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Searching for America: The Development of the Immigrant Narrative across Jewish, African, Cuban, and Korean American Literature

Amanda Maree Lawrence
University of Tennessee - Knoxville

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Amanda Maree Lawrence entitled "Searching for America: The Development of the Immigrant Narrative across Jewish, African, Cuban, and Korean American Literature." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.

Mary E. Papke, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Dr. Tom Haddox, Dr. CHarles Maland, Dr. Carolyn Hodges

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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Graduate Studies

SEARCHING FOR AMERICA:
THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE IMMIGRANT NARRATIVE ACROSS JEWISH, AFRICAN, CUBAN, AND KOREAN AMERICAN LITERATURE

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
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Amanda M. Lawrence
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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to all those who have made the journey.

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Abstract

Searching for America: The Development of the Immigrant Narrative across Jewish, African, Cuban, and Korean American Literature is a longitudinal study that traces and accounts for the development of immigrant literature within specific ethnic groups, focusing on how different generations rewrite the immigrant narrative of their own cultures. Considering multiple texts from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by Jewish, African, Cuban, and Korean American authors, I examine the changing relationship between language or literary form and identity politics for each group. In addition to exploring individual patterns of development, I suggest ways in which these very different ethnic texts speak to each other and to the myths and realities that constitute America. What emerges from this comparative study of group patterns is a picture of ethnicity in this country through the eyes of the immigrant writer, who is positioned as both insider and outsider of American culture. In showing how and why that picture has changed over the past century, I argue for the centrality of immigrant literature to the American literary canon.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The Immigrant, Outsider Perspective, and American Identity

As a nation of immigrants, Americans have long struggled with the difficulty of determining a national identity. When J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur asked "Who is this new man, this American?" in 1782, he opened the debate over American national character. In a country that is not bound together by a common ethnic heritage, belief system, or even a common history, is it possible even to discuss national identity?[1] Crèvecoeur's answer -- that "By making America, Americans would make themselves" -- tells us that "both political and characterological boundaries had to be invented in the same process" (Boelhower 10). The process of nation building would go hand in hand with identity formation. If we follow William Boelhower's argument, Crèvecoeur's answer also tells us that mapping our physical and cultural boundaries is, in a sense, mapping who and what we are. We are defined by the edges at which we come into contact with other lands and people. Accordingly, the outsider position offered by immigrants in American culture has historically provided the clearest view of "what it means to exist inside of American culture" (Dearborn 4). In immigrant literature, we typically find not only visions of day-to-day existence in the United States but also telling representations and sometimes deconstructions of our mythology. Immigrant writers frequently explore, for instance, what are considered American notions of rugged

[1] John Steinbeck thought so. In his 1962 book *Travels with Charley*, Steinbeck argued that in spite of the nation's geographic breadth, sectionalism, and multi-ethnic character, an American identity was exact and provable.

individualism, material success achieved through hard work, and cultural pluralism. In their texts we find careful consideration of American cultural identity.

Oscar Handlin's famous assertion from the introduction to *The Uprooted* (1956) speaks to the centrality of the immigrant experience to the American experience: "Once I thought to write a history of the immigrants in America. Then I discovered that the immigrants *were* American history" (3). Mary Dearborn extends Handlin's idea, noting that Handlin is

> reminding us that the central figure of American identity is the experience of migration, that Americans are in fact all descended from immigrants and that American selfhood is based on a seemingly paradoxical sense of shared difference. As Americans we partake of a national identity, a communally determined and accepted sense of self; at the same time, as Americans and ethnics all, we define ourselves ancestrally. This inherent tension in American identity accounts for the richness of our national literature and culture, which simultaneously reflects and questions notions of individual identity, interrogating the relationship of the self and the society, the private and the public, or, to borrow a term from the feminist movement, the personal and the political. (3)

In immigrant narratives, this tension is commonly figured as a negotiation between an individual ethnic identity and a communal American identity that arises from the process of assimilation. More specifically, the immigrant struggles to balance a personal narrative rooted in the past with an American narrative driven by a vision of the future. Such texts also explore the immigrant's disillusionment when faced with social and economic

realities which do not live up to his or her vision of a new life in the New World. The number of texts which contain these elements and the way in which the image of the immigrant struggling upward has become a part of our national mythic fabric speak to the power of this narrative construct.

Taking up M.K. Blasing's premise that artists create "a temporary center around which the accumulated facts of history may be organized" (xxiv), James Craig Holte argues that this created temporary center "may then become a fact of its own, a perceptual convention, influencing the perceptions of others to the degree that actual experience is transformed by the imagined construct" (3). In *Memory and Cultural Politics: New Approaches to American Ethnic Literatures*, editors Amritjit Singh, Joseph T. Skerrett, Jr., and Robert E. Hogan claim that "we create/maintain the memories we need to survive and prevail" and "those collective memories in turn both shape and sustain us" (8). Together, these assertions articulate the process by which the immigrant narrative has developed. This genre, which began as a means of recording and validating the immigrant experience in America, has been re-conceptualized by each successive generation, and has influenced both the lives and evolving literature of generations of immigrants in the United States. My study of American immigrant literature not only traces and accounts for the development of the literature within specific ethnic groups, focusing on how different generations rewrite the immigrant narrative of their own cultures, but it also examines this process across ethnic groups.

United States Policy and Images of the Immigrant in America

The *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*[2] divides the history of American immigration policy into five distinct periods: The Colonial Era (1609-1775), The Open Door Era (1776-1881), The Era of Regulation (1882-1916), The Era of Restriction (1917-1964), and The Era of Liberalization (1965 to the present) (Bernard 486). In terms of immigration patterns, the first great wave of immigrants came to the United States from roughly 1830 to 1860 and was largely comprised of immigrants from Northwestern Europe who were looking for the economic opportunities that America could provide (Payant xvi). Although public opinion of the newcomers was often negative, the government's attitude toward immigration at this time was generally positive, even welcoming (Handlin 264).[3] America actively sought to bring immigrants to the country to aid in economic growth. As in the colonial period, America sought to expand its labor force and offered tracts of land and employment opportunities as inducements. Promotional pamphlets designed to attract immigrants to America frequently contrasted American opportunity and European stagnation (Bernard 489). Governmental record-keeping of immigration statistics also began during this time. The

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[2] William Boelhower is critical of the approach which the editors of this text take toward ethnic groups. They list sixteen factors to be used in the examination of each group of people, although the editors admit that "any definition of ethnicity must remain flexible and pragmatic" (32). Boelhower does well to point out this conflict, especially as it supports his agenda of changing the narrow way in which many of us define ethnicity and ethnic texts. However, I have found the encyclopedia to be a useful reference for its general discussions of immigration policy and the historical events that affected each group in my study.

[3] The most notable exception to this is the Know-Nothing party, which sought to bar Catholics and non-natives from public office and to increase the naturalization period from five to twenty-one years. In response to mass immigration from Ireland and Germany, a strong nativist movement in the United States sprang up in the mid 1840s. In the early 1850s, several anti-immigrant organizations joined to form the American Party, also known as the Know-Nothing party because members answered "I know nothing" when asked about their organization. In 1856 Millard Fillmore unsuccessfully ran for the presidency on their ticket, although he did garner twenty-one percent of the popular vote.

State Department began entrance counts in 1820, and by 1864 a Bureau of Immigration had been established by Congress, although the Bureau of Statistics in the Treasury Department took over the keeping of immigration records in 1867 (Bernard 489). The debate over state versus federal control of immigration policies continued during these decades, but in the 1880s Congress passed a series of statutes which gave direct control of immigration to the federal government and thus allowed the government to make decisions restricting entry (Bernard 490).[4]

A second major wave of immigration, from the 1880s to the 1920s, brought immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe who were mostly peasants or uneducated people, as well as a large number of Eastern European Jews. Hostilely referred to as "new immigrants," these people not only affected government reform because states began to demand more extensive federal assistance with processing and acclimating immigrants, but they also began to test public acceptance. This group of immigrants experienced much more overt prejudice than did their predecessors or contemporaries from Northern and Western Europe; because many of them dressed differently, did not speak English, and were not Protestant, they were seen as people who "created unsanitary conditions and taxed public resources" (Payant xvii). This period, which saw a resurgence of nativism in the United States and further debates over the role of the immigrant in American society,

[4] Originally the government restrictions were designed to keep out immigrants who might become a burden on the public. Those unable to support themselves, such as "convicts, lunatics, idiots, and incapacitated persons," were frequently excluded (Bernard 490). By 1891 polygamists and those with contagious diseases were also excluded in the interest of the public good. Federal control became particularly important in California, where record numbers of Chinese workers were coming in with the gold rush. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the Foran Act of 1885 both placed severe restrictions on laborers coming into the country, and represented a reversal of America's long-established open door policy to an incoming immigrant work force.

also witnessed the production of the first extensive literature of immigration, primarily written by Jewish immigrants.

Images of the immigrant experience in America and debates over the immigrant's place in society from this time center on the idea of the melting pot. This image, characterized by Gilbert Muller as a "Eurocentric Eden," became popular as a result of Israel Zangwill's 1908 play *The Melting-Pot* (25).[5] Werner Sollors argues that "[m]ore than any social or political theory, the rhetoric of Zangwill's play shaped American discourse on immigration and ethnicity" (*Beyond Ethnicity* 66). Zangwill's play contrasts an older generation, unwilling to change, with the new generation, one looking forward to a distinctly American future. David Quixano, the young protagonist, is a Russian Jewish immigrant. Having lost his parents and siblings in a violent pogrom in his home city of Kishineff, he comes to the United States with dreams of a new life as a musician. More than any other character in the play, David espouses the American rhetoric of transformation and opportunity in the new land. He romanticizes the immigrant experience at every turn, even painting a positive picture of his journey on a crowded, dirty ship and spending his free time at Ellis Island watching the new arrivals. Along with the transformative power of the nation, David believes in the power of music both to transform and heal the individual. He speaks of crippled children dancing when he plays his violin for them, and his ultimate goal is to write a new American symphony which reflects the yearning of the immigrants and their transformation in what he terms the Crucible, or Melting Pot.

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[5] Although Crèvecoeur did not use the term melting pot specifically, he did describe the "new man" in America as an amalgam of many races and wrote that in America "individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men" (27).

David articulates the notion of the melting pot best when he boldly proclaims the following: "America is God's Crucible, the great Melting-Pot where all the races of Europe are melting and re-forming. [. . .] Germans and Frenchmen, Irishmen and Englishmen, Jews and Russians -- into the Crucible with you all! God is making the American!" (33). He believes that this process of melting and fusion will result in the true American, who has not yet arrived; perhaps he is "the coming superman" (34). David contends that all past vendettas, traditions, superstitions, and so forth must go into the melting pot in order for the transformation to occur. He does not advocate a complete separation from heritage but, rather, a vision of commonality. This is played out in his romance with Vera Revendal, a Russian Christian who casts aside her disgust with Jews when she meets and falls in love with David. When his uncle objects to David's engagement to Vera on the grounds that they have nothing in common, David reminds him that they are both Americans. Ultimately, David and Vera's families come to an understanding and tentative acceptance of their love, largely because their desire to remain closely connected with David and Vera overrides their political and religious beliefs. Vera's father, the Baron, was one of the leaders in charge of the massacre in which David's family was killed. He passionately proclaims his hatred of Jews when he arrives in America to see Vera, but his desire to renew his relationship with his estranged daughter in America lessens this hatred. Likewise, David's uncle Mendel comes to accept Vera when he sees how miserable David is without her. David and Vera must also transform in order to unite. Both are forced to confront the pain of their pasts in Kishineff and their families' beliefs before they can progress in the new world. As David says, "the ideals of the fathers shall not be foisted on the children. Each generation must live and

die for its own dream" (147). To this Vera replies, "Yes, David, yes. You are the prophet of the living present" (147). For David and Vera, and presumably for Zangwill as well, each generation of immigrants must break from the past and recreate themselves in the present moment. Here that past is a reminder of painful ethnic divisions, but by extension, future generations could break from David and Vera's vision of union through assimilation. Thus while the process of assimilation might not be undertaken by each generation, the process of transforming oneself to enable one's dream must be, because for Zangwill, the constant feature of the American experience is change. Self-transformation is inherent in the new world experience and must be undertaken by the people.

Even minor characters such as Kathleen, the Quixanos' Irish maid and Zangwill's source of comic relief, and Frau Quixano, Mendel's mother, undergo transformations as a result of coming into contact with immigrants who differ from them. Kathleen spends much of the first act denigrating Jewish customs and complaining because they make more work for her. She even decides to quit her job. She remains, however, after hearing of the Quixano family's suffering, and by the end of the play she has become such an expert on Jewish customs that she chastises several family members for not practicing them properly. Frau Quixano, miserable for her first ten years in America in that she is separated from her homeland and from others like her because of the neighborhood the family lives in, has found laughter by the end of the play, a new closeness with Kathleen, and is also able to let go enough to enjoy David's symphony performance on the Sabbath, something she would not have considered initially because of her strict observance of Jewish law.

In an afterword to the play, Zangwill explains that his play was criticized in "the Jewish pulpits of America [which . . .] resounded with denunciation of its supposed solution of the Jewish problem by dissolution" (208). Acknowledging that David's defense of assimilation in America was likely the cause of this denunciation, Zangwill notes that David is "speaking solely of the American Jews and asks his uncle why, if he objects to the dissolving process, he did not work for a separate Jewish land. He is not offering a panacea for the Jewish problem, universally applicable. But he urges that the conditions offered to Jews in America are without parallel throughout the world" (208). Zangwill's larger point is, then, that when the Jew is able to live in a place that has no state religion and is built upon "principles of justice and equal rights," he can "come into his own again" (208).

The Melting Pot was criticized as "romantic claptrap" by A.B. Walkley, a critic for the *Times*, and dismissed as an aesthetic failure by William Archer. In an afterword and a series of appendices to the 1924 edition of the play, Zangwill defended his dramatic choices. To Zangwill, someone like Walkley who had "never lacked liberty" was clearly not the ideal audience. Zangwill dismissed Walkley's response as "merely the reaction of the club armchair to the 'drums and tramplings' of the street" (200). Countering the notion that art which exists for its own sake is the only art of value, Zangwill stresses the importance of art that is "inspired by life, and seeking in its turn to inspire life" (200). Zangwill acknowledges

> with gratitude that this play, designed to bring home to America both its comparative rawness and emptiness and its true significance and potentiality for history and civilisation [sic], has been universally

> acclaimed by Americans as a revelation of Americanism, despite that it contains only one native-born American character, and that a bad one. [. . .] it has had the happy fortune to contribute its title to current thought, and, in the testimony of Jane Addams, to 'perform a great service to America by reminding us of the high hopes of the founders of the Republic.' (216)

Admitting that the Russian Jew was but one of many "being fused" in the melting pot each year, Zangwill states that he chose him as "the typical immigrant" nonetheless because of all the incoming immigrant groups, this group had no homeland and therefore was "more in need of a land of liberty" (201). Zangwill also saw this group as having much to give. For Zangwill, "the process of American amalgamation is not assimilation or simple surrender to the dominant type, as is popularly supposed, but an all around give and take by which the final type may be enriched or impoverished" (203).[6]

While Zangwill believed that assimilation into this melting pot was possible and that America was a welcoming place of transformation, others like Marcus Eli Ravage, an immigrant from Romania, did not share this view. Ravage's 1917 autobiography *An American in the Making* argued that Americans who had never lived anywhere else had lost a sense of the "romance and pathos of the [immigrant] story" and viewed immigrants as more comical than anything else (qtd. in O'Neill 34). Ravage's own experiences in moving from an immigrant neighborhood in New York to a college in Columbia, Missouri, taught him that the immigrant can end up isolated from both his American

[6] Critiquing Zangwill's message, James Stuart Olson writes, "by embracing all groups and envisioning a new culture, the melting-pot ideology was more generous than Anglo-conformity, but its objectives were the same -- cultural fusion and social stability. But the melting pot produced no single culture shared by all Americans. Indeed, it was naïve to think it ever would" (xvii-xviii).

peers and his friends and family back home. Unable to keep a roommate and successfully mix with the other students at school, Ravage returned home over a break, only to feel uncomfortable there as well. He began to see his family through the eyes of an outsider and thought that he had changed for the better. This made him fairly miserable, and returning to college did not improve his situation. Ravage writes that when he returned home, he "had merely come to another strange land. In the fall I would return to that other exile. I was, indeed, a man without a country" (42).[7] Isolated and demoralized by the process of "becoming an American," Ravage does not tell the immigrant fairy tale that Zangwill depicts. Although Ravage's autobiography ends on a rather upbeat note and he "succeeds" in America by becoming a journalist, foreign correspondent, and author, he is never quite comfortable in America.[8]

Perhaps the strongest challenge to the melting pot ideal came in Randolph Bourne's 1916 essay "Trans-National America." Bourne addressed an America confronted with the melting pot in the form of "the discovery of diverse nationalistic feelings among our great alien population" which had been in existence since long before the war (1732). Troubled by the war fever at the root of widespread hostility toward European immigrants, particularly Germans, he aimed to change Americans' perception

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[7] This may be a reference to Edward Everett Hale's "The Man without a Country" which appeared in the December 1863 issue of *Atlantic Monthly*. Hale's story follows the pain of isolation from a homeland experienced by Lieutenant Phillip Nolan who is sentenced to never hear the name of the United States again at a court-martial. Nolan is transferred from one ship to another in the decades between his sentencing and his death.

[8] Prominent sociologists Grover G. Huebner and Henry Fairchild extended this debate. For Huebner, assimilation was possible as well as positive, aided by the public school system, trade unionism, America's physical environment, and the church. Fairchild disagreed on the grounds that Americanization was a soul-changing process, and that while it might be possible to alter immigrants' language, dress, moral codes, and so on, "nationality is a spiritual reality, existing in the realm of the sentiments, emotions, and intellect" (178). For Fairchild, "the attempt to mix nationalities must result not in a new type of composite nationality but in the destruction of all nationality. No one of the components can survive the process if it is carried too far. This is the outstanding fallacy of the melting pot" (182).

of those immigrants' nationalism from a threat to a source of American strength. However, Bourne did not equate the failure of the melting pot with the failure of America, or the immigrant's desire and ability to direct his or her own life with the failure of democracy; rather, he believed that this strength in the immigrant population should "urge us to an investigation of what Americanism may rightly mean" (1732). He countered the nativist position by noting that even the early colonists did not assimilate to this land. Rather than become part of the already existent Native American culture or invent a new social framework, they brought with them European values and structures. Bourne saw this "English-American conservatism" as "the chief obstacle to social advance" and the argument of melting pot proponents as highly hypocritical since Anglo-Saxon descendants were more tenacious in clinging to their mother country than any other group in America (1733-34). He found that the imposition of Anglo-Saxon standards on aliens living in America was not only the height of arrogance but also a means of limiting freedom rather than enhancing it (1735).

Championing the benefits of ethnic diversity, Bourne argues that, "what we emphatically do not want is that these distinctive qualities should be washed out into a tasteless, colorless fluid of uniformity" (1736). He criticized what he termed "cultural half-breeds," those who in the interest of Americanization had lost the spirit of their native cultures; Bourne saw this type of immigrant as sapping American life and spirit (1736). Seeking to move the American democratic experiment forward into the future, he proposed a cosmopolitan worldview in which dual citizenship would become possible for immigrants and would benefit both America and the nations to which these immigrants might return. Rather than be frightened by the trans-national spirit already

present in America, Bourne encouraged people to embrace it in order to ensure the strength and survival of the country (1742-43).

Yet, just one year after the publication of Bourne's essay, the United States' policy on immigration became one of extreme restriction. The Immigration Act of 1917 was the first to impose a literacy test upon applicants; it also barred laborers from India, Indochina, Afghanistan, Arabia, the East Indies, and other smaller Asiatic countries (Bernard 492). These restrictions were designed to deny access to immigrants considered difficult to assimilate. President Wilson denounced the 1917 Act as "a violation of American ideals and the traditional Open Door policy," but Congress overrode him. The next step in this restrictive process was the Quota Act of 1921, also known as the Johnson Act, which limited the number of incoming immigrants from any given nation to three percent of the current foreign-born population living in the United States according to the 1910 census (Bernard 492).

Because the 1921 Act set up a series of preferences (within the quota limits) toward wives, parents, siblings, and other relatives of those already living in the United States and introduced a new category open to "non-quota" immigrants who were skilled in certain professions, by 1924 many were crying out for more rigorous measures. Senator Albert Johnson of Washington State came to the forefront of this cry. In Johnson's thinking, Americans

> have seen, patent and plain, the encroachments of the foreign-born flood upon their own lives. They have come to realize that such a flood, affecting as it does every individual of whatever race or origin, cannot fail likewise to affect the institutions which have made and preserved

> American liberties. It is no wonder, therefore, that the myth of the melting pot has been discredited. It is no wonder that Americans everywhere are insisting that their land no longer shall offer free and unrestricted asylum to the rest of the world.[. . .]
>
> The United States is our land. If it was not the land of our fathers, at least it may be, and it should be, the land of our children. We intend to maintain it so. The day of unalloyed welcome to all peoples, the day of indiscriminate acceptance of all races, has definitely ended. (qtd. in Bernard 493)

The Johnson-Reid Act cut the number of immigrants allowed each year to less than one fifth of the numbers allowed prior to the war, using the 1890 census as its basis for the two percent foreign born calculation (Bernard 492). All immigrants ineligible for citizenship were also barred, reaffirming the Chinese Exclusion Act and excluding many other Asians who had been declared "racially ineligible" (Bernard 493). Immigration patterns before the turn of the century thus dictated a preference toward Northern European nations and effectively "made the third world ineligible for citizenship" (Muller 25). The exclusionary American immigration policies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries thus "fostered a monoculturalism that nourished by extension a Melting Pot mystique" (Muller 25). According to Bernard, however, these policies had certain conceptual weaknesses. First, the effort to encourage immigration of "assimilable" people from specific countries was thwarted by the diversity that existed within those countries. For example, Czechs, Poles, and others born in Germany were

allowed entry under the German quota (493). Shifting national boundaries of approved countries also complicated the set restrictions.

Although the Depression brought with it a significant decline in numbers of immigrants, the restrictive policies remained in place until the World War II era, when shifts in immigration policy changed the name and face of the American immigrant. As Muller explains, it was during the World War II period that "immigrant narratology [. . .] began to forge an alternative mythology of a metropolitan nation of globally overlapping cultural subjectivities. The post-World War II era produces narratives depicting 'inconceivable aliens' (to reword a phrase used by Henry James in *The American Scene*) or hyphenated Americans -- 'Mexican-Americans,' 'Chinese-Americans' -- whose cultural differences push American national identity from Melting Pot to mosaic or collage" (16). The long-standing Chinese Exclusion Act was finally repealed in 1943 in the interest of Allied unity in the War, although the token quota China received, 105, hardly represented a full opening of the doors. By 1945 President Truman had begun plans for the prioritizing of displaced persons under the regular quota system. The War Brides Act of 1946 allowed 120,000 alien wives and children into the country on a nonquota basis, and more than 220,000 people were admitted under the Displaced Persons Act of 1948, although the requirements for admission were still rather exclusionary. By the time a revised act was passed in 1950, admission requirements were much more liberal; quotas were raised and eventually suspended. (Bernard 494)

However, the advent of the Cold War once again brought severe restrictions. Aliens from Communist countries were excluded or deported for national security reasons. With the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952, quotas were once again established and

Congress once again overrode a presidential veto, this time from Truman. This act was designed to bring the various policies from the first half of the century together in a unified code. Although it reestablished tight national quotas and gave preference once again to Northern and Western European countries, the McCarran-Walter Act did finally abolish "the category of aliens ineligible for citizenship and thereby loosened restrictions on immigration by Asians" (Bernard 494). One other positive outcome was the addition of further special preference categories and nonquota classes. A policy change that resulted indirectly from World War II was the World Refugee Year Law, passed in 1963, "admitting displaced persons from Cuba and China" (Bernard 494). Despite such changes, President Kennedy called for reform of immigration policies in 1963, and after Kennedy's death President Johnson pushed Congress for that reform (Bernard 495).

The postwar decades saw an interesting merging of ethnic groups in the United States. As Moynihan and Glazer's 1963 study *Beyond the Melting Pot* points out, "Ethnic groups are not just products of the 'Old Country' transplanted in America but are continually being recreated by their new American experiences" (4). Ethnic groups began to self-select and reform along new lines. Drawing on the work of sociologists Ruby Jo Kennedy and Will Herberg, James Stuart Olson explains that this development was particularly evident in the "newer cities of the South and the West, and in suburbs everywhere, where post-World War II migrations [. . .] blurred the ethnic distinctions so common in the East and Midwest. Jews from Germany, Russia, Poland, and Hungary merged into a self-conscious Jewish community. And among the Roman Catholic immigrants from Ireland, Germany, and eastern Europe, intermarriage [. . .] produced a large Roman Catholic group identity" (xix). The same process of merger occurred along

racial lines. Similar to the way that African Americans moved from the tribal or regional African identities they held as slaves into a larger Afro-American identification, Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Cuban Americans, for example, began to classify themselves as Hispanic American,[9] and Japanese, Chinese, and Korean Americans identified as Asian American. These groups still faced separation and discrimination because of visible markers, but their identification with larger groups generally resulted in increased political power. Michael Novak contends that "the new ethnic politics" was "a direct challenge to the WASP conception of America. It asserts that *groups* can structure the rules and goals and procedures of American life. It asserts that *individuals*, if they do not wish to, do not have to 'melt'" (270).

Accordingly, immigration policy became more liberal during this time. The 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act abolished the quota system and introduced a new preference system, a new labor certification process, and a limit on Western Hemisphere immigration, all of which worked to eliminate most of the former legislation based upon assumptions of racial superiority or cultural inassimilability.[10] Thus, significant shifts in terms of the immigrants' origins occurred. The number of immigrants from Asia and South and Central America rose dramatically, while the number of Western Hemisphere and European immigrants dropped. However, the limits on Western Hemisphere nations were such a source of complaint that the Western Hemisphere Act was passed in 1976 to distribute preference equally between the Eastern and Western Hemispheres, and allow

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[9] It should be noted that although the terms Hispanic and Hispanic American are widely used to describe various groups of Spanish-speaking Americans, these descriptors have been a source of conflict, especially in terms of their use as census categories, because they convey a linguistic rather than ethnic or geographic point of origin.

[10] Alvin J. Schmidt, author of *The Menace of Multiculturalism* (1997), traces the beginnings of multiculturalism to the passing of this law (124).

for priority to be given to Western Hemisphere immigrants with family ties and special training (Bernard 495).

In 1979, in his *The Ethnic Dimension in American History*, Olson concluded that this new era was defined by the recognition that "pluralism, not complete assimilation, is the reality of life in the United States. [. . .] Promoting equality and diversity, cultural pluralism is more tolerant than Anglo-conformity and more realistic than the melting pot" (xix-xx). In his preface he writes that he is not "convinced, as many others are today, that the 'melting pot' has not overtaken us and will not create an ethnically homogeneous society for many centuries. The forces of assimilation, of course, are as powerful today as ever before, but shifting coalitions of racial, religious, and cultural values continue to create a pluralistic society" (vii). For Novak, as for Olson, diversity furthered the humanity of American society rather than threatening it.

The post-colonial/postmodern era brought further notable changes to American immigration policy and to the immigrant's conception of him or herself. Now, "instead of denying their ethnicity and national origin, most of these new immigrants struggle to maintain a 'double citizenship' through contact with homeland cultures or by otherwise viewing themselves as sojourners" (Singh, et al 11). Many early immigrants had found themselves forced to sever ties with relatives still living in the homeland for financial reasons. However, technological advances in communication and travel have changed this, as Muller notes:

> For the new immigrants, the American Dream thus becomes the opportunity to retain a bifocal perspective on existence, one that might or might not preserve cultural habits and beliefs but which assuredly permits

> a reexamination of identity, an exploration of possibilities in the New Eden. By insisting on the interpretive space permitted by a bifocal perspective, the new immigrant -- this product of postwar and postcolonial historical shifts -- provokes a reconstruction of American reality. (22)

Interestingly, this shift in reality was in a sense predicted in the early part of the twentieth century. Many Americans then, as in Crèvecoeur's days, believed in what Boelhower terms the "great myth of nationalism," the idea that through *laissez-faire* capitalism, through moving forward, religion, race, and other dividing factors would disappear in the face of mass media, technology, and consumerism; in other words, "progress would know no barriers" (29).[11] However, it is quite clear that cultural divisions still exist; rather than erase cultural distinctions, technology has enhanced cross-cultural awareness.

This new reality has not met with complete approval from mainstream American culture. The flood of immigrants coming into the United States since the 1960s has brought a "growing nativist agitation against the newcomers [which] bears a strong resemblance to the old prejudice against the earlier immigrants" (Payant xxi-xxii). Alvin J. Schmidt's 1997 *The Menace of Multiculturalism: Trojan Horse in America* is one recent example of this response. Schmidt sees multiculturalism as a practice that betrays America's goals, divides its citizens "into warring factions," spreads lies, and in general undermines the possibility of people of different backgrounds living together in "a rational and civil manner" (D'Souza ix). Schmidt contends that the multicultural agenda revitalizes past injustices rather than atones for them and that in its acceptance of

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[11] See Boelhower's *Through a Glass Darkly* for a more detailed explanation of the relationship between capitalism, nationalism, and ethnogenesis in colonial America.

difference, multiculturalism opens the door for the decline of American institutions such as family and the church. He believes that while scholars have long tried to deny the existence and effectiveness of the melting pot, the process of assimilation has historically worked to the benefit of the country and should continue to do so (110). The debate over bilingual education seems to be at the heart of Schmidt's argument with multiculturalism. He takes exception to what he sees as government use of tax money to keep alive immigrant languages and customs (126).

Continuing debates over bilingual school programs, welfare benefits for illegal immigrants, and college admissions policies illustrate Charles Taylor's claim that much of politics turns on a need for recognition. In "On the Politics of Recognition," Taylor explores the relationship between public recognition and individual identity, asserting that the development of the modern notion of identity has given rise to a politics of difference in which we should all be recognized for our uniqueness. Whereas "with the politics of equal identity, what is established is meant to be universally the same, an identical basket of rights and immunities," the politics of difference recognizes and even fosters particularity (38-39).[12] The former would require the government to preserve individual rights by turning a blind eye to differences in the race, gender, age, religion, and sexual orientation of its citizens; the latter would require the government to protect the interests of specific groups against discrimination by acknowledging their

[12] David Hollinger's *Postethnic America* presents an interesting position that mediates between these two. Hollinger uses the term affiliation rather than identity to indicate that ethnicity is flexible, performative, and voluntary. He advocates both voluntary affiliation with groups and a trans-ethnic solidarity that enables a "national culture." Nathan Glazer makes a similar argument about affiliation in "The Emergence of an American Ethnic Pattern," claiming that "ethnicity in the United States [. . .] is part of the burden of freedom of all modern men who must choose what they are meant to be" (20). He acknowledges that for some groups marked by race, individual choice is secondary to a "belonging [that] is just about imposed by the outside world" (19-20).

difference.[13] Proponents of a politics of equal identity see a politics of difference as discriminatory because of its insistence on preserving difference. Proponents of a politics of difference resist equal identity because it "negates identity" by forcing individuals into "a homogenous mold that is untrue to them" (43) and may be reflective of a hegemonic culture. Taylor proposes that we adopt a presumption of equal worth in regard in approaching cultures with which we do not personally identify. Until that presumption is universally shared, I respectfully disagree with Schmidt and other melting pot proponents and support a politics of difference.

Definitions of Ethnicity

In her foreword to Roberta Simone's *The Immigrant Experience in American Fiction: An Annotated Bibliography*, Theresa Kanoza concludes that "[a]s is characteristic of much post-modern thought, there is little consensus about what constitutes 'ethnic' or 'immigrant' literature'" (vii). Olson concedes that "a precise definition of ethnicity is difficult because no set of characteristics is common to all groups; feelings of loyalty and community within groups rest on a variety of ties" (xv). Indeed, as Bonnie TuSmith, author of *All My Relatives: Community in Contemporary Ethnic American Literatures,* asserts, "the term *ethnic* shifts with each theorist, betraying unidentified assumptions of inclusion and exclusion that are inaccurate at best" (8). This

[13] For a more detailed examination of the historical basis of these perspectives, see the exchange between Nathan Glazer and Ronald Takaki reprinted in Takaki's *Debating Diversity: Clashing Perspectives on Race and Ethnicity in America*, in which they consider the nature of America's national narrative and how that narrative should affect public policy. For Glazer, America's history is marked by progressive, growing measures of inclusion, and any policy designed to control "the future ethnic and racial classification of the American population" by singling out groups works against that historical narrative. Takaki argues that Glazer's narrative fails to explain the history of exclusion of minorities in America, and that public policy should continue working to correct that exclusion.

being the case, the question then becomes, according to Robert Di Pietro and Edward Ifkovic in *Ethnic Perspectives in American Literature: Selected Essays on the European Contribution*, "Is there a definition of ethnic literature with which we can be comfortable?" Their answer is decidedly no (11-13). It seems that for the scholarly community, defining the nature and role of ethnic literature and immigrant literature has become more and more problematic over the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Changes in social attitudes toward immigrant and ethnic peoples[14] and changes in the nature of the texts produced by these peoples, texts which reflect their evolving experiences in America, account in large part for this.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* presents one of the earliest origins of the word *ethnic* as the Greek word *ethnikos*, an adjective now interpreted as meaning "pertaining to nations not Christian or Jewish; Gentile, heathen, pagan." A second definition -- "pertaining to race; peculiar to a race or nation; ethnological" -- dates from 1851, but the "heathen" or "pagan" association continued to be a common connotation at that time. Although in later usage this association was overshadowed by the association between ethnic and racial characteristics, followed secondarily by references to national characteristics, one constant factor has been emphasized -- ethnic groups as "other" or "lesser." The noun form of the word ethnic, *ethnos*, refers specifically to "others," and

[14] TuSmith criticizes what she sees as "the prevalent practice of scholars of labeling people of color in America as 'racial minorities' while labeling white non-WASP's 'ethnics' or 'immigrants'" (3). As examples, she cites "[t]he widespread practice of using *racial minorities* for people of color and *ethnics* or *immigrants* for Jews, Slovacs, Poles, Italians, etc." (10). She adopts the term *ethnic Americans* for the Asian American, African American, Native American, and Chicano/a writers in her study (12). My use of the terms *ethnic* and *immigrant* in this study carries no specific racial connotation. However, I do not see these two terms as interchangeable. In my study, the term *ethnic* will be applied to groups with a common heritage and distinctive culture. The term *immigrant* will be applied specifically to people or groups who come to the United States from other countries, whether by choice of by force.

when the word's meaning shifted from Non-Israelite (in Greek) to non-Christian (in English translation), "the word retained its quality of defining another people contrastively, and often negatively" (Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity* 25).[15]

In *Beyond Ethnicity*, Werner Sollors explains that when the relationship between "heathen" and "Christian" is translated into the American social context, it is recast as "ethnic" versus "American" (25). The immigrant is thus placed in a situation of having two conflicting identities. According to Boelhower,

> for most immigrants in the United States, being American is like having a second nature; it is simply a matter of hiding one's original identity and accepting the dominant patterns of social behavior . [. . .] The ethnic subject identifies with his host and is thus accepted in American culture as American, while the ethnic factor often remains prepolitical, apolitical, or simply a private matter. In this way, the ethnic self pretends to dwell in America even though he conceals an external perspective within the social system. (134-39)

As the above passage from Boelhower implies, the double-consciousness which was so troubling for W.E.B Du Bois in 1903 has been and continues to be a problem for many ethnic peoples. For instance, to return to an earlier example, after Michael Ravage

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[15] Fredrick Barth furthers this idea of defining ethnicity by what it is not with his theory that an understanding of an ethnic community can come only from studying its boundaries. What is and is not unique about a given ethnic group can be determined by examining its intersections with other groups. Behind this idea is Barth's view of ethnic boundaries as a matter of choice. He argues that the cultural features which distinguish given groups are, if not self-selected, ascribed to these groups by others and that this process of ascription is artificial rather than naturally occurring (Winsbro 14). TuSmith takes exception to Barth's idea that cultural content is always changing and that therefore "an immutable core culture" does not exist for any given ethnic group when this generalization is applied to non-European cultures in America (7).

attends college and begins to become socialized outside of his immigrant community, he finds himself unable to view his family as he did before. He sees them through both ethnic and American eyes, and finds them lacking. His two-fold perspective keeps him from remaining close with his family members, from becoming close to his schoolmates, and from feeling that he belongs anywhere. To draw on a more recent illustration, the protagonist in Chang-Rae Lee's *Native Speaker* is figured as a spy on American culture, despite the fact that he is a second-generation Korean American, and much of the novel depicts his struggles with the dual perspective that his heritage has given him.

Despite this seeming pattern of alienation that the immigrant's position engenders, Singh, Skerrett, and Hogan assert that for contemporary ethnic and immigrant peoples living in the United States, double identity is more possible and less crippling now than in the early part of the century (6). Holte agrees when he states that much of the shame formerly associated with cultural practices or languages that marked ethnic and immigrant people as different no longer exists (6). Sollors takes this idea further, commenting that "[s]ince the 1960's the sacred side of the antithesis has increasingly been the ethnic one. In contemporary usage ethnicity has largely been transformed from a heathenish liability into a sacred asset" (*Beyond Ethnicity* 33).[16] This may well be the

[16] Sollors conceptualizes this antithesis as sacred vs. heathenish in America and explains that while it has been expressed as a heathenish past against a sacred future, "us against them" and "old me against new me," it is flexible enough to "be charged with different political meanings" (33). Part of the transformation of ethnicity from heathenish to sacred may be related to Herbert Gans' argument that "Americans increasingly perceive themselves as undergoing cultural homogenization, and whether or not this perception is justified, they are constantly looking for new ways to establish their differences from each other" (215). An interesting example of appropriation of ethnicity as a means of establishing difference is provided by the trend among some suburban Caucasian teenagers of adopting the dress, speech, and mannerisms of the urban hip-hop artists whose music they enjoy. For this group, appropriation of black rage has also become a means of expressing their frustrations with the limitations of their own communities.

case in terms of an external social identity, but the ethnic's perception of his or her position is often different.

The Problem of Generations

More often than not, cultural assimilation took place over the course of generations rather than within communities of first-generation immigrant households. Marcus Lee Hansen, a prominent historian in the early twentieth century, theorized that frequently the second generation's desire to assimilate and Americanize is a reaction to the first's clinging to past traditions and language. By the third generation, an interest in cultural history and practices reemerges. When Hansen addressed his comments on generational succession among immigrants to the Augustana Society (a group dedicated to study of Swedish immigrants) in 1938, his goal was to impress upon its members the necessity of involving the third generation in its scholarship and of diversifying that scholarship to include multiple fields of interest. However, his notion that "what the son wishes to forget, the grandson wishes to remember," which he claims is an "almost universal phenomenon," is what attracted the most attention (206). Hansen states that "[h]ow to inhabit two worlds at the same time was the problem of the second generation" and that this "problem was solved by escape" (204). He contrasts the second generation's lack of interest in history with the third generation's fascination with heritage and accounts for this difference by explaining that the members of the third generation "have no reason to feel any inferiority" because of birthplace, speech, and wealth (207). His explanation of the reticence of second-generation immigrants to recall

what their children, the members of the third generation, seek to connect with has become so well-known that it is referred to by many as Hansen's Law.

Although it is difficult to find any critic of immigrant literature or scholar of immigration history who fails to deal with Hansen's theory, it has become common practice to find exceptions to it. First, Hansen's thesis clearly breaks down along gender lines. Feminist criticism "notes that the language of Hansen's historical formulation is obviously patriarchal"; we now recognize that "[w]hat granddaughters might remember is often very different from what grandsons remember..." (Singh et al 9). In "Feminist Fiction and the Uses of Memory," Gayle Greene notes that although "nostalgia is a powerful impulse that is by no means gender specific," it does have "different meanings for men and women" (295-96). In their explanation of this difference, Singh, Skerrett, and Hogan state that "immigrant women may expend much less nostalgia than immigrant men on homeland memories, which often include painful recollections of sexist behavior and patriarchal attitudes, customs, and conventions" (10). Greene concludes that "women especially need to remember because forgetting is a major obstacle to change" (298), and her argument applies to all generations.

Singh, Skerrett, and Hogan have also explored the limitations of Hansen's thesis along ethnic lines. They assert that although "Hansen's thesis remains useful when approaching the experience of European immigrants during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries," it proves problematic when applied to diverse groups (3-4). Among others, they present the experience of Japanese Americans as one which contradicts Hansen's thesis. Prior to 1941, the relationship of Japanese Americans to their past was rich in the memories of families, most of whom did not question their American identity. However,

this "bifocal cultural self-definition broke down" when many Japanese Americans were moved to "relocation centers" in the interests of national security. This experience led many Japanese Americans to "distrust the assimilated/acculturated American identity because it exposed them to the betrayal of the camps. And because whole families were interned, the second generation's experience -- oppression and rejection -- collapsed into that of the first" (5). African-American cultural history also complicates Hansen's idea. The post-slavery century of Jim Crow laws often forced African Americans of successive generations to remember and focus on their ethnic identities, whether they wanted to or not. Those who did follow Hansen's second-generation pattern reflecting a desire to move into the middle and upper classes were often accused of forgetting their roots, suggesting, ironically, that pursuit of economic success and higher education could be seen as a failure in the eyes of the community. Further, third, fourth, and fifth generations looking to reconnect with African ancestry were sometimes criticized for seeking self-definition on another continent at the expense of overlooking African *American* history. This process of African Americans' "constructing a new identity, even out of the painful experiences of the past" has nonetheless been in many ways positive and "has had a life of its own since historians, literary scholars, poets, and novelists began to reorient our sense of history by reclaiming slave narratives" (Singh et al 7).

Class complicates Hansen's thesis as well. An assimilated and economically secure third generation may be more inclined toward ethnic identification than a third generation which continues to struggle as social and economic outsiders. Although Hansen does not treat class explicitly, it is clear that financial success can enable the third generation's interest in ethnic heritage. As these exceptions to Hansen's Law show, each

immigrant's vision of America and relationship to his or her own history differs from any other because of gender, race, class, and the times in which the text is both written and read. They also point out the difficulties of approaching multi-ethnic studies with any degree of certainty.

Approaches to Ethnic Literature

Thomas J. Ferraro's examination of the change in terminology used by critics to describe ethnic texts reflects the evolving American attitude toward ethnicity seen in the term's definition. Ferraro begins *Ethnic Passages: Literary Immigrants in Twentieth Century America* by noting that "ethnic novellas have long been considered the poor stepsisters of a benighted realist fiction"; such texts have been viewed as largely stereotypical, assimilationist, and of limited interest (1). He claims that the beginning of the century saw the emergence of the "immigrant novel," a term overtaken by "ethnic literature" in the period following World War II and ultimately "replaced by multicultural representation" (1). Ferraro contends that while the new terms used to refer to ethnic literature were designed "to bolster the reputation of ethnic writing," they continued to support the original understanding of this type of literature, to keep it as a separate category which was, in many cases, praised more for its existence than for its literary value (1-2). This sense of defining ethnic literature as "other" in relationship to American literature on the whole follows the pattern of negative or contrastive definition seen in the term ethnic itself.

The gradual championing of ethnic texts grew largely from the new acceptance of ethnicity that came about as a result of the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, although

this acceptance was in no way uncomplicated or unchallenged. In *The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics*, Michael Novak delves into the politically charged ethnic scene of the 1970s. According to Novak, many working- and middle-class Caucasian ethnics did not understand the desire of some civil rights leaders to ally themselves with the white intellectual elite rather than other working-class minorities who also faced discrimination in America. This selective exclusion sparked a conservative backlash among some Caucasian ethnics who then decided to celebrate their own ethnicity, thereby critiquing and de-emphasizing the aims of the Civil Rights movement. By positioning African Americans as only one of many groups seeking a separate cultural and legal protection, Caucasian ethnics downplayed the need for special attention to African Americans. Despite the turbulence that led to this increase in ethnic pride among Caucasian groups, Novak ultimately supports the new cultural pluralism that developed. He introduces four propositions: that through an exploration of our individual ethnic identities we can "gain some insight into the differences implicit in being Afro-American, into black pride, into black politics, and the reverse"; that awareness of individual ethnicity will not be detrimental to our foreign policy; that "persons who are secure in their identity act with greater freedom, greater flexibility, greater openness to others"; and that "a politics based on family and neighborhood is far stronger socially and psychologically than a politics based on bureaucracy" (8-9). In Novak's view, black/white relations in the United States can benefit significantly from an increased attention to individual ethnicity, as can the strength and security of the nation as a whole.

The increased attention to ethnic differences which Novak described as prevalent in the early 1970s brought demands for college courses in various branches of ethnic

studies, anthologies of ethnic writers, and a greater inclusion of these writers in mainstream anthologies. As the number of ethnic texts being written and published increased, the scholarly world raised a hue and cry against the long exclusion of such texts from the canon. One response was the publication of volumes which focused on specific previously ignored ethnic groups, such as *Aiiieeeee!: An Anthology of Asian American Writers* (1974), and perhaps this initial response accounts for the fact that the overwhelming emphasis in work on ethnic and immigrant literature has been on single group studies. The authors and editors of such volumes frequently criticize reviewers and scholars for overlooking this literature in the past and earlier ethnic writers for "being inauthentic and ingratiating to the dominant white culture" (Payant xiv).[17]

The problem then becomes, as William Boelhower predicted in 1984, that "[s]ooner or later multi-ethnic critics, like their mainstream counterparts, will have to play the rather academic game of literary purity: this is ethnic, this is not" (35). Arguments over the "correct" themes to be addressed in various ethnic literatures arose, as did discussions of which texts could be considered appropriately representative for inclusion in the canon. Singh, Skerrett, and Hogan's work draws our attention to the exaggerated ideological values that they claim were often assigned to oppositional pairings of ethnic writers of similar backgrounds. As they explain, the "anxiety of influence" that shaped the work of contemporaneous writers such as Emerson and Hawthorne or Hemingway and Faulkner can also be seen among ethnic writers but is often translated into "a kind of 'battle royal' for the limited cultural space assigned to

[17] The Black Arts Movement perhaps exhibited this process most clearly, particularly in the movement's narrow definition of the appropriate nature and function of African American art.

them" (9). Offering Wright vs. Hurston, Chin vs. Kingston, Vizenor vs. Silko, Reed vs. Baraka, and Ozick vs. Roth as examples, they argue that ethnic literary scholarship is now beginning to recognize "the many ways in which ethnic writers have been pitted against each other in American cultural history" (9). Unfortunately, this oppositional view rarely did justice to the work of either writer in the pairing and overlooked entirely the multiple definitions of ethnicity explored by writers who fell between the two examples.

While these steps taken in the name of multiculturalism certainly had value and were necessary at the time, in retrospect it can be seen that the way in which many scholars approached the "correction" of the canon did not advance their cause, and, again, as Ferraro noted, also supported the segregation of ethnic literature from the rest of American literature. This problem needs to be addressed anew; as TuSmith contends, "if we continue to overlook the relationships and connections among American cultures and persist in separatism, we scholars are guilty of perpetuating misunderstandings that even now have serious repercussions in educational institutions and in the larger society" (ix).

Noting the separation between ethnic and American literature, Boelhower concludes that "mainstream and ethnic literature have [. . .] been affected by paradigm decontextualization. Indeed, the long established practice of compartmentalizing American literature into mainstream and ethnic cannot but lead to the belief that they are separable if not separate canons" (34). Discontented with the current practice of differentiating "American" and "ethnic" literature when he wrote *Through a Glass Darkly: Ethnic Semiosis in American Literature*, Boelhower postulated the following:

> Why not, for example, consider the ethnic novel (and I am too skeptical to believe that such an animal really exists) as a novel of difference. In other words, it can be ordered by such various narratological programs as the detective story, the pastoral novel, the utopia, the proletarian novel, and so forth, but what distinguishes it from mainstream samples of these literary typologies is the fact that it circulates ethnic signs with a greater or lesser degree of frequency and intensity. The very 'ethnicity' of ethnic and, for that matter, mainstream fiction then becomes pangeneric and transcultural. (35-36)

Boelhower's desire to avoid totalizing concepts like "the ethnic novel" should be applauded in that it moves these texts beyond the limiting labels which Ferraro speaks against, but, at the same time, I find his idea of little practical use in terms of defining ethnicity and ethnic literature for my study. This is not to say that Boelhower's study is without merit or interest. When Boelhower "questions studying ethnicity as if it were an essence or a pure substance" and "forces us to question our own ways of looking -- if we ever do want to see face to face" (Sollors qtd. in Boelhower 3-4), he reminds us again of the ways in which ethnicity exists as a series of social negotiations and that ethnic literature itself, as well as its place in the American canon, exists as a series of negotiations between writers and readers who do not necessarily share a common cultural background. Sollors's own definition of ethnic literature, which is fiction or nonfiction works that have been "written by, about, or for persons who perceived themselves or were perceived by others, as members of ethnic groups" (*Beyond Ethnicity 7)*, refocuses our attention on the role of perception in ethnicity as well.

In 1986, Sollors challenged scholars to move "beyond ethnicity." The call was to look past various ethnic spheres and such divisions, to view ethnic literature more holistically, the idea being that when we focus too heavily on separate ethnic spheres, we run the risk of once again viewing these literatures as social documentaries of the communities they depict but of holding little value for those who live outside those communities. In "A Critique of Pure Pluralism" (1986), Sollors asked, "should the very same categories on which previous exclusivism was based really be used as organizing concepts?" (255). He recommended instead a scholarship that recognizes cross ethnic trends and interplay, which covers the blind spots of a group-by-group study (256). Like Boelhower, Sollors "turns literature by immigrant groups outward, arguing that it has much more in common with the mainstream of American culture than its creators would acknowledge" (Payant xv).

Winfried Siemerling and Katrin Schwenk, editors of *Cultural Difference and the Literary Text*, are "uncertain whether the problems and essentialist dangers of a group-by-group approach, as well as the dangers of translating it into literary criticism, already justify dispensing with the idea altogether" (2). Returning to the position of critics seeking to build various ethnic canons in the 1970s, they state that "to argue for the necessity of the group-by-group approach also expresses concern that the knowledge of the existing body of that group's literature cannot (yet?) be taken for granted" (3). However, "taken to its other extreme, a transethnic, transnational, transworld approach to literature may suggest an organic view of an artistic universe that ignores certain differences and loose ends that cannot be synthesized -- namely, the specificities of a group's literature" (4). All this leaves us in a critical bind. To isolate ethnic texts for

study is to continue to call attention to their separate status from American literature, to decide upon token texts, and to call into question their artistic merit by judging them solely in the context of other ethnic texts. At the same time, to study them in a fully integrated way is to gloss over their specific differences. In the name of liberating them from the category of ethnic, we may downplay their unique features to the point of erasing these, thus suppressing the "ethnicity" of these texts once again.

Establishing a Comparative Approach

Paul Lauter sees the problems of comparative studies as arising from the limitations of our own training and knowledge as scholars and an "uneven development" of the material under study (11). Lauter points out, for instance, that "the relationship between the arrival of an immigrant group on these shores and the emergence of a literary (i.e., written) culture (or the beginning of the written articulation of an oral culture) is quite irregular" (11). Several factors account for this, the first being that basic literacy, even in one's own language, was not a given for many immigrants, particularly prior to 1917, when the first law requiring a literacy test passed after having been vetoed by three presidents.[18] The statistics from this time reflect a startlingly high degree of literacy, but the results are not reliable because many simply lied about their abilities. Beyond literacy, Lauter continues, the "development of a literary culture requires the diffusion

[18] The passing of this law is one of the most hotly debated issues in the history of American immigration policy. At the turn of the twentieth century, the debate raged most strongly due in part to the efforts of nativist organizations and literacy requirement supporters such as Senator Henry Cabot Lodge who claimed that the tests would have the effect of weeding out undesirable immigrants, reducing urban congestion, and preserving American national superiority. Despite a veto by President Wilson and the support of many outspoken immigrants familiar with nativist antagonism such as Father T.J. Brennan, himself an Irish Catholic and a proponent of the position that literacy did not guarantee moral superiority nor did illiteracy prove defects in character, the bill became law.

through a group of a set of ideas, particularly the notion that it is possible or valid for a person to devote time to the wonderfully arrogant act of artistic composition" (11). While English language acquisition was often valued by first-generation immigrants, especially for their children, dedicating time to writing instead of "work" was another matter entirely. English literacy was often valued primarily for the increased success it could bring in the business world, and education was in many cases thus reserved for the male members of the immigrant family. Lauter cites the development of a reading audience as another requirement for the emergence of a literary culture and as an extension of that reading audience the apparatus for publishing and distributing the work (12). Given the negative attitudes toward immigrant groups evidenced throughout much of the twentieth century in addition to the tendency of the academy to slight this type of literature, the difficulties of fulfilling this last requirement become clear.

So, is there any one theory of immigrant literary production that will cover all cases? And where do we begin? One of the difficulties of approaching a multi-ethnic study is that, as Boelhower warns, "there is no parthenogenesis of ethnic codes. One ethnic novel or a particular ethnic encyclopedia does not account for the production of another. In truth, there is no unilateral aesthetic starting point for the multi-ethnic critic" (35). This is hardly surprising given the variety of experiences that different immigrant populations faced upon entrance to the United States and goes a long way toward explaining why ethnic scholarship seems to shy away from comparative models.

Organization and Parameters of This Study

My study is organized in such a way that the best features of both the group-by-group and comparative methods are taken into account. I consider four separate ethnic groups, examining writers who are ethnic by both consent and descent, evaluating the ways in which they have interpreted the experience of immigration in the context of their own ethnic signs and codes. I also consider the ways in which these very different ethnic texts speak to each other and to mainstream American culture.

In terms of the changing American reality represented in the immigrant narrative, I am particularly interested in the relationship between language or literary form[19] and the display of cultural conflict in these texts. I explore such questions as the following: What types of language and modes of writing are immigrant writers using to tell their stories? What patterns can be detected when we look at, for example, the Korean American narrative as told by Younghill Kang, Mary Paik Lee, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, and Chang-Rae Lee? What do these patterns or lack thereof reveal about the development of immigrant literature within ethnic groups? What can we learn about the changing position of the immigrant writer from a cross-group comparison of these narratives? In answering these questions, I examine the formal, structural aspects of selected texts with the aim of seeing what these aspects reveal about identity politics.[20]

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[19] It is worth noting that the limitations of a reader's knowledge of an ethnic group may color his or her perception of its form. In the sense that immigrant texts are frequently committed to depicting daily life, they can be read as realist. However, readers unfamiliar with the cultures depicted in them may find themselves de-centered, or "lost in the plurality," leading them to view the text as postmodern.

[20] Priscilla Wald engages in a related project in *Constituting Americans*. Focusing on Frederick Douglass, Harriet Wilson, Herman Melville, W.E.B. Du Bois, Gertrude Stein and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, she analyzes the ways in which the formal elements of their texts are markers of "untold stories." Wald argues that these writers were necessarily engaged in acts of negotiation and that they "turn the limitations of their own stories into analyses of the limitations and possibilities of storytelling" (1).

As a whole, the writers and texts that I have selected represent a wide range of cultural experiences and homelands. My selections also represent a balance of male and female writers. I do not, however, claim to have selected writers for examination on the basis of their "representativeness" of their cultures. As a critic and an outsider to the cultures in my study, I am in no position to "measure" ethnicity in these terms. My criteria for selection are as follows:

1. Each text is a work of American literature;
2. Each writer identifies himself or herself as ethnic and/or immigrant;
3. Each text deals with some aspect of the immigrant experience in America and cultural conflict;
4. Within a given ethnic group, the selected texts represent a variety of literary approaches;
5. Each work is written in English or has been translated into English;
6. Each work is considered significant in its field;
7. Each work is significant in terms of the development of immigrant literature as a whole;
8. Each work is generally available and accessible to the public.

I examine multiple texts within each of the four ethnic groups I have selected: Jewish American, African American, Cuban American, and Korean American, drawing on works from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The four groups have been selected to offer a diverse picture of American immigrant literature. I ground each chapter with a discussion of foundational texts and then move to some that are less well-known and

studied. My aim is to capture the range of literary exploration and possibility evidenced in immigrant texts.

I anchor the study with the Jewish narrative in chapter two because it initiated the longest tradition of American immigrant fiction. Although a few Jewish American immigrant texts were published in the mid-nineteenth century, my discussion of specific texts begins with works written during the first great flowering of immigrant literature in the early twentieth century. I discuss the reasons why much of this writing employed realist aesthetic conventions and comment on the three primary concerns in Jewish fiction from this period -- anti-Semitic hostility, the ramifications of mass immigration, and the effects of assimilation -- as are illustrated well in Mary Antin's *The Promised Land* and Abraham Cahan's *The Rise of David Levinsky*. Antin and Cahan speak to these concerns through very different texts, but they share a desire to ease the transition of Jewish Americans into a fearful and hostile American society. I then turn to Anna Yezierska's *Salome of the Tenements*, which introduces the threads of inter-generational tension, the female immigrant experience, and a critique of assimilation that will be considered by writers that follow her. Yezierska explores these themes through the story of a Jewish woman from the ghetto who falls in love with a wealthy white social reformer. In the 1930s, the works of Tess Slesinger and Henry Roth move the Jewish American narrative from its established consideration of cultural clash toward explorations of the effect of personal and political events on the individual psyche. Rather than examining the position of the Jew within the binaries of Jew or Gentile and immigrant or American, their texts look at psychologically damaged Jews navigating their own realms of family, friends and neighborhood. Slesinger's *The Unpossessed* satirizes several would-be leftist

revolutionaries in their twenties and thirties as they wrestle with the role of the Jewish intellectual in American society. In sharp contrast to early realist texts, she adopts a stream of consciousness technique to register her characters' disillusionment. Roth's *Call It Sleep* shows America through the eyes of an immigrant child, depicting the social and linguistic chaos of the promised land for a young boy. What is striking about this text is Roth's blending of New York street English, Yiddish, Hebrew, and Polish.

The second flowering of Jewish American literature came in response to the cultural disintegration brought on by the Holocaust. Although by and large Jewish writers did not treat the Holocaust in fiction in the immediate post-war period, by the late 1950s they had begun to offer commentary on Jews' adaptation to the post-Holocaust world through the stories of survivors trying to rebuild their lives in America and settled Jewish Americans who were unsure of what their relationship to the Shoah should be. Phillip Roth's "Eli, the Fanatic" and Bernard Malamud's "The German Refugee" depict encounters between Jewish Americans and war refugees that force a confrontation and consideration of American Jews' responsibilities to understand and record the Holocaust experience. Isaac Bashevis Singer's *Enemies, A Love Story* follows a group of survivors who hide out in the promised land, recreating a Holocaust consciousness in the United States because they cannot reconcile their past with America's future-oriented narrative. Several decades after this initial period of examination, the Holocaust continues to haunt the Jewish American literary imagination. Thane Rosenbaum's 1996 short story collection *Elijah Visible*, for example, depicts the many ways in which the children of survivors continue to be haunted by their parents' experiences.

Although the Holocaust narrative is still a dominant form in Jewish American literature, a new literary thread is emerging that conceptualizes Jewishness as a choice rather than an inescapable fact and encourages an active return to a religiously based Jewish identity. The Jewish American narrative has changed considerably over the course of its development in response to social, political, and historical conditions, but it is characterized throughout by an obsessive introspection and a conscious reshaping of history. Thematically, Jewish American writers continue to explore the difficulties of translating the self through written language, the process of physical and psychological assimilation, the dangerous isolation of self-created fictions, and the struggle to balance a Jewish past with an American narrative rooted in the future.

The African American tradition is also lengthy and has been much studied; my reading of African American texts in the context of the immigrant narrative in chapter three sheds new light on that tradition. Although African Americans are not typically viewed as an immigrant population, historically their experiences in America have much in common with the other ethnic immigrant traditions in my study, particularly as the group recreates the immigrant experience through migration to the North, which is figured in many texts as the promised land. I address the ways in which African American writers are similar to other immigrant writers and make an argument for their classification as such, taking into account such complicating factors as the extent to which being brought to America by force rather than coming by choice separates African Americans from other immigrant groups, the chronological distance of contemporary African American writers from the initial immigrant population, and the resistance of some African Americans to aligning themselves with immigrants.

This literary tradition began with the writings of unwilling immigrants, the slaves brought to this country. Texts written by slaves provide the earliest records of the feelings of actual African immigrants about this country, although the interpretation of these feelings is often complicated by the influence of white publishers and audiences. I briefly consider Phillis Wheatley's poetry and then move to Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave.* Douglass's emphasis on education as a means of accessing the American dream, his drive for economic success and the development of individual identity, and his journey to the North place his text squarely in the immigrant tradition. To close my discussion of slave narratives and provide a bridge to twentieth-century texts, I discuss Booker T. Washington's *Up From Slavery*, which offers an alternate reading of slavery designed to promote acceptance of African Americans in the Reconstruction era and refigures education itself as the promised land.

Beyond the era of slavery, immigrant themes continue to be central to African American literature, as African Americans have faced many of the same difficulties of first-generation immigrants, struggling with the tension between education and heritage, between assimilating into the American culture and remaining a distinct ethnic group. Themes such as a loss of self, a sense of entrapment in American culture, isolation from the American dream or ultimate dissatisfaction when it is obtained, search for community, and a sometimes troubled relationship to heritage emerge again and again, particularly as African Americans migrate to the North in search of the promised land. Richard Wright's *Black Boy*, which transcends the social realism of much of the fiction of the 1930s and borrows structurally from the pattern of the slave narrative in terms of the drive toward escape to the North, suggests that the economic, social, and

psychological consequences of slavery make assimilation of African Americans into the North difficult if not impossible. Claude Brown's 1965 novel *Manchild in the Promised Land* considers the children of the first generation of migrants to the North, who inherit their parents' disillusionment and find themselves trapped in the place that was supposed to provide greater freedom and opportunity.

In closing this chapter I read two contemporary novels, both of which treat the legacy of slavery on the development of African American gender roles and communities. A.J. Verdelle's 1996 novel *The Good Negress* traces the story of Deneese, a young African American girl tied to a family unable to support themselves. Deneese is torn between the types of lessons that her family needs her to learn -- how to be "a good negress" through such activities as washing, cooking, cleaning -- and the future that her school teacher envisions for her. As she struggles to master "the King's English" in school, she also struggles to find some balance between the needs of her family, who see her education as pulling her away from them, and her own dreams. This tension between family values and remaking oneself through education, a process which includes shedding the markers of one's heritage such as language, leads me to read Verdelle's novel as immigrant fiction. Toni Morrison turns the focus of African American literature inward toward studies of community dynamics in *Paradise* (1998). Through the community of Ruby, she explores the failure of an all-black town to fulfill the dreams of those in search of a place in which to build their own promised land. The novel suggests that although utopian communities are compelling for those who have been excluded from America's social and economic systems, they cannot exist in reality.

These texts cannot begin to cover the range of literary production of African Americans, but they do represent a general movement from "testifying" texts concerned with assimilation to texts which openly critique American culture and, finally, to texts that are more concerned with the internal workings of African American communities. Together, the writers I consider thematize the desire for freedom and opportunity that African Americans share with other immigrants who come to America. Through the process of migration, most often from South to North, they search for a place in which America's promises will be fulfilled. The narrative development thus reflects a return to first-generation immigrant concerns again and again, as each new generation tries to find what their predecessors have not. This cyclical pattern indicates that, at least in part, the legacy of slavery continues to inform the fate of African Americans in the United States in terms of the limitations they encounter.

The Cuban American and Korean American traditions that I address in chapters four and five represent the new immigrants of the second half of the twentieth century. The literary productions of these groups have not yet been thoroughly explored. Scholars of Hispanic and Asian American literature have tended to address narratives written by people of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Chinese, and Japanese descent almost to the exclusion of other like ethnic groups. My study helps to fill this gap.

Cuban American literature has developed in markedly different ways from the Jewish and African American traditions. Because of the proximity of Cuba to America, Cuban politics have exerted tremendous influence over Cuban immigrant populations in the United States. The successive waves of Cubans who have left their homeland in response to changes in political regimes have often conceived of themselves as exiles

rather than immigrants and looked to the day when return would be possible. This consciousness and expectation led to the establishment of insular Cuban communities in America that were self-sustaining. Thus, for many decades, Cubans settling in the United States saw no need to engage with mainstream society, as other groups trying to assimilate had. Cubans living in America produced an extensive body of exile literature, but until the last decades of the twentieth century, that literature did not speak to a distinctly Cuban American experience. A Cuban American narrative line has only recently emerged as Cubans who came to America as young children and a second generation born in the United States have begun writing.

I examine three texts by Cuban American authors, all of which are concerned with generational and political divisions and the need for the youngest generation to preserve the experiences of different sub-groups. In *The Truth About Them* (1971), Jose Yglesias positions his narrator Pini as a recorder of family history. Pini desires to understand his family's intense nostalgia and set down their stories before their memories disappear, but ultimately finds that those stories continue to evolve with each new reader or listener. Oscar Hijuelos's *Our House in the Last World* (1983) captures multiple stages of the Cuban migratory experience, from 1929-1975. This novel examines the discrepancies between the American Dream and reality for first-generation Cuban immigrants, and comments poignantly on their American-born children's struggle to honor their parents' heritage and yet escape its oppressive weight. Cristina García's 1992 novel *Dreaming in Cuban* traces the stories of multiple generations within one family, in this case chronicling the separate reactions of three generations of women in the wake of Castro's revolution. For the women of the del Pino family, Cuba is an ever-changing dream. The

Cuban immigrant's relationship to American culture and representations of the Cuban homeland are prominent themes throughout this literary tradition. However, these writings present multiple approaches to the structure of memory, both individual and cultural, as they work to bridge divides within the Cuban American community.

Like Cuban American literature, Korean American literature is a relatively new area of immigrant writing that has been shaped by political upheaval. Unlike in the Cuban tradition, however, the relatively small number of Koreans entering the United States prior to the 1960s did not allow for the establishment of an early Korean press in America or a Korean reading community. Early Korean American writers thus used their texts to speak to mainstream American society, in an effort to educate Americans about the hostile Japanese takeover of Korea, the nature of Korean culture (as distinct from other Asian cultures), and the need for acceptance. The fiction of Younghill Kang addresses the Korean immigrant's losing battle to escape the effects of Japanese persecution, both physical and mental, and the immigrant's struggle to become part of American society. *The Grass Roof* (1931) tells the story of Chungpa Han's Korean childhood, imprisonment by the Japanese after they annexed Korea in 1909, and flight to America just prior to the cutoff of Asian immigration in 1921. His story is picked up again in Kang's 1937 novel *East Goes West*, the text which made Kang's literary reputation in America. Kang is typically credited with being the father of Korean American literature. His texts cannot be said to express the experiences of most early Korean immigrants, however, because Han comes to America as a student, not a field laborer. Still, Kang's voice is an important one in this tradition. A student himself when

he arrived in America, Kang was able to write at a time when the majority of Korean immigrants, who were working in agriculture, could not.

Because of the restrictive immigration laws that prohibited further Asians from entering America until the 1950s, the Korean American narrative did not develop further for several decades. When Korean immigrant writing finally re-emerged, it did so in several different forms, including memoirs written by earlier immigrants and edited by scholars who had become conscious of preserving this little-known history and forging a literary tradition, experimental texts treating Korean American identity as post-colonial, and fiction examining the damaging process of assimilation. To show this range of Korean American literary expression, I read a variety of texts. Alice Chai's 1978 work "A Picture Bride from Korea" details the experiences of Koreans living in Hawaii. Like Kang she treats the Korean desire for independence from the Japanese, particularly in her descriptions of the World War II era, but Chai's primary concern is telling the story of her emigration to Hawaii, the life of hard labor she faced there, and her resulting American success story. Mary Paik Lee's *Quiet Odyssey: A Pioneer Korean Woman in America* (1990), written when she was eighty-six, details her experiences as a first-generation immigrant in Hawaii and California. Like Chai she emphasizes the difficulty of the work she and her family did and the roots they were able to put down in America. Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's postmodern work *DICTEE* (1982) functions as a metafictional critique of the immigrant narrative. In its consideration of the Japanese occupation, Korean nationalism, feminism, the Korean War, and Korean immigration to the United States, *DICTEE* takes many textual forms, from historical accounts to photographs to grammar lessons to scrawled passages from drafts of the book itself, and it is written in a

mix of English, French, Chinese, and Korean. Departing from this experimentalism, Chang Rae Lee's *Native Speaker* (1995) is the story of a second-generation immigrant's search for his place in America. Drawing on the conventions of the spy novel, Lee depicts the immigrant protagonist both literally and figuratively as a spy on both American culture and his own people.

For the majority of its history, the Korean American narrative has been about issues of voice, from texts that detail the painful loss of Korean speech through the Japanese takeover to texts that examine the positive and negative aspects of adopting different voices in order to speak in America. However, that focus seems to be shifting now, as younger writers who see the right to speak as a given use their works to open up Korean American experiences that have not previously been discussed. Like the other traditions in this study, Korean American literature shows a continuing engagement with the creation of histories and the need to reclaim that past, although here that need is felt most keenly because of the legacy of the erasure of Korean history by the Japanese during colonization.

The cross-cultural reading I complete in chapter six weaves together the patterns of development elaborated on in chapters two through five. I highlight and attempt to make sense of the similarities found within the vast differences that characterize the literatures of these ethnic groups. In doing so, I comment on immigrants' negotiation of unfamiliar languages and cultural practices, their engagement with both outsider and insider reading audiences, questions of representation and representativeness, relationships to homeland and historical trauma, the mechanisms of assimilation, and definitions of who can be American. What I conclude, finally, is that although the

literatures of these very different groups point to the lack of an easily defined immigrant experience and would therefore seem to counter any totalizing arguments that can be made about the immigrant narrative, they do contain common elements that both promote and critique the status of America's national mythology, and are therefore a reflection of America's changing sense of self.

Chapter 2: Jewish American Literature's Engagement with an Inescapable Past

> Everyone has a heritage, but the Jews because of their everlasting struggle to maintain theirs, are especially conscious of it.
>
> -- Bernard Malamud

Because of the everlasting struggle that Malamud notes, Jewish writers have long dedicated themselves to the tasks of witnessing experience and preserving heritage through literature. When Jews first traveled from the Iberian Peninsula to the United States in the mid-seventeenth century, they brought with them a culture that valued education and expression through the written word. Although there was not a substantial Jewish population in America until the mid-nineteenth century, reading and writing were fundamental to the Jewish American community from its inception, as immigrants worked to record their past and define their future. The question of what Jewish identity would signify in a new, American homeland was not an easy one to answer, however. While many Jews arriving in the United States "perceived their ethnic existence as part of an historic and religious continuum that extended back to Biblical times," and therefore considered their people as "consecrated" and their survival as "a sacred obligation," religious schisms within the faith, as well as tensions between individuals integrating into the larger society and a community desire to preserve traditional structures and practices, tore at the group from the beginning (Goren 572-73). The majority of American Jews did embrace a communal vision, seeing themselves as part of "Kelal Yisrael, the totality of Israel" (Goren 573), but ideas about what that meant in terms of daily practices varied widely.

Consequently, examining Jewish immigrant texts as the products of a defined American ethnic group is not without complications. Jules Chametzky, for instance, questions whether it is accurate to use the term Jewish American literature in the same way that we would refer to other ethnic literatures, since "Jews have not often been a nation dwelling in one place. Nor are they bound only by religion. They are a people, over many centuries and all over the globe" ("General Introduction" 1). Chametzky's view cannot be fairly characterized as anti-Zionist; rather, his statement simply reflects the reality that throughout their history, Jews have rarely had a nation to call home in the same sense that other immigrant groups have, and that as a result, the ties that bind Jews as a group are sometimes tenuous at best. Nevertheless, the case can be made for the uniqueness of the Jewish experience in America serving as a binding factor. Nowhere else in the world have Jews had such freedom and rights, although they have had to fight for these (Chametzky, "General Introduction" 1). Further, for a group traditionally bound more by religion than geography, settling in America brought a sense of cohesion in terms of outsiders' perceptions of Jews and Jews' perceptions of themselves. As distinctions between various subgroups were all but erased in the eyes of the larger American population, outsider perception created a recognized cultural and ethnic category. Jewish writers' persistent literary preoccupation with what it means to be Jewish in the United States speaks to the conception that Jewish identity is fundamentally different here than elsewhere. Further, numerous texts that depict Jewish Americans as a chosen people reflect what Chametzky terms "the embrace, by Jews, in the main and over time, of America as the golden land, the promised land" ("General Introduction" 1). For

Jews from scattered parts of the world, even those who considered themselves Zionists, America became the New Jerusalem.

Accordingly, "much of the writing by Jews about their American existence reveals a prophet's urge to make the country live up to its best self" (Chametzky, "General Introduction" 2). The earliest Jewish American writing, appearing between 1654 and 1880, was characterized by a "patriotic exuberance" (Chametzky, "General Introduction" 12). Abraham de Lucena, Rebecca Gratz, and Isaac Mayer Wise, for example, emphasized democratic values as they demanded political and civil rights.[21] Notably, this early literature did not focus on a sense of Jewish ethnicity because the literature had a pragmatic function: that is, Jews "did not write for individual expression or to explore the imagination; rather, they intended to influence, to teach, and to promote the welfare of the Jewish people" (Chametzky, "General Introduction" 13, Flanzbaum and Hellerstein 19). As Hilene Flanzbaum and Kathryn Hellerstein explain, because Jews were able to express their grievances under civil law, Jewish literature from this time appealed to the government in the voice of reason, registered a high level of rejoicing, and addressed Jewishness from a religious rather than an ethnic point of view (22-23).

Early Jewish immigrants experienced less prejudice than one might expect, in part because of their contribution of necessary goods and services to eighteenth-century American society (Goren 574) and in part because of the ways in which the value Jews placed on education and hard work were congruent with the national patterns (Lipset 3-4). Benjamin Franklin's writings, in particular, were enthusiastically received by eastern

[21] Not all Jewish American writers from this period embraced the American ideal. Isaac Leeser's sermonic warning against the seductive assimilation promised by American democracy shows an early concern for the loss of Jewish identity in America.

European Jews; their translation into Yiddish around 1800 testifies to the popularity among Jews of the American dream of advancement through education and hard work (Lipset 5). As a result of numerous individual battles, Jewish Americans found some acceptance in legal, political, and social spheres. In New York, Jewish immigrants could become citizens, vote, and hold minor appointive offices (Goren 575). By 1740, Parliament had granted Jews naturalization rights after seven years of residence and exempted them from the required oath "upon the true faith of a Christian" (Goren 575). Ultimately, "the American Revolution legitimized the set of rights and ad hoc privileges that individual Jews had won" (Goren 575). Jews were fortunate to have had the political backing of George Washington, who supported full inclusion of Jews rather than mere toleration, and Adams, Jefferson, and Madison, all of whom stressed America's difference from Europe as marked by the absence of discrimination against Judaism (Lipset 7-8). Arthur Goren explains that "although stereotypical anti-Jewish remarks occasionally appeared in the press and in public utterances, they reflected traditional prejudices rather than grave social mistreatment" (575). In fact, by the end of the [eighteenth] century, with America's fairly open attitude, the issue for Jews was not if they would be accepted in larger society but if they would "be able to survive as a distinct entity" (Goren 575).

As Jews became integrated into American society, questions of how religious and national identity might co-exist became more pressing. The first large wave of German immigrants who came to the United States between 1830 and 1860 were, for the most part, absorbed into the American culture through entrance into the business world. The rapid growth of Eastern cities such as New York provided them jobs as tradesmen and

merchants (Goren 576). The majority of Jewish immigrants became peddlers, and as they saved money, moved from pack to wagon to store. The system depended on credit, so family ties were very important. As these businesses grew, more and more workers were needed as clerks, bookkeepers, and skilled factory workers; business owners drew on their countrymen, and soon a German business elite emerged with the building of large family fortunes (Goren 576). The arrival of 30,000 Yiddish-speaking immigrants between 1870 and 1880 (most of them Russian) and larger numbers soon after represented a threat to these Jews who were already established as middle-class Americans because the growing immigrant population brought with it increased anti-immigration and anti-Semitic feelings among non-Jews. By the 1880s, Jews had been put out of elite social clubs in which they had been members and barred from summer resorts and trustee rooms; by the end of the century, the stereotypes had escalated to the point that Jews were commonly seen as trying to take over the world and Jews began to appear with greater frequency in popular American literature as sinister and mercenary shylocks demanding their pound of flesh (Goren 585). The established Jewish community in America was quite surprised by the connections being made between them and the new Russian immigrants. They did accept some responsibility for the welfare and adjustment of the new arrivals, in part out of compassion but also out of the desire to aid in their integration and the removal of the stigmas surrounding the greenhorns and, by extension, themselves (Goren 585-86). Leaders of large Jewish charities in the United States spent the 1880s and 1890s asking their European counterparts to encourage limitations on immigration. They did not support legal restrictions but hoped for a voluntary curbing. Unfortunately for them, this did not occur. Overcrowding from

increased birth rates, banishment to the Jewish settlements known as the Pale, and the mob violence of the 1881 and 1882 pogroms all combined to produce a mass exodus of European Jews at the close of the nineteenth century. An astounding one third of European Jews left their homes during these decades, and 90% of them came to the United States. Between 1882 and 1924, a total of 2.3 million Jewish immigrants entered the country (Goren 579).

The majority of the arrivals were skilled workers who joined the growing clothing industry; in 1900, one out of three Russian Jews employed in major cities worked in the garment trade (Goren 582). The newcomers were largely religiously orthodox, although they soon found that the American way of life conflicted with many of their beliefs. The economic necessity or opportunity for violating the Sabbath became a problem in the Jewish community, as did the atrophy of the communal role of the rabbi. When parents embraced public schools for their children at the expense of the *cheders*, this showed a major shift in priorities and underscored a growing tension between America and Jewish ways of life (Goren 583).

In response to this tension, a thriving Yiddish press sought to galvanize the urban Jewish community in the United States. Under the direction of editor Abraham Cahan, a Russian socialist who had emigrated in 1882, the *Jewish Daily Forward* served as a strong voice for the concerns of Jewish workers. Between 1908 and 1918 the paper's daily circulation rose from 54,000 to 175,000 as it "became the popularizer of radical ideas, the interpreter of the United States to the immigrant, and the forum for Yiddish men of letters" (Goren 585). Unlike earlier Jewish immigrants who wrote and published in English rather than their native languages of Ladino, German, and Czech, writers from

this period chose to embrace their native Yiddish, and the Yiddish press, in turn, worked toward developing Yiddish as a literary language that "retained its Jewishness through its own linguistic and cultural independence from the American milieu" (Chametzky, "General Introduction" 13). Yiddish stories of the immigrant experience in America that were translated into English also became popular. The work of Yiddish-speaking immigrant writers who wrote in Yiddish and those who wrote in English began an embracing of ethnicity that would be adopted by Jewish American writers in later periods (Chametzky, "General Introduction" 13). In an essay on Mary Antin, Anna Yezierska, Emma Goldman and Kate Simon, Janet Handler Burstein argues that while "the choice of English may raise questions about the relationship of American Jewish women writers to both their Yiddish speaking families and their own ethnic identities [. . . ,] that choice need not suggest that these writers either converted away from or rejected the experiential 'text' that inspired their translations" (22). Antin, Cahan, and Yezierska, for example, all fluent in Yiddish, sought to "master an English prose style that could fulfill their artistic needs and portray the social reality of their experience as immigrants. From those efforts came a new kind of American English, infused with Yiddish words, inflections, and syntax" (Chametzky, "General Introduction" 13).

The Narrative of Assimilation

Mary Antin began her writing career in 1899 with a published account of her family's emigration from Russia to the United States. *From Plotzk to Boston*[22] grew out of a long letter Antin wrote in Yiddish to an uncle in Russia. Antin translated the text into

[22] The name of Antin's hometown in Russia was misspelled in the text.

English with the help of a local rabbi; Israel Zangwill, someone with whom she exchanged letters throughout much of her life, penned the introduction. When the book gained the favorable attention of Josephine Lazarus, poet Emma Lazarus's sister, Antin found an encouraging friend and mentor. At Lazarus's urging, Antin began work on her autobiography, the first written in English by a Russian Jew. The book was published as *The Promised Land* in 1912 with the help of Ellery Sedgwick, then the editor of *The Atlantic Monthly*. It was a bestseller when it was released and continued to be popular for several decades; the book even found use as a public school civics text in the 1940s (Chametzky, *Promised Land* x).

At the time of the book's publication, nativist reactions to immigration in the United States were raging. Antin sought to turn the tide of public opinion toward an acceptance of immigrants and the contributions that they might make to American society. As a speaker and writer, Antin supported progressivism and often pled eloquently for open immigration. In 1914 she published *They Who Knock at Our Gates: A Complete Gospel of Immigration*, a collection of essays that contained many of her lectures. Rather than attack proponents of the nativist position directly in *The Promised Land*, Antin crafted her life story to displace popular notions of immigrants as inassimilable and even dangerous to the nation's welfare. She wanted to show readers that the Old World and the New World were "learning to march side by side, seeking a common destiny" (5). Thus *The Promised Land*, written in the exuberant voice of a young girl given opportunities in America which she would not have had in her native Russia, highlights Antin's sheer joy in the process of becoming a citizen who can contribute to American society. *The Promised Land* was a comfortable read for many

Americans. Sections of the text had previously been serialized in *The Atlantic Monthly*, making readers familiar with Antin's work. Beyond this, her autobiography affirmed readers' sense of patriotism and the power of the educational system to help assimilate new arrivals into the American way of life. It offered a convincing picture of immigrants who wanted to shed the markers of their difference as quickly as possible and become productive members of the established society.

Antin aimed to present her story, then, in a form that would be true to the immigrant experience and yet palatable to a potentially hostile, Gentile readership. Keren R. McGinity establishes the extent to which Antin shaped the text for her audience through a comparison of the original manuscript of Antin's autobiography and the published text. She argues that Antin omitted material in the published version in order to navigate "the assimilationist terrain" and "the gender-coded framework of American society" (285). Antin's concerns about telling her story effectively can also be seen in letters she wrote to Sedgwick while working on the text. In her analysis of these letters, Evelyn Salz notes that Antin "compare[ed] her task to being called up to read the Torah without error," her writing of the Jewish story becoming a "sacred duty" (72).

In order to establish herself as a credible and trustworthy mediator between the Jewish and Gentile worlds, Antin had first to distance herself from her life story to show that she had sufficient perspective as a writer and cultural historian, even at the young age of twenty-nine.[23] Her introduction therefore establishes two separate selves, one who

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[23] Although Antin claimed to have been "not yet thirty" when she published *The Promised Land*, she was actually thirty-one years old. Antin had been pretending to be two years younger than she was since her first enrollment in American schools. See Keren R. McGinity's "The Real Mary Antin: Woman on a Mission in the Promised Land" for an extended explanation of Antin's reasons for doing this and Antin's short story "The Lie" for a fictionalized version of the issue.

lived before her transformation in America and one who lived afterward. As she explains, "I am absolutely other than the person whose story I have to tell. Physical continuity with my earlier self is no disadvantage. I could speak in the third person and not feel that I was masquerading. I can analyze my subject, I can reveal everything; for *she*, not *I*, is my real heroine. My life I have still to live; her life ended when mine began" (3). McGinity reads this passage as a reference to the extent to which Antin's "factual" autobiography was an intentional fabrication (286). More importantly, though, Antin's emphasis on being enabled by her separation from her earlier life lays the groundwork for themes she will develop over the course of the narrative.

In addition to establishing critical distance, Antin's introduction to the text makes clear that she was writing not only for herself but also for others like her:

> My life has been unusual, but by no means unique. And this is the very core of the matter. It is because I understand my history, in its larger outlines, to be typical of many, that I consider it worth recording. My life is a concrete illustration of a multitude of statistical facts. Although I have written a genuine personal memoir, I believe that its chief interest lies in the fact that it is illustrative of scores of unwritten lives. I am only one of many whose fate it has been to live a page of modern history. (4-5)

Aware that the flood of immigrants arriving in the country frightened many, her goal was to personalize and humanize the immigrant behind the statistics. Thus, her text had to be crafted as an individual story that could be representative, a fact upon which Antin repeatedly insists. For instance, she breaks from the narrative in chapter five to ask the reader "Should I be sitting here, chattering of my infantile adventures, if I did not know

that I was speaking for thousands? Should you be sitting there, attending to my chatter, while the world's work waits, if you did not know that I spoke also for you? I might say 'you' or 'he' instead of 'I'" (79-80). The "you" in this passage has been read as a reference to fellow Jewish immigrants who were considered part of Antin's audience in her initial draft. However, if this statement addresses the audience removed from the immigrant experience, as the rest of the text does, it serves as a reminder for them that all Americans are immigrants and that, consequently, Antin's story is theirs.

Antin also downplays the uniqueness of her situation and the advantages she had by suppressing many details from her life experience that might set her apart. Two notable examples are the absence of details about her relationships with well-known scholars and business people who mentored her and her marriage to Amadeus Grabau.[24] In the text, Antin positions herself as one of the common people: "But while the great can speak for themselves, or by the tongues of their admirers, the humble are apt to live inarticulate and die unheard. It is well that now and then one is born among the simple with a taste for self-revelation" (80). Further, she claims that she would be compelled to write even without an audience: "The man or woman thus endowed must speak, will speak, though there are only the grasses in the field to hear, and none but the wind to carry the tale" (80). This shifts the focus from Antin as a voice for her people, with a definite agenda, to Antin as someone who desires to speak for the sake of the story itself. Hers is a gift that must be shared because she is the heir of the dreams of her people (40), centuries older than her "true age" (5). She credits sensory experiences with the power to

[24] McGinity argues further that Antin's story is almost completely de-gendered so that she can speak for both male and female immigrants.

take her back through history, going so far as to say that perhaps one day in her pudding she will taste the manna that she ate in the desert and be able to write about the Exodus (83-84). Through sensory experience, Antin becomes one with the history of her people. She will be able to write about events that she was not alive to experience. She thus represents not only Jews of her time but of all times.

Antin's success in portraying herself as a representative Jew is clear in the reviews that her book received. One reviewer wrote that "her faults as well as her virtues reflect upon the race into which she was born. As the writer of *The Promised Land* she stands as a spokesman of the people whose life history she recounts. No matter what we say to the contrary, to the Gentile world she is an authority" (qtd. in McGinity 297). The reviewer continues, "If Mary Antin falls short of our expectations as a Jewess she exceeds them as an American. And perhaps it is better so. She probably had no intention of writing to or for her people but of them" (qtd. in McGinity 297). Antin's careful explanation of Jewish terms and customs would certainly indicate this. Although her editor disagreed, she insisted on using Yiddish and Hebrew words in the text with definitions provided in parenthesis or in the glossary following the narrative (Hellerstein 190). As additional evidence of Antin's decision to reach a non-Jewish audience, McGinity offers omitted fragments in which Antin speaks directly to her former friends in Russia, asking them to trust her as someone who can "turn the aliens' ridicule into sympathy" because she can speak both the Jewish and Gentile languages (297-298).

Given her need to convey an authentic Jewish story to her Gentile readers, one of the most striking features of the text is Antin's insistence that her artistic construction of history is more authentic or "real" than documented, verifiable facts. She writes, "as a

conscientious historian I am bound to record every rumor, but I retain the right to my impression. [. . .] It is only that my illusion is more real to me than reality" (73-75). By describing history as nothing more than a record of rumors, Antin questions what her readers think they know to be true. She continues, "And so do we often build our world on an error, and cry out that the universe is falling to pieces, if anyone but lift a finger to replace the error by truth" (75). Antin exaggerates the response to a biased view of the modern world to show the folly of such a vision and to open her readers' minds to the new view of Jewish immigrants that she presents. The picture she creates of immigrant life will be more real than the "reality" that readers think they know because she is replacing error with truth, correcting stereotypes and misconceptions. Even though Antin is aware that, for example, anyone could survey her village accurately and point out the discrepancies between her memory of flowers and what actually grew there, she boldly claims that she is "the better guide" (77). She has the authority to interpret history and convey it to outsiders as she feels it should be conveyed. In addition to granting herself the power to shape her own story, Antin grants herself the power to reshape the American perspective on Jewish immigrants. As an insider she is, indeed, the better guide.

The early chapters of the book, describing life "within the Pale," are sketches of the oppressive life of Jews in Russia that stand in sharp contrast to the freedoms of America. More importantly, these opening chapters serve as background for building a new understanding of Jews. The stereotype of Jews as stingy and greedy for gold is shown in light of the government that was constantly robbing them in one way or another: "Greedy for profits we were, eager for bargains, for savings, intent on squeezing the utmost out of every business transaction. But why? [. . .] To be a Jew was a costly

luxury, the price of which was either money or blood. Is it any wonder that we hoarded our pennies? What his shield is to the soldier in battle, that was the ruble to the Jew in the Pale" (26-27). The image of Jews as clannish is explained in the context of government restrictions and the physical and verbal abuse that kept them from forming close relationships with Gentiles in their towns. Antin discusses the image of Jews as Christ-killers in the context of the pogroms in which Christians, often led by a priest carrying a cross, would torture and slaughter Jews (12-13). By explaining the basis of stereotypes, contextualizing Jewish behaviors, and offering counter-examples, Antin dispels misconceptions and rewrites the image of her people. These moments in the text are departures from Antin's personal story, but they are significant to her larger project.

Because of her focus on telling Jewish community history through her family's story, Antin delays any introduction of herself until sixty pages into the narrative, at which point she writes, "I suppose I ought to explain my own name also, especially as I am going to emerge as the heroine by and by" (62). This delayed revelation is atypical of immigrant narratives, which usually begin with a clear statement of the narrator's name and his or her origins. For Antin, personal history is meaningless outside the context of family history and, in a larger sense, ethnic history. This positioning of her individual identity as secondary again highlights her representativeness and anticipates what she will later claim in the text -- that communal and national histories are an integral part of individual identities.

Antin's family is like most Russian Jews living within the Pale, intent upon preserving the rituals and traditions for which they have been exiled and are struggling to preserve. However, when they celebrate Passover, it is America, not Jerusalem, for which

they long. Antin explains, "So there was our promised land, and many faces were turned toward the West. And if the waters of the Atlantic did not part for them, the wanderers rode its bitter flood by a miracle as great as any the rod of Moses ever wrought" (12). America is seen as a fulfillment of God's promise to the Jewish people, and the journey there is a sacred one. Complete economic failure motivates Mr. Antin's emigration to the United States. Unable to support his family, he determines "to make a new start on a new soil" (71). Antin knows the day when America became real to her, not just another place where her father settled to make money. Although the words in her father's letter were not unusual, there was something "more than the words seemed to say" (123). She heard "a hint of triumph," "a stirring, a straining"; "he saw something -- he promised us something. It was this 'America.' And 'America' became my dream" (123). That dream is realized when, three years after her father's departure, the Antins are embraced by their father as they reach the promised land (153).

In America, Antin describes the assimilation process of changing the immigrant's customs through correction, admonishment, and laughter by friends and strangers as "spontaneous on all sides, like the education of the child by the family circle [. . .] in this pleasant nursery of America" (155). She extends this image with descriptions of her family being taught their first steps -- how to light a stove and how to dress like Americans (160-61). The immigrant depicted as a child is both innocent and vulnerable, in need of nurturing and guidance from the native-born. This image neutralizes any potential immigrant threat, as the newcomers' clothing, language, and customs are portrayed as effects that will be outgrown with the help of a well-meaning American society. Antin later discusses the inevitable growing pains that are part of the assimilation

process. Although "nothing more pitiful could be written in the annals of the Jews; nothing more inevitable" than the disorganization and disintegration of the immigrant family in America, "nothing more hopeful," could be written either (209). She dismisses the "pains of adjustment, as racking as the pains of birth" as a sacrifice that the immigrant mother will forget when she sees her children "moving as Americans among Americans" (228). The difficulties of assimilation are thus downplayed as an inevitable part of the growth process, and the willingness of immigrants to assimilate is again underscored.

While this process of growth through correction is shown as spontaneous and informal, Antin also recognizes the public school system as an institution with the power to assimilate immigrants quickly into a particular national narrative. In her case, an American was made in just two years through public education (188). Assimilation through education benefits the immigrant and America as a whole: "The public school has done its best for us foreigners, and for the country, when it has made us into good Americans. [. . .] You should be glad to hear of it, you born Americans; for it is the story of the growth of your country; of the flocking of your brothers and sisters from the far ends of the earth to the flag you love; of the recruiting of your armies of workers, thinkers, leaders" (188). Antin describes her first day at school as "the apex of [her] civic pride and personal contentment" (169). Although she admits to being aware of "speaking in superlatives," Antin claims that her thoughts, conduct, dreams, and desire to learn are typical of the intelligent immigrant child (169). Because Yiddish was one of the factors which led to eastern European immigrants being viewed as inassimilable, Antin expresses her love for the English she learns in school: "It seems to me that in any other language happiness is not so sweet, logic is not so clear. I am not sure that I could believe in my

neighbors as I do if I thought about them in un-English words. [. . .] And as I am attached to my prejudices, I must love the English language!" (176-77). Her admission of prejudice toward English, and therefore toward the American way, allows readers with similar prejudices to feel comfortable with her opinions which mirror their own. This issue of the immigrant's attitude toward both English and her native language is a common element that is explored in immigrant narratives, although most immigrant writers do not embrace English as quickly and easily as Antin does here, even among those who share her desire to garner support from a mainstream, English-speaking audience.

Through her study in school of American history, specifically the study of George Washington, Antin is paradoxically humbled and empowered. While the story of the cherry tree moves her to an understanding of sin and repentance and humbles her because of Washington's greatness, "the twin of [her] new-born humility" is a sense of dignity that comes from knowing she is related through her immigrant experience to Washington (189). From her history lessons, Antin gains a sense of American identity.[25] She comes to *feel* more than to *know* the meaning of citizenship, shouting the words to the song "America" in earnestness and becoming "faint with suppressed enthusiasm" when she hears another class sing "The Star-Spangled Banner" (191). This excitement about her new country leads Antin to realize that her former homeland held no meaning for her. She has no conception of it as a nation, no flag, and no heroes: "Polotzk was not my country. It was *goluth* -- exile. On many occasions in the year we prayed to God to lead

[25] A similar moment occurs in Anna Yezierska's short story "America and I" in which an immigrant woman understands herself as part of the national narrative when she reads the story of the Pilgrims and compares her experience to theirs.

us out of exile" (191). The story of Exodus was "a glorious myth" which had separated her from the world rather than defined her place in it; thus, when she came to America, she was eager to embrace the nation "in a great worship" (191, 193). Antin concludes, "naturalization, with us Russian Jews, may mean more than the adoption of the immigrant by America. It may mean the adoption of America by the immigrant" (193). This reflects Antin's earlier statement that when her father enrolled his children in school, he "took possession of America" (174) and the later ownership that Antin shows when she refers to *my* country and herself as heir to America. Antin closes her narrative with a powerful statement of her relationship to the past and her new country which reflects this sense of inheritance:

> The past was only my cradle, and now it cannot hold me [. . . ;] it is not that I belong to the past, but that the past belongs to me. America is the youngest of the nations, and inherits all that went before in history. And I am the youngest of America's children, and into my hands is given all her priceless heritage [. . . .] Mine is the whole majestic past, and mine is the shining future. (306)

Not all readers were equally accepting of this message of ownership, however. Agnes Repplie, who wrote about *The Promised Land* in *The Atlantic Monthly*, and Professor Barrett Wendell of Harvard were disturbed by Antin's bold claiming of America (Chametzky, *Promised Land* xv). Antin's assertions that the immigrant has the right to America's past, present, and future and that the immigrant is equal in citizenship and American identity to those who have been in the United States for hundreds of years were seen as presumptuous. Adopting the American way of life was acceptable, but

claiming an American national identity and America's very heritage as one's own was going too far in the eyes of some Americans who wanted to retain rights and privileges as only for the native born. Antin's assimilationist message was troubling to Jews as well, who castigated Antin for shedding her Jewish identity and past in favor of an American appearance, language, history, and ideal. For later writers who explored the painful sacrifice of ethnic heritage involved in becoming an American, Antin's work was disconcerting and offensive.

Antin's stance on assimilation is not as simple as it has been assumed to be, however. Passages in *The Promised Land* show that Antin did experience difficulties of cultural division. Because "everything impressed itself on [her] memory [. . .] with double associations," she "became a student and a philosopher by force of circumstances (5). Further, as she notes,

> All the processes of uprooting, transportation, replanting, acclimatization, and development took place in my soul. I felt the pang, the fear, the wonder, and the joy of it. I can never forget, for I bear the scars. But I want to forget -- sometimes I long to forget. I think I have thoroughly assimilated my past -- I have done its bidding -- I want now to be of to-day. It is painful to be consciously of two worlds. (6) [26]

The implication of "I want to forget -- sometime I long to forget" is that Antin has not been able to. She *thinks* she has thoroughly assimilated her past but is not certain. She is

[26] This was written just seven years after Du Bois's statement about double-consciousness in *The Souls of Black Folk*. Although Du Bois formulated his ideas on the internal division produced by seeing oneself through the eyes of others specifically in terms of the African American experience, expression of some form of dual identity is common in immigrant narratives produced by many different ethnic groups.

well aware of the struggle of dual identity and desires to avoid it.[27] It was not until later in her life that she was able "to rebuild an integrated world -- unifying the two-ness that was an inevitable part of an immigrant experience" through her study of Darwinism and evolution (Chametzky, *Promised Land* xvi).

With the exception of Antin's negative comments on the limited possibilities for Jewish women living in the Pale, an appreciation of Jewish culture runs throughout the novel. Had Antin wanted to deny her ethnic heritage completely, she would not have gone to such great pains to defend Jews against stereotypes and to explain her people's customs to outsiders.[28] Salz's analysis of Antin's letters shows that Antin never lost touch with Judaism as a central part of who she was, despite her explorations of Christianity and Eastern mysticism. Antin explains in *The Promised Land* that "it [is] doubtful if the conversion of the Jew to any alien belief or disbelief is ever thoroughly accomplished" (210). Whether practiced or not, Judaism is always a part of a Jew's identity. Beyond her statements in this text, Mary Antin's avid support of Zionism is evidence that she did not turn her back on her heritage. In a 1917 piece in the *Boston Jewish Advocate*, Antin explained that "assimilation is going on in every land where social equality is guaranteed by law" and that she looked for the day "when we [Jews] have the protection of a home center behind us [. . .] and when the precious seed of Jewish culture is safely embedded in a national core" (qtd. in Salz 74). As Salz explains,

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[27] Antin expresses a preference for divided worlds earlier in her narrative. Although she presents the problems of Polotzk as a divided society (Jew and Gentile), she describes this binary as safe because "one was a Jew, leading a righteous life; or one was a Gentile, existing to harass the Jews, while making a living off Jewish enterprise" (107). With no gray areas, one knew one's place and what to expect of others in that place.

[28] Kirsten Wasson's postmodern reading of *The Promised Land* positions the book's focus on women's communal relationships in Polotzk against Antin's rhetoric of conversion and national allegiance to argue for a complex double-voicing.

"assimilation for Antin was a matter of choice, but it in no way abrogated the Jewish people's right to a homeland. And cognizant of the increasing restrictionist sentiment in the country, she championed the Zionist cause at every opportunity" (74-75). While Antin's best known publication embodied a narrative of hope and opportunity through Jews' willing assimilation in America, a much-needed message at the time, she was much more conflicted personally.

The Realist Narrative

Unlike Mary Antin, Abraham Cahan was unwilling to manipulate his text for potential readers or to compromise his realist vision of America when he penned *Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto* in 1896. John Higham notes that *Yekl* was the first American immigrant novel written by a naturalized writer who sought to depict the immigrant experience of America through the immigrant's eyes (ix).[29] Cahan's work was not easily accepted by mainstream publishers because American tastes in popular fiction had not fully embraced the troubled vision of life he presented; as Jules Chametzky explains, "a reading public drawn from a class whose values and assumptions might be threatened by too severe an exposure to such grim social realities could not be expected to respond to

[29] The launch of Cahan's career as a novelist was aided immeasurably by the support of William Dean Howells, who sought to slow the turn of realism toward naturalism at the end of the nineteenth century by championing younger realists like Cahan, Hamlin Garlin, and Paul Laurence Dunbar. *Yekl*, Cahan's first lengthy text, was written at the urging of Howells and published in 1896 after he sent the manuscript to multiple publishers. For a detailed examination of the relationship between Cahan and Howells, see chapter four of Jules Chametzky's *From the Ghetto: The Fiction of Abraham Cahan*. Abraham Cahan is frequently looked to as the father of the Jewish American novel. See Dan Vogel's "Cahan's *Rise of David Levinsky:* Archetype of American Jewish Fiction" for a reading of Cahan's fiction as the source of many archetypal themes in Jewish American literature, including Old World orthodoxy's collision with the New World, the spiritual quest of the anti-hero, the failed attempt to escape Jewishness, and the triangle of withdrawn father/*yiddishe* mama/choked son.

work that was not basically reassuring" (*From the Ghetto* 32). The realism valued by Howells and Cahan was at odds with the public's desire for escapist fiction based in romance and sentiment. Eventually the advent of progressivism in the new century drew public attention to immigrants' struggles and thus some interest in their fictionalized stories. Further, the United States' growing obsession with muckraking reporting made harsh portrayals of the new immigrants increasingly popular (Chametzky, *Rise* xiv). When *McClure's Magazine*, best known for its exposés of industry and government, asked Cahan in 1913 to write several articles on the success of Jewish immigrants in the garment trade, Cahan was naturally surprised, particularly since *McClure*'s had earlier been uninterested in publishing *Yekl*. Cahan decided to accept the offer but was skeptical of the magazine's motives and aware of the risk of an anti-Semitic response to his pieces. Rather than produce articles, Cahan chose to tell the story of the rise of Jews in business through a first-person narrative of a wealthy garment manufacturer; by doing this he aimed to present, like Antin, "a personal story as well as the saga of a people" (Chametzky, *From the Ghetto* 127). He sought to continue the mission he had begun with his early stories of East Side life, which were "largely an attempt at explanation, demystifying the newcomers' 'foreignness,' and removing the sense of threat to the wider culture" (Chametzky, *Rise* xiii).

Cahan was unaware, however, that by writing "The Autobiography of An American Jew: The Rise of David Levinsky," he played into the hands of associate editor Burton J. Hendrick, who had penned an inflammatory article entitled "The Jewish Invasion of America" about Jews' supposed "acquisition of cultural and economic control in the United States" to announce Cahan's forthcoming pieces in the magazine

(Marovitz, *Abraham Cahan* 136).[30] Significant problems with Cahan's text as it was presented in serial form led to accusations against Cahan of anti-Semitism, a deliberately unflattering portrayal of Jews, and confirmation of stereotypes. Chametzky claims that these questions are not easy to dismiss because "his portrayal was used to confirm certain stereotypes and attitudes, though it was not Cahan's intention, nor was he complicit in certain distortions that occurred in the presentation of the series" (*Rise* xii). The captions presented with Jay Hambidge's illustrations of the third and fourth parts of the serial often warped the meaning of the text in that they were slanted toward the presentation of Jews as "lustful and salacious" (Chametzky, *Rise* xvi). One example of this is the scene in which Levinsky follows a woman down the street so that he can examine the cut of her coat. He comments, "I never weary of studying the trend of the American woman's taste. The subject has become a veritable *idée fixe* with me." In the serial, the passage is cut short, and the caption "Many a time, when I see a well dressed American woman in the street, I follow her for blocks" appears beneath a drawing of a stylish woman being followed by a man who appears to be ogling her.

Such distortions from the serial aside, the question of stereotyping in the expanded version of the text, which was published as *The Rise of David Levinsky* in 1917, was still troubling for many Jewish readers because of Levinsky's immoral business practices (including hiring non-union labor at meager wages and stealing other designers' ideas), his use of vulnerable women for his own ends, and the discarding of religious beliefs in the pursuit of wealth. On the whole, Cahan's work fueled "outraged

[30] Hendrick would later write *Jews in America* (1923), a work that aimed to prevent the entry of more immigrants by highlighting the differences between Russian Jews and other immigrants.

protests from many Americanized Jews who felt their respectability threatened" (Higham ix). For many recently Americanized Jews, Cahan's portrayals of greenhorns in the city were too close to a life that they had struggled to escape. They did not want the society they had successfully entered reminded of their roots. According to Higham, Jewish readers escaping the ghetto for the suburb "were defensive about the immediate past and eager to decontaminate Jewish life from the color and flavor of the Ghetto" (Higham ix). Consequently, "instead of seeing the nuances and varieties of character that Cahan had painted, instead of appreciating his implicit criticism of American business life, uneasy readers thought he had perversely documented all anti-Semitic stereotypes" (Higham xi).[31]

Both Jewish and non-Jewish readers fixated on Levinsky's negative qualities and failed to take Cahan's literary aims into account. He wanted to present the Jewish immigrant with neither ridicule nor romance (Chametzky, *From the Ghetto* 55). Although in many ways David Levinsky is typical of late-nineteenth century Russian immigrants, caught up in the "great New Exodus" and attracted to America "not merely as a land of milk and honey, but also, and perhaps chiefly, as one of mystery, of fantastic experiences, of marvelous transformations" (Cahan 61-62), Higham rightly contends that Levinsky was not created to be universal or representative. Instead, "[h]e was partly an individual, partly a specific type. Yet he combined a variety of traits characteristic of his ethnic heritage, he met the standard problems of cultural adjustment that immigrants faced, and his life touched virtually every segment of New York Jewish society"

[31] Despite the controversy that *The Rise of David Levinsky* created, or perhaps because of it, the expanded text which appeared in novel form in 1917 was a success. In its first two years of publication, it sold 8000 copies.

(Higham vi). In short, Levinsky was created to reflect Jewish East Side culture. Rather than idealize the immigrant, as Antin had done, Cahan wanted an unvarnished portrayal. He was, after all, a realist in the Russian tradition of Turgenev and Tolstoy, and under the American influence of Howells.[32] His "concern [was] with depicting people as they are -- unidealized, mixed bags of faults and virtues" (Chametzky, *Rise* xiv).

By writing in the first person, Cahan has the immigrant represent himself through his own command of the language. There is no outside linguistic interpreter or cultural observer to mediate readers' encounter with the immigrant in the text. Cahan's choice of first-person narration and incorporation of some of his own life experience into the novel have led to somewhat reductive readings of the novel as more autobiographical than not.[33] Further, the absence of a narrator who might comment on or make excuses for Levinsky's actions has been read as a signal of Cahan's approval, particularly by those looking at the text as a confirmation of stereotypes. This reading also oversimplifies the complexity of Cahan's text and the challenge he presents to readers to sift through the layers of Levinsky's assessments of his own character. On the surface, Levinsky is a reliable narrator because he does not hesitate to reveal his worst traits as well as his best and is always reflecting on his experiences as they affect his identity. Indeed, he claims to be constantly self-reflective, telling readers early in the narrative, "I love to brood over my youth" (3), and, later, "I was everlastingly revising my views of people, including my own self" (350). Yet, despite multiple references in the narrative to rebirths and the pride he takes in the changes he underwent in his transformation from an immigrant with four

[32] Some critics, for example Ruth Wisse, note the influence of Howells' *The Rise of Silas Lapham* on Cahan's *David Levinsky* in terms of the characters' shared struggle to balance a drive to succeed in business with conscience.
[33] See the comments of Louis Harap and Ronald Sanders for two examples.

cents in his pocket to a millionaire in the garment industry, Levinsky tells us that his inner identity has remained unchanged for thirty to forty years and his wealth and power are meaningless (3). His rise to success, ostensibly the subject of the book, is secondary to his personal struggle. To help the reader negotiate the disparate narratives of public success and personal failure that Levinsky presents, Cahan repeatedly calls attention to the role of language in the creation of identity. A closer inspection of not only what Levinsky says about his identity but also how he says it reveals a man who presents himself as carefully to readers of the text as he does to his business associates. Further, because Levinsky admits he does not change fundamentally, readers must question his use of the rhetoric of American transformation.[34]

From his early Talmud studies in Russia, Levinsky perceives an essential duality of identity making in the speech act. As he explains, "While your mind is absorbed in the meaning of the words you utter, the melody in which you utter them tells your heart a tale of its own. You live in two distinct worlds at once" (35). Levinsky is puzzled by the sound of his own voice: "Who is there? -- I seemed to be wondering, my tune or recitative sounding like the voice of some other fellow. It was as if somebody were hidden within me. What did he look like?" (38).[35] Changes in the rhythm of his speech render him almost unrecognizable to himself and send him searching for the other person inside himself. This is a small moment in the text, but the power of the delivery of language to create alternate meaning (here, alternate identity) beyond the meaning of the

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[34] In "The Secular Trinity of a Lonely Millionaire: Language, Sex, and Power in *The Rise of David Levinsky*," Sanford E. Marovitz examines the unintended effects of Levinsky's language, but he is primarily concerned with Levinsky's subtle incorporation of suggestive language which reveals repressed sexual conflict as the source of frustration in Levinsky's life.

[35] In Isaac Rosenfeld's reading of the text, David's sense of and yearning for something unknown within him is connected to the Jewish longing for Jerusalem since their exile (134).

words themselves is one which resonates throughout the novel as Levinsky learns to manipulate others' perceptions of who he is.

Recognizing that his speech pattern and word choice mark him as an immigrant in the United States, Levinsky sees mastery of American English as an essential step to shedding his greenhorn image and assuming an American identity. He is too old to benefit from public schooling like Antin did, so he begins by keeping a list of English words and phrases that Jews in America have incorporated into their speech (104-105). This collecting of bits of language for study and use is a practice Levinsky returns to later in his life when he clips passages from the financial column in order to understand the jargon of the business world (269). He also turns to speakers around him as teachers and is discriminating in his choice of models. As enamored of his new language as was Antin, at one point when Levinsky makes enough money to move to better lodgings, he chooses a street because of the English he expects to hear there (164). If he comes across a "street faker" with a foreign accent, he will pass on; if, however, he determines that person's speech to be that of a "real American," he will "pause and listen to his 'lecture,' sometimes for more than an hour" (175-76). Even among fallen women, he seeks "those who [a]re real Americans" (176). In Levinsky's mind, native speakers are always "real" or superior Americans, "proper" speech conveys status, and self-presentation is more important than class or job. When he meets a well-spoken Gentile butcher whose "cultured English and ways" seem to conflict with what Levinsky sees as "the character

of his business," he marvels out loud to himself at America's ability "to produce butchers who look and speak like noblemen" (330).[36]

Levinsky's struggle to master the ever-changing American idiom leads him to conclude that "not [being] born in America was something of a physical defect" which no surgeon can correct (291). Throughout his life he is aware of and battling the ways in which his speech and gestures mark him as an outsider and therefore, in his mind, as inferior. For instance, during a dinner with fellow business travelers, Levinsky becomes "so conscious of the whole performance" of constraining his hands as he speaks that he loses track of what he is trying to say (329). In this case, Levinsky tries to contain the story that his hands will tell about him but cannot reconcile the two separate worlds into which his carefully cultivated English speech, designed to help him succeed in business, and Jewish gestures place him.

Not surprisingly, as Levinsky becomes more at ease in the American business world, he becomes more and more divorced from the notion of an authentic self. This process begins when he learns the American expression of the "unsmiling smile" from his friend Bender (130) and the benefits of having "a credit face" from Meyer Nodelman (202). Levinsky comes to realize, in other words, that "we are all actors, more or less. The question is only what our aim is and whether we are capable of a 'convincing presentation'" (194). When his aim is to advance in the business world, he is quite capable, persuading the Chaikins to join him in a venture for which he has no start-up money, taking orders for garments which he has no way to produce, and leading potential

[36] Phillip Barrish sees Levinsky's self-reflexive idiom in this scene as positing "two distinguishable positions within him," and he reads Levinsky's divided identity and the butcher's as markers of an "incommensurability between something positioned as bodily and something else juxtaposed with it" (645).

clients to believe that his workers are treated like family when he pays them much less than union wages for working longer hours. Interestingly, Levinsky also embraces an immigrant identity when it will benefit him -- for example, he supports the Sons of Antomir synagogue in order to curry the favor of non-union workers he hopes to keep employed -- and dismisses his identification with "our people, immigrants from Russia," when he can gain from this, telling a business contact, for instance, that he used to be Russian, but he is American now (337). Similarly, his professed love for America fluctuates according to his current level of success and acceptance. His love for America is confirmed when he is able to dine with Gentiles in the dining car while on a business trip (329). However, when an important business contact refuses to see him, he concludes "that all talk of American liberty [i]s mere cant" (334). When he is doing well, America is a land of freedom and opportunity. When doors of opportunity seem to close, he dismisses America's promises as empty rhetoric. His convenient donning or dismissal of national identity and patriotism run counter to Antin's strategy of asserting love for the country in the face of possible rejection, but it still speaks to the immigrant's manipulation of the relationship between an acceptance of American identity and public opinion.

In the same way that Levinsky adopts personas to do business, he manipulates his presentation of self to the reader. His matter-of-fact accounting of shady business practices and exploitation of women leads Chametzky to question the self-serving nature of Levinsky's candor, because, "in every case, one can excuse his derelictions as being only too human" (*From the Ghetto* 136). Detailed confessions of his failings, even those he seems to be proud of, are designed to leave readers with the impression that Levinsky

is consistently truthful in his narrative, if not in his business. What is more interesting to consider than his confessions, however, are the moments when Levinsky mentions topics which are a source of discomfort to him. He eludes commenting in depth on troubling spiritual and emotional matters, especially on his role in decisions that turn him away from the values instilled in him as a youth and a sense of Jewishness. Instead, he speaks about such changes in his life with a sense of inevitability, as if he had no choice in the matter, or he fails to comment on them at all.

Before Levinsky leaves Antomir, both Reb Sender and Naphtali warn him about the power of America to separate him from his religion, Sender by telling him that "one becomes a Gentile there" and Naphtali by asking him how long he will believe after he emigrates (61-62). Although he reassures his friends that he will not change, Levinsky soon sees that the outward markers of his religion, his hair and clothing, mark him as different and a newcomer and hurt him as a peddler. He summarily sheds these markers, saying, "when I took a look at the mirror I was bewildered. I scarcely recognized myself. [. . .] It was as though the haircut and the American clothes had changed my identity" (101). Levinsky, in fact, attributes his loss of Jewishness in America to these changes: "The very clothes I wore and the very food I ate had a fatal effect on my religious habits. A whole book could be written on the influence of a starched collar and a necktie on a man who was brought up as I was. It was inevitable that sooner or later, I should let a barber shave my sprouting beard" (110). The wording of these passages describing a change in identity calls into question the sincerity of Levinsky's insistence on the new haircut and clothing as the source of his turn from religion. When Levinsky says "It was *as though* the haircut and American clothing had changed my identity" and "a whole

book *could be* written on the influence of a starched collar and a necktie" (emphasis added), he implies that the haircut and clothing were not the actual cause of his change and that his narrative is such a book, even though the underlying subject of the novel is not the influence of the society on Levinsky's turn from Judaism but his own choices. While the use of *fatal* and *inevitable* underscores his insistence on the significance of this moment in his turn from Jewish practices, that insistence is clearly at odds with the opening chapters of the book, which show Levinsky losing interest in studying Talmud while he is still in Russia. There, the combination of his friend Naphtali's cynicism and an introduction to women led to the waning of his interest in becoming a religious scholar and sparked his desire for the adventure America represents.

The ways in which Levinsky describes the secularization of his desire for learning and his abandonment of college for the business world are noteworthy as well. He characterizes the ghetto as ringing "with a clamor for knowledge" and saving money for college as "the most natural thing [. . .] to do" (156). The college he wishes to enter is "a symbol of spiritual promotion" and a diploma is "a certificate of moral as well as intellectual aristocracy" (169). Levinsky stresses that the college is more than a place to prepare for the battle of life and acquire knowledge: "if there was something that appealed to the better man in me, to what was purest in my thoughts and most sacred in my emotions, that something was the red, church-like structure on the southeast corner of Lexington Avenue and Twenty-third Street. It was the synagogue of my new life" (169). The significance of Levinsky's decision to pursue secular studies at the expense of religious ones is qualified by this description, which melds the replacement of desire for the religious life with desire for education in the reader's mind by the comparison of

college and temple. This comparison is extended later in the text when Levinsky, having abandoned education in favor of business, passes by the college and feels like "a convert Jew passing a synagogue" (207). He does not seem to feel this way when he passes actual synagogues, however.

When Levinsky abandons his quest for secular education (already established as an acceptable alternative to Talmud study), the decision is presented as a spontaneous reaction to an insult from his employer at the Manheimer Brothers coat factory. As Levinsky explains, "an unimportant accident, a mere trifle, suddenly gave a new turn to the trend of events changing the character of my whole life" (187). When he spills some milk on some silk coats at work, he is called a lobster by Jeff Manheimer. As retribution, Levinsky decides to steal Manheimers' designer Chaikin and open his own business to cause the downfall of his former employers. The decision made, he quickly lets the reader know that his vision broadened beyond revenge and became "a much greater thing" (189). He envisioned himself "a rich man, of course, but that was merely a detail. What really hypnotized me was the venture of the thing. It was a great, daring game of life" (189). Higham comments, "Cahan, who never steps beyond Levinsky's angle of vision, leaves the matter at that; we are free to speculate on its deeper sources" (vi). Clearly, there is more to Levinsky's decision to enter business than he wishes to admit.

By the time he begins to profit from his business with Chaikin, Levinsky is "fairly on the road to atheism" (236), and ultimately Herbert Spencer comes to replace his God (379). He attempts to soften this transpositioning by arguing that

> few people of wealth and power had real religion in their hearts. I felt sure that most of them looked upon churches or synagogues as they did upon

> police courts; that they valued them primarily as safeguards of law and order and correctness, and this had become my attitude. For the rest, I felt that a vast number of the people who professed Christianity or Judaism did so merely because to declare oneself an atheist was not a prudent thing to do from a business or social point of view. (379)

His complete abandonment of religion is placed in the context of the elite's lack of true faith. Despite a bald confession -- "I had no creed. I knew of no ideals. The only thing I believed in was the cold, drab theory of the struggle for existence and the survival of the fittest" (380) -- Levinsky wishes to show that he is not completely without spirit or emotion. He adds that "this could not satisfy a heart that was hungry for enthusiasm and affection, so dreams of family life became my religion. Self-sacrificing devotion to one's family was the only kind of altruism and idealism I did not flout" (380). This statement is not supported by his actions, however. After using his mother's death to gain sympathy and financial support, Levinsky embarks upon a series of love affairs which belie his stated self-sacrificing devotion to the concept of family.

Levinsky spends much of the novel searching for love and a wife, but in each of his relationships, he is more interested in the idea of love or marriage than in devoting himself to a woman. Once he decides to woo Dora, the wife of his good friend Max Margolis, he arranges to become a boarder in their home, claiming that it was natural to do so (248). Levinsky then seduces Dora with stories of his first failed love affair with Miranda in Russia. He creates a sense of intimacy between them by telling her the truth about the relationship. Once he has won Dora, Levinsky can easily pave the way for them

to be together by confirming Max's suspicions, but he does not and gives no real explanation. His engagement to Fanny Kaplan ends in a similarly understated and unexplained way. Levinsky chooses Fanny because of her father's wealth and position and his own desire to take a wife because he is getting older. There is no love in the relationship; he is merely "not repulsed" by her. The shallow nature of their connection is underscored when he meets and goes after another woman, Anna Tevkin, while on the way to visit Fanny's family in the Catskills. Rather than officially breaking off his engagement, he simply fails to show up and spends the next several months wooing Anna, with no thoughts of Fanny. Levinsky pursues Anna by becoming close to her father and donating money to her socialist causes, but he fails to win her. This rejection by his "true love" is a source of depression for the remainder of the novel, which Levinsky plays to his advantage to gain sympathy from readers.

We are left at the end with the portrait of a lonely millionaire who regrets not pursuing an education and pities himself as "a victim of circumstances" (530). This phrasing indicates Levinsky's unwillingness to accept responsibility for the actions and decisions that led to his misery. Ironically, he follows this statement by saying that if he had his life to live over again, he "should never think of a business career" (530). As Dan Vogel correctly asserts, this indicates that Levinsky could have chosen otherwise; therefore, he did have a hand in the outcome of his life (284). Levinsky's power of choice undercuts the arguments of many critics, including David Engel and Robert Sanders, who read the novel's ending as an indictment of America's failings. *The Rise of David Levinsky* is not a simple moral tale about the evils of assimilation or America's failure to welcome immigrants because Levinsky's misery does not result from his being

trapped by the American system or from America's failure to live up to the promise of opportunity. Rather, the seeds of Levinsky's discontent are with him all along. His desire for power and superiority, as well as his ability to manipulate and escape blame are clearly illustrated in the opening chapters of the novel that take place in Russia. As Sanford Marovitz explains, "it is not America that undermines Levinsky's psychological and moral life; it is already in a disoriented, degraded state before he leaves Antomir" (*Abraham Cahan* 160). Thus when Levinsky says that he cannot escape his old self, that his past and his present "do not comport well" (530), he is likely being sincere. To Cahan, the first generation immigrant's most challenging task is to balance an inescapable past with the values of an American society rooted in the idea of the future. Rather than have his immigrant character dismiss his Jewish past in favor of claiming an American past that is consistent with the future he envisions, as Antin did, Cahan has him acknowledge the disjuncture between past and present. *The Rise of David Levinsky*, Abraham Cahan's final work of fiction, thus introduced the struggle of past and present that would be reworked repeatedly in Jewish American literature during the rest of the twentieth century.

While the story of Levinsky, a first-generation immigrant, dominates the novel, Cahan is concerned with the second generation's potential fate in America as well. Cahan comments on this through the relationship between Dora Margolis and her daughter Lucy and through the Tevkin family. Lucy bears the burden of her mother's hopes for life in new world and frustrations with her own shortcomings. For Dora, as for many immigrant women "condemned to learn a new language and new ways from her children, while pledging her own happiness to them, the strains of assimilation [. . .]

become tragically intense" (Higham vii). Dora alternately praises and beats Lucy for her school accomplishments. Despite Dora's sacrifices and hopes, Lucy ends up in a loveless marriage to a well-to-do jeweler. She marries him for the lifestyle -- servants and an automobile -- that he can provide and informs her heartbroken mother that her decision is practical. To Lucy, caught up in a dream of materialism, Dora's ideas of marrying for love and happiness just are not American (490-91).

The Tevkin family, with whom Levinsky shares a Passover Feast, represents a shift in values from first to second generation as well. Although Tevkin spent many years as a free thinker and raised his children the same way, he always insisted on celebrating the Passover Feast yearly as a national custom. In the novel he is aging and desires to give more religious significance to the ritual, but his children, all radicals of different sorts, treat the ritual and their father as a joke. The image of Tevkin trying to recapture the spirit of Judaism with his idealistic family is both pitiful and laughable. As he delivers a speech about rituals like the Passover Feast binding the family "to the Jews of the whole world, and not only to those living, but to the past generations as well" (495), even Levinsky, the only one who senses the seriousness with which Tevkin approaches the ritual, is focused more on his plans to propose to Anna than on Tevkin's message. Here is a second generation completely divorced from its heritage and seemingly unconcerned about it.[37]

[37] Interestingly, Jewish immigrant writers after Cahan had anxieties that led them away from both Cahan and Antin, focusing on themes such as rebellion of the young against elders, intermarriage, psychological insecurity, and anti-Semitism.

Stories of the Second Generation

The rapid assimilation of first- and second-generation Jewish immigrants into American culture was greatly aided by America's entry into World War I. Goren estimates that 250,000 Jews served in the armed forces, the majority of them young immigrants (588). Sensitive to anti-Semitism at home, Jewish organizations and the Yiddish press came together to support "citizenship and Americanization programs and civilian war-aid activities" (Goren 588). During World War I and the post-war period, American Jews also grew increasingly concerned with the fate of their brethren in Europe and began to take up responsibilities as a Jewish center in the world untouched by war (587). Unfortunately, their concern fed a nativist view of Jews as inassimilable and more interested in their homeland than in the fate of the United States. By the 1920s, a "frenzied nativism" led to "intensified anti-Jewish agitation," and the anti-Semitism of the previous decade made Jews particularly vulnerable to the xenophobia of the times; during the Red Scare, Jews were "portrayed as architects of the Russian Revolution and as agents of world Communism preparing to seize control of America" (Goren 590). Additionally, continuing debate over immigration restrictions between 1918 and 1924 "provided a public forum for the expression of nativist racist theories" (Goren 590). Unfortunately, public and government opinion mirrored each other during this time. Goren cites an influential State Department report which described Jewish immigrants as "of the usual ghetto type [, . . .] filthy, un-American and often dangerous in their habits [, . . .] abnormally twisted, [their] dullness and stultification resulting from past years of oppression and abuse" (590).

The widespread fear and distrust of immigrants began to subside with the passage of the Immigration Restriction Act of 1924. With this act Jewish immigration fell dramatically, new immigrants "assumed a marginal place in American Jewish life, and rapid acculturation [of the Jews already living in America] shaped society" (Goren 588). The 1920s also saw a notable shift in the Jewish population from working to middle class, as Jews prospered as business owners, white collar workers, and pioneers in the film industry, and their children studied to be physicians, dentists, lawyers, and pharmacists who could return and serve the larger community (Goren 588-89). Most Jews sought a Jewish identity that would be compatible with their American outlook. By the end of the twenties, only one third of Jewish families were affiliated with a synagogue, and only one quarter of Jewish children attended religious schools; "for a considerable number, living in a Jewish neighborhood was the sole manifestation of Jewish identity" (Goren 590).[38]

Much of Anna Yezierska's work from the 1920s explores tensions within the immigrant family that resulted from the clash of an assimilated second generation and a first generation clinging to traditional values. Yezierska, who came to the United States in the 1890s, wrote six books between 1920 and 1932. She also published numerous short stories and reviews and an autobiography, *Red Ribbon on a White Horse*, in 1950. All of her books contain some autobiographical elements, since Yezierska found the Lower East Side ghettos she grew up in to be her most inspiring material. She once commented, "in only writing about the Ghetto I found America" (*Open Cage* 33). Yezierska made it out

[38] Yiddish culture did continue to flourish, if only on a smaller scale. In 1920, almost one-half of American Jews claimed Yiddish as their mother tongue; even by 1940, more than one third did (Goren 589).

of the ghetto when she was offered a Hollywood scriptwriting contract for her short story collection *Hungry Hearts*, but she found it difficult to write outside the Lower East Side. She wrote that she had "gone too far away from life" and "did not know how to get back" (qtd. in Kessler-Harris x). Within a year she returned to New York. *The Bread Givers* (1925), Yezierska's most strongly autobiographical novel, deals with the conflict between an Old World father and his New World daughter who is determined to escape her father's restrictive definitions of Jewish womanhood. While Yezierska depicts the constricting world of the tenements, the struggle to rise from poverty, and the tension between the past and present as well as any of her contemporaries, her forte is depicting the female immigrant experience.

Women like Yezierska's heroines faced the burden of living within an outmoded system of gender roles in America. In Old World Jewish societies, a woman's role was to serve a man, and marriages were typically arranged. The most valued and important men were scholars of the Talmud who were supported financially by their wives and children. As Alice Kessler-Harris explains, this system was designed to create submissive women relegated to the domestic sphere, but because some women were also providers for their families, they became more aggressive and articulate in the public sphere than was perhaps intended, although religious edicts and community sanctions still restricted their role (vii-viii). Younger Jewish women coming to the United States expected wider opportunities for work and education, as well as the chance to meet the ideal man who could be married for love (Kessler-Harris vii). They found the Old World community structure more a matter of tradition than necessity in America where there was no room for scholars who did not earn their own bread. Kessler-Harris notes that not

many women tried to break out of the prescribed roles, though, because that would involve breaking both Jewish community rules and American expectations for the early twentieth-century woman (viii). Those who remained within the set limitations often had no outlet for personal expression, and so their children became a source of intense concern. This produced the figure of the overbearing Jewish American mother (Kessler-Harris viii) that would later become a stock comic character.

For those who did rebel, the road was no easier. Some younger women became attracted to the socialist or trade unions as a source of stimulation; others took America's promises to heart and sought fulfillment through hard work and a loving relationship (Kessler-Harris viii). Anna Yezierska was one of these women. Seeking independence, she left home at age seventeen to work in sweatshops and laundries with the aim of making enough money to get an education. From the time she could write in English, she fictionalized her experiences in prose peppered with Yiddish. Like Abraham Cahan, this enabled her, in the words of Sam Girgus, to "create the impression [. . .] of an almost direct rendering of the immigrant experience and consciousness" (116). Yezierska wanted to show the harsh realities of life in the ghetto, particularly for women. Her goal was "to build a bridge of understanding between the American-born and [her]self [, . . .] to open up [her] life and the lives of [her] people to them" (*Open Cage* 33). This bridge would not be built by catering to an American-born readership, however. As Kessler-Harris notes, "Yezierska's great gift was her ability to capture the ambiguity created by America's consistent temptations. [. . .] She could describe the pull of prosperity and the urge for adequate food as she warily watched for the trap that the marketplace surely laid. She condemned the endless toil and incessant anxiety that bound America's workers, but

she remained eternally optimistic that its promise would be redeemed" (xii). Yezierska shared Antin's optimism about the possibilities for life in America, then, but was careful to show the darker side of assimilation as well.

What is unique about Yezierska's exploration of the trauma of immigrant adaptation is her careful consideration of the challenges female immigrants faced. While Abraham Cahan, Michael Gold, and others depicted women in their works, they appear most often as sex objects, manipulating and overprotective mothers, or frightened and dependent wives rather than fully developed characters with obstacles of their own to overcome. Kessler-Harris rightly contends that even Mary Antin's *The Promised Land* "provides no antidote to this view" (xvi). While Antin's sympathetic view of her older sister, who works and marries young instead of attending school, does speak to the limited roles available to women in Jewish culture, Antin does not address the problem thoroughly and dwells instead on her own good fortune. In contrast, Yezierska's fiction frequently features a marriage plot. Her heroines find themselves torn between worlds in cultural clashes that result from their attraction to men whom they perceive as possessing qualities they do not see in themselves. They pursue suave, sophisticated Anglo-Saxon Protestants who speak in calm tones and keep their emotions under control. The women thus, in Burstein's words, "seek validation by male surrogates who are not handicapped in America by Orthodoxy or immigrant poverty but possess the traditional patriarch's power to recognize immigrant daughters and to help them become active subjects in the new world" (31). Yezierska's protagonists want to downplay their own "coarse" use of language and passions so that they will fit into their men's worlds, never realizing that their passionate natures are the source of the men's attraction to them.

Although Yezierska reworked this basic narrative many times, her 1923 novel *Salome of the Tenements* is its most well-known incarnation. Based on the highly publicized romance between Rose Pastor (a friend of Yezierska's from the ghetto) and Graham Stokes (a millionaire philanthropist), as well as Yezierska's own failed romance with John Dewey, the novel presents a cynical view of intercultural, interclass relationships, of marriage as a way of escaping the slums, and the hypocrisy of upper-class social reformers. While for Yezierska and Pastor reformers like Stokes and Dewey initially represented the best of what they thought America could be, Gay Wilentz argues that the endings of their romances, like the ending of Sonya and Manning's relationship in *Salome of the Tenements*, show the inability of Anglo-Saxon men to bridge the cultural gap and view Jewish women as more than the archetypal other (Wilentz xiii). Sonya is equally blind in the novel, however, fixating on Manning's icy aloofness which she attributes to his race. She does not see his humanity until he breaks free from "custom, tradition, every shred of convention, every vestige of civilization" in a moment of passion (181). Manning's unrestrained desire for Sonya causes her to realize that "at bottom we're all alike, Anglo-Saxons or Jews, gentlemen or plain immigrant [. . . .] When we're hungry, we're hungry," and she experiences a "closeness of spiritual identification" which crosses racial boundaries (183), but at this point she is pledged to Jaky Soloman (Jacques Hollins) and is working to help both of them reconnect with the Jewish community. Sonya's story thus indicates Yezierska's belief that assimilation and marriage to an American savior are not necessary for Jewish women to succeed and that returning to work for their community may be a loftier goal than breaking through cultural boundaries.

Yezierska's critique of early twentieth-century settlement houses in the novel is notable as well. Run by liberals like Jane Addams, John Dewey, and Graham Stokes who purported to be working for the immigrants' own good, the programs associated with these houses were designed to acculturate immigrants into the American way of life and thus to minimize the threats that their differences were perceived to pose to larger American society (Wilentz xiv). Antin would likely have seen this as an admirable goal, but Yezierska uses *Salome of the Tenements* to criticize such programs that claimed to be working toward inclusion but were actually trying to "melt" the immigrants into a pre-set American mold that was antithetical to feeling and personal expression. Outraged at both the deceptions of Manning's "social experts" who outline programs for the neighborhood based more on appearances than on true need and the inhumane restrictions placed on young women who attend classes and functions at the settlement houses, Sonya denounces Manning's social reform project as "a make-believe, a fake. [. . .] a lie, like all settlements are lies" (147). Further, she characterizes "the whole show-off of uplift work" as "fit for jokes in comic papers" (148). Not surprisingly, the novel's judgment of reformers was overlooked by reviewers who were instead fascinated with and shocked by the heroine's passion and strength.[39] Still, in criticizing this assimilating mechanism, Anna Yezierska moves Jewish literature further toward the social critique that would characterize much of the writing of the 1930s.

Jewish literature from the 1930s was profoundly influenced by the social and economic crisis of the depression. Jewish writers hungry for change "identified with one

[39] See Gay Wilentz's introduction to *Salome of the Tenements* for a more detailed discussion of contemporary responses to the novel.

or another liberal movement or with those on the Left -- New Dealers, socialists, Stalinists, and anti-Stalinist communists, and a range of sympathizers and fellow travelers" (Chametzky, "From Margin to Mainstream" 331). For Jews, housing restrictions and discrimination in higher education and the workplace were common. Arthur Hertzburg characterizes Jews in the 1930s as second-class citizens and asserts that their morale during this time was lower "than at any time ever" (qtd. in Burstein 50). One interesting effect of the economic crisis was that "shared hardships" brought the concerns of ethnic groups to the center of American life (Chametzky, "From Margin to Mainstream" 331). At least temporarily, ethnic divisions were overshadowed by common class struggles. Marginal writers also moved to the center of American literary life. The popular proletarian fiction that grew out of this re-centering introduced a paradox for American ethnics: their identities "could be affirmed and celebrated when it was 'politically correct' to show that all groups shared similar class-based fates" (Chametzky, "From Margin to Mainstream" 331). This literature did not dwell on alienation of specific groups from American culture; rather, "a prophetic tendency became evident" as groups came together to push America to live up to its potential (Chametzky, "From Margin to Mainstream" 331). Unfortunately, proletarian fiction's function as art which dramatized the gap between the working class and the bourgeoisie "would underplay, even deny, the relevance of other distinctive group experiences" (Kessler-Harris and Lauter xi).

Most notably, the female experience was all but erased. Alice Kessler-Harris and Paul Lauter explain that although the Left supported gender equality in theory, "in practice, [it] tended to subordinate problems of gender to the overwhelming tasks of

organizing the working class and fighting fascism" (ix). The movement's rhetoric of equality did offer women a forum for debate and organization and produced a female community with shared experiences (Kessler-Harris and Lauter ix). Out of this community emerged Tess Slesinger, Muriel Rukeyser, and others who questioned the gendered limitations of Leftist ideology and the intellectual community that supported it.[40] Jewish women faced the double burden of Leftist prejudices and traditional limits placed on women within their community. According to Burstein, this explains why Slesinger, among other women writers, "courted American readers with stories primarily about Americans, not Jews" during this time and foregrounded social issues rather than specifically Jewish themes in her writing (50).

The works of both Tess Slesinger and Henry Roth, the two major Jewish novelists of 1934, move away from the standard novel of cultural clash toward explorations of the effect of personal and political events on the individual psyche. Their novels feature damaged and lost characters who are trying to understand the world around them not in terms of their place within a binary system -- Jew or Gentile, immigrant or American -- but within a family or circle of friends. Both experiment with language to show their characters' states and to dramatize disconnections and disjunctures in relationships through interior monologues. Slesinger was raised in a third-generation Jewish household in New York. Through her family, she was exposed to an "indifference to Judaism, marked openness about sexuality, a strong concern for literacy, self-expression, and vocation, and an interest in the systematic analysis of personality" (Sharistanian 359).

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[40] Kessler-Harris and Lauter find the conflicts Slesinger presents between "ostensibly progressive politics and real chauvinist behavior" common to the conflict of the 1960s that stimulated the women's liberation movement (xiv).

In addition to these attitudes, tensions between Slesinger's parents influenced the direction of her writing, which explored sexuality and reproduction, relationships, families, work, and social change (Sharistanian 361). Slesinger got her start as a writer by publishing book reviews and short stories in *Menorah Journal* as well as in such magazines as *American Mercury*, *Forum*, *Modern Quarterly*, *The New Yorker*, *Pagany*, *Scribner's*, *Story Magazine*, *This Quarter*, and *Vanity Fair* in the early 1930s (Sharistanian 363). She published her only novel, *The Unpossessed*, in 1934. The novel, which grew out of Slesinger's experiences with the *Menorah Journal* and her marriage to its assistant editor, Herbert Solow, probes the relationship between radical politics and sexual politics in the context of the disorientation of the 1930s.[41] In *The Unpossessed*, Slesinger uses a group of radical intellectuals who endlessly debate starting a magazine to question the purpose of intellectuals in a time of crisis.[42] While the novel on the whole does not explicitly treat the nature of Jewishness in America, it deserves brief mention here because of the commentary on Jewish intellectuals which Slesinger offers through Bruno, the would-be editor of the magazine who ponders the influence of his Jewish heritage on his role as a public intellectual.

Specifically, Bruno ascribes his tendency to overthink situations to the point of paralysis and inaction to his natural Jewish intelligence:

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[41] Alan Wald's "The Menorah Group Moves Left" traces the journal's creation and its changing mission over the course of the twentieth century.

[42] The novel was an unusual text because Slesinger dares to satirize the Left at a time when "writers were pressured not only to join ranks with the proletariat, but to close ranks against those whose writing was ambivalent or hostile toward socialism" (Sharistanian 373). The novel was widely praised for its style and wit, but it drew criticism for failing to sufficiently fulfill political objectives. *The Unpossessed* was criticized in *The Daily Worker* by Joseph Freeman for not placing blame for the characters' problems on class and material conditions and in *New Masses* by Phillip Rahv for not providing "a disciplined orientation for radicalized individuals" (Sharistanian 373). Slesinger was a believer in socialism, but she was enough of an individualist to be frightened by group ethics and she resisted the idea of any group that would dictate her subjects to her (Sharistanian 369).

> a Jew, if he had any brains at all, had twice as much as anyone else; he saw all sides at once and so his hands were tied, his brain stood still, he couldn't leap here and he couldn't leap there. [. . .] A Jew said Magazine and he was content, dancing on the point of a needle for his life thereafter to investigate the concept of Magazine, to explore the function of Magazine, to dream the fulfillment of Magazine conveying the Idea . . . which he knew, from the vantage point of his superior philosophical needle, could never be accomplished in the world. (33)

For him, the life of the mind, spent in contemplation of the Idea, is more appealing than the reality of production because endless thought requires no decisions and no actions. More importantly, this inaction forestalls the possibility of either success or failure. In Bruno's mind, those who not only think but also act become successful, but he is unsure if that success, which requires the reconciliation of two selves, is desirable:

> the Jew is born to think, as he must live, on two antipathetic levels at once; one the ordinary level and the other his own peculiar subterranean Jew-level. Every Jew a dual nature, split personality; if he coordinated the two levels he got to be a banker, or a jeweller, like the elder Leonard; if he couldn't, if he couldn't reconcile them, couldn't bring himself to sacrifice an iota of the integrity necessary to accomplish one concrete fact . . . then he was an idiot, he concluded witheringly. Or a genius -- he wavered. A genius, a dementia praecox, a genius, a demented peacock . . . [;] wearily he maintained his balance, teetering on the point of the eternal needle. (34)

True to form, Bruno wavers between being critical of his way of thinking, and therefore his Jewish heritage, and praising it. He initially concludes that a Jew's inability to reconcile his inherent duality makes him an idiot, but he then conveniently considers the possibility that remaining in the subterranean Jewish world of thought makes him a genius, even if a demented one.

Like Antin, Cahan, and Yezierska, Slesinger works with the idea of an escapable past troubling the Jew in America, but for Bruno, it is not an ethnic past associated with a homeland. Rather, his own past as a radical and as the son of a first-generation immigrant haunt him. Bruno wonders whether Firman, the leader of the young campus radical group the Black Sheep, exists "only to remind him that he must have been just such a conscientious bore himself fifteen years ago" (117). When he hears Firman and the other Black Sheep complaining about the campus paper not being an open forum, he is reminded of the passion with which he and his friends argued twelve years earlier and is alternately inspired, angry, and jealous. They are of the world, as he used to be, instead of just thinking about it like he is now. He reconciles his past and present by investing in the idea of being different and separate from them, somehow more evolved, theorizing that "perhaps poverty, undercutting everything else, removed them a priori from the class of intellectuals" (199-200). He then asserts that the fight should be about more than full bellies because his father, who was "reared in poverty and piety," came to the United States to provide food for his family, "dropped piety along with poverty, in favor of a paunch," and wore the signs of something missing for the rest of his life (200-01). As a second-generation immigrant, Bruno sees the failures of his assimilationist father and believes the job of the intellectual is to keep focused on more than full bellies in order to

teach society that there is more to life than the American dream of acquisition of wealth and status. This rationalization of the role of the intellectual keeps Bruno from having to deal with a problem which he can affect immediately -- hunger -- and allows him to retreat back into the world of abstract needs which he can spend endless hours defining.

Bruno characterizes the intellectual as a new breed that is detached from the previous generation and unable to conceive a future. According to Burstein, "Slesinger calls them 'unpossessed' because they no longer belong to an immigrant community or respond to the gendered imperatives that shape individuals in such communities. [. . .] Slesinger's intellectuals celebrate their detachment from bourgeois ethnic affiliations even as their sterility and pain manifest the deprivations associated with leaving home" (60). Slesinger offers glimpses of that ethnic home through the German grocer, the Italian landlady, the Greek singer, and the German cab driver, all of whom represent a fruitful, connected, community life. For Slesinger, isolation through lack of communication and repetition of self-created fictions prevent people from the connection to community and meaningful relationships that are part of a healthy cycle of life. While the community from which Slesinger's intellectuals are disconnected is not specifically Jewish, her emphases on the necessity of maintaining a relationship to one's ethnicity and on the struggles of second-generation immigrants ideologically opposed to their parents' choices are important benchmarks in the development of the Jewish immigrant narrative.

Although very different from *The Unpossessed* in subject and tone, Henry Roth's *Call It Sleep* explores similar themes and was similarly criticized for its failures as a proletarian novel. Roth joined the Communist Party in 1933, but like Slesinger he felt confined by its literary prescriptions. Although he never intended *Call It Sleep* to be read

as a proletarian novel, as its themes clearly exceeded the subject matter of class struggle, it was frequently read as an example of this subgenre. Critics in the 1930s alternately praised *Call It Sleep* as an outstanding part of the tradition of the proletarian novel or criticized it for failing to be a better one. A reviewer in *New Masses*, for example, remarked, "It is a pity that so many young writers drawn from the proletariat can make no better use of their working-class experience than as material for introspective and febrile novels" (qtd. in Allen 443). Negative reviews were few among those who examined the novel in other contexts. For instance, Roth was praised as a disciple of James Joyce, and *Call It Sleep* was compared to *Ulysses* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Others focused on the psychological depth of its portrait of childhood and the extent to which the novel reflected Roth's own youth on the lower East Side.[43] Roth states he began writing *Call It Sleep* in part to understand his own background: "like so many first generation American Jewish youth, I had already come to dissociate from family, Judaism, the whole thing -- and to embrace the American scene, the American attitudes" (qtd. in Walden 270). While Roth took the raw material for the book from his own experiences and initially conceived of the work as an autobiography, he has commented that he eventually gave in to the fictional possibilities that overtook the text (Wirth-Nesher, "Introduction" 6). Among other changes, Roth eliminated his sister from the family story, made his tale harsher, and split his mother into two different characters (Sollors, "World Somewhere" 161).

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[43] Roth's mother brought him to America in 1907 when he was an infant, and they initially settled in Brownsville (a section of Brooklyn) with his father. The family later moved to the lower East Side and then again to Harlem when Roth was eight years old. There they lived in a predominantly Gentile, Irish and Italian neighborhood.

An important type of critical response has been the investigation of how representative the text is of Jewish culture as a whole. As Meyer Levin notes, "This is not the kind of immigrant-portrait that abounds in Torah-mumbling patriarchs who are golden-hearted and filled with old-country wisdom. Nor is it the accented kind of 'sociological fiction' which points with alarm to the breeding ground of gangsters" (li). Unlike other major novels from the early 1930s, such as Michael Gold's *Jews Without Money*, *Call It Sleep* is not dominated by capitalist exploitation as the source of suffering, nor is the protagonist's major conflict a cultural one. In texts like *The Promised Land*, *Jews Without Money*, and *Salome of the Tenements*, to be Jewish is to not be American, and vice versa; the embracing of one cultural identity implies the rejection of another. In *Call It Sleep*, David Schearl's problems stem not from a divided society but from a divided family. His crisis of identity develops from an alternately nurturing and volatile home life and the effects of that hostile environment on him. This has led to debate in the literary community over whether or not *Call It Sleep* is, indeed, a Jewish novel.[44] While Leslie Fiedler called it the best Jewish novel of all time, Roth himself has acknowledged that "Jewishness isn't very important. They're only Jewish because that's the life I know best, but they might have been almost anything" (qtd. in Girgus 98).[45]

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[44] The story of the disappearance of Henry Roth and *Call It Sleep* from the Jewish literary scene is literary legend. When Roth did not follow his breakthrough novel with a second major text, his name and his work faded from public view until 1956, when *Call It Sleep* was mentioned by both Alfred Kazin and Leslie Fiedler in a feature run by the *American Scholar* called "The Most Neglected Books of the Past 25 Years." It was the only book in the essay to receive more than one mention. This led to its rediscovery and re-release in 1964. Since then it has sold millions of copies and never been out of print.

[45] Interestingly, the same patterns of response that the book originally received are still seen today, and the critic's task has become the bringing together of various elements of the novel. Werner Sollors's reading of the novel, for example, brings together the categories of ethnicity and modernism which he says are often taken to be antithetical.

According to Mark Shoening, family tensions frequently appear in immigrant narratives as "one of the most powerful sources of the immigrant's suffering" (53). They are depicted in earlier novels by Yezierska but presented from the perspective of Old World parents versus New World children. This division does not apply to *Call It Sleep*. Neither David's father nor mother espouses traditional beliefs and practices. The mother is a "problematic Jew" because she fell in love with a Christian as a young girl (Shoening 4), and the father's interest in Judaism is limited to his own funeral. David attends *cheder* only when his father decides he wants someone to be able to say the proper prayers over him when he dies. The novel's prologue clearly establishes the idea that the Schearls are not the typical immigrant family and that *Call It Sleep* will not tell the typical immigrant story. The first two paragraphs describe an arrival scene with which readers would have been familiar. Roth plays upon our familiarity with the setting to introduce variations on the common scene of the wife and child arriving at Ellis Island to be met by the husband who came over several years earlier to work (Wisse 61). The throngs of immigrants, the stench of the steamer ship, the emotional reunions are all depicted, but one family stands apart. The narrator then tells us that "there was something quite untypical about their behavior" and "altogether it was a very curious meeting" (11). The couple endures an awkward silence before fighting, causing the young child to burst into tears. David thus experiences chaos from the moment of his arrival.

The American scene that greets this family is not typical either. In contrast to the usual descriptions of the beauty of the harbor and the Status of Liberty, Liberty's "features [a]re charred with shadow, her depths exhausted," and she carries "the blackened hilt of a broken sword" (14). Around the Schearl family, "the grimy cupolas

and towering square walls of the city loomed up. Above the jagged roof tops, the white smoke, whitened and suffused by the slanting sun, faded into the slots and wedges of the sky" (16). Because the Schearls immigrated because of force rather than by choice, America functions as a trap rather than a haven for them. As the mother comforts her son, she whispers, "this was that vast incredible land, the land of freedom, of immense opportunity, that Golden Land. Again, she tried to smile" (16). Just as her husband was unrecognizable when she first met him at the ship, the promised land is so different from expectations that it is difficult to identify and must be named.

The focus of this opening scene is the young child. With the exception of the Prologue, the novel never wavers from his perspective. We see and hear the immigrant world solely through his eyes and ears. As in *The Rise of David Levinsky*, this singular perspective gives immediacy to the immigrant story, but Roth is less concerned than Cahan was about offering a panoramic view of the East Side. Rather, he delves into the mind of a child who realizes "that this world had been created without thought of him" (17). In Antin's *The Promised Land* the immigrant is both literally and metaphorically a child parented by America. The lessons she learns in assimilation are taught good-naturedly. In *Call It Sleep*, Roth emphasizes the immigrant child's harsh training, his loss, confusion, and fear of a world which offers him no guiding hand. Ruth Wisse notes that childhood is "the archetypal immigration" because "every child hopes to arrive in a friendly new land, a golden land, that will treat him with dignity and warmth" (61). Both child and immigrant are in the constant process of learning new language and adapting to new surroundings, but while the immigrant can choose how to do so or her new home, the child cannot (Wisse 62).

Roth's use of language in the novel recalls that of his literary predecessors. Like Antin, Cahan, and Yezierska, he uses Yiddish and represents immigrant speech as it would have been heard. Like Slesinger's work, his text is a chaotic mixture of voices and flow from his character's stream of consciousness. Roth takes linguistic innovation further than previous Jewish writers, however, with the creation of a multi-lingual text. Characters express themselves in Yiddish, English, Hebrew, and Polish. Roth draws on Cahan's technique; the Yiddish that David and his mother speak to each other is represented in the text by smooth, uninflected English. This is the language in which they are most comfortable. Consequently, Roth makes the reading experience most comfortable for his readers in these passages. Outside of the Schearls' home, communication is much more difficult and represented by more complex dialect. In the words of Sanford Pinsker, a "Yiddishized English [. . .] washes around him [David] on the mean immigrant streets" (11). Werner Sollors concludes that "this procedure suggests an inner world of richness and lyrical expression, a full range of feelings and words that might remain hidden to an English-only reader were it not for the narrator's mediation" ("World Somewhere" 131). The polyglot languages David hears in the street have been compared to the Tower of Babel. David's encounters with Jewish, Irish, and Italian immigrants, all represented by different dialects in the text, make some scenes difficult to comprehend and make David's navigation of the world outside his home almost impossible.[46] By representing the way that others' languages sound to David and his to

[46] Because of the cacophony of voices and the sounds of the city, Stephen Adams has termed *Call It Sleep* the noisiest novel ever written.

them, Roth brings the reader to an understanding of the immigrant's difficulty with cracking the American linguistic code.

Confusion over English words which sound like Yiddish provides, in fact, the few moments of comic relief in the novel as well as offering insight into the book's intended audience. Because Roth offers explanations of the Yiddish words in these moments of confusion and explanations of why these moments are funny, Sollors concludes that the implied readers must be English-speaking ("World Somewhere" 132). Misunderstandings are most often traumatic for David. For example, when he is lost, he cannot get the adults trying to help him to understand the name of the street where he lives. "Barhdee Street" in David's speech is "Boddeh," "Bodder, or "Potter" to them. Their language is similarly incomprehensible to him. David does not understand what "chawklit cake" is when the policemen offer it to him (103). Hebrew and Polish are also incomprehensible to David. He encounters Hebrew at the *cheder* and tries to understand it as a way to access the divine because the Rabbi calls Hebrew "God's tongue" and says that "If you knew it, then you could talk to God" (213).

If Yiddish is the language of home and family support, and Hebrew is the language of God, American English and Polish are closely related to sin and sexuality in David's mind. English is the vulgar language of the streets. It is spoken by the boys who curse and joke in David's *cheder*. Polish, in turn, is associated with David's mother's youthful affair with a Gentile in her homeland. David's lack of understanding of Polish prevents him from fully understanding his mother's past and therefore his own. Having come to America as a young child, he has only his mother's memories of their original home. Consequently, his understanding of himself is veiled. Further, David's mother and

her sister speak in Polish when they want to conceal information about the past from him. He desperately wants to know his mother's "secret," which he believes will reveal why his father hates him, but he has to piece together the story from the scattered Yiddish phrases that pepper their conversation.[47] David's quest to understand his past dominates the novel. From the moment of his arrival, his identity is called into question when his father demands David's birth certificate and stresses that his mother should have lied about the child's age, like she did to the doctor. Over the course of the novel, David comes to identify with the rumor of his mother's affair with a Gentile church organist.

Roth brings together the concepts of speech and sin through the Biblical story of Isaiah, who says to God, "my lips are unclean and I live in a land unclean -- for at that time Jews were sinful" and purifies his lips with a burning coal. Hearing the story, David wonders what Isaiah said that made his mouth so dirty. Ultimately, he comes to see himself as unclean since he thinks he is the product of his mother's sin and because of his attraction to the Gentile world, which is "both seductive and treacherous" (Wirth-Nesher, "Introduction" 7). Like Isaiah, David seeks cleansing from God. He thrusts his father's milk ladle in the railroad tracks to produce sparks and burn his lips so that he can be clean again. Although David's near electrocution causes the chaos of the street to still momentarily, the transformative power of David's act is questionable. The onlookers soon return to their busy lives. Some critics have read David's quest for cleansing at the track as a creative act, but Roth himself has commented that "the short-circuiting at the end seems to me an end of that kind of creativity. David's problem, as I saw it, would be

[47] See Wirth-Nesher, Sollors, and Buelens for more detailed discussions of Roth's use of language in the text.

to reconcile himself to a more ordinary form of existence from now on" (qtd. in Buelens 146). As Wisse asserts, in this moment, David has stripped away the final layers of false hope and false mythology (72). Because David emerges from this scene with an altered consciousness, Sam Girgus reads it as a rearticulation of "the rhetoric of the myth of America" (96). However, the closing lines of the novel undercut the idea of a complete transformation by indicating David's continued desire to live in a self-created world. As he drifts toward what "he might as well call sleep," he has the imaginative power to return to the moment of his electrocution, feeling "not pain, not terror, but strangest triumph, strangest acquiescence" (441). Assimilation in Roth's novel is, then, a psychological rather than a physical process. The immigrant must negotiate personal traumas as well as cultural differences. This new figuration of the immigrant experience resounds in the literature of the Holocaust to follow.

Holocaust Narratives

Refugees from Nazi Germany began pouring into the United States in the mid-1930s. According to Goren, 150,000 middle-aged, middle-class Jewish immigrants arrived between 1935 and 1941. Despite several proposed bills, efforts to ease the rigid immigration laws during this time and allow for the entry of greater numbers of refugees failed, and visa procedures became even more complicated until after the war, when hundreds of thousands of refugees were allowed to enter the country under the Displaced Persons Act.[48] While a number of different Jewish American groups developed plans to aid European Jews, internal divisions prevented the Jewish American community from

[48] Between 1945 and 1950 alone, the United States admitted almost 350,000 displaced persons (Muller 29).

effectively lobbying the United States government to take a more active role in rescuing European Jews and settling refugees in America (591-92). More than 500,000 Jews did aid the war effort by serving in the armed forces, however, and, like other Americans, Jews raised victory gardens, participated in newspaper and aluminum drives, and volunteered for neighborhood watch programs.

Jews' socioeconomic status generally rose after World War II, as they entered the middle-class and professional ranks, moved into the suburbs, and took advantage of opportunities in higher education (Chametzky, "From Margin to Mainstream" 333-34). During this time the sons and daughters of blue-collar workers were able to enter the white-collar world and the urban Jewish population dispersed, as many Jews joined the flight of the white middle class from the city.[49] Those Jewish Americans who were moving toward greater degrees of assimilation and acceptance had to reconsider their relationship with their heritage when President Truman recognized the new State of Israel in May 1948. The persecution and slaughter of European Jews during the Holocaust had shown many the necessity of a Jewish homeland; the formal creation of that homeland, however, led them to question their devotion to Zionism. In the end few Jews left to settle in Israel because, as John Felsteiner notes, even though they supported the new country, they "felt that they deserved to be American like every other American" (577). Having struggled to become part of American society, they decided to stay in the United States and work even harder to ensure rights and opportunities for their children (Felsteiner 577).

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[49] The clusters of Jews that remained in older, city neighborhoods, especially in New York, were evidence of "the persistence of a Jewish working class, strong communal institutions, usually staunchly Orthodox, a concentration of postwar immigrants, and the elderly poor" (Goren 592).

Interestingly, American Jews were not traumatized by the Holocaust at first. As Felsteiner comments, "a protective numbing, combined with belated reports and the slow straggle of survivors, let American Jews resume life as usual -- or better than usual. Nativism, xenophobia, virulent 1930s anti-Semitism, and the tagging of Roosevelt's New Deal as a 'Jew Deal' mainly subsided, although the Senate did pass a 1948 law discriminating against Jewish immigration" (575). Feeling disconnected from the events in Europe -- in part because of geographic distance and in part because the magnitude of the Holocaust was so difficult to comprehend -- and desiring to join in the national sense of post-war euphoria and prosperity, many Jewish Americans chose not to address Jewish identity openly in the decade following the end of the war. According to Chametzky, participating in "that sense of triumph required something akin to amnesia by Jewish American writers of English in putting aside or repressing the reality of the Holocaust and the impossible quest to fathom its deeper meanings" ("From Margin to Mainstream" 334). In his 1999 study *Imagining the Holocaust*, Daniel R. Schwarz notes that the Holocaust was almost never mentioned in his family's home or at his school when he was growing up, a silence typical in assimilated Jewish households in the immediate post-war period. Schwarz wonders if this silence could be attributed to American Jews' feeling of shame about not doing something to prevent the Holocaust, their fear of provoking anti-Semitism, or the older generations' concerns that children could not understand and cope with the horrors of genocide (15). All three explanations are likely. Regardless of the exact reason, older Jews' silence offered the younger generation more questions than answers about Jewish identity in America and their relationship to the Holocaust.

The Holocaust was not explored in Jewish American literature with any depth until the late 1950s, when Jews began to speak about the cultural disintegration brought on by the tragedy. Philip Roth, Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud, Cynthia Ozick, and Elie Wiesel, among others, sought at that time to incorporate the horrors of the Holocaust into the Jewish American narrative. Following the line of Tess Slesinger and Henry Roth, they explore a psychological alienation in America. Jews in the postwar literary imagination are haunted by experiences that render them unable to embrace the future-oriented American narrative. They cannot reconcile their shattered pasts with America's supposed power to transform lives because, as Muller explains, "the grand narrative of America simply collapses with the destruction of absolutes caused by the Nazi terror" (27). The horrors haunting the survivors arriving as displaced persons create a world of terror which is for them directly opposed to the post-war positivism of most Americans. Although they are removed from physical harm, they cannot leave behind the fear that America may become another Auschwitz. There is a collapse of past and present, and geographical boundaries become meaningless. Characters in this literature also experience a profound loss of faith as they struggle to comprehend a world in which God and Hitler can co-exist.

The emergence of Holocaust narratives raised a new set of considerations for Jewish American writers. Schwarz poses a series of questions that he sees as integral to approaching the Holocaust through literary texts, including the following: Is the concept of a "fictive construct" disrespectful to the Holocaust, the events of which are all too true? How can those of us who are not survivors write respectfully about the Holocaust since we cannot make amends through our writing for not being victims? Can we define

an ethics of Holocaust writing that accounts for rendering the horrors of the original events -- namely what happened to victims -- while still meeting the responsibility of *persuading* a contemporary audience? (3-4). As Schwarz's questions indicate, issues of authority (who can speak of the Holocaust experience), "appropriate" subject matter (what stories can be told while still remaining respectful to the experience), and audience (for whom is this literature written), permeate Jewish American literature about the Holocaust as a whole.[50] In the late 1950s and early- to mid-1960s, texts by Philip Roth, Bernard Malamud, and Isaac Bashevis Singer spoke to these questions, both in terms of the subjects they addressed and the reading public's responses to them.

When Philip Roth began publishing short stories in 1959, he changed the ways in which Jewish Americans would be written about in literature. Roth was born in Newark, New Jersey, in 1933, the grandson of an Orthodox Jewish immigrant who spoke Yiddish. As a third-generation Jewish American, Roth's perspective differed greatly from those of other writers who were his contemporaries. Rather than rehash the urban immigrant story he saw in Bernard Malamud's "fables about Roth's Yiddish-speaking elders," he wanted to address "a younger generation steeped in America, in its freedom and talk, its energies and superabundance" (Remnick 80). As Roth commented in *Reading Myself and Others:*

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[50] In "Fact, Fiction, Fascism: Testimony and Mimesis," Barbara Foley offers four categories of Holocaust literature -- personal recollections, realist novels, non-realist novels, and pseudo-factual accounts -- and suggests that pseudo-factual accounts are perhaps the most appropriate means for addressing the Holocaust because they introduce readers to the historical moment without the moralizing that can appear in other forms and without taking away from the actual experience. A surprising number of scholars studying Holocaust narratives suggest that no meaning can be derived from them. Lawrence Langer, for example, argues that the meaninglessness of the camps cannot produce a literature that celebrates the human spirit and offers insight into deeper truths. For Alvin Rosenfeld, there are limitations on how the Holocaust can be expressed and what it can signify. In *A Double Dying: Reflections on Holocaust Literature*, he writes, "There are no metaphors for Auschwitz, just as Auschwitz is not a metaphor for anything else" (19).

> With "Defender of the Faith" and "Eli, the Fanatic" [. . .] I began to move out of the old neighborhood, relying less upon the ethos and atmosphere of a place than upon a state of mind, a sense of self, which for lack of a better word is frequently called "Jewishness." [. . . ;] these two stories turned out to be something of a departure from those stories of Jewish life upon which many readers, myself included, had been raised, particularly in the immediate postwar years. (173)

Roth examined Jewishness through stories in which Jews were persecuted by other Jews, not by Gentiles (214). He quickly found that the Jewish readership was not ready for this kind of self-examination. Roth explains:

> I did not realize at the time that I had turned the familiar subject of anti-Semitism somewhat on its head, and that, in writing of the harassment of a Jew by a Jew rather than Jew by Gentile, I was pressing readers to alter a system of responses to "Jewish" fiction to which they had perhaps become more than a little accustomed. Had I been fully alert to the demand being made and the expectations being bucked, I might not have been so bewildered by the charges of "anti-Semitism" and "self-hatred" that were brought against me by any number of Jewish readers following the publication in *The New Yorker*, in 1959, of "Defender of the Faith." Only five thousand days after Buchenwald and Auschwitz it was asking a great deal of people still frozen in horror by the Nazi slaughter of European Jewry to consider, with ironic detachment, or comic amusement, the

> internal politics of Jewish life. In some instances, understandably, it was asking the impossible. (174)

Roth's satires of middle-class Jewish suburbanites hit too close to home for many and enraged many assimilated Jews who had recently made inroads into the suburbs. He faced charges of racial self-hatred and confirmation of anti-Semitic stereotypes from assimilated Jews who felt their respectability threatened, much like Abraham Cahan did over *The Rise of David Levinsky*. The fact that Roth's work reached the mainstream reading public through magazines like *The New Yorker* only added to the controversy. When "Defender of the Faith" appeared in March 1959 in the magazine, Roth was attacked by readers, rabbis, and the Anti-Defamation League. As David Remnick explains, "his sin was simple: he'd had the audacity to write about a Jewish kid as being flawed, as being aggressive and conniving, as being interested in money -- and he had done it in a national magazine. He had violated the tribal code on Jewish self-exposure: Not in front of the goyim!" (81). Interestingly, Roth's response to the controversy was engagement rather than hostility; he was excited by receiving such a large public reaction to his work and fascinated by his critics (Remnick 81).[51]

Roth's short story "Eli, the Fanatic" is the closing piece in his 1959 collection *Goodbye, Columbus*. According to Murray Baumgarten and Barbara Gottfried, the story was the first to tackle Western Jews' "repressed shame and guilt" about the Holocaust (54). The Jews Roth depicts are caricatures of middle-class Jews assimilated into the post-war consumer society. They reside in Woodenton, a sanitized 1950s neighborhood

[51] Roth's work has continued to court controversy, with *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969) drawing the harshest reviews of his career. As Remnick explains, within the genre of ethnic fiction, "which too often asks to be loved purely for its affiliations, its purity and virtue[,] this was a voice in *struggle* with its affiliations. It did not ask to be loved, and it often wasn't. Certainly not by the ethnic leadership" (84).

in which their lawns and their lives conform to community standards. In their desire to blend into suburbia, they have suppressed any outward signs of Jewish identity. When a yeshiva is established on a hill overlooking Woodenton for eighteen boys and their teachers, victims of the war, the residents of the town ask Eli Peck, local attorney, to get rid of the school.[52] The main source of contention is an older man associated with the school who dresses in an old black suit and hat. To the assimilated Jews, these orthodox Jews, particularly the man whose dress differs so greatly from their own, represent everything in the urban ghettos of their parents that they thought they had escaped. Artie Shaw comments, "If I want to live in Brownsville, Eli, I'll live in Brownsville," and Harry Shaw says, "Eli, when I left the city, Eli, I didn't plan the city should come to me" (184). They envision the yeshiva boys running loose in town and bothering their daughters, but their primary concern is maintaining the delicate balance which they have achieved between Jew and Gentile in Woodenton. This balance has been achieved through both Jews and Gentiles sacrificing their "extreme practices," and it is implied that if these sacrifices had been made in pre-war Europe, Jews would not have suffered as they did. There is no evidence in the story that the Gentiles have taken any notice of the yeshiva, however. Roth is concerned solely with the Jewish population's reaction and the conflict between Old and New World Jews.[53]

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[52] Muller reads the placement of the yeshiva in relation to the town as a "sly inversion of the Puritan concept of America as a 'city on a hill'" (36).

[53] Although Roth makes no specific reference to Israel in the story, it is important to note that "Eli, the Fanatic" is set in May 1948, when the State of Israel was officially declared. Thus while the story turns upon the relationship between American Jews and European Jews who suffered during the Holocaust, it also speaks to the difficult questions that the establishment of a Jewish homeland posed for many Jewish Americans.

In a reflection upon the long tradition of Jewish writers who mediated cultures within their texts, Roth has Eli attempt to negotiate with the yeshiva community through a series of letters. He offers reason after reason to justify Woodenton's position. The more uncomfortable he becomes with his message, the more he writes, and his lengthy tracts are unsuccessful at covering up the situation and his real response to it with words. In contrast, Tzuref, the headmaster of the yeshiva, uses relatively sparse wording in his replies. Responding to Eli's lengthy letter proposing compromise (if the gentleman wears modern clothes the yeshiva can stay), he writes:

> Mr. Peck:
>
> The suit the gentleman wears is all he's got.
>
> Sincerely,
> Leo Tzuref, Headmaster

Tzuref's few words represent the stark reality of the situation; rather than reply with a lengthy rejoinder, he lets the man's condition stand as evidence. Because the man has lost everything but the clothes on his back, Tzuref will not ask him to give up them and what they represent. Unlike previous immigrants, the orthodox Jews in Roth's narrative are unconcerned with their clothes and language as markers of difference and retain them as signs of identity.

When Tzuref does speak at length with Eli, he wants to make sure that the experience of displaced persons is translated correctly. When he explains that the man has *nothing*, he asks Eli if there is such a word in English. He does the same with *suffering*. The implication is that English has separated Jews from their heritage to the extent that they cannot understand the suffering and loss which is the painful core of the

Jewish experience. Tzuref's concern with language obscuring cultural meaning is an echo of earlier Jewish writers' need to communicate effectively with outsiders. That the exchange occurs between two Jews foregrounds Roth's point about the distance between modern Jews and their ethnicity.

Tzuref's name recalls the Yiddish word for trouble, *tsuris*, and the Hebrew word for participation, *(le)tsaref* (Baumgarten and Gottfried 55). Accordingly, he both troubles Eli and motivates his re-identification through participation in Jewish culture. He shakes up the neat categories into which Eli places people and causes him to question the easy answers that he finds so tempting. Tzuref first complicates Eli's sense of self by breaking down the divisions that are so important to the Woodenton Jews. Within the community, there are definite "us" and "them" divisions. But, Tzuref questions this, saying "You are us, we are you!" and baiting Eli into denying that his fellow townspeople define his identity by saying "they are you" (192-93). Eli argues against this -- "I am me. They are them. You are you" -- but these boundaries do not hold up in the story (193). Eli, who represents the law in asking Tzuref to move the yeshiva because of zoning codes, is also troubled by Tzuref's complication of the law's boundaries: "The law is the law [. . .] And then of course [. . .] the law is not the law. When is the law that is the law not the law? [. . .] And vice versa" (181). He offers his own definition: "What you call law, I call shame. The heart, Mr. Peck, the heart is the law! God! (192). Tzuref's definition forces Eli to consider the uncomfortable discrepancies between man's law, which allows him to remain detached from the refugees, and God's law, which compels him to become involved. For Roth, Eli's "central problem is, really, 'How far do you penetrate into the suffering and the error and the mistakes, say, in other lives?'" (Mangione 6). Eli's

unwillingness to become too involved is seen when he seeks to solve the problem first with logic (spelling out why the yeshiva should move) and then with money, offering to purchase a new suit for the man. Neither option is acceptable to Tzuref.

Out of frustration and a growing sense of compassion, Eli donates his own green suit to the man, whom he henceforth refers to as "greenie." This nickname is derived from the man's wearing of the green suit, but also echoes the concept of the "greenhorn" in America. Eli finally begins to understand Tzuref's point about the interchangeability of identities when he puts on the man's black suit, which is left on his doorstep, and comes face to face with the man wearing his own green suit: "The recognition took some time. He looked at what Eli wore. Up close, Eli looked at what he wore. And then Eli had the strange notion that he was two people. Or that he was one person wearing two suits" (209). For Eli, the sense of doubleness that ensues from the exchange of suits with the old man is essential to his reconfiguration of identity. Eli sees himself as Old and New World Jew simultaneously. He experiences a rebirth, but it is not as an assimilated American; rather, he is reborn as a religious fanatic, dressed in the garb of the Old World. In feeling the weight of the blackness of the suit and hat, Eli feels the weight of the Holocaust and his people's suffering. During their exchange, "greenie" never speaks. He represents a suffering so horrible that it cannot be verbalized. Hana Wirth-Nesher argues that his "inarticulate groan, which Eli tries to simulate, signifies Jewish suffering through the ages, culminating in the Holocaust survivor as the quintessential Jew" ("Resisting Allegory" 107). The inability of language to express such suffering is further emphasized by the image of the two white tears that Eli and "greenie" share.

A revelation leads Eli to walk through the streets of Woodenton wearing the man's black suit and hat. His appearance is so shocking that it disrupts cars, traffic lights, and pedestrians (211). He realizes he has the option of taking off the suit before he goes to see his wife and newborn son at the hospital, but he chooses not to. His neighbors attribute his appearance to madness or a nervous breakdown, but "his exchange of clothing with his double is the sign of his crossing over to the side of collective memory and responsibility" (Wirth-Nesher, "Resisting Allegory" 106). Further, he determines that the next generation must be initiated into this collective identity and ponders someday cutting the suit down to his son's size. At the hospital, he is taken by doctors and sedated, but "Eli is only partially sedated at the end of the story: the essential core of his being acknowledges the Holocaust and recognizes orthodox Judaism, so much at odds with the immigrant dream of assimilation and the suburban dream of conformity" (Muller 38). His transformation is so complete that "the drug calmed his soul, but did not touch it down where the blackness had reached" (216). Although he is temporarily sedated, Eli's encounter with the yeshiva has wakened him from the drugged effect of assimilation which keeps his fellow suburban Jews pleasantly unconcerned with the fate of others outside themselves.[54]

Critics of the story faulted Roth for his presentation of Jewish characters. For Irving Howe, for example, "it is difficult, if one bears in mind Roth's entire work, to take at face value this solemn espousal of yeshiva Orthodoxy as the positive force in the story; [he] cannot believe that the yeshiva and all it represents has been brought into play for

[54] See Hana Wirth-Nesher's "Resisting Allegory, or Reading 'Eli, the Fanatic' in Tel Aviv" for a fascinating counterpoint to this reading in which she explores her Israeli students' discomfort with Roth's merging of the powerless Holocaust survivor with the Haredi figure, a troubling symbol of power and resistance in their culture.

any reason other than as a stick with which to beat Woodenton" (234). Further, Howe criticizes Roth for "'not behaving in good faith' toward the objects of his satire" (234). For him, the Jews of Woodenton lack believability and were created as straw men who can be knocked down easily rather than as fully developed characters. Sol Liptzin, in turn, takes the gentleman's exchanging of his suit to appease Woodenton as evidence of Roth's "ignorance of the inner motivation and behavior of Jews" (qtd. in Halio 35). But Roth's exaggerations are part of the comic effect which overlays his point about American Jews' loss of values, tradition, and identification with the larger Jewish community. Like Slesinger, he aimed to correct through ridicule, but he failed to take into account a Jewish audience not yet ready to laugh at itself.

Bernard Malamud's "The German Refugee," the final story in *Idiots First* (1963), presents an American Jew similarly disconnected from the horrors of the Holocaust who becomes the teacher of a Jew who escaped just prior to the war. Eileen Watts rightly contends that Malamud's aim was not to represent Jews' experience of the Holocaust "but rather to gather its legacy into his work" (140). Malamud's concern was with Jews' survival strategies in America.[55] More than his other short fiction, this story is grounded in specific historical events and "is unmatched as a study of culture shock" (Solotaroff 82-83). Images of heat and suffocation infuse the narrative, underscoring the extent to which Oskar Gassner, the German refugee, feels trapped in America. The story takes place in 1939 and follows the relationship between Martin Goldberg, a twenty-year-old

[55] This is a theme that runs throughout the body of Malamud's work. Having been born in America in 1914 to immigrants fighting to survive economically and emotionally in a hostile Gentile neighborhood, Malamud was well-versed with the harshness and loneliness of life for new immigrants and the sacrifices they had to make.

college student who teaches English lessons to recently arrived refugees, and Oskar, a refugee who left his Gentile wife to escape Germany just prior to the war.

Oskar and Martin communicate through a mix of English, German, and Yiddish, represented in Martin's first-person narrative.[56] Malamud represents their speech almost completely in standard English, with Oskar's words occasionally spelled as they would have sounded. As Martin helps Oskar prepare for a lecture to be given in English which will mark the beginning of a career for him in America, Oskar struggles with guilt over having escaped the Holocaust and unresolved feelings for the wife he left behind. As in other immigrant narratives, language functions as a way to master culture and define experience, but in Malamud's Holocaust narrative, language fails. When Martin first meets the refugee, Oskar "would attempt to say something and then stop, as though it could not possibly be said" (196). Oskar's "tongue hangs useless" (200). As Martin explains, "To many of these people, articulate as they were, the great loss was the loss of language -- that they could not say what was in them to say. You have some subtle thought and it comes out like a piece of broken bottle" (200). For the immigrant who cannot speak English, identity is impossible to express because, lacking the proper words, the immigrant cannot translate himself to others.

Because Oskar's English lessons progress slowly, they decide that he should compose the lecture in German and then it can be translated. This proves impossible, though, as Oskar finds that he "could no longer write in that filthy tongue. He cursed the dirty language. He hated the damned country and the damned people" (202). The

[56] Sidney Richman comments that Malamud's use of first-person narration in "The German Refugee" and "Black is My Favorite Color" is a striking departure from his typical use of an omniscient narrator because it "divest[s] the stories of the most persuasive though most elusive element in his Jewish tales -- the sense of his own mitigating compassion" (135).

German language is representative of his pain and suffering, and expressing himself at all in that language, even on a detached academic subject, is overwhelmingly difficult. When Martin is finally able to get Oskar to speak about the root of his problems with composing the lecture, he confesses that "it is a paralysis of the will" (206). He has "lozt faith. I do not—not longer possezz my former value of myself. In my life there has been too much illusion" (106). The reality of the growing terror in Europe is inescapable, even in America. Oskar cannot construct another illusion, through his lecture, when faced with the real atrocities of the war.

As Oskar sinks deeper into despair, Martin finds himself doing the same. He writes notes on what he sees as Walt Whitman's influence on the German poets Oskar is addressing. This brings Oskar out of his depression and moves him to complete his lecture. He disagrees with Martin that these poets inherited Whitman's love of death and argues instead that they use Whitman's feeling for humanity, which, sadly, "does not grow long on German earth [. . .] and is soon destroyed" (209). Even though Oskar incorporates several lines from Whitman into his lecture, it is clear that Whitman's American narrative provides no respite from the European crisis; "Oskar [. . .] recognizes the unreconcileable disparity between Whitman's transcendental humanity -- the *Brudermensch* that intrigues German poets -- and the incompatible 'German earth'" (Muller 33). Similarly, he recognizes his failure to show humanity toward his wife as a mirror of the German failure to show humanity.

The lecture is a success because Oskar "read it as though he believed it. Warsaw had fallen but the verses were somehow protective. [Martin] sat back conscious of two things: how easy it is to hide the deepest wounds; and the pride [he] felt in the job [he]

had done" (211). The degree of the masquerade enacted by Oskar's speech is revealed several days later when Martin finds him dead in his apartment. A week later he reads a letter found in the apartment from Oskar's anti-Semitic mother-in-law in Germany. Her tight handwriting, which he spends hours deciphering, conveys the unspeakable: "She writes [. . .] that her daughter, after Oskar abandons her, against her own mother's fervent pleas and anguish, is converted to Judaism by a vengeful rabbi" (212). Soon thereafter, Oskar's wife was shot by Nazis and tossed into a mass grave. In deciphering her letter, Martin becomes a translator of the Holocaust experiences and realizes the shallowness of his earlier position on the war. He had previously seen Hitler's rise as an obstacle to his desires to embark on his life and the war as "a goddamn cheat" (195). Through Oskar's suicide, Martin realizes "that he can never fully grasp what it means to be displaced" (Abramsom 136).

As the survivor, Martin must work through the experience of another's pain and convey it. For this reason, Malamud's choice of first person is particularly appropriate. That the story Martin tells is Oskar's and not his is revealed by the fact that Martin does not speak his own name until the story's close when he is confronted by the policemen standing over Oskar's body.[57] Lawrence Lasher contends that at this point, his statement -- "I am Martin Goldberg" (212) -- is suggestive of "the mature Martin Goldberg, the narrator who will impose a larger meaning on the story as the events are penetrated by the omniscient eye of the artist" (79). Bernard Malamud acknowledged in an interview with Joel Salzberg that "someone like Elie Wiesel who had first-hand knowledge of the experience is in a better position to write about it than I. He has become a voice for those

[57] This is similar to Mary Antin's strategy of delayed personal revelation in *The Promised Land*.

people who could not communicate their personal experiences and emotions" (qtd. in Lasher 129). Thus, in "The German Refugee," Malamud does not focus so much on conveying Oskar's pain as on Martin's understanding and translation of it.

Although he was not a Holocaust survivor himself, Isaac Bashevis Singer considers the experience more directly in *Enemies, A Love Story*, the first of his novels to be set after the Holocaust. Singer's early years in Poland instilled in him a personal understanding of the refugee experience. He was born into an Orthodox family in 1904 near Warsaw, and the family fled to Biłgoraj in 1917 to escape the German occupation. Escalating anti-Semitism in Poland led Singer to come to America in 1935, where he found work with the New York *Forward*. *Enemies* was serialized in *The Forward* in 1966 and then published as a novel in 1972. It follows the fates of a group of Holocaust survivors in America. Lawrence Friedman places the novel "into that important subgenre of Jewish literature dedicated to remembrance. Even more critical than the task of memorializing the world of prewar Jewry is the sacred duty of bearing witness to its annihilation" (151). As it was for Singer's predecessors who shaped history to suit their aims, Singer's remembrance does not depend upon strict documentation.[58] Like Antin he must speak for his people's experience, but he is not compelled to make his story factually representative. In the author's note to *Enemies, A Love Story*, Singer explains that his novel

> is by no means the story of the typical refugee, his life, and struggle. Like most of my fictional works, this book presents an exceptional case with

[58] Singer published the novel in both Yiddish and English. See Dorothy Bilik's "Singer's Diasporan Novel: *Enemies, A Love Story*" for a reading of the textual differences which resulted from translation. In addition to exploring these differences, Bilik observes that Singer's English text includes many untranslated Yiddish words and unexplained references to Jewish culture. This leaves the reader "like an outsider" (98).

> unique heroes and a unique combination of events. The characters are not only Nazi victims but victims of their own personalities and fates.[59] If they fit into the general picture, it is because the exception is rooted in the rule. As a matter of fact, in literature the exception *is* the rule. (5)

But, if his characters are not typical immigrants, they are typical of Singer's creations -- caught up in a "fantastic and grotesque" world (Muller 43) in which bizarre plot twists are described in such an understated way that they seem the norm.

Like earlier immigrants, Singer's survivors are lost in the New World because the past that they bring with them is at odds with the American present. They do not resolve this tension through assimilation, however. Herman Broder, the novel's protagonist, reinvents himself many times in the text through different scripts. He creates a story so that the Rabbi for whom he works will not know where he lives, tells his wife Yadwiga that he is a traveling bookseller so that he can be with his mistress Masha, and lies to all three women to whom he is married. Muller aptly describes Herman as "an American Don Juan trapped in his own sexual hell" (43).[60] Herman's exploits with women are a way for him to avoid life, but relationships become another exile for him. Masha tells him, "you're a stranger" (275), and he is not able to find peace with any of the women, so he moves back and forth between them. He resists having children with any of them as well because he fears bringing children into a world in which they "could be dragged away from their mother and shot" (156). He does not want to commit to a future.

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[59] This is reminiscent of David Levinsky. Herman "had been a victim long before Hitler's day" and "a fatalistic hedonist who lived in a presuicidal gloom" (114, 33).

[60] Like David Levinsky, Herman's reprehensible actions and choices are rarely justified, and Singer's emphasis on the ways in which Herman is a victim downplays the extent to which he is a victimizer.

Although his scams are temporarily successful, allowing him to carry on these relationships for longer than one might think is possible, his fictions ultimately collapse. As Marilyn Chandler argues, Herman "loses authorial control" (105). Beyond this, he is never able to create a narrative which enables his successful escape from the past and integration into the present and future of America. There is no true American metamorphosis because he cannot escape either the nightmare of the Holocaust or his own character.

Rabbi Lampert, who makes his way in America as a speaker and writer with texts that Herman ghostwrites, theorizes that "either you're in the other world or you're in this world" (42). Herman is in both simultaneously and his cultural displacement is at the heart of his inability to be psychologically stable in America. As he says, "Anyone who has gone through all that I have is no longer part of this world" (28). The Old World versus New World clash of immigrant narratives plays itself out through characters who conflate the two. Herman's "essential vision of the world as a universal concentration camp" keeps him from finding his place in American life (Muller 44), and his American experience is "a virtual holocaust of the senses" (Muller 43). For Herman, the Holocaust continues in the United States. He cannot walk down a street without imagining where he might hide from Nazis. Even in the peace and beauty of rural New England, Herman and Masha cannot envision a place free of the terrors of their experience. When Herman hears a bird in the morning, he thinks, "somewhere on this lovely summer morning, fowl were being slaughtered. Treblinka was everywhere" (112). Herman and Masha wonder, "Where are the Nazis? What kind of world is this without Nazis? A backward country, this America" (110). Their characterization of America as "backward" speaks to the

horrifying extent to which, for them, the presence of Nazis in their world has become not only normal but also "right."

Herman, in fact, continually lives in the Holocaust. For instance, he visualizes his experience of hiding out in a hayloft for three years through the bathroom in his apartment, picturing the door sealed shut and Yadwiga, who hid him in Poland, once again providing him food. Through his relationships with Yadwiga, Masha, and Tamara, Herman creates the same conditions of hiding and fear of discovery that he endured during the war. His refusal to terminate relationships with any of them places him in the position of constant fear of discovery. He hesitates to be seen in public places or to converse with people for fear of being caught. This is the narrative of terror that Herman knows well, and, intentionally or not, he shapes his life so that he can keep reliving it.

He does so since he finds no guarantees of safety in an America wherein the present and the past co-exist in a cyclical pattern. As he concludes, "Cain continues to murder Abel. Nebuchadnezzar is still slaughtering the sons of Zedekiah and putting out Zedekiah's eyes. The pogrom in Kesheniev never ceases. Jews are forever being burned in Auschwitz" (33). History is always in the present moment, and those who suffer and die are condemned to do so repeatedly forever. This view is drawn from Singer's own experiences. When at age nineteen Singer saw Polish hooligans abusing Jews, he realized that in this anti-Semitism, he had seen "the essence of human history" (Friedman 150). The repetition of history protracts the narrative of Jewish suffering. In America, Herman's repetition of cycles fails to show him the path to escape. Rather, the novel ends with him escaping only to hide out again.

Like Herman, the women in the novel recreate their past conditions. Before the war Yadwiga was a servant to Herman's family. As his wife, she is no different. Shifrah Puah, Tamara, and Masha "survive as the sum of their Holocaust experiences" as well (Friedman 150). Shifrah Puah believes that God took all the pious Jews and that she survives only because of her sins. Her desire for salvation leads her to identify with the victims when she is in America, dressing in black and "liv[ing] in spirit with those who had been gassed and tortured" by reading books about the death camps (43). Tamara, who was shot but not killed by the Nazis who murdered her children, sees herself as a corpse. She has been made over by American consumer culture, but the image recalls an undertaker's art rather than the rebirth that Herman sees in her resurrection: "They put nylon stockings on me, dyed my hair, and polished my fingernails, God help me, but Gentiles have always prettied up their corpses, and Jews nowadays are Gentiles" (77). Masha's "compulsive search for instant gratification" signals her desire to live in the present rather than the past (Friedman 167). Her coping mechanism is ineffective, however, as she morbidly recalls the concentration camps and relocation centers even as she makes love.

As quickly becomes evident, Singer's Holocaust survivors are spiritually divorced from God, unable to conceive of a world in which God and Hitler can co-exist. Herman calls God an "Almighty sadist" (205), and he and Masha consider the possibility that Hitler is in heaven (123). In light of the mass destruction of the Jews, it becomes impossible for them to conceive of themselves as a chosen people when chosenness appears to be equated with persecution. Therefore, according to Lawrence Friedman, "either God is present in history and is therefore cruel or unfeeling; or He is absent from

history and is therefore nonexistent or dead" (158). Masha sees Judaism as a narrative which Jews have created to delude themselves: "we have dreamed up an idol who loves us and has made us his chosen people. [. . .] [T]he Gentile makes gods of stone and we of theories" (110).[61] Herman tries to return to Judaism several times. He approaches the Torah and the volumes of the Gemara, but he is unable to reconnect through reading and study because "these writings were home. On these pages dwelt his parents, his grandparents, all his ancestors" (172). His religion is tied to his family who are all gone. Friedman contends that "Singer's symbolic use of words in *Enemies* is a reminder that Judaism is, above all, a religion of the word" (163). Herman's ghostwriting for a Rabbi shows the extent to which the word has lost its sacred meaning for him. He creates unresearched religious tracts and has no personal stake in this work other than as a way to make money. He is also untroubled by the knowledge that someone else will claim ownership of his texts. As Chandler explains, "Herman sees the words he authors as mimicry, pretense, and deception. They no longer propagate a living faith, but only cosmetically create a semblance of life on the face of a moribund tradition" (109).[62] In contrast to Herman, Yadwiga's faith in the power of the word is so powerful that she carries a prayer book to services with her, even though she cannot read it. Language isolates her from others in the secular world. Because she speaks only Polish, she will not leave her street: she can understand neither the Jews nor the Gentiles she will encounter,

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[61] See Robert Forrey for an alternate reading. He claims that "Broder's faith had been shattered not so much by Nazis as by women" (101).

[62] The image of Herman's words as a deception mirrors Oskar's speech in "The German Refugee." Singer follows Malamud's theme of the failure of words to convey the Holocaust experience as well. Tamara says, "What happened to me can never fully be told. The truth is, I don't really know myself. So much happened that I sometimes imagine nothing happened" (73). When Herman first sees Tamara alive, for example, he cannot speak. Their recounting is a function of their guilt as survivors.

but her lack of facility does not keep her from converting to Judaism despite some misunderstandings along the way.[63]

At the novel's close Herman disappears in search of an American version of a Polish hayloft, saying "I will leave everybody" (250). While Herman repeats his cycle, Masha erases herself by committing suicide. Yadwiga and Tamara, the Gentile convert and the resurrected Jew, remain to form a new, hybrid Jewish community. Muller reads the inherited Jewish bookstore they operate as "the fusion of the Old World and the New" (45). More than this, the bookstore signifies the continuation of the literate tradition. Judaism will continue to be preserved through the word. The heir of this knowledge is, ironically, Yadwiga's child. The baby she conceived with Herman by accident serves as a symbol of hope and possibility in new life. In light of the countless Jews who can no longer identify with their religion because of the Holocaust, those who convert to the faith will ensure its survival. Singer's Holocaust novel brilliantly draws together elements of the Jewish immigrant narratives that came before it -- an intensive introspection, a conscious reshaping of history, the difficulties of translating the self through written language, the process of physical and psychological assimilation, the dangerous isolation of self-created fictions, and the struggle to balance an inescapable past with a national narrative rooted in the future.

More than half a century after the Holocaust, Jewish writers continue to explore its implications for modern Jews in America through these themes. In Cynthia Ozick's words, this must be done: "I don't want to tamper or invent or imagine. And yet I have

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[63] At one point Yadwiga misunderstands appliances and insurance policies as part of Jewishness in America because she cannot understand her modernized neighbors who try to teach her about their faith.

done it. I can't not do it. It comes, it invades" (qtd. in Flanzbaum 983). The urge to witness the Holocaust experience has grown considerably in Jewish literature since the 1970s, when, along with other ethnic groups in America, Jews began exploring their heritage and identity. The growing interest was also likely an effect of the 1973 Yom Kippur War, in which Egypt attacked Israel. The war made Jews around the world conscious of the fragility of the Israeli state.[64] In 1978 President Carter authorized the Holocaust Memorial Museum, and the Holocaust became the subject of many popular television specials and films which have shaped modern perceptions of it (Flanzbaum 982). In Schwarz's words, "the imaginative energy of Holocaust fictional narratives, transmuting facts in the crucible of art, has become more and more prominent a part of how the collective memory of the Holocaust is shaped and survives" (32-33).

While considerations of who could speak about the Holocaust and for its victims weighed heavily on the minds of previous generations of Jewish writers, those emerging toward the end of the twentieth century have spoken without hesitation (Flanzbaum 983). Some of the most prominent contemporary writers treating the Holocaust, including Art Spiegelman, Melvin Jules Bukiet, and Thane Rosenbaum, are the children of survivors.[65] Rosenbaum has been described by Elie Wiesel as "obsessed with the Holocaust." In his 1996 short-story collection *Elijah Visible*, Rosenbaum examines the spiritual damage that

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[64] Jews' relationship to Israel has continued to grow more complicated in the later twentieth century and early twenty-first. Many Jewish Americans' idealized view of Israel was shattered by the factionalism that characterized Israeli politics in the 1980s and 1990s and by Yitzhak Rabin's assassination (Flanzbaum 985). For those who disagree with contemporary Israeli politics, maintaining an identity connected to the Jewish homeland is all but impossible.

[65] Spiegelman's *Maus: A Survivor's Tale* is easily one of the most innovative considerations of the Holocaust to date. Spiegelman won a Pulitzer Prize for his graphic novel depicting a mouse's experiences in Nazi-occupied Europe and in the German concentration camps. He published various chapters in *Raw* magazine between 1980 and 1991, and the complete version of *Maus* appeared in book form in Volumes I (*My Father Bleeds History*) and II (*And Here My Troubles Began*) in 1986 and 1991, respectively.

haunts the children of Holocaust survivors. His second-generation characters work to understand their inherited legacy of pain, shame, and duty as they confront the silence created by their parents' inability or unwillingness to speak about their experiences. Rosenbaum depicts this confrontation in many arenas, including a stalled elevator in "Cattle Car Complex," a secularized Seder in "Elijah Visible," a college classroom in "An Act of Defiance," and a tennis court in "The Rabbi Double-Faults." Each piece shows that the trauma of the Holocaust cannot be separated from daily life, even for those Jews who did not experience it directly. Although the stories in *Elijah Visible* are unrelated, all of them follow a character named Adam Posner, the American-born child of survivors. Posner is depicted variously as a child, an adolescent, an adult, a professor, a lawyer, and an artist. Regardless of the scenario in which Rosenbaum places him, Posner always carries the weight of the history that was never discussed with him yet seems a very real, integral part of his identity. In this way he becomes representative of the many faces of second-generation survivors as they wonder if faith in God is still possible, if traumatic memories are inherited, and what their duty to their parents' experiences of the Holocaust should be.

New Possibilities

While many Jewish Americans have embraced the intense engagement with the Holocaust that Rosenbaum's stories represent, some argue that the Holocaust is taking too large a place in the Jewish consciousness. Rabbi Michael Goldberg, for example, contends in *Why Should Jews Survive?: Looking Past the Holocaust toward a Jewish Future* that a Jewish master narrative focusing on the Holocaust is damaging to

contemporary Jews because it encourages them to claim victimhood rather than chosenness as a legacy. For Goldberg, chosenness does not have to imply suffering or the notion that Jews are destined to be persecuted because they are God's people. He argues for a return to the Exodus story, which he believes can offer a more positively-grounded sense of Jewish identity. The adoption of the Exodus narrative might also refigure America as the promised land in the Jewish literary imagination, in the tradition of Antin and other early writers who invoked the rhetoric of chosenness and Exodus to the New World. Regardless, Goldman's comments suggest that Jewish Americans can now choose the legacy through which they define themselves.

Flanzbaum asserts that since the number of Jews who claim a Jewish ethnic identity has declined in the last few decades, as has religious participation, and since the conception of Jews as a separate race is no longer commonly accepted, American Jews must now examine who they are in a new context -- one in which Jewishness is "a matter of choice" (981). Over the last twenty-five years, a post-immigrant literature more concerned with religion than with ethnicity and assimilation has emerged. Jewish literature is moving in new directions in the hands of writers like Allen Grossman and Allegra Goodman,[66] who claim their Jewishness and urge others to recommit through a return to religious and historical study. Thus, Jewishness in America continues to be redefined as a struggle between the past and the present, even as perceptions of the nature of that past are changing.

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[66] Arguably, Grossman and Goodman were preceded in this by Chiam Potak, whose novels *The Chosen* (1967), *The Promise* (1969), and *My Name is Asher Lev* (1972) examine orthodox Jewish communities in America.

Chapter 3: The African American Narrative of (Im)migration

> *What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer: a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him, your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciations of tyrants, brass footed impudence; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade, and solemnity, are, to him, mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy -- a thin veil to cover up the crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages. There is not a nation on earth guilty of practices, more shocking and bloody, than are the people of these United States, at this very hour.*

When Frederick Douglass addressed these words to the nation on July 5, 1852, he spoke to the hollowness of the American Dream mythology for African Americans. While the United States was enthusiastically celebrating its seventy-sixth birthday, millions remained enslaved. Unable to access the freedoms available to others in the young nation, they were considered non-citizens and, for all practical purposes, inhuman. As Douglass's address showed, their presence highlighted the hypocrisy of a nation founded upon principles of equality and opportunity for economic and social advancement. This hypocrisy has continued to trouble America in the intervening 150 years, as the nation has sought ways to integrate African Americans into mainstream society and make restitution for the injustices of the past. Although many Americans resisted the changes that the masses of immigrants arriving from Europe brought to America's national character and resented the social and economic difficulties these new citizens posed for them, most European immigrants were nevertheless welcomed and easily integrated in comparison to the emancipated slaves and their descendents, who

represented national shame and a problem that could be neither easily solved nor ignored. Arriving immigrants enabled America to espouse its rhetoric of acceptance, even if struggles undergirded the popular notion of America as a melting pot. By contrast, African Americans presented a tremendous challenge to America's rhetoric and its machinery of assimilation. Would assimilation be desirable or possible for a group that had come to the United States by force rather than by choice, or would America remain divided, a nation within a nation? Once African Americans were legally defined as citizens, could they be expected to follow the same pattern of integration and upward economic movement that had been seen in other groups entering the country? Significant debates over this question emerged as African Americans began to migrate in mass from the rural South to the urban North in the early twentieth century.

By the 1960s, American sociologists and politicians analyzing the "urban crisis" brought about by this migration to Northern cities had begun to consider carefully the ramifications of viewing African Americans as an immigrant group. In his 1966 piece "The Negro Today is Like the Immigrant Yesterday," Irving Kristol aligned the urban crisis brought on by the mass migration of African Americans to Northern cities with problems created by the arrival of large numbers of eastern European immigrants in the early twentieth century. Toward both groups, he writes, "the main reactions were resentment and anxiety and anger. Public order, public health, public education and public life were all thrown into disarray" (198). Although Kristol noted that the situations of eastern Europeans and African Americans were not "perfectly parallel," he believed the term immigrant was "accurate enough" when applied to African Americans' movement from the rural South to the urban North rather than from Europe to the United

States (197-99). Comparisons like Kristol's were commonly used to critique African Americans' inability to assimilate as quickly as other minority groups and to downplay the need for government programs to aid them economically. In *Beyond the Melting Pot* (1963), for example, Nathan Glazer argued that once discrimination was eliminated legally, African Americans would assimilate as other groups had, integrating into American society through education and work. However, by 1997, when Glazer published *We Are All Multiculturalists Now*, he had changed his stance because legislated access to education, employment, and housing opportunities had not led to the pattern of success and integration many predicted. Glazer now claims that the continuation of distinctive residential patterns through decades when housing discrimination declined and was made illegal, the prevailing pattern of intragroup marriage, and the maintenance and even exaggeration of a specific dialect with cultural and political meaning within the African American community mark the African American pattern as distinctly different from the pattern of integration and assimilation seen in other immigrant groups.[67]

Scholars and commentators have suggested many reasons for this difference. Within his argument for basic similarity, Kristol accounts for differences in integration pattern by citing the fact that African American "'ethnicity' is racial rather than cultural, and the corollary fact that racial prejudice seems more deeply rooted than cultural prejudice" (203). While other groups could "whiten" through increased economic participation in society, African Americans would continue to be physically recognized

[67] Glazer made this argument in the context of debates over public school curriculum. He views the presence of a multicultural agenda that heavily emphasizes African American history and culture in the public school system as evidence of an institutionalization of differences. Glazer argues that this agenda has resulted from America's "inability or unwillingness to incorporate into its society African Americans in the same way and to the same degree it has incorporated so many groups" (147).

as "other." Kristol's point is well-taken, but he fails to consider that the same principle can be applied to other minority groups that have a racially rather than culturally defined ethnicity and are still considered immigrant populations. Chinese Americans are one example. It is not uncommon for Asian Americans whose families have been in the United States for generations to be asked where they came from and if they speak English. Indeed, the patterns of integration and acceptance of almost all non-European immigrant groups are markedly different from their European counterparts because of this perceived physical otherness. The differences that Glazer notes between immigrant and African American residential, marriage, and language patterns can be seen in other non-European groups as well. Within a broader view of the immigrant experience in America, one which does not take the European immigrant model as the standard, African Americans are aligned more easily with some other immigrants, especially those whose ethnicity appears to be marked racially as well as culturally.

Robert Blauner's distinction between colonized and immigrant minorities serves as an interesting way to mediate the perceived divide between the two models of ethnic assimilation in the United States.[68] Blauner defines immigrants as people who come voluntarily, while colonized peoples "become part of a new society through force or violence" (149). He classifies African Americans, Chicanos, and Native Americans as groups whose entry was "unequivocally forced" and whose treatment in the United States represents "internal colonialism." Blauner further asserts that it is misleading to equate the experiences of Asian immigrants with their European counterparts because the

[68] Blauner makes this distinction in the larger context of determining whether the term third world can correctly be applied to people of color in the United States.

experience of some Asian-American groups involved forced labor prior to the twentieth century and restrictive immigration policies limited their entry later (150-51). Immigrants and colonized peoples therefore developed a markedly different perspective on America. Largely because of their ability to engage in free labor, voluntary immigration led European groups to "identify with America and see the host culture as a positive opportunity rather than an alien and dominating value system" (Blauner 151-52). Groups engaged in free labor were able to develop and maintain "group integrity and autonomous community in the face of WASP ethnocentrism," whereas the colonial cultural dynamic that groups of color experienced prevented them from doing so (Blauner 155-57). In Blauner's argument, because of these differences European immigrant groups were ultimately able to assimilate more easily and at will, while colonized groups faced a more complex decision regarding assimilation. For them, assimilation could be seen as weakening a group integrity that had developed in response to oppression and attack (157-58).

Counter to Blauner's position, the literature produced by each of these "colonized" groups shows a constant struggle against oppressive systems and the development of a sense of community from which people draw strength to withstand oppression. Further, the perception of assimilation as weakening group integrity, even as traitorous to the group, is present in the literature of multiple ethnic groups, including both those Blauner defines as colonized and those he describes as immigrant. Blauner's explanation of the different perspectives on America and assimilation that have developed in response to labor issues is a useful tool for analysis, but the other

differences that he highlights are less pronounced and less important when, again, we take a wider view of the immigrant experience and its literary representations.

An additional argument against comparing the African American and immigrant experiences centers on the absence of a single national homeland from which African Americans came. Kristol argues that the American Negro "lacks a point of 'national origin' that could provide him with an authentic subculture of his own -- one on which he could rely for psychological and economic assistance in the face of the adversary posture of American civilization toward him" (199). The lack of connection to an origin that Kristol notes can easily be seen in the persistent desire of many African Americans to reconnect with Africa as a homeland. Further, the struggle to reconcile an African identity with an American one is well-documented in the literary tradition. However, the absence of a single point of a national origin does not preclude a group from being defined as immigrant. Like African Americans, Jews coming to the United States arrived from many different countries and spoke different languages. Nonetheless, their example illustrates that people from varied backgrounds can create an authentic, supportive subculture when they are conditioned by similar cultural and historical experiences, as Jews were in America. For African Americans as well as Jews, common experience, rather than a common national origin, has created the cultural bonds that define them as a unique group and serve as the foundation for a literary tradition.

Any reading of the African American experience as immigrant is further complicated by the seeming desire of some African Americans themselves to maintain a distinction. Recently, the increase of immigrants arriving from Africa has produced a substantial cultural divide between the various peoples who might be considered African

American in the United States. Frequently, these new immigrants resist being labeled African American because they are concerned about negative stereotyping through association with what is perceived as a culture of resistance, drugs, and crime. Thus, it is common for individuals in this group to maintain an African identity rather than a hyphenated one. By insisting on this identity, African immigrants often find the process of assimilation into American life and acceptance in the workplace much easier. On the other side of the issue, some African American supporters of affirmative action programs also desire to maintain a distinction between recent immigrants and African American descendents of slaves. African American groups claiming a need for governmental assistance to equalize the hiring process have traditionally been resistant to the idea of recent immigrants being offered the same opportunities. They argue that since these immigrants were not subject to the conditions that created the inequalities affirmative action is designed to correct, they should not benefit from it. Moreover, some supporters of affirmative action reject a more inclusive group identity since it would downplay the significance of African American culture as it has developed in response to the history of discrimination in America.[69]

In defining the African American literature that I will read in an immigrant context, I am aware of this point of contention and distinguish between the literary

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[69] For further discussion of the intersections of African American and immigrant interests in regard to affirmative action and equality opportunities in the workforce, see Hugh Davis Graham's *Collision Course: The Strange Convergence of Affirmative Action and Immigration Policy in America*, James S. Robb's *Affirmative Action for Immigrants: The Entitlement Nobody Wanted* and "Something for Everyone: No Americans Need Apply," William D. Dannenmaier's "Affirmative Action was not Meant for Immigrants," Roger Waldinger's *Still the Promised City*, and Robert Malloy's "'Cast Down Your Bucket Where You Are': Black Americans on Immigration." Alasan Mansaray's 1996 novel *Haunting Heritage: An African Saga in America* offers an African perspective on the division between African immigrants and African Americans.

productions of recent African immigrants, like Alasan Mansaray, and those of Africans who were brought to the United States as slaves and their descendents. My study examines the latter, not the former, although a larger project could consider both with some interesting outcomes. Neither am I reading texts from the Afro-Caribbean literary tradition, which has been considered in other studies of immigrant literature such as Muller's *New Strangers in Paradise*. Claude McKay, Paule Marshall, Jamaica Kincaid, and others have contributed to a substantial Afro-Caribbean literature within the American canon, but the issues raised in their work regarding a hybrid identity are separate from what I have chosen to address in this chapter.

I am interested in the continued African American response to the process of migration, beginning with the stories of slaves brought from Africa. Because literacy in English was rare among slaves, few early written accounts were produced by people who could recall the experience of bring brought to America. Those who could depict the journey as one of fear, crowding, disease, and death. While the work of some first-generation slave writers, such as Phillis Wheatley, shows the transplantation to America as, ironically, a liberating experience, the overwhelming majority of these writers did not look to America as the promised land. The second, and in some cases third, generation of African American writers refigured the immigrant experience within the borders of the United States, this time as a chosen journey to freedom in the promised land of the North. These writers authored the fugitive slave narratives that dominated African American literature in the nineteenth century. The journey motif appears again in a third set of texts, which chronicle the mass movement of African Americans from the South to the North in

the early to mid-twentieth century and in later texts that consider the ramifications of that movement for future generations.

Although each generation of African Americans has faced unique challenges, themes such as physical and cultural dislocation, a loss of self, a sense of entrapment in American culture, isolation from the American dream, the struggle to become educated, search for community, a troubled relationship to heritage, and a call for America to live up to its best image appear again and again as the immigrant experience is relived in different contexts. In *"Who Set You Flowin'?": The African-American Migration Narrative*, Farah Jasmine Griffin argues that the migration narrative is one of the dominant forms of African American cultural production in the twentieth century. In examining this narrative within the context of immigrant literature, I argue that while the migration narrative developed in resistance to limitations African Americans faced in the United States, it draws importantly upon American myths of self-creation and the rhetoric of the promised land, as do the literatures of other immigrant groups.

The First-Generation Narrative

Like other early immigrant writers, the first generation of slaves authoring their life stories faced the difficulty of expressing themselves in a new language, English. Their obstacles were twice as great, however, as they had first to master written English, then convince people that they could, indeed, write, as well as striking a delicate balance between exposing the horrors of their experiences as slaves and catering to a white readership. The image of the talking book that James Albert Ukawsaw used in his 1770 narrative, *A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert*

Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, An African Prince, Written by Himself, foregrounds the struggles of African Americans to engage with and be represented by printed texts. When he first sees the captain of his ship read, he believes that the book speaks to the captain because the man's lips move when he looks upon it. Gronniosaw later approaches the book and puts his ear on it, hoping to hear it speak, but the book is silent. He believes that the book, like "every body and every thing," despises him because of his blackness (19). In Gronniosaw's mind, his inability to crack the code of written language confirms the place in the world to which others have consigned him. Believing that he has been rejected by written language because of his skin color, he adopts a perspective regarding his race that was common in the eighteenth century, that people of African origin did not have the mental capacity to produce or understand literature. During this time, Europeans who sought to determine the position of Africans in the Great Chain of Being raised the question of whether Africans could engage with literature. Africans' inability to write poetry and prose that was considered comparable to the English models of the day was taken as confirmation of their lower position in the chain.

In the interest of advancing scientific knowledge, some slaveholders educated selected slaves in order to test this theory. Phillis Wheatley was educated through this practice. Wheatley's first volume, *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral, by Phillis Wheatley, of Boston, in New England*, was published in 1773. Because it was generally held by white Europeans that Africans were not capable of higher reasoning and the level of creativity which poetry required, her volume was accompanied by authenticating documents, including a letter from her master and a statement signed by eighteen white men (among them the governor and a number of judges and ministers),

that attested to the veracity of Wheatley's claim of authorship. Wheatley had passed a rigorous oral examination in order to receive the support of their testimony. Such authenticating documents became standard prefatory materials for published texts authored by African Americans, who depended upon the support of white publishers and readers for the acceptance of their work. Because much of Wheatley's work was written in the detached style which characterized poetry in the neoclassical form, it is difficult to determine her feelings about her status as a slave and about America. "On Being Brought from Africa to America," one of her few poems to address race and slavery, has been read as both supportive and critical of the slave trade. Wheatley's poem appears to support the popular notion that forced removal from Africa was to the slaves' benefit. Christian defenses of slavery were common in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century America; as Mary Frances Berry and John W. Blassingame explain, many Southern planters and even some historians chose to view slavery as a school, "designed to raise Africans from the barbarism of Africa, civilize and Christianize them" (12). However, Wheatley also unequivocally claims that Africans have souls that can be saved by God and that salvation is not open to Europeans alone. This was a radical idea for her time.

During the next century the notion that God's grace could be extended to Africans as well as people of European descent, as long as political and social equality did not necessarily follow, grew in popularity. Thus, as William Andrews observes, African American writers in the era of slavery "appealed to the traditional Christian gospel of the universal brotherhood of humanity as a way of initiating a discussion with whites that did not directly confront their prejudices and anxieties" ("Slavery and Freedom" 127). Through such appeals, they could assert equality in non-threatening terms. African

American writers also called upon America to live up to the ideals that had inspired its revolution. Andrews explains that "from the outset, African American literature challenged the dominant culture's attempt to segregate the religious from the political, the spirit from the flesh, insofar as racial affairs were concerned" ("Slavery and Freedom" 128). David Walker's 1829 "Appeal in Four Articles; together with a Preamble, to the Colored Citizens of the World" and James Whitfield's 1853 "America" are two outstanding examples of this critique of America's hypocrisy.

Ironically, slaves did receive some legal recognition by the framers of the Constitution in 1783 via the "three-fifths compromise" that counted each slave as three-fifths of a person, but this declaration of partial personhood did nothing to improve their situation, and resulted in a larger bloc of Southern voters in the House of Representatives, since the slaves were counted toward apportioning representation (Andrews, "Slavery and Freedom" 121). Five Northern states abolished slavery between 1777 and 1804, and Congress outlawed the African slave trade in 1807[70], but prejudice remained strong, even in the North, and slavery in the South boomed at the turn of the nineteenth century; in 1790 there were 700,000 slaves there, and by 1830 the number had risen to two million (Andrews, "Slavery and Freedom" 131-32). Just as the massive arrival of East European immigrants would unsettle Americans less than a century later, the growing number of slaves in the Southern states produced fears about controlling a changing American population.

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[70] In *Long* Memory, Berry and Blassingame estimate that 400,000 to 1,000,000 Africans were brought to America between 1619 and 1808, and that thousands more were smuggled in illegally until 1860 (7).

With Nat Turner's 1831 rebellion and the printing of 50,000 copies of his *Confessions*, tighter restrictions were placed on both slaves and free blacks in the South, particularly in terms of access to books and education (Andrews, "Slavery and Freedom" 132). Southern states made emancipation of slaves increasingly difficult (Berry and Blassingame 8). Even more damaging was the passing of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, which made it illegal for any citizen to assist an escaped slave. Escaped slaves who were sighted would be taken into custody and returned to their owners; no place would be safe for a fugitive. Northern abolitionists rallied in response, educating the public about slavery with petitions, newspapers, and protests. William Garrison's American Anti-Slavery Society was the leading group, and one of their most powerful tools was the fugitive slave narrative. These narratives dominated the fledgling African American literary scene from the early to mid-1800s, when hundreds of escaped slaves published their stories.[71] Henry Louis Gates, Jr. comments that "by at least one account, the sale of the slave narratives reached such profound proportions that a critic was moved to complain that the 'shelves of booksellers groan under the weight of Sambo's woes, done up in covers'" ("Binary Oppositions" 81). Although speaking and writing their life histories placed escaped slaves in greater danger of being caught and returned, they did so because they needed to validate themselves through sharing their experiences with a reading public often ignorant of the realities of slavery. These authors argued for their own personhood through the telling of their stories.

[71] Although the slave narrative reached the height of its popularity during this time, slave texts were written and read well before and after this period. Historian Marian Wilson Starling estimates that over 6000 slave narratives were published between 1703 and 1944.

Often this telling began as a verbal exercise, with the escaped slave reciting his or her experiences at an abolitionist meeting. Many slave narratives took their shape as a result of a series of questions posed by abolitionists, such as where were you born, who was your master, when did you first understand slavery, how often were you beaten, and what led to your escape. In most cases, a white editor would record and later publish the tale. As with the verbal testimonies, the majority of the published slave narratives tended to follow a similar pattern because white abolitionists and publishers took an active role in their production. These narratives were published with authenticating materials that Andrews has described as the white envelope surrounding the black text, including letters from white abolitionist sponsors and bills of sale.[72] The narratives typically featured a portrayal of slavery as hell, a crisis that precipitates the slave's decision to escape, and an arduous journey north propelled by the slave's faith in God and the liberty and dignity promised by America's founding fathers, and often concluded with a commitment to the work of abolition once the slave was safe in the North.[73] Interestingly, both Northerners and Southerners bought and read the texts, although, as Andrews notes, they were "composed and read in a spirit of extreme sectionalism. Northerners studied them for information about the horrors of the South's 'peculiar institution' and the sufferings of enslaved blacks. Southerners analyzed them to refute the calumnities of Yankee

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[72] In *From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative*, Robert Stepto acknowledges that while the primary function of these materials was to authenticate the former slave's story, the relationship between this authenticating material and the text varies from narrative to narrative. He posits four models: the eclectic narrative (material appended to the tale), the integrated narrative (material integrated into the tale to become voices and/or characters), the generic narrative (an integrated narrative in which authenticating documents are subsumed by the tale), and the authenticating narrative (tale subsumed by the authenticating strategy) (5).

[73] See James Olney's "'I was Born: Slave Narratives, their Status as Autobiography and as Literature" for a more detailed discussion of these common elements.

abolitionists and to expose the untrustworthiness of fugitive slaves celebrated in the North" ("Slavery and Freedom" 134). The texts of the first flowering of African American literature were, thus, in most cases, co-written, published, read, and interpreted by white audiences of varying backgrounds, making the establishment of an authentic written self extremely complicated for African American writers. In his discussion of authorial control in the Afro American narrative, Robert Stepto explains that freedom was contingent upon the writer's "ability to be variously literate and the opportunity to be so" (xi). Because the slave's own voice often became lost between the publishers' trappings and the readers' desire for confirmation of rightness, the freedom gained through literacy was, for many, questionable and incomplete.

Some former slaves who were brought into Northern abolitionism, like Frederick Douglass, initially believed in their ability to contribute to the cause but later became frustrated with the limitations of this method of bringing their experiences to the public. In the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself*, Douglass admits to speaking "reluctantly" at an anti-slavery meeting when urged to do so by William Coffin. He saw it as "a severe cross" because he "felt [him]self a slave, and the idea of speaking to white people weighed [him] down" (96). Still, he persisted because of his belief in the importance of his contribution to the anti-slavery cause. In an October 1841 speech in Massachusetts, he said:

> My friends, I have come to tell you something about slavery -- what I *know* of it, as I have *felt* it. When I came North, I was astonished to find that the abolitionists knew so much about it, that they were acquainted with its deadly affects as well as if they had lived in its midst. But though

> they can give you its history -- though they can depict its horrors, they cannot speak as I can from *experience*; they cannot refer you to a back covered with scars, as I can; for I have felt these wounds; I have suffered under the lash without the power of resisting. (*Papers* 3)

Garrison and John Collins of the Anti-Slavery society wanted Douglass to offer exactly this kind of testimony. As Douglass later wrote in *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Collins would tell him "give us the facts [. . .], we will take care of the philosophy," and Garrison would urge him to speak by saying "tell your story, Frederick" (367). Dramatically introduced to the audience as a man who had been a "chattel" and a "thing," Douglass would recite the often-repeated facts of his life, after which Garrison would provide the interpretation.

As Douglass explains in *My Bondage and My Freedom*, after he joined the abolitionist cause, he began "reading and thinking. New views of the subject were presented to my mind. It did not entirely satisfy me to *narrate* wrongs; I felt like *denouncing* them" (367). Tension grew between Douglass and Garrison over how Douglass's past was to be best used to influence the present. Who would tell his story, and what would the importance of that story be? Because of public skepticism about the veracity of his experiences and Douglass's desire to assert some measure of control over his story, he authored the *Narrative* four years after he became a public lecturer (*My Bondage and My Freedom* 367-68). Douglass's 1845 *Narrative* was one of the most widely read of the nineteenth-century slave narratives. Five thousand copies were sold in the first four months, 11,000 in the first two years, and 30,000 by 1860 (Gates,

"Introduction" xi). Although he wrote numerous impassioned articles and speeches denouncing slavery, Frederick Douglass's life story is, arguably, his most enduring and effective text. He rewrote his personal history several times, publishing it as *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845), *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855), and *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1881), which was revised and reprinted in 1892. With each version, Douglass felt able to reveal more of himself to his readers. The progression of these texts reflects the evolving purpose of Douglass's writing, changes in what his reading audience would both expect and accept, a growing candidness about his experiences living in the North, and his shift in politics as he grew as a public figure and emerged from the influence of William Lloyd Garrison.[74] As Douglass came to believe that the fate of African Americans was dependent upon their self-sufficiency, he grew further away from the white abolitionists who first supported him. The publication of the second version of his autobiography heralded his public split with Garrison. In lieu of the prefatory letters from Garrison and Wendell Phillips which appeared in the original text, Douglass wrote his own letter and included an introduction written by James M'Cune Smith, an African American physician and abolitionist who was a vocal opponent of Garrison's politics. In addressing the well-known disagreement between Douglass and Garrison over Douglass's newspaper, which led to the dissolution of their association in May 1851, Smith describes Douglass's life as "a noble vindication of the highest aims of the American anti-slavery movement" and Douglass himself as "a Representative American man, a type of his countrymen" (125,

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[74] For an extended reading of the ways in which differences between *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* and *My Bondage and My Freedom* signal Douglass's ideological shift, see chapter one of Priscilla Wald's *Constituting Americans.*

132). Many critics now acknowledge *My Bondage and My Freedom* as a superior text to the *Narrative* because of its greater emotional depth and revelation of Douglass's weaknesses as well as his strengths. I have chosen to address the *Narrative* rather than *My Bondage and My Freedom*, however, because of the cultural importance of the original document, as Douglass's *Narrative* has come to be considered the definitive slave narrative in American literary history[75] and because the form and content of the original text more closely work within the conventions of the immigrant narrative popular in the nineteenth century.

The cutting of all natural ties was part of the initial "Americanization" process of slaves. Although the process of assimilation and acculturation was unquestionably more violent for slaves than for other immigrants, it worked in much the same way. Rather than the dominant culture's melting Africans into a standard model of "American," however, slavery homogenized Africans from multiple nations into one slave culture, defined by white slaveholders. Slavery was designed to disconnect slaves from any conception of home culture and homeland. African language, naming, dress, dance, and drumming were outlawed. Legally, slaves were non-entities; as Andrews explains, they "could have no family, no personal home, no community, no past, and no future"

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[75] Deborah E. McDowell's 1991 article "In the First Place: Making Frederick Douglass and the Afro-American Narrative Tradition" offers a fascinating analysis of how Douglass's text came to be considered as a point of origin in African American literature. Dismissing claims of the narrative's priority as "heuristic or factitious," McDowell examines the ways in which the text's fluidity have allowed it to be adopted by successive critical movements and how criticism has tended to mimic the text's exclusionary view of the feminine as it relates to masculine culture. With the exception of his description of witnessing his aunt's beating and Mr. Covey's use of Caroline, a female slave, as a breeder, Douglass does not consider the particular plight of the female slave. This subject is explored by his contemporary Harriet Jacobs in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861). The first woman to author a slave narrative, Jacobs presents a groundbreaking examination of the sexual exploitation of female slaves and a justification of their means of resistance.

("Slavery and Freedom" 130). They were remade into a new mold, but unlike other immigrants who could, at least to a certain extent, fashion themselves as they chose and still succeed, slaves were unable to choose to retain facets of their culture of origin and had no means of improving themselves within the system; in Andrews's words, they had no access to "self-reliance, . . . since the very notion of selfhood had no meaning or application to those who could not even possess themselves" ("Slavery and Freedom" 131). Defining a new self within American culture became even more important for African Americans, then, than it was for other immigrants.

While the immigrant narrative typically turns upon the cultural conflict between old and new world values and practices, with the immigrant struggling to honor his or her heritage while remaking the self in a new environment, in the slave narratives of the nineteenth century, the cultural conflict is between the oppressive culture of the plantation and the freedom that the land north of the Ohio River can offer. Rather than providing the standard accounting of the author's parents, home, and young life usually seen in immigrant stories, Douglass asserts at the outset that, as is true of most slaves,[76] he has no knowledge of his birthday and that he was separated from his mother at such a young age that he formed no attachment to her (15-16). When Douglass leaves Colonel Lloyd's plantation for Baltimore, he again emphasizes his feelings of disconnection to family and birthplace:

> The ties that ordinarily bind children to their homes were all suspended in my case. I found no severe trial in my departure. [. . .] My mother was

[76] Although in many ways Douglass's life is exceptional, like that of Mary Antin, he creates the impression that his experiences are representative of others in his position through the repeated use of comparative statements.

> dead, my grandmother lived far off, so that I seldom saw her. I had two sisters and one brother, that lived in the same house with me; but the early separation of us from our mother had well nigh blotted the fact of our relationship from our memories. I looked for home elsewhere, and was confident of finding none which I should relish less than the one which I was leaving. (34)

Since Douglass has no access to origins, parentage, and home -- all defining facets of identity -- he feels no loss at leaving them. Douglass thus manipulates an immigrant trope by immersing his readers in the feeling of rootlessness that marked the slave's experience as different from that of others attempting to remake themselves in America.

Employing a strategy that Mary Antin later adopts, Douglass uses his life story, in part, to rebut long-held misconceptions about his people and to ease their acceptance into American society. His aim is to bring an awareness of the real conditions of slavery to white readers. For example, Douglass explains that the system that uses African Americans' supposed inhumanity as a justification for their enslavement is, in fact, designed to transform slaves from humans into brutes. He describes this dehumanization during his stay with Mr. Covey, the slave breaker: "I was broken in body, soul, and spirit. My natural elasticity was crushed, my intellect languished, the disposition to read departed, the cheerful spark that lingered about my eye died; the dark night of slavery closed in upon me; and behold a man transformed into a brute" (58). The eloquence with which he expresses this transformation stands in telling contrast to the process of dehumanization he describes. Douglass further asserts that, even within a system

designed to de-humanize, human bonds can exist by explaining that for slaves, family becomes redefined in terms of friendships. He describes his relationships with friends as "linked and interlinked with each other. I loved them with a love stronger than anything I have experienced since" (72). These bonds are so strong that they nearly prevent him from escaping later. In a statement that anticipates the would-be immigrant who remains home with family members who will not leave, Douglass concludes that "thousands would escape from slavery, who now remain, but for the strong cords of affection that bind them to their friends" (89). His point is that although slaves were unable to form the same family connections as others, they are still capable of feeling both love and loss. This is part of his strategy of showing slaves as excluded from the concept of individual family but very much part of the human family. He also connects slaveholders to this human family, referring to Mr. Gore, an overseer who killed a slave named Demby, as someone whose soul was "stained with his brother's blood" (31). By using terms of kinship, Douglass establishes bonds that exist between all people, regardless of color, and leads his white readers to see slaves as their own brothers and sisters, and therefore they must act on their behalf.[77]

To those who interpret slave songs as evidence "of their contentment and happiness," Douglass replies, "it is impossible to conceive of a greater mistake" (24). To combat the Biblical notion of Africans as the children of Ham, marked and therefore cursed by God and deserving of slavery, Douglass discusses the rapidly growing class of

[77] This was a technique Douglass used in speeches as well. Speaking in New York on May 6, 1845, he said, "Again, I am your brother, white as you are. I'm your blood-kin. You don't get rid of me so easily. I mean to hold on to you" (*Papers* 33). Here he denies the conventional interpretation of color and its meaning in terms of classification, and declares boldly that he will not go away.

slaves fathered by white masters. He argues that "if the lineal descendents of Ham are alone to be scripturally enslaved, it is certain that slavery in the south must soon become unscriptural; for thousands are ushered into the world, annually, who, like myself, owe their existence to white fathers, and those fathers most frequently their own masters" (17-18). This line of argument becomes part of Douglass's denunciation of those who claim to be both Christians and slaveholders, a topic which he addresses more thoroughly in the Appendix. There, Douglass carefully distinguishes between "the Christianity of this land" and "the Christianity of Christ" (97). Citing religious slaveholders who deny their slaves the ability to read the Bible, rob their slaves of the "sacred influence" of marriage, sell female slaves into prostitution, and rob men of their earnings, he "look[s] upon [Christianity in America] as the climax of all misnomers, the boldest of all frauds, and the grossest of all libels" (97). Again, like Antin, he locates the origins of the negative stereotypes in the class of oppressors. If slaves are reputed to be animals, ignorant, thieving, and morally loose, one must consider the role of their masters in creating this image.

Douglass's most persuasive tool is, of course, the story of his own struggle to become educated, attain his freedom, and participate in the American system as a wage earner. Like other immigrants, Douglass realizes that becoming educated will enable him to transform himself from brute to man, from slave to free person, and from property to citizen so that he can live successfully in the North. He learns from Mr. Auld that knowing how to read will make him "unfit to be a slave" (37). As Douglass explains, "I now understood what had been to me a most perplexing difficulty -- to wit, the white man's power to enslave the black man. It was a grand achievement, and I prized it

highly. From that moment, I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom. [. . .] Though conscious of the difficulty of learning without a teacher, I set out with high hope, and a fixed purpose, at whatever cost of trouble, to learn how to read" (37-38). Having comprehended that literacy will enable him to access the new world he desires to enter, Douglass's Americanization involves a struggle to master language. Like Cahan's David Levinsky and other immigrants who seek to acquire American language, he makes the most of chance encounters with those proficient in the language. In the absence of formal education, he learns to read and write from the little white boys who live on Philpot Street, men at the shipyard, Master Thomas's old schoolbooks, and a worn copy of *The Columbian Orator*. As Douglass becomes literate, however, he also becomes more aware of his condition as a slave, which knowledge torments him: "It opened my eyes to the horrible pit, but to no ladder upon which to get out. In moments of agony, I envied my fellow slaves for their stupidity. I have often wished myself a beast. I preferred the condition of the meanest reptile to my own. Any thing, no matter what, to get rid of thinking" (42). This knowledge that torments him drives him as well; once he is aware of his condition and the possibilities for a better life in a new place, he determines to journey north.

As in other immigrant texts, Douglass envisions a journey over water bringing him to freedom. He tracks the direction of steamboats when he is living at St. Michaels and determines that he will escape at the earliest opportunity (50). During his stay with Mr. Covey, the slave breaker, Douglass lives on the banks of the Chesapeake Bay, where he often watches the ships and calls out to them:

> You are loosed from your moorings, and are free; I am fast in my chains, and am a slave! You move merrily before the gentle gale, and I sadly before the bloody whip! You are freedom's swift-winged angels, that fly round the world; I am confined in bands of iron! O that I were free! O, that I were on one of your gallant decks, and under your protecting wing! Alas! betwixt me and you the turbid waters roll. [. . .] I will take to the water. This very bay shall yet bear me into freedom. (59)

In depicting his literal longing for the ships to bring him to freedom, Douglass plays upon the symbol of a transforming ocean journey voyage providing the immigrant with the chance to be reborn, redefined, in a new place. However, when Douglass envisions life in the North, he does not imagine the open welcome that so many immigrants did. His anticipation is tempered by an awareness of the dangers that will follow him because of the Fugitive Slave Act, as he explains:

> On the one hand, there stood slavery, a stern reality, glaring frightfully upon us, -- its robes already crimsoned with the blood of millions, and even now feasting itself greedily upon our own flesh. On the other hand, away back in the dim distance, under the flickering light of the north star, behind some craggy hill or snow-covered mountain, stood a doubtful freedom -- half frozen -- beckoning us to come and share its hospitality. (73-74)

America is calling, but its promised freedoms are distant, hidden, and questionable.

Before Douglass can leave and create a new life, he must negotiate the hold that his past has over him. This is a concern in all immigrant literature, but the struggle for

Douglass is particularly difficult because slavery has conditioned him mentally as well as trapped him physically. In introducing the changes that Douglass must undergo to enable his departure, he writes, "You have seen how a man was made a slave; you shall see how a slave was made a man" (66). For Douglass, this change occurs as he reconceptualizes himself, creating a new identity which is separate from his physical enslavement, and as he battles with Mr. Covey, the slavebreaker who treats him more brutally than any of his previous masters:

> This battle was a turning-point in my career as a slave. It rekindled the few expiring embers of freedom, and revived within me a sense of my own manhood. It recalled the departed self-confidence, and inspired me again with a determination to be free. [. . .] My long-crushed spirit rose, cowardice departed, bold defiance took its place; and now I resolved that, however long I might remain a slave in form, the days had passed forever when I could be a slave in fact. (65)

Physically defeating Covey enables Douglass to make the necessary mental reassessment of his condition. Once he conceives of a past self, who was a slave, and a present self, who is a free man, he can relegate his enslavement to a former condition in his mind and align form and fact through an escape attempt.

Like other immigrant writers, Douglass also shows shared values and knowledge of the past of the country he desires to claim as his own in his quest for acceptance. In explaining his decision to escape, Douglass subtly writes himself, and all escaped slaves, into the American narrative. He compares the challenges they will face to those faced by American revolutionaries, though he asserts that the slave faces even greater obstacles

than the early patriots: "In coming to a fixed determination to run away, we did more than Patrick Henry, when he resolved upon liberty or death. With us it was a doubtful liberty at most, and almost certain death if we failed. For my part, I should prefer death to hopeless bondage" (74). If to be an American is, by historical definition, to rebel against oppression by fighting for liberty at any cost, then Douglass and his fellow slaves are patriots rather than lawbreakers, exceeding even America's past heroes in their desire for freedom.

When Douglass finally escapes,[78] his narrative departs from the immigrant narrative format in that he says nothing specific about the voyage itself and little about his arrival on new shores. Douglass simply states that "On the third day of September, 1838, I left my chains, and succeeded in reaching New York without the slightest interruption of any kind. How I did so, -- what means I adopted, -- what direction I traveled, and by what mode of conveyance, -- I must leave unexplained, for the reasons before mentioned" (89). Out of a desire to protect the people who helped him and the route that he took so that other slaves might escape as well, Douglass omits any telling details. Unlike slave authors Henry "Box" Brown and William and Ellen Craft, whose texts center on their escapes, Douglass is silent and thus, as Stepto argues, "wrests [. . .] preeminent authorial control" from other voices in the narrative (24-25). Douglass is in full control of the presentation of his personal history at this moment. Although he does not elaborate on the sights that greeted him upon arrival in the promised land, as most

[78] Douglass's initial escape attempt, in which he attempts to write his way to freedom by forging passes or "protections" for himself and his companions, fails when his master learns of his plans.

immigrant writers do, the feelings he expresses upon reaching the free state of New York are ecstatic:

> It was a moment of the highest excitement I ever experienced. I suppose I felt as one may imagine the unarmed mariner to feel when he is rescued by a friendly man-of-war from the pursuit of a pirate. In writing to a dear friend, immediately after my arrival in New York, I said I felt like one who had escaped a den of hungry lions. (89)

Rather than express love for the new land and offer a testament to its beauty or to the welcome waiting him when he arrives, he invites the reader to share in a sense of profound relief through images of terrifying pursuit. The relief is short-lived, however. Immediately following these lines, Douglass reveals that

> this state of mind [. . .] very soon subsided; and I was yet again seized with a feeling of great insecurity and loneliness. [. . .] There I was in the midst of thousands, and yet a perfect stranger; without home and without friends, in the midst of thousands of my own brethren -- children of a common Father, and yet I dared not to unfold to any one of them my condition. (89-90)

He again asserts kinship and depicts himself as the newly arrived immigrant, a stranger in a new land, to ask, if only indirectly, for sympathy and acceptance. He asks his readers to imagine themselves in his position and asserts that until they do, they cannot appreciate and know how to sympathize with the fugitive slave (90).

Not comfortable in New York, Douglass goes on to New Bedford, where he believes he can find both safety and work. Known as Frederick Bailey in Maryland and Frederick Johnson in New York, he finds that, as many immigrants did, he must change his name in order to fit into society. He retains his first name but takes the new last name given to him by Nathan Johnson, who helped him upon his arrival. Douglass is surprised at the condition of life in New Bedford. When he arrives, he does not share the immigrant expectation of abundant work for everyone and an easy life in the new world. Given that there are no slaves in the North, he expects the standard of living to be lower there than in the South, not higher. Consequently, he is taken aback by the new ships, large warehouses, and clean, beautiful houses (93-94). He is surprised to find that

> every man appeared to understand his work, and went at it with a sober, yet cheerful earnestness, which betokened the deep interest which he felt in what he was doing, as well as a sense of his own dignity as a man. To me this looked exceedingly strange. From the wharves I strolled around and over the town, gazing with wonder and admiration at the splendid churches, beautiful dwellings, and finely cultivated gardens; evincing an amount of wealth, comfort, taste, and refinement, such as I had never seen in any part of slaveholding Maryland. (93-94)

In this passage, Douglass creates a picture which reflects the image of America many immigrants brought with them on their journey. Although he does not expect this utopia, he finds it. He also finds himself welcomed by New Bedford's black community, and, more importantly, employed and able to keep the wages he earns, a fact which offers him some of the greatest pleasure of his life. When Douglass cannot immediately find work

in the caulking trade in which he is trained, he shows himself willing to do whatever he can: "there was no job too hard -- none too dirty" (95). Douglass's simple desire to receive payment for work and his willingness to accept any form of paid labor would make him, and other freed slaves in the North, less threatening to a Northern society that may have condemned slavery but been wary of the changes that slaves' migration would bring to their way of life. Thus, at the end of his heroic journey, he humbles himself in the new world.

The narrative concludes as Douglass meets William Coffin and joins the anti-slavery movement in New Bedford. He makes no claims as to his success and devotion, leaving these for his readers to debate (96). Although Andrews reads Douglass's participation in the cause as a sign that his voice has been liberated ("*My Bondage*" 137), Douglass makes no such claims for himself. Rather, he closes with the image of a cross taken up reluctantly, and leaves his readers to decide upon the measure of success and devotion he might have achieved. He is content to let his words and deeds speak for him.

During the next two decades, African American writers moved away from the strict conventions of the slave narrative as a form of testimony. Douglass, William Wells Brown, Martin Delany, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, and Harriet Wilson all published novels and novellas during the 1850s and 1860s. While many texts from this time still utilized the slave story or drew upon some personal elements, they were not entirely autobiographical. Even with this shift toward fiction, the drive for African American writers to argue for America's acceptance of them was as strong as ever. Douglass's *The Heroic Slave*, for example, depicted the 1841 mutiny on the slave ship *Creole* in order to place "black violence within the tradition of the American Revolution," thus confirming

blacks as Americans (Berry and Blassingame 67). Even with the passing of the Emancipation Proclamation in 1862 and the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865, African American writers recognized that equality was far from a reality.

The decades between emancipation and the emergence of Booker T. Washington, who would position himself as the next great race leader following Frederick Douglass, were turbulent ones. Kevern Varney observes that the years 1865 and 1866 saw a tremendous interregional migration in the South, as families attempted to locate each other and reunite (2). According to Nicholas Lemann, sharecropping became the dominant form of labor for freed blacks in the South, in part because segregation denied them an equal education and therefore other career options, relegating them to field work (6). In theory, the sharecropping system benefited both the black sharecroppers and the white landowners whose property they farmed. This was often not the case, however, for the many farmers who worked without compensation when their crops did not bring in enough money to pay the required amount to the landowner. Congress established the U.S. Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands to assist 4,000,000 newly freed blacks in becoming self-sufficient, educated members of their communities, but the Bureau was troubled from the start and disbanded after eight years of operation. Twelve years into Reconstruction, the national Republican Party, which also controlled the presidency, was tired of the continuing problems and American voters were no longer willing to support a military presence to protect the rights of Southern black voters (Varney 4). The North's desire to nurture and provide for the freed slaves was gone.

In the South, in turn, African Americans saw a slow removal of rights. The 1866 Civil Rights Act[79] and the fourteenth and fifteenth amendments to the Constitution, passed in 1869 and 1870, would appear to have ushered in a new era and a new way of life for the recently freed slaves, but clearly any legislation passed on the behalf of African Americans was no protection. Lynching was at an all-time high through the end of the nineteenth century. Between 1889 and 1898, 1519 people were lynched. Even as late as 1923, an average of one person a week was still being lynched in the South. The establishment of the Ku Klux Klan in the same year that the first Civil Rights Act was passed and the institution of the Jim Crow laws, which legalized segregation, quickly countered any advances that had been made. Voting and literacy tests and grandfather clauses excluded many African Americans from the democratic process at the polls. When in 1883 the Supreme Court supported Tennessee's Jim Crow laws and struck down the Civil Rights Act of 1875, they made possible a flood of state laws designed to disenfranchise black men and divide blacks and whites in all public places (Andrews, Foster, and Yarborough 465). The Supreme Court's 1896 ruling in *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, which made "separate but equal" facilities permissible, undoubtedly relegated African Americans to second-class status because public facilities, opportunities for advancement, and applications of the law remained far from equal.[80]

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[79] The Supreme Court ruled this act unconstitutional in 1875.

[80] C. Vann Woodward's *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, first published in 1955 and revised for two more editions during the next twenty years, is a valuable study of the social upheaval brought by these transformations.

Reconfiguring the Past

The literature produced by African Americans during this period falls into several categories. The Reconstruction years saw African Americans attempting to rebuild not only their lives in the South but also their conception of themselves as a race. This was accomplished in large part through the efforts of the growing African American press. Fledgling magazines and newspapers that sought to reach an African American audience called for articles, stories, and other written materials that were, according to Frankie Hutton, "uplifting, positive, and forward thinking both in the messages conveyed and in spirit" (qtd. in Andrews, Foster, and Yarborough 470). While many of the more than 150 newspapers founded by 1896 did not last, they did foster the careers of Ida B. Wells, Phillip Bell, Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins, Anna Julia Cooper, and other reformers. One of the more popular genres at this time was the biography of notable African Americans, including texts about Frederick Douglass, Martin R. Delaney, and Norris Wright Cuney (Andrews, Foster, and Yarborough 469). Historical and sociological texts, such as William Wells Brown's *The Negro in American Rebellion* (1867), William Still's *The Underground Rail Road: A Record of Facts, Authentic Narratives, Letters* (1872), George Washington Williams's *History of the Negro Race in America from 1619 to 1880* (1893), and W.E.B. Du Bois's *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899), addressed the advancement of the race with the aim of uplifting African Americans through recognition of their accomplishments. Even in African American fiction, writers sought to create a new image of the people in order to move them beyond the present moment. William Wells Brown, Charles Chestnutt, and Frances E.W. Harper, among others, penned stories and novels that revised the stereotypes of blacks often found in white novels. As had

been the case before the war, personal testimonies continued to be a powerful and popular form of literature. The slave narrative evolved as "postbellum narrators recast the sin and suffering of slavery as trials and tribulations from which they and former slaves, like other survivors of the Civil War or another trauma past, emerged wiser and stronger" (Andrews, Foster, and Yarborough 468). Frequently espousing the rhetoric of rugged individualism and economic advancement through hard labor, these texts positioned former slaves as Americans who were not looking for retribution but, rather, the chance to prove themselves in American society. In addition to serving as models of advancement for other African Americans, these texts addressed the concerns of a white population fearful of change. Booker T. Washington's 1901 narrative *Up from Slavery* was one of the most influential of the texts with this aim.

One of the last published slave narratives to be widely read, *Up from Slavery* chronicles Washington's rise from slavery to prominence as an orator and educator. The text came about as a result of a letter that Lyman Abbott, the editor of *The Outlook* magazine, wrote Washington in December 1899 asking him if he would consider writing "an autobiography or autobiographical reminiscences" to be published in three or four parts in the magazine (Washington 157). Abbott provided early suggestions for the direction of the text, proposing that Washington write "in an anecdotal and reminiscent mood" with the aim of garnering the interest of "a great many [readers] who are not greatly interested in the problem as a problem, and whose interest would be awakened by such a story as you could tell, while at the same time such incidents would necessarily illustrate the principles for which you contend and the solution which you propose to the problem which confronts us" (Washington157). He later suggested more specific topics

for Washington to address, such as the way that the Reconstruction period looked to the emancipated slave (Washington 159). Although Abbott's input on the manuscript might seem to follow the earlier practice of white editors influencing the form and content of the black text, Washington's correspondence with Abbott makes clear that Washington was ultimately in control of the direction of the manuscript. This fact, along with Washington's propensity for explaining his methods as he writes, makes interpretation of his motives much easier. After much discussion between the two, Washington outlined the following method of composition in a letter to Abbott:

> to give the *first place* to facts and incidents and to hang the generalizations on these facts -- taking for granted that the average reader is more interested in an interesting fact than in a generalization based on that fact, and for this reason I have sought not to use too many generalizations and when they are used to have them well sugar-coated with some interesting incident. (160)

Following this pattern, the autobiography appeared in seventeen installments between November 1900 and February 1901. It first appeared in book form in May 1901 and was immediately successful.[81]

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[81] Washington had published an earlier version of his autobiography, *The Story of My Life and Work*, in 1899. This text was written primarily as a black self-help book intended to benefit readers. As Washington explained to the publisher of the original text in a letter dated September 22, 1900, the purpose of publishing his "reminiscences," which would become *Up from Slavery*, was entirely different. He argued that the two publications would not clash in any way because they would be "on different lines," sold in a different section of the country, and would be "sold by the trade rather than by subscription" (158). Further, he stated his intention of using the second book to gain financial help for Tuskegee from "a class of people who have money" and his belief that if Tuskegee prospered, sales of the original text would likely grow too (158).

In as much as Washington was a transitional figure, positioning himself to guide the post-Reconstruction South into the new century, *Up from Slavery* was a transitional text. When he wrote it, Washington's aims were entirely different from those of other former slaves narrating their lives. Rather than accurately reflect the horrors of slavery and justify slaves' desire to escape North, Washington sought to reconstruct the past. His concern was to make America's history of slavery usable in the present moment, instead of something that would continue to be divisive in American society. To Washington, Douglass and other leaders who had followed in Douglass's path were lacking something in their speeches that would go beyond reminding African Americans of their suffering and political rights: "they needed to do something more than merely to defend themselves" ("My Larger Education" 170). In order for the nation to move forward, Washington contended that both a new vision of slavery that would allow America to see its painful past as useful to future progress and a program of industrial education that would enable African Americans to become a presence in the economic system were necessary. Consequently, his narrative presents slavery as a school, rather than the living hell of nineteenth-century narratives, and downplays injustices and bitterness in the interest of promoting economic partnership and harmony. Through his autobiography, he needed to show a Northern audience that given opportunities for education and work, African Americans would be happy to remain in the South. Thus, more than the story of an individual, *Up from Slavery* is the story of an idea (uplift through industrial education) and an institution (Tuskegee). In telling that story, Washington, like other first-generation immigrant writers, employs the rhetoric of transformation through education

and hard work, consciously writing himself, and therefore African Americans, into the American mythos.

Like other immigrant texts, Washington's narrative works with the image of America as place in which the newcomer is transformed, theoretically for the better. He draws upon the same idea of slavery as a process of Americanization seen in Douglass, but reaches an entirely different conclusion about that process. He writes, "when we rid ourselves of prejudice, or racial feeling, and look facts in the face, we must acknowledge that, notwithstanding the cruelty and wrong of moral slavery, the ten million Negroes inhabiting this country, who themselves or whose ancestor went through the school of American slavery, are in a stronger and more hopeful condition, materially, intellectually, morally, and religiously, than is true of an equal number of black people in any other portion of the globe" (13). By subtly dismissing lingering bitterness and pain as racial feeling rather than reality, Washington presents his view as the logical one, an idea he extends when he explains, "ever since I have been old enough to think for myself, I have entertained the idea that, not withstanding the cruel wrongs inflicted upon us, the black man got nearly as much out of slavery as the white man did" (14). The system of slavery took the spirit of self-reliance away from white people and instilled a strong work ethic in blacks (14). In other words, slavery, in a sense, Americanized blacks while it distanced whites from one of the founding principles of their nation.[82] As part of a speech

[82] He extends this idea of suffering and struggling as instructive when he argues that the slow process of building Tuskegee was a learning experience as well: "I am glad that we endured all those discomforts and inconveniences. I am glad that our students had to dig out the place for their kitchen and dining room. I am glad that our first boarding-place was in that dismal, ill-lighted, and damp basement. Had we started in a fine, attractive, convenient room, I fear we would have 'lost our heads' and become 'stuck up.' It means a great deal, I think, to start off on a foundation which one had made for one's self" (75). This statement

Washington gave upon receiving an honorary degree from Harvard, he characterized the trials that African Americans would face in the next half-century as "the severe American crucible" (*Up from Slavery* 136). This crucible would test their patience, forbearance, perseverance, ability to endure wrong and withstand temptation, acquire and use skill, compete and succeed in the marketplace, and separate the superficial from the real (136). Washington views this test as the "American standard" by which the country demands every race measure itself (136). In these terms, prejudice and racial discrimination become part of the common process that all races must experience in order to become Americans. America's history of oppressing African Americans becomes suddenly benign and unexceptional.[83]

Through a rewriting of slavery that depicts both slaves and slaveholders as victims who should not be held accountable for their actions, Washington shows how America as a whole can separate from its past and emerge anew. He argues that if neither blacks nor whites can be held accountable for their actions during the period of slavery, questions of guilt and blame are no longer relevant and can be put aside in the interest of mutual progress. For example, Washington reasons that although his mother must have

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both humbles Washington and his enterprise and shows that he shares the American value of pulling oneself up by one's bootstraps.

[83] In addition to reconceptualizing the past, Washington took liberties with his depictions of the present, erasing racial conflicts by suggesting that changes that would eliminate them had already occurred. By suggesting that certain racist attitudes and behaviors no longer existed, he sought to pressure people into change. Occasionally, the extent to which Washington alters the present to reflect the future he desires is so extreme that one wonders if his audience really believed it. For example, after he describes Ku Klux Klan activities from his youth to illustrate the darkness of the Reconstruction period, he states, "today there are no such organizations in the South, and the fact that such ever existed is almost forgotten by both races. There are few places in the South now where public sentiment would permit such organizations to exist" (40). Interestingly, he applies this persuasive tactic to African American readers as well, when he comments on the common practice of black men voting the opposite of white men, regardless of the issues and their ignorance of them. After a description of this practice, he writes, "I am glad to add, however that at the present time the disposition to vote against the white man merely because he is white is largely disappearing, and the race is learning to vote from principle, for what the voter considers to be for the best interests of both races" (53).

taken the chickens she sometimes fed her children from their owner's farm, he would never have labeled her action then as theft: "If such a thing were to happen now, I should condemn it as theft myself. But taking place at the time that it did, and for the reason that it did, no one could ever make me believe that my mother was guilty of thievery. She was simply a victim of the system of slavery" (8). Washington's emphasis on what he would have termed the act *then* versus *now* again underscores his rhetoric of change and the need to break from old ways of viewing the past. This rhetoric can also be seen in the contrast between Washington's description of his birth and parentage and similar descriptions in the typical slave narrative. Following the pattern established in other slave-authored texts, Washington begins his text with stating that he was born a slave, identifying the plantation, and explaining that he is unsure of the exact year of his birth and who his father is, although his father was rumored to be a white man. He departs from Douglass's model at this point, however, by asserting that he does not find fault with his white father for taking no interest in his life. Rather, he adopts the view that his father "was simply another unfortunate victim of the institution which the Nation unhappily had engrafted upon it at the time" (8). The passive position in which he places his father and the passive wording of this sentence introduce Washington's strategy of relieving white slaveholders of any responsibility for their actions. Further, when he asserts that the lack of family ties or connections caused by slavery is, in some ways, beneficial because it motivates him to leave a strong record for his descendents, rather than to depend upon, or even be oppressed by, the record of the past, he widens the distance between his and Douglass's perspectives. Like most slaves Douglass was pained by his lack of family connections, but Washington believed that with no past

history to live up to, he was free to create his life as he saw fit. Thus reborn without the burdens of the past, the only obligation he felt was to the future. Here and throughout the text, Washington offers his attitudes as examples for not only African Americans but all Americans to emulate. He believed that if America as a whole could escape its legacy of slavery, the country could be reborn and could embrace a narrative of mutual progress.

As with Douglass, Washington's remarkable life story follows fairly closely the immigrant tale of finding a place within American society by transformation through education. Persuading his audience to believe in the truth of the transformation he underwent as a result of his education was important because his life story was the strongest evidence for the success of industrial programs such as the one he was trying to create at Tuskegee. As Kevern Varney explains in *The Art of the Possible: Booker T. Washington and Black Leadership in the United States, 1881-1925*, Washington "skillfully repackaged the narration of his life history to create an impression of unbroken achievement, and a seamless transition from poverty to international acclaim and material success" (135-36). Washington's audience needed to believe that he had risen through the American success narrative and that industrial education could, indeed, transform a freed slave into a hard worker grateful for any opportunities he was given. In the interest of creating this image, Washington took liberties in narrating the events of his past. Among other examples, Varney discusses Washington's claim that he was never called to the ministry, which is part of his critique of men who would profess religious calling so that they would not have to work, although Washington attended Wayland Seminary in Washington, D.C., for a year. Varney notes that even more interesting is Washington's emphasis on the "sweeping exam" that he passed to gain entrance to the Hampton

Institute. Mary Mackie, the Hampton teacher who supposedly administered the exam, could not recall it when she read *Up from Slavery* in 1901. It is entirely possible that Washington manufactured this incident to show honest physical labor as the gateway to education. Unlike Antin, however, he does not confess to this manipulation of the past, but rather states it plainly as truth.

As he relates his early experiences with education, Washington develops the image of attending school as akin to salvation and entry into the promised land and subtly likens himself to prominent figures from American history. Although he has no formal education as a slave, Washington is drawn to the idea of schooling at a young age when he carries books to school for one of his mistresses. He recalls the classroom scene he saw as one that "made a deep impression" on him; "I had the feeling that to get into a schoolhouse and study in this way would be about the same as getting into paradise" (9). Soon after emancipation, he has the opportunity to attend a local school established to educate former slaves. Upon enrollment, Washington finds himself in the position of needing to redefine who he is. Like Douglass, and indeed like many immigrants, he needs a new name as he takes his first steps toward integrating into American society. Having always been called simply "Booker," he realizes that he will need to add a surname, as the teacher will ask for his full name. He chooses the name Booker Washington, which he believes will "make [him] equal to the situation," and proudly announces it as his own (21). As he begins his new life in a new world that was previously denied to him, Washington thus connects himself with an early leader known for his integrity and claims American history as his own heritage, a strategy which is

reminiscent of Antin's homage to Washington and subsequent claiming of American history as her history.

Washington furthers his vision of school as paradise by relating an incident that he claims changed the course of his life. When Washington overhears a conversation between two men in the coal mine in which he works, he learns of the Hampton Institute:

> As they went on describing the school, it seemed to me that it must be the greatest place on earth, and not even Heaven presented more attractions for me at the time than did the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute in Virginia, about which these men were talking. I resolved at once to go to that school, although I had no idea where it was, or how many miles away, or how I was going to reach it; I remembered only that I was on fire constantly with only one ambition, and that was to go to Hampton. This thought was with me day and night. (24)

James Cox sees the symbolic image of the black boy hearing the call and rising from within the black earth as a construction formulated to support Washington's vision of "education rooted in the land" (234). Washington may well have fictionalized this event, as he did others, to fit the purpose of his narrative. Regardless, this moment of burning desire to travel to Hampton is an appropriate beginning for the epic journey Washington describes as he makes his way to the college. Easily comparable to Benjamin Franklin as he leaves home with little more than the clothes on his back, Washington travels five hundred miles by foot, train, coach, and wagon. He often goes hungry and spends several nights sleeping under boardwalks. When he finally reaches the school, his first

impression of it is comparable to many immigrants' impression of America upon reaching the shore:

> To me it had been a long, eventful journey; but the first sight of the large, three-story, brick school building seemed to have rewarded me for all that I had undergone in order to reach the place. If the people who gave the money to provide that building could appreciate the influence the sight of it had upon me, as well as upon thousands of other youths, they would feel all the more encouraged to make such gifts. It seemed to me the largest and most beautiful building I had ever seen. The sight of it seemed to give me new life. I felt that a new kind of existence now had begun -- that life would now have a new meaning. I felt that I had reached the promised land, and I resolved to let no obstacle prevent me from putting forth the highest effort to fit myself to accomplish the most good in the world. (28)

Washington cleverly uses this familiar pattern of journey, arrival, rebirth, and dedication to the new homeland to encourage benefactors to support schools like Hampton, or, more specifically, Tuskegee. Accordingly, the emphasis on his desire to serve the common good calls to mind the progress that could be made if many others have the educational opportunities he did.

Much like immigrants who find they need to Americanize themselves by changing their dress and daily habits, Washington discovers that becoming part of the Hampton culture requires him to transform physically as well as mentally. Bathing and toothbrushing become daily habits, as do neatness and cleanliness of clothes. He manages to maintain these habits even when he has but one suit to his name. Later in his

career as an educator, when he stays at the homes of his students, he finds nearby streams in which to bathe if no facilities are available in the house. When he begins his work at Tuskegee, he stresses lessons in neatness and cleanliness to his students, believing that changing the outer self will help them to fit better into society. As one who has assimilated, he teaches others to do the same and implicitly argues that, with support, Tuskeegee can continue this work of changing the children of slaves into acceptable Americans.

In promoting his ideas about education, Washington had to contend with the notion shared by many blacks and whites that becoming educated would make an African American unfit and unwilling to be a laborer. Consequently, he emphasizes the development of his strong work ethic via Hampton's industrial model of education. Because he believed it improbable that "a people who had spent generations in slavery, and before that generations in the darkest heathenism, could at first form any conception of what an education meant," Washington thought it his duty to correct the "too prevalent" idea that "as soon as one procured a little education, in some unexplainable way he would be free from most of the hardships of the world, and, at any rate, could live without manual labor" (40). Critical of educational programs which produced, for example, black students in the rural South who could speak Latin and Greek but not support themselves, or graduates who would spend themselves into debt because they lacked the moral lessons and work ethic to do otherwise, Washington supported a system of industrial education that would combine academics and skills training. When he started Tuskegee, he was aware of the image of the educated black man that many of his white readers would envision and sought to correct that misperception:

> The white people who questioned the wisdom of starting this new school had in their minds pictures of what was called an educated Negro, with a high hat, imitation gold eye-glasses, a showy walking-stick, kid gloves, fancy boots, and what not -- in a word, a man who was determined to live by his wits. In a word, it was difficult for these people to see how education would produce any other kind of colored man. (57)

Through his autobiography, Washington counters this image by presenting a type of education that will produce an entirely different kind of man, one capable of contributing to his home and people and willing to do so.

With other African American leaders, Washington shared concerns that even a trained, eager black workforce would lose jobs to the flood of Southern and Eastern European immigrants arriving between 1880 and 1914 (Varney 63). Thus, in his Atlanta Exposition Address, Washington played upon the anti-immigration sentiments that were common at the time by asserting that businessmen would be better off investing in local African American labor than in relying on "foreigners."[84] By contrasting the "local" African American workforce with the incoming immigrant population, Washington moves African Americans from an outsider to an insider position, aligning American and African American concerns. He further argues that once African Americans are able to fill an economic need in their communities, race relations will improve. In *Up from Slavery* he uses the example of brick making at Tuskegee to illustrate this point. As the school's brick industry grew, white neighbors came to Tuskegee to fill their needs and

[84] Despite his negative portrayal of immigrants in his 1895 address, however, Washington typically promoted the immigrant practice of establishing working communities as one that African Americans could model (Varney 63).

"their business interests became intermingled" (71). The working business relationship "helped to lay the foundation for the pleasant relations that have continued to exist between us and the white people in that section, and which now extend throughout the South" (71). This example again underscores his notion of economic partnership leading to social partnership.

Because Washington wanted funding for Tuskegee in addition to acceptance for African Americans, he presents the attitudes and behavior he desires his readers to emulate in his discussions of financial matters. In explaining the benefits of the door-to-door solicitation work he has done, he comments that he has had the opportunity to meet "*the best* people in the world. When one takes a broad survey of the country, he will find that the most useful and influential people in it are those who take the deepest interest in institutions that exist for the purpose of making the world better" (84). Never hesitant to reach his goals through flattery, Washington often told potential sponsors what they wanted to hear. He also remembered and thanked every one of them. In *Up from* Slavery, he carefully records contributions made to the Tuskegee Institute, identifying and praising the patron by name, often including a statement from the giver regarding the worthiness of his enterprise. When he does not have specific names, he refers to groups of people, such as the white families in Tuskegee, Alabama, who gave money for the school. In order to promote the idea that uplift in the South is the concern of people from all races and walks of life, Washington also mentions the race of each person who helps him, whether white or black, and when possible includes an identifying category as well, such as teacher, lawyer, or former slaveholder.

One of Washington's less subtle tactics for garnering support is to use others' words and actions to speak for him rather than praising his own achievements. Unlike earlier slave narratives, Washington's text is not prefaced with documents that attested to its authenticity. Because he was such a well-known public figure, his ability to read and write was unquestioned. Interestingly, though, Washington's text does include multiple endorsements from wealthy white patrons.[85] Most notably, rather than praise his own work, Washington includes passages from others' responses to his efforts. After the text of his Atlanta Exposition Address in Chapter XIV, he reprints a letter of congratulations that he received from President Grover Cleveland. Similarly, in Chapter XV on public speaking, Washington includes glowing reports of his speeches from both Northern and Southern newspapers; these show his widespread national acceptance. Although white testimony was not required for the publication of his autobiography, Washington makes use of it to show public approval of his work and to promote his ideas. By doing this,

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[85] Varney argues that Washington subtly included endorsements from Douglass and courted the approval of Douglass's followers as well by using the strategy of praising Douglass in order to praise himself indirectly. In *My Larger Education*, Washington claims that as a boy, he "wished to go to school and learn to read" so that he could read Douglass's words himself (qtd. in Varney 22). He also mentions hearing Douglass speak in 1892 and being too in awe of him to approach him at the time but inviting Douglass to speak at Tuskegee several years later. Washington then explains that Douglass accepted the invitation and delivered an address titled "Self-Made Men" which supported Washington's philosophy. Varney contends that Washington relates these stories, in part, to show his own rise in status in the intervening years (22). More overtly, Washington positions himself as Douglass's successor through the events surrounding the Atlanta Exposition Address. He takes that opportunity to inform his readers that Douglass died in the same year that he gave the address and to reference "the number of letters, telegrams, and newspaper editorials that came pouring in upon me from all parts of the country demanding that I take the place of 'leader of the Negro people' left vacant by Frederick Douglass's death, or assuming that I had already taken this place." Washington claims to be at first embarrassed and humbled by these communications and hesitant to take on that role, a response that further connects him with Douglass, who showed the same humility early in his career as a speaker. He also alludes to events that invite comparisons between himself and Douglass, such as when he recalls a story Douglass told about being forced to ride in the baggage car of a train and his accommodating the conductor's wishes rather than causing a stir. As Varney explains, "if the great Douglass chose to act in such a manner then this clearly implied a justification for Washington's own 'separate but equal' strategy of avoiding public confrontation over racial segregation" (23). Aware that his method of promoting economic progress before civil rights would invite unflattering comparisons between himself and Douglass, Washington made every effort to align himself with his predecessor and to allow Douglass, in a sense, to speak for him.

rather than speaking for himself, he can maintain the image of humility that won him favor with both politicians and philanthropists. In some cases, however, Washington's choices of those he lets speak for him are questionable at best. Perhaps the most troubling of the accounts he includes in *Up from Slavery* is James Creelman's description of the Atlanta Exposition Address that was telegraphed to the New York *World*. Creelman is certainly impressed with the text of the address and Washington's delivery of it, but, as Stepto has noted, Creelman's write-up perpetuates stereotypes about African Americans and "resorts to clichés in describing Washington" (43). Washington, the tall tawny Negro with big white teeth, piercing eyes, bronzed neck, and a muscular right arm, bewitches "the fairest women of Georgia" as he speaks; most of the Negroes in the audience, like "a ragged, ebony giant" who is seated on the floor, are moved to tears when the audience applauds Washington, "perhaps without knowing just why" (109-10). Washington does not comment on Creelman's words, but his inclusion of them spoke loudly to many readers of *Up from Slavery* who now interpret such strategies as either Washington's internalization of negative images of blackness or his willingness to court white support regardless of the cost.

As was the case with the work of other immigrant writers who presented "model" ethnic selves in order to seek acceptance, Washington's ultimate goals and methods were often misunderstood by his contemporaries. Some missed the point of his strategy of exonerating whites. W. D. Howells, for example, noted that "of all the slights and wrongs he [Washington] is patient, so they do not hinder the Negro from working or learning how to work in the best way" (Washington 165). Howells fails to consider the effect that this strategy might have been intended to have on a white audience as well.

Others were disappointed that in his Atlanta Exposition Speech he "did not say enough about the Rights of Man and the Declaration of Independence" (Washington 172). Washington's best-remembered critic was, of course, W.E.B. Du Bois, who published "Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others" as part of *The Souls of Black Folk* in 1903. In the essay, Du Bois acknowledges that Washington's simple, specific, economic-based plan provided freedmen's sons with the direction they wanted and needed, but, taking as his justification the spirit of democracy, he is sharply critical. For Du Bois, the popularity of Washington's ideas is a cause for regret, sorrow, and apprehension "among educated and thoughtful colored men in all parts of the land" (33).

However, as Washington wrote in a 1912 letter to the editor of the *Indianapolis Star*, his intention was not "to confine the Negro race to industrial education nor to make them hewers of wood and drawers of water," but to "enable them to combine brains and hard work to the extent that their services will be wanted in the communities where they live, and thus prevent them from becoming a burden and a menace" (qtd. inVarney 84). One of the reasons Washington believed in gradual progress is that he thought that if Southern whites were forced to make changes, they would resist and resent. If, however, they gradually came to understand the need for these changes and actively called for them, they would come to protect African Americans' rights themselves. In other contexts, particularly later in his life, Washington spoke out against segregation more forcefully. "Is the Negro Having a Fair Chance?" published in November 1912 in *The Century* magazine and "My View of the Segregation Laws" published posthumously December 4, 1915, in the *New Republic* are two examples. More recently, critics have

begun to explore the extent to which Washington's public persona diverged from his private self and the ways in which his public and private politics also diverged. In *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*, Houston Baker reads Washington's autobiography as a carefully constructed minstrel show, designed to introduce and manipulate tropes with which his white audience would have been familiar.[86] Indeed, Washington wore the mask that he thought was necessary for his people's advancement in society. Unfortunately, that same mask created the impression among large segments of American society that racism and segregation were acceptable practices.

Narratives of the Great Migration

In Washington's day, working for rural economic uplift did seem to be the most viable plan for the improvement of the lives of former slaves and their descendents, but after 1915, the massive damage to the cotton crop from boll weevils and the rural economic recession made the agricultural way of life less attractive and more difficult to sustain for African Americans in the South. While a cotton picker might earn four dollars a day at best, domestic, factory, and restaurant jobs in the North might pay seventy-five cents per hour (Lemann 8). The possibility of such an increase in wages for an unskilled laborer made the pull of the urban North all the more strong, especially when relatives and friends who had already "made it" returned home to visit in expensive cars and

[86] Although in this reading Baker praises Washington for his ability to master white form and reads Washington's manipulation of masks as a liberating means to achieve an effective modernity, Baker later re-reads Washington's power in regard to minstrelsy and modernity in *Turning South Again: Re-thinking Modernism/Re-reading Booker T.* In that study, he characterizes Washington's wearing of "white drag" as the result of "an outrageous, terrifying, white network of power, opinion, and desire" that limited Washington's quest for modernity for himself and other African Americans rather than enabling it (69, 74-75). Despite their different emphases, both readings examine the extent to which Washington wore a mask in the interest of advancing African Americans' position in American society.

clothing, as well as bearing tales of the freedom and opportunity available to African Americans in the promised land. Northern industrialists who wanted a source of cheap labor for their factories also encouraged the migration, with the press aiding their recruitment efforts. Robert S. Abbott, publisher of the Chicago *Defender*, began his "Great Northern Drive" on May 15, 1917; through slogans and songs, he promoted a comparison between the Biblical Exodus[87] and the Northern migration and persuaded railroads to discount group travel (Lemann 16). Additionally, white labor agents and black preachers who toured the South to recruit and black porters on the Illinois Central railroad line generated much interest in going north.[88] Combined with the departure of a significant part of the Northern labor force to fight in World War I and the 1924 National Origins Act that greatly reduced the influx of immigrants into the United States and opened job opportunities for others, these factors led to the mass migration of African Americans first from rural South to urban South and then on to the Northern industrial cities of Chicago, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Detroit, Cleveland, and New York. Most of the migrants had not experienced slavery and were, in Takaki's words, "restless, dissatisfied, unwilling to mask their true selves and accommodate to traditional subservient roles" (*A Different Mirror* 344). Tired of living under the Jim Crow laws, this generation of "young blacks spoke with their feet" (Takaki, *A Different Mirror* 345).

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[87] For the many migrants who invested the journey with religious significance, as their Jewish counterparts did, their trip was akin to the flight from Egypt, with the north figuring as Canaan. The opportunities presented in the North were for God's chosen people, finally freed from slavery. Some even knelt to pray and kissed the ground after crossing the Ohio River.

[88] Because of the fear of the loss of so many farm workers, the southern propaganda machine was working to keep blacks from migrating. Planters, politicians, preachers, and the press stressed the evils of Northern life and the benefits of remaining in the South (Lemann 16-17). Going even further, some towns took legal action to prevent blacks from leaving, levying "licensing fees" on labor agents and arresting blacks for vagrancy if they were in the vicinity of the train station (Lemann 16).

For some, this opportunity for redefinition was a time of unparalleled excitement. Alain Locke celebrated the changes in his 1925 essay "The New Negro." To Locke, the emergence of the New Negro had been long coming; at the turn of the century, "the Old Negro had long become more of a myth than a man" (961). Rather than be shackled with the view of himself as a problem, the New Negro was imbued with self-confidence and self-respect. Locke thought that the movement north should not be viewed simply as a response to crop failure or social terrorism. Rather, the migration was sparked by a new spirit and a new sense of self which led blacks to seize opportunities for improvement (963).

In *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How it Changed America*, Nicholas Lemann estimates that six and a half million African Americans moved to the North between 1910 and 1970, with five million moving after the advent of mechanized cotton farming in the 1940s (6). Lemann further notes that Chicago's black population "grew from 44,000 in 1910 to 109,000 in 1920, and then to 234,000 in 1930" (16).[89] He contends that "in sheer numbers it outranks the migration of any other ethnic group -- Italians or Jews or Poles -- to this country. For blacks, the migration meant leaving what had always been their economic and social base in America and finding a new one" (6).[90] Rather than coming to America on boats, they traveled on Highway 51, Highway 61, U.S. 49, and the Illinois Central line. For the hundreds of thousands arriving by train, the

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[89] Similar increases were seen in a number of major industrial cities. According to Ronald Takaki, between 1910 and 1920 Detroit's black population went from 5,000 to 40,800, Cleveland's from 8,400 to 34,400, and New York's from 91,700 to 152,400 (*A Different Mirror* 340-41).

[90] Thomas C. Holt notes that other sizeable migrations of blacks had occurred during the nineteenth century, including a "small but fairly consistent trickle to Liberia and West Africa," movements from Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas into Kansas, and from Kansas into Oklahoma to establish all-black towns (15). Still, the movement North was the largest by far and profoundly affected both Northern and Southern communities (15).

Illinois Central station at Twelfth Street and Michigan Avenue became known as the Ellis Island of the black migration to Chicago (Lemann 43). There, migrants crowded into waiting rooms with their meager possessions as they looked for family or friends who had already made the journey north.

As they adapted to the urban environment, African Americans had to navigate completely new social and economic systems. Much like their Jewish counterparts in New York, they found lodging in cramped and dirty apartments. According to Holt, the black migrants paid rents that were much higher than those paid by their white counterparts; in Cleveland, for example, they paid up to sixty-five percent more (15). Many were forced to take in boarders in order to pay the rent, which exacerbated the problems of overcrowding and disease. Jobs were plentiful, as promised, but competition and manipulation made the workplace difficult. Wages were generally lower for black workers than for white, and managers would sometimes pit one race against the other, hiring more blacks in order to thwart white labor unions. Racial tension erupted in neighborhoods as well. When blacks began to move out from the slums, they met with hatred and violence. The formation of white neighborhood improvement associations spoke to whites' fears of intermingling, as did the darker history of house bombing and riots.

As was the case with the second wave of Jewish immigrants, the new migrants were helped by an already established black middle class that played a prominent role in their assimilation into Northern life. According to Griffin, the Urban League was particularly active in this enterprise. As part of its project of educating Southern migrants, the Chicago chapter issued a flyer that read:

I AM AN AMERICAN CITIZEN.

I AM PROUD of our boys "over there" who have contributed to soldier service.

I DESIRE to render CITIZEN SERVICE.

I REALIZE that our soldiers have learned NEW HABITS of SELF-RESPECT AND CLEANLINESS.

I DESIRE to help bring about a NEW ORDER OF LIVING in this community.

I WILL ATTEND to the neatness of my personal appearance in the street or when sitting in front doorways.

I WILL REFRAIN from wearing dust caps, bungalow aprons, house clothing and bedroom shoes out of doors.

I WILL ARRANGE MY TOILET within doors and not on the front porch.

I WILL INSIST upon the use of rear entrances for coal dealers, hucksters, etc.

I WILL REFRAIN from loud talking and objectionable deportment on street cars and in public places.

I WILL DO MY BEST to prevent defacement of property either by children or adults. (qtd. in Griffin 104)

In the process of affirming new migrants' status as American citizens, the Urban League sought to erase any signs of their Southern heritage and to remake them in the mold of the Northern black middle-class (Griffin 104). Additionally, active middle-class women's clubs desired to influence the behavior of new female arrivals by encouraging them to repress their sexuality and adopt a Victorian model of deportment (Griffin 106). The actions of these middle-class service organizations were not wholly altruistic, as they were, in part, motivated by disdain and a desire for the new arrivals to assimilate so that

the established class would not be associated with the backward ways of the new migrants. This is the same desire that motivated established German Jews to assist newcomers when the second wave of immigrants, from Russia, came to the United States. Griffin explains that the new African American migrants were not consigned to the role of victim to whites or the black middle class, however; "from parties, dance halls, pool halls, and barber shops to kitchens, churches, families, and friendships," they developed an active culture to sustain themselves against the process of urbanization (107). The creation of what she terms "safe spaces" in the alien environment helped many migrants through the transition into the new way of life. These were physical spaces such as churches and kitchens in which rituals could be enacted, as well as psychological spaces created by recalling values from and memories of home, folks stories, songs, and even Southern cooking (Griffin 9).

In the decade following World War I, educational opportunities for African Americans increased dramatically and altered the fate of a generation, as illiteracy rates decreased from thirty-one percent to sixteen percent and the college and professional graduation rates of African Americans more than doubled between 1916 and 1930 (Holt 16). Consequently, African American art, literature, and music surged forward in the latter half of the 1920s in the hands of a new generation of artists, mostly the children of educated parents, who created works that affirmed the dignity of African Americans in the face of poverty and racism and explored the meaning of blackness in the modern, urban culture. In 1903 Du Bois had argued in *The Souls of Black Folk* that the double-consciousness of African Americans had left them with the "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others" and "measuring one's soul by the tape of a world

that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (3). Although white America was fascinated by black culture during these years "when Harlem was in vogue," the writers of the urban literary explosion later termed the Harlem Renaissance signaled a shift in artistic consciousness by claiming to create for themselves and their own community rather than writing to defend African Americans to white America or to curry its favor. With this new consciousness came the desire to theorize the nature and function of black art. Du Bois, who was editing *The Crisis*, contended that the aim of the cultural renaissance was to prove African Americans' genius in art and letters and therefore to prove their worthiness of equality. George Schuyler and Langston Hughes argued over the very existence of black art in their respective essays "The Negro Art Hokum" and "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain." Later, Zora Neale Hurston and Richard Wright continued the discussion of the social relevance of black literature that began in the Harlem Renaissance.[91]

The migration from the South to the North produced a new body of literature that again reflected immigrant themes, as African Americans faced the same difficulties of European immigrants, struggling to redefine themselves in an alien, urban environment. To use Griffin's description, while slave narratives centered on the auction block,

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[91] Within a growing African American literary community that was moving toward sustaining itself, the role of whites in the production of literature was complicated. As Arnold Rampersad explains, "such involvement was necessary to the movement, so deep was the historic chasm between the races in the United States because of segregation and racist beliefs; if books by blacks were to be published, something more than simple merit would have to be involved" ("Harlem Renaissance" 933). The careers of a number of writers were helped along by the interest of major publishing houses. Countee Cullen, Jean Toomer, and Charles Chesnutt, for example, all had books published by Harper and Brothers. Knopf, Macmillan, Harcourt and Brace, and Macaulay signed black authors as well. These publishers did not often dictate what was to be written, however, which set them apart from individual white literary patrons. Carl Van Vechten and Charlotte Osgood Mason, who supported Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston respectively, offered welcome funding but also ideas that made them uncomfortable. Still, for Hughes, Hurston, and others, financial backing was necessary for the creation of art.

whipping, separation of families, and miscegenation, narratives of migration dealt with lynching, meetings with ancestors, and urban spaces like kitchenettes, dance halls, and street corners (3). Rather than progressing from first-generation texts that addressed coming to America and finding one's way in the new country to second-generation texts that explored generational conflicts in the new land, African American literature had a double start in terms of the immigrant narrative. Balancing the tension between education and heritage, between assimilating into the American culture and remaining a distinct ethnic group, writers explored themes such as physical and cultural dislocation, a loss of self, a sense of entrapment in American culture, isolation from the American dream or ultimate dissatisfaction when it is obtained, search for community, and a troubled relationship to heritage. Although I have chosen not to discuss them within the context of this study, Marita Bonner's "The Whipping," Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*, and Jean Toomer's *Cane* all explore the search for a homeland and the dislocation that results from migration. Additionally, the writings of Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Gwendolyn Bennett, and Marcus Garvey examine what it means to be both African and American. They find no easy answers in terms of relationship to a distant homeland.

The Harlem Renaissance waned with the stock market crash of 1929 and the onset of the depression of the 1930s. As unemployment and crime rose in urban neighborhoods, portrayals of the problems of urban life began to appear in African American literature, signaling a shift from middle-class to working-class concerns. By the end of the 1930s, a group of writers critical of the Harlem Renaissance's inattention to social protest had emerged. Richard Wright was arguably the most vocal of these. In his 1937 manifesto "Blueprint for Negro Writing," he criticized the writing of his

predecessors as that of "prim and decorous ambassadors who went a-begging to white America," stating that "they entered the Court of American Public Opinion dressed in the knee-pants of servility, curtsying to show that the Negro was not inferior, that he was human, and that he had a life comparable to that of other people" (1380). Further arguing that this type of writing was "external to the lives of educated Negroes themselves," Wright advocated a new type of writing that would be a guide to daily living and bridge the gap between black writers and the masses of their people (1380-81). Writing should no longer be "devoid of wider social connotations"; rather, it should speak to the complex consciousness of Negro life in America and, in doing so, enable those far removed from the working class, whether black or white, to identify with it (1384-86). At the time, Wright's influence over the direction of African American literature was so pronounced that Deborah McDowell and Hortense Spillers argue that with his emergence as a major literary force, black art became synonymous with social protest (1322).

When Wright wrote his autobiography in 1943, he desired to speak for those who could not by showing the psychological terrors that shaped African Americans' lives in the North as well as the South. However, when *Black Boy* was first published in 1945, it reinforced for many readers the notion of migration to the North as a means of finding liberty, citizenship, and happiness because that version of the autobiography ends with Wright boarding the train for Chicago "without a backward glance," full of hope for a new future. Janice Thaddeus observes that because the book ended in this way, some readers took Wright's later commercial success as evidence of an easy transition from hopeful migrant to successful author (76). Interestingly, Wright did not initially intend to conclude the text with his journey north. The original manuscript continued beyond his

departure and covered his life in the North through the 1930s in a section entitled "The Horror and the Glory." Harper and Brothers accepted the book in the two-section format for publication, but negotiations with the Book-of-the-Month Club prior to its release led to changes. The club's judges were interested in Wright's book but requested that he cut "The Horror and the Glory." Because Wright wanted the exposure and income that would come from the book's selection, he made the requested changes.[92] According to Albert E. Stone, *Black Boy* would have reached over 325,000 readers through the Book Club's circulation (18). Wright did publish selections from "The Horror and the Glory" in a series of magazine pieces in the mid-1940s,[93] but the full text of the Chicago section was not published until 1977, when Harper and Row printed it based on surviving page proofs under the title of *American Hunger* (Rampersad, "Note" 488-89). In 1991 the Library of America issued both sections together as *Black Boy (American Hunger)*; this version is now considered the standard version of Wright's autobiography. The full autobiography, according to Jerry Ward in his introduction to the Library of America text, shows Wright's desire to tell a representative American story that would speak to the hunger for life common to all humans, rather than just a story of Southern poverty and racism (xiii). Because the Library of America version most closely matches the text as Wright initially conceived it, I have chosen to use this version in my study.

Wright's autobiography shows the recent immigrant writer's concern with creating a representative text. Wright sought to tell not only his story but also the story of

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[92] Wright later wrote that pressure from Communists led to the Book Club's request, since the second section of the book dealt with his party involvement (Rampersad, "Note" 488). Janice Thaddeus's article "The Metamorphosis of Richard Wright's *Black Boy*" offers a closer examination of Wright's motives for altering the text.

[93] See John M. Reilly's "The Self Creation of the Intellectual: *American Hunger* and *Black Power*" for a more detailed discussion of these articles.

many African Americans in the South. The accuracy of Wright's claim to "representativeness" has drawn much critical discussion over the years, beginning with early reviewers of the book. Du Bois, for example, was highly critical of Wright's claim to representation since the book did not present the image of blackness, or, for that matter, whiteness, that he felt it was appropriate to convey. For Du Bois, "nothing that Richard Wright says is in itself unbelievable or impossible; it is the total picture that is not convincing" ("Richard Wright" 36). Mary McCarthy's review spoke to the fears of many white readers who, if Wright did indeed represent the views of the masses, would justifiably be considered the enemy in the minds of the black population (41). Arthur P. Davis's review offers reasons for such reactions to the text: "With typical American optimism, we have fooled ourselves that conditions are not really as bad as they seem; and this ostrich-attitude has bred in us a measure of optimism. Black Boy rudely kicks this frail prop from under us, dumping us unceremoniously on the ground of ugly reality. And we do not like it" (589). Black Boy was a source of discomfort for more than subscribers of American optimism. Various groups attacked it on the grounds of inaccurate representation, including Communists, Southern politicians, social conservatives, black intellectuals, and members of the black middle class (Andrews and Taylor 4).[94]

Interestingly, Wright does not position himself as representative in the text in the way that Douglass and Washington, and immigrant writers like Mary Antin who shared

[94] For a more recent approach to the issue of Wright as representative, see Timothy Adams's "Richard Wright: Wearing the Mask," which argues that Wright's departures from the truth in terms of his life experiences bring him closer to representing the experience of Southern black boys. He concludes with a reversal of Du Bois's claim; "although much of what Wright wrote is not literally true, the total picture is ultimately convincing, taken in context" (188).

this aim, do. Wright consistently stresses the extent to which he is different from others in his community and the idea that he is often misunderstood. Rather than downplay the extraordinariness of his life in order to encourage others to believe that they can emulate him, Wright explores what set him apart from others from childhood through adulthood. In one example, this difference is pronounced when he enters Jim Hill public school and watches the other students eat their lunches when he cannot afford to buy his own. Physical hunger, which has always been a part of his life, is here expressed as an emotional hunger as well. His hunger for life comes from his desire to fill his empty belly with knowledge and imagination and yearning. Watching his classmates eat, Wright says, "again and again I vowed that someday I would end this hunger of mine, this apartness, this eternal difference; and I did suspect that I would never get intimately into their lives, that I was doomed to live with them but not of them, that I had my own strange and separate road, a road which in later years would make them wonder how I had come to tread it" (148). Wright explains that path through *Black Boy (American Hunger)* as he traces his frustrated attempts to identify with and become part of various communities in the South and North. In each case, he finds himself at odds with the values and norms of the group and moves on to look elsewhere for a sense of belonging. Still, in its panoramic view of black life, *Black Boy* reflects the typical experience of those who fled the rural South for better prospects in the urban North. As Wright describes the murder of a relative at the hands of the Klan, job discrimination, Jim Crow laws, and the dearth of opportunities for a young black man in the South, he is clearly presenting the story of black men of his generation. The difference between Wright and his contemporaries, as he constructs it, is not to be found in his basic experiences but in

his reaction to them. Instead of accommodating or becoming self-destructive through crime, paths that he saw as sacrifices of dignity and morality, Wright chooses to recreate his world through writing. Ultimately, he is able to succeed in analyzing and critiquing systems of oppression through literature precisely because he is different.

As Douglass did, Wright depicts the process of learning to read by borrowing knowledge from those more fortunate.[95] Seeing that some of the neighborhood children leave their books on the sidewalk when they play in the afternoons, he looks through the books and questions the children about the "baffling black print" (24). Like Douglass, too, his taste of knowledge leads to the expansion of his world. He explains, "there grew in me a consuming curiosity about what was happening around me" (24). As he learns to understand written language, his desire to process his experiences through the mechanism of language increases. Wright's early understanding of race relations in the South is limited by his failure to comprehend the connotations of being either black or white in the South. The nature of Wright's family accounts, in part, for his meager understanding. Because his grandmother is as light-skinned as any white person but "had never looked 'white'" to him, he does not perceive the color distinctions upon which the discrimination in his world is based. When his mother will not fully answer his questions about his grandmother's race, he comments, "again I was being shut out of the secret, the thing, the reality I felt somewhere beneath all the words and silences" (55). Further confusion results from the violence inherent in his relationship with his own father; he assumes that when a "black" boy is beaten by a "white" man, the man must be the boy's father

[95] Indeed, as Stepto argues, "despite Wright's brave assertion in 'Blueprint for Negro Writing' (1937) that 'tradition is no longer a guide,' there can be no doubt that tradition guided him" (129). In this scene and many others, Wright reflects Douglass's *Narrative* in content and style.

because, in his mind, beating one's son is a paternal right (27). Although he is aware that his society is racially coded, he cannot yet comprehend the meaning of the labels.

As Wright enters the world of books, he finds himself entranced with reading as the way to access the wider world and simultaneously estranged from his family. His grandmother insists that he will burn in hell for reading the dime novels that captivate him. Still, Wright persists in reading because he cannot turn away from the new world that has been revealed:

> I had tasted what to me was life, and I would have more of it, somehow, someway. I realized that they could not understand what I was feeling and I kept quiet. But when no one was looking I would sneak into Ella's room and steal a book and take it back of the barn and try to read it. Usually I could not decipher enough words to make the story have meaning. I burned to learn to read novels and I tortured my mother into telling me the meaning of every strange word I saw, not because the word itself had any value, but because it was the gateway to a forbidden and enchanting land. (47)

In this passage that Stepto describes as "debt-laden rhetoric" (141), Wright recreates the moment when Douglass is forbidden by Mr. Auld to learn more about reading and consequently discovers the key to freedom. Here, though, Wright's own grandmother forbids him further access to this new world by punishing him and dismissing Ella, the young schoolteacher who is boarding with the family. As Wright will demonstrate again in the battle with his school principal, those who limit possibilities for African Americans can be black as well as white.

Wright also learns as a young child that he can use his imagination to alter his reality. Feeling that he could not control "the objective world," he "made things happen within. Because my environment was bare and bleak, I endowed it with unlimited potentialities, redeemed it for the sake of my own hungry and cloudy yearning" (85). While these fantasies start off as innocent, childish wishes, they soon turn violent as he imagines bravely protecting himself against the nameless threat he feels from white people (86-87). Wright admits that whites never attacked him and that he has no personal reason to feel threatened. His fears are based on social conditioning: "I had never in my life been abused by whites, but I had already become as conditioned to their existence as though I had been the victim of a thousand lynchings" (87). However, his fantasies enable him to keep his "emotional integrity whole" (82). Only in his mind can he exert some control over the threats that loom over him. When Wright turns his imaginative powers to his first short story, he pens a tale with "no plot, no action, nothing save atmosphere for longing and death" (141). Although the story is not literally reflective of his environment, and in fact more closely resembles the horror stories he has read through the pulp fiction magazines that his grandmother objects to, it conveys many of the same feelings of hopelessness and chaos that surround him daily. Through writing, however, he finds that he can both create and control: "I had never in my life done anything like it; I had made something, no matter how bad it was; and it was mine" (141). Even more important to him than this feeling is the reaction of Wright's first reading audience, a girl in the neighborhood:

> God only knows what she thought. My environment contained nothing more alien than writing or the desire to express one's self in writing. But I

> never forgot the look of astonishment and bewilderment on the young woman's face when I had finished reading and glanced at her. Her inability to grasp what I had done or was trying to do somehow gratified me. Afterwards when I thought of her reaction I smiled happily for some unaccountable reason. (142)

Although he does not fully comprehend his own response at this time, Wright is gratified by his ability to do something that moves him beyond the limits of his community's understanding.

By the time Wright is twelve years old, he understands more fully the workings of race in the South and his place within them, as do the white boys his age:

> both of us, the white boys and the black boys, began to play our traditional racial roles as though we had been born to them, as though it was in our blood, as though we were being guided by instinct. All the frightful descriptions we had heard about each other, all the violent expressions of hate and hostility that had seeped into us from our surroundings, came now to the surface to guide our actions. (96)

Just as Wright understands his place in the conflict, he understands that he must participate in it in order to maintain his status on the streets. Although his mother has warned him against fighting white boys, he knows that her advice conflicts with the gang's. He sides with his friends because their life was his (97). Thus Wright is pressured to fulfill his prescribed role not only by the white society that forces him to "know his place" but also by his own society, which requires him to be a violent, angry, young man in order to salvage his pride within an oppressive system.

When his first published story, "The Voodoo of Hell's Half-Acre," appears in the local paper, Wright is forced to confront an additional limiting role through censure from family, friends, and teachers. He later admits, "had I been fully conscious of the full extent to which I was pushing against my environment, I would have been frightened altogether out of my attempts at writing" (198). His classmates feel that he is doing something "vaguely wrong," but neither they nor his teachers have the words to express the nature of his transgressions (199-200). A confrontation with his school's principal over which ninth-grade graduation speech Wright will deliver-- his or one penned by the principal -- compels Wright to take a stand for his principles and then to leave school. Forced to choose between accepting the advice of well-intentioned elders who want him to "remember his place" and going on his own, the seventeen-year-old seeks employment, determined to remake himself as he sees fit.[96] By rejecting the scripts that others offer him, Wright is taking authorial control over the text of his life, but finding his voice is not equated with finding his freedom. Even in his excitement, he is aware that he is crossing dangerous lines. In dreaming of writing and the possibilities of the North, Wright imagines himself not on a train headed toward a better life but on a train headed for certain destruction:

> Somewhere in the dead of the southern night my life had switched onto the wrong track and, without my knowing it, the locomotive of my heart was rushing down a dangerously steep slope, heading for a collision,

[96] Despite Wright's desire to learn, the classroom is never the paradise that it is in Washington's narrative. This is one of many episodes which reveal that in *Black Boy*, it is merely another site of rejection and repression.

> heedless of the warning red lights that blinked all around me, the sirens and the bells and the screams that filled the air. (200)

That collision is realized as Wright enters the working world. His first job working for a white family introduces him to the humble role he is expected to play in order to keep his employment. He quickly learns to say "yes ma'am," but decides that he cannot remain in this position after his aspirations of becoming a writer are insulted by his employer (173-74). Wright's clearest depiction of the Southern restriction of African Americans appears in the series of episodes that follows. Previously published as an essay entitled "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow," the vignettes describe the mental and physical abuse he receives while working as a porter in a clothing store and an apprentice at an optical company. Each position teaches him that he will not be accepted because boys like him are too much of a threat to the established order:

> Although they lived in America where in theory there existed equality of opportunity, they knew unerringly what to aspire to and what not to aspire to. Had a black boy announced that he aspired to be a writer, he would have been unhesitatingly called crazy by his pals. Or had a black boy spoken of yearning to get a seat on the New York Stock Exchange, his friends -- in the boy's own interest -- would have reported his odd ambition to his white boss. (232)

While Wright condemns the discriminatory practices of whites, he also acknowledges the role that African Americans themselves play in limiting their opportunities. By accepting the "rules" and censoring themselves, particularly those who desire something more than white society is willing to give, they have a hand in their own oppression.

Job opportunities are slightly better when Wright moves to Memphis to try again in a new place, but, more importantly, he takes large steps there in terms of his education. While working at another optical company, he comes across a newspaper article that denounces H.L. Mencken. Determined to learn why a white man would be criticized in the South, Wright conceives of a plan to check Mencken's books out from the local library that he is not allowed to patronize. Borrowing the library card of a sympathetic white co-worker, Wright gets books by forging a note from the cardholder authorizing him to take the books: "*Dear Madam: Will you please let this nigger boy* -- I used the word 'nigger' to make the librarian feel that I could not possibly be the author of the note -- *have some books by H.L. Mencken*?" (291). Trying to appear "as unbookish as possible" when he hands her the note, Wright succeeds in appropriating knowledge by playing a role. By manipulating the dominant cultural language, Wright gains access to knowledge and therefore freedom. Douglass employs this same manipulation when he forges the pass for his first escape attempt, as does Washington when he adopts the guise of the humble, non-combative former slave.

The anger of Mencken's writing strikes Wright, who for the first time begins to think of words as weapons (293). The books he reads offer him not immediate solutions to his problems but new ways of seeing the world. They also instill in him the desire to go north. Wright knows that he must keep his plans to himself because expressing a desire for change would be interpreted by the white community as dissatisfaction with his place in life and as a challenge to authority (298). When he eventually tells his boss he is leaving, he is questioned by white co-workers who use strategies commonly employed by those who sought to hold back the black migration. They tell him that the North will not

be any good for him, that he should not believe the stories about it, that he will change and act differently, and that he will eventually come back (302). When he departs, he half expects to be called back and told that his leaving is a dream (303).

Throughout *Black Boy (American Hunger)*, Wright shows the power of the vision of the North at work in Southern black communities. In a conversation designed to show off their knowledge and toughness to each other, he and several boyhood friends discuss the North. His added comments explicate the drive behind each statement in the conversation:

> 'Shucks, man. I'm going north when I get grown.' Rebelling against a futile hope and embracing flight.
>
> 'A colored man's all right up north.' Justifying flight.
>
> 'They say a white man hit a colored man up north and that colored man hit that white man, knocked him cold, and nobody did a damn thing!' Urgent wish to believe in flight.
>
> 'Man for man up there.' Begging to believe in justice.
>
> Silence. (94)

Stepto reads Wright's recomposition of this conversation as an exploitation of his past versus present selves to show the progress of the articulate survivor (132). No longer trapped as the boys were then, Wright is able to step outside of the conversational pattern and analyze its function. Here he moves beyond representing the immigrant drive for the North in his text to revealing the reasons for African Americans' need to believe in it. When Wright is older, he readily admits that his vision of the North "had no relation to what actually existed. Yet by imagining a place where everything was possible, I kept

hope alive in me" (198). Like immigrants dreaming of America, he reasoned that if he could create a new world, a world to which he might eventually travel, he could survive in the meantime. Wright had read Horatio Alger novels, pulp stories, and the Get-Rich-Quick Wallingford series thoroughly, but knew, in spite of the dreams they presented him, that the possibility of rising to material success in this was way "too remote" (199). On this point Wright stands in contrast to immigrant writers who came to the United States believing fully in the ideal of the self-made man. He believes too, because he has to, but also acknowledges that he will not be able to attain that ideal because of his race. So while the dream is clearly false, or at least not open to everyone, it still inspires him to want more than what he can have in Mississippi. Wright theorizes that belief in a dream that is unattainable stems from, and also propagates, a racial self-hatred. He reasons that blacks come to hate the part of themselves that whites hate, but that they submerge these feelings of self-hatred because their pride prevents them from showing whites the extent to which they have been conquered. As a way of balancing this self-hatred, they harbor dreams of owning businesses, making money, and advancing in careers, "like any other American" (323). Acknowledging the futility of these dreams is the final step in a cycle of self-hatred, as he comes to hate himself for "allowing [his] mind to dwell upon the unattainable" (313).

Wright opens the second section of the book with a blunt statement of the failure of the North to live up to his expectations:

> My first glimpse of the flat black stretches of Chicago depressed and dismayed me, mocked all my fantasies. Chicago seemed an unreal city whose mythical houses were built of slabs of black coal wreathed in palls

> of gray smoke, houses whose foundations were sinking slowly into the dank prairie. Flashes of steam showed intermittently on the wide horizon, gleaming translucently in the winter sun. The din of the city entered my consciousness, entered to remain for years to come. (307)

Greeted with a sprawling industrial scene that is reminiscent of the debased vision of America that greets Henry Roth's David Schearl, Wright learns that Chicago is not the promised land of his dreams. There is no threat of violence here but, rather, a dehumanizing indifference (Griffin 70). The close of this passage indicates the emphasis of the second section on the migrant's mental and emotional state and the power of the city to dehumanize, just as the racial divisions of the South had. Faced with returning to the known terror of the South or living in the unknown terror of the urban North, Wright chooses to stay, but senses from the strained faces of those around him that life will continue to be a struggle. His descriptions of other blacks convey the idea that in coming north, African Americans traded one sort of oppression for another: "wherever my eyes turned they saw stricken, frightened, black faces trying vainly to cope with a civilization they did not understand. I felt lonely. I had fled one insanity and had embraced another" (308-09).[97] As he meditates upon his new loneliness and isolation, he again sees that nothing he can dream has "the barest possibility of coming true" and comes to understand the limitations of his society all over again (314).

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[97] Earlier in the text, Wright recognizes the burden of the city on African Americans and the damage that it can do when he meets his father again twenty-five years after their estrangement. He describes his father as "a black peasant who had gone to the city seeking life, but who had failed in the city; a black peasant whose life had been hopelessly snarled in the city, and who had at last fled the city -- the same city which had lifted me in its burning arms and borne me toward alien and undreamed-of shores of knowing" (41).

Like most immigrants, Wright has difficulty adapting to life in this new world in part because he continues to read it as he did his old world. When he finds himself locked outside of language, for example, he attributes the same demeaning motives to his Jewish employers as he had to his white bosses in the South. He assumes that their use of broken English is a means of protecting their position as storeowners against him, even though they are newcomers and America is his native land (311). He is further mystified when white waitresses at another job he holds are not afraid to touch him (319). Contrasting his deep-seated psychological pain with their easy, carefree approach to life, he concludes, "we shared a common tongue, but my language was a different language from theirs" (320). Other examples from "The Horror and the Glory" show that Wright's use of his Southern understanding of race in the Northern world is not completely unfounded, however. He faces discrimination in many of his positions, from janitor at a hospital to editor of a leftist literary magazine.

Wright's search for a common thread of unity among men, which he deems "more important than bread," leads him to the Communist Party (374), where he once again feels his difference as he is labeled an intellectual and criticized for responding to what he sees as the organization's limited vision. As a member of the Chicago John Reed Club, Wright hopes that he will be able, through his writing, "to reveal the vast physical and spiritual ravages of Negro life" and their kinship to the suffering of others to the world (395). Wright's drive to speak for others grows out of his strong sense of independent thought, which is problematic for the party leadership. In embracing the American heritage of rebellion and free speech, he is condemned by the group that claims to be fighting to reform the nation. Stepto compares the Communist Party's

unwillingness to accept his independent thought to the Northern abolitionists' unwillingness to accept Douglass's; "in both cases, sympathizers, men and women who strove to see through race to the individual and to champion that individual's right to free access to literacy, became confused about the distinction between employing and exploiting an individual as a race representative" (197). Throughout the second section of *Black Boy (American Hunger)*, Wright presents the idea that for African Americans, there is no safe haven in America. Even the promised land is characterized by racial division and prejudice. Continuing African American literature's earlier critique of America's failure to live up to its promises, Wright asserts that for those who come to the cities looking for salvation, there is little hope. Even though *Black Boy (American Hunger)* stresses the dehumanizing effects of the city and its failure to fulfill the migrants' dreams, Wright rejected a nationalist agenda, instead embracing an integrationist vision. In a 1945 interview with Charles J. Rolo, he said, "as I see it, integration -- complete equality -- is the only solution, and as an artist I want to bring out the oneness of human life" (Rolo 29). More specifically, Wright contended that although migration to the North was not a final solution, "urbanization brings the Southern Negro within the living orbit of the nation for the first time. It brings him into contact with literacy, with democratic ideas, makes him conscious of his relation to the nation" (28). Wright's ultimate vision of America is of a place not yet "ready to probe its most fundamental beliefs" (321). He sees America as a nation too set upon viewing the world in terms of simple dichotomies -- good and bad, holy and evil, high and low, white and black -- because it is afraid of its history and would rather condemn that which it does not understand (321). He readily admits that he shares the flaws of his nation (321) and

concludes that solving the Negro problem will be tantamount to solving America's problems (350). But as outcasts of the nation, African Americans were uniquely situated to solve America's fundamental difficulties (350). Consequently, Wright concludes *Black Boy (American Hunger)* with the idea of continuing his search for "how to live a human life" (452). For Wright, this search will take the form of writing:

> I would hurl words into this darkness and wait for an echo, and if an echo sounded, no matter how faintly, I would send other words to tell, to march, to fight, to create a sense of the hunger for life that gnaws in us all, to keep alive in our hearts a sense of the inexpressibly human. (453)

More explicitly than either Douglass or Washington, Wright argues for the power of the word to overturn social systems. In doing so, Wright does not end his story with a feeling of completion and success but, rather, in Thaddeus's words, with "his sense of quest" (70).

Wright's dark vision of life in the North dominated the migration narrative through World War II (Griffin 10).[98] Ann Petry's 1946 novel *The Street* is a notable example of a text that develops similar themes in depicting the urban landscape as one that breaks its inhabitants' spirits. For Petry's protagonist Lutie Johnson, the street itself becomes a trap. Like Wright, Petry does not romanticize the South as a place of possible redemption; neither does she offer an uplifting vision of the North. Petry positions Johnson as torn between an identity associated with memories of her grandmother and the narrative of American success that she dreams of, which is embodied in Benjamin

[98] Dorothy West's *The Living is Easy* is one notable exception to Wright's model in that it presents the South as a source of spiritual sustenance.

Franklin's autobiography. Ultimately, her blind faith in the American system dooms her. Wright's critique of white America's attitude toward blacks and of the black community's failures can be seen in the work of Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin as well, even though both consciously moved their works beyond the narrow confines of Wright and Petry's naturalism.

The Second Generation in the North

A second wave of black migrants from the South, some 5.5 million people, came to the North between 1940 and 1960. As earlier European immigrant groups moved up the economic ladder and out of the inner cities, the new arrivals replaced them and created new ghettos. At this time American industry was moving from neighborhood to industrial sites, so as Southern blacks continued to pour in, industry was moving out. Many black migrants were drawn to the war industries, but because these jobs were temporary at best, life in the urban North continued to be characterized by labor conflicts, class antagonism, and housing discrimination. In his study of riots and civil disorders in the 1960s, John S. Adams concludes that the gap between urban black Americans' "sharply rising expectations and limited capabilities" widened considerably during this time (24). According to Lemann, in Chicago, "black people were regularly charged more rent and paid lower wages than white people, and they were barred entirely from many good jobs. There were no black drivers of yellow cabs, no black sales clerks at the great department stores in the Loop, no black linemen at Illinois Bell, no black bus drivers, no black policemen or firemen except at the stations in the black belt, and no blacks in the building-trades unions" (65). Despite these limitations on employment, the migrants kept

coming because "money and dignity" were still easier to come by in the North than in the South (Lemann 65). With the Montgomery bus boycott in the mid-1950s and the emergence of the Civil Rights movement in the late 1950s and early 1960s changes began to occur, but slowly and with many setbacks. The greatest disadvantage for migrants to the North seemed to be "the constant temptation to fall into the wild life that was there on the South Side for those who wanted it" (Lemann 65). In response to the impoverished living conditions in Northern black communities, a distinctly urban culture developed, with the hip talk, zoot suits, and bebop of a younger generation (McDowell and Spillers 1320). For this generation growing up in cities like Chicago, shootings and stabbings occurred regularly on Saturday nights, prostitution and number running were big business, and "law enforcement was casual" with police departments who were unconcerned with black-on-black crime (Lemann 65).

By the 1960s African American writers were seeking new forms of expression that would, in the words of Larry Neal, speak "directly to the needs and aspirations of Black America" (1960). Following the dictates of Maulana Karenga, one of the chief architects of the movement, art was to be judged on social rather than artistic criteria (1973). The works produced by the Black Arts writers were directed toward a divided readership. Because art was supposed to "expose the enemy, praise the people, and support the revolution" (Karenga 1974), it was created to affirm a black audience and shock a white one. Much of the literature that came out of the Black Arts movement addressed the problems of urban life in the North as African American writers began to explore their own communities.

Through his 1965 autobiography *Manchild in the Promised Land*, Claude Brown offers a wrenching portrait of growing up in Harlem in the 1940s and 1950s. In his foreward, Brown sketches the experiences of the first generation of migrants whose high expectations were dashed when they realized that the promised land "was a slum ghetto" with "too many people full of hate and bitterness crowded into a dirty, stinky, uncared-for closet-size section of a great city" (8). He then shifts the reader's sympathies to the children of these migrants, whom he describes as having inherited their parents' disappointment and anger, along with "little hope of deliverance" (8). Brown was one of these children, and his autobiography presents a painfully honest vision of life for this generation. In its focus on the plight of the second generation struggling to make it in the promised land and on value conflicts between parents and children, Brown's autobiography marks a turn in the African American migration narrative to thematic elements that are comparable to second-generation texts from other immigrant traditions. Brown and his fully urbanized peers fight against the influence of their parents who still look to their Southern roots for solutions to problems and continue to be intimidated by white authority figures. However, the autobiography contains elements of the first-generation experience as well. Brown depicts himself and his peers as immigrants entering a new land as the Harlem of their parents' experience changes with the drug culture and as they try to leave the city for wider opportunities.

Brown's autobiography grew out of an article on Harlem he wrote for *Dissent* at the urging of Ernest Papanek, a white educator who had mentored Brown during his stay at the Wiltwyck reform school for boys. The article caught the attention of editors at Macmillan, who offered him an advance to complete a book about his life in Harlem.

Although Papanek's influence calls to mind Garrison's urging of Douglass to tell his story, we can see that in the case of Brown and Papanek, the power dynamic is quite different. Papanek stood nothing to gain from Brown's success, and Brown retained control over the direction of the text throughout the writing and publishing process. Brown also consciously sought to follow black models. Having never written anything like the book he wanted to produce, he borrowed Douglass's *Narrative* and Wright's *Black Boy* from the Schomberg Library to read as guides (Roswell 450).

Manchild in the Promised Land became a bestseller almost instantly, and to date there are an estimated four million copies in print. At the time of its publication, Brown was heralded as the voice of his generation and *Manchild* as the harbinger of important transitions in African American literature. As Tom Wolfe commented, "Claude Brown makes James Baldwin and all that old Rock of Ages rhetoric sound like some kind of Moral Rearmament tourist from Toronto come to visit the poor" (Locher 89). Based on *Manchild* and Brown's second book, *The Children of Ham*, Arnold Rampersad declared Brown "the true epic poet of modern Harlem" in a 1976 review. Curiously, the book has received little sustained critical attention in literary circles since its appearance but has been read widely as a social history. Robert Goldman and William D. Crano's "*Black Boy* and *Manchild in the Promised Land*" (1976) is one example of a sociological approach to the text. Using a statistical value analysis that records examples of feelings toward parents, siblings, peers and authority figures in both books, they conclude that differences between the two reveal that there is no simplistic autobiographical paradigm. Houston Baker, one of the few literary critics to consider Brown, comments on the text's usefulness as a social document:

> the relationship between the narrator and the environment gives Brown's work a critical objectivity that makes the book useful for socio-historical purposes; moreover, the changes in environment that define the protagonist's struggle reflect a historical process with a degree of historical accuracy that also makes the work valuable as a social history. ("The Environment as Enemy" 53)

The lack of critical attention to *Manchild* in recent years may well be due to the view of it as more of a social record than a text which transcends the decade of its composition.

One of Brown's aims was to record the experiences of his generation. In doing so, he writes with what Eliot Fremont-Smith described in a 1965 review as "immense control [. . .] without the anger and resentment that he shows he is justified" (21). Baker observes that "there is no ineluctable march of naturalistic events; there are no long and bitter tirades against a hostile universe, and no scenes where the protagonist is portrayed as the mangled and pitiable victim of negative forces. Brown's work, therefore, can neither be rigidly classified as 'naturalistic' nor as 'angry' autobiography" ("The Environment as Enemy" 53). Neither can it be classified as a "how-to" text for boys in Brown's situation. Like Douglass, Washington, and Wright, he positions himself as one of the fortunate few to make it out, and therefore one in a position to help others by telling his story, but *Manchild* is not tightly focused on the steps that led to Brown's successful escape from the ghetto. While Brown transforms his life through the support of mentors who eventually lead him to believe in himself and through a turn toward education in his late teens, his book does not comment at any length about what enabled him to succeed when so many others failed. In recounting his life history, he introduces

readers to a host of juvenile delinquents, thieves, junkies, and prostitutes, most of whom did not make it. He is more concerned with presenting a realistic portrait of Harlem than he is with promoting a specific social agenda, like Douglass, Washington, or Wright. Although the book includes descriptions of the white community's failure to offer legal and economic assistance to those struggling upward, particularly in terms of police activity, this is not Brown's principal interest either. In this regard, Brown departs from the Black Arts formula. Ultimately, *Manchild in the Promised Land* is not a criticism of the forces that limited opportunities for migrant children or a defense of the lost generation's choices but a text that asks for understanding and acceptance of the conditions that compelled them to choose street life.

Turning the lens inward from stories of how black migrants relate to the outside world to how they relate to each other, Brown carefully explores the forces behind a community's self-destruction as he analyzes the lure of criminal life for those who see themselves as ostracized from American freedoms and opportunities. In the foreword, Brown writes that for his generation, the question is "where does one run to when he's already in the promised land?" (8). Appropriately, then, the story begins with flight:

> 'Run!'
>
> Where?
>
> Oh, hell. Let's get out of here!
>
> 'Turk! Turk! I'm shot!' . . .
>
> I ran. There was a bullet in me trying to take my life, all thirteen years of it. (9)

In this case Brown is running from the woman whose bedsheets he has attempted to steal. As the narrative progresses, Brown shows that while he and his gang, the Harlem Buccaneers, were literally running from outraged neighbors, truant officers, police, and other criminals, they were also running from broken homes, a bleak future that offered them nowhere to turn but the streets, and a fear that they would not be able to succeed at anything outside of hustling. Baker reads street life in the text "as a form of rebellion against the environment, an environment which, in effect, constitutes a colony held in check by white society 'downtown'" ("The Environment as Enemy" 55). It is also, as Brown shows, a community within which boys can find the power and acceptance they cannot receive elsewhere.

Rather than adopt the persona of an older, wiser man looking back on his turbulent childhood, Brown directly portrays the thoughts and impressions of himself as a child as he learns about his angry, violent world. In this way, the narrative voice resembles David Shearl's in *Call It Sleep*. As a six-year-old, Brown wakes up to loud noises coming from the streets that he thinks must be bombs from the Germans or Japanese because of the war. As it turns out, there is a riot happening in his neighborhood, but he still envisions the scene outside as a war zone: "While I listened to the noise, I imagined bombs falling and people running through the streets screaming. I could see mothers running with babies in their arms, grown men running over women and children to save their own lives, and the Japs stabbing babies with bayonets, just like in the movies. I thought, Boy, I sure wish I was out there. I bet the Stinky brothers are out there. Danny and Butch are probably out there having all the fun in the world" (12). There is no narrative voice commenting on the scene beyond that of the six-year-old, no

mature Brown pointing out his naiveté or warning readers against the folly of delighting in this kind of chaos. With the same enthusiasm for the excitement the streets can provide, Brown narrates learning to play hookey, ring cash registers, and steal food. Seven years later, as he waits to be taken to a juvenile facility after the shooting, he is tempted to blame several older boys who taught him to steal, but then admits "aw, hell, it wasn't their fault -- as a matter of fact, it was a whole lotta fun" (17). This cavalier attitude is demonstrated again after Brown, a pimp named Johnny, and a gang of other boys rape a prostitute whom Brown had dreamed about for some time. After the episode he comments, "It wasn't anything as great as I thought it was going to be, I just didn't enjoy it as much as I thought I would, but, anyway, the dream came true. And it probably came true for a lot of other cats that night too. A lot of people had their first white girl that night, just about everybody in the building" (110). As he matures in his environment and comes to understand the reasons that people around him have fallen into particular lifestyles, the narrative voice becomes much more sympathetic, particularly when he discovers that junkies are to be pitied more than scorned or dismissed and that whores can be worthy of love (243). However, even in these moments, which mark some of the more profound changes in Brown's perspective, he does not step outside of his thoughts at the moment to comment on his growth.

Brown courts his reader's compassion in part by keeping the narrative voice so closely aligned with the consciousness of a child forced to enter the adult world at such a young age. The distance between Brown's responses to his environment and his readers' reactions point out just how far away Harlem is from other neighborhoods -- physically, emotionally, and morally. By refusing to narrate this distance, Brown does not allow his

readers the comfortable recognition that escape is possible and that the street life is simply part of his past. Brown immerses his readers in Harlem, forcing them to witness the skewed value system of the streets. Brown also immerses his readers in Harlem culture by filling the text with slang terms -- bopping, ringing, horse, duji, gray women, pulling the Murphy, etc. -- which he does not clearly define.[99] Again, his emphasis is not on how far he has come or on the ways in which he has always been at odds with the environment that produced him. It is on representing the horrors of street life in the moment and on instilling the same feeling of enclosure in the reader.

The rare breaks in the narrative voice come when Brown reveals what he would like to have said to relatives and close friends, rather than what he did say. Most often this occurs in terms of conversations with his mother, to whom he wishes he had shown more care and concern (60). With Sugar, a girl in his neighborhood, he wishes he had done the same when they were younger so that she would not have grown into a junkie (268). Finally, he wishes that he had done a better job of guiding his younger brother Pimp as well so that Pimp would not have turned to drugs. Interestingly, Brown's regrets are all for people beyond his reach at the time he wrote the book. His mother had been killed by a junkie, Sugar was consumed by her addiction for heroin, and Pimp was in prison. His regret is, to a certain extent, an expression of his guilt over their fates. Brown indicates that at the time, he held back from expressing his feelings because he could not allow himself to show emotion for others. Later, he realizes that maturing may mean

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[99] One exception to this is Brown's extended explanation of the term "baby" which becomes popular in the early 1950s. He explains it as a greeting connoting a confident Black masculinity. More importantly, saying "baby" immediately created a sense of community between two black speakers, whether they were hustlers or lawyers. Brown also argues that the growing use of the word was a prelude to the "era of black reflection" characterized by the celebration of soul and the beauty of blackness (164-66).

facing what you are rather than what you have been told to be. Toward the end of the book Brown relates a conversation with his friend Turk, who is also trying to change his life. Turk confesses, "I just talk the shit that you're supposed to talk. I seldom say the things that are really on my mind" (359). Turk's comments reveal the dual identity of those living on the streets and Brown's reason for not telling his loved ones how he felt. Brown discusses the double-consciousness that is a result of being black in a white world but also the self-division that is required by gang life. Even in their "home" on the streets, boys like Brown are divorced from an authentic self because of the role they must play.

Like Wright, Brown finds that anger and violence are integral to the life that has been scripted for him as a young black man. His physically abusive, alcoholic father teaches him that being able to defend yourself is the only way to survive. The older men in the neighborhood who encourage the young boys to fight each other and then bet on the outcomes of the fights reinforce this lesson. When Brown is thirteen, he realizes that in order to maintain his reputation in the neighborhood he will soon be expected to kill anyone who mistreats him. He is afraid of this, but admits that he understands why he will have to do it:

> The bad nigger things really had me going. I remember Johnny saying that the only thing in life a bad nigger was scared of was living too long. This just meant that if you were going to be respected in Harlem, you had to be a bad nigger; and if you were going to be a bad nigger, you had to be ready to die. I wasn't ready to do any of that stuff. But I had to. I had to act crazy. (122)

Although he is afraid, Brown feels compelled to act this role because "there was no place to go, and it seemed like all life was just closing in on me and squashing me to death" (122).

Brown's work also shows the psychological implications of years of hopelessness and oppression; a community's value system becomes skewed until crime becomes a triumph to be celebrated. While attending the funeral of his friend Jim who was killed because he made enemies in the drug world, Brown comments that Jim "was like the community Horatio Alger. He had made it big in a short period of time. He had become a real big-time gangster" (210). The neighborhood success story is a hardened criminal. Alienated from legitimate means of achieving material success, boys like Brown turn to crime because they have no other models to follow and are unable to see anything different. When he asks his friend Mac if he has considered getting a job, Mac replies, "I don't know, man. I guess I'll deal drugs" (237). Brown comments, "this was what everyone in the neighborhood was doing. Nobody seemed to know how to do anything else" (210). For many, like his brother Pimp, drugs become the only means of escape from the ongoing misery of life. Pimp tells Brown:

> I think it's this place, all of it's dead. There's just nothing happenin', man. If you grow up in all this shit, when you get nineteen, there's just nothing else to do. You're through, man. There's just nothing happening. You've got to find some kind of excitement, something different, or you've just got to keep yourself blind . . . I mean wasted, man, to take all this damn monotony. [. . .] Stuff was the thing for me. This is the only thing that lets me get away. (392)

Brown concludes that for many junkies, "nodding" is a way to escape the expectations of others in terms of school, employment, and relationships. Thus he argues here, as he did in writings throughout his career, that poverty, rather than race, is the cause of urban violence, crime, and drug abuse (Peacock 39).

Brown chronicles the rise of several movements that are designed to instill race pride in the community and offer alternative paths for young men, but he observes that none succeeds fully because for so many in the neighborhood, the idea that a black man or woman helping someone else or making a significant life change is difficult to believe. When Brown is at Wiltwyck, he takes his problems to the white administrator rather than the black one, reasoning that "Mr. Upshur [. . .] couldn't help me. He was colored. What could he do for anybody?" (75). Some of Brown's friends on the street look to the Coptic religion as a source of strength and pride through the study of an African heritage. Although Brown is initially fascinated, his interest fades because he is so detached from the teachings.[100] Others' interest fades as well and this group fails to alter the lives of its practitioners for the better. The Black Muslims make greater inroads, and Brown attributes their success to their ability to communicate with people on the streets because they came from the community. Although he does not join this movement, he appreciates their ability to offer a clean path for junkies and prostitutes, and their ability to express black anger to the nation. Still, they cannot stop the spread of drugs through Harlem.

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[100] In contrast to Brown's dismissal of the Coptic faith, many of the Black Arts writers driven by a nationalist impulse looked to Africa as a literal and metaphorical homeland. Sonia Sanchez, Amiri Baraka, Larry Neal, Hoyt Fuller, and Nikki Giovanni all traveled to Africa as part of "their efforts to frame a new and liberated African American identity" (Baker, "The Black Arts Movement" 1801).

Brown also argues that for the children of the first generation of migrants, the idea of a Southern homeland cannot sustain them any more than can the fiction of Northern opportunity, the escape of drugs, or religions that are based upon an African homeland. Among the young, there is a disparaging vision of "back home" as backwards, as a combination of hard work for little profit, strange foods, superstition, and an outdated religion. Brown comments that it is easy to identify the new arrivals because they look for jobs and still believe in hard work as the way to get ahead. When he gets his first job at the Hamburger Heaven on Madison Avenue, he notes that you have to be a "real Tom" to work there, and that most of the guys who did were new arrivals from the South and "not too hip" (164). Brown and his peers are frustrated by their parents' attempts to raise them according to what they see as outdated Southern standards. For them, the values and practices their elders are teaching bear no relation to life on the streets: "You feel as though they're trying to make something out of you that you couldn't be and didn't want to be if you could, as though they're trying to raise you as a farm boy in New York (269). Brown characterizes his parents, who have been in New York since 1935, as having their minds "down there in the South Carolina cotton fields" (275). When he starts to get into trouble as a result of the gang he runs with, his mother looks to old ways of understanding for assistance. Believing that he has the devil in him, she prays, calls friends back home for solutions, and assumes that he has had roots worked on him (38-39). Eventually Brown's mother sends him to spend a year on his grandparents' farm, but even this does not change his behavior. The only lesson he learns there is how to lie more effectively (47).

Like Wright, Brown sees the first generation of migrants navigating the North using their Southern ways of understanding their place within a racialized society. When his parents migrated to the North, they brought what Brown sees as a limiting set of fears and a limited set of expectations. Rather than revel in their newfound freedom, they brought their anxieties and anger about white oppression with them and transferred these onto the Jews; in the North, Mr. Charlie was replaced by Mr. Goldberg (284). Their expectations for achievement were also conditioned by their experiences in the South:

> Mom and Dad and the people who had come to New York from the South about the time they did seemed to think it was wrong to want anything more out of life than some liquor and a good piece of cunt on Saturday night. This was the stuff they did in the South. This was the sort of life they had lived on the plantations. They were trying to bring the down-home life up to Harlem. They had done it. But it just wasn't working. They couldn't understand it. Liquor, religion, sex, and violence -- this was all that life had been about to them. And a prayer that the right number would come out, that somebody would hit the sweepstakes or get lucky. (281)

Clearly Brown's summation of his parents' experiences in the South is reductive, but his mother's responses to his own grander aspirations highlight the extent to which some Southern African Americans accepted the limitations placed upon them as "right," making wanting more from life than basic pleasures "wrong."[101] That Brown's mother

[101] This acceptance of a limiting alternate worldview is similar to Herman Broder's conclusion that a world without Nazis is backward.

cannot conceive of anything fundamentally different, despite her having moved to the North for a better life, is illustrated when she criticizes her son's own aspirations. When Brown informs his mother that he wants to be a psychologist, she replies that he should get rid of those crazy notions. As he explains, "she was scared. She had the idea that colored people weren't supposed to want anything like that. You were supposed to just want to work in the field or be happy being a janitor" (281). Brown shows that in transferring their simple expectations onto life in Harlem rather than trying for something grander or better, this generation of parents created a limited set of choices for their children. He acknowledges that had he not left Harlem, he would not have known that life could hold more than that either (281). Although Brown may be deliberately misreading his parents in order to emphasize his own status as a "self-made man," more likely his depiction of their inability to conceive of, and more importantly act upon, a different life is likely fairly accurate. Although migrants like Brown's parents were able to dream of change and embrace the idea of it, perhaps they, like Wright's childhood friends who dream of the North and boast of the life they could have there, proceeded with the understanding that these dreams would likely go unfulfilled. Brown attributes his parents' limited expectations to fear of change, although they may also be a product of the racial self-hatred that Wright argues is signaled by an acknowledgement of the futility of dreams.

Because his generation was attempting to exceed the limitations of Southern thinking, Brown thought that they were the ones to teach their parents instead of the other way around. This is an attitude common among socialized second-generation

immigrants. Although the parents eventually "became aware that the down-home life had kind of had its day," they had no notion of what would come next, and so they could not prepare their children for it (413). According to Brown, the great migration to Harlem produced "a generation of new niggers" which nobody could understand and for which nobody could be ready (288). The insular nature of Harlem life leads Brown to think of his generation as "the first Africans coming over on the boat" because they had "no familiar ground" and no common language with the outside world (288). Getting jobs and speaking to people outside of Harlem required a fresh start because they did not know what things would be like (288). The difficulty of entering a new world for which they had no preparation made many of Brown's friends remain in the neighborhood and lose themselves in the street life.

Education presents an alternate way of life for Brown, although it is one that he does not embrace willingly until his late teens. Unlike Douglass, Washington, and Wright, he has the ability to attend public school, but he chooses not to because crime seems more appealing. Until he meets Mr. Papanek at Wiltwyck, he believes that the power of his fists, more so than his mind, will control his destiny because his community has taught him that this is so. When Papanek comes in as a new administrator at Wiltwyck, Brown begins to revise his opinion. He is at first frightened of the man because "with just talk, he had won every living ass in the place. [. . .] Papanek was so slick that he didn't have to be mean" (83). Papanek's ability to build loyalty among the students and staff through honesty is so far removed from Brown's understanding of power gained through physical dominance that he determines to study Papanek and learn

how he works. Over time Papanek becomes a mentor to Brown, and his belief that the boy can stay out of prison and succeed motivates Brown to want to change (123).

Another mentor in Brown's life, Mrs. Cohen, introduces him to books. Like Douglass and Wright, his world is expanded through reading, and he dreams of new possibilities for himself. She encourages him to pursue high school and college degrees, but school is too foreign to Brown's immediate environment for him to contemplate this plan seriously. He does not know anyone who has finished high school because "cats around my way just didn't do that" (149). He is also convinced that he is too dumb to learn at this point in his life (168). Mrs. Cohen gradually changes his opinion, however, by offering him books to read. Brown becomes consumed by the biographies she gives him of Mary McLeod Bethune, Jackie Robinson, Sugar Ray Robinson, Albert Schweitzer, and Einstein (150-51). Inspired, he begins to want to know more and to do things that might take him away from Harlem. Rather than present his life story as a straight rise from criminal to author once he comes into contact with reading, Brown shows his fall back into crime. Within three months of his release from Warwick, he is dealing pot and learning to be a hustler (153).

Brown also breaks with the rhetoric of transformation through education when he reveals that the determining factor in his decision to "live straight" is a hold-up. He is held up by a junkie named Limpy and faces the prospect of having to kill Limpy in order to save face on the streets. This presents a moral dilemma for him; he does not want to kill a junkie because he now sees them as usually harmless and not in control of themselves when they are high (171). Therefore, he must choose between the self that the street requires him to be and the self that he feels he is. Brown refuses to accept the

role that until recently he has seen as his only option. Rather than track down Limpy and kill him, he decides to go out of business as a dealer. At age seventeen, he has already been living the street life for eleven years and wants to retire from his career as a criminal (172). Much to the disbelief of his peers, he enrolls in the night school program at Washington Irving. He does so with the confidence that he can "turn square now, even straighten up" and "not worry about anybody naming [him] a lame" because he has already built his reputation on the street (172). Unlike Wright, whose education brought alienation from his world, Brown's past experiences allow him to continue to cross lines, although he is clearly different from his friends once he stops smoking pot and dealing.

At this point Brown pursues his education more seriously and even tries to encourage others to get an education too by telling them that they can be more effective hustlers if they know math, but they struggle and drop out because "they didn't know what they were going for. I didn't know what I was going for either, but I knew I wanted to go. I suppose that was more than any of the other cats who's gone down there knew" (172). He spends less and less time on the streets but still feels the pull of that life. Scared of going to jail if he stays in Harlem and knowing that he will not be able to concentrate on school there, he decides to leave the neighborhood and move to Greenwich Village (176). There, he feels free for the first time that he will not have to go to prison, as if "anything could happen, anything that [he] decided to do" (178). Like his parents who came to the North for freedom, Brown finds freedom by moving away from an environment in which he has limited choices. As he builds a new life, Brown again compares himself to a first-generation immigrant. He does not conclude the text with this image of escaping and starting over, however. Even as he leaves to pursue college,

Brown is aware of the many who could not, and did not, escape. In the final pages of the book he meditates upon the friends whose dreams, however simple, were never realized. Having seen so many like him lost along the way, Brown cannot fully embrace migration's promise of opportunity.

Contemporary Considerations of Migration

Between 1975 and 1989, 637,000 African Americans migrated to the South (Griffin 145). The reasons most often cited for their movement were changes since the Civil Rights movement, a sense of tradition/history and values, and the rising rates of crime and cost of living in the North (Griffin 145). At the same time, as Barbara Christian explains, African American historians and writers began to reexamine Southern culture and the era of slavery as a way of understanding the present (2013). In response to the Black Arts movement which had defined blackness largely in terms of masculinity and the urban experience, Alice Walker, Maya Angelou, Ernest Gaines, Toni Morrison, and other writers explored blackness as both gendered and Southern. Rather than functioning as a symbol of oppression, the South became a vehicle for redemption through reconnection to heritage, especially for women in search of a Southern female legacy. Griffin argues that in this regard, Toni Morrison's vision of the migration narrative became dominant after the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements (11). The Black Arts movement's examination of community continued beyond the 1960s with writers addressing personal relationships within families as well as dynamics within neighborhoods and towns. Their emphasis on the politics of language and identity influenced later writers as well. These included A. J. Verdelle, whose 1996 novel *The*

Good Negress was widely acclaimed for its nuanced examination of language, gender, and identity in both the North and South.

Set in the early 1960s in both rural Virginia and urban Michigan, *The Good Negress* follows the story of Deneese, a young African American girl who is limited by the roles available to her in both the North and the South. Deneese's young life is defined by the processes of migration and assimilation. She is the daughter of migrants, but she is also a migrant herself and experiences multiple cultural shifts when she moves into and out of her parents' urban world. Her parents, Margarete and Buddy, leave Virginia for Detroit as newlyweds full of dreams.[102] Margarete has three children instead of becoming a singer, as she had hoped, and Buddy takes a job as a railroad porter that separates him from his family for weeks at a time (253-54). The family fractures when Deneese's father dies and her mother cannot make ends meet. Dispersing the children, Margarete leaves six-year-old Deneese with her grandmother "back home" in Virginia and rebuilds her life in Detroit. Six years later, when Margarete is remarried and expecting another child, she has Deneese come to Detroit to cook and clean for the family and help raise the baby.

Deneese is tied to a family unable to support themselves and torn between what her family wants her to become -- the Southern "good negress" who washes, cooks, cleans, and cares for children -- and the wider future that her Northern schoolteacher envisions for her. As she struggles to master "the King's English" in school, she also struggles to balance the needs of her family, who see her education as pulling her away from them, and her own dreams. Like Brown, Verdelle does not attribute her

[102] Although Verdelle does not specify when they move to Detroit, I estimate it was in the early 1940s.

protagonist's conflicted identity to tensions between the dominant white culture and the black subculture. The role of the good negress is, of course, the legacy of female slavery, but Deneese is not forced into this way of life by whites; instead, her own community pushes her toward it. She is not being urged to separate from her heritage by a white mentor either. The teacher who wishes to educate Deneese so that she can move "beyond her station in life" is herself black and tries to get Deneese to look to black role models. As her mother and her teacher argue over Deneese's future, Deneese feels forced to choose between two models of black womanhood that seem to be mutually exclusive, one rooted in a Southern past and the other in a Northern future. Verdelle complicates her choice by showing that for Deneese, each world can be both restrictive and a source of satisfaction and growth. Thus, while the tension between old world family values and remaking oneself in the new world aligns Verdelle's novel with many of the concerns of second-generation immigrant fiction, Verdelle does not present the clear choice that most second-generation texts do.

Having been born in the urban North, raised in the rural South, and reintroduced to the Northern perspective by the time she is twelve, Deneese has spent much of her life negotiating the experience of migration and the changes between past, present, and future-oriented thinking that this entails. Verdelle brings the reader into Deneese's mindset through the narrative structure of the novel. To show the mental shifts that Deneese makes between her two worlds, Verdelle writes in first person and has Deneese's story unfold through thematically arranged chapters that pair events from the past and the present rather than structuring the events chronologically to follow Deneese's development. The first chapter, for example, shows Deneese learning to cook

in her grandmother's kitchen and then immediately depicts her cooking for the family in Detroit. Verdelle connects other scenes through Deneese's memories. Her preparation of a ham for the family's Easter dinner, at the request of her new stepfather, is interspersed with her painful recollection of the Easter ham that she believes led to her father's death. Memories of lessons in her rural Virginia school intrude upon her teacher's lessons in Detroit. When Deneese comes to terms with her older brother Luke edward's (sic) turn to crime, we read her memories of his stealing from the country store in Petuskie. As Verdelle smoothly moves the story from past to present and back again, she draws the reader into Deneese's view of her world, showing the connections Deneese makes between her Southern experiences and their Northern counterparts.

Deneese is forced to learn Southern ways quickly when her mother leaves her at her grandmother's house early one morning. Unaware that her mother has brought her to live there from then on, she is horrified to find herself abandoned in a world with "no blocks or corners or streets, no other two-families with shutters[,] no traffic lights, no pavement" (3). Deneese describes herself as "left where Mama grew up, in history" (3-4). Her grandmother's solution is to let Deneese cry a little and then to put her to work because she believes that "when you put y'hands on somethin and make it somethin else, that will heal you lower places than you cry from" (8). Deneese learns this lesson well and applies it again when she is uprooted and returned to Detroit. There she chooses to spend her first painful, confusing week cleaning the house from floor to ceiling because this is what she has learned to do.

Deneese's grandmother has such a strong influence on her development that when she arrives in Detroit, Verdelle describes Granma'am's spirit as inhabiting Deneese's

body. Margarete's new husband comments that Deneese cooks like an old woman, and she is proud. She speaks like an old cook as well. Much of the narration explains how to make certain dishes, and when Deneese (as narrator) says things like "It takes good eyes and some dedication to cook greens" (13), we can see hear Granma'am's voice coming through her. Doing the day's housework, she explains, "Granma'am's rhythm was in me" (23). Following her grandmother's model, Deneese excels in her new domestic role. At the age of twelve, she is a proficient cook and maid. Further, as Lisa B. Day argues in her reading of *The Good Negress* as indebted to the tropes of the slave narrative, Denise "learns to incorporate her old habits with new models" in that she is able to make her grandmother's recipes with the modern appliances in her mother's kitchen (414). Even though Deneese works from sunup to sundown, Verdelle does not portray her as dissatisfied with her duties. She derives great pleasure from ordering her new environment.

While her ritual of household chores is comforting to Deneese, it also enables her family to accept her in the role of maid and mother and to forget that she is still a twelve-year-old child, in need of love and attention. The separation in her family life is evident when, upon her arrival, her mother and brothers neglect to share with her anything that has happened over the six years of her absence (25). They make no effort to help her understand and negotiate her new environment. Her stepfather's communication with her is limited to giving her money to buy the week's groceries. Caught up in her pregnancy, her mother pays little attention to Deneese, forgetting her birthday and glossing over important moments in Deneese's life, such as when she has her first period.

Margarete's neglect is such that Deneese can no longer think of her as her mother. While she refers to her mother as "Mama" when she flashes back to memories from her early childhood, she calls her mother "Margarete" from the time that she is left with her grandmother in Virginia. This renaming is one of the few topics about which they have an open confrontation. Deneese lies to her mother and tells her that she calls her Margarete because she calls Granma'am Mama. Her mother says she "don't know about this Margarete business," but lets it go. Deneese explains:

> She never said anything else about the Margarete business. And so that is how I came to call my mother Margarete, and that is how I knew that we agreed on a few things: the power of changing subjects [. . .], the control we have over the naming of names, and how in truth the change of name can change the person, even if the change is done in secret, or is done by somebody else. And how to the light of day nothing can be done to change the person back, there is no return to the prior name. (40)

When Denise assumes the power to rename her mother, she assumes the power to redefine their relationship and refuses to let her mother claim a role that she no longer plays in her daughter's life.

In addition to being emotionally neglected by her family, Deneese is literally and figuratively displaced in their apartment. She sleeps on a cot in the living room until the baby arrives. She cleans everyone else's closets as part of her household ritual, ordering their lives along with their things and noting what their possessions say about them, but she has no place to store her own things. The isolating environment of her new family is overwhelming for Deneese at times. She longs for the familiar:

> What did I want? I had to think. Somethin I knew or recognized, I guess. Maybe that's why the stuffed peppers, the pies. Or maybe I wanted somethin to know or recognize me. Luke edward and Margarete looked at me funny, even David and Big Jim sometimes too. And these were my people. (32)

Familiar things and personal recognition are one in the same for Deneese because the food, manners, and culture of the South have become so much a part of who she believes herself to be. Since these elements of Southern culture function as one of the safe spaces that Griffin describes, Deneese is frustrated and frightened when any of her memories of the South disappear. Losing those memories would be giving up parts of herself that help her to survive in her new environment. Particularly distressing for Deneese is her inability to recall what the shape of a pregnant woman's belly reveals about the gender of the baby (114-15) because this knowledge would help her to prepare for her future. The desire to remember also clarifies why Deneese quotes recipes incessantly and why she attends church and extends her hand in greeting to the older women there. She explains, "I am reaching for Granma'am's, of course. And also for my father, and for when I was little, when Easter was easy and ham didn't shake me" (127). Deneese insists upon wearing the dresses that she brought with her from Virginia even after she outgrows them because the clothes that Margarete gives her "look like I am doin things I ain't got no business doin" (39). Like the first-generation immigrant, she is afraid of change, even in her appearance, because that change connotes a shift in values.

Entering school in Detroit changes Deneese more than she could have imagined. Not surprisingly, her favorite subject is geography because it opens the world to her.

Deneese notes that in the South, any places outside of Richmond were all considered the same for the purposes of education; people who lived in Cleveland and Detroit "all got discussed as if they was living in one neighborhood called North" (165). As Deneese is taught about new places in geography class, she begins to imagine new possibilities for herself. She is quickly told, however, that wider opportunities will only come with improved speech. When she comes to the North, Deneese's speech is heavily accented and represented by Verdelle in dialect. In Deneese's ongoing struggle to master a language that seems wholly foreign to her, we see the immigrant's struggle to master English upon arriving in the United States. Stressing the importance of correct usage of the English language and how fortunate Deneese is to have this instruction, her teacher Miss Pearson makes the comparison between Deneese and an immigrant by explaining to Deneese that thousands come to America to learn English (118). Deneese learns that she must pronounce "ax" as "ass-suh-kuh" and "naw" as "noe." She also learns that "Lonts," a boy from her hometown, is Lawrence, and Mr. Dew Boys, a man she learns about from her teacher in Detroit, is actually Mr. Du Bois. Verdelle charts Deneese's lessons by altering the spelling of words in Deneese's narrative as she learns. When she concentrates and speaks carefully, her words reflect the new pronunciations she is taught. When she does not, Verdelle reverts to the spellings used before Deneese began attending school in the North. Like many new speakers of English, Deneese experiences the frustration of having the thoughts she can express limited by the "correct" language that she has at her disposal. Knowing that she will likely be interrupted and corrected by her teacher, she hesitates to say what is in her head (125) and recognizes a clear separation between "proper speech" and "train of thought" (175). She is diligent, though, and

grateful to her teacher when her thoughts and the English language begin to line up; "making a match between what I wanted to say and what is permitted in English is the closest thing I had then to religion" (190).

Perhaps the most shocking of her lessons occurs when she is told that the American spelling of her name is "Denise" instead of "Deneese" (120). Miss Pearson explains the difference to Deneese and writes the new spelling in her grade book, in effect renaming her Denise without giving her any choice in the matter. Miss Pearson is black, but here she performs the white abolitionist function of renaming the escaped slave beginning her new life in the North (Day 415), or the function of the Ellis Island official renaming the new immigrant with an American name. Deneese's new name throws her into a whirlwind of self-criticism. She cannot believe how dumb she is to have spelled her own name wrong and is frightened at the idea of what else she might have missed or what she will miss after the baby is born (121). She decides that the next time she is asked her name, she will say "Gibralter Jones," which was her great-grandmother's name (122). Recognizing the power of naming, Deneese wants to preserve herself through her matrilineal line, and to draw upon the strength of being named after land (122, 114). Later, though, she tests out her new name "Denise" and grows more comfortable with it, assimilating into the new system by deciding to spell her name "like it was in English" (171).

Because Miss Pearson wants to motivate Deneese by creating a positive, future-oriented narrative for her to believe in, she tells her that speech leads to importance. If she is able to speak the language of the nation, as other educated African Americans have been able to do, people will understand her and pay attention to what she has to say

(123). Miss Pearson also tries to inspire her with tales of great people of her own race, like George Washington Carver and W.E.B. Du Bois, but in Deneese's mind, Miss Pearson is her role model. An educated black woman who dresses well, is sure of herself, and helps others, Miss Pearson is the fulfillment of Deneese's growing desire for herself. Miss Pearson also wants to steer Deneese toward college and a promising future rather than entrapment through menial labor. But for Deneese, the weight of her position in the family keeps her from looking beyond her present condition. As she leaves Virginia, she describes herself as "trampled . . . by the miles and years ahead" (63) and pushed forward in a harness, attached to a plow, with nothing but bald, flat land ahead and no harvest to come, much like a mule (68). Deneese has no illusions that going north will offer her freedom and opportunity. Because she knows that Margarete's unborn baby will dictate her future, when the baby is closer to birth, she is impatient to "learn the rules" of English before her chances to get an education come to an end (186). Deneese describes herself as racing the baby to life (185), as she tries to become reborn through education before the baby enters the world. After the baby is born, she reflects, "Missus Pearson said that it was my not knowing the English language that cut me off from a bigger world. But it was Margarete's baby that kept me in the house, that cut me off from the outdoors, even" (192). The immigrant narrative often includes the image of rebirth in the new world. For Deneese, however, birth is a symbol of entrapment rather than freedom and renewal.

Tension develops between Deneese and her teacher when she begins working outside the home to provide more money for the family. She feels torn between the lessons the teacher wants her to learn in elocution and the lessons Margarete wants her to

learn in raising children. Both women believe that Deneese will need their brand of knowledge in her future. When Deneese accepts a janitorial job, Miss Pearson scolds her for her choices:

> You will never get over being colored. You have no business down to that store. [. . .] They got you in there cleaning toilets, making you a good little negress, and your mother's response to it is that you should buy the Christmas turkey. [. . .] Well, this is certainly not what I intended for you, Deneese. And I don't think it is what your grandmother intended either. Your mother is very shortsighted about your future; I have told you that before. [. . .] You can be like her if you wish, but where you will find yourself when it's over is very close to where you are right now. Now, when you lift your hands and face and nose from the toilets, you can come back to see me. Until then, you are excused. (209-10)

Deneese leaves feeling rejected and ashamed, wishing that she had never taken the job; at the same time, as Deneese notes, "But now I wave the flag of the dark and colored, and she and I witness it together" (210). After Miss Pearson tells Deneese "that Negro concentration in backbreaking labor comes straight from slavery," Deneese has difficulty looking at her Southern heritage in the same way (205). Having seen her domestic work through her teacher's eyes, she cannot take the pride in cleaning, and therefore herself, that she once did.

Miss Pearson further links Deneese's life with slavery in the young girl's mind through a conversation in which she raises the question of why African Americans are always migrating. Deneese's initial response is one she has heard from others; people

move "to get someplace better" (224). The teacher pushes her beyond this surface rhetoric of opportunity, though, by presenting the idea that people think they will be moving to a better life, but since they have never been there, they do not really know. She wants Deneese to consider further that "Negroes have been forced to live in temporary places. We have been made to consider, no matter who of our family and friends may be with us, that any day could bring an edict that we be split up, sold. We are accustomed to separation, splitting up, losing members. Our families are the families that slavery made" (224-25). In rooting the drive to migrate and the tendency of black families to fracture in the culture of slavery, Miss Pearson makes the dissolution of families like Deneese's seem painfully inevitable and, consequently, Deneese wishes she were a rat that could nibble her way out of the forces she envisions herself as trapped between.

At the same time, Deneese correctly reads her mother's and her teacher's motives for shaping her life. Margarete wants a maid and nanny, and Miss Pearson neither "knows or really cares enough about [children] to understand" (125). Both of her mentors want to use her to live for them. She recognizes this and learns from it, though, fulfilling her earlier statement about her own nature: "that is so like me, to work feverishly in other people's interest, and discover from the work a naked ache of my own" (25). Deneese decides that she will either be a teacher or nurse. She wants to write a future for herself that extends into eleventh and twelfth grade and a normal school education, far beyond the baby (175). This growth and drive suggest that escape from known patterns is possible.

Deneese finds an ally for her college plans in her grandmother, who has saved money for her education. Granma'am encourages her to learn as much as she can in Detroit and then come South again when the time comes (184). Despite the fact that Granma'am is the one who taught Deneese to cook and clean and pushed her to be a good helper for her mother, all of which limited Deneese severely in the North, this supportive attitude is not surprising. Her grandmother encouraged her dreams when Deneese was a child, even when they involved moving outside of the usual occupations for women. For example, when Deneese wanted to be a drummer in the church parade like the boys instead of carrying a banner with the girls, her grandmother watched her practice and then made her a purple shirt to match those of the drummers. She had Deneese wear a long skirt but also encouraged her to take on the male role because she wanted it so badly. Through Deneese's grandmother's acceptance of her, Verdelle indicates that Deneese may have a better chance for improving her life in the South than in the North. She will have to leave the promised land to find a place in which she can integrate her Southern heritage with her Northern knowledge. In the meantime, Verdelle shows that Deneese can find freedom in the process of learning:

> Even as I stumble up the road. I recall myself learning. I remember when that sky opened up. I feel the new sensation of lightness over my head. I explore this endlessness that seems to be a part of the whole thing. I smile about all those many discoveries, new words. I learn to identify humidity and to predict the coming rain. I reach to where the freedom is. (299)

Like Verdelle, Toni Morrison writes about the ways in which the legacies of slavery influence the inner workings of black communities. In the context of the

immigrant narrative, her novel *Paradise* turns away from the urban experience to examine African American migration west to an all-black town. In a 1998 interview with Elizabeth Farnsworth on PBS's *Online Newshour*, Morrison explains that in heading west, "African Americans were looking for a second one [home] and hopefully one that would be simply up to them, their own people, their own habits, their own culture, and to contain themselves in that" (Farnsworth). Roy L. Brooks extends this idea in his examination of black towns in *Integration or Separation: A Strategy for Racial Equality*:

> The residents of black towns were primarily motivated by their desire for freedom -- economic and political -- and by racial pride. More than anything else, African Americans wanted to get away from racial violence and discrimination by whites, especially in the South. Black towns were a way of dealing with the failure of American society to transform the hopes of emancipation into the reality of everyday life. (169)

Through the all-black town of Ruby, Oklahoma, Morrison indicates that the idea of a promised land for African Americans is problematic, even when they create that promised land themselves. *Paradise* suggests that while the fiction of a utopian community is compelling for those who have been excluded from America's social and economic systems, in reality no such place can exist.

Morrison explains why, in her mind, paradise itself necessitates exclusion:

> The isolation, the separateness, is always part of any utopia. And it [*Paradise*] was my meditation [. . .] and interrogation of the whole idea of paradise, the safe place, the place full of bounty, where no one can harm you. But, in addition to that, it's based on the notion of exclusivity. All

> paradises, all utopias, are designed by who is not there, by the people who are not allowed in. (Farnsworth)

In the novel, the principle of exclusion is played out when the founders of Ruby become obsessed with protecting their creation from what they perceive as the evil influences of a nearby convent. While the Convent has become a shelter for women escaping abuse and trauma in their lives, the men of Ruby see it as a house of deviant sexuality and associate the women who live there with "revolting sex, deceit and the sly torture of children" (8). In their minds, the women of the Convent call into question the value of the women in Ruby (8). Believing that their community must be protected, they form a party to raid the Convent and slaughter all its inhabitants. However, the men are protecting the idea of Ruby more than the actual town itself. Morrison shows that the women in the Convent pose no real threat; they are simply being used as scapegoats for a multitude of problems in Ruby (11), and being sacrificed to maintain the image of Ruby's utopian ideals.

Ruby was founded in 1949, twenty-five years before the slaughter occurs. It was modeled on Haven, a "dreamtown" in Oklahoma that was born and died within fifty years (5). Refusing to become tenant farmers after emancipation, the Haven freedmen created their own promised land, which eventually collapsed as economic hardship drove more and more families away. According to Brooks, this was a common fate for black towns because "even without white discrimination, the black towns' agrarian character -- particularly those that concentrated on cotton -- ensured their eventual failure" (184). Haven was also affected by a younger generation that wanted "to get away and try someplace else. A big city this time, or a small town -- anywhere that was already built" (6). The idea of Haven lives on, however, in the dreams of the grandsons of its founders

who decide to recreate their grandfathers' vision when they return from World War II. They are motivated to begin life again in an isolated community where they can protect their families from the corruption that exists "Out There" (16). Driven by this vision, they rebuild the town fifty miles west of its original location.

Haven had been founded as a self-sustaining community that was suspicious of outsiders. The founders' rejection of others was based on the rejection they experienced on their journey toward freedom. Traveling from Mississippi to Louisiana to Oklahoma, "they were unwelcome on each grain of soil from Yazoo to Fort Smith" (13). Turned away by Native Americans, poor whites, and, most painfully, by already established black towns, the founding families determined to create their own home that would be equally exclusive. As their journey continued, they came to see it as directed by God and themselves as his chosen people being led to the promised land. When they found their new home and bartered with the Native Americans living there, they meditated upon Oklahoma's open space as a fulfillment of the long denied promise of freedom:

> To the Old Fathers it signaled luxury -- an amplitude of soul and stature that was freedom without borders and without deep menacing woods where enemies could hide. Here freedom was not entertainment, like a carnival or a hoedown that you can count on once a year. Nor was it the table droppings from the entitled. Here freedom was a test administered by the natural world that a man had to take for himself every day. And if he passed enough tests long enough, he was king. (99)

The freedom of the frontier was quite different from the freedom of the North that so many migrants sought. Here, African Americans would not have to prove themselves to

white society in order to earn equality; they would simply have to prove themselves equal to the challenges of the land.

This idea was attractive to Ruby's founders, too, but later the town's citizens came to be divided along generational lines over what their relationship with whites and other outsiders should be. Two of Ruby's most prominent citizens, Reverend Misner and Steward Morgan, represent opposing ways of relating to whites and outsiders. Misner is a civil rights advocate who encourages Ruby's youth to become involved with his cause. Morgan, on the other hand, fully believes that isolation will protect the townspeople from racism and stresses avoidance, with the support of the older generation. In their basic positions, they are representative of W.E.B Du Bois's and Booker T. Washington's respective responses to white racism (Reames 34). The generational conflict in Ruby is dramatized through an argument over the interpretation of the words on the communal Oven that was brought from Haven. The Oven was built as a symbol of Haven's residents' togetherness and determination to create a new home in the wilderness. The fact that the new generation cannot successfully recreate their forefathers' communal vision is shown in the generational conflict over the Oven in Ruby. The younger generation wants to rename the Oven in order to "give it new life" as marking a place for people to meet and connect with their African heritage. In the spirit of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, they want to claim this history as their own. The older generation sees their desire to rename the Oven as willful destruction or alteration of a sacred past (86). The further disagreement about the motto forged on the Oven -- whether it originally said "Beware the Furrow of His Brow" or "Be the Furrow of His Brow" -- is really rooted in the two groups' interpretation of their ancestors' attitudes and

desires. The younger residents refuse to believe that the ex-slaves who founded Haven would advocate "ducking and diving" and argue that they are supposed to act as God's instruments of justice for their race. The older residents, who claim the Oven used to say "Beware," support caution, separatism, and leaving the business of retribution to God. The need for confrontation with whites mystifies them since there are no whites there to incense the younger people (102). As Dovey's reaction to the younger people's movement for a more active, confrontational relationship with whites shows, the older generation takes the young people's desire for change as "a kind of winged accusation" against them, their parents and grandparents (104). Each group reads what they want to in the words as confirmation of their current position in terms of civil rights. Through their debate, Morrison shows that separatism does not preclude being affected by racial issues in the country, or the generational conflicts that they produce.

Through the story of Pat Best, the schoolteacher who is writing a history of Ruby's founding families, Morrison shows that prejudice can touch an all-black community as well. When the founders of Haven headed for the frontier to build a new life, they assumed that "the division they sought to close was free against slave and rich against poor" rather than the "light-skinned against black" division that they met when they encountered established free black communities (194). Since the founders of Haven were discriminated against for their dark skin, the founders of Ruby are committed to protecting what Pat terms their "eight-rock purity." In her reading of shame in Morrison's works, Brooks Bouson explains that the residents of Ruby have recreated "the rigid racial and economic demarcations and the polarizing binarisms of white/black and us/them found in the dominant culture" (197). The rejection of their forefathers, which

they call the "Disallowing," combined with the disrespect they are shown when they return from World War II, leads Ruby's founders to discriminate against the lighter-skinned families who desire to settle in Ruby, among them Pat's.

The founding families of Ruby fail in their attempt to relive their forefathers' mythic quest for freedom precisely because they operate their community under the same principles of exclusion that drove their ancestors to Oklahoma in the first place. In rewriting the past to correct injustices, they have brought in the negative elements of larger society they were trying to reject.[103] While the migrants in Northern cities were in many cases destroyed by becoming trapped within the white boundaries to their world, the residents of Ruby create their own boundaries and destroy themselves all the same. As Connie explains in the novel, "Scary things not always outside. Most scary things is inside" (39). Deek Morgan confirms this when he publicly contradicts his brother Steward, who justifies the murder of the women in the Convent by claiming that there is evil in their house (291). Deek says, "My brother is lying. This is our doing. Ours alone. And we bear the responsibility" (291). This realization prompts him to confess to Reverend Misner his regrets over having become what the Old Fathers cursed (302). Through Deek's conversation with Misner, Morrison shows that redemption may be found in recognizing complicity in a destructive pattern.

Morrison also argues that while physical utopias may be impossible to build, freedom from oppression can be found metaphorically through storytelling. We see this in the storytelling that the women at the Convent engage in after Consulata's feast.

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[103] This same principle is at work in Jody Starks who is the mayor of the black town in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

Rather than simply taking refuge in the Convent where they can hide from the traumatic events that have shaped their lives, they are able to heal through offering their stories to each other as a community. While in this regard the Convent itself becomes a sort of paradise for the women who live there, a place in which they can be free from the people who have victimized them, Morrison offers no indication that it would have collapsed on its own like Ruby. This is because, rather than being built upon exclusionary understandings of race, class, and gender that kept some people out of Ruby and silenced others, the Convent was open to women from all walks of life and existed as a place in which multiple stories could be safely told.

In depicting redemption through testifying, Morrison brings the African American narrative full circle. The freedom of the speakers and their intended audiences has changed significantly over the course of that narrative's development, but despite these changes, several common threads emerge. The African American migration narrative reveals a consistently frustrated drive to find a place of social and economic acceptance in the United States. As these writers argue, African Americans share the hunger for freedom and opportunity that motivates other immigrants to come to America, but they are never able to find a place in the promised land which does not reject or oppress them in one way or another. The narrative development thus reflects a return to first-generation immigrant concerns again and again, as each new generation tries to succeed where previous ones have not by finding a place in which America's promises can be fulfilled. Even in the work of writers who explore the generational conflicts which characterize the second-generation story, we see these concerns repeated. The narrative's pattern of development suggests that, in part, this cyclical response to America can be

attributed to the ways in which the legacy of slavery continues to inform the fate of African Americans in the United States, both in terms of boundaries created by white society and black society's acceptance of them. With the loss of the North as a symbolic area of possibility and with no African homeland to return to, renaming and therefore reclaiming the painful past of slavery have become important projects. The idea of homeland has become more about relationships than about a physical space as African Americans have turned inward to make peace with the past and to create their own spiritual and emotional homes.

Chapter 4: Immigration as Exile in Cuban American Literature

> Someone who's been uprooted, exiled, has no country. Our country exists only in memory, but we need something beyond memory if we're to achieve happiness. We have no homeland, so we have to invent it over and over again.
>
> -- Reinaldo Arenas, "Last Interview"

As in the African American tradition, Cuban American immigrant narratives feature the quest for a homeland within the borders of the United States. However, rather than depicting a search for a place that can become "home" through the fulfillment of national promises, these narratives dramatize immigrants' drive to replicate the Cuban homeland in America. Faced with the impossibility of immediate return, Cubans have rebuilt their homeland both spatially, in areas like Miami's Little Havana, and mentally, through an unrelenting nostalgia. As Virgil Suárez and Delia Poey explain in the introduction to *Little Havana Blues*, the Cubans' "longing for roots, a sense of displacement, the persistence of memory, a need to replay history, and an idealization of Cuba itself" indicate their frustrated desire to return (11). In much of the literature produced by Cubans in the United States, Cuba, rather than America, is the longed-for promised land. Thus, rather than viewing themselves as immigrants who have chosen to come to America with hopes for a better life, many Cubans living in the United States have historically preferred to adopt an exile identity that reflects the extent to which they felt forced to leave the island and their expectation of an eventual return. María Cristina García comments in *Havana USA*, "when the Cubans called themselves 'exiles,' it was a powerful political statement, a symbol of defiance that at the same time distinguished and

isolated their experience from that of other immigrants" (84). Indeed, for many, the need to maintain a Cuban exile identity rather than an American or hybrid one was important because, in the words of David Rieff, author of *The Exile: Cuba in the Heart of Miami*, "to assimilate was to accept that exile was over, and, on a political level, that Fidel Castro had won" (30). García contends that Cuban identity was for the exile community inherently political as well as cultural; "for the refugees from Castro's Cuba, preserving *cubanidad* ('Cubanness,' or Cuban identity) became a political responsibility" associated with both their desire to enact revenge upon Castro through succeeding and to prepare for an envisioned return to the homeland (2). In short, more so than other immigrant groups, Cubans' emigration to the United States, process of assimilation, and conception of cultural identity in America have been influenced and defined by their relationship to their homeland.

In *Life on the Hyphen: the Cuban American Way*, Gustavo Pérez Firmat defines the process of Cuban adaptation to exile as occurring in three phases. The first is the substitutive stage in which the exile "aspires to reproduce, rather than recast, native traditions" (8). Cuban restaurants, music, social clubs, and so on are all imported to the United States and recreated on American soil. Surrounded by familiar sights, sounds, and smells, Cuban exiles can delude themselves into believing that they are still in Cuba when they are, in fact, in areas like Little Havana which Pérez Firmat tellingly describes as existing in a time warp (8). Ultimately, the reality of exile will intrude upon this imaginary world, resulting in the exile's disorientation when "the fiction of rootedness" can no longer be sustained (8). This sense of rootlessness characterizes Pérez Firmat's second stage of exile, in which the exiled person feels that he or she must be "nowhere"

and drifts, seemingly nonexistent (10). The passage of time eventually brings the third stage, in which the exile begins to examine what it means to exist "here" in the present moment and invests in a new relationship between self and place with the full acknowledgment of the reality of existing in America (10-11). While Pérez Firmat's progression from substitution to destitution to institution is, in many ways, a chart of individual growth, he acknowledges that it can also be used as a model of community growth in the three decades following the Cuban Revolution. During the 1960s, many Cubans in America lived with nostalgia and substitution, under the notion that Cuba's problem would be resolved when Castro fell from power; in response to his continuing power, the attitude of the 1970s was destitution, which grew into institution in the 1980s with younger Cuban Americans taking the lead (11). This younger generation, which Pérez Firmat labels the 1.5ers, produced the first self-identified Cuban American literature, although their work expresses the concerns of the generations before them as well as their own experiences. Pérez Firmat acknowledges that the "life expectancy" of this generation and their influence are necessarily limited, however. With the continued growth of the second generation will come the detachment to culture and homeland seen in other ethnic groups, despite current evidence suggesting that second-generation Cubans are holding onto their parents' and grandparents' culture more tightly than most. He predicts that, eventually, younger Cuban Americans will have a sentimental rather than vital attachment to Cuban-ness (17).

According to Eliana Rivero, the "transition from exilic to ethnic concerns" or, in other words, the transition from Cuban in America or Cuban exile to Cuban American, involves a conscious shift in perspective built upon "a personal awareness of

biculturalism" and an assumption of "the reality of permanence in a society other than the one existing in the country of birth" (193). Immigrant narratives in the Cuban tradition roughly follow this progression from exile to ethnic concerns. For much of the history of the Cuban experience in the United States, the literature is as much about maintaining a Cuban identity and recreating the Cuban homeland in a new place as it is about negotiating a new American self and home. Suárez and Poey argue that rather than adapting to America through the process of assimilation, many writers explore the process of adapting America to the Cuban way of life (11). The persistent assertion of a Cuban identity and culture rather than a hybrid one and the repetition of the first-generation immigrant experience by four successive waves of arriving Cubans have created an interesting pattern of development in terms of the immigrant narrative. Unlike other ethnic groups whose literatures begin with a desire to gain acceptance from dominant American society and grow toward consideration of internal concerns and an internal readership, Cuban American texts do not speak to the dominant society until after more than one hundred years following the first Cubans' arrival in the United States. With no intention of remaining in the United States, early waves of Cubans created isolated communities because they felt free from pressure to assimilate. Thus, despite the presence of Cubans in the United States since the early nineteenth century, a distinctly Cuban American literature did not appear until the last few decades of the twentieth century, with the emergence of a Cuban American consciousness which was seen in the new arrivals who intended to stay, and, in the second generation, children of the immigrants of the 1950s and 1960s, who, with little connection to Cuba themselves, considered themselves a new type within the Cuban community. My analysis focuses on

texts produced by members of these generations, as they are the first to consider themselves to be writing Cuban American literature and the first to explore an ethnic identity alongside an American one, and are thus comparable to other groups in my study. Interestingly, even though this literature depicts a younger generation that has, for the most part, abandoned the dream of return, that dream and the desire to re-create Cuba in the United States still figure prominently in the texts. A survey of earlier groups of Cubans entering the United States is necessary for understanding the writings of these later groups because they so often consider the history of multiple generations of Cubans in America.

Nineteenth-Century Cuban Immigration

Although large-scale Cuban immigration to the United States is a relatively recent phenomenon, Cubans first came to the United States in the mid- to late-nineteenth century when they arrived seeking political refuge. As Lisandro Pérez explains, Cuba's struggle from independence from Spain led many to flee from the conflict in hopes of economic and political freedom. Settling in Key West and Ybor City/Tampa, Florida, and New York City, Cuban cigarmakers and tobacco workers brought their businesses and skills with them as they relocated (256). They rebuilt the Cuban communities to which they had belonged and maintained strong interest in and connections with the political situation in Cuba.[104] For example, during the 1880s and 1890s Cuban poet José

[104] For a detailed study of Cuban nationalism in the United States as it developed from a reliance on Cuba's elite to a working-class, self-reliant nationalist movement, see Gerald E. Poyo's *"With All, and for the Good of All": The Emergence of Popular Nationalism in the Cuban Communities of the United States, 1848-1898.*

Martí, [105] who was then living in exile in the United States, galvanized the cigarmaking community to support a Cuban independence movement which he launched from Key West; interestingly, his orders for the uprising against the Spanish were sent from Key West to Cuba inside a cigar (Pérez 256, Suárez and Poey 10).[106] Martí and other patriots began a tradition of Cuban literature in the United States by contributing essays, stories, poetry, and editorials to a number of Spanish-language periodicals published in New York, such as *El Mensajero Semanal*, *El Mercurio del Nueva York*, *La Patria*, *La Vos de la América*, and *Las Novedades* (Kanellos xiv-xv). According to Rodolpho J. Cortina's study of Cuban literature in the United States from 1824-1959, *Jicoténcal*, which is about the conquest of Spain by Hernán Cortés, is possibly the first Cuban novel published in America in the nineteenth century. Although the novel was published anonymously, Cortina and others argue that it was penned by Father Félix Varela, a Cuban patriot (78). Two other of the best-known writers from this period addressed abolition and American racial politics in their novels. Cirilio Villaverde considered the enslavement of Africans in order to comment on Spain's hold over Cuba in his 1892 novel *Cecelia Valdés o La loma del angel*, which relates the tragic tale of an orphaned mulatto who kills her white

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[105] While Martí is most often looked to as the father of Cuban writing, Cristina García believes he is "overrated" because "in the Cuban context, everybody claims him for himself. The beginning of pretty much every Cuban text, whether by Fidel Castro or the Cuban American National Foundation, quotes José Martí. Everyone wants a piece of him" (Kevane and Heredia 73-74).

[106] America's role in Cuba's battle against the Spanish for freedom was, according to Gilbert Muller, not entirely altruistic (95). In the words of Louis A. Pérez, author of *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, "a Cuban war of liberation was transformed into a U.S. war of conquest" (178). America's economic interest in Cuba led to the government's intervention in its politics. In order to protect its own interests, the United States began a military occupation on January 1, 1899, which would be the first of a series of such occupations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, establishing a pattern of American control over its island neighbor (Muller 95-96).

lover (Cortina 79).[107] Ricardo Otheguy, Ofelia García, and Ana Roca argue in "Speaking in Cuban: The Language of Cuban Americans" that *Cecelia Valdés* is the most important Cuban novel of the 1800s, although it was written in New York (167). Anselmo Suárex y Romero's *Francisco*, written in 1838 but published after his death in 1880, follows the story of two slaves who decided to marry against their master's wishes (Cortina 79). Both Villaverde's and Romero's novels stress the inhumanity of slavery, again, to comment on Spain's inhuman treatment of Cuba. In *Cuban-American Literature of Exile: From Person to Persona*, Isabel Alvarez Borland notes that Cuban women authors, including Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda and Mercedes Merlín, were also producing works related to their experience of exile in the nineteenth century, although their works were not as widely read as were texts by their male counterparts (5). Of the texts written by Cubans in the nineteenth century, most were in Spanish and were neither intended for nor widely read in America outside of Cuban communities. Among early Cuban writers in America, there was no sense of building a literary tradition or writing for the sake of easing integration into American culture. They were far more concerned with how best to influence what was happening back home. Because of this, information about the development of Cuban literature in America is sketchy until the anti-Castro texts of exile begin to appear following the Cuban revolution. Indeed, Cortina describes the first sixty years of the twentieth century as "a block of time full of narrative ghosts awaiting to be embodied in hidden texts lost in libraries in New York, New Orleans, and Tampa" (80).

[107] The first part of the novel was published in a Cuban periodical in 1839, but the full text was not published until 1882 in New York (Cortina 79).

Cuban Revolutions and the Exile Experience

The American government continued to welcome Cubans through the first few decades of the twentieth century. In fact, while the 1924 National Origins Quota Act had restricted immigration from almost all non-European parts of the world, immigrants from the Caribbean islands, Mexico, and other Latin American nations "enjoyed protected status" because of American demands for cheap labor (Muller 97). With Fulgencio Batista's rise to power in Cuba, however, the number of Cubans entering the United States dropped from the 1930s to the 1950s (Muller 97). Some did escape during this time in response to Batista's rule. Alejo Carpentier, for example, came to the United States in 1928 in a self-imposed exile because he did not want to live under Cuba's dictatorship (Borland 5). In *Coming to America: A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life*, Roger Daniels explains that in 1950, there were "only thirty thousand foreign-born Cubans in the whole country" (373). This number increased with the end of Batista's dictatorship through Castro's takeover in the late 1950s, as an estimated 10,000-15,000 Cubans came to America each year, including members of a ruling elite out of favor with Batista, others who were politically and socially alienated, and unemployed Cubans seeking work (Pérez 256). María Cristina García explains that within this first major wave of immigrants, the first to leave Cuba were of the upper-class, many of whom were part of Batista's regime and faced the loss of property, wealth, and even life with the regime change. They were followed by middle-class merchants, business people, and other professionals. The last to leave were the members of the working class, including office and factory workers and both skilled and unskilled laborers. The violence, harassment, social indoctrination, Marxist propaganda, censorship, and food

shortages that were outgrowths of the new government's policies led the Cubans to leave (13-14). Those who came in this wave brought with them nostalgia for Cuba as it was before Castro's revolution and a sad realization that their homeland would be profoundly changed by his regime. However, because their departure was motivated by the change in government, they assumed, as their predecessors had, that return would be possible when the government changed again. Additionally, Cubans in America anticipated going back because, unlike displaced Jews for whom the distance between the old world and the new was a significant factor, they knew that the geographic proximity of Miami to Cuba would allow them to return easily when the time came.

The exact number of Cubans entering America between 1959 and 1962 is a matter of some debate. Because of the United States' hostile relations with Cuba during these years, the American government suspended immigration quotas on Cubans and granted refugee status to those entering the country (Pérez 256). Pérez estimates that Castro's massive restructuring of Cuban society initiated an exodus to the United States that brought more than 155,000 Cubans to America between January 1959 and October 1962 (256). In *Latin Journey: Cuban and Mexican Immigrants in the United* States, Alejandro Portes and Robert L. Bach offer the figure of approximately 215,000 (86). Isabel Alvarez Borland estimates the figure at 250,000 (5). Looking at the long-term effects of Castro's rise to power, Muller contends that overall the revolution led close to a million people to come to the United States (107). After the United States cut off communication with Cuba in 1961, the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service received requests for an astonishing twelve hundred visa waivers per day (García

16).[108] These widely varying estimates indicate the difficulty of accurately processing so many immigrants so quickly through a system that was ill prepared to handle them, and the difficulty of accounting for those who entered the country illegally as well as those who received official visa waivers.

The October 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis cut off all direct communication between the two countries, and immigration thus slowed considerably with the suspension of commercial flights between Cuba and America (Pérez 256). Prior to the crisis, 3,000 upper- and middle-class Cubans had been arriving in the United States every week (Muller 108). Still, 30,000 Cubans arrived in America between 1962 and 1965, some on small boats and some by first migrating to another country and then applying to enter the United States (Pérez 256). In September 1965, the Cuban government decided to open the fishing port of Camarioca for a boatlift that would aid the departure of Cuban relatives of exiles living in the United States; approximately 5000 new exiles entered the United States in this way (Portes and Bach 86). President Lyndon Johnson's signing of a "memorandum of understanding" with the Cuban government in December 1965 reestablished migration by plane through the launching of an airlift between Varadero and Miami which brought 340,000 Cubans between 1965 and April 1973, when it was terminated by the Cuban government (Portes and Bach 86). Many elderly Cubans were a part of this wave of migrants. Finally convinced that the new government was not going to fall, they decided to move to be with their children; they were granted permission to

[108] Interestingly, few of the Cubans arriving in this group possessed regular immigrant visas; most came with "tourist" or student visas or none at all, since they did not intend to stay (García 16).

leave by the Cuban government, which saw them as dependents and a financial burden (Pérez 257).

The assimilation pattern of these Cubans differs from that of other immigrant groups in part because of the government's reception of them. According to García, Cubans were officially recognized as political refugees from a communist state when President Eisenhower designated $1 million in relief aid from the Mutual Security Act to aid with resettlement of Cubans. Using these funds, the Cuban Refugee Emergency Center was established in downtown Miami in December 1960 to administrate the resettlement program and to coordinate other relief efforts (21-22). Kennedy's administration furthered the view of Cubans as "victims of the Cold War and thus a national responsibility" (García 22). Approving even more extensive aid than Eisenhower had, he established the Cuban Refugee Program[109] which continued resettlement efforts and offered Cubans health services, job training, education, and food; funds were provided for the Dade County public school system as well, which was struggling to integrate more than 3500 refugee children by January 1961 (García 22-23). The Dade County school system instituted a program of bilingual education in 1963 with Spanish used not as a transitional language for students learning English but as an equal presence in the classroom (García 89).[110] Overall, the Refugee Program "pumped millions of dollars into the economy and facilitated the Cubans' adaptation through

[109] This program came under the permanent authority of the Migration and Refugee Assistance Act in 1962 (García 23).

[110] Cuban children unaccompanied by adults proved to be one of the most challenging groups to assist. By September 1963, more that 14,000 had arrived, many under Operation Peter Pan, an underground network of volunteers from churches, schools, government agencies, and airlines dedicated to rescuing children from the political indoctrination and religious oppression they would be subject to if they remained in Cuba (García 23-25).

vocational and professional retraining programs" (García 2).[111] As Portes and Bach explain, the institution of the Cuban Refugee Program under the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare and the efforts of the Emergency Center gave arriving Cubans access to resources unavailable to other groups (88).[112] The government's assistance for Cuban refugees was so extensive that it began to surpass the amount of assistance available to United States citizens living in Florida, who, not surprisingly, came to resent the Cubans because of this (García 28-29).

Additionally, the residents of Miami and Dade County did not fully embrace the newcomers because the local economy was so dependent upon the business of tourists and retirees who, they feared, would be turned away by the area's overcrowding. This fear was combined with the competition for jobs which the Cubans represented during the recession the area was experiencing. Although approximately thirty-six percent of the early arrivals had been professionals in Cuba, the majority found themselves working in the construction, maintenance, service, and agricultural industries in Miami since they lacked the licensing necessary for and the opportunity to practice their professions in the United States; Cubans' willingness to work in these industries for lower salaries than

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[111] Despite the government's financial assistance toward Cuban settlement in the early 1960s, García argues that the American government shared the Cubans' desire for return. With Eisenhower's and later Kennedy's approval, the CIA trained and equipped Cuban refugees for Castro's overthrow. The failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961 and the negotiations that resulted from the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 dashed the hopes of the émigré community, who had counted on the United States becoming involved in a military overthrow of Castro. She contends that a sense of guilt led the government to increase aid to Cubans after the failure of the Bay of Pigs. Job training and resettlement programs were expanded, with the Cuban Refugee Program even encouraging Cubans to resettle through appeals to patriotism: they would be democratic ambassadors for Cuba who could spread awareness of communism in Cuba in the new homes throughout the United States. By the time the Cuban Refugee Program began to be phased out in 1974, 299,326 Cubans had been resettled in New York, New Jersey, California, Puerto Rico, Illinois, Louisiana, and the Virgin Islands, and over $957 million in relief services had been distributed (30-45).

[112] The Catholic Church provided significant assistance to settling Cubans as well; the diocese of Miami had offered $1.5 million in aid by December 1961. Bishop Coleman F. Carroll's social welfare agency, the Centro Hispano Católico, offered housing and job referrals, English classes and other educational programs, a nursery, medical clinics, and loans to cover basic expenses (García 19).

those expected by American workers created tension between the two groups (García 19-20). Soon the nature of Cuban culture began to disturb the locals as well, who complained about their noisiness, disrespect for laws, effect on property values, and effect on the quality of education offered in public schools (García 29).[113] The local Miami population was also afraid of being caught in the middle of the military attack on Castro that so many of their Cuban neighbors were invested in planning (García 29-30).

The conflict between Miami residents and the new Cuban arrivals was played out in the local media through stories that depicted with a resentful slant the difficulties of assimilating the Cuban population. To counteract this negative press, the federal government waged its own propaganda war, emphasizing the ease with which Cubans had assimilated into American social and economic systems and providing statistics on the number of Cubans who had been turned down for federal assistance or, if accepted for it, were paying it back once they were able to (García 30). Americans outside the Miami-Dade area were much more accepting of the Cubans, who "received sympathy and admiration" from many Americans because they were seen "as refugees from communism during the height of the Cold War" (García 6). *Life*, *Newsweek*, and *Fortune* depicted Cubans as model immigrants, heroes, patriots, and the new Horatio Algers during this time (García 6). Thus, in García's words, "while the national news media celebrated the refugees' heroism and middle-class values [. . .] letters to the *Miami*

[113] García notes that Department of Labor studies revealed these fears to be largely unfounded. Rather than taking jobs from local citizens, Cubans were creating new businesses, the Cuban presence did not increase the crime rate in Miami, tourism increased, no new slums were created despite housing shortages, the school system improved due to the money it received from the CPTR, and the government funds pumped into the local economy helped development (37).

Herald and the *Miami News* revealed the frustration in the city that was forced to accommodate them" (20).

The image of Cubans as a successful, model minority was not solely a creation of the press. Among immigrant groups, Cubans have been remarkably successful in establishing themselves economically and politically. While the desire to retain Spanish as a first language was strong within the exile community, many realized that English acquisition would enable them to succeed more quickly in the business world. English gradually became the language of public commerce and Spanish the language of home and social situations (García 89). In the Miami area Cuban Americans built a self-sustaining community of businesses, churches, and schools. Many of the Cubans moving to the Miami area in the 1960s settled in the four-square mile area of "Little Havana" which boomed with Cuban-owned businesses catering to all of the Cuban population's needs (García 86). Cuban women in particular played a large role in the developing workforce by creating businesses that catered to the needs of working women, including dry cleaners and hot meal delivery services (García 87). In contrast to the prediction of many hostile whites who thought that the Cubans would turn the area into a ghetto, the new community turned Little Havana into a profitable commercial center (García 86). In addition to creating their own economic network, Cubans sought to sustain each other culturally and socially. This exile generation tried to align itself with a heritage of proud resistance by comparing their response to Castro with the nineteenth-century exiles' struggle against the Spanish. This gave a larger importance to their cause and a firm foundation for their beliefs. Cuban exile bookstores and publishing houses first appeared in the 1960s, allowing readers to acquire the works of past as well as present heroes;

hundreds of émigré newspapers appeared in the 1960s and 1970s as well (García 91, 100). Anti-revolutionary poetry was extremely popular because of Jose Martí's influence (Boswell and Curtis 152). Anti-revolutionary novels were also widely read in the exile community. Andrés Rivero Callado's 1960 novel *Enterrado Vido* (*Buried Alive*), published in Mexico, is credited as the first of these anti-revolutionary novels; it was followed by works by Emilio Fernández Camus, Orlando Núñez, Manuel Cobo Souza, Raúl A. Fowler, Luis Ricardo Alonso (Kanellos vxi). At the time, the angry, bitter tone of many anti-revolutionary novels led non-Cubans to question the accuracy of the stories about Castro that the texts presented; in time, these works have proven "valuable more as sociopolitical documentary than as literature" (García 171). Thomas Boswell and James Curtis offer a kinder perspective than most scholars, writing in *The Cuban-American Experience: Culture, Images, and Perspectives* that the fact that most of the authors were novices greatly contributed to the criticism their texts received (152).

According to García, a variety of organizations were formed by members of the exile community in the 1960s and 1970s to help Cubans in America keep in touch with their past. Lectures, seminars, literary contests, and cultural pageants were among the more popular events, all of which were designed to encourage honoring memory of the past and to reinforce a nationalist spirit. One aim of these programs was to educate the second generation properly so that they would be equipped to reenter Cuban society upon return to the homeland and so that they could develop the self-esteem as Cubans that would keep them from falling into what the older generation saw as the social and moral traps America offered. These lessons were offered through private Cuban schools as well. The success of the exile community's attempts to preserve the past in the present

moment was remarked upon when the next wave of exiles arrived in 1980 and joked that they had gone through a time warp and emerged in 1950s Cuba (90-94). For some Cuban Americans, then, there were negative aspects to the creation of a new Cuba in America. Commenting on his escape from Miami in *Next Year in Cuba: A Cubano's Coming-of-Age in America*, Pérez Firmat writes: "Even though I love Miami more than any other place I know [. . .] I can't conceive of not having left. If I still lived in Little Havana, I'm afraid I would be trapped by memory the way my father is" (270). Cristina García's relationship with Miami is similarly conflicted. In an interview with Bridget Kevane and Juanita Heredia, she comments that she feels drawn to and yet alienated from Miami because "It can be an intolerant place. It is frequently monolithic in its approach to Cuba. As far as Cuban identity goes, there are three concentric circles -- The Cubans, the Miami-Cubans, and the other Cubans. I'm in the third ring three times removed!" (71). As evidenced by Pérez Firmat and García's comments, writers from the one and a half and second generations often emphasize the extent to which they feel suffocated by the insular nature of Cuban communities and cut off from possibilities because of their parents' desire to hold back change.[114]

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[114] Roberto Fernández's novels demonstrate the ways in which Cuban American communities can fail to support their members in a meaningful way and the futility of holding onto an idealized past. Having come to the United States with his family in 1961 when he was ten years old, Fernandez is part of a younger generation that is able to see the problems with their parents' exile politics and skewer them in their writings. As Virgil Suárez and Delia Poey explain in the introduction to *Little Havana Blues*, Fernández "satirizes Cuban society in the U.S., providing us the catharsis of laughing at our own human failings and realizing the tragic-comic nature of our history" (13). The darkly comic *Holy Radishes*, for example, features a varied cast of exile characters who leave the Cuban city of Xawa (*Sagua)* and settle in Belle Glade, Florida, where they try to recreate what they see as the perfection of Xawa society. As García notes, memory is selective for Fernández's exiles, whom he uses to satirize the Cuban propensity for exaggerating former holdings of property and wealth in Cuba prior to the revolution (173). Consumed by the fantasies of a wealthy, charmed past and possible future that they have created, they fail to connect with each other. The men in the group scheme to recapture and rebuild the Xawa Ladies' tennis club that was expropriated in a military takeover, Nellie never unpacks her suitcase because she expects to return at any moment and is

The Johnson administration worked to integrate Cubans into America by passing the Cuban Adjustment Act in 1966, which enabled Cubans to change more easily their legal status and waived the thirty-five dollar fee required under the immigration and nationality act (García 42). By smoothing the way for Cubans to become American citizens, Johnson hoped to encourage Cubans "to establish psychological ties to the United States rather than cling to the hope that they would soon return to their homeland" (García 42). García argues that the first signs of a change in the community's perception of itself appeared in the 1970s with their growing economic success, the increasing number of Cubans seeking naturalization, and Cubans' involvement in local, state, and national government. By 1980, the émigré community in Dade County brought in close to $2.5 billion in yearly income, with forty-four percent working as professionals and sixty-three percent owning their own homes. The Cubans enjoyed spreading their own success story, in part because it flew in the face of Castro's negative claims about democratic societies and the hardships that those who left for the United States would face. Naturalization rates soared from 1970 to 1980, climbing from twenty-five percent to fifty-five percent in the decade (108-13).

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absorbed in her daydreams about the wonderful past with her pet pig Rigoletto, one of Nellie's female co-workers practices paramilitary maneuvers in the Everglades for the coming takeover of Cuba, and Nellie's husband is obsessed with a Cuban prostitute he once knew who dressed as a squirrel. When Nellie foolishly boards a ship full of rowdy, English-speaking sailors she believes will take her back to her beloved country and Rigoletto at the novel's end, Fernández indicates that her dreams have blinded her fully to the reality of her situation. In all likelihood Nellie will be raped again, in a repetition of her earlier violation at the hands of Cuban revolutionary soldiers that propelled her entry into her nostalgic dream world.

The Mariel Boatlift

Cuban migration slowed again until another wave of immigrants arrived in 1980 via the Mariel Boatlift, which brought over 150,000 Cubans to America after the storming of the Peruvian Embassy in Havana (Suárez and Poey 10). When Castro withdrew troops from the Peruvian Embassy on April 4, 1980, 10,000 refugees seeking asylum came to the embassy that day; along with 115,000 others, they were later exiled to Miami (Muller 114). Initially, the exile community in the United States supported the *marielitos.* Moved by stories of terrible conditions for the Cubans inside the Peruvian embassy compound and the dangerous flight from Cuba, exiles in America identified and sympathized with this latest group of arrivals. They urged President Carter to intervene, organized food and clothing drives, and raised money for relief efforts (García 57). Although Carter was hesitant to become too involved in the Cuban situation, 6,200 of the embassy refugees were eventually taken in by the United States, with others going to Costa Rica, Spain, Ecuador, Argentina, Canada, France, and West Germany (García 57). When the airlift that enabled these refugees to leave was suspended, others began to leave by boat. Castro turned this exodus to his advantage by announcing that any *escoria* wanting to leave Cuba could through the port of Mariel and that he would cleanse his country by adding a large number of Cuban criminals, mental patients, and homosexuals to the wave of immigrants (Muller 114). He also urged Cubans in America with relatives in Cuba to come pick up their family members. Within the first week, five hundred boats arrived, and hundreds of others followed (García 60). Many of those who sailed to Cuba did so in the interest of helping fellow Cubans rather than rescuing family members because "they considered it their moral obligation to assist anyone who wanted to leave

the island" (García 60). Cuban officials took full advantage of the situation, detaining the arriving boats, charging extravagant fees for basic necessities in port, and forcing boat captains to return with boatloads of strangers (García 61). President Carter admitted the *marielitos*, as well as Haitian boat people, under the newly-created immigration category of "Cuban-Haitian Entrants (Status Pending)" (Muller 109). Although Carter initially announced that only 3,500 refugees would be admitted into the United States, his administration quickly shifted to an "open hearts, open arms" policy and began setting up refugee camps to accommodate the flood of exiles (Portes and Bach 87). From May to September 1980, 124,769 Cubans arrived, breaking all records of previous entry (Portes and Bach 87).

The Mariel wave was like others in terms of the complex system that was developed to process the new arrivals and help them assimilate into American life (García 62). Refugee camps were established in Miami's Tamiami Park, the Opa-Locka barracks, the Orange Bowl Stadium, Eglin Air Force Base in Florida, and three additional bases in other states. Additionally, refugees were housed in numerous churches, schools, hotels, and National Guard armories. The number of arrivals was so overwhelming for the facilities that the government eventually established tent cities for those who lacked sponsorship and were not likely to be placed immediately (García 62-63). Approximately seventy-five percent of the Mariel refugees remained in the Miami/Dade County area to live and work (García 73). Many were members of arriving family groups or reconnecting with family already living in the United States and so were the first to be settled. Contrary to Castro's propaganda, few were actually Cuban criminals; among those refugees entering the temporary camps, however, the percentage of the incarcerated

in Cuba was higher than in the general Mariel population, sixteen percent, as was the percentage of single men under the age of thirty with no relatives in the United States (Portes and Bach 87).

More so than other waves of Cuban immigration, the *marielitos* received extensive press coverage, and a public debate over their acceptance into American society ensued, particularly in light of Castro's comments about ridding Cuba of "undesirables" through this movement (Portes and Bach 87). Felons comprised less than four percent of the total population of *marielitos*, but the intense media attention paid to them stigmatized all *marielitos* in the eyes of both American and Cuban societies; unlike their predecessors in the early 1960s, "they were not granted refugee status, not were they celebrated for their patriotism and heroism" (García 6). Those arriving via the boatlift faced hostile competition over jobs and political discrimination from fellow Cubans; for those who were black, racial discrimination was a reality of America as well (Borland 5).[115] In November 1980, as part of a public outcry against the newest Cubans entering America, voters in the Miami area repealed the Bilingual-Bicultural Ordinance that had been passed seven years earlier (García 74).

Initially, the Cuban population already established in South Florida assisted the *marielitos*. Members of the community brought food, clothing, medicine, radios and

[115] Although Cuban immigrants have tended to represent all social classes, they have been more homogeneous racially. An overwhelming majority of Cuban Americans has identified as white in the U.S. Census. The perception that race relations would be better in socialist Cuba than in the United States and the potential for double alienation of black Cuban Americans, first from their ethnic group and second from other black groups in America, have led to much smaller numbers of this group coming to the United States (Pérez 257). The exception to this trend can be seen in the Mariel boatlift, which had an estimated thirty percent non-white refugees, as opposed to five percent in previous waves of immigrants (Portes and Bach 88).

televisions, and mattresses and cots daily; some even donated cars and house trailers (García 72). However, like that of the German Jews in America who eventually rejected their Russian counterparts, Cubans' generosity was curbed when rumors about the *marielitos'* criminal records began to spread, along with fears in the exile community about the *marielitos'* inability to adapt and the effect that their reputation would have on the successful "model" immigrants. They sought to distance themselves from the new arrivals, coining the term *marielito* that quickly became a pejorative within the community and becoming increasingly unwilling to serve as sponsors (García 72-73). Interestingly, García notes that they did not, however, call for an end to the boatlift because for so many it provided the only means of reconciling with family members who had remained in Cuba (72-73).

Despite the negative propaganda surrounding their entry to the country, the *marielitos* followed the same pattern of success as did previous waves of Cuban immigrants; self-employment rates rose, and unemployment rates dropped drastically during the 1980s (García 115). The 11,000 children from the boatlift who enrolled in Dade County schools succeeded beyond expectations, with only eight percent still needing bilingual instruction within seven years of arrival, several graduating as valedictorians, and many going on to colleges (García 116). The *marielitos* were not as committed to the idea of revolution and return as their predecessors were, and their children were even less so. Seeing themselves as Cuban Americans instead of Cuban exiles, this new generation struggled to define relationships with the country in which they were growing up and the country that their parents and grandparents told them was home (García 118).

As their predecessors had, the Mariel immigrants started their own magazines and gave voice to a new generation of writers, among them Reinaldo Arenas, Victor Gomez, and Edwardo Michaelson (García 117). Literature by and about Cubans arriving via the Mariel boatlift does not contain the nostalgic elements seen in works by past waves of immigrants. Because they were fleeing Castro and had no illusions of returning home once his dictatorship ended, and because they met with hostility from many Americans, their literature explores these immigrants' desire to connect with non-Cubans through shared feelings and experiences. Virgil Suarez's *Latin Jazz* (1989) and *The Cutter* (1991) and Reinaldo Arenas's *The Doorman* (1991) are prime examples of this type of writing. Arenas arrived in America in 1980 as part of the boatlift after having been imprisoned for two years for smuggling his work out of Cuba. The novels he wrote over the next decade explore his conception of a political exile's relationship to the existential vision of the exile status of all humanity. In novels like *The Doorman*, Arenas argues that happiness is not possible in either Cuba or the United States and that the only fruitful position for the writer to take is that of the outsider who can bring readers to see their own exile. Borland explains that Arenas's depiction of the ills of both Cuban and American society make his writing a turning point in the Cuban American literature of exile because it is broader than previous conceptions of exile, focusing not only on the loss of exile but also on the writer's need to move beyond it (46). To Ricardo L. Ortíz, the work of Reinaldo Arenas "bridges and breaches the more continuous tradition in Cuban writing among those who stayed on the island after the revolution and the current state of Cuban writing in exile" (195). His autobiography details his painful experiences in Cuba under Castro's regime as well as his equally painful rejection by members of the United States' Cuban exile

community in Miami, which he felt "was like a caricature of Cuba, the worst of Cuba" (qtd. in Ortiz 196). Arenas explained his writing interests in an interview with Franscisco Soto:

> I'm interested fundamentally in two things about the world of narrative. First, the exploration of my personal life, of my suffering, of my own tragedies. Second, I'm interested in the historical aspect of the world. And in taking that history to a wholly fictional plane. To interpret that history as it was seen by those people who experienced it. (qtd in Borland 39)

In the works of Mariel immigrants like Arenas, history is interpreted not only for those who have similar experiences but also for a wider audience unfamiliar with the nature of Cuban politics and exile.[116]

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[116] Arenas's goal of interpretation of events through fiction is shared by Christine Bell, who also wrote about the Mariel experience. Set in Miami, Bell's 1990 novel *The Pérez Family* depicts the boatlift at its close through the carnivalesque story of Juan Raúl Pérez (a released political prisoner), Papa Perez (an insane ex-soldier), Felipe Perez (a petty criminal), and Dottie Perez (a sometimes prostitute determined to remake her life in the United States as she pursues her American dream of John Wayne, Elvis, blue jeans, nail polish, and rock and roll). Bell explores the government's complicated system of processing the immigrants through Dottie's exploitation of it. Determined to move herself up on the waiting list for sponsorship and get out of the Orange Bowl refugee camp as soon as possible, Dottie creates a "family" from Juan, Papa, and Felipe because they all share the same last name and will be assisted more quickly as a family group. The group develops a genuine attachment to each other and rejects relationships with relatives who are finally located in Miami, allowing Bell to examine the ways in which for exiles, common experience may create closer bonds than blood. Bell's novel also presents multiple responses to the *marielitos*' arrival through the family's encounters with the Miami population and older exiles, and her depiction of the media's influence on the treatment of the refugees. Although Bell presents one of the most original, sympathetic, and compelling literary treatments of the Mariel boatlift, she is neither a *marielito* nor even Cuban American. Bell's understanding of these immigrants' experiences and her desire to write about them grew out of her work as an EMT in Miami during the boatlift, where she treated many of the newly arrived immigrants. Still, Bell's novel and the later film adaptation of it are important to the extent that they brought greater public attention to and understanding of the plight of this wave of Cuban immigrants. The film was directed by Mira Nair, an Indian director known for her sensitive treatment of ethnic and immigrant communities in movies such as *Mississippi Masala*, *So Far from India*, *Salaam Bombay!*, and *Monsoon Wedding*.

The Rafters

Cubans have continued to come to the United States since the Mariel boatlift, although their entry has been on a much smaller and less organized scale, with thousands attempting the journey to the United States in small boats and on homemade rafts (Suárez and Poey 10). This most recent wave of immigrants began in 1994 with the departure of 37,000 Cubans who became known as *balseros* because of the rafts in which they sailed (Otheguy, García, and Roca 169). In their flight to freedom, they faced the possibility of shark attacks, drowning, storms, sunburn, starvation, dehydration, and becoming lost at sea. According to Arturo Cobo, General Coordinator of the Hogar de Tránsito para los refugiados Cubanos in Key West, Florida, often only one in four arrived (186). Like the *marielitos*, these Cubans had left with their government's permission. In his book *The Cuban Americans*, Miguel Gonzalez-Pando states that because Castro was faced once again with a collapsing economy and internal opposition, he declared in the spring of 1994 that the government would allow those who wished to leave in small boats and homemade rafts to do so (75-76). Castro hoped that this would ease domestic tensions caused by the United States' trade embargo against Cuba and human rights groups' calls for reform (García 78-79). By enabling another full-scale wave of Cuban immigration to the United States, Castro also sought to corner President Clinton into negotiating another immigration accord and lifting the trade embargo. Predictably, Clinton's administration negotiated in order to end the new flood of refugees through an accord that suspended preferential treatment for Cubans under America's immigration policy (Gonzales-Pando 76). According to Gonzales-Pando, the exile community was so angered by Clinton's suspension of the open-arms policy and the idea of the United States Coast Guard's

working with Cuban authorities to return rafters to Cuba that they staged civil disobedience demonstrations in protest (76). Despite Clinton's announcement, an estimated 17,000 Cubans attempted the passage by the end of August 1994, and a total of 30,305 Cubans were picked up at sea in the five-week period from August 5 to September 10, 1994 (79, ix). Clinton had the *balseros* sent to camps in Panama and Guantanamo where they would remain unless they agreed to return to Cuba; within just over a month, the population of Guantanamo rose to 32,000 (Gonzales-Pando 76-77). When another large group of rafters attempted entry in 1995, Clinton instituted a policy of interception and return which simultaneously horrified the exile community and failed to stop the flow of rafters. Eventually the Cuban and American governments came to an agreement under which the United States would allow the entry of 20,000 Cubans annually (Otheguy, García, and Roca 169). This more open policy is viewed both positively and negatively by different segments of the Cuban community in the United States. For those hoping to bring remaining family members to America, the policy offers hope; for those still looking for Castro's overthrow, "the migration diminishes the possibility of an internal uprising" (García x). Unfortunately, relations between the United States and Cuba worsened dramatically after a 1996 incident in which four Cuban Americans died when two unarmed American planes in search of drifting rafters were shot down by Cuba over international waters. Clinton denounced Castro and signed the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act, which further tightened the U.S. embargo and imposed sanctions on other countries doing business with Cuba (Gonzales-Pando 77-78).

As was the case with the *marielitos*, the *balseros* received extensive coverage from the press, much of it negative.[117] Because this wave of Cubans was in large part black or multi-racial, poor, born after the revolution and raised in the communist system, and entering the country illegally, Cuban exiles and Americans alike held mixed opinions about their arrival. In her introduction to *Balseros: Oral History of the Cuban Exodus of '94*, Tamara Álvarez-Detrell characterizes the *balseros* as "more misunderstood" than any other wave of Cuban immigrants, although they came to the United States for exactly the same reasons as their predecessors -- to escape "oppression, lack of civil liberties, fear for personal safety, etc." (105). Alfredo A. Fernández's *Adrift: The Cuban Raft People* (2000) is one recent study that works to correct misperceptions of the *balseros* by contextualizing their decision to leave within the Cuban political chaos that resulted from the collapse of the Soviet Union. Fernández depicts the rafters as heroic survivors who left Cuba out of desperation through very creative means. Álvarez-Detrell's *Balseros* emphasizes the rafters' ingenuity and bravery as well and is one of the few available texts that presents the rafters' stories in their own words. It contains interviews with eighteen *balseros* living in Albuquerque and Miami that Latin American Studies scholar Felicia Guerra Paredes conducted, transcribed, and compiled. Álvarez-Detrell notes that a common theme in the *balseros'* accounts is a concern with accurate representations of

[117] The *balsero* experience received its most human face in the media through the story of Elián Gonzáles, the five-year-old Cuban boy who was found by fisherman off the coast of Florida in 1999. Tied to an inner-tube by his mother who died on the journey, Gonzáles was one of only three survivors of a group of fifteen who had left Cuba several days before in search of freedom in the United States. The shy child quickly became the center of yet another political battle between Cuba and the United States as his father in Cuba and his great uncle and family in Miami both sought custody of him. The exile community in South Florida fought for Elián's right to remain in the United States; Castro used Elián's presence in Florida as a symbol of U.S. oppression of Cuba, even erecting a new statue of Jose Martí in Havana that depicted the Cuban independence leader as a father holding a child and pointing menacingly toward the United States' Interests Office in the city (Fernández 250). When the United States government denied Elián the right to apply for political asylum and facilitated his return to Cuba, protests soon turned to riots in South Florida.

their thoughts and feelings (106). One of the most interesting features of the book is its presentation of the stories in both Spanish and English. Fully titled *Balseros: Historia Oral del Éxodo Cubano del '94/Balseros: Oral History of the Cuban Exodus of '94*, the complete text is given in Spanish first and then in English, including a second title page, introduction, acknowledgements, and so forth. Although the bilingual text is clearly designed to relate the *balseros*' stories to both Spanish and English speakers, Spanish is privileged in the text. The rafters' experiences have also been related first-hand in *Balseros*, a recent documentary film directed by Spanish telejournalists Carlos Bosch and Josep Maria Domenech. The film follows the stories of half a dozen *balseros* as they flee Cuba, are detained in Guantanamo camps, and eventually enter the United States to be resettled in various parts of the country. Finally, Bosch and Domonech examine the fates of the rafters five years later and return to Cuba to see what has become of their families.

One of the few recent fictional texts to address the *balseros* is Anilu Bernardo's 1996 novel *Jumping Off to Freedom,* which dramatizes the experiences of a father and son and two others who leave Cuba on a homemade raft. Like Bernardo's other fiction, including *Fitting In* and *Loves Me, Loves Me Not*, *Jumping Off to Freedom* is written to teach a young adult audience about compromise and understanding others. Margarita Engle's 1995 *Skywriting* examines the rafters through a more complex lens. Although Engle was not a *balsero* herself, she was visiting Cuba in the early 1990s with a journalist's visa when some of her relatives left for America on a raft (Alvarez Borland 134). The narrator of *Skywriting* is an American who journeys to Cuba to meet her half-brother. When her half-brother attempts to escape Cuba on a raft, she finds herself sharing in his family's anguish as he is first reported missing and later imprisoned.

Ultimately, she records the events and is also given charge of a family document that details the history of injustices in Cuba and helps to explain her half-brother's decision to flee. Engle positions her narrator as a bridge between Cubans and Americans who are so detached from Cuban politics that the exodus of the rafters might be difficult for them to understand. By writing through an outsider who comes to an intimate understanding of Cuba's history, Engle aims to introduce her readers to an insider perspective and to help them understand the plight of the *balseros*. While Engle is concerned with promoting American acceptance of the raft people, J. Joaquin Fraxedas's project is to bring together various subgroups within the United States' Cuban community to support the newest wave of immigrants. *The Lonely Crossing of Juan Cabrera* (1993) follows the stories of Juan, a *balsero*, Alberto, a Cuban exile, and Vivian, a 1.5 generation Cuban American who was part of Operation Peter Pan, all of whom arrive at different times and yet come together in a sense of a shared community. Aside from these few texts, there has not yet been a major production of literature by and about the *balseros*, perhaps because of the recentness of their departure from Cuba. However, if they follow the pattern of their predecessors, that will soon change, most likely at the hands of children who arrived as rafters and rafters' children born in the United States.

Defining Cuban American and the Problem of Generations

Studies of Cuban, Cuban exile, and Cuban American literature are greatly complicated by the entry of new groups of Cubans into the United States every few decades in the twentieth century. Clear, widely accepted divisions between the literatures are nearly impossible to make because, as Andrea O'Reilly Herrera discovered in

assembling her collection of expressions of Cuban exile, *ReMembering Cuba: Legacy of a Diaspora*, "the term 'exile' occupies many alternate places and meanings" for the members of the Cuban and Cuban American communities (xxi). For Cubans in exile, Cubans in the United States and Cuban Americans, cultural identity is fluid, negotiable, and largely a matter of choice. Given this fact, one of the most contested labels or categories is *Cuban American*, and, consequently, defining what is and is not Cuban American literature is extremely difficult. This debate over terminology has likely arisen because the majority of Cuban immigrants have entered within a short period of time, but in very distinct waves rather than in a relatively consistent stream, as was the case with Jewish Americans. Herrera claims that the term *Cuban American* is problematic since it fails to take into account the complexities of the ways in which different Cubans in the United States conceive of an exile consciousness and it cannot contain the multiple Cuban "presences" in the United States (xxix). She therefore proposes the term "Cub*and* presences" to function as a way of grounding "Cuban exile identity to an actual place and an idealized, rather than imagined, geography and history, which are at once both present and absent" (xxix). Other theorists resist categories altogether. Cortina, for example, raises a series of questions about birthplace, language of composition, and literary subject or theme that he then declares "not so much irrelevant as impertinent" to how Cuban American writers and their texts should be defined (70). For Cortina, who fully embraces the idea of transnational identities as appropriate for figures like José Martí who live in a "transnational reality," people and texts do not have to be singularly categorized (70). Rather than focus the inability of Cuban American as a category to contain multiple subject identities, Pérez Firmat suggests that a hyphen between Cuban and American be

viewed as a plus sign rather than a minus, or read as "Cuban + American" to indicate the benefits of both cultures rather than the compromise or loss of one culture to another. Given the long history of people immigrating to Cuba, he reads Cuban culture as hybrid and the Cuban American role as but one that Cuban culture can assume (16). He defines Cuban American literature according to its expression of hybridity. María Cristina García distinguishes between Cuban exiles and Cuban Americans in terms of how they regard themselves: "Cuban exiles regard themselves first and foremost as Cubans forced to leave their homeland for political reasons. A Cuban American is an American of Cuban heritage. [. . .] The amount of time in the United States and the degree of adaptation are two factors that determine the development of this dual identity" (213). Because I find Herrera's terminology awkward and disagree with Cortina's assertion of the irrelevance and impertinence of background, language, and theme to definitions of Cuban American literature, I use *Cuban American* in my selection and discussion of literary texts specifically to reflect the duality of experience referenced in Pérez Firmat and García's definitions.

Defining a first-generation text in Cuban American literature is problematic because of the many starts and stops involved in Cuban immigration to the United States. In her study of narratives that grew out of the 1959 revolution, Isabel Alvarez Borland classifies first-generation writers not as those who arrived at a particular time but as those who present a naked vision of exile, overtly political and angry at the events and individuals that led to their exile (6-7). She includes Cabrera Infante, Reinaldo Arenas, Severo Sarduy, Novás Calvo, Hilda Perera, Herberto Padilla, Carlos Victoria, and Antonio Benítez Rojo in this category, most of whom were successful writers in Cuba

and continued to write for a Spanish readership while in the United States (6). Borland's first-generation writers represent multiple generations; Arenas and Victoria, for example, arrived in the 1980s but shared a sensibility of exile and conception of homeland with their predecessors (8). She reads the first generation as those who were fully educated in Cuba and left as adults, enabling her to group writers such as Cabrera Infante and Reinaldo Arenas, who arrived decades apart, because of their shared background and consciousness (7). For Borland, generations are defined by ideology and emotion rather than chronology.

In addition to being a viable tool for grouping exile writers, Borland's approach to categorizing Cuban American authors by type of experience can be extended to Cubans who came to the United States as children, either with their parents or alone, regardless of which decade they arrived in America. While these immigrants could be considered first-generation immigrants in the standard sense of that category, they do not share the experiences and attitudes common to Cubans who came to America as adults in exile. Rather, these children comprise Pérez Firmat's 1.5 generation whose "intercultural placement makes them more likely to undertake the negotiations and compromises that produce ethnic culture" than either their parents, who retain a Cuban consciousness, or the second generation, who see themselves as more wholly American (4). The experience of the 1.5 generation of Cuban immigrants is both first and second generation. Born in Cuba but raised for the most part in the United States, they are the first group of Cuban immigrants to be neither Cuban nor American exclusively but both. Rather than view their position between cultures as a source of double marginalization, Pérez Firmat sees this generation as marginal to neither culture and therefore able to circulate equally

well within both (4). Rejecting the term *American Born Cubans* (ABCs) typically applied to the second generation, Pérez Firmat emphasizes the American basis of identity for the 1.5ers with his suggestion of the acronym CBAs, for *Cuban-Bred Americans* (5).[118] He acknowledges that the children of the 1.5 immigrants as well as the children of first- generation immigrants (both of whom could be considered second generation) fit into the category of CBA because their experiences of Cuba are their parents'. Describing their perspective by referring to his own children, Pérez Firmat explains that for them, "Cuba is an enduring, perhaps an endearing, fiction. Cuba for them is as ethereal as the smoke and as persistent as the smell of their grandfather's cigars (which are not even Cuban, but Dominican)" (5). For many Cuban Americans, including those who left the island as children and those born in the United States, Cuba has become a creation of the imagination, a fictional space pieced together from recollections, fading photographs, and family anecdotes. Borland argues that writers of these generations are less interested in confronting history or expressing loss through their investigation of the past than they are finding "a way to balance the disparate elements of their existence, such as their Cuban childhood and their American present" (50). Like the members of the first generation who can be grouped according to a common consciousness according to Borland, Pérez Firmat brings together those born in Cuba who came over as children and those born in the United States through a set of common attitudes.

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[118] In contrast to theorists like Pérez Firmat who focus on Cuban Americans' relationship to the United States, poet and scholar Lourdes Gil, also a member of the 1.5 generation, argues for the place of Cuban American writing within Cuban literature. Her suggested classification recalls that of the work of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century writers whose work was considered Cuban, even though it was authored in the United States.

Not all members of the 1.5 generation would agree with Pérez Firmat's definition of those attitudes, however. In compiling the selections for *ReMembering Cuba: Legacy of a Diaspora*, Herrera found that the members of the 1.5 generation insisted upon the authenticity of their own consciousness of exile and its manifestations in their daily lives, despite the fact that their connections to Cuba are what she terms products of a "vicarious imagination" (xxii). For those of this generation living in Miami, this consciousness is attributed to the physical proximity of Miami to Cuba and to the strong sense of Cuban identity present in the community, even for *American Born Cubans* and *American Raised Cubans* (ARCs).[119] She found that the majority of those of the 1.5 generation not raised in Miami, with the exception of Cuban Americans from the concentration in New York, "claim to be in a state of perpetual cultural dislocation" (xxiii). Regardless, such ABCs and ARCs frequently feel compelled to choose a Cuban identity and heritage, often describing themselves as being forced to choose one even when they could adopt a more generic "American" identity (Herrera xxiii-iv). According to Carolina Hospital, a poet, critic, and child of first-generation exile parents, because Cuban American writers were formed as people and as artists by a sense of displacement, they must necessarily remain in contact with their Cuban heritage and "deal with the ideological conflict that arises as an inherent part of his condition as a child of exile" (qtd. in Borland 54). In Hospital's view, Cuban American writers who give up this connection to the exile community and exile experience become ethnic writers rather than Cuban American ones. Borland's division between exile and ethnic is useful here. She defines the second generation rather

[119] While most of those Herrera spoke with considered this exile consciousness an asset, others felt stifled by it. Some Cuban women, for example, insisted that they would not marry a Cuban man while living in South Florida because he would expect them to behave like their mothers (xxiii).

simply as the children of the first and observes a split in that generation between those who are among Pérez Firmat's 1.5 generation and those whom she labels Cuban-American ethnic writers. Using Lisandro Pérez's classification of the second generation as those who were children upon arrival or born to Cuban parents in the United States, she places those Cubans who came to the United States in the post-Castro era as adolescents or pre-adolescents as 1.5ers, and those who came as infants or were born in the United States to Cuban parents as Cuban-American ethnic writers because they write "simultaneously for an American and a Cuban audience" (8). Borland argues that Cuban American ethnic writers may not write in Spanish or even necessarily know it, while Spanish is a complicated choice for the 1.5 generation of writers, many of whom experienced it as the language of childhood and English as the language of adulthood and do not want to sacrifice either of the communities to which those languages enable them to belong. As in Hospital's trajectory, Borland's 1.5 generation maintains a connection to an exile identity, albeit a complicated one. However, unlike Hospital, she sees Cuban American ethnic writers as necessarily more distanced from the revolution than their 1.5 counterparts, but drawn to it nonetheless as they attempt to locate their past and negotiate it in the present (8-9).

Varieties of Cuban American Literature

In a larger view, Cuban American literature represents the complex set of relationships between Cuba, language, and arrival in the United States that Herrera, Borland, Pérez, Pérez Firmat, and Hospital attempt to articulate. A starting point for Cuban American literature is difficult to establish because this literature did not grow out

of a singular type of immigrant experience or one specific generation's expression of ethnic identity.[120] Rather, the continual waves of Cuban immigration have led to the simultaneous production of very different, sometimes conflicting, sometime overlapping expressions of the immigrant experience by writers of multiple generations. Works of Cuban American literature do share certain common features -- a duality of experience, a concern with Cuban and non-Cuban reading audiences[121], and a desire to create dialogue between groups with various experiences of Cuba and America -- but tracing a line of development in the narratives seems impossible. Indeed, the greatest challenge for both scholars of Cuban American literature and Cuban American writers themselves is negotiating divisions between sectors of the Cuban community in America. For some

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[120] Several scholars have attempted to mark starting points. Garcia traces the birth of this literature to the close of the 1980s that saw the emergence of a group of writers who saw themselves as Cuban and American rather than Cubans writing in exile, including Roberto Fernandez, Ana Maria Simo, Gustavo Pérez Firmat, and Maria Irene Fornes. Although many were first-generation immigrants themselves, they were also among those Cubans who had grown into adulthood in the United States and were thus bilingual and bicultural. Rather than set their works in Cuba, they examined cultural interaction within the United States and were thus ethnic as opposed to exile writers, more in line with what we think of as the immigrant tradition. Their work does approach the subject of exile and exiles themselves but in a new way in that they both celebrate and satirize the exile experience (169-70). Jose Yglesias undertook a similar project as early as 1963, however, during the heyday of the anti-revolutionary novel. A second-generation immigrant, Yglesias was already exploring the hybrid culture of Ybor City, Florida, and the dual identity of those born into it, a topic that he would address most fully in his 1971 novel *The Truth about Them.* Eliana Rivero marks the transition from Cuban exile to Cuban American women's writing in the work of Lourdes Casal, which she argues includes a "fully conscious recognition of a 'double identity'" (192). Casal lived in the United States for twelve years and traveled back and forth to Cuba several times before her 1981 death there. In her work, Rivero reads "the transition from a consciousness of immigration to a certainty of permanent dualism, existential as well as socio-cultural" (192). Rivero believes this consciousness allows Casal and others like her to claim a hyphenated Cuban-American identity (195). She notes that the consciousness of a dual identity also appears in the plays of Doloras Prida and in the work of Achy Obejas (195). For Rivero, the final distinctions between Cuban writers in exile and Cuban American writers are the full consciousness of dualism, the sense of belonging to a minority, and the use of English (197). I agree with Rivero that a consciousness of dualism and the use of English mark Cuban American literature, but within Cuban American literature, not all writers present a minority consciousness or approach the use of language in the same way.

[121] Critical studies of Cuban American literature and culture have taken up this task as well. Pérez Firmat explains, for example, that he wrote *Life on the Hyphen* with an audience of those who are not like him in mind, which prevented him from taking the shortcuts that writers can when they share knowledge and values with their readers (14-15). He writes for Cuban Americans also, however, and hopes that one audience will be Cuban Americans like himself (15).

writers, building bridges involves writing from an American perspective back to Cuba, for some the bridges must be built within the community in the United States, and for others bridges are needed between Cubans and Americans and Spanish and non-Spanish speaking people. All totaled, Cuban American writings emphasize the tremendous variety of people and experiences in the Cuban community in the United States and thus take on many forms. As they forged a new literary tradition, Cuban American writers in the late twentieth century worked to create dialogue between different groups' experiences through anthologies, memoirs, community novels, and family history novels, all of which attempt to organize and promote understanding of, in some fashion, the history of a divergent immigrant group still in constant flux.

Cuban American literature surged forward during the 1990s under the auspices of minority presses such as Arte Público and Universal and major houses Doubleday, Farrar and Straus, and Knopf that made Cuban American texts more widely available (Borland 51). The number of anthologies appearing during this decade speaks to the growing popularity of Cuban American writing and their structure to the attempt to define it through dialogue. Behar's *Bridges to Cuba*, Ballester, Escalona, and de la Nuez's *Cuba la isla posible*, Suárez and Poey's *Little Havana Blues: A Cuban American Literature Anthology* and Hospital and Cantera's *A Century of Cuban Writers in Florida*[122] all appeared between 1994 and 1996. Although these anthologies have different points of focus and origin, some looking from Cuba outward and others looking from the United States toward Cuba, they all seek to promote conversation and cultural exchange and to

[122] Hospital published an earlier anthology in 1988 titled *Cuban-American Writers: Los Atrevidos*. This collection is important because it was the first to identify her generation of writers as a cohesive group whose works illustrate common themes (Borland 55).

create in readers an awareness of the diversity in Cuban and Cuban American writing in the twentieth century through the presentation of "recovered" works and the introduction of new voices. This goal is furthered by Cristina García's recently produced anthology of Cuban writing, *¡Cubanísimo!*, in 2003.

On an individual basis, the proliferation of Cuban American memoirs speaks to the desire to record specific perspectives before they are lost. Pablo Medina's *Exiled Memoirs* (1990), which depicts his childhood in Cuba, is one example of these texts that chronicled a past that current and future generations would not remember if it were not recorded. For Medina and others, writing is "a means to ensure the survival of a collective identity" (Borland 64). Gustavo Pérez Firmat's 1995 memoir *Next Year in Cuba: A Cubano's Coming-of-Age in America* examines his acculturation in two different cultures and, like many fictional texts from the period, moves back and forth in time between his childhood in Cuba, his adolescence in Miami, and his adulthood in North Carolina. He writes: "rather than merging Cuba and America, I oscillate ceaselessly, sometimes wildly, between the two" (274). Virgil Suarez's 1997 memoir *Spared Angola: Memories from a Cuban-American Childhood* returns to the past as a means of personal healing. Suarez's early years in Cuba are marked by violence, poverty, and his father's depression. He presents a personal record of pain rather than a collective experience wrapped in nostalgia and ultimately seeks to erase the past by confronting it rather than to preserve it for future generations.

The work of Jose Yglesias also addresses younger generations' responses to the ways in which Cuban nostalgia is used to cover pain. Yglesias authored fourteen books of fiction and nonfiction, translated four others, and contributed numerous short stories,

book reviews, essays, and articles to *New Yorker*, *New Republic*, and *Book Week*, among other publications, between 1963 and his death in 1995. Although a number of his earlier works went out of print by the 1980s, the reprinting of his novels by Arte Público Press in the 1990s as part of their Pioneers of Modern U.S. Hispanic Literature series has brought his impressions of Cuban American culture to a new generation of readers. Public interest in Yglesias's novels has also grown since 1980 as a result of the new waves of Cubans entering the country.

Yglesias was born in Tampa, Florida, in 1919 to Cuban and Spanish parents. In contrast to many second-generation Cuban immigrants, he grew up fluent in both Spanish and English. His formative years in Tampa's Cuban neighborhoods provided him with an awareness of the influence of revolution, exile, and nostalgia on individuals and of the labor issues that touched the Cuban community in South Florida. In his novels set in the United States, Yglesias typically depicts working-class immigrants' struggle to adapt to the harsh realities of American life. He describes his aim in an interview with *Contemporary Authors*: "[I] should like in my work to bring into clear view the moral views and approach to experience of workers, something which seems to be missing from most fiction" (Evory 793). Yglesias's success in bringing a new view of immigrant workers to print is reflected in the words of Thomas R. Edwards, who reviewed Yglesias's 1971 novel *The Truth about Them* for the *New York Review of Books*: "Yglesias's perspective on America has considerable freshness. These are not the conventional poor people of social protest novels, though they knew poverty well enough in hard times and felt the confused and inept discriminations" (19). Indeed, Yglesias's working-class subjects fight the economic systems designed to exclude them by clinging

to a nostalgic Cuban family identity that "success, not suffering, dissolves . . . " (Edwards 5). In *The Truth about Them*, Yglesias explores the ambivalent relationship to a created ethnic identity that stems from assimilation and success. Yglesias uses Pini, a middle-aged writer, to illustrate the third generations' conflicted feelings about moving away from a family-centered identity as he grows up and yet still wishes to engage with it. The novel charts changes in Pini's relationship with his family and hometown of Ybor City as he uncovers his family's history and tries to incorporate it into his conception of himself as an American.

Pini narrates the novel as he reconstructs and reconsiders nearly a century of his family's experiences, from his grandparents' arrival in Key West in 1890 to the passing of their legacy to his own son, Ralph, at the novel's close. Through Pini's quest to understand his family's hidden history, Yglesias comments on the intense nostalgia that permeates the lives of Cuban families in the United States, covering unpleasant "truths" about their past experiences and present economic suffering. When Pini's grandparents approach Key West by ship as the novel opens, his grandfather is not seeing the island for the first time. Having been there eight years earlier, he is delighted and reassured by the sights that greet him. Pini's grandmother, who sees herself as beginning a new life, comments years later to her grown daughters that her "soul shriveled" at the site that "looked to her like a further descent into the unknown world of the working class" (1-2). Although his grandmother had grown up in a wealthy Cuban household, once she enters Key West with her husband she is "irrevocably a cigarmaker's wife" (2). She arrives to meet for the first time her in-laws, who believe that she is ten years younger than she is, and who do not know the full story of her eldest daughter, the product of a brief love

affair that took place before her marriage to their son. Pini admits that "these few truths" are little to offer after "almost a lifetime" of searching (2) and considers the possibility that one cannot ever really know the past as he sighs and closes a photo album, "despairing of ever really knowing the life [his] grandmother had led" (3). Seemingly conscious of appearing desperately obsessed with finding the truth as he tells his story, Pini offers an aside to the reader: "(Not that I was obsessed from day to day, but there is reason, God knows, to look in any direction, including back into time, for a happier way of living)" (2). Although Pini seems to intend this statement to be taken as an offhand justification of his search, through it, Yglesias introduces Pini's conflicted attitude toward his heritage. Drawn to a past he does not fully understand in the hopes that knowledge of it will answer the questions about his identity that torment him, Pini is still reluctant to admit the power that the past has over him.

In relating his family's history, Pini brings the reader into his own process of discovery, carefully detailing everything that he learns from various sources. Drawing on journals that he reprints in the text, memories, and half-told tales, Pini reconstructs what he believes happened to his grandparents. In his eagerness to know the past, he sometimes relies on empirically flawed evidence. For example, when he visits Key West and sees young boys diving off the pier for pennies thrown from ships, their carefree attitude strikes him and confirms "the truth" of his grandfather's stories of diving there when he was young (23). For Pini, "knowing" his family is about more than knowing a series of facts and dates. He wants to connect with them emotionally through shared feelings and, when he is able to do so, takes the experience as a confirmation of the rightness of his impressions of his ancestors. He first opens his grandfather's journal

when he is in the Navy, hoping to connect with the man who had been an officer in the Spanish army, through a common disdain for wealthy colonials (5-6). When he travels to Cuba to visit relatives on what he calls a wholly unsentimental trip, supposedly to find facts for an article, he admits, "they were bound to be counter-revolutionaries, and I would be pleased (forgetting this was sentiment) to hate them in memory of my grandmother who had revolutionized her life when she left Mantanzas without asking for an accounting of her inheritance. Yes" (22). The idea of understanding ancestry through common emotions or drives is expressed again when Pini stands in his great-grandfather's house in Cuba and declares him to be his "real ancestor, for he was the only one that I knew felt a compulsion to turn his experience into words on paper" (23). With this, Yglesias establishes that the novel will be as much about Pini's development as a writer as it will about his family's history and that his search to know that history is really a means of trying to justify and accept who he has become.

Pini's most egregious rewriting of the past to confirm his own beliefs is seen in his interpretation of his Uncle Leandro's anti-American poems as patriotic. Leandro wrote in Spanish with the help of his wife Chucha, but when Pini translates the poems for his readers, he presents only the English versions, clearly taking control of the texts. He also identifies his rationale for the order in which he presents them. In order to counter Leandro's "lack of gratitude for President Roosevelt's New Deal measures," he includes a poem about his own mother's thankfulness for her pension and explains,

> it must be said that Mama Chucha and Papa Leandro were thankful for their own pensions, though in the years he was writing verse Papa Leandro was bitter about our country's unfriendly relations with the Cuban

> revolutionary government. The classical *decimal*, still to come, shows, however, that he made distinctions among Americans. Papa Leandro might not have conceded that, but I believe it, as literary critics believe in the unconscious element in fiction. (150)

Pini finds confirmation of his belief that Leandro on some level accepted America, even in Leandro's poem which denounces Kennedy, reading the "we" in "we have a shit for president" as signaling Leandro's mental association of himself with the "we" of the United States (153). Pini positions himself as the interpreter of his family's words and intentions according to his own agenda. Because he is trying to reconcile his American identity with his Cuban one, he interprets the writings of his uncle as supporting the country that he sees as his own.

Pini's explanation of the power of imagination in shaping and understanding the past also underscores Yglesias's point that how we perceive history is perhaps more important than what actually happened. In examining his grandmother's young love in Cuba, Pini acknowledges that even all the facts "are not entirely reassuring; a mystery remains. [. . .] It requires, perhaps, an imagination that overlooks the facts" (15). Despite this claim, at other points in the novel Pini is conscious of making distinctions between fact and fiction as he tells his tale because he does not want readers to assume that his account has no basis in reality. When elements of the story he weaves seem too symbolic to be true, such as the name of the Cuban street his father's family lived on -- Jesus Peregrino -- he reassures readers that "it was not a literary invention" (19). This insistence on the veracity of his account is an outgrowth of his discomfort with fully embracing the nostalgia that his older female relatives indulge in when they spin tales of

a marvelous Cuban past. Pini's discomfort is marked again, later, when he hears the nostalgic tone of his aunts begin to enter his own voice as he tells his cousin Luz Sophia about Aunt Titi's life in America. In response he quickly hurries on, extricating himself from taking part in the ritual he is both drawn to and seeks to avoid (184).

Sitting on Aunt Angela's porch, Pini's aunts "regrouped and reinvented the recent past to fit the mood of sad, sweet nostalgia proper to a Florida summer evening" (167). Nostalgia becomes important to the women of the family during the Depression, when, as Pini says, they "feared, without confessing it, that the old philosophical expressions were inadequate now. They became, rather, intensely nostalgic; their conversations were all remembered joys spoken at the pitch of anguish. [. . .] These were the things I knew about their lives, tales borne by sentimental conversations that the many crises during the Depression inspired. A Family as protective and serene as a giant oak. Only the present was full of anxiety and unpaid grocers' bills" (168-69). Pini recalls that no matter how much his mother and her sisters argued, their Saturday nights conclude with crying, reminiscences of his Grandmother, and the formation of "a charmed, circle, all exclusivity," much like the close groups his sisters and girl cousins form (117). Although Pini's words show a clear understanding of their need to live in the past, he is still uncomfortable with the fictions that the women in his family create because, as a male, he is excluded from the truths that the stories are designed to cover. He explains the nature of this female secrecy through his aunts' behavior after Titi's funeral: "They had also made a pact on the return train never to mention that they had given their last twenty dollars to Mama Chucha. All of which meant they would tell their daughters -- the girls

were women, after all -- and the men would in time find out but never be about to confirm any of this" (141).[123]

Pini is closed out of many parts of his family's history because of his gender. When he confesses to his mother that his cousin Zenaida told him about his Aunt Titi's parentage, his mother's sorrowful response acknowledges that "Zenaida had broken the rule of the Spanish Cuban women of Tampa that men are not to be privy, except in unsmotherable crises, to family secrets" (3). Pini's mother is concerned that his grandfather's reputation will be marred by the revelation that Titi is illegitimate; even though he is dead and both grandparents had been forgotten outside the family, she is still the preserver of reputation and is relieved to hear that her son has only recently learned about Aunt Titi's background (3-4). This desire to protect through secrecy is seen in each generation of women in Pini's family. His grandmother removed herself from her own father's journal. As Pini explains, she tore out the pages covering 1854 to 1863 not to cover her true age, as he had long thought, but to erase any references to her scandalous behavior (4). Pini's sister Eloisa, who believes the best about everyone, also has a strong sense of what should and should not be said in order to protect heritage. When she questions Pini's reasons for including information about the Russians in his last article on Cuba and he tells her he had to include it because it is the truth, she replies that she can understand his having to put it in because "that way they let you get in some good stuff

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[123] Pini's Aunt Chucha and Uncle Leandro, known as Mama and Papa because of their large number of children, are "exasperating" to the rest of the clan because "they had no secrets and no discretion" (111). Unlike her sisters, who take after their soft-spoken mother who brought a "civilizing influence" to West Tampa, Mama Chucha is loud and shrill, and married to a man who is not Spanish but fully Cuban. The other uncles' reactions to him lead Pini to conclude, as a child, that "'Cubans are not to be taken seriously'" (113).

about Cuba, right?" (88). To soothe his anger, she reminds him that they are the children of cigarmakers and therefore have to support the workers (89). Pini reveals that this statement was often used by her ex-husband Abel as a "grand appeal for unity in all political disputes in the family" and that it rolled off Eloisa's tongue "unself-consciously" (89). For Eloisa, this simple reminder of where they came from is a sufficient guideline for action in all situations. This is not so for Pini. While family history sustains the women of the family, Pini struggles to incorporate his past into his present life because he is denied access to family secrets and does not fully understand his background. The same Cuban heritage that directs Eloisa conflicts with Pini's desire for an American self he can define and control; it confuses, rather than clarifies, his path.

Pini initially senses when he is a young child entering school that being a Cuban American will pull him between two cultures. He perceives a clear division between Us and Them at his grammar school "where everyone of Us had first met the terrifying English language" (128). At this point, his foray into a new world represents the first-generation immigrant experience. Moreover, he begins the immigrant process of assimilation through education when the knowledge he has acquired thus far in his life is questioned, causing him to doubt the importance of what he has learned from his Cuban family:

> Before I started grammar school in Tampa, I used to think, listening to Grandfather on our porch, that everyone knew about Jose Martí, but after a week of hearing American teachers speak only English I began to suspect that the years before I entered Ybor City School had been wasted. Martí's name was not mentioned in junior high or in high school either, and one of

> the things I learned in school was that there were many things you were expected to forget. To this day I use his name hesitantly and look quickly at the eyes of the person to whom I'm talking. Should I identify Martí for him? Should I do so now? (39)

For Pini, who has never been outside the circle of his Cuban family until he enters public school, Americanization entails the newfound awareness that not everyone shares the same cultural knowledge. Thus, learning in America becomes about forgetting Cubanness. From then on he questions what anyone he speaks to "knows," even the audience to whom he is presumably writing the novel. Through Pini, Yglesias shows his readers the immigrant's uncertainty involved in encountering those who are different, and at the same time, shares his own uncertainty in the presence of his readers. Yglesias shows Pini's sensitivity to his reading audience elsewhere when Pini avoids overtaxing his readers in the event that they will turn away. In one scene, for example, he omits the names of cousins present at a dinner because "how many Spanish names can one impose on a reader without his closing the book?" (131).[124] Still, just by mentioning his hesitation about bringing up Martí and the Spanish names, he brings readers closer to understanding the position of the immigrant and the immigrant writer.

The conflict between Cuban and American identities arises again through an educational setting when Pini is in high school and trying to assume a more American identity. This time, the forces driving his assimilation are social ones. At this age, he

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[124] Yglesias is very conscious of writing for a non-Spanish speaking audience. He writes entirely in English and indicates conversations that took place in Spanish with a parenthetical aside afterward informing the reader of the language used in the actual conversation. He also indicates the limits of his knowledge of Spanish when he indicates how he heard words spoken, as opposed to how he later learned they were pronounced (137).

reflects, "all that occupied me were the oppressive differences between us in Ybor City and the Americans I first met in high school. [. . .] My dead father was born in Spain and my mother was wholly of Cuban descent, but I claimed neither. I was stubbornly intent on being American, a singular view of myself that no one in or outside that anomalous Southern community shared" (60). This statement reveals the extent to which Pini's desire to fit in, to be "normal" rather than from an "anomalous" place, drives his desire to assimilate. He also looks to align himself with a distinctively American intellectual tradition at this point in his life. Aunt Angela and Uncle Candido encourage Pini to read Cervantes to enrich himself, but he and his cousin Zenaida spend time at a library in West Tampa because it has American bestsellers. Pini explains their subterfuge, "We went with the entire family's blessings -- they all believed that the life of the intellect would keep us out of the cigar factories -- and returned with Ernest Hemingway and Zane Grey, Theodore Dreiser and Eleanor Glynn (sic)" (58). Ironically, the pursuit of intellectual life does take Pini beyond the limited opportunities for young men in Ybor City, but stories of America's myths and the working-class ultimately motivate him rather than the romanticized tales of a heroic Spanish past represented in *Don Quixote*.

As Pini grows older, his assertions of his American identity are much more direct and are played out in parent-child conflicts that are typical in second-generation immigrant fiction. In a confrontation with Candido, who acts as Pini's father after his father passes away, Pini denounces his uncle's "backward" view of the world and his place in it: "This is not the Centro Asturiano canteen where you can walk in like a Spanish grandee and have them kiss your ass because you're a foreman. When you are ignorant and do not know what you are talking about" (79). By publicly criticizing

Candido and asserting that his own American-gained knowledge is superior, he feels that he has felled the man who was standing between him and his "full manhood" (79). Pini reflects upon the importance of such rituals, acknowledging that they "must be enacted and taken seriously," although he clearly comes to regret his harsh treatment of his uncle and wonders if his behavior is cause of laughter or tears (79).

In as much as Yglesias depicts Pini as the traditional bi-cultural youth fighting to establish his own identity, he also shows that for Cuban Americans of any generation, moving out of an isolated Cuban community is akin to entering America for the first time. When Pini and his immediate family leave Ybor City to join Aunt Angela and Uncle Candido in New York, they experience moments reminiscent of first-generation immigrants arriving in the United States. In New York they hear the American English they had hoped for -- "English as spoken in the movies" -- and experience the culture shock of seeing America outside the Cuban community, including girls who will "kiss you in the presence of their families" (75-76). Yglesias depicts the differences in Cuban and Cuban American society as so marvelous that they delay the new arrivals' recognition of their relatives' broken lease and liquidated store (76). After Pini has assimilated into New York life, he contrasts himself and other relatives who have left West Tampa with Mama Chucha, who "had not felt that little click inside her -- like the uncoupling of noiseless trains -- that separates one from the ways of West Tampa and Ybor City" (139). Mama Chucha, for her part, has no desire to travel and become more American. She sees her sisters who have left home as "Americans, [. . .] Florida Crackers, and without feelings" (140). Her husband Leandro shares this view and despairs for the next generation, dismissing his children as "a bunch of Florida crackers

[. . .] some of [whom] cannot even speak Spanish" (157). For Chucha and Leandro, who are second-generation immigrants but not unlike the first generation in attitude and experience because they are from such a close-knit Cuban community, assimilation is tantamount to cultural death and the cessation of the family line.

Pini's entry into the working world leads him to reconsider his relationship to heritage yet again. He assumes an American name when he writes for a Communist newspaper, but his brother-in-law Abel's response to this change -- "Sure, to fool the FBI" -- leads him to suspect that he may have changed his name for another reason (101). He initially imagines that in his career as a writer, he will not hide his background but rather embrace it for the glamour it will give him among the intellectuals of his generation and with the women he meets; at the same time, though, he imagines adopting a thoroughly American accent. Pini's vision of his future is one in which he is ethnic enough to be exotic and interesting but also able to blend with the mainstream (169-70). In this dream, he shows the third generation's desire to adopt an ethnic identity when it will be beneficial but to be able to escape it when desired.

Pini continues to be conflicted about his heritage into middle age, until a dinner with his wife Esther, Mama Chucha, and Papa Leandro leads him to reassess his understanding of the family and his place in it. When Leandro speaks loudly and several Midwesterners on an adjoining terrace turn to look, Pini returns their stares haughtily, imagining that the way he holds his drink will tell them that he is a sophisticated New Yorker (160). At another point in the evening he loudly describes Chucha and Leandro as "a typical American couple," knowing that the Midwesterners are listening and unwilling to have others, even strangers, believe that his family members are anything other than

the norm. Later that evening, though, Chucha's casual remark about when all of them were young prompts Pini's sudden realization that his relatives are not what he had always believed them to be. They are not fixed, in a sense, preserved as they are in the stories he knows about them: "They really had been young once. It made me think differently about their lives in West Tampa and Ybor City. They had not been finished and set, as in the stories I listened to, or as in my own memories. (I think now their lives will never be set but keep changing and enriching those whose eyes light on them.)" (160). Pini finally realizes that the meaning of his family cannot be understood through a set of tales. Rather, family members and therefore family identity are dynamic, with the ability to change and enrich those who take the time to know them as the people they have been, are, and will become. This realization leads Pini to question his family members about their experiences and to write a book about the Ybor City readers' strike during the Depression, his first about his hometown (160). He has finally found a way to incorporate his family's past with the person he has become, a way to succeed as a mainstream writer and still maintain a healthy, genuine relationship with his heritage.

Yglesias turns the novel to Pini's son Ralph in the final chapter as a way to explore more fully the results of his protagonist's decision to share his heritage through writing. Having read his father's book on the strike, Ralph pronounces that Pini feels guilty for having sold out his hometown (185). This causes Pini to realize that he has failed to express his real feelings about his hometown to his son and to conclude "that the very hope that I could pass on some sort of inspirational tradition was literary nonsense, an attempt to compensate for the miserable facts of life" (186). Still, he attempts to pass on this tradition when Ralph gets the opportunity to spend several weeks with relatives in

Ybor City. Pini accompanies him, feeling "sentimentally foolish" when Ralph experiences his first touch of nostalgia for the place he was taken to as a child (188), smiling at his son's awkward attempts to explain to the family in Spanish that he has not come for a personal visit but to do research for school. While driving Ralph around the city, Pini points out some landmarks from his youth but is hesitant to note others that remind him of loss and grief: "I wanted to tell Ralph about Papa Leandro, now dead, but I could not. Why pass on to him my elegiac mood?" (192). When the entire family gathers because Aunt Angela has broken her leg, Pini realizes that there are things he cannot tell his son if he wishes Ralph to love them as he does. He does not let him know about an argument that Chucha has with his mother about a Cuban refugee because he knows that it will "appeal to his new political sense" (211). In the same way that the past was carefully presented to Pini and in the same way that Pini shapes his family's past as he presents it to the reader, he decides which aspects of the unfolding moments he will introduce to Ralph. While Pini recognizes that he and Ralph will never share the same attachment to the family -- "I realized there would always be this difference between Ralph and me in the way we felt about Ybor City. It was inevitable: He had never lived there as one of them and would never fight through the enveloping oppression of their attention and indifference to love them hopelessly" (211) -- in the end he finds joy in the knowledge that Ralph has been brought into the family tradition after all when they argue over a comment that Ralph makes about Ybor City. Additionally, Yglesias closes the novel with Pini's mother instructing her grandson in the art of survival through cover-up talk and secrecy, asserting that the next generation will carry with it some of the lessons of the past.

Like Yglesias, Oscar Hijuelos examines the difficult position of men growing up in between Cuban and American cultures. Interestingly, his success as a writer has led him to be rejected by one culture and embraced by the other. Himself a second-generation Cuban American, Hijuelos is easily the most widely recognized Latino writer in the United States today. He crossed into mainstream acceptance with his Pulitzer Prize-winning second novel *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love* and has achieved a level of commercial success unprecedented among Cuban American writers, although recent increased mainstream attention to Cristina García's work has brought her close. The popularity of Hijuelos's novels outside the Cuban community has greatly complicated his relationship to Cuban American readers, some of whom question the accuracy of his representation of Cuban life and his own relationship to Cubanness. In "Exilados on Main Street," a review of works by Hijuelos, Virgil Suarez, and Roberto Fernandez that appeared in *The Village Voice*, Enrique Fernández criticizes Hijuelos as having "conspired with the Anglo-American need to deny the existence of other American civilizations" because of his depiction of underdeveloped, superstitious Cuban origins that must be killed off for Cuban Americans to become Americans. Fernández comments, "Hijuelos's protagonist bought it and, I suspected, so had Hijuelos himself" (85). Fernández tries to establish his viewpoint of Hijuelos as the dominant one in the Cuban community in America. While he notes that *The Mambo Kings* was critically hailed, he states, "Most Cubans I know don't like it. Soon after it came out I started getting calls from friends who felt the need to share their displeasure, nay, disgust with this novel. As one of them put it, 'Any novel about Latinos that gets such a fine reception from Anglos can't be any good'" (85). From this viewpoint, Hijuelos's

crossover success marks him as someone who has lost touch with or even sold out his Cubanness in the interest of impressing an Anglo community. Fernández furthers this argument by remarking that Hijuelos's writing fails to portray Cuban families convincingly and asserting that this failure results from Hijuelos's distance from his heritage; Hijuelos's writing "tastes flat" and his "characters [sound] like some generic 'ethnic' family seen through gringo eyes" (85).

In a 1993 interview with Esther B. Fein for *The New York Times*, Hijuelos confessed his frustration with readers' expectations for the relationship between his ethnicity and his work. He is troubled when readers expect his books to be, in a sense, even more "Cuban" than they are based upon their own assumptions about the nature of Cuban American literature. In the interview, he recalls attendees at a reading in Miami who asked "why he hadn't written a book about post-Castro Cuba" and "whether he planned to write a book in Spanish" (C 22). In some cases, critics' approaches to his novels have been just as narrow as the reading public's. Fein notes that reviewers of his work can be "equally 'myopic,'" comparing him to Gabriel García Márquez, for example, and not considering other influences (C 22). Indeed, Hijuelos's works are most often read in terms of his importance to the Cuban American and larger Hispanic literary traditions and his exploration of themes related to these experiences. Most reviewers read even *The Fourteen Sisters of Emilio Montez O'Brien*, a book that clearly intends to expand narrow definitions of ethnic identity in America, solely in terms of its reflections on Hispanic life. Hijuelos is frustrated by those who view him "with a kind of single-mindedness, that what I am about to them is just Cuban" and emphasizes that his ethnic background is but one of many influences on his work (Fein C 22).

Hijuelos's first novel, *Our House in the Last World* (1983), is particularly interesting in the context of this debate over the relationship between Hijuelos's ethnicity and his writing. Within the body of his work, this novel most closely draws on his own background as an American-born child of Cuban immigrants.[125] As Hijuelos explains, "although I am quite Americanized, my book focuses on many of my feelings about identity and my `Cubanness.' I intended for my book to commemorate at least a few aspects of the Cuban psyche (as I know it)" (May and Trosky 165). Even so, the book has been read as telling a universal story rather than one specific to the Cuban American experience. Kanellos, for example, describes it as "a typical ethnic autobiography, a standard genre in American literature's accommodation of ethnics within the parameters of United States culture" (xvii).[126] For him, *Our House* is a symbol of Cuban assimilation and the evolution of Cuban American literature beyond the novel of exile into the more mainstream form of ethnic autobiography (xvii).[127] Indeed, although commemorations of Cuba and the longing for the lost world are certainly represented in the mother and father of the Santinio family, Mercedes and Alejo, Hijuelos focuses most closely on the development of their two children born in the United States, particularly that of the younger son, Hector, who is the more Americanized of the two and, like

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[125] Many details from the novel suggest that *Our House in the Last World* is as much Hijuelos's own story as it is his protagonist Hector's. When his parents came from Cuba, they, too, settled in New York, where Hijuelos's father Pascual worked as a hotel cook. Like Mercedes, his mother Magdalena, loved poetry. Like Hector, Hijuelos was born in 1951 and as a young child spent time in an isolated children's hospital. Also like his protagonist, he learned that his father had died while he was away visiting an aunt in Miami.
[126] In contrast to this perspective, Bridget M. Morgan argues that the novel challenges the notion of a "typical" or "representative" immigrant narrative and that Hijuelos compassionately depicts how each of the unequal participants in the American Dream is transformed by the process of assimilation.
[127] While critics like Fernández castigated Hijuelos for this move, Kanellos hoped that the novel would open the door to mainstream publishing, as other such ethnic autobiographies by other ethnic writers had done (xvii). The development of Hijuelos's career after *Our House in the Last World* has proved his prediction correct.

Hijuelos, struggles to understand his divided loyalty and identity. Hijuelos's work presents a hyphenated perspective through characters who struggle with the effect that Cuba has on them, particularly in terms of masculine identity through the influence of their fathers, but they have no real connection to Cuba themselves. In its attention to characters learning to negotiate ethnic and American identities, *Our House in the Last World* has much in common with texts written by second-generation immigrants of different ethnic backgrounds. However, even in its adoption of a mainstream form, Hijuelos's novel reveals the ways in which the process of assimilation is different for Cubans and the challenges specific to their experience.

Our House follows the Santinio family from the arrival of Mercedes and Alejo in the United States in 1944 until Alejo's death in 1969. Although the story opens in 1939, more than a decade before Hector, the second son, will be born, Hijuelos signals that the book will be Hector's with his opening line: "Hector's mother met Alejo Santinio, his Pop, in 1929 when she was twenty-seven years old and working as a ticket girl in the Neptuna movie theater in Holguín, Cuba" (11). The majority of this line offers details about his mother Mercedes, but she and Alejo are accorded importance only because they are Hector's parents. While Hijuelos develops their characters in the novel, what he reveals about them will be important in terms of how they influence Hector's identity.

Hijuelos also lets the reader know in the opening chapter that the book is drawn from Hector's and his brother's memories: "There is much more to be told . . . One day Hector and his older brother Horacio would hear all the different stories, and it would amaze them that for all her ability and talent their mother ended up tearing tickets off a spool and pushing them out under the window of a gold painted booth" (18-19). By the

end of the novel, when Hector is grown and decides to pursue a career as a writer, Hijuelos has positioned him as the one who will tell these stories.

Hijuelos's choice of Hector as a narrative conscience is reflected in his use of language in the novel. Hector is Americanized. Pérez Firmat explains that Hector's dropping of the accent from his own name confirms his assimilation into American culture ("Teaching" 98). Hector's fluency in English slang is seen in words such as Pop that are sprinkled casually throughout the text, and his discomfort with speaking Spanish in an English world (or in the English world of the text) is reflected in Hijuelos's translations.[128] When Hijuelos uses Spanish words, he always signals them with italics and translates them for his readers. For example, in describing Mercedes's father, he writes, "he wore a perfectly folded *pañuelo*, 'handkerchief,' in his vest pocket" (13). He also explains aspects of Cuban culture with which his readers may be unfamiliar, such as a *santera* (44). Pérez Firmat describes Hijuelos as writing "*from* Spanish but *toward* English" in part because, although the novel's central characters are Spanish speakers, the narrator does not attempt to represent their speech with any Spanish markers. While he argues that "this drift toward English makes this novel somewhat atypical within Cuban-American literature" ("Teaching" 98), I contend that Hijuelos's use of language is actually typical of Cuban American fiction and shows his desire to reach a mixed audience.

[128] See Pérez Firmat's "Teaching *Our House in the Last World*" for a more extended reading of Hijuelos's use of English slang in conjunction with Hispanic linguistic markers.

Unlike many other characters in Cuban and Cuban American novels, the Santinios do not leave Cuba for political reasons.[129] Rather, they share the common immigrant dream of opportunity and adventure. As Hijuelos explained in a 1989 interview in *Publishers Weekly*, the novel is about "an ambitious people from a nonprofessional class coming to America" (Coffey 42). Alejo dreams of leaving his small town life in San Pedro and seeing the world (23). He is enticed by letters from his sister Margarita who has a thriving business in New York with her husband Eduardo. In letters reminiscent of those written to African Americans in the South by friends and relatives in the North, she describes the high life he could experience in America -- the dance halls, parties, restaurants, and sophistication of city life (31). Despite some objections from his family, Alejo and Mercedes leave, unconcerned about the journey and unprepared for what they might find:

> But who gave thought to the fact that they spoke no English? Who considered the difference between doing business in a small Cuban town and in America? Or that they would need plans, connections . . . [,] that it wouldn't be a casual little vacation voyage? Or that Mercedes would be unhappy with fear and loneliness, or that they would miss the very things that so bored them now? Alejo? He thought only that he would have more excitement and fun, perhaps more opportunity, and that he would escape

[129] While Cuban politics affect the exile community surrounding the Santinio family and even occasionally members of the family in Cuba, Hijuelos is not expressly concerned with the influence of those politics on the Santinios in America. The second generation of Santinios is particularly blind to any relationship between Cuban politics and themselves. For example, when Hector decides to get into shape with his friend Georgie, he does so in order to be stronger than Alejo, rather than to train for the reinvasion of Cuba as Georgie is doing (161).

> the midday lethargy, the sleepiness of humid, heavy-aired, Cuban afternoons. (32)

In this and similar passages, Hijuelos creates tension between the family's carefree attitude and the difficulties that his tone suggests will come, foreshadowing that the novel will not be the typical immigrant success story and that perhaps the Santinios' difficulties will be due to their own lack of planning and poor decision making. Even though Alejo has saved five thousand dollars for their voyage and start in their new home, his plans for success in America are based more on dreams than reality: "What was he going to do with that money? He had some kind of vague plan to double, triple, infinitely multiply it. His plan was vague, because there was no plan. Somehow he would find Cubans in New York to give him ideas, honest Cubans like his sister and her husband, to point him toward prosperity. Somehow he would triumphantly return to San Pedro with gifts of fine clothing, electrical appliances, watches, and jewelry for everyone" (35). This naïve trust in others and desire to spend lavishly on family and friends so that he can feel prosperous and appreciated begin to deplete the Santinios' funds on the boat to America, where Alejo lends money to Cubans he has just met, gambles, tips extravagantly, and buys rounds of drinks for his new acquaintances. In contrast to his cavalier celebration of the high life he believes he is heading toward, Mercedes experiences a sense of loss on the voyage as she realizes that her past life is "now being washed away forever in a trail of white foam in the choppy sea" (36). These contrasting images show two types of Cuban immigrants -- those who look to the future and those who live in the past -- and also establish the perspectives that Alejo and Mercedes will adopt in the United States;

while he is always looking to a future in which he will be prosperous and well-liked, she lives to mourn what she has left behind.

Hijuelos's description of the couple's arrival in America is unusual in the context of immigrant fiction. It reflects an uncertain translation of the new land from Spanish to English, hostility mixed with the patriotism in the new environment, and the extent to which the Santinios do not think in terms of permanent residency, envisioning themselves as wealthy visitors rather than poor immigrants making a start in a new place:

> New York harbor. New York, America. *Los estados Unidos*. "De Junidad Stays?" They saw warships, tugboats, and American flags everywhere. They saw seagulls circling over the docks. They saw the Statue of Liberty, startling as the moon. [. . .] Mercedes and Alejo were happy and excited, checking through customs like a couple of rich Cuban tourists in New York for a visit. (36)

Muller reads them as "the early prototype of Cubans who are viewed as *los ricos* or 'rich kids' among Latino groups" and argues that this scene reveals their immigrant vision of the United States as "predicated on misconceptions" because of their ignorance of the wartime conditions under which they enter and their pretense of wealth (98-99). Greeted enthusiastically by Margarita and Eduardo, Alejo's sister and brother-in-law, they set off for their new home in the Bronx. Hijuelos does not conclude the scene with their excitement and vision of prosperity, however. As they leave the docks, they drive under "endless projections of metal," the weight of the urban sprawl bearing down on them, and Mercedes closes her eyes so as not to face the reality of their new lives (36).

Mercedes has more difficulty adapting to her new surroundings than any other character. Isolated by her inability to speak English, her sister-in-law Buita's hatred, and her separation from the places that contain her memories, Mercedes feels ungrounded and temporary, as if she will be forced out of the country at any moment. Even after she has lived in the United States almost twenty years, Mercedes insists that every bill she pays be marked "PAID" so that she will not be "kicked out of the country for some infraction" (123). Her greatest fear in America is eviction, not just from her home but also from her family and "from this world into the next" (48). When her husband, children, and in-laws turn away from her, she struggles to learn English so that she can connect with others, reasoning that if she can converse in English, she can make friends. Mercedes translates phrases from Spanish to English in her notebook nightly, hoping to improve, focusing on questions and statements that reveal her needs and fears: "*¿Qué hora es ya?* 'What time is it?' *¿Dónda está la tienda?* 'Where is the store?' *Estoy sola aquí.* 'I am alone here.' *Yo Vengo de otro país.* 'I come from another country.' *Estoy perdida.* 'I am lost.' *¿Puedas ayudarme?* 'Can you help me?' *Estoy sola y tengo miedo.* 'I am alone and afraid.' *Por favor, no me pegues.* 'Please don't hit me.' *Yo quiseira ser su amiga.* 'I would like to be your friend'" (48). Even after Mercedes begins to master English, she spends much of her time feeling "lost and stupid" as she tries to navigate the urban landscape and her troubled marriage with Alejo (79). However, she gradually befriends the women in her neighborhood by listening to their struggles with men, children, and money (54). In this way, she becomes part of a community of sufferers like herself. Mercedes's desire to connect to the present is really a desire to be heard more than to hear others, however. Significantly, her best friend Mary is a deaf-mute.

Ultimately unable to overcome her husband's abuse and her family's rejection, Mercedes withdraws to the type of dream world she had resigned herself to living in before she first met Alejo. Then her dreams were of the elegant home her family lived in before her father died (11-12). Her "last world" in the novel, according to Muller, becomes "the romantic memories of her childhood in Oriente Province and her delusional (or mystical) visions of a previous reincarnation in the time of Columbus" (99). In her former life, Mercedes envisions herself as a favored servant in Queen Isabella's court where she meets and falls in love with Alejo, a friend of Columbus's who is handsome and romantic. Although he is rumored to have died at sea, they meet again in Cuba. Her life there with him is one of hard work, leading her to conclude that Alejo's hard work for her in their next life is God's retribution and to take pity on "the good Alejo," whose soul she knows in her present life (252-53). For Mercedes, the promised land is one in which she is both loved and vindicated, offered understanding of her suffering.

Like Mercedes, Alejo engages in bouts with nostalgia about his homeland and fights the depression that inevitably results when he compares his impoverished life in America to life in Cuba. Rather than surrender to her ghost world, however, he becomes an alcoholic and cultivates the image of the macho, successful Cuban American at all costs. Alejo builds friendships through drinking with men at work and in the neighborhood (63) and buys every new gadget that appears so that he can give them as gifts to family, friends, and neighbors in a compulsive manner that is described as an infection (40). Alejo pursues his prosperous image even when the family is living in poverty; he wears new suits, hats, and shoes while Mercedes dresses Horacio in hand-me-downs she finds in hallways and alleys (57). Alejo's weight gain over his twenty-five

years in America also reflects this desire to appear prosperous although he becomes, in Muller's words, "a 300-pound parody of the well-fed immigrant at the American banquet" (100). While Alejo struggles to maintain the American image he desires, he is also tormented by his conception of Cuban masculinity. His ideas of masculine and feminine roles in the house, based on what he remembers as Cuban standards, do not transfer well to America. Alejo struggles to be the "big man" who is strong, unquestioned, independent, abusing his wife and children and then apologizing with gifts the next day (61). He recalls that in Cuba women care for the children and keep them separate from their fathers, but "in the small apartments of New York you see the kids all the time" (67). The narrative voice goes into Alejo's mind as he ponders the differences between his homeland and his adopted country. As he excuses himself for mistreating his wife and son, he is distant even from himself:

> That wasn't Alejo's fault: when Buita left him and Hector died in Cuba, he felt abandoned in the world. A wife cannot be pure family. You have to provide for her and prove yourself. And if you can't do that, if she doesn't respect you and calls you a drunk, then you have to go out and find people who do respect you. And pretty women to dance with you and shake their bodies for your admiration. That woman, Mercedes, was letting herself go. She was thin before but now she was pregnant again and too fat with the baby, which filled her up. In Cuba, a man could truly have his way. Poor Hector used to have his way. [. . .] Papa had his little girl, too, so why couldn't he? (67)

After justifying his drinking and adultery as the results of loss, failure, and lack of respect, Alejo finally takes refuge in the idea that he is entitled to these behaviors because he is a Cuban man. Further, his wish for confirmation is seen in the lessons he teaches his sons. Horacio and Hector grow into manhood by engaging in petty theft, drink, seducing girls, and becoming tough younger versions of their father. Hector, named after a much-admired relative of Alejo's, is particularly subject to his father's desire to teach that Cuban manhood is acceptable. As the favored younger son, Hector is used to confirm Alejo's manhood. In a common ritual, Alejo asks Hector "Who is the man?" to which Hector must respond "You, Pop!" (116).

Alejo is so caught up in his own image of Cuban masculinity that he cannot escape the traps he has laid for himself, take advantage of opportunities when they arise, and succeed in America. Indeed, Hijuelos's America is not one that resents the presence of immigrants and prevents their rise in society. Alejo works as a chef in the same restaurant for several decades, trapped in a job frequently taken by new immigrants before they move up the economic scale, but Hijuelos argues that this limitation is due more to Alejo's own failings to seize opportunity than to any closed-door policy that American society might have. When Alejo's brother-in-law Eduardo offers him a share of the tobacco business, Alejo refuses because he is intimidated by the bookkeeping and associates the shop with Eduardo's failing health. The narrator announces this refusal as "Alejo's first big mistake in America" (43). Alejo makes a second mistake in not listening to his sister Buita when she tells him about the opportunities for buying land and finding jobs in Florida. Again acknowledging Alejo's misstep, the narrator explains that

opportunities were better there and then ponders the reasons for Alejo's rejection of the idea:

> [. . .] either Alejo didn't have the money or Mercedes talked him out of it. Or he was stupid. Who knows? But he didn't take any of Buita's advice. How could Alejo know that property values would triple over the years? Why did he buy shares in a non-existent light bulb company? Why didn't he suspect that the fields near Buita's house would one day be a thriving mercantile district, clogged with traffic and crowds of passersby and shoppers? Why did he buy swampland in New Jersey instead, which to this day is still swampland? Why did he fail to see opportunity? (56)

Hector has more questions than answers about his father's inability to invest wisely. Alejo's failures cannot be blamed on a lack of work ethic, either. Although in later years he drinks before, after, and during work, he never fails to go until he is deathly ill. Alejo derives self-worth from his job, both from the respect he commands in the kitchen and from his view of himself as a provider for his family. Alejo passes up opportunities to advance in his workplace, earning as much as fifteen dollars more per week, because of the respect and friendship he has with his co-workers. He allows others to move up because he says he does not want to leave his friends. The narrator elaborates, "He didn't take any of the other jobs because he wanted to be nice, but underneath that he didn't think he would be good enough, and underneath that he didn't want to go away from the bar. And these guys were his friends" (125). For Alejo, being well liked is compensation enough (130). Alejo eventually dreams of opening a small store, something out of the

Cuban past, but he falls ill with heart disease due to his drinking and overeating before he can build upon his dream.

Mercedes, in particular, is angered by their inability to move out and up while so many fellow Cubans are able to do so; she blames their stasis on Alejo's unending generosity (113). He offers any Cuban who asks a place to stay in their home and a loan without the expectation of being repaid. When he sees fellow Cubans advance while he remains in the same life, he is not hurt or jealous because in his reasoning "they have suffered in Cuba" (182). Hector is amazed when he sees how easily newer Cuban immigrants establish themselves and accumulate possessions. Clearly laying the responsibility for his parents' failure on them, he concludes that those who succeed "work like dogs, raise children, prosper. They did not allow the old world, the past, to hinder them. They did not cry but walked straight ahead. They drank but did not fall down" (182).

Born in America and distanced from their Cuban heritage, the Santinio sons do not share their mother and father's nostalgic view of Cuba: "Horacio thought of Cuba as a place of small towns and hick farms. He did not see it with Mercedes' romantic eyes. Romanticism existed in the distant past and died with the conquistadors, gallant caballeros, and señoritas. [. . .] He could see under and through things. [. . .] Cuba was in the nineteenth century -- okay, a nice place, and not anything more" (80-81). When the boys go to Cuba for a visit, they are unable to connect with it. Horacio is impressed only by the vision of his grandfather's burning ghost that appears to him, and for Hector, who is three years old at the time, "the journey was like a splintering film. He was so young,

his memory had barely started" (84). Hector's impressions of Cuba are a jumbled collection of wonderful colors, smells, sounds, and tastes.

Hector does gain a sense of Cuban identity as a result of this trip to his parents' home, but Hijuelos shows that for the second generation, a return to the homeland can have positive as well as negative consequences. Perhaps because he is so young and fair in coloring, Hector's Cuban relatives repeatedly remind him of his heritage in order to instill a Cuban identity in him: "You know what you are, boy? You're Cuban. *Un Cubano*. Say it" (87). The trip appears to transform Hector who, according to Mercedes, "came back saying *Cuba*, *Cuba* and spent a lot of time with Alejo. He was a little Cuban, spouting Spanish" (91). However, Hector's new Cuban identity is complicated by an intestinal infection he contracts while visiting there that leads him to question himself and begin to consider his ethnicity as a punishment and a disease:

> A Cuban infection of some kind had entered him. In any case, that was what Mercedes always said. What had he done? Swim in the ocean? Drink from a puddle? Kiss? Maybe he hadn't said his prayers properly or had pissed in his pants one too many times or cried too much. Maybe God has turned the Cuban water against him and allowed the *microbios*, as Mercedes would call them, to go inside his body. Who knew? But getting sick in Cuba confused him greatly, because he had loved Cuba so much. (88)

Mercedes's ignorance of science and her fear of Alejo's anger (he blames her for Hector's illness) lead her to believe that her son's illness "had come almost supernaturally from the Cuban water, making her look bad for Alejo. Microbios malos,

little malicious spirits had penetrated Hector's flesh" (97). This view only furthers her son's fears that he has somehow been rejected by Cuba and that Cuba is responsible for his illness and unstable home life. While he is hospitalized in the United States for more than a year, he concludes, "Cuba gave the bad disease. Cuba gave the drunk father. Cuba gave the crazy mother. Years later all these would entwine to make Hector think that Cuba had something against him" (102).

This view is encouraged in part by the process of assimilation that Hector undergoes along with his recuperation in the hospital. Rather than depicting assimilation through language mastery in the classroom as a process that enables the immigrant to access wider opportunities, Hijuelos shows Americanization forced upon Hector as a "treatment" that leads to his estrangement from his community. The process through which Hector learns English differs significantly from the classroom education or even street education that most immigrant narratives feature. He is instructed by one of the nurses in the hospital who tells him, "you're very stupid for not speaking in English. This is your country. You live here and should know the language" (102). Her teaching method is to lock Hector in a supply closet for hours at a time until he repeats "Let me out!" in English, instead of crying out "Open the Door" in Spanish ("¡Abra la puerta!") (102-03). In imagery that conveys a fall from grace, Hector comes to believe that he has been taken from the paradise of Cuba and "dropped into a dark room" where he is punished (103). The punishments continue until Hector becomes "suspicious of Spanish. Spanish words drifted inside him, he dreamed in Spanish, but English began whooshing inside. English forced its way through him, splitting his skin" (103). In as much as Cubanness seemed to enter Hector supernaturally, English becomes part of him through a

violent possession. Pérez Firmat reads Hector's experiences in the hospital as a death and rebirth; "he loses one identity and acquires another. That closet is a womb from which he is delivered by the American nurse, who is both mother and midwife, tender and terrible at the same time" ("Teaching" 96). By the time Hector leaves the hospital, he sees Spanish as his enemy and is silent with his family (103). Hector even comes to despise his mother's speech because of her continued use of Spanish: "her jittery Spanish flew like pins into his side" (115). He dislikes her use of English as well (119).

Ironically, Mercedes continues the program of education that the nurse began. She forces even more English into Hector when she removes him from school because of her fear that he will become re-infected. Mercedes' homeschool program consists of reading to him from any printed source, from comic books to prayer pamphlets (127). English pours into Hector from his mother, from the street, but it makes no sense to him: "English words were long lists of medicines and snippets of books that added up to confusion. She taught him, but without any sense of order, priorities. And Spanish? Spanish was the language of memory, of violence and sadness" (128). Spanish becomes symbolic of the chaos and nostalgia of his mother's life from which Hector desires to distance himself.

His physical weakness and use of English distance him further from his father as well, who blames Mercedes for the changes in Hector, and lead Alejo's friends to make jokes about him in Spanish: "Now he looked American and spoke mostly American. Cuba had become the mysterious and cruel phantasm standing behind the door" (106). As Hector grows older, his association between Cuba, Spanish, and disease only grows stronger. When he attempts to choose a Cuban identity, in anticipation of family members arriving from Cuba, he is miserable: "the very idea of *Cubanness* inspired fear

in him as if he would grow ill from it, as if microbios would be transmitted by the very mention of the word *Cuba*" (173). Because Hector feels that Cubanness has the power to invade his body like a disease and because he associates Cubanness with his father and Spanish, he envisions the language as physical and violent: "He had a stutter, and saying a Spanish word made him think of drunkenness. A Spanish sentence wrapped around his face, threatening to peel off his skin and send him falling to the floor like Alejo. He avoided Spanish even though that was all he heard at home. He read it, understood it, but he grew paralyzed by the prospect of the slightest conversation" (173). Hector is afraid that the language will peel away his new American skin and reveal him to be a stumbling Cuban drunk, like his father. He sees his American identity as a surface cover and fears the Cuban self that is lurking inside him, able to be released by the use of Spanish. In contrast to other texts in which the Americanized second-generation Cuban does not know Spanish and therefore feels disconnected from it, Hector is fluent in the language but afraid to speak it. Because he has been socialized to hate and fear Spanish in the hospital and is afraid of becoming like his father, he cannot use the language for fear of horrible transformations.

Hector's physical likeness to his father, despite their difference in coloring, creates some of his most intense discomfort with who he is. Hijuelos describes them as "like twins, separated by age, with the same eyes, faces, bodies. Except Alejo was from another world -- *Cubano, Cubano*. They wore matching shoes, matching pants, matching shirts. And when he ate, Hector matched his father mouthful for mouthful. Together they grew so fat, it was a neighborhood joke" (145). This identification and mirroring has negative consequences for Hector, however, who comes to hate in himself the traits he

hates in his father. Hector recoils when people mention his resemblance to his father, saying that he feels "like a freak, a hunchback, a man with a deformed face" and a "Cuban Quasimodo" (190, 192). Pérez Firmat argues that the hybridity of this last description "conveys Hector's sense of lacking a suitable cultural habitation" and that "if Hector thinks of himself as a freak because he is not Cuban enough, he sees his father as a freak for being too Cuban" ("Teaching" 95). Hector's ultimate frustration lies in the fact that he cannot seem to change himself because he perceives the problem as internal:

> Hector was out in the twilight zone, trying to crawl out of his skin and go somewhere else, be someone else. But he could do nothing to change himself to his own satisfaction. Anything he did, like growing his hair long or dressing like a hippy, was an affectation, layered over his true skin like hospital tape. Hector always felt as if he were in costume, his true nature unknown to others and perhaps even to himself. He was part 'Pop,' part Mercedes; part Cuban, part American -- all wrapped tightly inside a skin in which he sometimes could not move. (190)

Feeling that too many people are trapped inside him, too many identities are warring in his body, Hector is immobilized. Because Hector cannot conceive of an authentic self that encapsulates his many identities, one of his greatest fears is that his visiting relatives, whom he considers "real" Cubans, will find out about his "false life" (174). He fantasizes about Cuba, "want[ing] the pictures to enter him, as if memory and imagination would make him more of a man, a Cuban man" (174), but even his sketchy memories cannot transform him internally to match his external self.

Hector cannot fit, then, into either Cuban or American communities. He feels "sick at heart for being so Americanized, which he equated with being fearful and lonely" (173). When his mother takes him to a discount store to buy clothes that are factory seconds on sale, he imagines others in the crowd questioning his presence as a "white boy" and wants to leave (122-23). Hector visits the exile community in Florida, but like Pilar in *Dreaming in Cuban*, he is always an outsider there. He is able to attend meetings of the overthrow club with his uncle (195), but when he is alone he is not taken for Cuban and addressed in English (202). Later, Hector "think[s] about all he should have said to prove his authenticity," and offers readers a laundry list of Cuban from belief in spirits to a man's ability to make women faint with a gaze (202). His list of Cuban attributes is based entirely upon his parents' traits. The recitation does not bolster him in any way, however; rather, it just went "on and on until he felt himself fading away" (202).

Too American to be Cuban and too Cuban to be American, Hector wanders between cultures. Muller suggests that this "rootlessness" enables his objective viewpoint of both cultures and the distance that he achieves from both of them by becoming a writer allows him to objectify "his condition by recomposing it" (102). Although Hector is estranged from both his parents, the act of writing brings him back to them, in a sense. He explains, "When I write in my notebook I feel close to her [Mercedes] and to the memory of my father. I go back to that certain house. I go back to my beginning" (245). For Hijuelos, the second generation's hope of reconciling multiple identities and coming to terms with the pain of the past lies in this distancing and ability to return at will through writing.

Like Yglesias and Hijuelos, Cristina García's background influences her writing. She was born in Havana in 1958, came to the United States with her parents at age two, and grew up in New York. However, as she explained to Iraida López in a 1993 interview, her mother worked to instill a strong sense of "Cubanness" in her and, consequently, she "always thought of [her]self as Cuban" (606-07). García believes that she and other members of her generation are "in a unique position to tell the story of exile" in a way that their parents could not because "they were too scared and busy remaking their lives" (Smith 26). That unique position is the result of an identity that she describes as "truly bilingual, truly bicultural" (López 612). Given the uniqueness of this perspective and the popular and critical success of García's novels,[130] it is little wonder that she has recently found herself being taken as a spokeswoman for her people. In an interview with Bridgit Kevane and Juanita Heredia, García revealed that her feelings about this are mixed: "since I have only become a 'professional Cuban' in the last few years it is all very amusing to me, and puzzling too. I joke with my friends and say, 'I'm going to do my professional Cuban thing now.' That's what it feels like sometimes, and there are certain bizarre expectations that can go along with it" (75). Those expectations can be seen in the readings of her work by critics like William Luis, who sees her as a "savior" of "the Cuban family tradition" (233), and Amelia Weiss, who describes García as "taking back her island" through *Dreaming in Cuban* (67). More commonly, those expectations involve her work speaking for the entire Cuban experience. Venting her frustrations to Kavene and Heredia, she commented: "The thing I hate most in the Cuban

[130] Ricardo Ortíz attributes her success "in part to Garcia's ability to position herself in a more general tradition of writing in the United States by immigrant women and women of color" such as Toni Morrison and Amy Tan. However, as he acknowledges, even though Garcia's lyricism may invite readers in the same way that Tan's does, in content her novel is "profoundly Cuban" (192).

context is this attempt to limit what it means to be Cuban. [. . .] The point for me is that there is no one Cuban exile. I am out here in California and may not fit in anywhere, but I am Cuban too. I think I am trying to stake out broader territory. There is a weird cultural balkanization going on in this country that I recoil from. For me, the emphasis should be on amplitude and inclusion" (75).

To that end, García's novels re-map the Cuban cultural landscape, both in Cuba and the United States, through multiple expressions of exile and explorations of the many ways in which the experience of exile fractures families. Even within this spectrum, she insists that her work and more specifically her characters are not intended to be taken as representative: "I'm not trying to create models or types or prototypes or archetypes. . . . Even though there is something about them that can still be distilled as Cuban, I would be disappointed if it began and ended there, if people from other cultures couldn't relate to or see themselves in my characters" (Kevane and Heredia 76). Instead, she is trying to get closer to what she calls "truth" by "encompassing the complexity of the situation": "I'm presenting different points of view that I don't think can be categorized by the official polarization that exists in the Cuban context" (Kevane and Heredia 76). In broadening her readers' conception of the Cuban experience, García specifically addresses the place of women in Cuban history because of her belief that "traditional history, the way it has been written, interpreted, and recorded, obviates women and the evolution of home, family, and society and basically becomes a recording of battles and wars and dubious accomplishments of men. You learn where politics really lie at home" (López 609-10).

Cristina García's 1992 novel *Dreaming in Cuban* traces the lives of three generations of women in the del Pino family through Celia, the matriarch, her daughter Lourdes, and her teenage granddaughter Pilar, all of whom are, in different senses, estranged from Cuba and yet obsessed with it as a homeland. Although husbands, lovers, and sons also figure in the novel, these three women are at its heart.[131] For Celia, a supporter of Castro's revolution, Cuba is a place in which she can create and maintain memories of the past she desires to live in, enabling her to exist outside of the progression of time. For the anti-Castro Lourdes, Cuba is static, trapped in the negative past created by the revolution. Lourdes moves to New York and seeks to redefine herself as American, although she can never fully escape the absent presence of her homeland. Lourdes's teenage daughter, Pilar, looks to Cuba as a spiritual and emotional home. Cuba exists for Pilar largely as an imagined space, however, because she was so young when her family left the island. Ultimately, each of the del Pino women is trapped in a form of exile but also has agency because of her conception of Cuba as homeland. Celia's work for the revolution empowers her with a sense of mission and importance, Lourdes' determination to leave Cuba behind drives her to become a self-sufficient

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[131] Garcia also tells the story of Celia's daughter Felicia who, like her mother, has created a world into which she can retreat. The victim of a violent and unfaithful husband, Felicia retreats into a surreal world shaped by her devotion to *Santeria,* Beny More records, and her son. She dreams about the suffering of women and children and mourns the loss of her youthful, romantic ideals. As Felicia slides further into madness, she sets fire to her first husband Hugo, loses her second husband in a mysterious fire, disfigures a woman in her beauty shop, and pushes her third husband off a roller coaster onto power lines below, killing him. When she tries to kill herself and her son, she is sent to join a prisoners' brigade of outcasts and dissidents that will, in theory, reform her. There she meets others who have been separated from their children because of political differences. Felicia recognizes that the revolution has brought positive changes in that it provides food and medical care for the masses, but she also knows that it cannot sustain them emotionally or spiritually. As she comments to her mother, "We're dying of security!" (117). I have chosen not to comment on Felicia at length because, unlike those of the other female characters in the novel, her story is not principally related to homeland and identity.

businesswoman, and Pilar's desire to know Cuba leads her to discover the meaning of belonging and home, offering her definition and direction in her life. Although Cuba exists more as a myth than a reality for these characters, García's novel suggests that the construct is what is important for each of these women. This is because, as Felicia explains, "imagination, like memory, can transform lies to truths" (88). Indeed, in contrast to the line of immigrant fiction that is invested in accurate or "correct" representation and asserts a singular vision of the immigrant experience, *Dreaming in Cuban* highlights the ways in which multiple visions of a time and place can co-exist without contradiction.

Celia del Pino's Cuba is defined by her passive role in relationships for the first sixty years of her life. She is abandoned by Gustavo, her Spanish lover, when she is twenty-five and commits herself to an eight-month homebound exile in bed as she mourns his loss. Celia falls into marriage with Jorge del Pino, who courts her in this exile and marries her when Gustavo does not answer her first letter to him. She quickly finds herself powerless in her relationship with Jorge's excessively protective mother and sister.[132] Finally driven insane by their intense cruelty, she hands over Lourdes, her first-born child, to be cared for while she is treated. When she leaves the asylum, her life continues to be directed by others -- in this case her husband and doctor. This is symptomatic of a larger pattern in Celia's life that she articulates when she reflects that "she spent her entire life waiting for others, for something or other to happen" (35).

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[132] Although Garcia does not develop the theme of Cuban mother-son relationships as fully as Oscar Hijuelos does, her novel reflects similar issues of mothers who revere their sons to the point of confusing them with lovers through the relationships between Jorge and his mother and Felicia and her son. See Phillipa Kafka's *"Saddling La Gringa": Gatekeeping in Literature by Contemporary Latina Writers* for a further exploration of this theme in *Dreaming in Cuban.*

During her marriage Celia does stage tiny, personal rebellions, however. For over twenty years, she writes a letter to Gustavo on the 11th of each month. In one letter she explains, "memory is a skilled seducer. I write to you because I must. I don't even know if you're alive and whom you love now" (97). Celia is seduced by the idea of her lover and the lure of the past. She keeps her relationship with Gustavo alive in the present moment by sharing her life with him through the letters. The fact that she does not know where he is or what he is doing is irrelevant because she wishes to preserve her relationship with the Gustavo she knew in 1934, not the Gustavo who would have changed over the years. Similarly, the letters allow her to preserve the girl she was when she met him and, as Cristina García has explained in an interview with Allan Vorda, to keep hold of the "private corner of herself" that she gave to Gustavo and never to Jorge, to whom she gave her public side (74). Celia wishes to save her best "self" for Gustavo.

In the same interview, García described Celia's letters as a kind of diary, "a private act of rebellion and optimism, in a strange way" (Vorda 74). Strange indeed, as the letters are never mailed. They cannot be read as evidence of agency in her life because they remain a private act, functioning more as a personal record than as an active engagement with life outside Celia's mind. Like her other private rebellion — waiting for Jorge to leave so that she can play the Debussy piano pieces that Jorge and her doctor have forbidden her to play -- Celia's letters do nothing to change her status. They allow her to believe in the possibility of a different life and thus enable her to survive, but she does not progress. Celia's vision of Cuba during this time reflects this same idea. In 1945 Celia writes to Gustavo, "If I was born to live on an island, then I'm grateful for one thing: that the tides rearrange the borders. At least I have the illusion of change, of

possibility" (99). Even though the change provided by the tides is not real, having an illusion in which to believe comforts Celia.

Castro's 1959 revolution marks a turning point in Celia's life. She writes her last letter to Gustavo just as the revolution begins and her granddaughter Pilar is born. With the new regime and the new generation, both Celia and Cuba can begin again. Since recorded history has no bearing on the new era that has begun under El Líder, Celia no longer needs to keep a record herself; she says that Pilar will now remember everything (245). Consequently, Celia is free to adopt a future-oriented vision of her homeland. Rather than dreaming of what Cuba was when she was with Gustavo, Celia now dreams of what Cuba *could* be under Castro's influence and works toward it.

After her husband's death, she decides to devote the rest of her life to the revolution. Having suffered under Batiste's regime, Celia believes in Castro's cause, but her fervent desire to aid that cause is also the result of transferring her romantic feelings for Gustavo to Castro. She is drawn to El Líder in part because, like Gustavo was, he is a young, idealistic lawyer. As Celia watches the coastline outside her home for traitors, a duty that she feels honored to perform, she fantasizes that if she spotted another Bay of Pigs invasion, "She would be feted at the palace, serenaded by a brass orchestra, seduced by El Líder himself on a red velvet divan" (3). However troubling Celia's transfer of devotion and subsequent fantasies might seem, her desire to please Castro motivates her to become an active woman. She builds nurseries, sets tiles, operates a construction lift, inoculates schoolchildren against malaria, watches for invaders, and works in the sugarcane as part of a volunteer brigade. Through all of this, Celia returns to health and life: "Despite her age or because of it, Celia advances steadily through the fields,

hardening her muscles with every step, every swing. She rips her hands on the tough, woody stalks. The sun browns her skin. Around her, the sugarcane hums" (44). Because Celia is identified with her physical surroundings throughout the novel, we see rejuvenation in herself and her environment. She also serves as a judge in the People's Court (111-12). This last role becomes particularly interesting when Celia, who has always allowed men to dictate her life, finds herself settling a dispute between a wife and her husband's reported lover. Instead of ruling in favor of one of the two women, she calls for the man to be brought to court and sentences him to work in a state-run nursery. Having always sought to appease men in her life, Celia now arbitrates justice for women.

While her work for the revolution clearly makes her a stronger woman mentally as well as physically, it also enables her to stop time, as she did in her relationship with Gustavo. When Celia returns from working in the cane fields, she "live[s] in her memories. Sometimes she'll glimpse the hour on a dusty Canada Dry clock, or look at the sun low in the sky, and realize that she cannot account for her time. Where do the hours go? Her past, she fears, is eclipsing her present" (92). As Mary Vasquez explains, that has always been the case in Celia's life (25). More specifically, Vasquez argues that, "a fervent critic of earlier Cuban regimes and keenly aware of social injustice, Celia has stopped national time at the moment of this regime's triumph, a device that obviates the needs to record, assess, and finally judge its history" (25). Further, if she continues to view Cuba through the moment of the revolution, she will not need to see the changes in El Líder and judge him. The Cuba she has chosen to see will always be in the process of becoming and rife with possibility. If the state's goals have not yet been met, if life has not improved dramatically, it is only because the promised changes will take time. This,

like the coastline that appears to change with the tides, is a comforting vision of her homeland.

While for Celia Cuba exists in two times -- in the days of her affair with her lover and in the moment when the revolution was new -- for her daughter Lourdes, it exists only in the moment of her rape and mutilation by soldiers of the revolution, and the subsequent loss of her unborn child. In light of these horrific experiences, it is understandable that Lourdes "wants no part of Cuba, no part of its wretched carnival floats creaking with lies, no part of Cuba at all, which [she] claim[s] never possessed her" (73). The pain she experienced leads her to reject everything that the revolution, and therefore in her mind everything that Cuba, stands for, straining her relationship with her mother Celia even further. Because both mother and motherland are synonymous with pain and abandonment in Lourdes's mind, when she comes to the United States she desires to live in a cold climate, where she can freeze her emotions and begin again as someone new. Leaving Florida, she urges her husband Rufino to drive further and further north, as she searches for someplace "cold enough" to settle (70-71). Finally, she chooses New York, where she "relishes winter most of all [. . . because] its layers protect her" (73). In this cold, isolating climate, she can remake her life.

Lourdes lives her life in the United States in such a way as to negate Cuba and her experiences there. Because of the vulnerability she felt when the soldiers attacked her home, she never wants to be unprepared or powerless. Thus, planning and exactness become ways to exert control over her life. At the urging of her father's ghost, she walks a volunteer police beat in order to be prepared to fight the Communists when the time comes. This position also allows Lourdes to remove herself from the role of victim and

become, in Kafka's words, "a heroic woman warrior, to do feminism in practice rather than to theorize" (82). The thick-soled black shoes she wears on the job are

> to her, are a kind of equalizer. [. . .] If women wore shoes like these, she thinks, they wouldn't worry so much about more abstract equalities. They would join the army reserve or the auxiliary police like her and protect what was theirs. In Cuba nobody was prepared for the Communists and look what happened. [. . .] If only Lourdes had had a gun when she needed it. (128)

Lourdes equates the violation of her body with the violation of Cuba by the new regime and determines that neither will fall victim the next time.

Lourdes also rejects her homeland by becoming as American as possible. In her new home, she transforms herself into a flag-waving, ultra-conservative patriot. In the eyes of her daughter, she becomes a collection of stereotypes. According to Pilar, Lourdes "makes food only people in Ohio eat, like Jell-O molds with miniature marshmallows or recipes she clips from *Family Circle*" (137). Most importantly, for Lourdes, being an American means being a capitalist. She owns and runs the Yankee Doodle Bakery and fantasizes about owning franchises nation-wide. She takes pride in her business and constantly reminds those around her that the financial success she achieves would not have been possible in Cuba under El Líder's regime. Lourdes sends Celia "snapshots of pastries from her bakery in Brooklyn. Every glistening éclair is a grenade aimed at Celia's political beliefs, each strawberry shortcake proof -- in butter, cream and eggs -- of Lourdes's success in America, and a reminder of the ongoing shortages in Cuba" (117). Lourdes lives to find fault with the communist system in

Cuba. Because all the vignettes in *Dreaming in Cuban* are viewed through Pilar's eyes, García's descriptions of Lourdes in this capacity are humorous and mocking. Still, Lourdes's behaviors are symptomatic of those in the exile community who thought that living well would be the best revenge against Castro. Despite Lourdes's claim that Cuba has no power over her, that it never possessed her, her vision of Cuba's failures under the revolution and her obsession with her homeland make her success possible. Without her desire to reject Cuba, she would not have been able to accomplish her goals. Thus both Celia and Lourdes are driven by what they imagine Cuba is under the revolution, but while Celia works for the Cuban utopia she envisions (which will bring economic and sexual bliss), Lourdes uses the dystopia she believes the revolution has created as motivation to seek personal and economic fulfillment in the United States.

Although Lourdes appears to have built a good life for herself and her family in America, she is not emotionally sustained by it. She tries to fill the emptiness that Cuba's absence has created in her life with food and sex, gaining one hundred eighteen pounds by consuming the sweets she bakes at work and wearing her husband out in bed. Later she fasts to purify herself, losing all the weight she has gained. Kathleen Brogan reads Lourdes's weight gain and loss as "her attempt to reinvent herself as non-Cuban by 'incorporating' America through its food or by purging revolutionary Cuba from her body" (101). Still, Lourdes's weight fluctuations and continuing unhappiness show that these temporary solutions prove ineffective. Although Lourdes will not admit it, her disconnection with Celia and Cuba and her failure to confront her pain have left her emotionally empty. She recognizes the difficulties that other immigrants must be experiencing when they are separated from their motherland and mother tongue, but she

does not extend this analysis to herself, instead changing topics to glory in the possibilities for reinvention of the self that English and America have offered her (73).

When Lourdes travels home to Cuba after her sister Felicia's funeral, there is hope that a reconnection with homeland will heal old wounds. Unfortunately, because of her static vision of Cuba, Lourdes fails to benefit from her return. She sees only what she expects to see, signs of decay and stagnation. She focuses on clothing and cars that are decades out of date, yelling at the Cubans about the newer, better-made things they could have in America, but she fails to communicate with them. As Pilar explains, "The language she speaks is lost to them. It's another idiom entirely" (221). Even El Líder ignores her when she calls him an assassin (237). Brogan reads this inability to communicate as the cultural separation that is marked by an exile's Spanish and a Cuban's Spanish, which are outgrowths of different cultural viewpoints (99). Indeed, more so than her actual use of Spanish, Lourdes's singular vision of the revolution separates them. Vasquez notes that for Lourdes, "Cuba itself is immutable, lost, and deviant until Castro's fall, which must surely come, and, when it does not, can only be delayed by the regime's lies and the people's blindness" (22). Lourdes believes that educating Cubans about the evils of the revolution and the opportunities available in America is her duty. She throws her mother's picture of Castro into the sea and fills her nephew Ivanito's head full of tales of the American dream, eventually aiding his escape. When she leaves for New York, she is essentially no different from when she came. In order to survive the terrible things done to her as part of the revolution, Lourdes needs to maintain her vision of Cuba's government as inflexible and inhuman, and of life in Cuba as backward compared to life in the United States.

Lourdes's daughter Pilar realizes that her mother's need to live entirely within a worldview she has created is "not a matter of premeditated deception. Mom truly believes that her version of events is correct, down to details that I know, for a fact, are wrong. . . . Telling her own truth is *the* truth to her, even if it's at the expense of chipping away at our past" (176-77). Because Pilar is aware of her mother's revisionist tendencies as well as the slanted histories she is taught in school, she expresses a need to recover history herself before it is gone. As she explains, "every day Cuba fades a little more inside me, my grandmother fades a little more inside me. And there's only my imagination where our history should be" (138).

Like her mother and grandmother, Pilar desires to preserve a specific vision of Cuba, but unlike them, she is not looking to a Cuba of her own creation. She has some romanticized notions of home, but realizes that she must physically return to Cuba to find it. Pilar believes that this journey and reunion with her grandmother are essential to understanding who she is and where she belongs (58). Questions of identity haunt her in the novel, which shows her trying to find herself through New York's punk scene and expressing feelings for which she has no words through her abstract paintings. Pilar rejects her mother's assimilation into mainstream American culture, adopting instead a rebel consciousness that leads Muller to describe her as "a sort of double exile from both America and Cuba" (110). When Lourdes asks her daughter to paint a pro-American mural for the opening of a new branch of the Yankee Doodle Bakery, Pilar paints her vision of the Statue of Liberty off center with the torch floating free, a safety pin through her nose, stick figures that look like barbed wire surrounding her. The text in the painting is Pilar's "favorite punk rallying cry," "I'M A MESS" (141). In *Dance Between Two*

Cultures, Luis reads Pilar's painting as a comment on the sacrifice, suffering and imprisonment of immigrants in the United States (218-19). The image she creates seems more personally driven, however, and reflects the extent to which she cannot align herself with the America that Lourdes embraces so willingly.[133] Pilar admits, "Even though I've been living in Brooklyn all my life, it doesn't feel like home to me. I'm not sure Cuba is, but I want to find out. If I could only see Abuela Celia again, I'd know where I belonged" (58). Even a trip to Miami to visit with relatives who she hopes will help her get to Cuba leaves unanswered questions about the location of home. There García depicts Pilar sneaking around her aunt's house, watching various family members through the windows as they go about their weekend routine. Her voyeurism of this substitute homeland leaves her feeling ridiculous and wondering if she is a fugitive from her mother's bakery (62). Seeing herself as exiled from both her mother's America and the Cuban exile community in Miami, Pilar is even more determined to get to Cuba.

Pilar views Celia and Cuba as, in Rocio Davis's words, "the idealized objects of personal fulfillment and stability" (66). A member of the 1.5 generation, Pilar was two years old when her family came to the United States. But even though she emigrated at such a young age, the Cuba that Pilar knows comes, in part, from her early memories of her homeland. She claims to remember everything that has happened to her since she was a baby, "even word-for-word conversations" (26). Through García's use of magical realism, Pilar is also able to communicate nightly with her grandmother, even though they never physically converse. Celia conveys feelings and experiences to Pilar through

[133] Ironically, the unveiling of the painting at the bakery's opening leads Pilar to recognize how much she loves her mother. Although Lourdes is shocked when she sees the image, she instantly attacks a man who criticizes Pilar's work, tumbling toward him as "a thrashing avalanche of patriotism and motherhood" (144).

their special psychic connection. As Pilar explains, "I hear her speaking to me at night just before I fall asleep. She tells me stories about her life and what the sea was like that day. She seems to know everything that's happened to me and tells me not to mind my mother too much" (29). Moreover, she credits Celia with helping her to follow her conscience and instincts: "Even in silence, she gives me the confidence to do what I believe is right, to trust my own perceptions" (176). Pilar credits her grandmother with teaching her most of what she has learned that is important (28). Still, she lacks the first-hand knowledge to understand and embrace fully a Cuban identity. The Cuba that she "knows" is based more on impression than experience.

When she finally reaches Cuba, she feels an instant connection with her grandmother and responds to the land and people around her, which she sees very differently than her mother does. Pilar is able to take in the grace and beauty of Cuba as well as the decay. She recognizes the absurdity of "billboards advertising the revolution as if it were a new brand of cigarette" (215), but focuses instead on the architecture of the buildings and the colors of the sea and sky. In Cuba she dreams in Spanish for the first time, which is a moment of revelation since she has struggled with her lack of fluency in the language before, writing letters to Celia "in a Spanish that is no longer hers" and speaking it in a "hard-edged lexicon of by-gone tourists" (7). Finally, Pilar has language to match the images in her mind. After these dreams, she wakes up feeling as if something inside her has changed and "there's a magic working through [her] veins" (235). Cuba empowers Pilar by grounding her. Connected to her heritage, she finds answers to her questions about identity and belonging. Interestingly, they are not the answers she expected. As a result of her journey Pilar realizes that Cuba is home but New

York is home as well. She admits, "I know now it's where I belong -- not *instead* of here, but *more* than here" (236). Not until Pilar is in Cuba does she realize that the homeland that existed in her imagination does not exist at all. When she says, "Cuba is a peculiar exile, I think, an island-colony. We can reach it by a thirty-minute charter flight from Miami, yet never reach it at all" (219), she asserts that Cuba can never be fully accessed or understood.

Rather than presenting Cuba as a finite place with a definable character, García shows that as a homeland, Cuba is open to interpretation, functioning differently for each person who encounters it. Each of the del Pino women makes her homeland into what she needs it to be. The final images of Celia, Lourdes, and Pilar in the novel comment upon their respective visions of home. With Celia's last act of walking into the ocean, García creates a beautiful portrait of a woman merging with the place which has sustained her. At this moment Celia imagines herself as "a soldier on a mission -- for the moon, or the palms, or El Líder" (243), but as she casts off the pearl earrings which she has worn since Gustavo gave them to her four decades before, we see her finally letting go of the past. Lourdes's final act -- promising her nephew Ivanito that she will take him to Disney World and helping him to escape Cuba through the Peruvian embassy after she dreams of the Mariel boatlift -- shows that in her mind, life in Cuba does not measure up to the materialist dream of America. She feels responsible for freeing the next generation from tyranny and through her offer of sponsorship shows Ivanito that the exile community in America will embrace him. Lourdes cannot reconnect with her homeland because her pain is so deep that she will not be satisfied until "a violence of nature, terrible and permanent [. . .] record[s] the evil" that was done to her there (227). Since she associates

Cuba with her body, it, too, must be permanently marked, as she was by the soldier's knife. More so than her mother and grandmother, Pilar comes to see Cuba outside of her own desires for it. The Cuba she finds is the spiritual home she wished for, but she is able to realize that life there has its limitations for her generation. We see this in her final act -- aiding Ivanito in leaving by lying to her grandmother about Ivanito's whereabouts. Unlike her mother and grandmother, however, Pilar questions herself at the end, wondering if she has made the right decision. This questioning of how she responds to Cuba, and how that response will affect others, sets Pilar apart from Celia and Lourdes. It shows that even though Pilar has spent the least amount of time in Cuba, she may have the most objective view of its mutability as a homeland. She recognizes that her conception of homeland does not invalidate others.

This recognition is also shown in the storytelling form of García's novel, which is ostensibly a collection of Pilar's own writings. As Pilar as narrator adopts the voices of other members of her family in order to record their stories, *Dreaming in Cuban* preserves the many Cubas that exist for the del Pinos and their many definitions of home. Alvarez-Borland notes, "as an embedded text within the novel, Pilar's diary functions as a repository of stories that will help her piece together her life" (138). For García, as for Pilar, "identity is more emotional, intellectual, and fictional but not so much geographic," and home can be found on the page (Kevane and Heredia 82). Filtered through Pilar's eyes, her relatives' experiences of exile appear at turns mystical, humorous, and heartbreaking, but each is presented with an empathetic vision that does not privilege one experience over another. Even though Pilar is critical of her mother, the narrative voice offers insight into Lourdes' need to be the way she is. As Kafka argues, García "succeeds

by giving readers a complexity of experience beyond binaries, where many diverse and conflicting perspectives circle around one another endlessly" (57). With the exception of Celia's letters, Pilar's story and her cousin Ivanito's, which are told in first person, the narrative voice is omniscient. The inclusion of the letters in their original form shows Pilar's concern with preserving history, and her incorporation of them throughout the text, shifting the action from past to present, comments upon the relevance of the past to the present moment. García's choice of first-person narration for Pilar and Ivanito illustrates the younger generation's growth into voice and articulation of the history that their parents have not been able to tell. Ivanito dreams of one day becoming "a translator for world leaders" (230) and imagines himself communicating with millions of people, like his idol Wolfman Jack (191).

Although as a narrator Pilar functions as a bridge between the very different Cuban and American experiences that her grandmother and mother live and her surname Puente even translates as "bridge," she does not bring the women themselves closer before Celia's death. As Davis contends, their separation at the end of the novel undermines the pattern of mother-daughter separation and later bonding common in ethnic texts (67). García indicates further generational separation of Felicia, her children, and Cuba. Her son Ivanito will presumably travel to the United States. Her twin daughters Luz and Millagro, who exist in a world of their own in the text, remain isolated from others in Cuba and dream of one day leaving too. So while García argues that the members of her generation can build bridges through their unique perspective, her work also shows that the fractures in the Cuban diaspora cannot be so easily overcome.

While Cuban American literature is not unique in the immigrant trajectory in its emphasis on examining divisions internal to the ethnic community, its turn to this undertaking is uniquely timed. Writers in the Jewish and African American traditions concern themselves with the expectations of dominant society for generations before making this shift in perspective, while Cuban American authors have done so at the outset, at the same time as their writing departed from the exile literature that was neither written for nor concerned with outsiders. Admittedly, there are early Jewish and African American writers who address community divisions; Abraham Cahan, Michael Gold, and Charles Chesnutt are notable examples. However, their work is exceptional to the larger pattern of early writing in each group, and it drew criticism from group members concerned with the potential response of mainstream society.[134] Perhaps the community examination that figures so prominently in Cuban American literature as that literature begins to address a mainstream audience is simply the next evolution of a narrative line long concerned more with insiders than with outsiders. Even though the emerging Cuban American narrative features themes common to other immigrant literatures at the same early stage -- including assimilation, language acquisition, education, relationship to homeland, and even generational tensions -- this literature is not shaped by a perceived need to speak to larger society, as others are. Thus even when an outsider audience is considered, the literature still looks inward in the same way that Cuban writing in the United States had since its inception.

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[134] As noted earlier, the work of Oscar Hijuelos has been criticized by Cuban American readers, but this critique focused on his depiction of characters and dialogue deemed "too American" rather than on his descriptions of community divisions or portrayals of Cuban culture that were perceived to be negative.

Cuban American writers show an early consciousness of the importance of framing Cuban and Cuban American history for themselves as well as for mainstream America and, through the depiction of second, third, and even fourth generation characters who become writers and interpreters of those histories, lay the challenge of continuing this project before their successors. Perhaps the felt need for Cuban American writers to continue building bridges is motivated by a sense of impending change on the Cuban political front. Cuban Americans and Cuban exiles in America will confront yet another set of puzzling questions in terms of identity if and when Castro falls from power. If travel resumes between the two countries, Cubans will have to decide whether or not they will remain in the United States, and therefore whether or not they will choose exile. Having established a rootedness here, will they leave if the opportunity presents itself and establish a Cuban cultural identity? Those who remain will redefine exile consciousness because in choosing to stay, they will implicitly acknowledge an American identity.

Chapter 5: The Korean American Search for a Voice

The truth, finally, is who can tell it.
-- Chang-rae Lee

Like their Cuban counterparts, the first Korean immigrants arrived in the United States in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century seeking refuge from political oppression and the opportunities that working in America could provide their families. Those who made the journey were certainly invested in creating a new life in America, but equally invested in promoting changes in Korea that would allow them to return home. Thus, the first Korean immigrants shared the exile consciousness of Cubans discussed in the previous chapter. If anything, their sense of loss was magnified because of the hostile takeover of their country by a neighboring nation. Although Korea's peninsular location between China, Japan, and Russia had made it vulnerable to attack for centuries, it had remained largely sealed off from the world in a self-created seclusion and was self-governing until the late nineteenth century, when, as Sucheng Chan explains, Korea signed formal treaties with Japan (1876) and the United States (1881), Great Britain and Germany (1883), Russia and Italy (1884) and France (1886), opening itself as a trade center and making its government vulnerable to the influence of foreign presences. The Russo-Japanese War that began in 1904 led to Korea's eventual loss of autonomy at the hands of the Japanese, despite the Koreans' declaration of neutrality. Having defeated the Russians, the Japanese declared Korea a protectorate and gradually began controlling the nation through what was called internal administration. By 1910,

these pretenses were dispensed with and Korea was officially named a Japanese colony, which it remained until 1945 (xxiii-viii). In addition to slaughtering the royal family, the Japanese government made its tongue the official language of the country, and replaced traditional Korean practices with Japanese culture. The new government believed that once Koreans were legally separated from the markers of their heritage and forced to adopt another, they would cease to exist as Koreans and be made over as Japanese. It therefore passed laws altering almost every facet of Korean life, from the structure of the government to the permitted length of hair and pipes for smoking, thus systematically erasing 5,000 years of Korean history and dismissing the prior existence of the nation.

In response to these sweeping changes to their country, the first wave of Koreans, numbering approximately 7,000, arrived in Hawaii between 1902 and 1905 to work on the sugar plantations; although others had left earlier, finding new homes and jobs by crossing into other Asian countries on the mainland, this was the first group to leave Korea with official sanction (Chan xxxix).[135] Following the suggestion of former Presbyterian missionary Horace N. Allen, who had aspirations of becoming America's foreign minister to Korea, Emperor Kojong set up the first emigration bureau, the *Yuminwan*, to process those desiring to leave. He believed that his people would benefit economically and in terms of prestige, since Allen brought word that the Hawaiian sugar makers specifically wanted Korean labor (Chan xl-xli). In truth, Japanese laborers' protests over wages and working conditions had led Hawaiian sugar manufacturers to

[135] While this was the first major wave of Koreans to enter the United States, Korean entry actually began in 1885 with the arrival of three Korean men who came to work (two of whom returned home) and sixty-four students who came between 1890 and 1905 to pursue degrees. Among these were Syngman Rhee, Ahn Chang-ho, and Pak Yong-man, all of whom later became active in Korea's independence movement (Hyung-chan Kim 602).

look to other groups for sources of cheap labor, so the Koreans were courted for their low cost rather than their national character. The emperor also supported emigration because he saw the opportunity to turn a profit by charging two won (one dollar) per passport (Hyung-chan Kim 602). Allen and the emperor set up an "emigration franchise" between Korea and David Deshler, a friend of Allen's who, through Allen's contacts, began to recruit workers for the Hawaiian Sugar Planters Association (HSPA) (Chan xl-xli). Allen touted Deshler as an official of the nonexistent "Territorial Bureau of Immigration" in order to help with recruiting (Hyung-chan Kim 602). According to Brian Lehrer, author of *The Korean Americans*, Deshler was paid five dollars per worker he lured to Hawaii, an exorbitant fee in those days (56). The United States' annexation of Hawaii in 1900 brought laws which made it illegal to import contract laborers, so Deshler assisted the new Korean immigrants by giving them money to bring into the country as proof that they were entering as free immigrants. In addition, Koreans were promised a wage of fifteen dollars per month, free housing, health care, English lessons, and a great climate (Lehrer 56). Recruiters played upon Koreans' desire for progress with the slogan "The Country is open -- go forward" (Lehrer 56). Hawaii was thus depicted as a welcoming paradise. Advertisements and posters promised laborers free housing, medical care, and wages that equaled a small fortune in Korea (Takaki, *Strangers* 55).

Although initial responses to the offer to leave Korea for Hawaii were few, the number rose through the recruitment efforts of Christian missionaries in Korea. Consequently, "an estimated 40 percent of the emigrants were Christian converts" (Chan xli). They were from a variety of social classes and occupations, including farmers, laborers, clerks, students, police officers, minors, servants, and Buddhist monks (Takaki,

Strangers 53). All were looking for a better life and were willing to work hard for the opportunities America offered. They maintained strong ties to their homeland and had no real desire to assimilate, as many intended to return to Korea as soon as they had become financially stable and the Japanese relinquished control of Korea.[136] On the whole, the group was young and educated; according to Takaki, over ninety percent of the adults were between sixteen and forty-four years old and about seventy percent were literate (*Strangers* 53). Still, the nature of their life in Hawaii did not allow for the production of a new literature, in either Korean or English.

The life they undertook was difficult at best, with ten-hour days and six-day workweeks spent bent over in the sugarcane fields, poor food and housing, and little time or energy for the promised English lessons (Lehrer 58). Because of the difficulty of fieldwork, the majority of Koreans in Hawaii fulfilled the terms of their contracts as sugar workers and then moved to more urban areas, where they opened small businesses and boarding houses. As the years passed under Japanese rule and the chances for returning to an independent Korea lessened, some immigrants moved to the mainland in California, where they faced difficulty being hired for all but the most physically demanding, lowest-paying jobs as miners and seasonal farmers. Takaki estimates that "by 1907, some one thousand Koreans had remigrated" to western America. Most remained in California, but some traveled into Colorado, Wyoming, and Utah to work as miners, and others headed north to Alaska to work in the fisheries (*Strangers* 270). In

[136] While it is generally acknowledged that the initial group living in Hawaii intended to return to Korea, Chan argues that the make-up of the initial wave of immigrants indicates a desire to stay, since almost ten percent were women and eight percent children (xlii). Takaki accounts for these figures as resulting from male workers' fears that they would not be able to reunite with families in Korea under Japanese occupation (*Strangers* 56).

part because of the competition they posed for American workers and in part because of business people's fears of losing white business if they served Asians, Koreans faced discrimination in housing, theaters, restaurants, and other public facilities.

In 1905 Korean emigration to the United States ended as quickly as it had begun. The Korean government barred further exit from Korea due to reports of mistreatment of workers in Mexico. Pressure from the Japanese to end this emigration was a factor as well, since Korean workers were taking the jobs of Japanese sugar workers who were on strike. Migration from Hawaii to the mainland United States ceased two years later by order of President Theodore Roosevelt, who was bowing to pressure from groups in California that did not want more Japanese immigrants entering their country. Although it was intended to affect the Japanese, his Executive Order 589 restricted Koreans as well (Chan xlii-xliii). This marked the first of many occasions on which American public opinion toward the Japanese would negatively affect Korean immigrants.

In 1910, the year when Japan officially annexed Korea, The U.S. Census registered 4,533 Koreans living in Hawaii and 461 on the mainland (Hyung-chan Kim 602). For both groups, returning to Korea was no longer desirable or even possible in the immediate future. That this first group of immigrants, mostly male, began to consider living in Hawaii at least semi-permanently was evidenced by the arrival of an estimated 1,066 "picture brides" in Hawaii by 1923 (Takaki, *Strangers* 56).[137] An unmarried Korean man working in Hawaii would send a photograph to a matchmaker in Korea, and if a Korean woman were interested, she would send hers back (Lehrer 60). If the couple

[137] In addition to about five hundred students who were anti-Japanese activists and managed to enter the country as Korean refugees, these women were the only Koreans allowed to leave Korea legally until Japanese rule ended in 1945 (Chan xliii). With the passing of the 1924 Immigration Act, further Korean immigration into the United States was barred.

agreed, they would marry, usually before the woman left Korea so that she could enter the United States as a resident and stay if she chose to do so, with or without her new husband (Lehrer 60). Many of the husbands in these arranged marriages were twenty years older than their wives (Takaki, *Strangers* 56). For the picture brides, marriage meant an escape from either poverty or social limitations for women or both. Hawaii represented the personal and economic freedom that was becoming more and more elusive under Japanese rule. For the male plantation laborers, wives meant homes and stability. Despite the establishment of new homes and families in Hawaii, a Korean nationalist spirit flourished among the early immigrants, most of whom sent large portions of their weekly pay to relatives in Korea or gave it to organizations supporting the cause of Korean independence. Korean women, in particular, felt empowered by their ability to work in support of their nation.

Those who had come to the mainland continued to farm because of the scarcity of other opportunities in California's segregated society; due to the presence of groups who organized to terrorize Asians in response to the influx of Chinese and Japanese workers, they found themselves accepted only in the agriculture industry, where they were welcomed because they would accept lower wages than white workers and were willing to live and work in worse conditions. Regardless of their level of education or status in Korea, in the western United States Koreans slept in shacks, cooked over open fires, and did seasonal field and orchard work (Chan xlv). Tenant farming provided stability for those fortunate enough to get a verbal contract. Asians in the United States were not allowed to enter into written agreements, and property owning was illegal for them because of California's 1913 Alien Land Law, which prevented "persons 'ineligible to

[*sic*] citizenship' from buying agricultural land and from leasing it for more than three years" (Chan xlvi). Korean immigrants were allowed to farm, but not permanently, and were thus denied the security that land ownership could foster. Later legislation forbade cropping contracts and entry into agriculture by any corporations in which Asians owned more than half the stock (Chan xlvii). Still, Korean immigrants found ways around these laws, including verbal contracts and leasing land using the names of their American-born children; eventually, a thriving economy based on rice farming and fruit and vegetable stands developed (Chan xlv-vii). Although the number of Koreans farming in the West was small compared to those of other immigrant groups, their experiences in their homeland had made them conscious of themselves as a community. Because, as Takaki argues, "for the Korean immigrants, economic success was tied to ethnic solidarity," Koreans worked hard to succeed in the professions available to them, believing that "their productivity as workers would help to open employment opportunities for Koreans in general" (*Strangers* 274). Kim Chong-nim's success as a rice farmer earned him the nickname the "rice king," and when Kim Hyung-soon and Kim Ho formed the Kim Brothers Company to grow and package fruit, they succeeded beyond their wildest dreams with their invention of the nectarine (*Strangers* 276). Agriculture remained the primary occupation for Korean immigrants for decades, although some moved to the cities eventually, as they had in Hawaii, and became entrepreneurs in hotels, laundries, restaurants, bakeries, barbershops, and grocery stands (*Strangers* 276). Initially, they catered to the Korean community. In most cases, Koreans established their own businesses not because they wished to remain separate from the white community, as the Cuban exile community had, but because of racial discrimination. In fact, Koreans

desired to assimilate through accommodation because they saw the mistakes that their Chinese and Japanese predecessors had made. Believing that these groups had "provoked white anti-Asian reactions by retaining their old ways and keeping to themselves," Koreans worked hard to learn English, to prove to their white neighbors that they "were trusty, hardworking, and worthy" through their economic success, to demonstrate their Christianity, and to express gratitude to America for the opportunities they had been given (*Strangers* 277). Their desire for a free Korea to which they could return was strong, but those settling in California were also practical and acted upon a felt need to assimilate.

Like the Cubans, Koreans adapted fairly easily to life in America through the creation of their own organizations that were dedicated both to easing the transition into America and to protesting the Japanese occupation of their homeland. Male Korean plantation workers in Hawaii formed their own system of governance because they did not think they could count on the Hawaiian government for assistance (Lehrer 59). Chan explains that the *Sinmin-hoe* (New People Society) was created in Honolulu in 1903 and the *Hanin Hapsong Hyop-hoe* (United Korean Society) in 1907, which later joined with the San Francisco based *Kongnip Hyop-hoe* (Mutual Assistance Association) to form the *Taehan Kookmin-hoe* (Korean National Association), which spread throughout North America and formed chapters as well in Manchuria and Siberia. The KNA's missions were "to promote education, social welfare, and economic development among Koreans abroad, to train them to work together in equality and freedom, and to restore national independence. To disseminate these ideas, the KNA started publishing a weekly newspaper, the *Sinhan Minpo* (*New Korea*), in 1919" (Chan viii). As the independence

movement grew, other publications emerged, including the *Kongnip Sinmun* (*Korean News*), the *T'aeo'yongyang Chubo* (*Korean Pacific Weekly*), and the *Sin Han'gok Po* (*New Korean News*) (Takaki, *Strangers* 281). In addition to the men's political organizations, Korean women formed their own groups to work for independence. The *Hankuk Pain-hoe* (Korean Women's Association) in San Francisco, *Taehanin Puin-hoe* (Great Korean Women's Association) in Honolulu, *Taehan Puin Kuje-hoe* (Korean Women's Relief Society) with Hawaiian and Californian branches, and *Taehan Yoja Aikuk-dan* (Korean Women's Patriotic Society) with branches throughout California and in Mexico and Cuba were all established between 1908 and 1919 to support independence through demonstrations and fundraising (Chan lviii). That Korean women succeeded in these efforts in addition to raising children, feeding their families and others, taking in laundry for extra money, and working in the fields alongside the men speaks to their remarkable strength and desire to succeed.

Because so many of the immigrants had been Christian converts in Korea, Korean churches in the United States also helped them adapt to their new home. The success that Presbyterian and Methodist missionaries had achieved in Korea was reflected in the proliferation of Korean Presbyterian and Korean Methodist churches, first in Hawaii and then on the mainland. Within ten years of the opening of the first Korean Methodist Church in San Francisco, twelve other Korean churches had been started in California (Takaki, *Strangers* 279). In the United States, the Methodist churches in particular became active in their parishioners' acculturation, offering English language lessons, becoming centers of community life, and continuing the struggle for independence (Chan xlviii-ix). Churches forwarded a nationalistic agenda in addition to a spiritual one

through "debates on topics such as 'Jesus Christ and the Future of Korea,' 'The Relationship between Korea and Christianity,' and 'The Duty of Koreans Abroad'" (Takaki, *Strangers* 279). Many churches taught that in America nationalism was a more important concern than discrimination. When Koreans did face hostility and rejection by the white mainstream culture, it was most often a response to the Japanese presence, with which they were, ironically, often associated. Labeled "dirty Japs" and forced into a separate, segregated existence defined by whites' refusal to admit them to mainstream churches, public swimming pools, and restrooms, Korean immigrants lived in what Sucheng Chan describes as "a world apart" (lix). They responded to discrimination with a quiet persistence to succeed in their new country and to keep alive the spirit of their old one, and they were supported in these beliefs by their religion.[138]

As it was in Hawaii, the fight for independence from Japan was carried out through regular contributions to churches and political organizations, even from those who were barely surviving on their wages. Chan cites Bong-Youn Choy's assertion that for decades, every Korean American gave the equivalent of one month's wages per year to the nationalist cause (lv). Takaki notes that, for instance, in 1918, rice farmers in the Sacramento Valley gave $42,955 to the KNA (*Strangers* 278). Koreans also fought for Korean independence through education. They established Korean language schools to teach the next generation lessons in language, culture, and history. At the same time, they stressed the importance of a Western education, which would allow their children to

[138] Sucheng Chan notes, however, that the children of this first group of immigrants, those who were born in America, were unable to find solace in religious and political organizations as their parents did and experienced discrimination more keenly. However, she argues that, paradoxically, they did not share the "desperate desire" of their Chinese and Japanese counterparts to prove their Americanness, possibly because the embattled nature of their history made it something to be preserved (lix-x).

move up in the world and do more good for the cause. One of the most prominent political leaders of the Korean immigrant community was Syngman Rhee, whose education in prestigious American universities was largely financed by contributions from fellow immigrants. The first Korean to receive a doctorate in the United States, Rhee became a powerful spokesman for Korean nationalism, addressing the United States government for help and urging fellow expatriates to buy bonds that would fund the freedom fight. He later won a 1948 election that made him the first president of the Republic of Korea (Chan liv).

Korean American Literature's Atypical Beginning

Again, because of the conditions in which the majority of Korean immigrants to the United States were living and working, few writers emerged from the earliest groups entering America before the "golden door" was closed in 1924. Elaine Kim attributes the scarcity of texts by early groups of workers from China, Japan, and Korea to the limited time field workers would have had due to the nature of their work, the isolated life in field camps, the pervasive American ignorance of Asians, the legal segregation that separated them from American social and economic life and lack of any sense of owning or contributing to an American cultural identity, the absence of autobiographical writings in the literary traditions from which these immigrants came, and the nature of writing and literature as pursuits of the scholarly class, who worked in poetry and the classical essay rather than autobiography when they did write (*Asian American Literature* 24). Of these early writers, the only one to gain prominence was Younghill Kang. Many scholars view Kang, who fled Korea in 1921, as the father of Korean American literature. However,

Kang's life story was atypical for a Korean immigrant, and thus his work makes an unusual beginning point for the Korean American immigrant narrative. In "Younghill Kang and the Genesis of Korean-American Literature," Kyhan Lee notes that Kang was one of the six hundred Koreans who had entered the United States as students by 1940 (64). A scholar and aristocrat, he made his way to New York with an American missionary and followed employment and education opportunities into Canada, Boston, and Philadelphia. Kang entered the American literary scene through the assistance of Thomas Wolfe, his friend and colleague at New York University.[139] Believing in Kang's talent, Wolfe introduced him and his work to Maxwell Perkins, his editor at Scribner's, and Perkins then offered Kang a five-hundred-dollar advance with which Kang wrote *The Grass Roof* (Trudeau 193). According to Kyhan Lee, Kang's first novel established his "reputation as the representative immigrant writer of his time" (69).

Although Kang and the other students of his generation who became writers were not representative of the majority of Korean immigrants, Kyhan Lee explains that "they alone had the educational background to assume the difficult role of cultural ambassadors. Reluctantly, young scholars like Il-han New, No-Yong Park, and Younghill Kang became writers because they felt obliged to serve as intermediaries between the two often antithetical cultures" (65). They sought to encourage better understanding of themselves and their homelands by offering picturesque descriptions of upper-class life, including ceremonies, clothing, and food (Kim, *Asian American Literature* 25). Il-Han New's 1928 autobiography *When I Was a Boy in Korea* follows

[139] For further information on their relationship, see "Thomas Wolfe's Korean Connection," by David Strange.

this model to the exclusion of any details about his life in America (Kim, *Asian American Literature* 25-26). Not surprisingly, this emphasis, according to Kyhan Lee, baffled New's editor (67).

Kang felt strongly that Koreans were unknown to and therefore misunderstood by most Americans. He wrote, "Koreans are a passionate people. Since they are not so much passionate on the surface as underneath, it takes a long time to know them and most Americans have not gotten around to it. This is a very great tragedy, an untold tragedy of horrible ignorance" (qtd. in Kunitz and Haycraft 744). Kang saw his principal task as introducing Americans to Koreans and their culture. He did this through his first novel, *The Grass Roof* (1931), in which he comments on the root of American ignorance about Asians:

> To a Westerner, all orientals look very much the same, just as to an oriental, all Westerners look high-nosed and red-headed. But there is fully as much difference between typical Chinamen, Japs and Koreans as there is between a German, a Frenchman, and an Englishman. There is more. Each of the oriental nations has not only its own language, but its unique culture and unique characteristics. [. . .] A Korean is unlike either Jap or Chinese. There is no greater insult to him than to be mistaken for a Chinaman or Jap. That is the great secret others do not know. (245, 249)

Because they were so often confused with Chinese and Japanese immigrants, early Korean writers like Kang were, in Kyhan Lee's words, "openly blunt in communicating their anti-Japanese sentiments" (66). Kang marks the difference between Koreans and Japanese with this characteristic bluntness in *The Grass Roof*: "My people always spoke

of them [the Japanese] as 'savages,' and they were thought to have no civilization. They were a new race compared to Koreans, and their morals were not like ours" (74). Like Il-han New, Kang wrote about both his life and the lives of his fellow immigrants. He did so through autobiographically based fiction because of the Korean reluctance to tell an "I" centered story. Kyhan Lee argues that "albeit in a westernized autobiographical form, to the Korean-American author, the notion of the 'I' still conformed with its traditional connotation of the 'collective' whole" (67). Kang used his life as the basis for his novels, but he clearly manipulated the facts to suit the purposes of his fictional account. In creating Chungpa Han, his fictional alter-ego, Kang was able to present an optimistic, adventurous character through whose eyes the panorama of American life could be seen and critiqued.

In *The Grass Roof*, Kang's protagonist Chungpa Han seeks a Western education so that he can understand how and why the Japanese were able to take over his country, and he dreams of learning how to bring Korea unto independent power once again. Disappointed in the Western lessons about the Western world he is taught in Japanese schools and convinced that he can find the real world and real knowledge only outside Korea, Han sets his sights on America. The novel closes with the familiar image of the immigrant remaking himself through his own efforts. As he is sailing away on a British ship, Han acknowledges that his dream is coming true because of his decision to leave and says, "there are many more dreams within me, greater and greater, also going to come true through my own act" (366). *The Grass Roof* and *The Happy Grove,* Kang's 1933 adaptation of the book for children, were well received largely because of their novelty as books about Korean life. The picturesque story of a boy's desire to escape the

confining life of his village and to seek Western knowledge resonated with Western audiences, as did Kang's critique of the Korean practice of arranged marriages and his anti-Japanese stance. Kang's first novel also appealed to the general American reading public because it appeared to confirm stereotypes about Asians. For example, Lady Hosie, who reviewed the novel for *The Saturday Review of Literature* in 1931, was pleased to find Kang's Asians the "easy-going race" she expected; she termed the part of the novel in which Kang describes Han's family and life in the village charming and interesting, and praised Kang's English, adding that "a few unconscious jerks and jars of very modern American slang only add naivety to the candor of his tale" (707). She was critical of his portrayal of American missionaries in the second half, however, stating that he "should also gratefully remember that it was American missionaries who first made the world aware of Japan's former policy in Korea, happily reversed" (707). She asserts that he is "on sure[r] ground when he gives us Korea and Koreans" (707), showing her discomfort with his portrayals of Americans. Elaine Kim notes that responses like this one to Kang's work show that Anglo-American critics' criteria for the evaluation of Asian American writing "have not always been literary" (*Asian American Literature* xv-vi). Indeed, James Livingston characterizes Kang's challenge in writing a story that would be palatable to his audience as "formidable" because of the pressure of American nationalism and parochialism in the 1930s and 1940s (128-29). Aware of the need to educate an ignorant readership and yet not to offend them, Kang carefully couched his critiques in *The Grass Roof*, knowing that success would bring the opportunity to be more outspoken in forthcoming books. According to Livingston, "By gaining American sympathy and encouraging the readers to forge a rapport with him, Kang empowers

himself to launch a bold critique of American materialism and racism in his next major work, *East Goes West: The Making of an Oriental Yankee*" (129).

Originally published in 1937,[140] *East Goes West* traces Han's search for the America of his imagination and his desire to "know" the West. Kang's intent for the text can be seen in his original title, "Death of an Exile," and in his Guggenheim application, which stated that the novel would

> treat of Orientals in America, being the reflection through the hero's eyes of this mechanical age, of American civilization, and of the literary and cultural epoques he experiences here over a period of ten years; also a history of his spiritual evolutions and revolutions while love-sick, bread-sick, butter-sick, education-sick, he is lost and obliterated in the stone-and-steel jungles of New York City. (qtd. in Sunyoung Lee 380).

While these elements featured prominently in the completed novel, readers latched onto Han's eternal optimism and desire to find work rather than his many disappointments. They saw what they expected to see, the story of a hardworking immigrant who, like his creator, made it. Elaine Kim notes reviewers who praised the "humor and charm" and "good natured naivety" with which Kang's character approaches America; "critics saw *East Goes West* as an example of how minorities should respond to American racism, that is, as another Asian American 'success story'" (*Asian American Literature* 34). Clearly the *New York Times* writer who termed Kang "no cynic" missed his point entirely (qtd. in Sunyoung Lee 383). This is likely because, still aware of the care with which he

[140] *East Goes West* was reprinted in 1965 and 1997.

had to write, Kang placed his critiques of American materialism and racism in the mouths of characters other than his protagonist, whom he knew his American readers would take to be himself. Han, and therefore Kang, was seen as the model immigrant.

Sunyoung Lee, whose essay "The Unmaking of an Oriental Yankee" follows the novel in the most recent edition, argues that Kang's heavy critiques of American society were overlooked for decades because the novel was read as simply autobiographical and not the fictional creation that it is. Indeed, Katherine Woods' 1937 review of *East Goes West* for *The New York Times Book Review* thoroughly confuses the author and his protagonist. She claims that Kang was born as Chungpa Han and that his story "holds the attention as if it were a novel" rather than the autobiography she assumes the book to be (11). Woods writes, "it is a candid record of 'the making of an Oriental Yankee'; and its author has been so successfully Americanized as to become Assistant Professor of Comparative Literature in New York University and a member of the staff of the Department of Far Eastern Art at the Metropolitan" (11). Sunyoung Lee sums up Wood's position: "In other words, Kang's own life becomes proof of Han's successful assimilation" (378). A review appearing in the *Springfield Sunday Union & Republican* continues this faulty line of reading by reporting that the novel "concludes with [Kang's] winning of an American wife and achieving the first rung of an intellectual career" (qtd in Sunyoung Lee 378). Kang did marry Frances Keely, a white American woman, and begin work as a lecturer at various universities, but this is not at all Han's fate. Interestingly, Lee notes that even Kang's editor encouraged this confusion, suggesting that Kang focus more on Han's would-be love Trip, "and to definitely show that you married her, because the fact that you did, makes one of the principal points of the book,

in that the Easterner became a Westerner through this experience" (qtd. in Sunyoung Lee 380). These perceived overlaps between author and subject reveal the belief common in Kang's time that minority writers had no stories to tell but their own and, as Sunyoung Lee asserts, show an underestimation of Kang's abilities as a fiction writer. Lee rightly argues that reading the text as fiction rather than autobiography "restores its creative muscle" (383). This allows us to become aware of the ways in which Kang's text both reflects and critiques the script available to immigrant writers of his time.

Kang metaphorically depicts Han's decision to leave Korea as one of cosmic life and death. Korea is a dying, ancient planet, "called to get off the earth. Death summoned" (8). It is "a spiritual planet that had been my fathers' home" but one that can no longer sustain the life of the newer generations because its air has thinned and cooled (4-5). Accordingly, Han describes himself as "hurtled forward, out into space, out toward a foreign body" and his entry into America as the exploration of a new world which must, by its very nature, be able to sustain him: "Here I wandered on soil strange as Mars, seeking roots, roots for an exile's soul. This world, which had sucked me in by its onward, forward magnetism, must have that in it, too, to feed and anchor man in the old durability...for in me has always burned this Taoistic belief in the continuity of living and of time" (5). Stressing the vast differences between Korea and America by projecting them on a cosmic scale, Kang underscores America's powerful optimism and desire to move into the future, which here are strong enough to pull visitors from as far away as other planets. The question becomes whether this new world can sustain life. However, in posing this, Kang shows that Han does not expect that the immigrant will be handed what he or she needs to survive as well as an immediate understanding of his new

environment. Rather, as Han says, "It was here...[,] here in America for me to find...but where? This book is the record of my early search, and the arch of my projectile toward that goal" (5).

Han comes to America seeking life, but the images Kang uses to depict his first vision of New York indicate that he will not find it there, despite his protagonist's enthusiasm for his new home. Although Han glories in New York's "arrogant pride of rejoiced materialism," its towers of Babel "materialized by those hard, cold, magic words -- opportunity, enterprise, prosperity, success," and its "savagery which piled great concrete block upon concrete block" to form the great American "monument to the Machine Age," Kang's word choices suggest the bleakness of the city that is without welcome or, indeed, soul (6-7), and underscore his impression of New York as steeped in an isolating materialism. In contrast, Han sees New York as a place in which he can be nurtured, calling the city a place that would become, in the years that he records, "the vast incubator of me" (6). He also evokes the familiar trope of immigration as rebirth and locates that image within the Korean language to show readers that the desire to start anew is intrinsically part of Koreans: "It was in New York I felt I was destined really 'to come out of the boat.' The beginning of my new existence must be founded here. In Korea *to come from the boat* is an idiom meaning *to be born*, as the word 'pai' for 'womb' is the same as 'pai' for 'boat'" (5). Han's first hot bath in his new world similarly evokes a new beginning, this time investing his journey with a sacred connotation: "I was washing off the dirts [sic] of the Old World that was dead, as in my country people did before they set out on Buddhist pilgrimage. Now I had washed everything. Everything but the inside. If I could, I would have washed that as

thoroughly, I suppose, and left a shell. But the inner folds felt the echo of the outer" (11). He further emphasizes this division between inner and outer selves, and Americans' perception of them, when he studies himself in a mirror and notes that his face still reflects Korean traits that are racially determined. He explains, "In more ways than one, I looked like an alien to the Machine Age and New York. One could not tell from my outside that I had lost touch with dew and stars and ghosts" (12). Here Han reassures readers that he has separated himself from his old-world mystical beliefs and fully intends to invest in the modern mission of America. As Kang shows in the remainder of the novel, however, this separation drains Han and ensures his misery. Indeed, for Kang, the inherent tension between participating in the capitalist system and maintaining an ethnic identity ensures that the immigrant must either starve physically or spiritually.[141]

In addition to calling on the familiar image of rebirth, Kang casts Han in a familiar mold -- as Benjamin Franklin -- both to bring Koreans into the American story and make them more familiar and palatable for his audience and to critique that particular story. Kyhan Lee compares Kang's entry into New York and purchase of two loaves of stale bread with the last of his money to Franklin's arrival in Philadelphia as it is depicted in his *Autobiography,* writing "It is seemingly difficult in this sense not to find elements of the archetypal 'American success story,' that propagated the untrue notion that anyone strong-willed, independent, self-reliant, and purposeful can achieve success in America" (71). Franklin also represents the model of efficiency that Han strives for but is unable to become. Kang's novel disproves the myth of success through self-perfection, showing the

[141] Interestingly, later in the twentieth century, Korean Americans' entrepreneurial efforts and work ethic, which enable them to enter America's economic system, come to be seen as part of their ethnic identity. To be Korean American is, in part, to participate in the capitalist system as a green grocer or dry cleaner.

distance between myth and reality for Korean immigrants. Han is undoubtedly driven, hard-working, and independent, but he fails at every turn. He fits the Franklinian model in many ways, but he does not become a master of the efficiency that he believes will allow him to become part of the smooth-running American machine. This is because his background in spirituality and poetry separate him from the materialist system that is designed to kill his spirit.

Indeed, as the novel unfolds, Han's struggle is between the machine age of the new world and the poetry of the old world. Although he says he wants to begin again, his past pulls at him, even in his dreams. During his first night in the city, he envisions his family questioning his choice to leave. He also imagines his uncle's books with thousands of Chinese poems and asks, "Must I leave all this behind at the portals of America? ...Couldn't they at least pass through into the world of the machine?" (13). Kang depicts America as the archetypal gateway to opportunity but also emphasizes all that the immigrant must leave behind if he is to succeed. Even though Han imagines himself washed clean and empty, he comes to the city with expectations and is surprised by the complete separation he encounters between the worlds of art and business. Having gained his knowledge of the West through the study of Western literature, he expects that Americans will share this knowledge and that it will gain him entry into the new world. In fact, his early attempts to communicate with people in the new world are all staged through Western literature. In his first night in the city, he asks the elevator operator at his hotel if he knows Shakespeare (11). He assumes that the Scotch cook at a diner will know Mac Flecknoe (15). In both instances, Han is looked at as a puzzle and a joke. At the first college he attends, Han converses with the other students using lines from

Tennyson and Browning: "Tennyson was especially good, as his lines easily became prose, especially those in long narrative poems. 'Where were you yesterday? Whose child is that? What are you doing here?' It was like a conversation manual" (101). He finds that this method of sentence construction is not effective overall. When his sentences "began to look like the life of Johnson," his English tutor edits them all to the minimum: "He would attack some ambitious sentence of mine that curled and wound around itself. He would reduce it, 'This sentence is just like saying, "I hungry," Now what else do you need?'" (101). In contrast, Han gains entrance into the Chinese community in New York through his poetry. When he is starving, he is able to obtain a free meal in a Chinese restaurant by writing a classical Chinese poem for the owner (25).

Kang further develops a tension between Han's idealized view of the West and the demands of the Western workplace through the image of Han's suitcase full of Shakespeare books, the only possession he brought to America. Elaine Kim describes the books as "a talisman to him, a symbol of value and the unattainable ideal of Western civilization he seeks" ("Searching" 43-44). Han's first job as a house servant shows the conflict between the world he seeks and that in which he is living as a comedy of errors.[142] When his suitcase full of Shakespeare books breaks open and the books spill out, he does not know whether to pick them up or help his new mistress, which will entail her stepping on the books. The suitcase falls open several more times in the next few minutes as he follows her into the house, spilling Shakespeare everywhere each time and further irritating her. She finally shudders as she sees the books on the floor of her house,

[142] This is the second job that Han applies for in the novel. He is rejected outright for the first position he seeks with the YMCA in Harlem because they will not hire "Negroes" or "Orientals."

commenting, "I hope they have no germs" (58). Han quickly finds that he is too busy in his position to study Shakespeare and reasons, "I don't believe Americans got much out of Shakespeare -- American domesticity gave no time" (61). He is fired from this job, indirectly, because of his love of Shakespeare. He oversleeps one morning after staying up late to read and loses his position. As Han discovers, his own material needs frequently conflict with his desire to study poetry. In his dreary, unheated room, he has difficulty concentrating on Shakespeare because he is so hungry: "Even in the midst of Hamlet's subtlest soliloquies, I could think of nothing but food" (30). Later when he is a student in Boston, "a numbing cold, hostile to life" overpowers him, forcing him to sleep rather than study. He reads in between working hours and spends time in the warmth of the library, but cannot fully grasp the material because of the conditions under which he tries to learn it (184). In episodes like these, material reality repeatedly intrudes on Han's American dream.

Han fails at his next forays into the business world because he cannot learn American business practices. Kang comments on the lack of opportunities for educated Asian immigrants when Han takes a job at a restaurant where eight of the nine other waiters have advanced degrees (81). As with his other positions, however, Han is fired and leaves with the understanding that he "did not square with American efficiency" (84). Determined to find the America he is seeking, he says, "Well, it seems I can do nothing until I go to college and learn something. [. . .] Not even cooking or waiting or dishwashing. When I get out of college, then I may begin to master American civilization, American culture" (160). None of his working experiences leads Han to reflect negatively on America, however, only upon his own skills of adaptation. He

leaves New York, describing it as "a closed book" (85), and comments, "And it seems to me I had not yet known New York, or penetrated beyond the merest outskirts of her impregnable treasure, her fuller expanding life of the Machine Age" (87). Han sees this as his fault, but Kang implies that the problem is America's, not just Han's.

Han obtains a scholarship to study at a Canadian university, but the same difficulties in making himself understood and connecting with people on a personal level follow him there. In fact, he is taken for deaf and mute in Canada because he does not speak French (112). Even among those who are supposedly close to him, Han feels a distance. He describes his classmates' treatment of him as "almost too kind" (105), explaining, "For me there was always special favor, special kindliness, special protection...[,] the white-man's burden attitude toward the dark colonies" (118). When the school term is over and friendship with him is no longer mandated, none of the boys acknowledges him on the train (108). After a year in Canada, Han heads to America again, this time to try studying in Boston. He carries with him a more realistic expectation of what he will find and a renewed determination to succeed: "I had no sooner reached the black streets of Boston, than the easy bread and butter of charity which I had eaten for a year seemed far behind. I was in the land of opportunity once more, and very glad to be there. But again I must attack the problem of American efficiency, American business methods" (131).

Han is aided in this pursuit by Mr. D.J. Lively, a slick-talking businessman who runs an encyclopedia sales company and is, in Kyhan Lee's words, "a painful reminder of what American materialism could degenerate into" (72). Lively offers Han the opportunity to sell his *Universal Education* door-to-door to earn money for college. Han

sees Lively as "such a generous man, his charity shining out to every corner of the earth -- even to the interior of Asia," meaning even to himself, and happily pictures himself "almost like a missionary" as he furthers the spread of knowledge by selling the books (135). He believes that the lessons in salesmanship he is offered will be his sacramental introduction into American society: "Was I not being admitted into the Holy of Holies of the American civilization? This was just the very baptism I needed" (144). During his training the sales manual is referred to as the sales Bible (145), furthering Han's understanding of salesmanship as sacred. Kang's descriptions perhaps comment on missionaries' role in bringing Koreans to America as cheap labor. He certainly shows Lively taking advantage of his convert. Lively takes Han into his home and feeds him, but in exchange, Han is worked so hard around the house that he makes little progress in memorizing his sales talk and starting his career. Han's over-the-top descriptions of Lively and this enterprise, coupled with Kang's revelation of how Lively and his family treat Han, reveal how critically Kang wanted readers to see Lively and others like him. Han's stint as a door-to-door salesman is a complete failure. His few sales come through contacts who are more interested in talking about his background than about his product. He is mistreated by many of the customers, including one who literally kicks him out the door. Although he does bring himself to criticize Lively's books, he is understanding of those who reject him and even more determined to succeed at something else, again representing the model immigrant.

Han handles being misunderstood, rejected, and taken advantage of equally as easily when he later encounters an evangelist who is remarkably similar to Lively. Because Brother Bonheure wants to showcase the baptism of a "Chinee" at a revival in

order to gain converts and, along with them, more money, he takes Han into his home and feeds him. Instead of preaching salvation, Han speaks to the crowd about racial prejudice, self-reliance, and the importance of the life of the mind. Missing his message entirely, the crowd erupts when they hear that he can speak English: "Chinee -- Chinee can speak!" (339). Han's speech is, in fact, better than that of the preacher who has brought him there. In a comic moment, Han is corrected: "It's genu-wine, you know, not genuine. You want to look out for that" (339). Still, Han stays with Brother Bonheure for a time, thinking that he can "play a real intellectual part in America" (339). In this way, Han indeed may be a mirror of Kang who, while praised by many reviewers more for his ability to write than for what he said, still sought to engage in America's intellectual culture and enlighten those to whom he spoke through his novels and lectures.

Han's ultimate alienation from the working world comes when he is employed as a salesman at Boshnack Brothers department store. The lessons in sales techniques to manipulate buyers he learns there make Lively's seem like "amateur work" (287). Han's opinions of the store come to reflect Kang's critique of the materialist machine in that he is appalled by the regimentation in the store and its many managers over many departments (289) and says of his boss Mr. Boshnack, who watches all his employees and customers from above, "for all his Benjamin Franklin spirit, he was almost like a great spider in the midst of his web" (291). Han works in the antiques department where "Oriental objects" are sold. He is fully disillusioned with the American business machine when he is forced to sell fake Ming vases and teakwood tables. When Han pours out his frustrations to a co-worker, complaining about how horrible the store is, he is met with disbelief: "What! No good in building up a big department store business like

Boshnack's? Campbell could not see good in anything else! He thought I was crazy. 'Yes,' I said gloomily with sincere dogmatism, 'it costs too much in soul-destroying energy. A store is worse than a factory. The aim is always money, things, sales [. . . ,] never life, never creation of anything. It turns away from life. It makes humanity into a stuff-handling machine" (294). Campbell's response reminds Han that he will be accepted as long as, according to his friend Kim, he is "willing to be docile and obedient" (255). Han, however, rebels against the idea of being "nicey-nice" (255). He does not want to have to wear a mask.[143] Han questions his own position on the store, however, when he wonders if his Korean friend George Jum, who believes that America can be accessed through materialism, is right:

> I wondered if George was right and I was wrong. Well, this must be the lesson I must learn, of American life. This *is* American life, I said stubbornly. All day long the moving multitudes of humanity, with busy legs, constantly darting false smiles to cover their depressed facial expression, the worn-out machine bodies turning round in the aisles of unmoving glass and china sets, slowly figuring with shaking hands -- haste and moving too many heavy things made them so -- now over the tally they go, recording 50 cents. Chasing after the dumb aisle man to O.K. a charge account, a C.O.D. sale [. . . ,] two eyes to look at the customer, two

[143] Kang shows Han effectively wearing a mask one evening at a party in order to settle an argument between two other guests. Sunyoung Lee reads this moment as Han's lesson in "how to function within the strict rules of polite company" and further as a sign of Kang's own accommodation. In taking the middle ground between two extremists, Han is able to settle the fight and gain acceptance in Mrs. Churchill's home for future events. Kang has done the same, Lee writes: "Kang the writer, like Han the character, needed to tread the middle ground between the extremes of honest expression and diplomatic restraint. Like Han, he could not afford to alienate his audience. And like Han, he was vying for a place at the table" (389).

> hands to count the change [. . . ,] then to make a sale check, to carry the good to the packing room, then to run with the legs' tottering strength after a new customer, for fear of losing the sale to another salesman (there is a half percent commission on that sale), at last the dead-tired body moving from the cloakroom to breathe the air -- the street air, the dusty, respectable, staid air of staid Philadelphia. (294-95)

The store is a microcosm of what America has become in Han's eyes. Kang concludes Han's exhausting tirade with a simple question: "But where were all the enchantment and romance, the glorious vision, which I had seen in my dreams of America as a boy?" that, tellingly, he does not have Han answer as this chapter concludes.[144]

Through Han's friends, Kang offers several models of Koreans with different relationships to America, each of which causes Han to question his own relationship to it. Assessing his own inability to enter into American life, Han thinks about Jum who is "not a guest in the house. He felt himself quite at home" (282).[145] Jum is the first Korean Han meets in New York. Convinced that material possessions will win the hearts of American women and secure his entrance into society, Jum is obsessed with clothing, appearance, and love affairs. He is an efficient worker, enabling him to succeed in business, and he has expensive tastes. When he and Han first meet, he immediately begins remaking Han, by offering him a bath and cutting down his long Korean underwear into the shorter American style. As Han says, "he attempted to be my teacher in all things American, and

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[144] While Kang's critique of American materialism is similar to critiques being made by some of his contemporaries, among them Sinclair Lewis, critics have not yet explored the connections between his work and that of mainstream American writers, particularly in terms of potential influences.

[145] Han is contrasting George, who works, with his conception of himself as a student and therefore a houseguest: "Just by being a student, I had got fed, clothed, sheltered, as guest in the house of Western civilization" (281).

certainly he had left all Asian culture behind as a thing of nought" (31). Han is grateful for his friend's assistance, but falls asleep after a long morning, "exhausted by my efforts in reaching the real America at last" (37). To others in the Korean community in New York, Jum is "an Americanized pagan" and "obscenely Westernized," (50, 52), but to Han, at least at first, he is a model for entry into American life. Jum's obsession with a white woman who dances in Harlem later shows the limits of social acceptance for Korean men in American society. Kang illustrates this by having the Lively family turn against Han when they see his friend Jum dating a white woman. Mr. Lively tells him, "I love you just as much as if you were my own boy, but you are getting wrong ideas. I don't want to see you marry an American girl. Neither would I want to see Elsie marry an Oriental. And all decent people are like that. It is not as the Lord intended" (150). This is another way in which Lively falls short as a welcoming missionary. Kang shows the limits of acceptance through Jum's fate as well. Unable to sustain a relationship with a white American, he marries a Korean woman in Hawaii and deems himself not a success, but not a failure either.

Pak, in turn, is representative of the many Koreans fully invested in the nationalist cause. Kang describes him as an exile who attends church services because of their nationalist bent, supports revolutionary societies, and dreams of return; "for fifteen years, his single ambition had been to get back there and settle down. On Korean land, he wanted to raise 100% Korean children, who would be just as patriotic as himself" (55). Kang shows the extremism of the nationalist movement when Chinwan, a Korean who is rumored to be a Japanese consul on leave, is stabbed at a nationalist rally by Lin, Chinwan's assailant. Lin is praised in the Korean papers in America as a hero. Han finds

that not sharing this perspective is dangerous. Several days later when he is talking with Lin, Lin remarks, "I would not be a true Korean if I did not feel that what I did was right. You are going to hell and ruin. You forget your country, your country's cause. But I -- I am only sorry that it was unfinished and I could not give my life to get Chinwan" (68). Strangely, even Chinwan understands Lin's logic. When he comes out of the hospital, he says, "I am glad he did it if it was for Korea. Because it was done for love of country, I am willing to accept it as punishment, and not as a crime on Mr. Lin's part" (69). Han himself is unmoved by the event: "But it was as if I saw Korea receding farther and farther from me. Lin failed to arouse my patriotism; he merely italicized my loneliness and lack of nationalist passion, my sense of uncomfortable exile even among my fellow countrymen, where the homeland was constantly before my eyes. The rebellious individualist in me could not accept his Asian arguments for that bloody attack" (69). Interestingly, Han admits that he is moved by stories of heroism in the classical tradition, just not anything contemporary in America (69). As he explains, "Here in this cosmopolitan city I saw Lin as living in a narrow world, a small world in a large. No message came back and forth from the large world to the little nor from the little world to the large. The big world did not know the small world, nor the small world the big" (69). The role of the exiled nationalist is too limited for Han because he had already rejected the role of martyr in coming to America: "I could have [...] written my vengeance against Japan in martyr's blood, a blood which like that of the Tasmanians is strangely silent though to a man they wrote" (9). Instead, he chose to "engraft [his] scholar inherited kingdom upon the world's thought" (9). Here Kang works with the image of a cutting taken from a plant to convey both Han's and Korea's rootlessness and hope for

new life in a new context. For Han, who believes that Korea can no longer sustain life, the only hope for his, and therefore Korea's, future is to cut himself away from his roots. In engrafting himself, the cutting, upon the new world, he may be able to bring both himself and Korean scholarship to new life.

To Wan Kim is an artist who represents the painful rootlessness of the exile condition. Han describes Kim as more like the preceding Oriental generation in mood and outlook (159). Kim is, in his own words, "a Korean ghost" (157). He uses traditional tools and techniques to create his art and draws his inspiration from classical Chinese poetry (159). At the same time, he is critical of himself for being seemingly unable to move forward with the world. Attached to neither his homeland nor his new country, Kim wanders from place to place, seemingly unable to find happiness. After spending twelve years in Europe, he has come to New York, but perceiving a conflict between the city's nature and classical learning, Kim is lost there as well. He asks Han, "but tell me, what now is to be our fate? Being unable to go back to that previous existence, being unable to label ourselves in this new world...becoming lost within another world?" (166). Even the thought of Korea being freed from the Japanese does not sustain him as it does Pak because he believes that "No one is free. We are all chained" (153). He does not share Han's perception of America as a land of opportunity, asking at one point, "Why not cut the hearts and livers of fools out and feed them to some monster the way I eat chicken livers? That way, no more fools and no more heartbreak. Here, toss them to Lady Liberty" (246).

Amazingly, Kim appears to find some solace when he falls in love with Helen Hancock, an upper-class white woman. Although Helen's parents welcome him into

their home on many occasions because of Mr. Hancock's interest in Asian art, there are, again, restrictions placed upon Korean men as potential suitors of American women. As Elaine Kim argues, Kim's "rootlessness and alienation are compounded by the color bar which prevents him from ever being accepted as anything more than an adopted child by the Western literary establishment" (*Asian American Literature* 38). He commits suicide when he is forced apart from Helen. In *Assimilating Asians: Gendered Strategies of Authorship in America*, Patricia Chu writes, "that Helen Hancock herself is not as important as the abstract hope of belonging, and of being mentally at rest, which she represents, is suggested by the fact that Han identifies Kim with Ulysses the exile, not Paris, and Hamlet the displaced prince, not Romeo the thwarted lover" (32). This image of the white woman as a symbol of home and belonging is supported in the third and final part of the novel, in which Han, too, falls in love with a white woman onto whom he transfers his dreams of America.

Han sees the appropriately named Trip as "mystically interwoven into [his] whole dream of America" (354). As Chu observes, "both Han's conduct in the courtship and his narration of it are mediated through his deep love of literature and his knowledge of the Western classics and the Anglo-American literary tradition. [. . .] Han selects Trip because she is a poet" (33). For Han, Trip will be the one who can understand him and help him translate himself, metaphorically, into someone who can be accepted in America. Chu reads Han's obsession with Trip as both a desire for a spiritual home in America and "an antidote to Han's fear of negation as a scholar and writer of literary texts. [. . .] Trip, then, is also the audience Han seeks in America, someone who will read, translate, and value the 'Oriental poems' that comprise his subjectivity" (35). Indeed,

Han tries to make Trip the recorder and interpreter of his life, asking for her help writing his life story. When this fails, he gives her a paper on Poe that he has written, hoping that by sharing his poetic soul with her they will become closer. For Han, Trip is not only a receptor and interpreter of poetry; she is also the embodiment of Western literature. In his mind, she surpasses the tradition of Western literary heroines: "Miranda, Rosalind, Imogen, all Western heroines, crowded to take their place behind the warm, sweet face of my Western love, and the fanfare of all Western literature broke in my brain until she was like a mystic bloom set in the land of beauty forever" (309). Concerned that his feelings will overwhelm Trip, Han sees himself as courting her in a distinctly Western, restrained poetic way, giving her the immortal "Keatsean kiss that was never kissed" (309). Trip is unaware of Han's concealed feelings and not even vaguely interested in him until he takes her to Chinatown. When Trip is approached by a police officer there to protect American girls in Chinatown, Han becomes representative of exotic adventures in her eyes and is an exciting companion. He is nothing more than an evening's entertainment, though, and she does not inform him when she moves out of her apartment.

This implied rejection is not as difficult for Han as one might think, though, because Trip is more symbolic than real for him. In Chu's words, "When Han loses track of Trip's whereabouts, he is disappointed but not really crushed because his ideal of 'the romance of America' remains intact and pleasantly vague" (34). Kang writes, "Trip seemed a dream, or if real, hidden now by all the obstacles of fate, time, space, and the world. But I did not forget her. Nor what I had come to America to find. And I set out now inspired to seek the romance of America. [. . .] I became the man who must hunt and hunt for the spiritual home" (322). The fact that Han's rejection leads him on an

additional quest illustrates Kang's concern with the difficulty Koreans faced in establishing homes in America. Chu concludes that for the male writers in her study, authorship emerges as an important issue because at the time of arrival, Asian immigrant men had difficulty founding families because of their separation from wives and children. For them, writing "serves as a symbolic means of self-fathering and fathering literary, if not actual, progeny while also intervening in the pubic discourses that publicly justify their marginalization, the discourses that form the orientalist side of the exclusion narrative" (Chu 62). This reading resonates with Kang's life. Although he later married and fathered children, he was continually concerned with establishing an Asian presence in American literature upon which others could build their work.[146] The concern with literary progeny figures in the novel as well, through Han's desire for Trip to help him author his autobiography. He insists that together they will produce the text that will share the ideas he has inside him with the West. Trip rejects his plan, however, comparing her own writing to a stillborn baby and saying that she would rather write about America anyway.

Throughout the text Han is reminded of the conditions under which he will be accepted in America -- as a laborer and a curiosity -- and the conditions under which he will not -- as a lover, a husband, and a citizen. Toward the end of the novel, Han is hitchhiking and is picked up by Senator Kirby, who tells him that if he wants to be an American badly enough, he can. Han is quick to realize the flaws in this logic. Legally he cannot become a citizen. Chu argues that by presenting Han's conversation with

[146] Kang's success in this enterprise is shown in his influence on not only Korean writers but other Asian Americans as well. Filipino American writer Carlos Bulosan claims to have written *America is in the Heart* because he thought that if Kang had succeeded, he could as well.

Senator Kirby in dialogue, "Kang the author demonstrates the mixed message Han receives from America. [. . .] By diplomatically withholding comment on Kirby's final promise, Kang leaves the final assessment of Kirby's promised 'help' open to the reader" (30-31). Kang himself saw citizenship papers as "a symbol of the spiritual America meeting with the physical" ("Oriental Yankee" 63). In his 1931 Guggenheim Fellowship application, Kang wrote: "In practice an American and permanently located here, but debarred by the United States Government from naturalization as an Oriental, I am not a citizen elsewhere, since the Korean Government was dissolved [by Japan] in 1910" (qtd in Sunyoung Lee 376). Despite many petitions filed on his behalf by well-known, politically connected Americans, he never received his own citizenship. Through Han, he hoped to effect change in America's policy toward Korean immigrants.

As with the question of Han's citizenship, Kang concludes *East Goes West* on a note of uncertainty. The potential for a romance with Trip exists but has not yet materialized, and consequently Han has not yet found a permanent place in America. He realizes that he cannot return to Korea either because of political difficulties there and the spiritual changes he has undergone in the United States: "My own beyond-time, time-traveling ties have been made on American soil. There are besides political difficulties besetting the Korean who returns to native shores. Perhaps spiritually it would be difficult to return whole-heartedly, and I would be there an exile from America. The soul has become molded to the Western pattern, the whole man has become softened somewhat by the luxuries of Western living" (367-68). In closing, Kang relates a dream that illustrates Han's perception of his position. From the top of a tree, Han is able to see "a hairlike bridge" that leads to "a paradise of wild and flowery magic, with mountains

and waterfalls and little gushing streams on which as in an old Chinese landscape could be discerned the scholars with their brush-pens or tranquil fishing rods" (368). Beckoned by his boyhood friends on the other side, Han begins to cross to them, but as he almost reaches the other side, he sees that all his money and a set of car keys have fallen out of his pocket and are out of reach. This is different from the dream he has always had before, in which Trip accompanied him in the car as he entered the village (368). The dream then changes, and Han runs down into a cellar underneath the pavement of a city, still seeking his keys. He is trapped there with "some frightened-looking Negroes" as they attempt to fight off a mob with clubs and knives. Finally, the cellar is torched, and Han "awoke like a phoenix out of a burst of flames" (368-69).[147] Earlier in the novel, Kim comments on the inaccessibility of money and power to immigrants, but Han himself never seems to link his difficulties in America to his race. Through his dream, Kang shows that subconsciously, Han thinks otherwise. Still, when he awakes, Han recalls that in the Oriental interpretation, death by fire in a dream means success and good fortune, and he hopes that he will live again, happily, in another time and another world. By suggesting that Han cannot live happily in the present in America, Kang subtly undermines Han's own summation of his situation once again and calls into question America's willingness to accept Korean immigrants. That Kang's contemporaries could so easily overlook his critiques of American life suggests, to a

[147] Han meets African Americans with limited work opportunities similar to his several times in the novel, including Lozarro, an educated man who drinks because the only work he can find is as a house servant, and Wagstaff, an elevator operator who is in law school and asks Han to consider "what room is there in America for an educated Negro?" (273). For a full treatment of Kang's consideration of the oppression and displacement experienced by both African American and Korean characters, see Stephen Knadler's "Unacquiring Negrophobia: Younghill Kang and the Cosmopolitan Resistance to the Black and White Logic of Naturalization" and Kun Jong Lee's "The African-American Presence in Younghill Kang's *East Goes West*."

certain extent, a willful blindness to his presentation of them. Still, Kang's treatment of assimilation, citizenship, intermarriage, and economy was important in its time and introduced issues that would be taken up again later by the Korean American writers who followed him. Because of limitations on immigration, however, the next wave of Korean writers did not appear until several decades after Kang's novels were published.[148]

Korean Americans in the Post-WWII Era

In the meantime, the bombing of Pearl Harbor brought additional difficulties for Korean Americans who were in many cases assumed to be Japanese and then shunned, tortured, and driven from their homes. Korean Americans' concern was not solely with the public's actions, however. As Takaki explains, "government policies also failed to distinguish the Koreans from the Japanese. In 1940, the Alien Registration Act classified Korean immigrants as subjects of Japan; after the United States declared war against Japan, the government identified Koreans here as 'enemy aliens'" (*Strangers* 365). In response to these incidents, when America entered the war, the Korean National Association in Los Angeles resolved:

> 1. Koreans shall promote unity during the war and act harmoniously.
>
> 2. Koreans shall work for the defense of the country where they reside and all those who are healthy should volunteer for national guard duty. Those

[148] There were several Korean American writers publishing in the 1940s, but their work tended to center on the Korean experience outside of America, and they were not widely read at the time. Morris Pang published "A Korean Immigrant," which presents a first-generation immigrant's memories of life in Korea, China, Russia, Japan, and Hawaii in 1949. Induk Pahk, who arrived before 1945 and became popular in the 1960s, wrote autobiographical texts that stress the role of spirituality in her success as a Korean educator, including *September Monkey* (1954), *The Hour of the Tiger* (1965), and *The Cock Still Crows* (1977).

> who are financially capable should purchase war bonds, and those who are skilled should volunteer for appropriate duties.
>
> 3. Koreans shall wear a badge identifying themselves as Koreans, for security purposes. (Takaki, *Strangers* 364)

Out of necessity, Korean Americans became extremely patriotic. Koreans who were fluent in Japanese aided the war effort as teachers and translators, women volunteered for the Red Cross, and men served as emergency fire wardens (Takaki, *Strangers* 367). The Korean Cultural Association, Inc. published *The Culture of Korea: Racial Background, Sketch of Geography, History of Korea, Religion, Literature, Art, Science, Music, Economic Background, and History of Revolutionary Movement* in 1945 to spread awareness of Korea and its culture in America.[149] While the internment period closed many doors for them, it did open others. Koreans were able to move into Japanese positions vacated when they were taken. With the defeat of the Japanese in 1945, Korea became independent once again, for the first time in four decades, but by this time many of the early immigrants who have dreamed of returning to Korea had died, leaving descendents who lacked a strong connection to the Korean homeland.

Unfortunately, the long-awaited freedom from occupation did not last long. The Soviet Union invaded Manchuria and northern Korea on August 9, 1949, and within one year had established a communist government under Kim Il-Sung, triggering the flight of thousands of Koreans across the 38th parallel to the American-occupied south. Despite the United Nations' recommendations for the establishment of a unified Korea under a

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[149] For background on the association, see Mrs. Samuel Halm's essay in this volume, "The Korean American Cultural Ass'n, Inc.," which considers the history of the association from its founding in 1939 to the book's publication in 1945 and includes current bylaws and past and present officers.

democratic government, the country was divided into two distinct parts in 1948, with the Soviet-backed People's Republic of Korea in the North and the American-supported Republic of Korea in the South. A Northern attack on the South in 1950 led to three years of war, which finally concluded with the establishment of a demilitarized zone at the 38th parallel on July 27, 1953 (Lehrer 34). The war brought a second large wave of Koreans to America in the 1950s, as war brides, orphans, and other dependents were allowed into the country even though Korean immigration was restricted to one hundred per year, according to the quotas set up by the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952 (Lehrer 69). Between 1950 and 1965, approximately 17,000 Koreans came to the United States, "most of them non-quota spouses of American citizens" (Takaki, *Strangers* 417). According to Hyung-chan Kim, between 1960 and 1965 alone, 12,000 wives and children of American servicemen arrived (601).

The first Koreans who considered themselves professional writers and sought recognition from the American reading public came to the United States as part of the post-Korean War wave, including Kim Yong Ik, the younger Peter Hyun (whose father Peter Hyun was born in Hawaii), and Richard E. Kim (Han 144), who would become the best-known Korean American novelist until Chang-rae Lee emerged in the mid-1990s. Like Kim Yong Ik, Kim identifies himself as Korean American, but his major fictional works are set in Korea against the backdrop of major events in Korean history and feature Korean characters. He has said, "Korea is the foundation of my literature, my eternal

pursuit of my literary way and all of my literary resources" (qtd. in Choy 284). This is true of the majority of writers from this period.[150]

The 1965 Immigration Act, which removed the quota system based on national origins, led to a third major influx of Korean immigrants. According to Lehrer, for the first time in four decades Koreans could enter the country freely and did so by the hundreds of thousands (13). Between 1965 and 1976, over 175,000 Koreans came to the United States (Hyung-chan Kim 601). Because of the preference system outlined in this Act, South Korean doctors, nurses, and other professionals in the fields of science and technology flooded the country. Like their predecessors, they filled an American labor shortage, but this time they entered white-collar positions in hospitals and research laboratories. By the early 1970s, many were taking positions in inner-city hospitals that American doctors avoided, filling an even greater need (Lehrer 70-73). Takaki estimates that "between 1965 and 1977, over 13,000 Korean physicians, nurses, pharmacists, and dentists entered the United States" (*Strangers* 438).[151] Spouses, siblings, parents, and other members of extended families from all walks of life were able to enter under a loophole in the immigration law and followed them (Lehrer 70). Once they became naturalized citizens, these immigrants were able to sponsor others from home and did so

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[150] One notable exception is Easurk Emsen Charr, who came to the U.S. in 1903 and whose *The Golden Mountain: The Autobiography of a Korean Immigrant, 1895-1960* was published in 1961. Like Kang, Charr was atypical in that he earned a college degree in the United States, although he was first a worker on the Hawaiian plantations. *The Golden Mountain* traces Charr's life from his boyhood in Korea to his service in the military during World War I and subsequent battle for citizenship and work as a civil servant. It overflows with the rhetoric of American exceptionalism and the immigrant's thankfulness, downplaying the presence of racism in Korean Americans' lives and painting a wholly positive picture of the immigrant experience. Because Charr had to resort to publishing the book through a vanity press and only several hundred copies were printed, it has not attracted much scholarly attention until recently, when it was reissued by the University of Illinois Press with an introduction situating Charr's life within Korean history.

[151] Not all Korean professionals have been able to find work in their fields in the United States, however. Like their Cuban counterparts, many have struggled with language barriers, obtaining the proper credentials, and glass ceilings.

at such a high rate that the 1965 Immigration Act "was informally dubbed the 'Brothers and Sisters Act'" (Lehrer 74). That rate did not drop significantly in the years following; in a 1979 poll taken by a Seoul, South Korea newspaper, fifty percent of South Koreans said that they would come to America if given the chance (Lehrer 17).

Between 1960 and 1985, the Korean population in the United States went from 10,000 to 500,000 (Takaki, *Strangers* 437). The *Korean American Coalition-Census Information Center in Partnership with the Center for Korean American and Korean Studies, California State University, Los Angeles* shows that the Korean population in America climbed 34.8% between 1990 and 2000. According to the 1990 census, 798,849 Koreans were living in the United States, and by 2000, the figure was 1,076,872, making them the fastest growing group of Asians in America, although they are still only the fifth largest Asian group overall in the United States (http://www.calstatela.edu/centers/ckaks/census_tables.html). In *Korean Immigrants and the Challenge of Adjustment*, Moon H. Jo explains that while the attitude toward Korean immigrants has been decidedly hostile in those areas in which they represent an economic threat, such as in already desperate urban neighborhoods, on the whole, Americans seem unconcerned with this growing presence in the United States; "they have made little or no effort to learn more about their new neighbors or to try to meet and welcome these strangers into their midst. As a result, the Korean immigrants are left to muddle their own way through the maze of problems they encounter in surmounting the language barrier, social isolation, family tension, and the challenge of earning a livelihood" (xiv). Perhaps because of this, Korean-language radio broadcasts and newspaper are popular in areas with large Korean populations, such as Los Angeles (Hyung-chan Kim 606).

Koreans who have relatives in the United States continue to comprise the largest group of currently arriving Koreans; "since 1972 a majority of the approximately 20,000 Koreans arriving annually in the United States have been brought over by their relatives. (Lehrer 75). As evidence of this group's intent to remain in the United States, in 1975, eighty-six percent of Korean households in New York were married, and the majority of Koreans entering the country now apply for citizenship at the end of the required five-year residency period (Takaki, *Strangers* 437). While some come for political reasons, most have embraced a vision of opportunity. For those who have poor English skills or lack contacts or the ability to secure American licenses in their fields, blue-collar work has become the alternative. Those who were white-collar workers in Korea are sometimes forced to "become auto mechanics, welders, radio repairers, and television technicians as well as gas-station attendants, gardeners, and janitors" in America (Takaki, *Strangers* 440).

Koreans have also thrived in the small business environment. Many Korean entrepreneurs buy abandoned businesses in urban areas and make them profitable, while others start from scratch. An estimated ninety-five percent of dry cleaners in Chicago are owned by Koreans, Korean groceries are found in most New York neighborhoods, and Korean import-export businesses in New York, Los Angeles, and El Paso continue to grow (Lehrer 76). One aspect of Korean American culture that has enabled the growth of Korean-owned businesses is the practice of the Korean *kye* loan system,[152] in which business owners contribute to a financial pool that supports one entrepreneur at a time (Lehrer 81). Another factor is the relative financial security of Koreans entering the

[152] This is also known as the *ggeh*.

country. As of 1981, the South Korean government has allowed immigrants to bring up to $100,000 with them to start small businesses in America (Takaki, *Strangers* 441). Members of this newest wave of immigrants sell their homes and possessions before leaving so that they will have money to invest in a new business upon arrival. Start-up businesses are family-run, saving labor costs, and are pushed to success by owners who work from four or five a.m. until late in the evening. This lifestyle is difficult and often unfulfilling, but first-generation immigrants willingly undertake it so that their children can attend American universities and make a better life for themselves.

Along with other Asian American groups, Korean Americans have come to be viewed as a "model minority," a label which has led to some governmental and social exclusion of them. Takaki notes that, "thinking Asian Americans have succeeded, government officials have sometimes denied funding for social service programs designed to help Asian Americans learn English and find employment. Failing to realize that there are poor Asian families, college administrators have sometimes excluded Asian-American students from Educational Opportunity Programs (EOP), which are intended for *all* students from low income families" (*Strangers* 478). Socially, Koreans and other Asian Americans sometimes come in conflict with other groups who have not achieved their level of success. For example, Korean entrepreneurs' work ethic and ability to create thriving businesses in poor, urban neighborhoods have contributed to an ongoing conflict between Korean Americans and African Americans in these areas. African Americans sometimes perceive Korean business owners as exploitative, exclusionary, and cold because of their practice of hiring Koreans only and their formality in business transactions. Korean American business-owners, on the other hand,

may perceive African Americans as poor, lazy, violent, criminal; both groups' perceptions are, of course, based in stereotypes and misunderstanding of cultural and economic conditions (Takaki, *Strangers* 494). Nonetheless, the outcome of these misunderstandings has been devastating. The Los Angeles Riots that followed the Rodney King verdict were an explosion of the tension between these two groups. When the rioting was over, more than three thousand businesses had been burned and looted, many of them in Koreatown, where "nearly half" of the Koreans coming to America each year make their home (Lehrer 75). Calls for cross-cultural understanding and a desire to move forward with a new spirit have been more common since the riots, but the problem is far from being solved.[153]

In addition to this inter-group tension, Hyung-chan Kim notes significant inner-group tensions between Korean Americans of different generations and backgrounds. The second generation, or *ise*, has had difficulty understanding the first generation's nationalism because they do not feel as connected to a Korean identity as their parents do. Separated from the family homeland by physical, cultural, and psychological distances that are difficult to overcome, they have become more American than Korean and consequently do not share the same sense of loss, dislike, and distrust of the Japanese, and feelings of abandonment (Takaki, *Strangers* 292).[154] Interracial marriages have become much more common among the members of the second generation than the

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[153] For detailed examinations of the relationships between Korean Americans and African Americans, see Kwang Chung Kim's 1999 *Koreans in the Hood: Conflict with African Americans*, Nancy Abelmann and John Lie's 1995 *Blue Dreams: Korean Americans and the Los Angeles Riots*, and Pyong Gap Min's 1996 *Caught in the Middle: Korean Merchants in America's Multiethnic Cities*.

[154] They have, however, experienced some of the same American discrimination. In recent years, second-generation Korean Americans in higher education settings have become targets for racial slurs and hate crimes on college campuses.

previous one, leading to the redefinition of what it means to be a Korean American. According to Hyung-chan Kim, descendents of the older groups view the newer immigrants as lacking an understanding of American society and therefore are unable to interfere in the cultural life of those Korean Americans born here (despite their attempts) and see their own efforts to connect to heritage as unappreciated by newcomers. Further, tension exists between the larger Korean community and the war brides of the 1950s, who have been stereotyped as "lower in social class, uneducated, and socially unacceptable" (605). Finally, Hyung-chan Kim sees tension caused by the attitude of some newer immigrants, particularly political refugees, who expect respect for the standing they held in Korea rather than for their achievements in the United States. However, Kim concludes that all of these fissures will likely lessen through the eventual process of acculturation and the growth of a new generation of American-born Koreans (605).

Recovery of Texts and Experiences

In the 1970s and 1980s, Korean American literature blossomed though the efforts of a younger generation of scholars with the desire to recover early texts and to record the history they represent, some of whom entered the United States after 1965 and others who were born here. As Elaine Kim wrote in 1982, "history has taught us to regret the relative paucity of published literature in English that expresses the Asian American culture and experience: hence, today's feverish attempts to collect oral histories from among rapidly vanishing oldtimers and to restore our foundations through contemporary writing about an almost-forgotten past" (*Asian American Literature* 278). During the

1970s and 1980s, published oral histories and autobiographies were dominant forms in Korean American literature.

One example is Alice Chai's article "A Picture Bride from Korea," published in *BRIDGE: An Asian American Perspective* in 1978.[155] Based upon interviews with Mrs. Kim, the picture bride of the title, Chai's article is a first-person recounting of Mrs. Kim's life.[156] Born in Korea in 1904, at the age of twenty the narrator sends her picture to a matchmaking cousin and leaves for Hawaii in search of the freedom and opportunity that marrying a man there could provide. Her departure is arranged in secret because, at that time, her going would have been perceived as selling herself (37). Arriving in Hawaii, she is very disappointed to see that her groom is twenty-five years older than she is and that the young, handsome picture he had sent of himself was very outdated. She decides to marry him anyway rather than return to Korea because she values the chance for a better life more than a handsome face. Because Mrs. Kim is interested in "living well," she seeks employment. Over the course of her thirty-four-year marriage, she goes from working in a laundry to owning one and, finally, to owning a hotel. Each section of the narrative emphasizes how difficult the work is, but Mrs. Kim is very happy with her ability to live in greater and greater comfort. Interestingly, her dreams are not made possible by either her husband or living in America. Rather, she is empowered and

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[155] Ki Chuck Lee's 1989 narrative "From Korea to Heaven Country" (1989) and Bong-youn Choy's *Koreans in America* (1979), which contains five oral histories, are other examples of these kinds of texts. More recently, Elaine Kim and Eui-Young Yu collected thirty-eight oral histories in *East to America* to offer a diverse picture of the Korean American experience.

[156] For a more recent treatment of the picture bride experience, see Cathy Song's 1986 book *Picture Bride*, which is a lyric collection of poems depicting the relationship between a picture bride and her older husband.

enabled by the financial and emotional support she receives from the community of Korean women in Hawaii, from whom she receives encouragement and business loans.

In addition to becoming a successful businesswoman, Mrs. Kim is a committed Korean nationalist. She joins the church because it supports nationalism, studies English and passes the Red Cross exam so that she can volunteer for the World War II effort (which she, like many, sees as a nationalist cause), collects clothing for war refugees, and sells food to make money for the effort. Her greatest sacrifice, however, is giving her son permission to join the Navy. When she is unsure about the wisdom of allowing him to go, he reminds her that he will be fighting to free Korea, and she capitulates, despite her fears. Mrs. Kim does return to Korea several times after the war ends, but ultimately she decides to stay in the United States because, after having lived in America so long, life in Korea seems too difficult. The emphasis in the text on America as a land of unlimited opportunity for those willing to work hard mirrors most early immigrant narratives. However, "A Picture Bride" departs from the pattern because of the absence of any descriptions of pressure to assimilate in order to succeed. Rather, emphasis is placed upon the difficulties of being a working woman, specifically a working mother, and the pleasure of female empowerment in the business world.

Since Alice Chai did not publish any notes with the article that explain her methodology in creating it, it is difficult to assess the extent of her influence over it. However, Chai's dedication to sharing the experience of women like Mrs. Kim is clear. She presented the article at a conference before enlarging it for publication and also worked on a film version entitled *Picture Bride*. In all of its forms, "A Picture Bride

from Korea" is valuable because of the insight it offers into a little understood group of women who played a vital role in Korean American history.

In the late 1980s and 1990s, several Koreans who had come to the United States as children in the first wave of immigrants or were born to parents who came in that wave published accounts of their lives. Peter Hyun's 1986 memoir, *Man Sei!: The Making of a Korean American*, for example, shows his childhood in Hawaii, Korea, and China. Among examples of this type of text, Mary Paik Lee's *Quiet Odyssey: A Pioneer Korean Woman in America* (1990) offers readers the most expansive view of the Korean American experience in the United States, covering eighty years in the lives of the Paik and Lee families. Lee, who was born Kuang Sun Paik in 1900, wrote her memoir in 1984. Rendered homeless when Japanese military officers took their house, the Paik family fled to Inchon and from there boarded a ship to Hawaii in 1905. Although her family easily fit into the family of agricultural workers that was already there and began attending a church, they were not happy and took another ship to the mainland when the first opportunity presented itself. Through the story of her family that moved at least twenty times to find work, Lee presents the experiences of Koreans in Japan, Hawaii, California and several other Western states as they farm, mine, and enter into businesses such as fruit and vegetable stands, laundries, and real estate. She also examines the condition of Korean exile, nationalism, the role of the church, education, and the experience of prejudice. Tracing four generations, Lee shows the many changes Koreans have experienced over the course of the twentieth century in America.

Lee's original sixty-five-page text was edited by Sucheng Chan, a professor at the University of California, Santa Cruz, who sought to transform a family record into a text

she considered to be publishable as a social and historical document. Chan chose to edit the text and solicit further information from Lee because of the value she thought Lee's story had as a meaningful historical text for students and scholars. Having decided to step down from administrative work at her university so that she could spend more time researching and recording the stories of early Asian American immigrants, Chan met Lee "by sheer good fortune" when Lee's son Allen read an article about her in the local newspaper (Mary Paik Lee xiii). Compelled by reading Lee's original narrative, she interviewed Lee several times and worked closely with her to publish the text. Her role in the scholarly edition of Lee's memoir was "to augment Mrs. Lee's text with a comprehensive explication, to verify her factual statements, and to edit for increased readability her lively and perceptive prose" (135). Although Chan conducted ten hours of interviews with Lee in an attempt to get additional information for the text, she found that ninety percent of the taped material was already in Lee's manuscript. Additionally, while Chan as an editor attempted to draw from Lee information that would change the direction of the text, trying, for example, to get Lee to speak more specifically about Koreans' relationships with Japanese immigrants in America, when Lee did not want to comment further on this issue, she ceded authorial control to Lee and understood her reasons for telling her story in the way that she did. Chan explains changes she made to Lee's text in detail in Appendix A. These included deletion or correction of historical data external to the family story that could not be verified, combination of some choppy sentences, and the addition of pronouns such as I, he, she, and it to sentences lacking subjects. Chan is careful to note that she did not change Lee's tone in any way, especially in terms of Lee's responses to both racism and kindness from others. Chan's lengthy

introduction on Korean history provides what she sees as the necessary global context for reading the narrative (xviii). She covers Korean geography, politics, religion, and gender roles from 1592 to the acculturation of the first generation of Koreans in America in the early twentieth century, arguing that a knowledge of this history is necessary to understanding the forces that brought Koreans like Lee's family to America and to understanding why religion, politics, and work played such a prominent role in the lives of Korean immigrants.[157] This kind of introduction is uncommon in similar texts in other immigrant literary traditions, although it is a staple in Korean American memoirs and autobiographies. That Chan and other editors have found it essential to include this material speaks to their desire to establish these texts as important historical records, but also to the extent to which Korean history was erased through their conquering by the Japanese and to Americans' general ignorance of Asian and American history.

Lee opens her story with an overview of Japan's entry into Korea to show the "tragedy [that] began a long history of aggression against Korea and created the unhappy world in which Koreans have lived since 1905" (3). She closes the text by referring to a moment of heroism that ended in further tragedy -- the thirty-three Korean patriots' signing of the Korean Declaration of Independence on March 1, 1919, that led to their deaths. Her final statement in the text is about Korean Americans' yearly remembrances of the "courage and sacrifices" of these patriots (134). In book-ending her own life story in this way, Lee establishes the importance of Korean political events to the lives of Korean Americans. This is a theme she develops throughout her discussion of major

[157] Interestingly, this kind of prefatory material appears in most of the critical work published on the book as well. See, for example, Monica Chiu's "Constructing 'Home' in Mary Paik Lee's *Quiet Odyssey: A Pioneer Korean Woman in America.*

events from her life in America. For example, after she describes the humiliating ways in which Asians were treated in America, she includes her mother's explanation of how their relatives were faring in Korea under the new Japanese government that made them second-class citizens. Of the many losses that the Korean people suffered and the many changes to their lifestyle, she writes, "It was the complete humiliation of an entire nation. Since all letters leaving Korea were censored, the tragedy was unknown to the rest of the world. But there were letters from people who had escaped to China or elsewhere. We could not do anything to help our loved ones; we had only the agony of hoping and praying. Life was just one crisis after another" (42). Here as in other chapters, the experiences of Koreans in America are contextualized within the larger experience of Korean oppression, and the urge to tell the story of immigrants in America is overshadowed by the need to relate the larger tragedy that had been erased from history in the outside world. Here the Korean American narrative, as Lee tells it, mirrors Cuban American texts in its emphasis on the relationship of the history of the homeland to daily life in the United States.

Beyond presenting the experiences of her family in Korea as a lesson in suffering, Lee offers stories of her ancestors, particularly women, as a source of personal strength and example. She establishes a history of female literacy in her family, beginning with her grandmother who learned to read and write from her husband, and who then taught her daughter-in-law (Lee's mother), who, in turn, practiced writing by using a stick to scratch letters into the earth floor (3). Lee's grandmother taught other women to read and write as well so that they could study the Bible. Her life's ambition was to start a girl's school, which she did despite opposition and criticism from men in her village. Lee

comments, "her life story shows that whenever women get together and work for a good cause, miracles can happen" (4-5). She furthers this view when she explains that her grandmother would not leave her school to come to Hawaii with the rest of the family: "She was certainly a very remarkable woman, with much courage in the face of danger. It is women like her who get things started in spite of opposition, and who accomplish what seem like impossibilities" (9). In these and other moments, Lee is direct about the qualities she admires and the people she wishes her readers to emulate. She underscores the heroism of those who stayed behind when she explains her grandparents' decision to stay: "They knew what would happen to them in the future. They were prepared to face great hardship or worse, but they wanted at least one member of their family to survive and live a better life somewhere else. Such strong, quiet courage in ordinary people in the face of danger is really something to admire and remember always" (12). Because Lee seeks both to record her family's history and to inspire others through it, she adds such comments to guide readers' thinking about her subjects. Although she never asks readers to admire her decisions and work ethic, she implies that they are worthy of praise and emulation as well since they mirror her family's.

Lee's tone remains positive throughout the text as she emphasizes overcoming hardship and presents a record of strength through times of adversity. As Chiu explains, "the walls barring her from full participation in owning land, voting, and attending certain schools and churches cannot contain her spirit" (136). Lee shows herself and her family as determined and enterprising in any situation. Her mother and father labor for decades without complaint, at the expense of their health, and find inventive ways to improve their lives. Lee describes in detail her father's creating a two-piece mill so that

they can grind beans. She concludes, "he was always thinking up ways to improve our living conditions, always making things out of materials other people have discarded. We never had much, but he always tried to make our lives as comfortable as possible -- even though harsh circumstances made that difficult most of the time" (39). Lee presents their poverty as real and painful but also able to be overcome with a positive attitude and a determination to succeed. Similarly, she emphasizes the discrimination she and her family face as they move around California looking for work, but she does so with acceptance, not bitterness. In Chiu's words, "despite political, social, and economic regulations that attempt to define the Asian individual, Lee navigates among such obstacles, resisting cultural confinement in order to render America her *home*land (126). Lee survives the taunts of schoolchildren, the sneers of wives in whose homes she is a domestic worker, and the threats against her children that are a repercussion of the anti-Japanese sentiments resulting from the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Throughout this frank acknowledgement of prejudice, she maintains her position of not wanting to name individuals about whom she has negative recollections because she does not want to hurt anyone. This strategy allows her to instruct her readers and not alienate them. In this way, Lee's narrative is a fascinating mixture of the features of early-twentieth century immigrant texts, which praised America and overlooked its flaws, and later texts, which dealt with discrimination in more detail and clearly laid blame.

Lee balances tales of inhumane treatment with portraits of individuals who took a stand. Unlike Frederick Douglass, who offered the names of oppressors but omitted the names of those who assisted him because of his consciousness of their situation, Lee remembers and praises anyone who was kind to her or offered her and her family

assistance, as a way of affirming positive behavior toward Koreans and downplaying the impact of discrimination on her early life. Although few of the people she mentions act in an extraordinary way -- indeed, most just treat her with basic human kindness -- Lee includes their names and describes what they did for her and her family. For example, she mentions a Mrs. Stewart who gave her her first and only doll (18). She also writes:

> During my early life, I had the very good fortune to meet kind people who helped me in times of dire need. When my family came here in 1906, the feeling towards all Orientals was hostile and cruel. "For White Only" signs were everywhere. We could not go to restrooms, theaters, swimming pools, barbershops, and so forth. But in the midst of all this, there were also kind and courageous persons, like the principal, who helped me in spite of their friends' disapproval. That was a wonderful experience. (48-49)

Another model is a county judge who is the father of a white friend of Lee's. He also helps to smooth her entry into the church and her brother Ernest's way in school. She uses his efforts on their behalf as illustration of her father's statement that "it often takes someone of great courage and position to turn something around" (55). This lesson is highlighted again during her discussion of the period of Japanese internment, during which Hannah Nixon stood up for Lee against hostile customers in Nixon's grocery store, and the manager of a J.C. Penney store protected Lee's right to shop there (95-96). Through their examples, Lee encourages her readers to act on behalf of their Asian American neighbors in response to discrimination.

Throughout the text, Lee encounters people who are not aware of the prejudice against Asian immigrants. She educates them, and, in some cases, they become her champions. The minister of the Hollister Presbyterian Church, for example, cannot understand why she might feel uncomfortable attending. Lee writes, "I had to tell him about the kind of world I lived in" (51). Once he is aware of her situation, he invites her to the church, leading his congregation to accept her through his example, and even insists that she become a Sunday school teacher. She takes that opportunity to teach her students about the world outside America and humanity (50-51). When she is living in Anaheim, she meets a white woman who does not understand why Lee cannot swim in the public pool because she has never paid attention to the "Whites Only" signs in the park. Again, Lee calmly introduces a stranger to her world (78). Years later an American friend is chastising Lee for not voting and does not realize that she cannot legally do so until Lee corrects her. Although she is angry over the treatment she and her family receive, Lee refrains from bitterness as she gradually introduces readers to the hidden history of discrimination against Asians, a history equally as hidden as Asian history, culture, and even humanity were to most of the Americans she encountered as she was growing up.

Like many Korean Americans who had embraced Christianity, the Paiks' religion shapes the patient way in which they handle discrimination in America. Their arrival in California prompts the first of many descriptions of discrimination they face and the Paik family's patient attitude toward it. She recalls being laughed at and spit upon when they leave the boat. Her father answers his daughter's question about why they have come where they are not wanted by reminding her that the first white missionaries who landed

in Korea had received the same treatment and that "anything new and strange causes some fear at first, so ridicule and violence often result" (12). His solution to the problem is for the family to "study hard and earn to show Americans that we are just as good as they are" (13-14). Lee credits this as her first lesson in living and says that she never forgot it. Indeed, it sustains her throughout the narrative. When the children are laughed at for collecting thrown-out animal organs from the slaughterhouse, their father reminds them to thank God that others did not know the value of what was thrown out because it prevented them from starving (16). When they suffer under extreme poverty in Colusa because "negative feeling towards Orientals" limits her parents' ability to work, her father's reminders to pray in thanksgiving for their blessings irritate Lee. Recalling the suffering of the family left in Korea and realizing the extent of her parents' suffering change Lee's attitude, however, as she is "awakened [. . .] to the realities of life" (23). Chan notes the tension in the narrative between Lee's father's advice to treat others with Christian charity and Lee's childhood motivation to fight injustice. She uses this tension as evidence to argue that Lee's "desire to write and publish her autobiography is a retrospective attempt to come to terms with the tensions between being a Christian *and* an Asian immigrant in America" (137). Further, she contends, "That her story is an act of reconciliation rather than a full disclosure is corroborated by my not-entirely-successful efforts to elicit more information from her [regarding relations between Koreans and Japanese in America]" (137). In showing her struggle to adopt an accepting, Christian perspective of those who treated her unfairly, Lee presents her own reconciliation of her religion and ethnic experience and encourages readers to come to the same position.

Lee portrays a mixed relationship between Koreans and Japanese in America. While she tells Chan that they avoid the Japanese when possible, crossing to the other side of the street when they see them coming, she also relates other instances in which Koreans are kind to their Japanese neighbors. For example, she and her husband kindly correct a vegetable vendor who tries to sell to them below market price, even though they could have easily taken advantage of his ignorance (75). They watch over the land and home of Japanese neighbors who are taken to an internment camp during World War II. Although the neighbors suggest that the Lees can take anything they want, they do not because of their strong sense of friendship. She sympathetically presents the story of a Japanese American soldier who fights bravely for America in World War II and yet cannot get his hair cut in an American barbershop, even when he is wearing his uniform (105). The Asian American community as a whole suffers greatly during the internment period at the hands of people who do not distinguish between Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans. The Lees' one-year-old son Allen is nearly beaten and many others are, cars are wrecked, and people are made afraid to go out at night (95-96). Although other Korean American writers present Americans mistaking them for Japanese as the final insult in light of Korean/Japanese history, the internment experience seems to make Lee more sympathetic to Japanese Americans. Perhaps this is the reason for her lack of bitterness toward Japanese people as an adult, even though she suffers because she is confused with them. Chiu comments, "given her own angry feelings about discrimination against Koreans, as well as Koreans' general contempt for the Japanese, Lee's words, couched in Chan's editorial notations, offer rich material for addressing hypocrisy and an absent moral harmony among Asian immigrants and nationalities themselves" (131). Indeed,

through these incidents, Lee stresses the importance of an Asian American solidarity, despite past wounds.

Overall, her narrative contains elements of a multicultural consciousness. As Anita Mannur has noted, Lee "posits a version of cross-racial solidarity, identifying commonalities between the way African Americans, Mexican Americans, and Asian Americans were treated" (200). When a black friend tells her that she is lucky not to have been born black, she replies that "color did not seem to be the problem. That we were all in the same situation. The Mexicans people were here first, but they were in the same hopeless state. Due to our mutual problems, all minorities felt a sympathetic bind with one another. We patronized each other's stores, to help out" (103). Lee emphasizes the mutually supportive relationships her family developed with other immigrants as they helped each other survive poverty. For example, she notes the Mexican families who always made enough extra food for her and her older brother when they were schoolchildren: "They didn't have much, but they were willing to share with others. Their generosity turned rainy days into picnics" (41). She posits a shared consciousness toward racism when she describes the reactions that she and her Mexican friends had toward the first movie they had ever seen. The film depicted drunken cowboys taunting and then killing a Chinese man. Lee comments, "That movie reflected the attitude toward Orientals in those days. Our Mexican friends didn't like it, either. They remembered the days when their people were also treated that way. They had bitter memories of how their country lost California" (41-42). She also mentions sympathetically the son of a Jewish neighbor who was not accepted in universities in the eastern United States (107). Lee corrects misperceptions about various ethnic groups, not

just her own, when she has the opportunity. When she meets a German man who insists on calling her Mary because he thinks that "all you Jap women [a]re Mary," she chides him for his ignorant assumptions and further instructs him on the demeaning white practice of calling all black men "boy" (77). According to Lee, he admits to never having thought through these practices for himself and becomes interested in learning more about Asian people and cultures afterward (77). Again, this shows the kind of transformation she hopes to effect and to encourage readers to seek out.

In addition to addressing discrimination and the ways in which she wishes others to respond to it, Lee considers the acculturation process of her own family as they look for the America they had envisioned. Although the Paiks had been on the mainland for "four or five years" before they moved to Claremont, California, Lee credits that move as "our first experience with the American way of living" because for the first time, they lived in a house with a gas stove, electricity, running water, and an indoor tub and toilet (22). To Lee, who was still a young child, these things were miraculous affirmations of their decision to emigrate: "for the first time, I felt glad we had come to America" (22). However, Lee's first vision of America as paradise is reflected not in a home with modern conveniences but in her description of the farm her family works on Roberts Island: "We had never seen a vegetable farm before. It looked like a heavenly paradise to us. Fish jumped up and down in the river, and the banks were full of various vegetables growing wild from seeds scattered by former farmers. We had plenty to eat and to be really thankful for. [. . .] All of a sudden we were in a new world. We felt alive and eager to see everything" (27). Lee attributes their arrival in this paradise to the guiding hand of God, agreeing with her mother that they had been led there (27). Because of their faith,

Koreans like the Paik family saw their journey to America as a fulfillment of God's promise, much as early Jewish immigrants did.

Unlike other family-centered immigrant narratives, in which the children adapt more quickly to their new home than their elders and work to Americanize their parents, in Lee's narrative her father teaches the children lessons in adaptation. In their home in Claremont, he shows them how to flush the toilet, leading her to conclude, "he must have seen these wonders before somewhere, because he wasn't surprised at anything" (22). He also teaches them how to navigate the social environment of their new world, explaining, "there was nothing to be afraid of; now that we were living here in America, where everything is different from Korea, we would have to learn to get along with everyone (16). Lee's father explains how to behave in an American home when she begins her first job cooking and cleaning for a white family at age eleven. He instructs her on how to set the table and explains what the limitations of her interaction with the family should be (24). This instruction is furthered when she leaves home for high school in a town in which she will live with and work for a white family. He says that she should eat in the kitchen and please the wife, whatever happens. For the most part his lessons focus on being the model immigrant worker, an industrious, quiet presence in the home, but he also tells her to learn to think like a man, by which he means that she should make correct judgments, speak when necessary, and "stand up for what is right" (44).

Like most immigrant children, Lee and her brother Meung learn about becoming Americans through public schooling. Called "Hey you!" when they first enter school because the other children cannot remember their names, they realize that it is too late to change their own names, but they determine that any future brothers and sisters should

have American names, beginning with Paik Daw Sun, whom they decide to call Ernest (17). Like Antin, Washington, and others who realize that getting an education will enable their entry into American society, Lee dreams of pursuing a high school degree, although she knows that she will need books and supplies that her family cannot afford.[158] The year before she leaves, she works for her teacher cleaning blackboards and the outhouse, chopping wood for the stove, and ringing the school bell, earning twenty-five cents a day (38). Even with her savings, Lee needs to work to support herself through high school since the nearest school is in Hollister, sixty miles away from where her family is living. She finds a "school girl" job to cover her room and board that requires house and yard work to be done before and after school and on the weekends. Her father suggests that the work combined with studying will be too much for her, but she argues that she can succeed and leaves home at fifteen, the day her sister Charlotte, the eighth of the Paik children, is born (44-45).

While Lee is dogged in pursuit of her education and thankful for the opportunity to attend school, she describes her schooling as "a constant battle of wits" because of the uninformed, prejudicial attitudes she encounters from her teachers. Formal education is not the kindly process of American indoctrination that Antin depicts but more like Wright's hostile environment. When she protests her English teacher's policy of giving nonwhite students lower grades than white students, she is told that she can leave if she

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[158] Lee's older brother Meung dreams of pursuing an education as well, but he chooses instead to work and support the family when their father becomes ill. Lee stresses the difficulty of this choice for Meung and praises him for his love and consideration of others (43). This is similar to Mary Antin's depiction of her older sister who works to support the family rather than attending school with Mary.

does not like it and that she is not wanted anyway.[159] Her history teacher's lessons about "stinking Chinks and dirty Japs" and the "wild savage country" of Korea that the Japanese "civilized" anger her so much that she confronts him about his teaching and threatens to ruin his reputation in the school by revealing his frequenting of the red-light district in which her family is forced to live (56). The teacher backs down, but does not teach Asian history again. So while Lee succeeds in preventing the further spread of stereotypes and misinformation, she fails in that now no Asian history will be taught at all. Like Wright at this age, she speaks her mind but cannot change the system.

Lee's hopes of completing her high school diploma are finally dashed not by conflicts with teachers or lack of acceptance of her presence in the classroom but by physical disabilities that result from her severe malnutrition. Counseled by a doctor that she should rest and not read for two years so that her eyes and body can heal, she leaves school (58). This disappointment is immediately followed by a discussion of conditions in Korea, however, which de-emphasizes her loss. Rather than dwell upon what she was unable to learn in school, Lee offers accounts of what her mother taught her about Korean history, including the murder of the Korean royal family, the March 1, 1919, uprising, and the formation of the nationalist movement. Lee concludes with her characteristic determination, "We felt sad and troubled by all the tragic news from Korea, but we had to carry on and do the best we could with our lives" (59-61).

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[159] A similar incident occurs several decades later when Lee's son Henry is denied the prize for winning his class spelling match because the teacher gives it instead to a white student who did not spell as well as Henry. Lee teaches her son a lesson she learned from her father, that the knowledge he gained is more important than the prize and it cannot be taken away. Her attitude toward Henry's teacher is more forgiving, however. When the young woman apologizes and explains that she had to give the prize to the white girl or face losing the job she desperately needed, Lee sympathizes with her and notes that times are improving (104).

Lee's marriage to H. M. Lee, another immigrant from Korea, several years later tells the story of Korean enterprise in the early to mid-twentieth century. Their experiences as farmers and merchants mirror the historical record and are representative of that of many Korean Americans. When the Lees purchase a fruit stand from some friends in Los Angeles, they are able to move into "a real house at last, with a big backyard and a fig tree. It was the first time we ever had everything just like the white people did. It really felt good" (74). Later they are forced to sell their business because of H.M.'s health and go back to farming, this time using their son's American name to lease property on which they grow vegetables and rice. As their business grows they hire Korean and then Mexican workers, cultivating good relationships with the Mexicans through H.M.'s mastery of Spanish. Back in Los Angeles they eventually enter the real estate business. Their return to the city where they had lived years earlier allows Lee to reflect on the progress Korean Americans have made during her lifetime, from working for fifteen cents a hour as farmers to owning grocery stores, restaurants, laundries, and fruit and vegetable businesses. Again, she shows heroism in the ordinary lives of her parents' generation: "The first generation laid the foundation for the future by teaching their children to be honest -- never to steal or do anything that might cause ill feeling toward our people. We felt that was the only way we could prove to Americans that we are also human beings" (103). She especially admires the women who worked for years in sewing factories so that their children could attend college and become doctors, lawyers, and engineers. To Lee, these women are pioneers (107). She comments on the changes that have occurred in her lifetime:

> I am always happy to see Orientals able to work almost everywhere now. America is the only place in the world where people of all races can live in peace and harmony with one another. It is the responsibility of all persons to obey the laws of the country and do their part to maintain this harmony. As my mother always said, 'God is surely leading us in the right direction.' (113)

Here again Lee asserts the importance of hard work and good citizenship and the role of divine providence in the direction of her people and her nation.

In the final analysis, prejudice, fire, disease, and death follow Mary Paik Lee's family, but so does success. She and her husband run several profitable businesses and have enough money to support both their families periodically. The accomplishments of their children, which Lee describes in detail, speak to her belief that any obstacle, social or economic, can be overcome with hard work. In the closing chapters of her narrative, Lee celebrates the achievements of her three sons and many grandchildren in order to show the progress of Asians in America. Henry earned advanced degrees and entered international business. Allen served as a soldier and became a partner in a real estate and development company. Tony, who had suffered from polio and a host of other physical problems, graduated from high school and found work as a janitor at Macy's. Lee is as proud of him as she is of his brothers because of his spirit and ability to endure without blaming anyone, as well as his optimistic approach to life (116). In the years after H.M.'s death, Lee herself finds meaning in volunteer work at a local Korean senior center where she becomes an interpreter and helps newly-arrived Korean immigrants. She closes by reflecting on the firm foundation that has been built for her grandchildren, now the fourth

generation in the United States, and on the brave Koreans who signed the declaration of independence so that future generations of Koreans could be free.

Although Lee's memoir was written and published toward the end of the twentieth century, it has much more in common with works by earlier writers like Kang than with texts by others writing at the same time.[160] This is likely because Lee and Kang were of the same generation and were roughly the same age (she was just two years older). At the time Lee wrote and published her memoir, her optimistic vision of immigrant life in America went against the grain of contemporary ethnic writing, but the book still found a home in academic discussions because of its importance as a historical record. In contrast to Lee, Ty Pak, Chungmi Kim, Myung Mi Kim, Min Paek, John J. Song, Kichung Kim, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha and Chang-rae Lee, who came to the United States after the Korean War, sought to "galvanize" rather than "record," to borrow Han's phrase (151). Han suggests that "perhaps the aggressive tone and vision of newer Korean-American writers parallel those of other ethnic writers who have begun to assert their own voices" (152). Indeed, texts produced by this group are more critical and less accepting of discriminatory practices toward Koreans and Korean Americans. Interestingly, a shift in focus has come with this emerging voice. Most of these younger writers, who can be classified as *ilchom ose*, or the bilingual 1.5 generation, use their writing to consider the experiences of Koreans and Korean Americans outside the United

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[160] Kim Ronyoung's 1986 novel *Clay Walls* is perhaps the exception. Like Lee, Ronyoung is concerned with the preservation of Korean American historical experience for future generations. Her novel depicts the lives of a Korean noble family struggling with discrimination and blue-collar work in Los Angeles in the 1920s through 1940s. As a Korean American who grew up in Los Angeles, Ronyoung felt the importance of sharing the experience of her predecessors in that community. For the dust jacket of her novel she writes, "A whole generation of Korean immigrants and their American-born children could have loved and died in the United States without anyone knowing they had been here. I could not let that happen" (qtd in Han 150).

States rather than inside. For Shu-mei Shei, author of "Nationalism and Korean American Women's Writing," the 1.5 generation is distinguishable by its sense of being "neither/nor" and "both/all" that is markedly different from Asian and Asian American immigrants (146). Although many of these writers examine Korean Americans, they do so in the context of other nations.

Pak's short fiction, like the works of Richard E. Kim and Kim Yong Ik, is set against the backdrop of major historical events, including the Korean War and the Vietnam War. Kichung Kim's 1972 story "The Homecoming" depicts a Korean American's inability to feel at home on a return trip to Korea. After ten years in America, Namshin finds himself unable to stay with his parents on his trip, opting instead for a hotel room, because he is uncomfortable with their living conditions and the food his mother prepares for him. He feels more connection with an uncle who has lived in America, although they have never been close, than he does with his parents. Although his American identity dictates his perception and experience of his family, in public he finds himself in the common position of the returning immigrant -- uncomfortable with being perceived as American and unaccepted as Korean. Elaine Kim concludes, "Kichung Kim paints a grim picture of the immigrant exile, suspended between two worlds and lacerated by feelings of guilt and inferiority" (*Asian American Literature* 277).

Exploring a Post-colonial Identity

Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's work explores the physical and psychological dislocations that result from the processes of colonization and immigration, but her

treatment of this theme is radically different, much more experimental and sophisticated, from that produced by writers who came both before and after her. Born in 1951 in Pusan, Korea, Theresa Cha came to the United States in 1962 with her parents, first living in Hawaii and then in San Francisco. Cha studied comparative literature, performance art, foreign languages, and film at the University of California, Berkeley, and later pursued her film studies further at the Centre d'Etudes Américaine du Cinéma á Paris. Her diverse interests are reflected in her 1982 book *Dictée*. The text has been read as an autobiography, and indeed some statements from Cha herself suggest that this approach is relevant,[161] but *Dictée* extends beyond the traditional tale of finding one's way in America. Through a combination of translation exercises, poems, photographs, correspondence, official documents, and drafts of the text itself, Cha examines the ways in which language and historical narrative operate as means of cultural domination for Koreans and Korean Americans. She dramatizes the struggle of the individual to speak in the face of dominating forces. Shih reads *Dictée* as the work of a 1.5-generation writer because of Cha's acculturation in the United States as a second-generation immigrant but less adamant rejection of the homeland than is usually seen in second-generation writers (146). Indeed, Cha aligns the Korean and Korean American experiences and examines commonalities between multiple sites of oppression -- political, linguistic, gendered, and religious -- for both groups. Cha traces in particular the forced linguistic and cultural dictation that enabled the Japanese erasure of Korean history, the suppression of the

[161] Cha's letter of application for a position at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, penned while she was working on *Dictée*, contained the following statement: "I am presently writing a historical and biographical narrative with my memories of Korea as the content in which nine women personages are depicted" (THKC Collection 1992.4.639, qtd in Cooley 120).

female story from the history of Korean nationalism, the division of the country into North and South, and the remaking of Koreans into Americans.

When *Dictée* was published in 1982, it clearly diverged from the main lines of Asian American literature and scholarship. According to Shelley Sunn Wong in "Unnaming the Same: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictée*," much of Asian American literature being produced in the 1970s and 1980s was shaped by the need to provide a corrective narrative to what was viewed as misrepresentations of Asian Americans in mainstream literature and culture. In order to counter "disabling fictions," "positive" fictions grounded in the development of an authentic Asian American identity were needed. Consequently, much of this writing was realist. This form allowed writers to present political and social issues confronted by the Asian American community and to consolidate the notion of an Asian American identity in order to galvanize a social movement. This would involve working toward a subjectivity that could help to achieve political representation. Thus, two primary criteria for Asian American literature at this time were representativeness and authenticity (103). Cha's *Dictée* confounded critics in its refusal to be a representative text and its critique of "representative" narratives and foundational discourses. As Lisa Lowe argues in "Unfaithful to the Original: The Subject of *Dictée*," "*Dictée* stands in contrast to Asian American novels of formation [. . .]; its formal deviations from the genre allegorize the practical importance of recognizing heterogeneities of national origin, language, generation, gender and class within the Asian American constituency" (64). More precisely, Yi-Chun Tricia Lin writes that Cha's "post-colonial identity is not nation-bound; it is both Korean and American, yet neither Korean nor American. Above all, significantly, Cha seeks an identity that is not

exclusively Asian American" (xvi). Further, Juliana Spahr's "'Tertium Quid neither One Thing Nor the Other': Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *DICTEE* and the Decolonization of Reading" argues that the book "complicates the assumption that works which address colonialism and/or minority immigrant experience should propose clear selves, group solidarities, easy nationalisms, traditional values, or the preservation of absolute cultures and identities" (126). The text is either endlessly fascinating or endlessly frustrating, depending on the reader's position, because it refuses to offer a single definition or location of ethnic or national identity. Cha prefers instead to explore the indefinable "in-between" space in which both Koreans and Korean Americans exist because of their history. Lin argues that "Cha does not intend her presentation to cohere, as does the majority of the Asian American writing, which is predominantly shaped and defined by hunger for identity. [. . .] Departing from 'mainstream' identity politics, Cha's text, together with her life, challenges the existing yet ever fluid parameters of Asian America" (123, 128). Indeed, *Dictée* raises questions of identity formation common in Korean American literature but offers no clear answers.

Consequently, *Dictée* was widely read when it appeared but rarely considered in studies of Asian American literature.[162] The book got more consideration in the 1990s, beginning with a panel discussion at the 1991 Association for Asian American Studies conference (L. Hyun Yi Kang "Dictée" 34) and continued to gain prominence with the

[162] Nicole Cooley suggests that Cha's premature death (she was murdered in 1982 just one week after the publication of *Dictée*) accounts, in part, for the lack of early thorough critical exploration of the text. Her death led to readings which focused on Cha's tragic murder in ways that limited the text. Cooley notes, for example, that "discussion of Cha's revision of myth in her work is preempted by the construction of Cha herself as a myth" in Stephen-Paul Martin's argument that Cha herself becomes the Persephone of the lower east side (118). One notable exception to the initial lack of critical attention was Walter Lew's 1982 critical collage book, *Excerpts from: ΔΙΚΤΗ DIKTE for DICTEE*, which, like *Dictée*, also received limited discussion.

growth of an Asian American feminist discourse that ran counter to the largely masculine nationalist discourse of the previous decades. However, Cha's text often got reduced in one way or another to fit into various critical conversations. Poststructuralist critics, for example, have examined the book outside of the specific material and historical conditions that Cha addresses. Gradually, *Dictée* has been reconsidered within Asian American literary studies and has found a new home with the reissuing of the book by Third Woman press in 1994 and the simultaneous publication of Elaine Kim and Norma Alarcón's *Writing Self/Writing Nation: A Collection of Essays on DICTEE by Theresa Hak Kyung Cha*. The most recent edition of *Dictée*, issued in 2001 by the University of California Press, is clearly intended to draw a wider reading audience by placing the book in the context of Asian American women's writing about generational conflict and suffering. The redesigned front cover features a photograph of Cha's mother and the overview of the book on the back cover describes it as the story of several women who are united through suffering and the transcendence of suffering. A brief biography of Cha also draws the reader in, as does the front cover quotation about the book's importance by Carole Maso from *Spin* magazine. These are significant changes from the covers of the original edition, which were dominated by a desolate landscape on the front and a group of unidentified Korean women on the back. Aside from the title and author, no other text appeared.

The mixed response to *Dictée* in the first decade after its initial publication and the current rush to explore it can perhaps both be attributed to the text's relative

inaccessibility.[163] Although Cha is concerned with the representation of lost national histories, particularly the painful history of the Japanese occupation and Korea's later occupations and divisions, she does not write in such a way as to draw in an audience. For her, identity cannot be conveyed in a singular, linear story because language and narrative are always suspect and always contain the seeds of misrepresentation. Therefore, as Trinh T. Minh-ha writes in *Woman Native Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism*, "There is [. . .] no need for a linear progression which gives the comforting illusion that one knows where one goes. [. . .] The story never stops beginning or ending. It appears headless or bottomless for it is built on differences. Its (in)finite subverts every option of completeness and its frame remains a non-totalizing one. The differences it brings about are differences not only in structure, in the play of structures and of surfaces, but also in timbre and in silence" (1-2). Cha's aim is to break her readers out of the well-known stories, to strip them of the "comforting illusion" to which Trinh refers. Indeed, one cannot approach Cha's text like any other immigrant story. Here we find no tropes of the immigrant's arrival, dreams of a brighter future, struggle to become educated, and either final success in the new land, confirming the American mythos, or rejection from it, critiquing the openness of the American dream. In fact, there is no seeming point of entry into the text, leading readers to have the reaction that Elaine Kim did when she first approached the text: "The first time I glanced at *Dictée*, I was put off

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[163] Although Cha's art exhibitions have been critically acclaimed, they have also been similarly off-putting to critics. Lawrence Rinder's review of Cha's 1978 Berkeley exhibit *Passages Pasayges* notes its balance between Cha's individual need for expression and her desire to reach an audience. He writes, "Cha's suffering dissipates as it is absorbed into the collective consciousness. Although it is intensely personal, *Passages Pasayges* does not address us personally. [. . .] It is incomprehensible as such. Rather, it scatters its meanings and effects among us, Cha's innumerable relatives" (361).

by the book. I thought that Theresa Cha was talking not to me but rather to someone so remote from myself that I could not recognize 'him'" ("Poised" 3). L. Hyun Yi Kang's experience was very similar, although she approached the book differently once she examined the source of her response:

> My biggest frustration was what I perceived as the 'slipperiness' of the book. It angered me that the text was not always accessible, that it seemed to speak to a highly literate, theoretically sophisticated audience that I did not identify with. [. . .] Subsequent readings and other illuminating experiences enabled me to understand this anger and frustration as stemming from my own narrow, fixed and rather homogenous definitions of Korean/American identity and collective experience. I believed that I, as Korean/American woman, should be able to immediately understand and identify with the work of another Korean/American woman. ("Liberatory Voice" 76)

Cha's own thoughts about her art reaching an audience can be seen in some of her more personal writings. A poem in her 1977 handmade book "Audience Distant Relative" speaks to the distance she feels from her audience and the concern that she may not be heard:

> you are the audience
> you are my distant audience
> i address you
> as i would a distant relative
> seen only heard only through someone else's description

> neither you nor i
>
> are visible to each other
>
> i can only assume that you can hear me
>
> i can only hope that you hear me (THKC Collection 1992.4.62 qtd. in Cooley 140)

A letter she wrote to her mother in 1978, parts of which appear in *In Honor of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha* (a book created the year after Cha's death by her family), further addresses this issue:

> I think I am getting some answers from deep inside. It will be blown out some day. I believe it. It is not only for myself. I like to let other people know that there is the pure, lily-like simplicity and beauty somewhere in the world. Of course, I will get a lot of sufferings and heartache because of the crazy and strange world but I will be satisfied with illuminating my ideas like a clear mirror to one or two persons. [. . .] Anyway if I am good someone will listen to my voice. (qtd. in Roth 1)

Although she clearly desires to reach an audience, the character of that audience is undefined and the size is irrelevant.

One of the facets of *Dictée* that prevents Cha from being fully heard by most readers is her use of multiple languages in the text, including English, French, Latin, and Korean. Lin argues that Cha's choices are derived from "both the historical experience of Korean people and her personal experience as an exile -- from her country, her tongue, and her culture. An exile, an immigrant, Cha spent most of her adult life educated in and

speaking in tongues other than Korean" (28).[164] In fact, the only Korean script in *Dictée* appears on the opening page in the form of Korean characters carved into the wall of a Japanese coalmine, supposedly by Korean workers who were conscripted.[165] Shelley Sun Wong translates the characters as "Mother, I miss you, I'm hungry, I want to go home to my native place" (107). Within the text, these words are emblematic of the desolation of Koreans removed from their home in many ways, whether by the Japanese or by coming to America and the division from home and self that Cha explores fully throughout the text. However, they are inaccessible to most readers. Similarly, Cha includes the untranslated Chinese characters for "mother," "father," "man," and "woman" in the text, although her use of language in these instances is not like the inclusion of untranslated Spanish or Yiddish in texts by other immigrant writers. Cha uses characters not to speak to a Korean audience only or specifically to exclude English-only readers. Rather, she wishes to point out the isolation of the people who spoke this language. Indeed, Spahr contends that rather than alienate readers whose language skills do not enable them to read all of the text or alienate those who have not had the immigrant experience, Cha's use of multiple languages brings readers into "discussions of the difficulties of negotiating different linguistic systems as its narrator attempts to negotiate" (139).

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[164] Images of broken tongues and broken speech pervade the text. Opposite diagrams of the human head, neck, chest, throat, and vocal folds, Cha writes:

> Broken speech. One to one. At a time.
> Cracked tongue. Broken tongue.
> Pidgeon. Semblance of speech.
> Swallows. Inhales, Stutter. Starts. Stops before
> starts. (75)

As Shi notes, "her tongue is hence 'cracked' and 'broken' in the sense that it speaks with impediment and also in the sense that it is divided into many tongues" (155).

[165] In "The 'Liberatory Voice' of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictée*," L. Hyun Yi Kang notes that Kyoto University Professor of Korean History Naoki Mizuno has questioned both the location and authenticity of this inscription. However, as Kang rightly argues, these questions do not detract from the "symbolic and emotional significance" of the writings "in *Dictée* and for Korean consciousness" (99).

Readers who cannot translate all of the languages "cannot assume reading's colonizing powers" and also cannot "domesticate" the text by translating it (140). In closing the reader out, Cha brings him/her into the vulnerable, disempowered position of the colonized subject.

When the Japanese colonized Korea in 1910, Japanese was instituted as the official language of the country and Japanese culture became the system of reference for understanding life within Korea's borders. Cha explains these sweeping changes in linguistic terms: "Japan has become the sign. The alphabet. The vocabulary" (32). As Lin notes, "for Cha, language acquisition defines, marks, scars, and becomes her and her people's existence. In Cha, the act of 'acquiring' language is a constant reminder of cultural domination, or more precisely, cultural invasion -- not merely of a nation, but of a human subject" (126). *Dictée* is largely concerned with language and dictation as apparatuses of cultural domination. Cha shows this through the translation exercises she presents. As Lin explains, "For Cha, language is never 'merely' language. Language is invasion, both physical and ideological. Language commands, taking over the subject" (134). Consequently, even the simple translation exercises that Cha includes in *Dictée* introduce command and domination:

> Traduir en francais:
>
> 1. I want you to speak.
> 2. I wanted him to speak.
> 3. I shall want you to speak. (8)

Inherent in the exercise is the demand to vocalize, a demand that is presented as one that exists in the past, present, and future.

Cha uses the figure of the diseuse, a highly skilled professional female orator, to dramatize the difficulties of speaking against languages and therefore cultures that are not one's own. In the section titled "Diseuse," Cha contrasts the ease with which one would expect a diseuse to speak with descriptions of a speaker struggling to produce sounds with her lips, teeth, tongue, and breath. The speaker is compelled to speak, despite the difficulty, because inside her the message "*murmurs. Inside is the pain of speech the pain to say. Larger still. Greater than the pain not to say. To not say. . . . It festers inside. The wound, liquid, dust. Must break. Must void*" (3). Unable to produce her own sounds, "She allows others. In place of her. Admits others to make full. Make swarm. All barren cavities to make swollen. The others each occupying her" (3). This passage links the internalization and production of others' language with an image of physical takeover of the female body by "tumorous layers" (3-4). Cha's presentation of alien language and culture as an uncontrollable disease that overtakes the body of the speaker recalls Hector's conception of Spanish (and therefore Cubanness) entering him and making him ill in *Our House in the Last World*, although for Cha, the linguistic oppression is also political. Because for the diseuse the pain of holding in her message is greater than the pain of physically expressing it, she slowly, painfully, claims speech as her own, making use of pauses in the dictated material. "*She would take on their punctuation. She waits to service this. Theirs. Punctuation. She would become, herself, demarcations. Absorb it. Spill it. Become it. Seize upon the punctuation. Last air. Give her. The relay. Voice. Assign. Hand it. Deliver it. Deliver.* [. . .] She takes the pause. [. . .] Utterings. Hers now. Hers bare. The utter" (5). By becoming the system that controls the sprawl of speech, she can create order, stopping time and determining the

development of narrative at will. Speech is the means of reclaiming the language, body, and ultimately nation: "you leave you come back to the shell left empty all the time. To claim to reclaim, the space. Into the mouth the wound the entry is reverse and back each organ artery gland pace element, implanted, housed skin upon skin, membrane, vessel, waters, dams, ducts, canals, bridges" (57). Through the process of speech, here physical, the spaces of the homeland can be reclaimed, "for the writing is to re-compose a body, a nation from broken pieces" (144).

For Cha, equally as damaging as the erasure of Korea's past through the change in language was the neutralizing of her suffering in accounts of the takeover. Again, Koreans were dominated and/or erased through linguistic manipulation. In the Clio (History) section of *Dictée*, Cha includes passages taken from such accounts, including a letter of petition that Koreans in Hawaii wrote to President Theodore Roosevelt in 1905, asking for America's assistance.[166] The letter refers to Koreans' having "lost confidence" that the Japanese will honor the conditions of their treaty and contains expressions of resentment at Japan's "high-handed treatment" of Koreans. Unfortunately, the language used to explain the Koreans' situation is so polite and detached that there is seemingly no urgency for the United States to become involved. Indeed, as Cha explains, when conflicts are described in such distant terms, "the enemy becomes abstract. The relationship [between conquered and conqueror] becomes abstract" because such reports are "not physical enough. Not to the very flesh and bone, to the core, to the mark, to the point where it is necessary to intervene, even if to invent anew, expressions, for *this*

[166] As Cooley notes, "from our current historical perspective, this passage is replete with a terrible irony, as the United States played a primary role in the Japanese annexation of Korea" (139).

experience, for this *outcome*, that does not cease to continue" (32). For those outside the immediate context of Korea's oppression, the atrocities are unknowable because "to the others, these accounts are about (one more) distant land, like (any other) distant land, without any discernable features in the narrative, (all the same) distant like any other" (33). Reported this way, the occupation of Korea is reduced to yet another incident in a series of such incidents, and the Japanese-Korean conflict is thus fit into a long-standing narrative of crimes against humanity. Cha asserts that this essential sameness results from words and images designed to "appeal to the masses to congeal the information to make bland, mundane . [. . .] Neutralized to achieve the no-response, to make absorb, to submit to the uni-directional correspondence" (33). In the same way that Korean culture is rendered meaningless within a system in which it cannot be legally expressed, the conflict becomes meaningless when language is used to blend events into a known historical narrative that does not call for a response.

Cha argues that this endless cycle of neutralizing historical abstraction leads to the repetition of conflicts, in this case to the continued oppression of the Korean people. She represents the Japanese occupation, the Korean War, and the resulting division of the country into North and South all in the present tense to emphasize that these events have left Koreans "inside the same struggle, seeking the same destination" (81). In the Melpomene (Tragedy) chapter, when Cha returns to Korea in 1980, she is caught up in a demonstration that brings to mind the demonstration in which her brother was killed in

1962.[167] She finds herself locked inside "the same crowd, the same coup, the same revolt" (81). At the heart of the repetition of this pattern of oppression and resistance is, again, the use of narratives that obscure specificity. To the question "Why resurrect it all now," Cha answers that old wounds and old emotions must be renamed "so as not to repeat history into oblivion" (33) and so as not to conceal the truth. When "there is no destination other than toward yet another refuge from yet another war [,] [m]any generations pass and many deceptions in the sequence in the chronology towards the destination [occur]" (80). By nature, narratives that move chronologically toward a predetermined end are driven by an agenda and are therefore exclusionary and deceptive. Because such narratives are constructed "without the leisure to examine whether the parts [are] false the parts [are] real" (28), the act of writing history renders the concept of truth inconsequential. Cha argues that unlike history, which exists within time, truth exists "Outside time. Outside space" (28). It can be seen and heard in the fragments, or particles, of the past that exist outside the boundaries defined by historical and cultural patterns. Thus the renaming of the past requires careful extraction of each fragment from each word and image (33) because within the remnant, we can find the whole of the story (38).

In presenting the fragments that will rename and retell the narrative of Korean oppression and resistance, Cha looks, in part, to the stories of a group whose experiences have been buried even further by language and cultural ideals. These are "from another epic another history. From the missing narrative. From the multitude of narratives.

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[167] Notably, the 1962 demonstration was one against the then-ruler of Korea, Syngman Rhee, and the 1980 demonstration was against the rule of Park Chung-hee. In both cases, students were opposing their government, and therefore Korea was opposing itself, like an "Insect that eats its own mate" (88).

Missing. From the chronicles. For another telling of recitations" (81). Drawing on the stories of women rather than men, she calls up the fragments that have been left out of the history of Korean nationalism in order to question the masculine focus of the nationalist narrative. Elaine Kim explains that because "official Korean chronicles of 'what happened' were written in Chinese characters, which were off-limits to females for centuries," and because Korean women were discouraged from learning until well into the twentieth century, women rarely appear in Korea's written historical record ("Poised" 14). Further, Kim notes that female devotion to Korean nationalism traditionally met with acceptance only when it was "expressed through the filter of the family. [. . . ;] in traditional Korean society [. . .] the most patriotic thing a woman can do is give birth to or be the wife of a great patriot" ("Poised" 15-16). In *Dictée*, Cha rewrites this model of the Korean woman as passive and subservient, able to support the nationalist effort only as an extension of a man, by renaming martyrdom as a female role and by presenting women as the keepers of Korea's spirit during times of oppression. More specifically, Cha addresses the suppression of the female story by relating the short life of Yu Guan Soon, a female martyr in the 1919 uprising against the Japanese occupation of Korea, and by merging her mother's experiences with the history of her mother tongue and motherland to illustrate that the history of Korean resistance to oppression cannot be understood apart from the voicing of the female narrative. Throughout the text, Cha moves between personal and political stories, between the past and the present, to foreground speech and writing as forces of female resistance to oppression and ways to position oneself outside a masculine, linear narrative of history.

In Cha's telling of the March 1, 1919, uprising, Yu Guan Soon is powerful, determined, and proud. She is described as a "deliverer of nation" (37). The only daughter of patriots, Yu Guan Soon is sixteen years old when the Korean Queen and the royal family are assassinated and the government is overthrown. She organizes a student resistance group but is dismissed by a nationally organized movement whose leaders do not accept her seriousness and devotion to the cause because she is female. She will not be silenced, however, and walks to forty towns to organize the March 1st demonstration, which will be the largest outcry against Japanese domination in Korea's history. On the appointed day, thousands of protestors wave Korean flags at the demonstration, "every individual crying out the independence the freedom to the people of this nation. Knowing equally the punishment" (37). Along with many others, Yu Guan Soon's parents and brothers fall in the conflict. As a leader, she is arrested, questioned, and stabbed in the chest, but, facing death bravely, she refuses to give any information to her captors. Her silence is a rebellion, just as her speech was when she worked to organize the movement. Cha describes Yu Guan Soon's martyrdom:

> The eternity of one act. Is the completion of one existence. One martyrdom. For the history of one nation. Of one people.
>
> Some will not know age. Some not age. Time stops. Time will stop for some. For them especially. Eternal time. No age. Time fixes for some. Their image, the memory of them is not given to deterioration, unlike the captured image that extracts from the soul precisely by reproducing, multiplying itself. Their countenance evokes not the hallowed beauty,

> beauty from seasonal decay, evokes not the inevitable, not death, but the dy-ing. (37)

Yu Guan Soon's courageous death places her outside of the progression of time because she dies so young but also because her act stands as an eternal sacrifice for the nation. If the passage of time is understood as a progression toward death, then the image of Yu Guan Soon, for whom time is fixed, evokes not deterioration or decay but a continual life. Her martyrdom is a fragment that exists outside of the historical record.

Through the story of a mother as told by her daughter, Cha positions women within Korean nationalism as not only those who publicly lead others, like Yu Guan Soon, but also as those who endure and preserve Korea within themselves until changes come. Women's memories recorded in private journals and passed from mother to daughter tell the story of another type of resistance to colonialism. Excluded from official historical records, these stories represent the personal, female history that Trinh T. Minh-ha has described as lying somewhere "outside the hierarchical realm of facts" (qtd in Kim, "Poised" 15). As Lisa Lowe notes, "the "'feminized' renarration of the subject/homeland relationship as a relationship between daughter and mother, as opposed to between son and father, also intervenes in the nationalist narrative which subordinated the feminine figuration of the motherland to the developmental progress of a masculine state formation" (49). In the Calliope (Epic Poetry) section of *Dictée*, Cha draws upon her mother Hyung Soon Ho's journals to create a mother/daughter relationship that will give voice to the women who were silenced during the colonial period. She presents the mother's story by having a daughter tell the story back to her mother rather than simply repeating it. The daughter says, for example, "Mother, you are eighteen years old. You

were born in Yong Jung, Manchuria and this is where you now live. You are not Chinese. You are Korean" (45). By creating a dialogue in which she speaks to her mother in response to the journals, Cha reverses the one-way form of communication that journals represent. In Lowe's words, the daughter is "renarrating her mother's silence" (48). The daughter affirms that she has heard her mother's life and understood it, and in the process reclaims the voice of her mother and those like her who could not express their thoughts publicly under occupation. The daughter is also, as Helena Grice argues, "affording the woman control over her own story; she is both source and addressee of her own tale" ("Korean American National Identity" 46).

Even within the village of Korean exiles where her mother's family lived, speaking the Korean language was illegal, as was singing the national song. Drawing on the image of Korea as motherland, Cha argues that this loss of language was synonymous with the loss of a mother for Koreans. When "they take from you your tongue," the mother and those like her are "Birth less. And orphan" (46). She maintains her connection to home by speaking her language "in a whisper. In the dark. In secret. Mother tongue is your refuge. It is being home. Bring who you are. Truly" (45-46). She also writes as a way to maintain her connection with her homeland, although Cha envisions her words as carried by natural forces because they could not be shared through traditional means:

> You write. You write you speak voices hidden masked you plant words to the moon you send word through the wind. Through the passing of seasons. By sky and by water the words are given discretion. From one mouth to another, from one reading to the next the words are realized in

> their full meaning. The wind. The dawn or dusk the clay earth and traveling birds south bound birds are mouth pieces wear the ghost veil for the seed of message. Correspondence. To scatter the words. (48)

By repeating the story of the mother's exile, Cha gathers those scattered words and helps to give meaning to the lives of those who carried the nation internally when it could not exist externally under the occupation.

The daughter acknowledges that even though her mother's family was living in exile, her mother held Korea in her MAH-UHM, in her spirit-heart (46). She writes, "It is burned into your ever-present memory. Memory less. Because it is not in the past. It cannot be. Not in the least of all pasts. It burns. Fire alight enflame" (45). Because this spirit exists outside of time, it cannot be taken from her through colonization. Surviving through the knowledge that the exile cannot last forever, she waits inside her spirit-heart, remembering, for thirty-six years until the reclamation of her home. Although she is not fighting the external battle of a patriot in Korea, she still plays a role in Korean nationalism in that she holds close the spirit of the nation until it can be spoken aloud again. Her ability to remain loyal to that spirit is tested when she graduates from a teacher's college at eighteen and is assigned to a village in which all the teachers are Korean but must speak Japanese to each other and to their students. The Japanese flag hangs at the school with a framed educational message from the Japanese emperor that is read at assemblies. The Korean children in her class are to be renamed in Japanese, their Korean identities replaced, as they are educated into the new system. In her position as teacher, she is required not only to accept the cultural domination of the Japanese but also to instill it in others.

Alone and unused to the harshness of this life, she falls ill. In what reads like a fevered dream, the mother finds herself being taken over by words and images that "seek you, inhabit you whole, suspend you airless, spaceless. They force their speech upon you and direct your speech only to them" (50). The language of the oppressors seems to rise up inside her, to fill her, so she stops eating. She imagines that she is taken to a series of houses, in which she is tempted by music, dancing, clothing, and food that are familiar but unidentifiable. Her battle with the temptations in her dream that threaten to take over her body and soul parallels the Korean battle to reject Japanese colonialism, which threatened Koreans' physical and spiritual existence. As the mother is offered and rejects three different dishes, Cha intersperses Biblical passages about Christ's temptation by Satan in which he rejects both food and power. As angels minister to Christ when he refuses to give in and the Devil departs, the mother's parents nurse her back to health after she has rejected the last meal in her dream. The comparison to Christ places the Korean woman in the role of keeper of spiritual truths and aligns her again with the figure of the martyr. Like Yu Guan Soon's martyrdom, the mother's keeping of the spirit is an eternal act for the nation.

Cha shows that the preservation of a Korean spirit for those living in America is equally as difficult. This is because, according to Shih, "her relationship to the Korean nation is anything but unambiguous: strictly circumscribed by a patriarchal nationhood, no longer a Korean citizen, and often unable to speak the language, she is ostracized or, at best, left out" (148). Cha introduces Korean American identity with a series of questions:

From A Far

What nationality

or what kindred and relation

what blood relation

what blood ties of blood

what ancestry

what race generation

what house clan tribe stock strain

what lineage extraction

what breed sect gender denomination caste

what stray ejection misplaced

Tertium Quid neither one thing nor the other

Tombe des nues de naturalized

what transplant to dispel upon (20)

Grice explains, "These identity classifications proliferate and multiply through the epigraph, moving from national differences, to those of genealogy and biology. The shoring up of these differences stresses the myriad potential divisions between people and this serves to set the tone of division and schism that dominates the text" ("Korean American National Identity" 44). The Korean American is figured as a source of question and confusion, both for herself and outsiders. The question of identity -- who are you -- can be asked in many different ways, all of which lead to the conclusion that the Korean American is difficult to categorize, a lost fragment perhaps, and does not belong in any one place.

Unlike Younghill Kang and Mary Paik Lee, however, Cha is not concerned with the dislocation of Korean immigrants within America's social and economic systems. She does not argue for Koreans' right to be accepted socially, economically, or even legally as Americans. The ability to become a citizen is not longed-for, and the transformation that naturalization brings about is not depicted positively. Because Koreans could become naturalized American citizens at the time in which she is writing, Cha addresses how this new legal identity affects Koreans' relationships with their homeland and the Korean community. She critiques the cultural dictation required to become an American citizen, which is a process strikingly parallel to that which made Koreans into Japanese:

> I have the documents. Documents, proof, evidence, photograph, signature. One day you raise the right hand and you are American. They give you an American Pass port. The United States of America. Somewhere someone has taken my identity and replaced it with their photograph. The other one. Their signature their seals. Their own image. And you learn the executive branch the legislative branch and the third. Justice. Judicial branch. It makes the difference. The rest is past. (56)

The signs of citizenship are essentially meaningless -- a picture, a document, a memorized series of facts -- but the new legal status has the power to alter and define identity. In fact, identity becomes external through the text and picture, something separate from the whole person. The swearing in process itself is alienating as well. As Grice explains, "Even Cha's right hand is experienced as alien as it performs the bodily ritual accompanying naturalization"; Cha refers to it as *the* right hand rather than *her* or

my hand ("Korean American National Identity" 47). Grice's reading is based on the assumption that the subject in this scene is Cha, although her point about the impersonal use of language in the description is valid whether or not this is the case. Grice continues, "Rather than conferring an American identity, the naturalization oath simply allows Cha to reflect back an American identity that she does not possess, but can only mirror [. . . .] Figured as an empty vessel at this moment, Cha has no identity herself. Her Korean identity has been 'taken,' and she is able only to reflect back someone else's identity" ("Korean American National Identity" 47). This is the new script, the new cultural dictation, that is given to naturalized citizens, and like the language Koreans were forced to adopt under colonization, it alienates the individual from an authentic self. Priscilla Wald correctly asserts that Cha's choice of possessive pronouns in the naturalization passage -- *my* identity as opposed to *their* photograph and *their* image -- signals the subject's position as other in relation to her new country and Cha's envisioning of "identity as a possession, a conditional property, which, like the documents that represent it, can be expropriated" (301). However, her reading of the following border-crossing scene as "an analysis of the need for a new story of We the People" (300) fails to account for Cha's argument about the extent to which American citizenship divides Korean Americans from a sense of their Korean heritage and therefore divides them internally, again mirroring the division of their homeland. Because, for Cha, to be a Korean American is to be a postcolonial subject, the adoption of a new national identity produces a painful double-consciousness.

The narrator feels this separation from a Korean identity on a return visit to Korea, when she is legally and emotionally alienated because she is now an American:

> You return and you are not one of them, they treat you with indifference. All the time you understand what they are saying. But the papers give you away. Every ten feet. They ask you identity. [. . .] They say you look other than you say. As if you didn't know who you were. You say who you are but you begin to doubt. [. . .] Not a single word allowed to utter until the last station, they ask you to check the baggage. You open your mouth half way. Near tears, nearly saying, I know you I know you. I have waited to see you for long this long. They check each article, question you on foreign articles, then dismiss you. (56-58)

The American citizenship indicated by the speaker's papers renders her unrecognizable to the border guards and, by extension, unrecognizable to herself. Most painful for the Korean immigrant is the perceived conflict between her language and appearance and her new, official identity. The conclusion of this passage, in which the speaker "nearly" utters the words that will enable some connection to her homeland but fails and is dismissed, returns to Cha's theme of the struggle to speak words that will meaningfully convey identity. The papers are privileged over other markers of identity, underscoring her assertion that while official documents do not, and cannot, tell the full story of Korea's history and people, they are taken as authoritative and therefore function as erasers of "true" history and identity.

What the narrator encounters on her return is a divided Korea, equally as conflicted as when she left, still being torn apart internally: "Here at my return in eighteen years, the war is not ended. We fight the same war. We are inside the same struggle seeking the same destination. We are severed in Two by an abstract enemy an

invisible enemy under the title of liberators who have conveniently named the severance, Civil War. Cold War. Stalemate" (81). As the narrator commented earlier, the Korean struggle for freedom has been perpetuated under new language that neutralizes the importance of the specific parties involved in the conflict and the need for action on the part of the outside world. She says of the soldiers at the dividing line: "You are your post you are your vow in nominee patris you work your post you are your nation defending your country from subversive infiltration from your own countrymen" (86). The vow that the soldiers recited, another form of dictation, has become their identity. Cha further writes, "SHE opposes Her. SHE against her. [. . .] Nation against nation multiplied nations against nations against themselves" (87-88). Korea is divided against herself and so, therefore, is the narrator. Cha calls upon Melpomene, the muse of tragedy, to stop the division by speaking:

> Arrest the machine that purports to employ democracy but rather causes the successive refraction of *her* none other than her own. Suffice Melpomene, to exorcize from this mouth the name the words the memory of severance through this act by this very act to utter one, *Her* once, Her to utter at once, *She* without the separate act of uttering. (89)

If the language of division can be exorcized from the mouth by speaking a single subject, rather than a divided one, the cycle of suffering will cease.

Finally, for Cha, writing (speaking) functions as a way to tell a gendered Korean story that will no longer be bounded by the progression of time and therefore will be excluded from its corresponding repetitive historical narratives. Writing also becomes a way of escaping the linear progression from life to death. The female speaker in the

Thalia (Comedy) section "says to herself if she were able to write she could continue to live. Says to herself if she would write without ceasing. To herself if by writing she could abolish real time. She would live. If she could display it before her and become its voyeur" (141). Lin notes that "indeed, Cha becomes Time's voyeur, and as readers we are part of the voyeuristic creation" (157). Cha calls upon the diseuse to display time before us and rename the stories of those who have been lost within its narratives. The diseuse will resurrect:

> *Dead words. Dead tongue. From disuse. Buried in*
> *Time's memory. Unemployed. Unspoken. History.*
> *Past. Let the one who is diseuse, one who is mother*
> *who waits nine days and nine nights be found.*
> *Restore memory. Let the one who is diseuse, one*
> *who is daughter restore spring with her each ap-*
> *pearance from beneath the earth.* (133)

Memory will be restored through the twin figures of the mother who steadfastly waits and remembers and the daughter who dies and is reborn. Thus, in renaming Korean nationalism through Hyung Soon Ho and Yu Guan Soon, Cha is able to make immortal the stories of forgotten female patriots and to give perpetual voice to those who have previously been silenced by history.

In the final section of the book, Polymnia (Sacred Poetry), Cha suggests the importance of passing history through a female line with the image of an older woman giving a young girl a drink from a well, quenching her thirst and enabling her to speak

clearly. She also gives the girl ten pockets of medicine to take home to her sick mother, nine of them representing the nine sections of *Dictée* that Cha has used to tell Korea's story and one for the girl to keep for herself along with the bowl in which she is to mix the medicine. These bundles begin to weigh down the child as she gets closer to home (168-70). However, she is able to break free from the weight of the stones she imagines tied to her when her mother lifts her up to the window where she can, ostensibly, see the future (179) because she is supported by her mother, who also connects her to the past.

Entering the Mainstream

Although Korean American writers after Cha have not continued in her experimental vein, instead returning to more standard narrative forms, their work does carry forward the need to theorize Korean Americans' relationship to the painful history of Korea's occupations and the desire to shed light on events from that history that until recently most Koreans have wished to leave undiscussed. Korean women forced to serve as "comfort women" for Japanese soldiers from the early 1930s to 1945 are now beginning to talk about their experiences that have gone unacknowledged for decades. *The True Stories of the Korean Comfort Women*, a 1996 collection of first-person narratives edited by Keith Howard and the Korean Council for Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan, takes up this topic. In fiction, Nora Okja Keller's much-lauded 1997 novel *Comfort Woman* examines a former comfort woman's attempts to deal with her past and explain it to her mixed-blood daughter. The text moves back and forth between the two women's perspectives, thus encouraging contemporary readers

to engage in dialogue about the issue.[168] Heinz insu Fenkl is another contemporary writer whose work is set in Korea and examines a formerly taboo topic. *Memories of My Ghost Brother*, his 1996 novel, looks at the adolescence of a child who is the product of a German-American soldier and a Korean mother. Drawing together Korean folklore with the American lifestyle of the military base near which his protagonist lives, Fenkl brings to light the experiences of another overlooked group, the mixed-race children who were a part of two cultures but accepted by neither. Keller's most recent novel, *Fox Girl* (2002), examines this group as well, although she goes even further than Fenkl into uncharted literary territory with characters who are the children of 'bar girls' and American soldiers and themselves heading toward prostitution.

Ki-han Lee, an English professor at Myongji University in Seoul, has called the 1990s "the heyday of Korean-American literature" because "as the paradigm of multiculturalism sweeps American society and education, Korean American authors are moving from the fringes to the mainstream of American prose fiction" (qtd. in Jin 1). The recent publication of three anthologies of Korean American writing -- *Kori: The Beacon Anthology of Korean American Fiction*, *Echoes upon Echoes: Korean American Writings*, and *Surfacing Sadness: A Centennial of Korean American Literature, 1903-2003* -- is evidence of this movement. As has been the case with Jewish, African

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[168] Not all Korean American fiction writers have felt comfortable speaking for the comfort women, however. Chang-rae Lee's second novel, *A Gesture Life*, was originally going to be written from the perspective of a comfort woman, but, as he told Dwight Garner in an interview for *The New York Times on the Web*, once he interviewed several former comfort women in South Korea, "I began to feel that what I had written didn't quite come up to the measure of what I had experienced, sitting in a room with these people. I began to feel that there was nothing like live witness" (http://www.nytimes.com/books/99/09/05/reviews/990905.05garnet.html). Lee still treated the subject of comfort women in *A Gesture Life*, but he did so through the fictional story of a medical officer for the Japanese army who tried unsuccessfully to help a Korean comfort woman he met in Burma.

American, and Cuban American literature, the growing interest in Korean American fiction over the past decade is an outgrowth of the multicultural movement in school curriculum. Adolescent-targeted books like Patti Kim's *A Cab Called Reliable* and Linda Sue Park's *A Single Shard*, which won a Newberry Medal, are drawing new readers to the Korean American experience and also shaping publishing trends. Soon Nyul Choi's *Year of Impossible Goodbyes*, originally a six-hundred-page adult consideration of her experiences during the Japanese occupation, was cut down and rewritten for a teenage audience at the request of her publisher (Jin 4). Writers like Choi find themselves shaping their work to meet the demands of the literary marketplace. While in principle this is nothing new for the ethnic writer, that the market is being driven by educational standards for the younger reader does represent a significant change.

Ki-han Lee sees some significant problems with the mainstream success of Korean American writers, among them Chang-rae Lee. With the success of his 1995 novel *Native Speaker*, Chang-rae Lee brought the Korean American immigrant story its widest reading audience yet when the city of New York selected *Native Speaker* for its "One Book, One City" campaign. *The New Yorker* named Lee one of the twenty best writers under the age of forty (Jin 3). Having received multiple national prizes for his work and having recently joined the faculty at Princeton University, Lee is, arguably, the most visible face and voice of Korean American literature in the United States today. For Ki-han Lee, this places Lee and others who have achieved success in the problematic position of writing texts that will be considered representative:

> The writers may not feel that they are acting as conveyors of Korean culture, but their works are inevitably read that way by the mainstream

> American public [. . .] In 'Native Speaker,' for instance, the author makes some basic errors of Korean language such as transcribing a common proverb incorrectly.[169] While these specific mistakes are minor, there is some potential for misrepresentation in the novel as a whole. [. . .] Koreans have a tendency to treat Korean-American writers as heroes or even patriots, advancing Korea's image and prestige in the United States [. . . .] But this is a misunderstanding. Korean-American writers of the 1990s are essentially American in their sensibilities. In order to properly appreciate their works, we must first recognize this fact. (qtd in Jin 3-4)

For Lee, then, the success of Korean American writers, while laudable, introduces a two-fold problem that revolves around the familiar question of representativeness in immigrant fiction. While Korean American writers may have no intention of being seen as arbiters of Korean culture, readers in both Korea and America may see them as such and misunderstand Korean culture. Lee's concerns may at first seem dated, but taking into account Korea's history of being unknown to and then misunderstood by the outside world, they are significant indeed.

Born in South Korea in 1965, Chang-rae Lee came to the United States with his family at the age of three. He is a member of the 1.5 generation and shares with Cha a concern with the pain that accompanies the loss of one language and the adoption of a new one. In *Native Speaker*, Lee considers the ways in which his protagonist Henry's use

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[169] If anything, the errors to which Ki-han Lee alludes indicate Chang-rae Lee's second-generation protagonist's lack of facility with the Korean language, but he is likely right in his assumption that most readers would not be aware of the errors and understand them in this light.

of language functions both as a mask that separates him from others in personal relationships and yet uniquely suits him to be an effective spy who is able to assimilate into others' lives at will. Unlike Cha, however, Lee addresses the Korean American experience in the United States, more specifically the second-generation experience, rather than focusing on the immigrant's relationship to Korean history and homeland. Grice claims that *Native Speaker* is a new departure in Asian American literature because it moves "away from the more traditional preoccupations with ethnic identity and the processes of Americanisation [sic]" ("Negotiating Identities" 10). She makes this argument because *Native Speaker* is, at least on its surface, genre fiction. Written as a spy story, the novel would seem to depart from these typical concerns. However, Lee's figuration of the immigrant as spy on American culture through Henry Park, who is a double agent for a private firm, is simply a more sophisticated way in which to address ethnic identity. As John C. Hawley writes, "Park consciously becomes what many Caucasians in American society suspect him of being; a voyeur, an untrustworthy ingratiator who smiles and smiles and all the while is looking for information to use against the naive Caucasian" (189). Through his exploration of the identity crisis that results from Henry's acceptance of this prescribed role, Lee is able to address the high cost of assimilation for the second generation in America.

Interestingly, most reviewers of the book criticize Lee for failing to make effective use of the spy novel format. Verlyn Klinkenborg writes for *The New Yorker*, "*Native Speaker* is barely a spy novel" (76). Rand Richards Cooper's "Excess Identities" in *The New York Times Book Review* classifies the novel as "a memoir struggling to get

out" of Lee's spy story, which Cooper believes should have been scrapped (24).[170] While the espionage plot is clearly not as engaging as Henry's personal disintegration, to remove it or suggest that the text would function better as a memoir ignores Lee's insistence that the image of immigrant as spy is central to understanding the position of Koreans in the United States today. According to Jeff Yang, who reviewed *Native Speaker* for *The Village Voice*, that image resonates "in the binary of our race politics, [in which] Asians are regularly seen as double agents, outsiders and in-betweeners harboring an enigmatic personal agenda, more so now, when anti-immigrant hysteria has brought back the interrogator's hot lights and the loyalty oath. In post-Proposition 187 California, to be yellow or brown invites accusation. To be a nonnative speaker becomes a daily confession. 'Traitor' and 'spy' and 'false speaker of language' have become identical; and now more than ever we are tongue-tied" (27). Lee acknowledges this perception of Asian Americans with passages in which Henry's first-person narrative reads like a confession of what is perceived as the immigrant's *modus operandi*:

> We will learn every lesson of accent and idiom, we will dismantle every last pretense and practice you hold, noble as well as ruinous. You can keep nothing safe from our eyes and ears. This is your own history. We are your most perilous and dutiful brethren, the song of hearts at once furious and sad. For only you could grant me these lyrical modes. I call

[170] In contrast to the majority of reviewers who criticize Lee's failure to write an effective spy novel, Tina Chen argues in "Impersonation and Other Disappearing Acts in *Native Speaker* by Chang-rae Lee" that Lee draws on the conventions of the spy novel "to criticize formally the generic conventions that make the telling of Henry's story such a difficult thing" (638). Chen introduces the Asian spy "stereotyped as sneaky and inscrutable" as a cultural and literary convention, offering Charlie Chan, Mr. Moto, Dr. Fu Manchu as examples, and points to "the 'racist ambivalence' that writers such as Lee are addressing when they rework the figure of the Asian spy" (656).

> them back to you. Here is the sole talent I ever dared nurture. Here is all of my American education. (320)

The twist in Lee's novel is, of course, that Henry is a spy on Asian Americans, not on white American culture. After college he is recruited by Dennis Hoagland to work for Glimmer and Company, a "research firm" that sends out ethnic moles to gather information, to spy on their own, at the behest of corporations and politicians.[171] They do this by becoming friends, co-workers, sometimes lovers, and then writing "the tract of their [subject's] lives, remote, unauthorized biographies" (18). This places the ethnic spy in the difficult position of remaining disengaged while telling the story of his or her people. Having spent most of his life disassociating from an ethnic sense of self, Henry, a second-generation Korean American, excels in this task. Henry acknowledges his exploitation of other Asian Americans as his "ugly immigrant's truth" (319), a truth shared by his first-generation immigrant father who exploits new immigrants as cheap labor in his fruit and vegetable stores. However, Henry lays the responsibility for the necessity of this exploitation and the honing of his skills as a spy in part on mainstream America and in part on the nature of Korean language and culture.

The novel opens with Henry's white wife Lelia leaving him. Their relationship has collapsed because of their different ways of grieving over the death of their young son and Lelia's discovery of the real nature of Henry's job with Glimmer and Company. As she boards her place at the airport, Lelia hands Henry a list of who he is:

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[171] Hoagland created the company in the 1970s as a way to capitalize on national fears about the growing immigrant population entering the United States. He recruits Henry because he believes that Asian American culture creates people suited to intelligence work because of the "discipline farms" in which they are raised (172-73).

You are surreptitious

B + student of life

first thing hummer of Wagner and Strauss

illegal alien

emotional alien

genre bug

Yellow peril: neo-American

great in bed

overrated

poppa's buy

sentimentalist

anti-romantic

_____ analyst (you fill in)

stranger

follower

traitor

spy (5)

Her list reflects the irreconcilable contradictions she sees in her husband, and her references to his work, a source of great tension between them, indicate the betrayal she feels because the "*Henryspeak*" (6) he uses to discuss what he does prevents her from knowing him. Just as Henry nears the point of forgetting the list, he discovers a scrap of paper under their bed which reads "*False Speaker of Language*" (4-6), a label that reflects his ability to hide his "true" self through speech.

As a speech therapist, Lelia is, in her own words, "the standard-bearer" (12). Henry was attracted to Lelia, initially, because of her speech:

> I noticed how closely I was listening to her. What I found was this: she could really speak. [. . .] Every letter had a border. I watched her wide full mouth sweep through her sentences like a figure touring a dark house, flipping on spots and banks of perfectly drawn light. (10-11)

He is drawn to the clear, easy manner in which she can express herself and to the way in which her face reflects her every thought and feeling. In contrast, he has always struggled to make himself understood in English. As a boy Henry worked with therapists to master the sounds of the English language, so difficult for someone raised in a Korean home. Henry describes himself as "raised by language experts, saved from the wild" (232). Lelia recognizes his careful pronunciation and even more careful demeanor, both of which mask emotion, when they first meet.

Lee uses Lelia and Henry's marriage to explore power dynamics in the relationship between white and Asian America. She is unapologetically outspoken, emotional, free to express herself, and ultimately in control of their relationship. She rejects Henry as inscrutable and, over the course of the novel, gradually accepts him back into her life, on her terms. From the very beginning of their relationship, when Henry imagines himself as the man Lelia has always dreamed of so that he can "cast for her the perfect picture of a face," he tries to become what Lelia wants, altering himself so that he can be deemed palatable and even desirable to her (13). Henry continues this acting for ten years until their marriage begins to fall apart, noting that "the surest testament to the magnificent and horrifying level of [his] virtuosity" was that neither of them recognized

what he was doing (161). Henry has grown so accustomed to performing identity that it seems natural and real to him. When they argue over their different responses to their son Mitt's accidental death, Lelia complains that she does not know Henry, that she cannot tell what he is thinking or even who he is anymore.[172] She tellingly invokes stereotypes to express her anger at Henry's lack of physical, demonstrable grief over Mitt's death: "You were solemn and dignified. Remember? That's who you were for about a year. The bowing, the white-glove bit. You're the one who calmly explained to everyone how well we were doing. Of course I was the mad and stupid one. The crazy white lady in the attic" (117). She conjectures, "Maybe it's a condition with you. I just know that you have parts to you that I can't touch" (127). Henry wants to tell her, to explain himself, but he finds that he has nothing to say because he "had always felt that [he] could be anyone, perhaps several anyones at once" (127). This is why spy work appeals to Henry: "I found a sanction from our work, for I thought I had finally found my truest place in the culture" (127).

Lee shows that Henry came to his knowledge of this "truest place" through his parents' example. In watching them, he learned that he must play a role in order to be accepted in America. Henry's father, a dominant force in his life, is like many Korean

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[172] Mitt dies at age seven in a neighborhood accident in which he is accidentally suffocated at the bottom of a dog pile of white boys while they play. During their grieving, both Lelia and Henry suggest that perhaps he was too perfect to live in the world. Mitt was, in Henry's words, "beautifully jumbled and subversive and historic. No one, I thought, had ever looked like that" (103). In addition to being a physical mixture of Lelia and Henry's characteristics, Mitt was able to adopt the various uses of speech by his mother, father, and grandfather: "he could mimic the finest gradations in our English and Korean, those notes of who we were" (240). The child is depicted as the physical and mental blend of the two cultures, able to exist with ease in both worlds. After Mitt's death, Henry's realization that despite his delight in his son's bi-culturalism, he had hoped that Mitt would "grow up with a singular sense of the world, a life univocal, which might have offered him the authority and confidence that his broad, half-yellow face could not," forces him to acknowledge his "own ugly and half-blind romance with the land" (267).

immigrants. He came to the United States with a degree in engineering, found work in the fruit and vegetable industry, and worked to expand his business from one fruit stand to a small chain of stores. Although the Park family ascends the economic ladder and eventually moves into a wealthy neighborhood, they never interact with their neighbors and maintain what Henry calls a "great sham of propriety, as if nothing could touch us or wreak anger or sadness upon us. That we believed in anything American, in impressing Americans, polishing apples in the dead of night, perfectly pressed pants, perfect credit, being perfect" (52). Through this façade, Henry's family upholds the myth of the model minority. Though he is puzzled at his parents' behavior as a child, wondering what his mother might be afraid of outside her home, Henry adopts his own practice of remaining an outsider until invited in:

> If I may say this, I have always only ventured where I was invited or otherwise welcomed. When I was a boy, I wouldn't join any school club or organization before a member first approached me. I wouldn't eat or sleep at a friend's house if it weren't prearranged. [. . .] So call me what you will. An assimilationist, a lackey. A duteous foreign-faced boy. I have already been whatever you can say or imagine, every version of the newcomer who is always fearing and bitter and sad. (160)

In accepting a given code of immigrant behavior, he embodies the experiences of those newcomers, even though he was born an American. As he grows up Henry finds that he can slip into this immigrant persona at will and does so when it will benefit him. In his father's store, Henry realizes that speaking Korean, "the language of work," will ensure his invisibility to customers. Embarrassed by his father's wish for him to show off his

perfect English in order to impress customers (53), he would rather use the Korean language to disappear into the character of the first-generation immigrant.

Henry believes that his father plays the role of the hardworking immigrant with gusto, engaging in what Henry calls "self-promoting immigrant lore" (283) that involves telling the story of starting his business with nothing but the $200 he came to America with, when Henry knows that his father got a loan from the *ggeh* in which he was a member. He scoffs at his father's embracing of this fiction and drive to succeed at the cost of, in Henry's mind, emotional connections to others. Henry sees the principles that ruled his father's life -- what he saw as the "inalienable rights of the immigrant" -- as his inherited legacy:

> you worked from before sunrise to the dead of night. You were never unkind in your dealings, but then you were not generous. Your family was your life, though you rarely saw them. You kept close handsome sums of cash in small denominations. You were steadily cornering the market in self-pride. You drove a Chevy and then a Caddy and then a Benz. You never missed a mortgage payment or a day of church. You prayed furiously until you wept. You considered the only unseen forces to be those of capitalism and the love of Jesus Christ. (47)

Lee suggests that Henry's father is intent upon embracing this new American identity because of his painful past. Once when Henry asks him to talk about the Korean War so that he can complete a school report, his father chokes up. Henry turns to the encyclopedia for information and thus writes about the glories of MacArthur and Truman and how lucky Koreans were to have their help (241-42). His admission that he believed

the propaganda "more or less, when [he] was little. Sometimes even now" (242) recalls Cha's concern with the confusion that can result from Korean Americans seeking knowledge of their heritage in print sources which may mask the truth through language.

For Henry, Korean as well as American culture offers prescribed roles within which to hide from personal contact. The structure of the Korean language enables its speakers to maintain an emotional and social distance. Lelia is shocked to learn that Henry never knew the name of the Korean woman who cooked and cleaned for the Parks for years after Henry's mother died. Henry explains, "She didn't understand that there weren't moments in our language -- the rigorous, regimental one of family and servants -- when the woman's name could have naturally come out" (69). Henry further admits that he still has difficulty recalling his parents' names because they always referred to each other by their roles in the family, including "spouse," "wife," "mother," "husband," "Father," or "Henry's father" (69). However, for Henry's father, Korean is the language of truth and English is the language he uses when he wishes "to hide or not outright lie" (63). His inability to converse fluently in English allows him to evade offering specific meanings in conversation. Sometimes the vocabulary he uses is completely divorced from any intended meaning. In one incident he hurls "some awful stream of nonsensical street talk" at his wife, a mix of curses he has learned at work that neither fully understands (63). Henry tries to break up this fight with a similar use of English, hurling complete sentences filled with the longest English words he knows at his father, regardless of their applicability to the situation, but he succeeds only in angering his

mother, who corrects Henry's outspoken behavior in Korean, the language that defines relationships in his life (63).[173]

Because of this background which taught Henry to use language to separate himself from the self that others see, Henry is one of his company's most successful spies. The double-consciousness that is a product of his upbringing enables him to excel in his job. This is the case until he is assigned to investigate Dr. Luzan, a Filipino psychiatrist who has some ties to a revolutionary group. In the guise of Luzan's patient, Henry meets with him for therapy sessions, during which he reveals parts of his "legend," the background he created for himself for this job, and carefully draws information out of Luzan as well. Difficulties arise when Henry, seduced by the kind doctor's wish to help him understand who he is, interweaves his real experiences with his created ones and loses track of the "self" he is supposed to be performing with Luzan. Henry is removed from the assignment immediately, but not before damage has been done to his ability to function as an operative. As Chen explains, "Henry's difficulty in distinguishing the performance of identity from that which is ostensibly 'real' problematizes his initial belief that masks can be taken off, facades stripped away to reveal the concrete foundations that structure who we are" (653).

Henry's next assignment is to shadow John Kwang, a city councilman from Queens whom many believe will be a contender in the next mayoral election. Although the assignment is supposed to be an easy one, designed to help Henry regain his ability to

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[173] Lee represents the Park family's mixed use of language though multiple techniques. When his parents speak in Korean, he offers their words in smooth, italicized English to represent their fluency in the language. In contrast, his father's English contains the markers of the new speaker -- incorrectly chosen words, dropped articles, and so forth. Lee uses little Korean, but when he does it is romanized, italicized, and translated for the English speaking reader.

separate himself from his persona, it leads to the further dissolution of Henry's construction as agent as he explores who he might be beneath the many masks he wears. Because Kwang is a Korean immigrant, like Henry's father, Henry is unable to maintain the necessary critical distance. Kwang's appeal to his multi-ethnic constituency lies in his promise to help them access America as he has. His campaign workers register immigrants for naturalization, tell Kwang's life story which mirrors the immigrants' own, and say in ten different languages, "*Kwang is like you. You will be an American*" (143). He also works to establish dialogue between the African American and Korean American communities.[174] Although he opens himself to all of the immigrants in his district, Henry is particularly taken with Kwang because Kwang creates for Henry a space in which he can be comfortably Korean. Kwang calls Henry by his Korean name and serves him Korean food in his home. As a public figure, Kwang is a wonder to Henry, a new type of Korean who is willing to speak and therefore outside of the family sphere, who has ambition, and who is unafraid (139). According to Chen, Henry's association with Kwang, along with his son's death and his wife's departure, forces him to face "the extent to which his identity is the result of both his own performative choices and of his American education that leads him to enact a particular role" (639). He questions, for the first time, the pleasure he has always taken in being able to assimilate at will: "I have always known that moment of disappearance, and the even uglier truth is that I have long treasured it. That always honorable-seeming absence. It appears I can go anywhere I

[174] Kwang's belief in a united, multi-ethnic community as an extended family has developed, in part, as a response to what he sees as a media move to question and then limit diversity in America. He tells Henry that the media is looking to report racial strife so that the public will begin to question the presence of diversity in America and come to see it as something that "ails rather than strengthens and enriches" the country (274). Suspecting the gradual closing of America and "a narrowing of who can rightfully live here and be counted" (274), Kwang speaks out for a cross-racial solidarity.

wish. Is this my assimilation, so many years in the making? Is this the long-sought sweetness?" (202). Henry comes to wonder if his serial assimilation through role playing is the haven he has believed it to be. Through Henry's work compiling information for Kwang on new immigrants, which leads him to reassess his immigrant heritage and to see *their* stories as *his* (279), Lee suggests that he may find a new sense of home in the immigrant community.

After Henry learns that Kwang also has hidden layers, specifically that Kwang is cheating on his wife and that he had a hand in the murder of one of his campaign workers who he thought betrayed him, he is devastated. He turns over Kwang's roles of campaign supporters' names to his boss, as requested. He then looks elsewhere for a connection to the Korean community, but even with a waitress in a Korean noodle shop, he cannot speak: "I bow my head low to her. I want to thank her, too, with a surprise of saying something in our language, but there is nothing in my throat to call up. I am half afraid of disappointing her with some fumble of poorly accented words" (315-16). He laments what he would say to her if he had "the right words" to do so, but he does not speak. When the media releases the story of Kwang's involvement in a massive, illegal *ggeh*, the public response to Kwang's downfall confirms for Henry the limitations of American acceptance of Korean men. Protestors fill Kwang's yard with banners reading "America for Americans" (331). In this moment Henry reflects on his parents, especially his mother who, had she lived, might have commented that Kwang wanted too much. He then recalls his father's simple dreams and realizes "what I have done with my life is the darkest version of what he only dreamed of, to enter a place and tender the native language with body and tongue and have no one turn and point to the door" (334). Most

painful of all, he learns that the information he collected on Kwang's supporters led to the deportation of about one hundred illegal immigrants who contributed money to Kwang. Henry's ability to assimilate has led him, finally, to the betrayal of his father's dream and of his own people.

In the end, Henry embraces a romantic immigrant vision. Haunted by the faces of those whom he inadvertently helped to deport, he longs to hear the mixed, mangled speech of new immigrants (337) and proclaims a love of the sounds and smells of ethnic neighborhoods in Queens (346). Min Song criticizes Lee for questioning immigrant myths and then bowing to them, noting that he seems aware of the "brutal physical and psychological experience of many immigrants in homogenizing mythologies" and yet has Henry claim his love for America as he looks at the streets crowded with American cars and hears the sounds of early-morning shopkeepers opening up (186-87). Lee undercuts this sweeping gesture with the final scene in the novel, however, which depicts Lelia and Henry, reconciled, working together to teach young immigrant children to speak English. Henry's part in Lelia's lessons is to play a character called the Speech Monster. He wears a green rubber mask and chases the children around the room, cowering whenever they say the secret English phrase of the day. Even in this innocent game, he has returned to playing a role in which he is a predator confined by language. Chang-rae Lee, like Kang and Cha, thus asks whether emigration to America provides an escape from oppression or simply another chosen version of it. His text seems to suggest that the second generation's desire to assimilate through psychologically damaging role playing cannot easily be escaped and that the promise of the third generation (represented by Mitt) will not be realized. The future of Koreans in America thus remains uncertain.

Lee's emphasis on the complex linguistic and cultural negotiations that Korean immigrants and their descendants perform in the United States brings full circle the issue of the violation of linguistic and cultural spaces that the Japanese takeover of Korea initiated at the beginning of the twentieth century. Lee returns to the themes of the destructive power of false histories which divide Koreans against themselves (and by extension against the nation), the conferring of new identities through new languages, and the search to find a language through which an authentic self can be voiced that are the hallmarks of the Korean American narrative. His treatment of these subjects may well mark the end of this line of consideration in Korean American literature. In Ed Park's estimation, "Korean American writing has been clutching its throat, feeling the words come out [. . .] but such language about language may have run its course" (3). Now that Korean American writers have found sizeable reading audiences both in the Korean American community and in the mainstream, the narrative of finding a voice, of who may speak the Korean experience and how, may give way to other stories at the hands of emerging writers who will assume voice and cultural space as givens.

However, this literature will likely continue to be shaped by the drive to preserve and explore Korean history, particularly in terms of Korean Americans' relationship to it. Moving in an opposite direction from the Cuban American tradition, which has progressed from texts that dwell solely upon Cuban experiences and identities to ones that are set in the United States and look at hybrid selves, Korean American literature seems to be returning home. With its focus on the fruits of a nation that continues to be divided and occupied -- such as the stories of the comfort women and the mixed-race children of Korean women and American soldiers -- Korean American literature is

turning to the Korean side of Korean American identity. This move is not simply evidence of the third-generation's romanticized search for heritage, though, but an earnest desire to bring to light and, in some sense, come to terms with, painful experiences that are part of Korea's colonial history. If recent works by Nora Okja Keller, Heinz insu Fenkl, and Chang-rae Lee are any indication, Korean American writers will continue to explore the dynamics of Korean ethnic identity not only within the United States but within the larger Korean diaspora.

Chapter 6: Cross-Cultural Concerns

As a longitudinal study, this project provides the broader perspective that is missing in current studies of American immigrant literature. The immigrant writers discussed represent groups entering the United States in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries through multiple ports, including New York, Miami, and Hawaii. Brought together, they represent a needed exploration of the diversity of the story that the immigrant is moved to tell. As I conclude this study, I find myself asking a series of questions: Is there such a thing as *the* immigrant experience in America? Or, are the experiences of various ethnic populations in the United States so different that comparisons between them serve only to homogenize those experiences in a way that does disservice to each? If there is any validity in the concept of a common immigrant literary pattern, how does that experience relate to what might be considered the *American* experience? Finally, is a continuation of studies of immigrant literature even relevant to contemporary American society, or is this genre now only of historical interest?

Although the four literary traditions I have examined emerged in response to widely different political and social experiences, I have found that they do have much in common, including the condition of entering a new society in which one must negotiate an unfamiliar language and set of cultural practices, more often than not contend with discrimination, and balance the desire for change with the weight of past experiences, both individual and collective. For all groups, the production of a body of literature

serves as a way to process these experiences, to speak to society outside the group, and, finally, to critique the group's own adaptation to American life.

Immigrant groups with a history of literary production, like Jewish Americans and Cuban Americans, began producing literature in the United States almost immediately upon arrival, through the auspices of their own newspapers, magazines, and, eventually, publishing houses. Initially, their literature spoke only to members of the group. They were written in Yiddish and Spanish, respectively, and treated aspects of community life. The acceptance of literary works by Jewish and Cuban American authors by mainstream publishing houses necessitated certain concessions to an outsider audience, however, particularly in terms of using a language accessible to English speakers. For African Americans, the production of written literature became possible only with access to long-denied education and even then, what could be said, how, and by whom was initially determined by outsider audiences. Rather than being able to produce their own literature that addressed inner-group concerns and served as a safe haven from the turmoil of American life, writing for African Americans was immediately a test through which they had to prove their abilities and worthiness to a skeptical and sometimes hostile public. For Koreans, too, the first texts produced were directed toward an audience external to the group and immediately took up the work of promoting understanding and acceptance of the group in American society. For both of these latter groups, writing toward an outsider audience was dictated by the limitations of the group, not only by the size of the literate population but also by the harmful perceptions of the group that led to discrimination and oppression. Additionally, for Korean immigrants as well as for African Americans, the emergence of a written literary tradition was delayed by the

nature of the work they did, which did not allow time for development of literacy skills. In both traditions, the first literature produced in English was written by those who managed to escape menial labor and obtain an education.

In each of the literary traditions in my study, engagement with mainstream audiences, whether that comes early or late, dictates form as well as message in the text. The difficulties of "translating" the self, both linguistically and culturally, for an outsider audience feature prominently in the literature. Immigrant writers across the board illustrate a consciousness of the environment into which their work is going and speak accordingly. Writing becomes a way of entering into the American community. Thus, the literature serves a political and social as well as artistic function. The literature of each group also shows a turning point at which writers shift from addressing their texts to an outsider audience to creating for an insider group. At this point writers turn inward to consider in-group dynamics, such as fissures between factions created by generational, political, and experiential differences. Certainly writers in each tradition produce works depicting their ethnic communities when they are writing to an outsider audience, but the nature of that depiction changes when the immigrant writer envisions his or her own group as the principal readership. Sometimes this turn inward involves criticism of the group, which is met with resistance by those who consider themselves standard-bearers.

Each group of writers considers issues related to representation. Some writers such as Mary Antin, Booker T. Washington, and Younghill Kang claim representative status in order to promote a particular agenda. Others, including Richard Wright and Isaac Bashevis Singer, acknowledge that their experiences and the experiences of their protagonists do not represent the majority, but they claim the power to write a text that

speaks to the collective experience nonetheless. Still others, such as Phillip Roth, Cristina García, Oscar Hijuelos, and Chang-rae Lee, are accorded representative status by mainstream readers but are clearly uncomfortable with this position, which sometimes places them at odds with the ethnic community. All of these relationships to representativeness point to the complexity of ethnic identity in America as it is constructed by those in the group who claim authority to represent, those who are criticized for the nature of their representation, and those who are labeled representative by mainstream culture. The problem is that notions of collective identity are grounded in an ethnic essentialism that is the foundation of both the negative stereotypes that immigrant writers try to argue against and of the new identities they posit. There seems to be little room for telling the individual story in light of the drive to present a positively-figured collective identity, on the one hand, and the assumption that a writer has penned a representative text even if that was not his or her intention, on the other. Interestingly, over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the immigrant narrative as it is presented by the groups in my study points to the lack of a monolithic, easily defined ethnic experience in any single culture, despite these issues of representation.

Comparison of the specific features of each of the literary traditions reveals that certain images and issues emerge for all groups, although they are treated differently. The search for a better life that brings the first generation of each of the groups in my study to America (or to the North, as in the case of African Americans) is motivated by their desire to escape political, economic, and sometimes religious hardships. In Antin, Cahan, Singer, Douglass, Wright, García, Kang, and Paik Lee, among others, social and political crises disrupt the immigrants' sense of nation as a physical, spiritual, and emotional home

and move them to seek that homeland elsewhere. This is true regardless of when the group arrives. Jews see themselves as a people without a country, African Americans are separated from an African homeland and depict the South as hell, Cuban Americans are unable to embrace the political changes that render their country unrecognizable, and Korean Americans find themselves detached from a nation that legally ceases to exist as they knew it. The same basic motivations that brought nineteenth and early twentieth-century Jews from Europe to escape poverty, banishment to the Pale and the mob violence of the pogroms, and later those who fled the Holocaust and its aftermath, brought African Americans to move North to escape poverty and racism, Cuban Americans to Florida to escape political instability and the resulting economic crises, and Koreans to Hawaii and then California where they could live and work free from the limitations brought about by Japanese colonialism. Unlike Jews and African Americans, for several generations Cubans and Koreans anticipated a re-formation of the former national state and the opportunity to return. However, for all of these groups, seeking out America's promises was as much about what they were leaving behind as it was about what they were going toward.[175]

This accounts, in part, for the common desire to convey and encourage understanding of the forces that brought particular immigrant groups to America and the ways in which those forces have shaped immigrants' responses to the new world. Antin, Cahan, Yezierska, Douglass, Washington, Wright, Yglesias, García, Kang, Mary Paik

[175] Although the journey to America seen as the journey to a promised land is secularized for most of the writers in my study, referring simply to a place of freedom and opportunity, for several writers in the Jewish, African American, and Korean traditions, the journey to America is invested with religious significance and seen as guided by divine providence. Mary Antin, Toni Morrison and Mary Paik Lee, for example, depict the fulfillment of a religious mission. For each of these writers, their people are the chosen ones, and their presence in the new place is directed and sanctioned by God.

Lee, and Cha all offer analyses of the conditions that led them or their characters to leave and seek life in a new place. The degree of realism in their depictions of what the immigrants are leaving behind varies according to audience, agenda, and expected reception. For most, particularly those writing in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, the need to be understood by a reading audience leads the writer to produce a realist text. The argument behind this turn to realism is, of course, that an accurate knowledge of the oppressive conditions which led to the immigrant's departure will bring him or her greater understanding and acceptance here. Literature becomes a form of social testimony, with accounts of suffering designed to sway the court of public opinion. For those who do not write in the realist mode, the desired outcome is the same. Washington, for example, glosses over the pain of slavery in his bid for acceptance. Cha forces her readers into the fractured mindset of the postcolonial subject, trying to align readers with the experience of being alienated through language.

The extent to which the conditions the immigrant is escaping dominate his or her perspective on American life determines the placement of this testimony in the text and its shape. Accordingly, the ways in which the conditions that prompted immigration differ widely. In the Jewish tradition, an inescapable past troubles immigrants in America. That past may be an individual past or the memory or reminder of a collective experience. This theme is developed most prominently in the fiction of the last four decades that considers the weight of the Holocaust on Jewish consciousness in America. Roth's "Eli the Fanatic" shows that past in the form of the orthodox Jew who refuses to dress differently. He serves as a physical reminder of what Eli and the rest of Woodenton have tried to leave behind through assimilation. Singer's Herman Broder is hiding out in

the promised land, his worldview and relationships dictated by the past which, in his mind, merges with the present. Even for the second generation, the weight of the past is difficult to escape. This is seen in Thane Rosenbaum's "Cattle Car Complex," in which Adam Posner, a modern Jewish American lawyer, gets stuck in an elevator and, through the experience of entrapment, takes on the identity of a Holocaust survivor. Similarly, the experiences of African American migrants to the North continue to be shaped by their Southern consciousness. Douglass, Wright, and the first-generation characters in Brown's narrative bring Southern ways of understanding to the North only to find that these cannot sufficiently account for life in the new world or help immigrants to make sense of it. Wright and Verdelle depict characters whose opportunities in society are limited by those who cannot conceive of other roles for them. Wright encounters this in terms of white employers and co-workers who cannot accept his presence and black friends and educators who discourage him from pursuing his dreams. The family of Verdelle's Deneese similarly seeks to confine her to the traditional role of the black woman as cook, maid, and mother. Thus slavery continues to dictate the place of African Americans in the United States long after emancipation. Even in Morrison's *Paradise*, the architects of a new community base their creation, albeit unconsciously, on the guiding principles of the society they sought to escape. Like Herman Broder's, their choice to recreate the place from which they came does not aid in healing but, instead, further divides. As Jews are haunted by a past that reasserts itself and that they try to leave behind but are unable to, African Americans are reminded of that past at every turn through the black/white racialization of American society. For both groups, there is a point at which that painful

past is internalized and chosen, signaling the psychological breakdown of the immigrant character.

Cuban immigrants' sense of the past's shaping of the present and future led to the publication of an extensive literature of exile before the appearance of a distinctly Cuban American literature in which an obsession with the past is both mockingly and poignantly displayed. Characters like Nellie in Fernandez's *Holy Radishes!*, who does not ever unpack her suitcase, show the comic side of nostalgia and the expectation of return, while Hijuelos's Mercedes and Alejo from *Our House in the Last World* illustrate the tragedy of it. In Korean American literature, the need to address the historical conditions that led to departure is felt even more keenly than in the other traditions because of Americans' ignorance of Korea's oppression by the Japanese. The victims of cultural erasure in their homeland, Korean American writers use their texts to record and teach through framing their narratives with Korean history, as in Kang and Paik Lee, and immersing readers in the sense of loss and inability to express the self because of detachment from history, as in Cha and Chang-rae Lee.

Again, the effects of historical trauma extend beyond the first generation to the second, third, and even fourth generations who are psychologically haunted by cultural memory. This is seen in all four literary traditions. Wright admits that as a child he had never been physically threatened by a white man but was afraid nonetheless. Henry Roth's David Schearl bears the weight of his parents' past although he does not fully understand it. Hijuelos shows both Hector and Horacio crushed under the weight of their parents' Cubanness. García's Pilar feels the loss of exile, although she is fully American-raised, and she cannot make sense of her mystical connection to Cuba until she visits

there. Chang-rae Lee's Henry Park is distanced from his father who will not tell him about his past and consequently adopts damaging social roles. These texts suggest that some historical narratives take generations to play out. This may be because of the tightly-knit nature of the ethnic families and communities in which second, third, and fourth generation characters are raised. Writers in each tradition show that these communities can embrace and sustain the younger generations, but they also hold them back as groups assimilate and desire to move into the mainstream. Yezierska, Henry Roth, Phillip Roth, Wright, Brown, Verdelle, Morrison, Yglesias, Hijuelos, García, and Chang-rae Lee all explore this aspect of immigrant life in America.

Assimilation is a principal concern in the literature of each of the groups in my study and is discussed in terms of education, work, and personal relationships. Education is a principal factor in the process of assimilation that appears in the literature of each group. In the Jewish tradition which places a high value on scholarship, American education is supported and synonymous with American opportunity in early texts, but later becomes associated with the separation from an ethnic identity. For African Americans as well, like Douglass, education enables entry into the promised land. For Washington, education *is* the promised land. Education becomes more complicated, however, for future generations who find that while getting an education may enable them to engage differently with the mainstream, it puts them at a disadvantage in their community and marks them as an outsider there. Texts by Wright, Brown, and Verdelle explore this idea. In the Cuban American tradition, American education functions as a process of re-education through which the immigrant unlearns Cubanness. Yglesias's Pini, who discovers that his cultural knowledge is not shared by others and that he will

have to learn new histories, and Hijuelos's Hector, who is terrorized into mastering a new language, illustrate this well. In the Korean American tradition, Mary Paik Lee and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha both construct subjects who fight this type of cultural domination and offer correctives to it. In all four groups, writers depict the reality that education does not guarantee success in cases in which prejudice prevents the immigrant from entering the workforce, or, in the case of Cuban and Korean immigrants, foreign credentials are not acceptable in the United States.

These writers also show that immigrants' assimilation into the workforce leads to severe discrimination when their presence is perceived as a threat. For example, Levinsky's rise in the garment industry, Wright's entry at the optical company, and Koreans' success with start-up laundries and fruit and vegetable stands (shown in *Native Speaker*) are all met with a destructive hatred. The limits of America's acceptance of immigrants are also seen when they attempt to cross the color line through inter-ethnic relationships. Yezierska's Sonya, who enters into a relationship with a white man; Brown, who has a white, Jewish girlfriend; Kang's Jum, Kim, and Han, all of whom pursue white women; and Chang-rae Lee's Henry, who does the same, all test the bounds of acceptable behavior for immigrants. These boundaries are redrawn over the course of the Jewish literary tradition as Jews are perceived to "whiten" and therefore become more acceptable in American culture. For African Americans and Koreans, however, physical otherness helps to sustain the idea of the necessity of strict social divisions. Notably, these relationships also show the psychological damage done to the immigrant figure when he/she seeks acceptance through the idealization of white culture and the rejection of an ethnic heritage.

Predictably, the narratives sustain a shared concern with the definition of who can become an American. The majority of immigrant writers in each group argue for their right to be considered Americans, even as they critique the nation's politics and practices. For those groups barred from the rights and privileges of legal citizenship, the immigrant writer becomes the political lobbyist, with his or her text read as proof that citizenship should be extended to that group. Indeed, immigration and naturalization laws play an important role in the development of the literatures. For example, Korean American literature begins in the early twentieth century but does not grow as a tradition until the late twentieth century, at which point changes in America's naturalization policy toward Asians produce corresponding changes in the presentation of citizenship in literary texts. Kang, Paik Lee, and Charr, none of whom could become citizens, critique America's laws. Cha, who was naturalized, examines the effect of that process on the immigrant's conception of self and relationship to homeland. As with the Korean tradition, African American literature begins with those who are *not* allowed into the North legally, and an awareness of their refugee status is reflected in their texts. Later they consider the dangers inherent in adopting a fully American, assimilated identity in lieu of an ethnic one. Cuban American literature has been shaped by America's changing policy toward Cuban immigrants, producing groups of writers who are influenced by and reflect the different waves of immigration. Tellingly, the younger generation, for whom citizenship is a given, is the one writing to bridge the divisions between sectors in the Cuban community. Overall these texts also preserve a sense of what America claims its best self to be. More so than in mainstream literature, they contain and promote the elements of our national mythology, even if through critiques of America for not living up to it. Thus,

the immigrant presence in American literature is a constant reminder of America's promise and its sometimes hypocritical stance.

Ironically, as I consider the conclusion to this project and its importance both in the realm of critical literary studies and in the world outside academia, I have just received two emails that speak to the issue in different ways. The first is an advertisement for a company offering to help me apply for one of 55,000 Visas available through Immigration and Naturalization's Green Card lottery. Their ad reads:

> Some chances come only once...
>
> Find out here!
>
> Live and Work in the United States of America!
>
> You only have one life to live!
>
> Reach OUT and touch your FREEDOM!
>
> The UNITED STATES of AMERICA is welcoming 50,000 NEW PEOPLE this year!
>
> Get one of the thousands of Green Cards and turn your DREAMS into REALITY.
>
> The American Dream is calling you, start a better life in the Free World!
>
> View here - Visit this address for your chance to win!
>
> Wealth, Freedom and the chance to live life the way YOU want it!
>
> Some chances only come once in a life time - Apply for your Green Card and create a Better Tomorrow!
>
> Apply for your Green Card

> Cut and paste the URL above in your browser or simply double click it NOW.

Going to the web page itself, I find images of an American flag, a dove, and a sunlit field in which two children stand looking, presumably, toward their future. Banners implore me to "Stop Dreaming," "Start Living," and "Dare to Live a Better Life!" I am also told that "From New York to California, you will find that when it comes to your dreams, the only limit is your own imagination" (http://200.210.170.34/v4u/index2.html). Clearly, at least for those marketing this service, the American mythos still has the power to draw people to the United States, in spite of the nation's well-publicized conflicted attitude toward immigration and the presence of ethnic tension in America.

The second message is from a group called Project USA, whose aim is to rally American citizens to lobby politicians for an immigration time-out. The group's website explains that they are in favor of reducing immigration to "sustainable levels" but are not "anti-immigrant" (http://www.projectusa.org). Although I did not subscribe myself to the Project USA mailing list, they have dutifully sent me weekly messages for the past two years, all of which, essentially, point to the problems that immigration is causing for America and Americans in the areas of national security, race relations, labor, health, education, the environment, and community. This week's message includes a form letter requesting more strict enforcement of immigration laws that I can fill out on-line and have sent to Attorney General John Ashcroft in my name. What strikes me about the rhetoric of Project USA and other contemporary proponents of an immigration time-out is the extent to which it reflects statements popular during previous decades of fervent American nationalism. This is particularly notable in terms of the underlying notion of

America as a family and American identity as something that can be inherited that Walter Benn Michaels examines in *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism.* The same mainstream concerns that surfaced regarding immigration in the 1920s, for example, are being raised again, with an additional emphasis on terrorism that has resulted from the September 11th attacks and the current concern over driver's licenses and bank accounts for illegal immigrants. Given such contemporary debates over immigration policy, even in today's much more ethnic-friendly American society, considerations of immigrants' expressions of their journey through acculturation are still relevant and necessary, as are considerations of how immigrants express themselves to a sometimes hostile society. The perceived need to enact an American identity in order to ask for acceptance is not relegated to the historical moment of Antin, Washington, and Kang, among others, but can be seen in the post 9/11 images of Arab Americans draping their bodies, homes, and businesses in American flags. An examination of the emerging literature of this group and others now associated with terrorism in the popular imagination would be an interesting area for further study.

As the American immigrant experience continues to be transformed through social and political changes in the global community, new writers are expanding the canon of immigrant literature through texts which challenge our conceptions of the ways in which the immigrant story can be told. Recent literary treatments of the immigrant experience by Gish Jen, Jhumpa Lahiri, Jessica Hagedorn, Edwidge Dandicat, Roberto Quesada, Paul Stoller, Geling Yan, and Firoozeh Dumas illustrate the incredible diversity of theme and form in contemporary immigrant writing. The increasingly difficult and fascinating ways in which the immigrant story resonates both inside and outside of the

United States speak to the centrality of the immigrant experience to the American experience and to the centrality of immigrant literature to an American canon that promotes and critiques the ideas of self-fashioning, advancement through hard work, and inclusion. Immigrant narratives have been, and will likely continue to be, reflections of America's changing sense of self. Indeed, through the study of immigrant narratives, Americans can see who we have been, who we are, and who we will become.

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Vita

Amanda Maree Lawrence was born in Athens, Georgia on October 5, 1972. She grew up in Dalton, Georgia and Douglas, Georgia, where she graduated from Coffee High School with honors in 1991. She then attended Georgia Southern University in Statesboro, Georgia, and graduated Magna Cum Laude with a B.A. in English and a minor in music in June 1995. In the fall of 1995 she enrolled in the Master of Arts program at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, where she taught writing and literature courses as a Graduate Assistant. She received her M.A. in English in 1997.

While pursuing her Ph.D. in English at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville from 1997-2003, Amanda has been a Graduate Teaching Associate in the English Department and a Graduate Assistant at the Thornton Center. She has taught courses in writing and literature, and has tutored in the English Department Writing Center, where she was Assistant Director in 1999-2000, and the Thornton Center Writing Lab. She is the co-author of two writing textbooks, *The College Writers' Workshop: Volumes I and II*. She has held a John C. Hodges Fellowship, Norman J. Sanders Dissertation Fellowship, Durante da Ponte American Literature Fellowship, and Volunteer Fellowship, and was a participant in the Pew Younger Scholars seminar "Ethnic Pluralism and the Question of Integration in American Life" held at the University of Notre Dame in the summer of 2002. She was awarded the doctoral degree in May 2004.