1910s, *The Making of an American* is structured around many assumptions about immigrant (il)literacy, especially in the context of congressional literacy bills for immigrant admission to the US and the 1906 Nationality Act, which made English proficiency a requirement for naturalization.\(^48\) Although the teaching of English to foreigners became a responsibility of each state, it was a matter of national concern and even hysteria, especially after the entry of the United States in World War I, when old nativism and new nationalism fused to accentuate the divide between desirable and undesirable immigrants. As we have seen before, the literacy bill passed in 1917 (over President Wilson’s veto) marked not only the beginning of the immigration restriction policy, as Robert Divine
suggests (5), but also an increased emphasis on the English language as the essential mark of Americanism. Between 1917 and 1922, “[m]ore than 30 states passed Americanization laws which obligated aliens unable to speak or read English to attend public evening schools.” In some cases, aliens who did not comply were fined. “[T]hirty-four states also passed official English-language policies which declared English the only language of instruction and effectively closed most bilingual and native language programs.” If the relatively flexible degree of emphasis on English proficiency before World War I aided the unprecedented flourishing of the immigrant press in the United States, the literacy bill of 1917 paved the way for legislation restricting immigration (in 1921, 1924, and 1929).

Unlike other immigration-themed films, The Making of an American offers a prescriptive representation of the immigrant’s path to Americanization by relying on a handful of stock images and tropes. Yet, the film does not buy into the popular iconography of immigrants: the trans-Atlantic scenes are missing and none of the iconic images in the immigrant imaginary grounds this immigrant story in Old World memory. After the film’s initial appeal to all foreigners to learn English before the film even begins, its second intertitle substitutes for all the missing formative episodes in Pete’s pre-American life: “Attracted by the hope of greater things than Italy can afford him, Pete has taken the greatest step, and landed in America.” The emphasis on the “greater things” and the material and economic end of immigration feed into popular beliefs about new immigration that the film endorses and that Americanizers (federal, state, municipal, private or voluntary) were ready to support. As in so many stories of immigration, in print or film, Pete’s story emphasizes the immigrant’s final destination, minimizing and condescending to the role of the place of emigration. As historians have shown, however, like many Southern and Eastern European new immigrants, Italian immigrants returned home in
great numbers, and many of them were not willing to assimilate or become Americans. Many returned home willingly. Others were forced to return, amounting to a repatriation of a third of all immigrants entering US territory between 1880 and 1924.\textsuperscript{50} The immigrant Pete does not conceive of returning home and sees immigration as a one-way street; this is the type of desirable immigrant the state of Connecticut envisioned. As he imagines the new world he has just landed in, Pete is welcomed by none other than “Tony, his boyhood friend, an American already made.”

![Figure 7.14. The Making of an American: The Americanized Peter [Standing]](image)

In *The Making of an American*, English saves Pete’s life. Almost killed in an elevator shaft at the beginning of the film because of his inability to read the “danger sign,” Pete emerges victorious at the end of the film not only as a proficient English speaker and an Americanized
foreigner, but also as a civic leader. Unlike the Hungarian Bela in *An American in the Making*, who marries his English teacher and thus improves his chances of becoming an American, Pete is already romantically connected with (we guess) an Italian woman in an idyllic domestic environment, where the woman picks grapes in a melodramatic tableau reminiscent perhaps of the home left behind. But she is otherwise almost absent from the film, a statement about the gendered division of labor in 1920. Without any civic power and presumably without much responsibility in the labor market, immigrant women are often doubly silenced in the silent film, where their “voices” in intertitles and on screen are seldom heard. (The immigrant woman’s civic status depended on the status of her father or husband; single women immigrants often lacked any civic status.51) At the end of this fictionalized documentary, Peter Bruno becomes the head of the Safety Council, where he continues to fight for the well-being of fellow immigrants—or so the story goes.

The film’s last intertitle, in caps, yet again reiterates the silent’s propagandist undertones: “IF **YOU** KNOW MEN OR WOMEN WHO DON’T KNOW ENGLISH, URGE THEM TO GO TO NIGHT SCHOOL.” Assuming a literate and English-speaking audience, the film’s ideological message thus works only by proxy. The “**YOU**” of the message is a direct address to the literate worker (in keeping with the Americanization Department’s mission of distributing this film to factories), who must, therefore, bring literacy to other immigrants for their own protection. The insertion of this element of altruism seems to ignore (or to veil) the limits of this literacy message or its collective urge: on the one hand, immigrant laborers cannot be safe if they don’t speak (and especially read) English; on the other, once they know English and become American citizens (reflected in Pete’s new clothes and trimmed moustache), they can climb as high as Pete in leading the Safety Council—but not higher. The lesson of literacy this film
promotes, therefore, includes social mobility, but speaks also to the limits of the future of the literate immigrant laborer. Even though the Connecticut Board defined Americanization in the broadest and most generous terms in 1921—"Any process which makes a man or woman a loyal, active, and intelligent citizen is Americanization" —The Making of an American, like most of the films discussed in this chapter, tells a different story.

Notes


2 As Abel documents (xi), French films not only dominated the early American market but also determined what would later become “American” cinema. Abel says that “by the summer of 1905, the films of Pathé Frères had become the leading supplier of moving pictures on the American market.”


4 Hansen, 30.

5 Kellner, 354-55; Kleinman and McDonald, 79-87.

6 Kleinman and McDonald, 83-84.

7 See Hansen, 43.

8 Emigrants Landing at Ellis Island, Edison Manufacturing, 1903, 2 minutes.

9 Another Romanian immigrant who became a famous actor in the US also entered the US in 1903: Emanuel Goldenberg, a.k.a. Edward G. Robinson. Born in Bucharest to a Jewish family, Robinson was a popular actor in the US in the 1930s and 40s, recognized mainly for his gangster roles. His most popular film is perhaps Little Caesar (1931), and he wanted a part in
Francis Ford Coppola’s *The Godfather*, the part offered to Marlon Brando. Robinson received an honorary Academy Award in 1973.

10 Seventy other ports of entry admitted immigrants in 1903, but none rivaled the capacity of the main entry port. Ellis Island was named after Samuel Ellis, “who ran a fishermen’s tavern on the four acres off Manhattan in the eighteenth century” (Simmon, *Treasures III*, 119). Thomas Pitkin offers a cogent history of Ellis Island. See also Virginia Yans-McLaughlin and Marjorie Lightman. For an ample collection of visual representations of immigrants, see also Oscar Handlin, *Pictorial History*.

11 Simmon provides the Film Notes and Richard Abel the audio commentary for *Emigrants Landing at Ellis Island* in *Treasures III*, 119-121.


14 Idem 70. See the whole article for an extended analysis of the role *actualités* played in early French cinema.

15 Film scholars are divided on the issue of immigrant spectatorship. See Hansen..

16 For a brief history of early film, see Mast’s classic history of movies. The prolific work of Abel on both early French cinema and the “Americanization” of early American cinema has been particularly influential for my own work. See the article cited above and Abel, *Red Rooster Scare*.

17 Hansen, 44.

18 The recent work of Sabine Haenni repositions immigrants as cultural consumers and producers, arguing for reading the new sites of leisure (like the theatre and the silent film) as potential sites of immigrant “virtual mobility” (8).
Blaché’s biographer, Alison McMahan, suggests that, because the director owned more than 50% of Solax (located in Fort Lee, New Jersey, the center of the American film industry in 1910), Alice Guy Blaché is also the first and only woman in film history to own her own studio. In France she had also been the production manager at Gaumont for nine years (1897-1906), and hundreds of films were made under her direction and supervision before she and her family immigrated to the US. See McMahan.


22 The courtroom scene is great. The judge seems to have descended straight from a caricature of Uncle Sam in *Judge*, a caricature I discuss at length in Chapter 5.


24 One key industrial scene is filmed in front of the Illinois Steel Corporation, where Bela pauses in front of a multi-lingual instruction board at the entrance. (Safety guidelines are written in English and three East European languages, suggesting perhaps the ethnic make-up of the Illinois Steel immigrant labor force.)

25 For a similar discussion of the “individualizing” of Indian people forced into Americanization scenes, see Joel Pfister’s *Individuality Incorporated*.

26 See, for instance, Handlin, *Pictorial History*.

27 Other intertitles include bland descriptions, making almost half the film artistically dull and predictable (even by 1913 standards): “Goggles protect the eyes from flying chips,” “An actual demonstration of the value of goggles,” “Safety insured by locking switches before

19 Gunning, 71-84, 71, 74, 75.

20 The film is now available for mass circulation in the series *The Movies Begin*, Vol. 4.
making repairs or working on line,” “Chip guard on Shaper for protection of eyes,” and many more. The images (in the film itself and the intertext) use the safety discourse seemingly to humanize the otherwise dangerous working environment, where thousands of immigrant workers died every year. Immigrant Italian writer Pietro di Donato, for instance, dramatized the death of his father during a construction accident in one of the most important American novels of the 1930s, *Christ in Concrete*. Moreover, as Simmon documents, “a 1910 congressional investigation found that 40,000 U.S. steel workers (almost half its employees) earned less than 18 cents an hour, with some 20,000 putting in 12-hour shifts. President Taft initiated an antitrust suit in 1911, which the company was still fighting. […] Indignation at US Steel reached a height with another set of congressional hearings that concluded in 1912, just before the company approached Thanhouser about the film” (122-23).

28 See King, 11.

29 In the previous chapter I invoke a stanza from an Italian sonnet by Rosina Vieni, which seems appropriate to reproduce in this context: “[B]ut who cares about the greenhorn, the paesani / Struck dead without the sacraments? / What’s it worth, if by misfortune or by accident / your body falls and smashes to the floor below— / Poor Guinea, poor Dago?” Rpt. in La Sorte, 95.

30 Stokes and Maltby.

31 Thissen, 15-28.

32 Bertellini, 29-45.

33 The film’s running time is approximately 20 minutes. In 1998, *The Immigrant* was selected for preservation in the United States National Film Registry by the Library of Congress as "culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant." [http://www.filmsite.org/filmreg.html](http://www.filmsite.org/filmreg.html) Web.


35 Chaplin first visited the US with a theatre company in 1907. According to Theodore Huff, Adam Kessel, of the Keystone Co. persuaded Chaplin to sign his first contract in the US for $150 a week starting December 1913. He made 35 films for Keystone in 1914. In 1915, Chaplin made 14 films for Essanay studios, with increasing artistic control over his films. From 1916-1917, he was hired by Mutual, where he made *The Immigrant*, along with 11 other two-reel films. In 1918, he moved to First National, after he was offered a million-dollar contract. In 1919, along with Mary Pickford, D.W. Griffith, and Douglas Fairbanks, Chaplin founded the film studio United Artists. See Huff.

36 After this bitter incident in 1952, he returned to the US only once, in 1972, when he received his Academy Award for Outstanding Career Achievement. Chaplin had received an honorary Academy Award in 1929, at the first Academy Awards ceremony, for acting, writing, directing, and producing *The Circus*.

37 A brief version of Chaplin’s FBI file is now available at <http://www.paperlessarchives.com/chaplin.html> Web. March 27, 2010. According to this file, “Chaplin first came to the attention of the FBI in the early 1920's, due to his left of center political views. Then Assistant to the Director of the FBI, J. Edgar Hoover, wrote in a memo that
Chaplin was one of Hollywood's "parlor Bolsheviki." Chaplin came under increased review after his 1936 film "Modern Times" and his 1941 "The Great Dictator."

38 I discuss the assumptions of early immigration historians vis-à-vis the Crèvecoeurian myth of Americanization in the previous chapter.

39 “Cinema of attractions” is Gunning’s famous phrase to describe silent film before 1908. In Gunning’s view, “by its reference to the curiosity-arousing devices of the fairground” the cinema of attractions “denoted early cinema’s fascination with novelty and its foregrounding of the act of display” (73).

40 The Immigrant is only one of those fifteen. Others include: Easy Street (1917), The Cure (1917), The Rink (1916), and Behind the Screen (1916).

41 The first part of The Immigrant was filmed and conceived last, to round up a story which was never scripted. Initially the film started with Charlie’s character in the artists’ café, exasperating a fellow customer with his uncouth table manners. (Some of these elements will be kept in the final version of the film.) As the story advances, and as Charlie sees Edna sitting at a nearby table, Brownlow and Gill suggest that the question that propelled the film further and gave it a theme and a title was: “Where does Edna come from?” Edna and her mother were immigrants, so Charlie becomes an immigrant, the first part of the story is imagined, and thus the transatlantic ship comes to life. Unknown Chaplin, section “My Happiest Years.”

42 Edna Purviance starred as Chaplin’s leading lady in 35 films he made between 1915 and 1923.

43 Early in his career, Chaplin himself was intimidated by waiters. Brownlow and Gill, Unknown Chaplin, “My Happiest Years.”

The film has twenty-three inter-tiles.

Although the film was made for the Connecticut Department of Americanization, evidence indicates that copies of the film were sold to other states, thus expanding the seemingly regional focus. Since immigrants established themselves in industrial cities for economic reasons, it is fair to assume that audiences exposed to the 1917 film made for U.S. Steel Corporation (*An American in the Making*) could also have watched *The Making of an American* in organized viewing sessions.

The Northeast Historic Film, which preserved this silent film along with the National Archives of Canada on new 35 mm film stock in 1999, released it for public access in 2006. The film notes include documentation of the film’s initial reception: Mark H. Jones, the Connecticut State Archivist, found government reports on the making of the film and its dissemination, but no copies of the film were known to exist until 1999, when Alan Kattelle, of Hudson, Massachusetts, donated a print to the Northeast Historic Film. The film from the Kattelle collection was on 28 mm film stock, now obsolete and rare to find. See Mark H. Jones file, Northeast Historic Film.

“The census of 1910 revealed that out of 13 million foreign-born persons 10 years of age and older living in the USA, 23% or about 3 million were unable to speak English. Aneta Pavlenko, “‘Ask Each Pupil about Her Methods of Leaning,’” 279.

Idem 279. On this topic, see also Pavlenko, “We Have Room for But One Language Here” and Michael Olneck. Edward George Hartman’s *The Campaign to Americanize the Immigrant* from 1948 used to be the standard book in the field of immigrant education, but the
recent work of Pavleknko, Olneck, and others offers immigrant-centered perspectives on Americanization.

50 See Wyman, 193.

51 See Siobhan Somerville.

52 Archivist Mark H. Jones, whose research was used in Northeast Historic Film’s preparation of this film edition, found these documents in the Connecticut state archives. Author’s correspondence with Northeast Historic Film Archivists, September 2009.
8.1 “A Real Indian” on Screen and Behind the Camera: James Young Deer and the Demands of the Silent Western

The public is no longer satisfied with white men who attempt to represent Indian life. The Actors must be real Indians.

—Balshofer and Miller, *One Reel a Week*¹

If the directors of the moving picture companies knew how foolish their women and girls look in the Indian pictures, with from one to three turkey feathers in the top of their heads, they would be more careful.

—John Standing Horse, Carlisle Indian School, *Motion Picture World*, 1911²

In a book intriguingly titled *Making the Movies* from 1915, Ernest A. Dench devotes an entire chapter—a grand two pages and a half!—to address “The Dangers of Employing Redskins as Movie Actors.” His concern stems primarily from Indian actors’ excess of “realism” and their unrelenting behavior in front of the camera, which sometimes jeopardize the white cast’s well-being: “Once a white player was seriously wounded when the Indians indulged in a bit too much realism with their clubs and tomahawks.” According to Dench, “they naturally object to acting in
pictures where they are defeated” and sometimes “manage to smuggle real bullets into action,” which enhances their “realist performance” at the same time that it renders them more threatening to the crew on the set and behind the camera. Dench’s cautionary tale romanticizes and critiques the Indian “actors” such that, by the end of a section devoted to warning moviegoers and critics of the “dangers” of employing Indians in the movies, he offers a more sympathetic description of Indian actors than he perhaps intended. We learn that Indians were able to secure permanent employment with Western film companies; that this new adventure, rather than “civili[zing] them completely” had “a quite reverse effect”; that Indian actors were hardworking and conscientious, often resistant to being coaxed into “objectionable parts.” At the same time, they are “seldom adaptable” to taking on leading roles, for which white actors fit better because, Dench concludes, “to act as an Indian is the easiest thing possible, for the Redskin is practically motionless.” Many (white) directors of later Westerns would share Dench’s view, especially as the Western as a national (and international) genre would soon become a vehicle of Americanization, as a form of what film critic Richard Abel calls “white supremacist entertainment.”

Winnebago/Ho-Chunk actor and director James Young Deer (sometimes spelled Youngdeer) may not have shared Dench’s views; in his productive albeit short-lived career as director, producer, and actor in one-reel Westerns between 1908 and 1913, Young Deer joined the work of other Indian activists and writers to offer a representation of the Indian on the silver screen that provided an alternative to the “vanishing Indian” of late nineteenth-century American master narratives, departing from Western conventions yet using them to foreground survival, native and mixed race family ties, and tribal sovereignty. Young Deer started his career in the Wild West shows, which would later influence his acting and directing visions. In 1909 he
starred in D.W. Griffith’s *The Mended Lute* (1909) and worked for other US-based film companies such as Kalem, Lubin, Vitagraph, and Bison. When the French company Pathé Frères started producing films in the US, Young Deer was appointed general manager of the Pathé West Coast Studio. Most of the films he directed and wrote are now lost, but his Western pictures “were often highly successful,” with titles such as *The Cheyenne Brave, The Yaqui Girl, Lieutenant Scott’s Narrow Escape, Red Deer’s Devotion.* Nevertheless, he never received credit at the time for the films he directed or wrote, and, to understand his work, we must rely primarily on reviews in specialized film magazines and brief glimpses into some of his handful surviving films, such as *White Fawn’s Devotion* (1910)—one of the few silent films directed by a Native American, which I turn to at the end of this section. Young Deer is said to have directed and acted in around sixty films, a prolific pace for such a short-lived career (five years or so).

Young Deer did not launch on a career in film alone; his wife, a Carlisle Indian School graduate Lillian St. Cyr (stage name “Princess Red Wing”), also a Winnebago from Nebraska, acted in over thirty-five films from 1909 to 1921. A film power couple before the concept emerged in later Hollywood, Young Deer and St. Cyr left a mark on the representations of Indians in silents before the late 1910s, when American Westerns would take a more predictable turn. Helped by the early industry’s openness to ideas of “authenticity” and cultural accuracy, as well as Indian survival, Young Deer and St. Cyr intervened in the early years of the American Western to offer a truthful and often critical stance on native representation. For a (lost) one-reeler from 1911, *Old Indian Days*, Young Deer received high praise from one of the film industry’s most respected venues, *Moving Picture World*: “The showing of Indian customs, the Indian manner of living, cooking, feasting, traveling, wooing etc. is very prettily done.” Apart from a possibly reductive comment on Young Deer’s aesthetic style (“prettily done”), the critic
also notes elements of authentic Indian customs and behavior, a key critical characteristic of westerns in the first decade of the twentieth century that later films will disregard. Brownlow also documents that Young Deer “once returned from a visit to his people on their reservation with trunkloads of Indian costumes.” Whether to document, to critique, or to invent a new tradition of Indian representation, Young Deer and St. Cyr mark a pivotal moment in US indigenous film. Such a daring enterprise was ahead of its time, but Young Deer quickly disappeared from the public eye after falling victim to an orchestrated scandal in Los Angeles. Although he was not proven guilty, Young Deer’s career was virtually over after that incident.

The western—both the Eastern and the Western western—came in a variety of forms and with an equally generous host of names, “a dozen or more subgenres, including settler subjects, frontier military films, western comedies, all Indian stories, and ranch pictures.” Characterized by violent scenes, including the famous chase scenes, by crime, and by loose morals, the western has been popular in the United States since the 1890s, when the actuality films (actualités) marketing the frontier to potential settlers became popular with (white) audiences. The western as a prominent category came of age in 1909 when it became the national leading genre, “American” in subject matter, sensational, filmed in attractive and scenic landscapes. By 1910, the western represented a fifth of all film releases in the United States and the genre became, in Richard Abel’s words, the “quintessential American subject.” The extreme popularity of the Western genre during the silent era—both in the US and abroad, where many films about cowboys and Indians soon found a welcoming market—set the tone for the reception of a genre whose longevity would have devastating effects in misrepresenting Indian cultures.

Although the westerns glorified life on the Western frontier, the first Westerns in the US were filmed on the East Coast—in New Jersey, New York, and Connecticut—representing a
genre that contemporary film critics call the “Eastern western.” This detail alone helps understand the highly romanticized westerns, with landscapes—in a film critic’s apt reading—“lush, woodsly, and wet: filled with lakes, streams, and canoes, of chases through the underbrush, of hand-to-hand fights through forest clearings.” D.W. Griffith directed around thirty Indian-themed films during the industry’s early years, but his films consistently portrayed Indians as villains, noble savages, or vanishing Indians. Unlike Young Deer’s films, most of D.W. Griffith’s films have survived. A good case in point is The Red Man and the Child (1908), where the Sioux Indian man kills mercilessly to punish the white villains who had killed his white friend. Many of these Westerns were set in tribal communities or feature a “noble redskin” as guide or savior to the white hero. As Richard Abel also argues, in an attempt to make the film industry more “American”—considering the high pressures from the French imports—“Half of the so-called westerns produced between 1907 and 1910 […] were actually Indian stories or had an Indian (or Mexican) as a central character or even the hero.” These early films offered “one of two narrative strategies: melodramatic stories of good versus bad characters” (usually played by white actors) in an Indian community and stories of Indian characters “defined in relation to whites, with the hero or heroine demonstrating a sense of honor, justice, or self-sacrifice.” Some of these early westerns were also daring in subject matter—like Young Deer’s Young Fawn’s Devotion, which ends on an unusually risky conclusion for its time, with the survival of an interracial couple. According to Simmon, after Young Deer moved to Pathé’s California studios, he wrote and directed a similar film where he “reversed the sexes of the interracial couple,” which upset his reviewers. The (now lost) Red Deer’s Devotion, shot by Young Deer in 1911, received the following criticism in Moving Picture World: “Another feature of this film will not please a good many. It represents a white girl and an Indian falling in love with each
other. While such a thing is possible, and undoubtedly has been done many times, there is still a feeling of disgust which cannot be overcome when this sort of film is depicted as plainly as it is here.\textsuperscript{18} Angela Aleiss identifies several recurring themes that later Hollywood films would perpetuate “to represent Indians,” such as the Indian characters’ cyclical evolution in movies (as opposed to a linear pattern) and the uneasy relation of Hollywood with the theme of miscegenation. This latter theme, in particular, Aleiss suggests, indicates “the industry’s struggle to define American Indians’ identity.”\textsuperscript{19} In Young Deer’s \textit{Young Fawn’s Devotion}, although this uneasiness with cross-racial relations in the silent era’s most permissive years did not change cultural stereotypes, it nonetheless remains the film’s main concern, and the film offers a counter-narrative to racial separatism and fears of “the passing of the great race.”\textsuperscript{20}

Although most silent westerns depicted violent encounters between white settlers and native people on the western frontier, often resulting in removal, suicide, or murder of the Indian characters, \textit{Young Fawn’s Devotion} (1910) tells a story of Indian survival and reconciliation. As film critics point out, the early 1910s were favorable to Indian-themed films both in Europe and in the United States. In some of these early westerns, Indian women were heroines; St. Cyr, for instance, was the protagonist in Pathé’s \textit{The Red Girl and the Child} (1910), directed by Young Deer. Aleiss notes the peak of the early westerns’ popularity, between 1910 and 1912, when:

\textit{[S]tudios released between twelve and fifteen of them per month. […] Tales of ruthless whites would parallel those of hostile warriors, lasting interracial marriage would complement the Indian-white relationships that failed, sympathetic half-breeds would occasionally offset the treacherous ones, and an Indian’s heroic sacrifice might be matched by a white man’s generosity. And many films delivered a sharp indictment against civilization and its unfair treatment of Native Americans.}\textsuperscript{21}
So popular were the “Indian” westerns in Europe that Pathé Frères, one of the world’s most powerful production companies, opened its own studios in the US and hired Young Deer as director and manager of Pathé’s California branch.22

Filmed in Pathé Frères studios on the East Coast before the French company moved to Los Angeles, *Young Fawn’s Devotion: A Play Acted by a Tribe of Red Indians in America* tells the story of a white settler, Combs, and an Indian woman living on the Pine Ridge reservation in South Dakota. Combs receives “an unexpected legacy,” as we learn from the film’s second intertitle, and has to sail to London immediately. This detail establishes Combs as a British immigrant, confirming his “settler” status and opening up the interpretive possibility for critiquing US settler colonialism. He starts reading the letter—which appears in full text in the next shot—to discover he is “the heir to an immense fortune.” When his wife, White Fawn, learns about his plans—which also imply that he will take the couple’s daughter to England—the mother attempts suicide. Just as the mother succumbs to a melodramatic fall, the girl appears and finds her father holding a bloody knife. The intertitle explains: “Deceived by appearance and believing her mother to be dead, the child accuses her father of murder.” Terrified, the child runs to her mother’s Indian family, which arrives at the family’s cabin as soon as the father leaves. The chase begins: “The Indian chief starts in pursuit of the settler.” After a dangerous chase, where Combs shoots a few Indian men down, the unnamend “Indian chief” catches up with Combs and subdues him. He ties him to a rope and drags him back to the Indian camp, placing him on what resembles a sacrificial stone (where we see an Indian woman grinding corn as the film begins). White Fawn’s family brings the daughter forcefully to the scene to punish her father—the intertitle announces, “Justice by his child”—but all ends well as the mother, who had only wounded herself, appears to save Combs, thus contributing to the happy note ending the
film: “White Fawn arrives in time to save him.” The film ends with a family tableau (see photo), suggesting the endurance of the interracial family. The Indian chief points west, potentially toward the log cabin where the family will most likely go, to indicate that the settler changed his mind about his travels East for his inheritance, thus suggesting that family wins over the inheritance. Although the surviving film is missing the last few seconds, we learn from promotional material about its resolution: “The Combs take their departure and return to their home, for he feels he will be happier with his family on the plains than if he goes east and claims his legacy.”

Figure 8.1. White Fawn’s Devotion [Last Tableau]

White Fawn’s Devotion departs from the conventional Indian-themed western to tell a story of survival, family unity, inter-generational and community relations, and the “legacy” of
Indian representation in American films. The monetary “legacy” Combs must claim, as the beginning of the film alerts the viewer, transforms into a symbolic legacy he fulfills by the end of the film. In substituting social capital for capital gain, Combs chooses the nuclear Indian-white family over his (implied) settler dispositions toward seeking land or cash or both. Although the film still places agency on the white settler (it is his “legacy,” his decision to stay on the Pine Ridge reservation or to return to England etc.), White Fawn and her daughter (who has no name) play a central role in redirecting the story’s trajectory. White Fawn survives her self-inflicted wound and reemerges in front of the camera at the most opportune moment, “saving” her white husband—Pocahontas-style—from the wrath of Indian men surrounding him, who make the child the agent of punishment: “justice by the child.” *White Fawn’s Devotion* thus moves away from predictable Indian deaths, the chases are more realistic, and the suspense of tribal justice at the end ultimately save Young Deer’s film from many of the clichés of early westerns. Some scenes and elements in the film show its indebtedness to the western genre’s conventions and, possibly, a sense of obligation to the audience’s expectations: the Indian characters’ regalia sometimes prevent them from walking fast, and one of the Indian family members pushes the child forward, to alert her. Nonetheless, the film deemphasizes the blind revenge that filmic Indian characters would typically take in punishing a white settler, as in D.W. Griffith’s *The Redman and the Child* (1908), where Griffith makes his Indian character the murderer, thus fulfilling the audiences’ expectations to witness an “Indian death.”

Pleading with her tribe to save Combs’ life and thus to strengthen the future of the interracial (or cross-racial) family, White Fawn’s melodramatic appearance in the film’s climactic scene saves not only Combs but also the film; her emergence from self-inflicted pain suggests her endurance and, consequently, the film’s investment in living Indians, not vanishing Indians. The film’s title also places the
emphasis on White Fawn’s agency, and viewers may ultimately conclude that her devotion is ultimately to life, to survival. Although Combs seems to dominate the action—he leaves, returns, is chased, eventually exonerated—White Fawn is the film’s central consciousness. Similarly, the film’s sub-title—“A Play Acted by a Tribe of Red Indians in America”—emphasizes not only the idea of the scripted drama, but also places agency on Indian actors, who are named “Red Indians.” Instead of “Red Indians,” however, “Redskins” would soon dominate Hollywood western feature films, despite occasional attempts at seemingly benevolent representations of Indians in the “reform dramas” of the 1920s, such as Redskin (1929), as I show at the end of this chapter.

8.2 To Dix or Not to Dix: The Vanishing American (1925) and the Limits of “Sympathetic” Representation

To act as an Indian is the easiest thing possible, for the Redskin is practically motionless.

—Making the Movies, 1919

Mr. Dix is a splendid Indian.

—Chicago Daily Tribune, 1926

An interesting and important fact about the poor, vanishing American Indian is that he is not poor and he is not vanishing.

—The Youth’s Companion, 1911

In September 1925, Paramount completed filming The Vanishing American, adapted from Zane Grey’s novel of the same name, with major changes to fit the studio’s artistic and
ideological interest in presenting Indian people on the way to extinction. Paramount’s team amassed an impressive cast and crew, including serial director George B. Seitz, and headed for the Arizona desert in Navajo country. After two years of planning and shooting, the result was, according to a reviewer, “an inspiring production fashioned with infinite pains.” Although the film would ultimately diverge from Grey’s equally exploitative book, the contract Grey signed with Paramount—ceding the film company the rights to all his works, “past present, and future” [over seventy!]—required that the films based on his books be “made on the exact locations of the author’s stories.” This contract clause proved a major inconvenience for the studio, as we shall see, but the film introduced the viewers to a world they had only imagined before; the production of the film also intruded on Navajo land in Monument Valley, as Paramount crewmembers “opened up a road and constructed usable cliff dwellings for the spectacular attack sequence.” For many decades after its first display, the film was forgotten, but it was rediscovered by the American Film Institute in 1970 and has since received scholarly attention. After its rediscovery, critics immediately viewed The Vanishing American as “one of the most important films ever made about the Native American,” especially considering later representations of Hollywood “Indians.” For the twenty-first century viewer, however, the film’s “importance” lies perhaps in its mis-directed political potential, its artistic and technical accomplishments, as well as glimpses of cultural loss clouded in the film’s ultimate emphasis on death, loss, and disappearance. At the same time, given the scarce attention contemporaneous silent films gave to harsh reservation life, the demands—and often promises—of assimilation and Americanization (through either education or the participation of Indian soldiers in World War I), and the corruption of the Office of Indian Affairs employees, a film like The Vanishing
American continues to appeal to viewers for its “sympathetic” look at reservation life and its (mis)representation of Indians.

In his review of the film, poet, writer and film critic Carl Sandburg calls The Vanishing American “a bizarre attempt at setting down on gelatin the story of the American red man in broad strokes.” Like many of his contemporaries attuned to “pleas” on behalf of American Indians, Sandburg laments both Zane Grey’s fictional attempt and George Seitz’s cinematic effort to impress the audience with a “passionate sentiment for the red man” at the expense of making such dramatizations “partisan, exaggerated, and pleading.” The film is, in many ways, partisan to Indian causes which contemporaneous social reformers and other “friends of the Indian” championed in the 1920s, criticizing the federal programs calling for the disintegration of Indian reservations and their incorporation into American institutions and practices. Although critical of federal Indian policy, the “sympathetic” portrayal of Navajos in The Vanishing American (represented by the fictional Nopah tribe) in the decade of the Great War makes the film a good contender for a “sympathetic melodrama.” Even so, the film diverges from an initial impulse to test the meanings of its title and moves to a broader Hollywood indictment of “the weak” in the film’s reliance on social Darwinism. The Vanishing American praises the efforts of the Navajo soldiers who fight in World War I and who are recompensed with US citizenship, thus praising the main Indian (played-by-a-white-actor)-character’s efforts to learn English and to fight for the country. At the same time, the film explicitly takes a critical stance on the Indian Bureau: as the soldiers return home, they find their reservation in a precarious state, the women abused, their land taken, and the Indian Agent (Booker) instituting a regime of terror. (This critical streak did not go unnoticed, and the Chicago Daily Tribune published an opinion piece by a superintendent of the Creek Crow agency at Fort Thompson, South Dakota, who objected to
Grey’s portrayal of Indian agents.) But *The Vanishing American* nonetheless reinforced Americanization agendas at the same time that it attempted to chastise them.

If films participate in “a political struggle for supremacy,” as Jacqueline Kilpatrick has argued, *The Vanishing American* may be read as an attempt at staging the irreconcilable distance between colonial fantasy and white guilt, or what D.H. Lawrence calls “the desire to extirpate the Indian” and “the contradictory desire to glorify him.” Lawrence’s study from the 1920s is also emblematic of the decade’s struggle to restore the Indian’s place in modernity, but the film’s ending suggests that there is no place for the Navajo hero in this modernity. Nophaie dies at the end—accidentally killed by one of his people!—and the film eschews the potentially dangerous trope of the interracial couple. The white teacher, Miss Marion Warner (a.k.a. “Little White Rose” or the “White Desert Rose,” as Nophaie repeatedly calls her) is disheartened, but the young (white) officer Ramsdell reappears just in time at the end of the film to console her as Nopie dies. As the next section will show in more detail, these adaptations of Indian-themed novels resort to a sentimental plot (either between a white woman and an Indian man, as in *The Vanishing American*, or an Indian woman and an Indian man—preferably from different tribes—as in *Redskin*) and relegate to Indian women the role of assimilation, as advocates for Christianity and Americanization. *The Vanishing American*, therefore, not only participates in the political struggle for white supremacy but also reproduces patriarchal structures of domination.

The favorable reviews’ raving about the film’s technical achievement, the visibility of the Arizona desert and canyons, and the “amazing “ Richard Dix contrast sharply with the reviewers’ striking downplaying of the story’s Indian “theme”—which some reviewers merely gloss over, thus rendering the story of the Navajos and their “plight” only semi-visible.
review of the film from 1925, suggestively titled “Good Taste Appears: A Race Vanishes,”
summed up the contradiction between the film’s aesthetics and politics, calling it as “serious as a
requiem.” The favorable reviews started pouring in before the film was actually displayed in
teatres across the country; the less flattering reviews appeared in more specialized film
magazines, with a smaller national audience. The Vanishing American, reviewed as an
“extraordinary picture,” was compared to (the notoriously racist film) Birth of a Nation (1915).
One Los Angeles Times review called it “one of the most ambitious motion picture undertakings
in the history of the screen” and presented in great detail the lengthy process of production: that
it “kept 500 whites on the Navajo Indian reservation, from 160 to 200 miles from a railroad, for
four months, and brought 10,000 red men before cameras for the first time in their lives.”
Although the numbers point to an unprecedented and overwhelmingly Indian cast, the Navajos
served only as background to a story told by white actors, who occasionally wore too much
make-up. As theatre and film critic Mordaunt Hall recorded in his column “Screen” for The New
York Times, “Mr. Dix […] weakens in some scenes in the dark make-up.” The same Mordaunt
Hall praised Dix’s performance, for the most part, but criticized the changing make-up, which
“does not always strike one as being a redskin.” Similarly, a reviewer for the Wall Street
Journal noted: “There is a lovely heroine with her exaggerated eye-work.” Another reviewer
noticed the heroine’s melodramatic acting in her blinking too much (“to a sort of Morse code”)
and high heels (which seem at odds with “such a wild place”). The reviewers were quick to
observe the white characters’ exaggerated attributes but few notice, in fact, the stunning
invisibility of Indian characters (partly because Indian characters in leading roles were rare in the
1920s and partly because Dix’s artificiality as a “splendid Indian” begged for these types of
comments). At the same time, because the film industry was young, the specialized reviews
addressing the representation of Indians on the silver screen in specialized journals were also scarce, accounting for an uncritical reception of films like *The Vanishing American*, supported by displays and reviews in big city venues.

An early interview with Jesse L. Lasky, the film’s producer, suggests that the Paramount team also took the liberty of “teaching Indians how to act”—presumably how to act as Indians. Acting Indian and being Indian were two different things, as both film producers and audiences would have known. Lasky explains: “Making the thousands of Indians who appear in ‘The Vanishing American’ understand what was wanted of them (99 out of every 100 of whom had never heard of motion pictures) was also a job.” This paradoxical attempt to capture “the” American Indian as “the Vanishing American” (in his imagined “authentic” location)—performed by white actors and amateur Indian actors for whom the new medium was equally strange—raises questions about the film’s politics and (politics of) representation. Does the film, therefore, condemn the nineteenth-century trope of the “vanishing Indian” by turning its attention to genocide and cultural annihilation in the first decades of the twentieth century, filled with government neglect and impoverished communities? If so, why the emphasis on the “braves” who fight both for the country and their own community, since the fight that animates them seems already lost? Does the film, then, simultaneously mourn the “vanishing” of the Indian as the first American? Does the film then reinscribe national pride through an unthreatening “symbol,” albeit by failing to acknowledge the survival of the Indian as the new American (especially once the Indian soldiers return from fighting in World War I)? In its privileging of the trope of the Indian as the “Vanishing American” that it endorses and displays, the film also calls attention to its own politics of representation for the angst-filled urban audiences of the 1920s.
The *Vanishing American* was conceived and publicized as a “dramatic tribute to the fast disappearing red man” and amassed an exceptional team and studio efforts, as we have seen, to shoot on location in Arizona, over two full years, to tell the story in cinematic form. To make the “fast disappearing” part appeal to wider audiences, Dix became, overnight, “a splendid Indian,” as the epigraph above implies. (As we will see in the next section, this was only the beginning of Richard Dix’s short career as “the” cinematic Indian.) In an interview with the *Los Angeles Times*, Dix did not shy away from imparting his sympathy for the “copper colored lads” who “aren’t bad fellows at all, once you get to know them.” Although he enjoyed their company, Dix was also frustrated by the demands of shooting on location in Arizona, “a million miles away from nowhere,” as he confessed to a reporter a few months before the film’s release. Dix was less interested in the location as “the copper lad’s” own home, an elision suggestive of the film company’s and actors’ colonial acts. But Dix’s seeming distress at the demands of a challenging location was a small price to play Indian in an “epic of [the] red man.”
Dix’s leading, lady Lois Wilson, was equally uncomfortable, as she described her experience in *Picture Play*: “We have had rainstorms, sandstorms, heat that sent the mercury up to one hundred thirty degrees, locations that could only be reached by long horseback rides, and sometimes only by mulepack.”

Despite all these technical and physical challenges, the audience may have been mesmerized by Dix’s performance, which facilitated their identification with an imagined, simulated “Indian” on screen. As a reviewer for the *LA Times* put it, Dix exuded a certain “primitive fire […] which is magnificently effective”: “I guess all of us turned a little bid [sic] Red Indian at the moment, especially after Dix showed up.” Manipulating the audience’s emotional response—an ideological trick which elicited sympathy for an Indian
character played by a white actor, hence a second degree of representation—also calls into question the film’s seemingly “sympathetic” rendition of indigenous peoples, especially when reviewers for newspapers with wide national circulation know very little Indian history.

The making of the film was equally challenging for the production crew. According to its producer, The Vanishing American was shot in “one of the most isolated spots in the United States.” Paramount built camps “at intervals for 200 miles across the reservation, a reservation which serves as a home for 35,000 Indians,” and employed both local bodies and machines: “Every available truck and touring automobile and nearly all the horses in Northern Arizona were pressed into service.” Pausing for a second to reflect on the additional demands of “teaching Indians to act,” the producer also talked about his “duty” to provide food for the Indian amateur actors on the set: “Permit me to say that 10,000 Indians can consume an amazing amount of groceries.” The production team had the challenging mission of “building” locations, which included not only the “village” in the desert, ninety miles from Flagstaff, but also the cliff dwellings at Keetseel, in the Sagi Canyon, 185 miles from Flagstaff. The cliff dwellings appear at the beginning of the film, in a bizarre prologue that attempts to render the historical “vanishing” of indigenous tribes, setting the tone for the reception of the film. Successive versions of Nopah parade in front of the camera, replaced by ever stronger-looking people, suggestive of the film’s larger political implications rendered in the first intertitle through a quotation from Herbert Spencer: “We have unmistakable proof that throughout all past time there has been a ceaseless devouring of the weak by the strong, … a survival of the fittest.” The producer’s descriptions of his crew’s major challenges often involved references to the raw mechanics of the production process, including references to “rock,” “cement,” cans of paint, nails, and hammers: “Twenty tons of cement were carried the same way [by mule pack], as well
as every last nail, hammer, can of paint, tapeline and everything else.” As all these supplies were carried up the Sagi Canyon, the team sometimes had to “blast the rock.” But the film’s producer was too excited about the film’s technical and cinematic potential to worry about how Navajos might feel about the desecration of their lands.

Although the film was innovative in both subject matter (the discrepancy between modernity’s promises for Indians as the new Americans and the harsh realities of Indian reservations caused by government neglect) and technical achievement (the discrepancy between the production effort to film on location and the employment of white actors in Indian roles), *The Vanishing American* was not a box-office success. Despite the massive praise and publicity for the film, after a brief success the film did not bring the expected revenue. Aleiss suggests that the “Indians’ predicament was hardly entertainment for audiences hooked on action-packed cowboy epics.”52 But the film also appeared during a decade marked by alarmist rhetoric about the “vanishing American race” as the racial urban landscape of the United States was changing dramatically following the largest immigration wave that began in the 1880s and continued through the 1910s. Therefore, the conflation of the Indian as the “vanishing American” with the “old stock” Anglo-Saxon as the “vanishing American” represented, as Brian Dippie suggests, “a perfect fusion of the nostalgic with the progressive impulse.”53 The vanishing Indian discourse subtly meets the vanishing American discourse in a film calling attention to the failure of federal Indian policy yet also signaling an imminent change in categories of nostalgic identification (from vanishing “Indian” to vanishing “American”).

A film like *The Vanishing American* elicits interest from progressive audiences concerned with the disappearance of Indians (as the ultimate “symbol” of American geography) and from nationalist alarmist predictions about the “vanishing American race,” tempered by
progressive beliefs in the potential of the “new” Americans to become good citizens. An article for the Chicago Daily Tribune, suggestively titled “The Vanishing American Race,” advises its 1907 readers that, as long as the “new” Americans entering the country desire American citizenship, panic is unwarranted: “The American is not necessarily a descendant of a colonial ancestor. He is a product of many contributing forces.”54 By 1915, this seemingly optimistic view turned into alarmist predictions about the disappearance of the Anglo-Saxon “race.” An LA Times article from 1915, alarmingly titled “Our Vanishing American Race,” estimated that “in an average 100 individuals of our present-day population, there are no more than twenty-seven of pure colonial stock, as against twenty-seven whose ancestors came to America not more than two generations ago, thirty-five who are aliens or of foreign-born parentage, and eleven negroes.” There are many documentable instances where popular national magazines and newspapers spread the panic about the “vanishing American race.” The audiences of the film The Vanishing American were, most likely, familiar with these popular discourses.55

The film’s prologue, although not directly sharing the fears about the waning of the “colonial stock,” offers in brief episodes the history of Indian disappearance (and reappearance), whereby successive tribes are destroyed by stronger generations following them. From the Basket Makers to the Slab House People and the Cliff Dwellers to contemporary Nopahs, the film renders the “evolution” of these successive tribes as a history of violence and repeated conquest (by the fittest). To this end, every new generation has a Nophaie character (a hereditary chief). When the Conquistadors emerge in front of the camera (they literally suggest an upward movement, consistent with evolutionist notions of progress), the intertitle explains: “for every generation, a Nophaie would do what no one would attempt.” The prologue ends with the overwhelming menace of the white conquest of the Nopahs, thus setting the tone for The
Vanishing American as a film also about the imminent disappearance of the Navajos. The rest of the film revolves around the time the United States entered World War I, a moment important for the participation of Indian soldiers in the war.\textsuperscript{56} Although signaling the discrepancy between Indian bravery in the Great War and the soldier’s return to a destitute reservation marked by corruption and greedy Indian agents, The Vanishing American ends with the Indian character’s death, missing an important chance to develop the Indian soldier’s potential for U.S. citizenship. The film ultimately suggests that no act of bravery can erase the Indian characters’ perpetual wardship, despite heroic acts at home and on the battlefield.

The classroom setting and the preparations for war represent the film’s main sites of assimilation and Americanization (both complemented throughout by references to Christianity). In the classroom, the agent of Americanization is feminized, with white teacher Marian Warner teaching both “the primitive desert children” (intertitle min. 40) and Nophaie, described in another intertitle as “the smartest buck on the reservation.” We also get a glimpse of a more individualized Indian child character in Nasja, who becomes Nophaie’s right hand man and who, along with Dix, offers a believable “impersonation,” according to one reviewer for The Wall Street Journal: “an Indian boy […], [a] lad of his race, with all the native energy and a surprising intelligence, was a lucky find for this undertaking.”\textsuperscript{57} The reviewer’s note about the Indian boy’s “surprising intelligence” reflects wider assumptions about certain “inherent” Indian characteristics the cinematic and social audiences were invested in, and which often infantilized Indian people.
Figure 8.3. *The Vanishing American:*
Nasja, Mourning Nophaie’s Death [End of the Film]

Nasja is a student in the on-reservation government school, taught by Miss Marion Warner. A typical class day, the viewer learns, begins with a pledge of allegiance to the U.S. flag: one Indian student presents the flag to the classroom while the others seem to utter the words of the pledge. All the Indian children acting in the scene look scared, disoriented, not in the least excited to pledge allegiance to a symbol they know little about. As *The Vanishing American* is a silent film, the absence of Indian voices is both symbolic and literal, but their presence in this rudimentary scene of Americanization indicates the future envisioned for them, which includes the English language, loyalty as good citizens, and (implied) Christianity—suggested in the teacher’s reading the Bible outside the classroom, and her “gift” to Nophaie in
the form of a small New Testament. But this film does not dwell as much on Christianity as it
dwells on the idea of patriotism and the affirmation of Americanization. The same classroom
where young students pledge their allegiance to the United States flag is, only minutes later, a
battleground for racial and masculine supremacy. As the Indian Agent (Booker) sexually
harasses Miss Warner, Nophaie comes to her rescue, confronting Booker and his small army of
bullies. The mise-en-scene makes clear that the fight desecrates the symbolic power radiated by
the presidential portraits and the flag decorating the room. At the same time, as the fight
progresses, taking the protagonist to various angles of the room, the flag accompanies him
throughout the fight. Nophaie, therefore, is constantly interpellated by Americanization symbols
even as he (literally) fights the government’s most powerful representative (embodied by
Booker, the weak Indian Agent).

In an anti-colonial gesture, after saving the white woman from white men, the Indian
protagonist disappears for a while, only to reemerge as Marion pleads with him to help in the war
effort. Distressed to hear that Uncle Sam needs him—“The government comes to me—a haunted
man—for help?”—Nophaie listens to Marion’s ventriloquizing affirmation: “You’re as much an
American as any of us.” The scene ends with Nophaie contemplating, in disbelief, the distance
between the “haunted man” he is and the desired American he can shortly become—especially if
he shares his tribe’s horses with the U.S. troops: “American! Me!” This conversion, however, is
too abrupt—by any measure. In the next few minutes we find Nophaie a changed man, joining
the war effort in hopes that his effort will be rewarded and the reservation will escape the
tyranny of agents like Booker: “Since we are Americans, we go fight. Maybe if we fight…maybe
if we die…our country will deal fairly with our people.” The scene ends with the Indian
soldiers, led by Nophaie, leaving to fight in the Great War; U.S. flags are flying in the wind in a
As Nophaie leaves the scene in a triumphant exit, leaving behind their old lives, Marion critically contemplates in an intertitle: “Pitiful and Riding away to fight for the white man…” Another intertitle praising the bravery of Indian soldiers soon follows this fleeting critical stance: “In all the annals of the Great War, there were no more thrilling pages than those written by the first Americans.”

Both writer Zane Grey and director Schertzinger are critical of the clash between this recognized patriotism of Indian soldiers and the dismal changes in Indian communities after the soldiers’ return from fighting in World War I (despite the conferral of the de jure citizenship) as a recognition of their patriotism. The film dramatizes the loss the war causes in the fictional Nopah community as the returned soldiers find their lands stolen by the Indian agent’s new scheme (Booker’s new “experimental farm”). As a shell-shocked soldier returns home, his double vision facilitates the superimposition of the two “realities” (before and after the war). As the unnamed soldier faces the distorted reality around him, he sees shadows of Indian people walking around, a glimpse of the pre-war reservation land, now forcefully taken away. The eerie, ghostly quality of this scene is striking, especially in its emphasis on the ghostly present, marked by a single mud house and an old Indian man refusing to leave his land. But the implication remains that the world as he knew it is gone. Nophaie is visibly distraught and angry at “this God of the white man [who] looked from those cold heights beyond the stars and let his people perish!” He tries to reconcile the rebelling Nopahs and the American government, represented by Booker and his entourage, and is accidentally killed by one of his own men. As he dies, Nophaie asks Marion to read to him from the New Testament she had given him. The scene thus implies that Nophaie dies an American (i.e., a Christian, by one 1925 definition). The only element that saves this scene from melodramatic predictability is Nasja, the Indian boy; his mourning for the
dying Nophaie, in a brief frame, captures the sadness that the funeral ceremonies cannot render. As Dix’s character dies—“vanishes”—taking with him, the film suggests, the hope for the future of the Nophas, the last intertitle brings the audience back to their historical moment: “—For races of men come—and go but the stage remains.” Drawing the viewer’s attention to the story’s illusory medium and its artistic merits, The Vanishing American does not disappoint to the very end. In its emphasis on the triumph of the artistic over everything else (including the disappearance of certain “races of men”), the film’s disclaimer says, seemingly, “It’s just a movie, folks!” The (technically-) ambitious film ends by reminding the audiences about the medium’s artificiality, thus privileging the silent film’s complicity with discourses of Americanization and de-emphasizing the potentially promising political implications of the critiques the film begins but ultimately fails to make.

8.3 ‘I’m Going Back to My People Where I Belong’: The Silent Redskin (1929) and the Stakes of Americans in the Making

Even to-day a few white players specialize in Indian parts.
They are masters in such roles, for they have made a complete study of Indian life, and by clever make-up they are hard to tell from real redskins.

—Making the Movies, 1919

In 2007, the National Film Preservation Foundation issued a four-volume collection of rare silent films in the series “Social Issues in American Film, 1900-1934.” The silent Redskin is part of volume four, “Americans in the Making,” which also includes several short films such as
“Emigrants Landing at Ellis Island,” “An American in the Making,” “Ramona,” and “100% American.” It has been praised as the “most brilliant film” of the collection, “at least in terms of archival preservation.” Its recovery is timely especially in the context of recent academic decolonizing discourses and practices, including calls for decolonized viewing relations. But the marketing of the film (forgotten for eighty years) in the series “Americans in the Making” is intriguing. One of Paramount’s last silents, the film appeared in 1929, during a decade of intense criticism of federal Indian policy, and shortly after an exacerbated nativism surrounding World War I and culminating in immigration restriction laws with the passing of the Quota Act in 1924. The Indian Citizenship Act also passed in 1924, generating even more false assumptions about Indian people’s desire or willingness to be incorporated. Although presumably exploring the story of a “Navajo caught between two cultures” and attempting to show “what it means to be an American and what values an American should embrace,” I argue that the film’s good intentions (and embrace of cultural pluralism) reinscribe older misrepresentations of Indian people on the silver screen—but this time in Technicolor!
In his introduction to the film notes accompanying the series, non-Native film critic Scott Simmon optimistically calls *Redskin* “the most authentic Hollywood fiction film about Native Americans” and “almost the last Hollywood feature for twenty years to take a sympathetic look into Native American life.” Compared with its contemporaneous portrayals of Indians in film and on stage, *Redskin* is clearly ahead of its time (especially technically), and indeed takes a slightly more sympathetic view of the “Indian problem”; the film explodes the fantasy of assimilation and Americanization, but Native control over representation is minimal, as we shall see, with an all-white cast, director, writer, and producers. The film itself thus becomes a tool of Americanization and assimilation at the same time that it critiques the inhumanity of the
boarding school experience and as Paramount brings “civilization” to Navajo and Pueblo lands—For this film, Paramount carved a road of about 300 feet to carry the heavy Technicolor equipment up the Mesa, a road still functional today. I also argue that this visual text, with a provocatively racist title, produced shortly after the passing of the Indian Citizenship Act (1924), when Americanization efforts started waning, stages the assimilation debates in unexpected ways. The sentimental plots and sub-plots are complicated by the film’s artistic choices, which end up obscuring the film’s larger ideological and political underpinnings.

Redskin was produced by Paramount, directed by a Paramount house name, Victor Schertzinger, and written by Navajo enthusiast Elizabeth Pickett (whose 1929 novel, initially titled Navajo, was published as Redskin immediately after the film’s premiere, with illustrations from the film). As the title suggests, the film follows in the tradition of other Hollywood racist films—Justice of the Redskin (1908), Romantic Redskins (1910), and The Trapper and the Redskins (1910). It was filmed in both black and white and two-color Technicolor—a process introduced in 1917. It combines black and white scenes (when the characters inhabit the white man’s world) with two-color scenes filmed on the tribal lands of the Navajos and Acoma Pueblos. (The three-color Technicolor was introduced later, in 1932). The silent enjoyed a popular Anglo cast, with Richard Dix as Navajo Wing Foot and Gladys Belmont as Corn Blossom. Hundreds of Native people were employed as extras, “representing” the rivaling Navajos and Acoma Pueblos. A dashing Dix returned to play the role of Wing Foot after his stint in The Vanishing American (1925. Whether Dix accepted Wing Foot’s role to redeem his star image tarnished by the melodramatic caricature of the Navajo man in his previous film or he was, in fact, interested in a more sympathetic representation, it’s hard to tell. But as most of the
reviews of *Redskin* on the East and West Coast alike suggested, it was Robert Dix who sold the film.

![Redskin, Richard Dix as Wing Foot on the Navajo reservation](image)

**Figure 8.5. Redskin, Richard Dix as Wing Foot on the Navajo reservation**

Although this was a big studio film (with a budget of $400,000), it was shot on location, in Arizona and New Mexico. At the beginning of the film, Wing Foot lives in Arizona, in Canyon de Chelly, and Corn Blossom lives on the Mesa of Acoma Pueblo in New Mexico. Granted that the Commissioner of Indian affairs at the time, Charles H. Burke, gave his permission to Paramount to make this film—as long as it provided “wholesome and instructive entertainment to the public, especially in regard to the attitude of the Government toward
Indians, “...” this gesture does not in the least exonerate the colonial gesture of the film enterprise at a time when the eastern audiences in particular took comfort in the “primitivism” of the West and writers went to retreats and “writers’ colonies” to appease their angst and traumatic encounters with modernity.

The main sentimental plot line follows Wing Foot, from his peaceful childhood on the Navajo reservation as chief Notani’s son, to his boarding school days, his college years at a fictional Thorpe University where he is a star athlete and studies medicine, to his return home. The boarding school scenes, in black and white, were filmed at the Chinle Indian Boarding School in Arizona and at the Sherman Indian Institute, in Riverside, California. In the process, Wing Foot meets Corn Blossom, and they fall in love. She is called back home before the romance can get any further, they are apart, he is banished from his own tribe for defying his elders and for refusing the honor of becoming the new medicine man, and drifts for a while (a difficult episode in his life, as we learn from the book, and which the film does not develop). All’s well that ends well: Wing Foot discovers oil on his land claim, shares half of it with the Pueblos, thus ending the long conflict between the tribes, and weds Corn Blossom in a brief traditional ceremony. As the caption reads, this reconciliation brings forth “the greatest gift of heaven—tolerance.”

The initial screenings of the silent were accompanied by music playing an absurd, romanticizing “Redskin” theme song throughout, setting a particular mood and tone for audience identification and the early reception of this silent. Early reviews of the film raved about the song, which was already a popular radio tune. The song captures Pickett’s and the country’s
fascination with an imagined American Indian, gendered masculine and simultaneously infantilized, to withstand threats to American masculinity and presumed racial superiority:

Redskin, Redskin, boy of my dreams
Take me back to silvery streams […]
With happy hearts we’ll go roaming,
I’ll whisper in the gloaming,
I love you, Redskin, love you.

The song also sets the tone for a potential interracial romance between Wing Foot and a white college flapper, attracted to the mysterious Navajo. As she glances at his athletic body on the track field from her privileged box seat, thus inviting the audience to gaze at his body through her eyes, she demands her obliging white boyfriend: “You must invite that Redskin to the dance tonight. He ought to be a new thrill—in the Ballroom!” In the meantime, Corn Blossom cheers for Wing Foot from an upper stadium tier, “Come on, you Navajo!” Wing Foot does his best to navigate these competing gazes, speeds up, and wins the race. “Where’s my Redskin?,“ the flapper asks her chubby boyfriend, as everybody awaits the triumphant appearance of the Indian track champion in the ballroom. “Say! What’s the idea—getting all steamed up over an Indian?” asks the chubby. A minor character, he gets upset and provokes Wing Foot to a fistfight just as his girlfriend provoked him to a whooping dance only minutes before. Wing Foot ends up surrounded by white students dancing and whooping around him—“Well, if you can’t dance my way, I’ll dance yours!” But Wing Foot’s humiliations are just beginning. Punched in the face, told he is tolerated only because he is needed on the track team, he passively withdraws and
returns to his college room only to find out that “he sure acted white—for a Redskin!” The roommate’s sympathy is the last straw that triggers Wing Foot’s radical gesture of separation from a world where he is branded a “redskin.” In a scene full of pathos (and perhaps too much make-up), Wing Foot decides to return home. Sobbing, clutching Corn Blossom’s portrait to his heart, he declares his “redskin” pride in a scene memorable for its internalized racism: “After what I saw tonight, I’m proud to be a Redskin. My mistake was in thinking I ever had a chance among you whites! “I’m going back to my own people where I belong!”

Although in some ways more sympathetic than other films to unidirectional representations of Indian people on the silver screen in the first two decades of the twentieth century, Redskin belongs to an era when the “Indian Docudrama” was one of Hollywood’s favorite genres, combining dramatic stories with documentary footage that romanticized “a lost tradition.”68 Cases in point are Edison’s The Vanishing Race (1917), reviving the noble but doomed Blackfeet who disappear into a majestic background; Nanook of the North (1922), documenting Inuit life with a loose story line and a central character; and Edward Curtis’s In the Land of the Head-Hunters (1914), a story about Kwakiutl Indians on Vancouver island, with an all Indian cast. But the silent shares more thematic elements with two other silents from 1925: Braveheart (1925)—directed by Alan Hale—a pro-Assimilation movie set in the present and, as a studio blurb advertised, “dealing with the modern Indian and not the savages of ’49;”69 second The Vanishing American (1925), directed by George B. Seitz. As I have argued in the previous section, this film adaptation was an attempt to suggest the failure of federal Indian policy and the brutality of Indian agents, but it failed dramatically in its over-emphasis on discourses and practices of Americanization: education, Christianity, modernization, and disease.
The initial reception of *Redskin* also contributed to the imagined audience’s detachment from the political statement the film could have made—but didn’t—in choosing to draw attention to its esthetic and technical accomplishments instead. An overtly racist *New York Times* reviewer—presumably reaching millions of readers in 1929—described the beauty of the Navajo reservation as “unsurpassed by any other region of the West,” referring to the Navajos as “the Arabs of the New World,” who “live their primitive lives almost wholly untouched by civilization.” Similar reviews from 1929 praised either Dix’s sympathetic performance (that reestablished him as a dramatic actor) and the film’s “magnificent” and “unforgettable” “photographic values,” thus privileging again the beauty of the landscape (or what Stuart Hall would call the *poetics* of representation) to the detriment of the film’s undeveloped ideological consequences (*politics of representation*). A review in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* exploded: “This *Redskin* is a glorious symphony of color and scenery.” A *Washington Post* review completely overlooked that the film was about Pueblos and Navajos and focused instead on the film’s sound effects, music, and Richard Dix. Even though one critic lent a more sympathetic eye, his review did little to change the reception of the film in terms of how it reinscribed the violence of representation. Said an *LA Times* reviewer: “The real epic of the Indian has never been filmed. *Redskin* might have been the saga of these interesting people, so little understood.” Indeed, it “might have been.” Last but not least, Paramount’s president Herbert H. Kalmus took pride in producing this film in an “age of miracles”:

It wasn’t easy. Five cameras equipped for color work made the scenes. They finished, usually, at about 5 o’clock in the afternoon. Immediately, the negative was handed over to special developers, who worked on it in impromptu sheds until 10 o’clock. Then it was
rushed in tracks to Gallup for shipment. The train was met the following morning by our representatives, the film brought here [studio] to be printed—and by afternoon it was ready for showing. [...] This is the age of miracles. The Indians will tell you so! They came from far and wide to see themselves projected on a screen in the heart of the desert; they whooped and went wild at the sight.”

While it was an age of miracles for Paramount, it certainly was not an age of miracle for Indians “who came from far and wide,” as both the film and the book suggest. The Meriam Report (titled The Problem of Indian Administration) appeared in 1928, urging a change away from assimilationist policy—largely viewed as a failure—and recommending a policy of cultural pluralism. The report was also critical of the boarding schools, finding them “grossly inadequate,” and exposed the public for the first time to major physical and psychological abuses Indian children were subjected to. As Brenda Child suggests, “The Merriam Report affirmed the complaints Indian families and students had been making for years, among them that the federal government neglected to provide Native children with even the most basic necessities.”

Earlier in the film, in one of the black-and-white scenes at the boarding school, Wing Foot receives new clothes, a new haircut, a new and derogatory name (Do-Atin, “The Whipped One/The Tamed One/The Broken one”), and a new lesson in American democracy through corporal punishment (which the film, sensibly, does not actually show). In his refusal to salute the US flag, asserting the chief’s son’s choice to resist patriotic interpellations, we see a fleeting moment of rebellion that many runaway students attempted with the risk of punishment and sometimes death. His resistance to paying respect to the symbol of American citizenship (technically granted him in 1924) is silenced in the following scenes where he voluntarily and
automatically engages in similar patriotic rituals as a student at U.S. Albuquerque Indian College.

Figure 8.6. Corn Blossom Teaches Wing Foot to Salute the American flag in *Redskin*

It is Corn Blossom, however, who becomes Wing Foot’s less threatening, seemingly innocent agent of Americanization in the film, an under-developed character suggesting Paramount’s gender biases, and described throughout the book and in the film as “the little Indian flapper.” Corn Blossom teaches Wing Foot one of his first lesson in American democracy and also in survivance: “‘You must salute the flag.’ With a startled glance at her, Wing Foot watched as Corn Blossom saluted respectfully. The little Pueblo girl, his one friend, then took his
hand and with earnest explanations, guided it awkwardly to his forehead.” In the book, Corn Blossom tells Wing foot: “‘That’s it!’ she says, nodding toward the flag as it fluttered out on the strong desert wind. ‘That stands for our Uncle Sam, who loves his Indian children!’ she whispered softly.” In the film, the caption reads: “that’s Uncle Sam. He is going to take care of you and me.” Later in the book, when they both go to college (Wing Foot as a student, Corn Blossom as a stenographer), they resume this conversation. The film, however, does not approach this potentially dangerous dialogue:

Corn Blossom raised her eyes to the flag. A puff of wind had stretched it straight out for a moment, and the hot red stripes glowed unbroken against the sky.

‘It’s our Uncle Sam,’ she said. ‘He’s given us two step children a good start in life.’

‘Yes, and I’ll pay it back to him by being the best Injun he’s got!’ answered Wing Foot.

‘Gosh, but wouldn’t I love to go to Congress when I’m through Thorpe!’

‘Say, Redman, wait a minute!’ teased Corn Blossom, ‘You’ll be in the White House next.’


Wing Foot does not go to Congress or the White House. He goes back to his people, where he thinks he belongs, as one of the intertitles informs us. At the end of Redskin, after he becomes a scholarship student and star athlete at a fictional Thorpe university, withstanding constant racist diatribes from his white peers, Wing Foot decides to return home: “My mistake was in thinking I ever had a chance among you whites! I’m going back to my own people—where I belong!”
Throughout the film, Wing Foot navigates among several identities, names, landscapes, and (presumably) languages that make any kind of belonging incomplete. I hesitate about Wing Foot’s linguistic navigation since English dominates the intertitles in this silent film—even when he speaks with his grandmother Yina, played by Augustina Lopez—a relevant slip and assumption about the film’s main audience in 1929. In Pickett’s novel, the linguistic nuances are more visible, and the Indian characters are said to speak specific Indian “dialects.”78 Taken to boarding school by force at the age of nine, Wing Foot rebels against the confines of the
regulatory institution and its Americanization practices, which include saluting the US flag. His refusal costs him not only a major whipping and failure of his first Americanization lesson, but also a shameful name his Indian fellow students give him: “Do-Atin,” or “The Whipped One.” The writer makes clear in her novel that the “Whipped One” or the “Tamed One” was a shameful phrase the Navajos used to refer to a broken mustang. Wing Foot’s own father, Chief Notani, calls him “Do-Atin” after he refuses the honor of becoming the tribe’s medicine man. As a student of medicine in the white man’s world, Wing Foot starts disdaining traditional medicinal ways: “Your witchcraft killed my mother [who died in childbirth]—it is killing my grandmother [who is going blind]—and now you want me to preach such nonsense!” As he meditates on the effects of education on his life, Wing Foot concludes bitterly: “I am neither Indian nor White Man. Just… Redskin.” Wing Foot’s return home, as the end of the film suggests through a forced happy ending, is nonetheless just the beginning of another journey that will take six more decades to gain visibility on the silver screen.

Notes

1 Balshofer and Miller, 28.

2 Motion Picture World, 398.

3 Dench, 92-94.

4 See especially Abel, The Red Rooster Scare, 151-75 and 158.

5 Hearne, 192-93.

6 Kevin Brownlow, The War, the West, and the Wilderness, 331-34.

7 According to Simmon, “Most of Young Deer’s production and directorial credits are impossible to confirm, but such a number is suggested by Moving Picture World’s mention in
1912 that he had just completed his 100th film for Pathé. *MPW*, June 29, 1912: 1218. Only 8 of his films are thought to survive in US archives.” *The Invention of the Western Film*, 303 n 3.

8 Young Deer was born in Dakota City, Nebraska, date unknown, and died in April 1946. Lillian St. Cyr was born on February 13, 1873 on the Winnebago Reservation in Nebraska and died on March 13, 1974.

9 *Motion Picture World* (July 1, 1911): 1508.

10 Brownlow, 331.

11 Simmon claims that Young Deer was “the victim of changing tastes, or of the Hollywood production system, or of a complex vendetta from the Los Angeles sheriff’s office, probably extending what Young Deer himself claimed with some bitterness was ‘the vengeance of the white man meted out to Indians.’” According to Simmon, in late 1913, the LA county sheriff accused Young Deer for being part of a “white slave ring.” The charges were dropped later but the publicity put an end to his collaboration with Pathé. After this episode, according to Kevin Brownlow, Young Deer continued directing in France and England, returning to the US in 1919: “The twenties were lean years for him; he operated an acting school and returned to direction on Poverty Row in the 1930s.” Angela Aleiss also suggests that Young Deer had a “taste for adventures,” which “sometimes competed with his own movie stories.” She also documents that he was diagnosed with “alcoholic hysteria.” See Simmon, *The Invention of the Western Film*, 30 and 303 n. 36, Brownlow, 334 and, Aleiss, *Making the White Man’s Indian* 16.

12 Andrew Brodie Smith, 6, 9, 37.

For a relatively recent study of the misrepresentation of Indians in Hollywood films, see Rollins and O’Connor. For the popularity of Westerns in Europe, see Abel, *Americanizing the Movies and “Movie-Mad” Audiences, 1910-1914*, 105-107, and 112-117.

This western was also filmed in New Jersey.

*Idem*, 4.


Simmon, “Program Notes,” 70.

Aleiss, *Making the White Man’s Indian*, xvii. For another useful study of cross-racial romance and Indianness in early silent films, see Berndt, 39-76.

I refer to Madison Grant’s concept as a dominant view of Anglo-Saxonism. This concept is in direct opposition to concepts of dominant vs. marginal races shared by the American Indian and Immigrant writers I consider in this project.

See Aleiss, *Making the White Man’s Indian*, 1-2.


Qtd. in Simmon, “Program Notes,” 70.

I borrow the concept “Indian death,” which I take to mean cinematic death inflicted on Indian characters, from Joanna Hearne’s “The Cross-Heart People: Race and Inheritance in the Silent Western.” According to Hearne, the Western genre had already prepared audiences to expect the death of Indian characters. See Hearne 193.
The first feature-length western is Cecil B. DeMille’s *The Squaw Man* (1914), starring Lillian St. Cyr (Young Deer’s Wife), uncredited, based on a melodrama of the same title from 1905.

Hearne defines “reform dramas” as films “depicting government corruption on reservations” in the 1920s. Although my analysis also brings together two of the “reform dramas” Hearne mentions—*The Vanishing American* (1925) and *Redskin* (1929)—my analysis questions the limits of these feature films’ “sympathy,” especially as I read them in the context of Americanization discourses. See Hearne, 193.

Dench, 94.

Tinee, 33.

The first story in what would later become the novel *The Vanishing American* was published in 1922 in *Ladies Home Journal*. Aleiss suggests that Harper & Brothers planned the publication of the book so that it would coincide with the release of the film but altered the book considerably after pressures from religious and social groups. Grey criticized whites for the destruction of Indian culture and especially targeted missionaries for stripping Indian people of material and cultural possessions. Aleiss, *Making the White Man’s Indian*, 35.

The cast also included Richard Dix (as Nophaie, the Navajo warrior), Lois Wilson (as the white teacher, or “White Desert Rose”), Noah Beery (the villain, i.e., the Indian Agent), Malcolm McGregor, Shannon Day, Charley Crockett, Bert Woodruff, John Dillion, Dick Howard, and Bruce Gordon, as well as an impressive number of Navajos as extras.


Brownlow. *The War, the West, and the Wilderness*, 344-45. Zane Grey also had his own studio, the Zane Grey Productions at Paramount studios. According to Aleiss (35), Grey
conceived the idea for the book in 1922 after he and a few Paramount executives spent time in the desert of Northern Arizona.

33 Brownlow (345) documents that “an original tinted print [of the film was] presented at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in February 1970, in the Series Here Comes the Parade.” He also suggests that, had the film not been “so tied to a melodramatic story line, it might have been an enduring classic.”

34 Friar and Friar.


36 Film critics tend to agree about the film’s ideological implications suggested by the director’s choice of a Herbert Spencer quotation in the first intertitle: “We have unmistakable proof that throughout all past time there has been a ceaseless devouring of the weak by the strong … a survival of the fittest.” See Simmon, The Invention of the Western Film, 84-85, and Aleiss, Making the White Man’s Indian, 34-37.

37 W.E. Dunn objected to the film not because “it isn’t a good yarn but because the Indian agents in it aren’t all they should be.” Dunn calls for a recognition of the merits of the Indian Field workers who do not share Booker’s callousness.

38 Kilpatrick, xvi and Lawrence, 36.

39 A Paramount publicity release also centers on Dix: “There is no greater story than the passing of the Indian—the picture had the desert, the canyons, and the plains to conjure with—there was something of the wilderness of space and of the infinity of time written on it that took one’s breath away. The whisper of the winds of history was on it—Dix was amazing.” Qtd. in Brownlow, 344.
The reviewer’s sympathetic take is filled with melodramatic twists: “Bursting its seams with plot, the modern story uses a reincarnation of Simon Legree and a band of villainous white marauders to show just what happens to the poor Indian when Uncle Sam’s back is turned. It is indeed awful.” Reiners, 616.

These magazines included *Picture Play, Moving Picture World*, and *Photoplay*. Brownlow (344-47) offers a useful synthesis.

“New Zane Grey Film Finished by Paramount,” A11.

Mordaunt Hall, “The Screen,” 18. Carl Sandburg starts his review of the film in 1925 with the following telling motto: “Though an attempt to consider the West from a Native American point of view, *The Vanishing American* starred actor Richard Dix wearing dark makeup in his Indian role.” Sandburg, 301.

Hall referred to the Indian characters as “energetic,” in the same review. “‘Vanishing American’ Has Inspiring Scenes,” X5.

Metcalf, “Lo, the Poor Indian,” 3.


“Producing Indian Film Was a Stupendous Task,” X5.

“To Play Indian Role in Epic of Red Man,” A15.


Qtd. in Brownlow, 345.

The same reviewer also noted that, given the Indian’s putative improved living conditions, “we no longer feel ashamed to trot him out and show him off in the movies. Our crimes against him are lessening, I hear, and we can afford the luxury of feeling sorry for him
now that we no longer feel the so great need of stealing from him and murdering him.” See Kingsley, “’Vanishing American’ Is Triumph for Dix,” A9.

52 Aleiss documents that “the movie peaked at $ 10,735 in October 1925, but fell to only 6,000 by December 12.” Making the White Man’s Indian, 37.

53 Dippie, xii.

54 “The Vanishing American Race,” 8.

55 Henry Smith Williams, M.D., L.L.D. [Formerly Medical Superintendent of Randall’s Island Hospital, New York City] “Our Vanishing American Race,” 114.

56 For Indian Participation in the Great War, see Britten and Krouse.

57 The reviewer concludes his piece, “Lo, the Poor Indian” with a scathing political indictment and praises the film’s aesthetic merits: “Anyone can see “The Vanishing American” with profit, aesthetically for one thing and for another, the increased hatred it may inspire for the professional politician and his greed.” See Metcalfe, 3.

58 In the restored version from 2000, following the 1925 version closely, the audience members clap as the Indian soldiers are leaving the scene. This identification with the bravery of Indian soldiers exemplifies, perhaps accurately, an instance of their desire to “play Indian” and not necessarily just admiration (since the film was made in 1925 and World War I ended in 1918). See The Vanishing American, color-tinted black & white, 108 minutes, not rated, Film Preservation Associates, distributed by Image Entertainment, 2000. [1925]

59 Dench, 93.

60 The silent era lasted from 1888-1927. In American Indian studies terms, this period is also important as it spans roughly from the beginning of Allotment to the Merriam Report,
landmarks in the forced campaign of assimilation. In the book project, I will write about all these films in detail.


Mellen, 16.

Simmon, “Program Notes,” 132-34.

This was also Elizabeth Pickett’s last screenplay for Hollywood, following a series of documentaries about the Pueblos she made in 1925.

“This film was planned entirely for color but scenes in black and white were substituted to save money.” Simmon, “Program Notes,” 132.

Qtd. in Simmon, “Program Notes,” 133. According to the New York Times, “Before Paramount could make use of the Indian reservations which afforded such gorgeous scenic background for Redskin, it was necessary for Miss Pickett to secure the consent from the Commissioner of Indian Affairs in Washington.” See “Mr. Dix’s Color Film,” 117.

Chinle was established in 1910, close to Canyon de Chelly, where Redskin was filmed.

Aleiss, Making the White Man’s Indian, 30.

Qtd. in Aleiss, Making the White Man’s Indian, 180 n. 17.

LA Times, February 10, 1929, A2.

“Scenery Puts Strength into ‘Redskin’ Plot; Tully Marshall Also Aids Film’s Effect,” 15.


Busby, 7.
74 Interview with Philip Sheuer, *LA Times*, Feb 17, 1929.

75 Child, 32.

76 Pickett, *Redskin*, 70.

77 Idem, 77.

78 Pickett, *Redskin*. 
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