Land of the Kike Home of the Wop

The Reverend Shegog's Easter sermon in the fourth chapter of William Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury (1929) repeats and interlaces that novel's twinned fantasies about language and the family—about language, that the word can be made flesh and, about family, that endogamy can supplant exogamy—by invoking the Eucharistic miracle that turns the sign of Christ's blood into the blood itself and by reimagining a congregation as a collection of blood relations: "Bredden en sistuh," the Reverend Shegog says, "I got de ricklickshun en de blood of de Lamb." In The Sound and the Fury, the desire to make words into things and the desire to sleep with your sister are inseparable or even, as is the case with Quentin's "I have committed incest I said" (49), indistinguishable. To commit incest by saying that you've committed incest is to make the words the thing; to say you've committed incest and thus to commit incest is to keep your sister forever in your family—"if I could tell you we did it would have been so and then the others wouldn't be so and then the world would roar away" (107–8). In The Sound and the Fury, these ambitions are doubly linked, first because they both involve a repudiation of arbitrary or conventional relations (between word and thing, between husband and wife) and, second, because the repudiation of those relations is everywhere deployed in defense of a tautology that will find its definitive formulation in the proposition "blood is blood and you can't get around it" (146).

The Sound and the Fury repeatedly insists that what people and things do or mean is a function of what they are; it insists, that is, on identity as the determining ground of action or significance. In this, as the following
be presented as efforts to work out the meaning of the commitment to identity—linguistic, national, cultural, racial—that I will argue is common to both.

So, while Quentin's joke, "Land of the kike home of the wop," makes one version of the nativist point—"America," as a congressman speaking in support of the immigration bill put it, "for Americans"—his desire not only to commit incest but to commit incest by saying he committed incest makes another. And this extension of the interest in "purifying and keeping pure the blood of America" beyond Congress's desire to exclude "unassimilable aliens" suggests not only the discursive range but the imaginative potential of nativist logic. "We have a great desire," Calvin Coolidge remarked, "to be supremely American," which is to say that, in nativist modernism, identity becomes an ambition as well as a description. Indeed, it is only this transformation of identity into the object of desire as well as its source that will make the dramas of nativism—the defense of identity, its loss, its repudiation, its rediscovery—possible. What we want, in other words, may be a function of what we are, but in order for us to want it, we cannot simply be it. Thus The Sound and the Fury's insistence that "blood is blood" will be doubled by strategies for making blood be blood; the insistence that the word become the thing, that naming your sister be a way of having your sister, must be shadowed by the failure of the word to be the thing and by the disappearance of your sister.

This is why the only word that the languageless Benjy responds to is "caddie," which he hears as a proper name—Caddy—and which signifies to him not the presence but the disappearance of his sister, Caddy. Proper names are imagined in The Sound and the Fury as at least ideally linked to their referents so that, for example, changing Benjy's name from Maury can be imagined as a good thing for Benjy's Uncle Maury, who will no longer be linguistically linked to an idiot, and a bad thing for Benjy, who will no longer be called by the name that is really his. "Folks don't have no luck, changing names" (36), says Dilsey. And since names are further imagined not only as uniquely designating a single person but as inseparable from that person—"long after" she's "forgot," Dilsey says, "Dilsey" will still be her name, and when her name is read in "the Book," all she'll have to do is say "ise here" (36)—the word "caddie" appears to Benjy less as the use than as the misuse of her name; uttered on the land that was sold to pay for her wedding, it marks not the fact that she's "here" but the fact that she's "not here. Which is why, hearing the word that he under-
stands only as a name, and hearing the name as a reference to the absence rather than the presence of the person named, Benjy starts bellowing. And he can only be calmed by another sign for Caddy, the “satin slipper” she wore on her wedding day, a sign that signifies Caddy more satisfactorily than her name since, understood as virtually a part of her, it comes closer to making her in fact present, “here.”

The Reverend Shagog’s sermon addresses this issue most obviously in its central assertion: “I got the recollection and the blood of the Lamb” (175). What it means to have this recollection and to have it through the blood of the Lamb has, of course, been a central issue in Christian theology. Does the bread and wine eaten and drunk “in remembrance” of Jesus symbolize Jesus (and thus remember him while acknowledging his absence) or does it embody him (“This is my body”) (and thus remember him by making him present)? Is it like a word that functions in the absence of the referent or like a name that is supposed to mark the referent’s presence or, even better, like a slipper, which can be imagined actually to make at least a little of the referent present? In the Reverend Shagog’s sermon, through which the reverend himself “sees de blastin’, blindin’ sight” (177) and makes his hearers see it also, language appears to achieve the identity of word and thing that Caddy’s slipper foreshadows.

The delivery of the sermon also makes a version of this point. Beginning in a voice that is “level,” “cold,” and “inflexionless,” the minister ends in a voice that is “as different as day and dark from his former tone” (175). This new voice has “a sad, timbrous quality like an alto horn” and, in a description that seems to allude to the sermons of the Reverend Dimmesdale in Hawthorne’s The Scarlet Letter (whose “vocal organ,” like “other music,” “breathed passion and pathos . . . in a tongue native to the human heart”), the Reverend Shagog’s voice sinks into the “hearts” of his audience, “speaking there again” until “there was not even a voice but instead their hearts were speaking to one another in chanting measures beyond the need for words” (176). Just as, in The Scarlet Letter, the “hearts’ native tongue” conveys Dimmesdale’s “feeling” by embodying it rather than meaning it—“The young pastor’s voice was tremulously sweet, rich, deep, and broken. The feeling that it so evidently manifested, rather than the direct purport of the words, caused it to vibrate within all hearts . . . ” (53)—so, in The Sound and the Fury, the musical quality of the Reverend Shagog’s voice produces its effect without recourse to the conventional symbols of meaning. Indeed, it is by making “words” unnecessary that the “chanting measures” in which his heart and the hearts of his con-

gregation speak testify to the fact that he and they have been brought “face to face” (177) with Jesus.

Hawthorne imagines that words are not only unnecessary but also potentially dangerous; because they are a “grosser medium” than sound, they have the potential to “clog” the “spiritual sense” (172). So Dimmesdale’s wordless eloquence shows how “etherealized by spirit” he has become, and his audience’s wordless response—it “absolutely babbled” (175)—shows how truly they have understood him. The voice of the Reverend Shagog repeats this identification with the spirit and reproduces the Dimmesdale effect; “succubus like,” it “consume[s]” his “body” (175) and elicits from his audience a series of prolonged “Mmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm” (176) that match the babbling of Dimmesdale’s congregation. The sermon’s topic, the Eucharistic identity of sign and referent, is thus doubled by its formal repudiation of those conventions that, acknowledging the gap between sign and referent, are ordinarily understood to make meaning possible. If the word in Hawthorne must be etherealized in order to let the “spiritual” meaning come through, the word in Faulkner must be eliminated in order to let the thing itself appear. The Reverend Shagog’s language “beyond the need for words” repeats the language of the Eucharist which, by making words things, makes them, as words, unnecessary: once the sign becomes the thing it need no longer function as a sign.

But this commitment to transubstantiation achieves its most explicit articulation in the effort to save Caddy for the Compsons, to “isolate her out of the loud world” (107). Quentin’s claim—“I have committed incest I said” (49)—is an attempt through language to substitute the blood ties of family for the affective and/or legal ties of love and marriage. It picks up the linguistic fantasy of the word becoming the thing—“if I could tell you we did it would have been so”—and deploys it on behalf both of a Benjy-style preference for natural signs (the slipper instead of the word) and of Quentin’s own commitment to replacing husbands and lovers with brothers—and then the others wouldn’t be so and then the world would roar away” (108). This is what it means for Quentin to call the little Italian girl he picks up “sister,” and it is also what it means for the first word that the Reverend Shagog speaks in his transformed voice to be “Brethren.” The linguistic fantasy of meaning without conventions turns out to be emblematic of a more thoroughgoing effort to empty the world of all non-natural relations. Every chapter in The Sound and the Fury involves the effort to replace arbitrary or social relations with natural ones, which is to
say that every chapter imagines the disappearance of the sister, Caddy, as the introduction of the arbitrary, and so every chapter involves some attempt to keep her from going or to imagine her brought back.

Thus even Jason, who (unlike Benjy) has never slept with Caddy and (unlike Quentin) has never said he slept with Caddy, indeed who hates Caddy, nevertheless finds himself in the position of articulating the rationale of the commitment to Caddy. Lured into the woods and left stranded with a flat tire by Caddy’s daughter, Quentin, and her boyfriend from the carnival, Jason can’t believe that she would let her “own uncle be laughed at by a man that would wear a red tie” (146). The point is not that there is any affection between Jason and Quentin—“Let’s forget for awhile how I feel toward you and you feel toward me...” (146)—but that kinship makes affection irrelevant—“I just wouldn’t do you this way. I wouldn’t do you this way no matter what you had done to me. Because like I say blood is blood and you can’t get around it” (146). Who Quentin is should count more than how she feels and should thus determine what she does; “blood is blood” expresses the priority of identity over any other category of assessment and makes clear the position of the family as bearer of what I will call ideantitarian claims.

It is this position that I mean to emphasize here and that I regard as crucial in the development of American modernism. My point is not that the family as such is an object of interest in The Sound and the Fury; even less is it that the psychological relations among the members of the family are the object of interest. Rather, by insisting on the importance of family in The Sound and the Fury, I mean to suggest the way in which newly revised categories of collective identity—and, in particular, of collective national identity—began in the 1920s to occupy what I will argue was a central position in American culture, which is to say, first, in the idea of what an American was and, second, in the idea of what a culture was. The significance of the family is that it was in terms of familial relations (as opposed, say, to economic relations or regional or even generational relations) that the new structures of identity were articulated. America, A Family Matter was the title of Charles W. Gould’s nativist polemic of 1922. And, although Horace Kallen’s Culture and Democracy in the United States (1924) was directed against nativism, Kallen shared Gould’s model of national identity; according to him, the very idea of “nationality” was “familial in its essence.”

Thus, even though The Sound and the Fury may, at first blush, seem an extreme and even perverse instance of the defense of the family, both its strategies and its goals are, in fact, typical of American writing in the ’20s. The long first section of Willa Cather’s The Professor’s House (1925) is called “The Family,” and it is entirely animated by the impossible vision of Rosamond St. Peter saved for her father and sister by having married Tom Outland, who was “like an older brother,” instead of the “foreign” Louie Marsellus.10 By the same token, it’s “family life” (130) that is invoked by Tom Buchanan in his attempt to keep Daisy from Jay Gatsby, and if The Great Gatsby (1925) seems, like Daisy herself, to be “pretty cynical” about “family life and family institutions,” it’s worth remembering that the “natural intimacy” between Tom and Daisy proves in the end more resistant than anything in Cather or Faulkner to the threat, embodied in Gatsby, of what Tom thinks of as miscegenation.11 And even in a novel where no one is related to anyone else, like Hemingway’s The Sun Also Rises (1926), the defining characteristic of familial identity—“breeding”—here transformed into the defining characteristic of the Hemingway aesthetic—afoxion—operates to reproduce the structure of The Professor’s House and The Great Gatsby: Brett, like Daisy from Gatsby and Rosamond from Louie, must be saved from Robert Cohn.

What’s wrong with Cohn is, put negatively, that he has no breeding, no afoxion, or, put positively, that he’s Jewish. In this, of course, he is like Murrells, whose “foreign” status is racial, and he is not unlike Gatsby who, although he differs from the Buchanans (and from Nick Carraway) in belonging to a different class, is persistently understood by them as belonging to something more like a different race; this is why he provokes in Tom diatribes against “intermarriage between black and white” (130). Indeed, in The Sound and the Fury Faulkner contrives to mark even Quentin’s otherwise anonymous man in the red tie as racially other; this is what it means for him to be one of the show people who take money from the farmers without, Jason thinks, giving anything in return. Having “brought nothing to the town” (118), they occupy the same position in Jason’s imagination as the cotton speculators in New York, the “dam eastern jews” who “trim the suckers” on the market and leave the farmer himself with nothing but “a red neck and the hump in his back” (116). “I have nothing against the jews as an individual,” Jason says, “It’s just the race. You’ll admit that they produce nothing” (116). Blood is blood; by way of his nonproductivity, the man with the red tie turns out to occupy the position of the Jew, and keeping women in the family turns out to be identical to keeping them from the Jews.

What’s at stake in the desire to keep someone in the family is thus the
sense that what is outside the family is also outside the race. In *America, A Family Matter*, Gould argued that, forcing our children to "rub shoulders" with "strangers and foreigners," we were robbing them of their "heritage." He urged not only that immigration be restricted—as it would be in the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924—but that all naturalization laws be repealed. Immigrants, he thought, could never be successfully "Americanized" since the qualities that constituted the American could "not be taught"; they were functions instead of "birth, breeding," "they must come to us with the mother's milk, the baby's lisping questions, and grow with our nerves and thews and sinews until they become part and parcel of our very being" (163). The point, then, of identifying as a Jew the "stranger" who wants to marry into your family is to identify as American the family he wants to marry into, which is to say, to transform American identity from the sort of thing that could be acquired (through naturalization) into the sort of thing that had to be inherited (from one's parents). Insofar as the family becomes the site of national identity, nationality becomes an effect of racial identity.

These transformations are, in an important if not an absolute sense, inventions of the '20s. The major writers of the Progressive period—London, Dreiser, Wharton—were comparatively indifferent to questions of both racial and national identity. Dreiser's *An American Tragedy* (published in 1925 but articulating a set of preoccupations that had been put in place some fifteen years earlier) looks in certain respects strikingly similar to texts like *The Great Gatsby* and *The Professor's House*: Clyde Griffiths, like Gatsby and Marsellus, is an outsider, eager to be accepted by Lycurgus society and seeking that acceptance through his relations with one of its daughters. But where Cather's Marsellus wants to join the family, Clyde already belongs to it (it's because he's a Griffiths that he's come to work in his uncle's factory), so the object of Marsellus's desire is the condition of Clyde's: Clyde wants "a better collar, a nicer shirt, finer shoes . . . a swell overcoat like some boys had"; Louie wants to be "related" to the professor's "sons" (165), those books on the Spanish adventurers in the new world, which play in *The Professor's House* the role played by the eyes of the Dutch sailors in the famous last pages of *The Great Gatsby*. "American" in *An American Tragedy* means a certain set of social and economic conditions that make the desire for nicer shirts unprecedentedly powerful; Gatsby and Louie Marsellus have all the nice shirts they need—what they want is something that seems to them more plausibly married than bought. In these texts, "American" designates not a set of social and economic conditions but an identity that exists prior to and independent of those conditions.

This transformation in the meaning of "American" proceeds necessarily in tandem with a transformation in the meaning of contrastive terms, like "Jew." In a text like Sinclair Lewis's *Babbitt*—published in 1922 but still committed to the logic of naturalization—the term "Jew" is so utterly deracinated that, even when used by Jews, it has almost no racial meaning. The Jewish Sidney Finkelstein, insisting that "in the long run," it always pays to buy the most expensive goods, admits that "if a fellow wants to be a Jew about it, he can get cheap junk" and acknowledges that "the Old Folks"—"they live in one of these hick towns up-state and they simply can't get into the way a city fellow's mind works, and then, of course, they're Jews"—would "lie right down and die" if they knew the price he'd paid for a new top for his car. Since Sidney is himself Jewish, the "Old Folks" are, "of course," "Jews." But since Sidney is not himself "a Jew," the Old Folks' being Jewish isn't really enough to make them "Jews": Sidney isn't a Jew because he buys the best and the Old Folks are Jews because they are shocked by how much he spends. The economic meaning of the term is so removed from its racial roots that you don't have to be Jewish to be a Jew and being Jewish isn't enough to make you one. In a text like *The Sound and the Fury*, however, although "Jew" continues to have an economic meaning (Jews are identified with people like the carnival men who "produce nothing"), that meaning is put back into contact with its racial roots. If the alternative to being a Jew in *Babbitt* is being someone who spends freely, the alternative to being a Jew in *The Sound and the Fury* is being an "American." And this reconfiguration of the Jew transcends politics as well as for the same reasons that it transcends economics. "I've known some Jews that were fine citizens," Jason tells the drummer with whom he drinks a Coca-Cola. "You might be one yourself . . . 'No,' he says, 'I'm an American'" (116). Citizenship, like money, can be earned; for the new nativists, appalled by immigrants who, as Lothrop Stoddard put it, had become "American citizens but not Americans," "American" could no more be a simple political term than "Jew" could be a simple economic one.

But the comparison of these texts of the '20s to the major literary texts of the Progressive period (and to those texts like *Babbitt* and *An American Tragedy* that continue the Progressive problematic into the '20s) both over- and underemphasizes their originality. It overemphasizes their originality by ignoring an important body of Progressive literature that,
Unlike the works of Dreiser, Wharton, et al., was deeply concerned with questions of racial and national identity: the plantation novels of writers like Thomas Nelson Page and the radical racist novels of writers like Thomas Dixon. And it underemphasizes their originality in the same way, for only against the background of these earlier attempts to imagine through race an American national identity can the particular contribution of nativist modernism be understood. In Dixon, for example, the family represents a threat to rather than (as for Gould) the site of racial “purity,” since what seemed to Dixon the omnipresence of the mulatto counted as a continual demonstration of the fact that one family could be made up of two races. Dixon's effort, then, is to replace family ties with racial ones and, since the only races he recognized were black and white, he was prepared to welcome as exemplary candidates for American citizenship those “aliens” who, twenty years later, would count as threats to the American family. In fact, insofar as its horror of “amalgamation” with any blacks was utterly compatible with its enthusiastically assimilationist attitude toward all whites, Progressive racism was foundational for the projects of “Americanization” that ‘20s racism existed to combat. The Jew in Dixon's Trilology of Reconstruction is a negrophobic American hero, a supporter of the Klan who looks forward in dialect to the day when a “monument” to its leader will be erected in “de public square.”

Not all Progressives, of course, were as keen on Jews as Dixon; most, probably, were in some degree anti-Semitic. But, in contrast to the situation in the ‘20s, anti-Semitism played only a minor role in Progressive racism; and, part of the originality of ‘20s nativist modernism consists in its promotion of anti-Semitism (and of various related ethnic prejudices) from what Hannah Arendt called a form of “social discrimination” into something like what she called “a political argument.” And, as a political argument, anti-Semitism could play its role in nativism not only by going beyond but sometimes by abandoning altogether its socially discriminatory or prejudicial tendencies. This is surely one thing meant by Jason's remark that he's got nothing against “the Jews as an individual... It's just the race.” Twenties' nativism made anti-Semitism an element of American cultural citizenship and therefore an essential aspect of American identity regardless of how one felt personally about individual Jews, just as—in a slightly more eccentric fashion—Faulkner's version of that nativism made incest an element of Americanism regardless of how attracted one might be to one's brother or sister. In The Sound and the Fury, the logic of Jason's response to the man with the red tie and

to the “dam eastern jews” is the logic also of Benjy's preference for slippers over words and of Quentin's claim to have slept with Caddy and of the Reverend Shegog's Christian transformation of a congregation of (to him) strangers into “Breddren and sistuhns” (176). At the same time, however, this rewriting of both race and nation as family corresponded to two important shifts in racial logic, one that emphasized not the inferiority of “alien” races but their “difference,” and a second that tended to represent difference in cultural instead of political (and in addition to) racial terms. These transformations will be analyzed at length in what follows, but they can be exhibited economically in Gino Speranza's description (in Race or Nation, 1925) of “the Jew” as someone who “can, of course, be politically a citizen of any state to which he gives his political allegiance,” but who “holds tenaciously to his racial and special culture.” In Speranza, racial identity is disconnected from political citizenship and connected instead to “culture,” and racial hierarchy is transformed into racial pluralism. Just as Anglo-Saxons, according to Speranza, think of their own “racial point of view” not as “better or finer than that of the stocks of our newer immigration,” but as “different” (52), so “the Jew” insists on his difference and declines to “assimilate.” Indeed, from Speranza's point of view, what will seem disconcerting about a text like The Professor's House will not be the St. Peters' desire to keep the Jew out but the Jew's uncharacteristic desire to get in. And, in a series of texts, from Anzia Yezierska's Bread Givers (1925) to Oliver La Farge's Laughing Boy (1929), the refusal of the ethnic alien to become American will be increasingly crucial. In fact, this ethnic response to nativism finds expression even in The Sound and the Fury, tangentially in the Italian Julius' emergence as a figure for Quentin in defense of his sister against Quentin, more centrally in the Easter sermon. For as the Reverend Shegog turns his congregation into his family, and as his “cold inflectionless” articulacy becomes the inarticulate spiritual voice of hearts chanting to one another “beyond the need for words,” Faulkner describes him as ceasing to sound “like a white man” (175) and beginning to sound “negroid” (176). The disappearance of the white man's voice and its replacement by “negroid” “intonation” and “pronunciation” marks an essential step in the process of what the "Cultural Pluralist" Kallen called “disjillation” (114); in the presence of his racial family, repudiating the intonations of assimilation, the disjilimated Negro emerges.

But if, as we have seen, the family is the essential form of nativist identity, it is also, as we have also begun to see, a form that is essentially flawed.
The marriages that keep it alive at the same time destroy it; even before Caddy's and Quentin's betrayals, the Compsons are threatened by the necessary presence among them of the Bascombs. Indeed, one of the novel's projects is to take the two Compsons who are in some way identified as Bascombs (Benjy, who is named originally after Uncle Maury Bascomb, and Jason, who is "a Bascomb" "despite" his "name" [110]) and make them into Compsons, changing Benjy's name and naming Jason into a repetition of Quentin's effort to keep Caddy. But Caddy and Quentin aren't saved from the loud world; the unenforceability of the incestuous imperative makes the technology of biological reproduction simultaneously the technology of miscegenated contamination. Thus one alternative to incest as a strategy for keeping the blood uncontaminated is sterility. Writers like Cather and Zane Grey redeploy the nineteenth-century stereotype of "the vanishing race," celebrating the supposed disappearance of the Indian as a mark of his racial integrity—better death than "cross-breeding." And this is what it means for Benjy to be not only (like Jake Barnes in The Sun Also Rises) a "gelding," but more precisely, as Jason puts it (and as Jake, I will argue, also is), "the Great American Gelding" (158). Because writers like Lothrop Stoddard in The Rising Tide of Color were impressed by the "reckless procreation" (234) of the non-Nordic races, the comparative sterility of Nordics constituted both a problem—they were committing "racial suicide"—and a solution—their low birthrate testified to the irreducibility of their difference from the non-Nordics. From this standpoint, Benjy's inability to procreate is a sign of his native Americanness, matched only by Jason's refusal to procreate and by Quentin's desire for there to be no such thing as procreation—what Quentin wants is to imagine himself not as castrated but as born without genitalia: "It's not not having them. It's never to have had them . . . " (71). The Sound and the Fury represents the Compsons as Cather's Indians, committed above all to their own "purity" and thus—since "Purity is a negative state and therefore contrary to nature" (71)—to their own disappearance. Blood is blood, but—because blood is blood—blood isn't enough.

Another nativist alternative to utopian incest is homosexuality. This is most obvious in the "Powhatan's Daughter" section of Hart Crane's The Bridge (1930), where the origin of American identity is located in a sexual dance between the white poet and an Indian chief, which—because the chief, Maquokeeta, has replaced the "wanton" Pocahontas—makes that American origin simultaneously the scene of "the extinction of the In-

dian."24 Crane's Pocahontas is the ancestress of Caddy and Brett Ashley, and the poet's homosexuality is a kind of compensation for her promiscuity, as Jake's impotence is for Brett's. Indeed, the mention of Jake's "accident" in The Sun Also Rises immediately triggers Bill Gorton's declaration of affection for Jake—"I'm fonder of you than anybody on earth"—which in turn opens up the question of the homosexual—"I couldn't tell you that in New York. It'd mean I was a faggot."25 But the point in Hemingway is not that Bill or Jake really is homosexual; when the hotelier Montoya smiles at Jake "as though there were something lewd about the[ir] secret to outsiders," something that it "would not do to expose" to "people who would not understand" (130), that something is afeccion, not homosexuality. Hence it is the easy substitutability of what I will characterize as the racial discourse of afeccion (Cohn doesn't have it) for the discourse of homosexuality that I mean to stress here, as well as the interchangeability of both the aficionado and the homosexual with the cas- trato. All these figures can be equally (if differently) mobilized as blood supplements, as strategies for insisting upon a race-based model of identity when more literal strategies for preserving it have failed.

Much of what follows in this book will be an attempt to elaborate the claims made above and, in so doing, to show that the great American modernist texts of the '20s must be understood as deeply committed to the nativist project of racializing the American. At the same time, however, I want to argue that the most important result of this effort, a result toward which the ingenuities of incest, impotence, and homosexuality count only as a series of rehearsals, was the perfection not of racial identity but of what would come to be called cultural identity. Another way to put this would be to say that the emergence of race as the crucial marker of modern identity was accompanied almost from the start by an acknowledgment of the limitations of race as a bearer of identity—it is these limitations that the technologies of blood supplementation were designed to overcome. In the end, however, the most effective of these technologies would be one that could proclaim itself in opposition to as well as in defense of race. Culture, put forward as a way of preserving the primacy of identity while avoiding the embarrassments of blood, would turn out to be much more effective than incest, impotence, and homosexuality as a way of reconceptualizing and thereby preserving the essential contours of racial identity.

It is in particular the pluralizing of culture, I will argue, that adapted it to a racial purpose. The commitment to pluralism—both racial and cul-
tural—should probably be understood as nativism's most significant and distinctive contribution to the technology of racial identity in the United States. Pluralism is, in a sense, built into nativism since the essence of nativism is its preference for the native exclusively on the grounds of its being native. As Lothrop Stoddard reminded his readers in *Re-Forging America* (1927), the defense of American culture properly understood raised no “theoretical questions of ‘superiority’ or ‘inferiority’”: “The really important point is that even though America (abstractly considered) may not be nearly as good as we think it is, nevertheless it is ours... That is the meat of the matter, and when we discuss immigration we had better stop theorizing about superiors and inferiors and get down to the bedrock of difference” (103). Stoddard had himself been a white supremacist; the argument of his first book, *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Supremacy* (1920), is parodically but accurately summarized by Tom Buchanan in *The Great Gatsby*: “It's up to us, who are the dominant race, to watch out or these other races will have control of us” (13). But by 1927 he had begun to recognize that his racism did not require the assertion of Nordic superiority. My point here is not that he had entirely given up white supremacy but that his commitment to it had become, as Gatsby himself might have put it, “just personal.” Although he remains both a racist and, to some extent, a white supremacist, his racism has been disarticulated from his white supremacist. Even if, he argues, “it could be conclusively shown that a certain stock was superior to us... we should still refuse to receive it, on grounds of self-preservation” (257–58). This is what it means for the “bedrock” to be “difference”; it is only for the pluralist that identity—the difference of oneself from others (and, as we have already begun to see, of oneself from oneself)—is absolutely crucial since only the pluralist, striving to see the different as neither better nor worse, must like it or dislike it on the basis of its difference alone.

And it is precisely this pluralism that transforms the substitution of culture for race into the preservation of race. For pluralism's programmatic hostility to universalism—its hostility to the idea that cultural practices be justified by appeals to what seems universally good or true—requires that such practices be justified instead by appeals to what seems locally good or true, which is to say, it invokes the identity of the group as the grounds for the justification of the group's practices. Thus, although the move from racial identity to cultural identity appears to replace essentialist criteria of identity (who we are) with performative criteria (what we do), the commitment to pluralism requires in fact that the question of who we are continue to be understood as prior to questions about what we do. Since, in pluralism, what we do can be justified only by reference to who we are, we must, in pluralism, begin by affirming who we are; it is only once we know who we are that we will be able to tell what we should do; it is only when we know which race we are that we can tell which culture is ours.26 It is only, we might say, in pluralism, that the meaning of Americanism comes clear.

Dimmesdale's election sermon at the end of *The Scarlet Letter* is heard by Hester Prynne from outside the church so she can't make out the actual words—a good thing, says Hawthorne, since the words, “if more distinctly heard, might have been only a grosser medium, and have clogged the spiritual sense” (172). Dimmesdale turns the letter into the spirit by way of the voice. And not only is this process made visible also to his congregation inside the church, who see the holy "spirit" “descending upon him, and possessing him, and continually lifting him out of the written discourse that lay before him...” (176), it is thematized in the sermon itself which, discussing “the relation between the Deity and the communities of mankind, with a special reference to the New England which they were here planting in the wilderness,” makes good on the Puritans' understanding of themselves as “a people amongst whom religion and law were almost identical” (41). Through Dimmesdale's voice, the letter of New England law becomes the spirit of New England religion. Inspiration in Faulkner—"I got de ricklickshun en de blood of de Lamb" (176)—also addresses the problem of community identity but in a form that is quite different from the essentially religious problem imagined in *The Scarlet Letter* or from the essentially political problem to which *The Scarlet Letter* imagines itself the solution. That political problem is, in a nation confronted with the imminent possibility of dissolution: What makes the nation one nation? What makes Americans Americans? In the “land of the kike home of the wop,” the question of what makes Americans American is a real one but not exactly or, at least, not primarily, a political one. Jews, we recall, may be “fine citizens” without being Americans. So what is an American?

The nativist answer to that question—the invention of American identity as a cultural identity—involves a double gesture of disarticulation. Identity is disconnected first from citizenship, which is to say, from the rights and obligations conferred upon the subject by his or her legal status as a citizen of the nation-state. Wops and kikes can participate in
American elections, but being able to participate in American elections doesn't make them American. But if what seems to be at stake here is a move to culture as the determinant of identity, a move that is, to the nonpolitical beliefs and practices that constitute more vividly than one's political affiliations the everyday fabric of the subject's life, that move is definitively set aside by the second disarticulation, which is precisely the disconnection of one's culture from one's actual beliefs and practices. Pluralism makes this disconnection possible by deriving one's beliefs and practices from one's cultural identity instead of equating one's beliefs and practices with one's cultural identity. It thus produces the possibility of a discrepancy between the two; because your culture cannot simply be equated with whatever you actually do and believe, it now becomes something that can be lost or stolen, reclaimed or repudiated. It now makes sense to think of yourself as deprived of your culture or as trying to get back in touch with your culture or as turning your back on your culture.

If, then, the meaning of "American" is altered in nativist modernism, so too is the meaning of "culture," and it is these reciprocal alterations that are the ultimate subject of the pages that follow.

Nation or Empire?

THOMAS NELSON Page's Red Rock was published in 1898, the year in which the United States annexed Hawaii, went to war in Cuba, seized the Philippines from Spain, and emerged as an imperial power. Needless to say, Red Rock, actually written the year before these events took place and written about events that themselves had taken place some thirty years earlier, is unconcerned with Cuba or the Philippines. But it is not unconcerned with American imperialism; indeed, American imperialism and, above all, the resistance to it, is its main subject. Red Rock tells the story of a conquered people, of how they survived under occupation, and of how they eventually "reconquered" what it sometimes refers to as their "country" and sometimes as their "section." It is, in short, an anti-imperialist novel.

In the years immediately after its publication, a good many other similarly anti-imperialist novels appeared, most notably Thomas Dixon's The Leopard's Spots (1902) and The Clansman (1905). Like Red Rock, they are set in the Reconstruction South and make no mention of Cuba or the Philippines. But they are nevertheless importantly marked by the anti-imperialist arguments that had been invoked against McKinley, in particular by the description of the campaign in the Philippines as "a war of conquest" and by the claim that the president had no authority to "govern any person anywhere outside the constitution." "The constitution," insisted Chicago reformer Edwin Burritt Smith, "makes no provision for the forcible intervention by our government in the affairs of a people who do not form an integral part of our union." More important still, "To the extent we permit our chosen representatives to exercise arbitrary powers, whether at home or abroad, we allow them to sap and destroy representative government itself" (emphasis mine). McKinley's commitment to governing the Philippines "without constitutional restraint" was thus seen as an attack not merely upon Filipino rights but upon American rights, upon "the very principles for the maintenance of which our fathers pledged their lives." Hence Lincoln, in The Clansman, asserting that his first postwar "duty is to reestablish the Constitution as our supreme law over every inch of our soil" (43), denies that the Civil War was "a war of conquest" (44) and refuses to establish martial law or to enforce "Negro suffrage" in North Carolina: "The Constitution," he says, "grants to the National Government no power to regulate suffrage, and makes no provision for the control of 'conquered' provinces" (42). And hence his radical Republican enemy Stoneman (Thaddeus Stevens) wishes to make the "Negro" "the ruler" and condemns the Constitution as "the creation, both in letter and spirit, of the slaveholders of the South" (43).

Thus, although the major anti-imperialist literature of the turn of the century made no mention of the major imperialist adventures of the turn of the century, it did not fail to address the issues raised by those adventures. Rather it understood those issues as having essentially to do with the nature of American self-government and American citizenship. "Nation or Empire?" was the question posed by the anti-imperialists. The return to Reconstruction for the answer to this question placed anti-imperialism at the heart of an emerging discourse of American racial and national identity. Texts like Red Rock, I will argue, sought to avoid the perils of empire by avoiding the perils of nationhood first; for Page and for the plantation tradition more generally, the South was a "region" rather than a political entity. In Red Rock, no government can quite be legitimate, and this refusal of legitimacy is connected with a comparative indifference to racial identity (signaled by a feudal identification with the Indian) and an insistence on the importance of the family. For Progres-
sives like Dixon, however, citizenship in the “new nation,” produced out of resistance to an “African” empire, became essentially racial; the legitimacy of the state (its identity as nation rather than empire) was guaranteed by its whiteness. This is why in Red Rock, where whiteness doesn’t yet have any real meaning, the state cannot be legitimated—the choice there is between the illegitimate government and the “tribe.”

Another way to put this is to say that in Red Rock, by what would come to be Progressive standards, no one is American. Red Rock is set in the old South, in a “region” without a name, referred to as “the old County,’ or, ‘the Red Rock section,’ or just, ‘My country, sir.’” Its heroes are those “aristocrats” who, “subjected to the humiliation” of Reconstruction, eventually “reconquered their section and preserved the civilization of the Anglo-Saxon.” But where, in Dixon, the resistance to Reconstruction will involve not just reconquering the “section” but nationalizing it, making Southern anti-imperialism the basis for the new American nation, in Page the restoration of “the old County” to “the rule of its own citizens” (506) is really meant to be just that, a restoration; it’s no accident that the “old patrician[s]” of the South use china presented to their “ancestors by Charles the Second” (284). And where, in Dixon, what Anglo-Saxon civilization will be saved from is “the Negro,” in Red Rock it is saved from ambitious “clerks” and “overseers.” “Anglo-Saxon” in Dixon will mean “white”; in Red Rock, it means aristocratic. Red Rock’s clerks and overseers desivisely refer to Page’s heroes as “Lords,” but the point of the novel is to confirm this identification and to insist on its patriarchal accessories. Thus, in contrast to the social threat posed by the new class of ambitious white men, Red Rock’s blacks present no real racial threat and stand instead as a kind of bulwark against the new whites: “these quality-niggers,” the scalawag overseer explains to the carpetbagger clerk, “are just as stuck up as their masters” (129).

The “quality-nigger’s” quality derives from membership in a quality family, and it is the family that Page presents as the essential unit of Red Rock society. During the war, slaves behave “more like clansmen” (49), and after the war, they are insulted by the new offer of wages: “How much does you pay Miss Bessie?” (91) Mammy Krenda asks her former master, contemptuously analogizing the idea of his paying his mammy to the idea of his paying his wife. In the context of the contemporary critique of marriage as a kind of prostitution (in, say, Charlotte Gilman), this analogy made a feminist point; in Red Rock, however, its purpose is to emphasize that Negroes are “member[s] of the family” (92) and that, as such, they cannot be sold or bought—even from themselves. The surest signs of the overseer’s degeneracy are his desire to divorce his wife and his history as a “nigger-trader,” both understood as assaults on the family.

The transformation in race relations envisioned by Dixon requires the destruction of this essentially multiracial family; it calls for the elimination of the old “uncles” and “aunts” of the plantation tradition and a general rewriting of the childhood intimacies with blacks that were supposed to enable white Southerners to understand and appreciate them better. In The Leopard’s Spots, the lonely Charlie Gaston finds a “playmate and partner in work” in the “ragged little waif” Dick, who attaches himself to the Gaston household and even helps to defend it against a “Negro uprising.” In plantation versions of this story, Dick, sticking “doggedly to Charlie’s heels” (99), would count as the loyal Negro in contrast to the new Negroes of Reconstruction and especially of the ’90s. In The Leopard’s Spots, however, Dick disappears in the early ’70s only to reappear some twenty years later as rapist and murderer of a young white girl. Gaston’s attempt to save him from being burned alive is represented here as a feeble and ineffectual deviation from his own white-supremacist principles, and Dixon’s account of the girl’s death doubles the repudiation of the old attachments to blacks by refusing even to allow her to be buried by a black man. The girl’s father spurs the grave dug by “old Uncle Reuben Worth” (376) (“the only negro present”) and asks “a group of old soldier comrades” to dig him a new one. Comradeship with white soldiers severs the ties of affection with blacks. The transformation of the friendly little black boy into a savage murderer, a transformation that is revealed rather than explained by the novel since it takes place entirely offstage, is made to stand, precisely because it is unexplained, as a revelation of the truth about blacks. In Dixon, the brutality of the new Negro exposes as a lie the fidelity of the old one.

But this exposure has positive consequences because it is only by means of this confrontation with the new Negro that new ties of affection among whites can be made available: “In a moment the white race has fused into a homogeneous mass of love, sympathy, hate and revenge. The rich and the poor, the learned and the ignorant, the banker and the blacksmith, the great and the small, they were all one now” (368). This “fusion” involves to some extent the blurring of lines that might in other contexts seem to divide whites racially among themselves; thus the speech that wins Gaston the gubernatorial nomination characterizes his fellow North Carolinians as descended, “by the lineal heritage of blood”
It was "on account of the enfranchisement of the Negro," Gaston says, that "the people of the South had to go into politics" (280). The Negro left in slavery would have left the essentially prepolitical, prenatal plantation intact. But—every crisis an opportunity—his enfranchisement brought Southerners into politics in the effort to make the South part of the nation. And now the effort to disfranchise him (an effort that succeeds in The Leopard’s Spots and that succeeded also in the elections of 1898) makes possible the elevation of politics to a "search for righteousness." For the Progressive Croly’s desire to "purify" politics and Dixon’s insistence on the "purity" (281) of the "State" both require that political differences be understood as moral ones. "The principle of democracy is virtue," wrote Croly, citing Montesquieu and Santayana; for democracy to succeed, the "citizen" must aspire to become a "saint" (454). The great triumphs of The Leopard’s Spots are thus its translation of political fusion into racial "fusion," its representation of a debate between citizens as a debate over who can be a citizen, and its consequent identification of citizenship with "righteousness."

From this perspective, Red Rock, with its evocation of the preswar "family, black and white" and its suspicion of the "Government," represents a certain resistance both to the emergence of race as the crucial marker of identity and to the commitment to the state that the primacy of race makes possible. In The Clansman racial ties replace familial ones; the Klan, dressed like "Speris" (348) and depicted by Dixon as "the reincarnated souls of the Clansmen of Old Scotland" (2), embody a racial purity that transcends the family. Under a regime in which even a single, invisible drop of black blood made a man black, their sheets are whiter than anyone’s skin. But in Red Rock, the Klan’s sheets are disparaged as a "disguise" for "blackguards and sneak" (352), and the familial "clan," in its biological and aristocratic purity, is multracial. More striking still, Red Rock’s repudiation of the Klan is articulated not as respect for the laws the Klan violates but as respect for the code of "honor" that is itself violated by the law. (Think of Judge Driscoll’s horror in Pudd’nhead Wilson [1894] when he learns that Tom, instead of taking physical revenge for Count Luigi’s "assault" on him, has "crawled to a court of law about it.") In Red Rock, it is carpetbaggers who embody the law, walking about, literally, with copies of "The Statutes of the United States" clasped under their arms, whereas Southern gentlemen, black and white, are bound by "honor" not to betray each other to the "Government." In Dixon, however, both the forming of the Klan and its disbanding are attempts to replace blood and honor with law and order.
This is most obviously true in the last volume of the trilogy, *The Traitor* (1907), which, although it is sometimes described as Dixon's attempt to backtrack away from the positions he had taken so strongly in the first two volumes, is, in fact, an extension rather than a repudiation of them. Its hero, John Graham, is the leader of the Klan in North Carolina and so of the resistance to the "African Government," but as the Klan degenerates and becomes increasingly identified with "lawlessness," he will become increasingly reluctant to participate in its activities and will eventually seek to disband it. When he is nonetheless arrested for murder (actually committed by a carpetbagger), he rejects the possibility of escape, proclaiming, "I'm done with lawlessness... I've led a successful revolution... and now with silent lips I'll face my accusers" (266). But while it is true that rejection of escape is somewhat anomalous in Dixon, the rejection of lawlessness and the proclamation of the "successful revolution" suggest the ways in which *The Traitor* continues the commitments of its predecessors. For insofar as the real effort of these books is to replace an illegitimate ("African") state with a legitimate one, "lawlessness" can never be countenanced. Indeed, Graham's submission to and eventual redemption by authority is here contrasted to the refusal of authority embodied in the "African Government" itself. For that government—making the Klan illegal, suspending habeas corpus, proclaiming martial law in the South, and placing Graham's home "county of Independence under military government"—itself stands "in violation of the Constitution" (330). And Graham's threat to take his case all the way to the Supreme Court, "the last bulwark of American liberties," produces a hasty pardon from those "little politicians" who finally "do not dare to allow the Supreme Court to overwhelm them with infamy." The point, then, is that Graham's is the true commitment to "the process of the law" (61) and to the Constitution that is both the ultimate law of the land and the originating document of the state.41

In sum, anti-imperialism here becomes synonymous with a certain constitutionalism. Just as the enemy throughout the trilogy is the imperial "African," usurping the Constitution, the hero is inevitably a defender of the Constitution and a creature of the state. In Page, the "clan" was saved from the state (loyal blacks supporting honorable whites against the corrupt administrators of the "Statutes"); in Dixon, the state is saved by the Klan ("We have rescued our state from Negro rule," [53] Graham tells his fellow Klansmen). Or rather, since Dixon actually imagines no preexisting state to be saved from the empire by the Klan, the state is constituted or prefigured by the Klan, which offers racial identity as a kind of rehearsal for the collective identity required by the new modes of national citizenship. Making it white, Dixon distinguishes the nation from the family and chooses it over the empire, indeed, creates it out of resistance to the empire. His point, then, is not the defense of the white state but the creation of the state through whiteness.42

The Rising Tide

*The Carraways are something of a clan* (2), Nick Carraway remarks in *The Great Gatsby*, and Nick's "something" marks a certain distance not only from the Ku Klux Klan but from the less ironic identification of themselves as members of "clan Cameron" (192) produced by the Southern heroes of *The Clansman*. It is worth remembering, however, that in 1924—the year *Gatsby* was written—Klan membership was at its all-time peak, and, in fact, the Klan's style of racism finds a nonironic spokesman in *Gatsby*'s Tom Buchanan explaining the argument of a book Fitzgerald calls *The Rise of the Colored Empires* by a man he calls Goddard: "The idea, [Tom says,] is that we're Nordics... And we've produced all the things that go to make civilization, [but that] if we don't look out the white race will be... utterly submerged by these other races" (13–14). The book Tom is speaking of was actually called *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Supremacy*, and its real author was Lothrop Stoddard, but Tom's paraphrase, though crude, is essentially accurate. According to Stoddard, the world's population was divided into five major races—brown, black, red, yellow, and white—which could themselves be divided into "sub-species"; whites, for example, could be broken down into Nordics, Alpines, and Mediterraneans. Stoddard's mission in *The Rising Tide* was to teach white men the importance of a "true race-consciousness" (309) before it was too late, before that is, the white race was overrun by the coloreds and before American Nordics, in particular, were drowned by the immigrant "flood" of Mediterraneans.

Stoddard's racism, then, like Dixon's, was anti-imperialist (and, like Dixon's, it would eventually involve a fundamental redefinition of the meaning of "American"). He "regretted" the opening of the Far East which, although it had been "hailed by white men with general approval," had had the unfortunate effect of dragging till then "reluctant races" into
country"; the Jew in America, however, as exemplified by Antin herself, instantaneously becomes an American, writing poems in honor of George Washington and celebrating his birthday with her "Fellow Citizens." What makes this transformation possible is that, whereas Jewish assimilation in Russia required "apostasy" (to become a Russian the Jew had to become a Gentile), assimilation in America is national rather than religious. Hence for the Jew to become American in no way requires giving up one nation for another; on the contrary, it involves, as it does for Dixon's (in contrast to Page's) unreconstructed Southerners, their first experience of "a spirit of nationalism." Americanization in Antin, as her title suggests, is almost a kind of Zionism, insofar, at least, as Zionism is understood as the fulfillment of the "national expectations" of a people in "exile." The Promised Land, like the Trilogy of Reconstruction, tells the story of a people achieving nationality and becoming citizens, and Mary Antin—with her hatred for the czar—is a fitting compatriot of Sam Nicroshinski, with his hatred for the "African empire."

In Stoddard, however, and by the 1920s more generally, Jews and other Eastern Europeans had been redefined as "Asiatics" or "Mediterraneans," and just as the identity between them and Nordics had come to look a lot more problematic, the difference between them and Africans had come to look a lot less fundamental. So, in The Rising Tide, non-Nordic whites have their own role to play in the rise of the colored empires, a point missed by Fitzgerald's Jordan Baker when, in response to a diatribe by Tom that begins by attacking Gatsby and ends by predicting "intermarriage between black and white" (130), she murmurs, "We're all white here." For Tom, as for Stoddard, Gatsby (né Gatz, with his Wolfshiem "gonnegtion") isn't quite white, and Tom's identification of him as in some sense black suggests the power of the expanded notion of the alien. Gatsby's love for Daisy seems to Tom the expression of something like the impulse to miscegenation, an impulse that Nick Carraway understands as "the following of a graft. [Gatsby] knew that Daisy was extraordinary, but he didn't realize just how extraordinary a 'nice' girl could be" (149). "Nice" here doesn't exactly mean "white," but it doesn't exactly not mean "white" either. It is a term—like "breeding"—that will serve as a kind of switching point where the Progressive novel's discourse of class will be turned into the postwar novel's discourse of race.

Comparing The Great Gatsby to Dreiser's An American Tragedy, we have already noted that when Fitzgerald's novel begins, Gatsby already has what Clyde Griffiths wants; insofar as class mobility involves transform-
ing one's clothes, one's manners, one's friends, one's women, The Great Gatsby makes it almost magically easy. But Gatsby wants Daisy—the "grail"—which is to say that he wants something more or something else. The fact that he is, when they first meet, "penniless" hardly presents itself as an obstacle, partly because it can be concealed from Daisy, more importantly because it can be—and quickly is—overcome. The real problem is that he is "without a past" (149) and to get Daisy he must get a past. Thus Jimmy Gatz's efforts to improve himself, which begin in the Franklin-like scheduling of his present intended to produce the perfected Gatsby of his future ("study electricity, etc."), must themselves be transformed into efforts to reconstruct his past: "I was brought up in America but educated at Oxford, because all my ancestors have been educated there for many years. It is a family tradition" (65). And thus in his mind (and also, as it turns out, in hers) the key to winning Daisy back is precisely his ability to redescribe and so alter the past.40 Urged by Gatsby to proclaim not only that she doesn't love Tom but that she never loved Tom, Daisy finally cries out, "Oh, you want too much . . . I love you now—that isn't that enough? I can't help what's past" (133). Loving him now, as Gatsby, Tom, and Daisy herself all instantaneously see, isn't enough precisely because it doesn't help what's past, it doesn't contribute to the project of rewriting that would give Gatsby a past and thus retroactively make him someone who could be "married" to Daisy.

The point here is not only that the desire for a different future has been transformed into the desire for a different past but that the meaning of that past has been rendered genealogical, a matter of "ancestors."44 Tom's mistress Myrtle only married George Wilson because she made a mistake about his "breeding" (35); her friend Mrs. McKee "almost made a mistake too" but avoided it by marrying Chester instead of the "little kike" (34) who had been after her for years but who she knew was "below" her. These distinctions parody but also reproduce the quest for the "nice"; indeed, by representing the attraction of niceness in its vulgarized form as the attraction of breeding, they make it possible for niceness to count simultaneously as identical to breeding and as a reproach to the vulgarity of breeders. Hemingway's Robert Cohn (another "kike" [164], although he didn't become "race-conscious," Hemingway says, until he went to Princeton) says in The Sun Also Rises that Lady Ashley has "breeding" (38). Jake Barnes says in response to Cohn that she is "very nice." "Breeding" is the term used by people who don't really have any; "nice" is the term used by people who do.46

Cohn thinks that Brett has "a certain quality, a certain fineness"; "nice" is deployed by Hemingway against descriptions like that and, more generally, against the "abstract words" famously condemned in A Farewell to Arms (1929). "There were many words that you could not stand to hear," Hemingway writes, "and finally only the names of places had dignity."49 "Nice" isn't the name of a place, but it is a name for people who come from a place as opposed to, say, Gatsby who—despite the family history designed to show that he is not "just some nobody"—really is "Mr. Nobody from Nowhere" (130).50 Removing Fitzgerald's quotation marks, Hemingway installs "nice"—along with words like "good" and "true"—at the heart of a prose style that no longer needs the explicit vocabulary of race (e.g., "Nordic") to distinguish those who have breeding from those who don't, in the way that, say, Jake's concierge distinguishes between visitors who are not to be allowed up and visitors like Brett, who is "very nice," which is to say, "très, très gentille," which is to say, "of very good family" (52). "Nice" has its pedigree; indeed, pedigree is its pedigree. As a character in Fitzgerald's The Beautiful and Damned (1922) puts it, "if a person comes from a good family, they're always nice people."51

Robert Cohn, not a very good writer, doesn't "know how to describe" (38) the "quality" that Jake Barnes so easily finds a word for. To be nice—even better, to be able to say nice—is to identify yourself as neither Gatsby nor Cohn; the social point of Hemingway's prose style was relentlessly to enforce such distinctions: "Cohn made some remark about it being a very good example of something or other, I forget what. It seemed like a nice cathedral, nice and dim, like Spanish churches" (90). Racial inferiority is reproduced here as aesthetic failure. To be insufficiently "race-conscious," as Cohn had been before going to Princeton, was to be insufficiently alert to the difference between people who really were nice and people who just looked or acted nice. The war had encouraged such inattentiveness: Tom can't understand how Gatsby "got within a mile" of Daisy unless "he brought the groceries to the back door" (132); the answer, of course, is that Gatsby was wearing the "invisible cloak of his uniform" (149) so that Daisy couldn't see he was just Jimmy Gatz. Tom has to make what he calls a "small investigation" to clear up the confusion. Even Cohn "can be . . . nice" (101); in fact, Hemingway's obsessive commitment to distinguishing between Cohn and Jake only makes sense in the light of their being in some sense indistinguishable, a fact that the novel makes particularly vivid in their relations to Brett. But such similarities are definitively disrupted by the taxonomies of the bullfight and
by the "oral spiritual examination" (132) Jake has to pass to prove that he has aficion. "Aficion is passion," Jake says: the difference between a bullfighter with it and a bullfighter without it is that the one gives "real emotion" while the other gives "a fake emotional feeling" (168). The bullfighter with aficion in The Sun Also Rises is Romero, who is to an "imitation" like Marcial as Nick is to Gatsby or as Jake is to Robert Cohn: "He knew everything when he started. The others can’t ever learn what he was born with" (168).

Aficion thus takes its place alongside niceness as another name for breeding. It may be "spiritual" but, like breeding, it is manifest in bodies; when aficionados see that Jake has it too, they put a hand on his shoulder: "It seemed as though they wanted to touch you to make it certain" (132). But this doesn’t exactly mean that aficion can be reduced to breeding. For one thing, as we have already seen, the term “breeding,” when applied to people, isn’t itself very nice; Robert Cohn is reproved for using it to describe Brett, and when Brett herself urges Mike Campbell to "show a little breeding" (141) and behave better to Cohn, Mike answers her, "Breeding be damned. Who has any breeding anyway, except the bulls?" And, for another thing, even the bulls’ breeding can’t exactly be reduced to breeding. Only bulls have breeding, as Mike says, but as Mike also says, “bulls have no balls” (175, 176). Mike is drunk and he means to be insulting the bullfighter Brett is so attracted to, but there is an important sense in which Hemingway’s identification of breeding with a literal inability to breed should be taken seriously, as should indeed the converse identification of literal breeding prowess with a lack of breeding.

“One thing’s sure and nothing’s surer,” someone sings at Gatsby’s house, “The rich get richer and the poor get—children” (96). Or, as the author of The Passing of the Great Race, Madison Grant, put it, “If we continue to allow [immigrants] to enter they will in time drive us out of our own land by mere force of breeding.”52 Grant and Stoddard both worried that, compared to the other races, whites were the “slowest breeders” (7), and Stoddard focused in particular on the sterilizing effect of immigration on whites: “There can be no question,” he wrote later in the decade (after the Immigration Act of 1924 had ostensibly put an end to mass immigration), “that every low-grade alien who landed prevented a native American baby or a North European baby from ever being born” Re-Forging, 167).53 This contraceptive effect finds a weirdly literal echo in The Sun Also Rises, where the alien Cohn is the only one with children and where, more tellingly, he has an appropriately sterilizing impact on Nordic types like his girlfriend Frances who, having “wasted two and a half years” (47) on Cohn, imagines that her childbearing opportunities have passed: “I never liked children much,” she says, “but I don’t want to think I’ll never have them.”

Frances, however, is hardly the most spectacular example in The Sun Also Rises of the inability to reproduce. Jake Barnes is. The Great War, according to Stoddard, was a breeding disaster for the white race since, in killing millions of Nordic soldiers at an age when they were “best adapted to fecundity,” it had (like immigration) “prevented millions more from being born or conceived” (Rising Tide, 185, 184). Jake’s war wound is often understood as a symbol for the Lost Generation’s disillusion, but the testimony of writers like Stoddard and Grant gives new meaning to the wound and to the very term Lost Generation. War tends to “induce sterility,” Stoddard writes (184); “You have given more than your life,” the Italian colonel tells Jake (31). The Great War, the “White Civil War,” had induced sterility above all in members of the “Nordic race” since it was Nordic men who “went forth eagerly to battle” (Stoddard, Rising Tide, 183) while “the little brunet Mediterranean either stayed home or even when at the front showed less fighting spirit, took fewer chances, and oftener saved their skins”; “You, a foreigner, an Englishman . . . have given more than your life,” the Italian colonel says. The war had thus “unquestionably left Europe much poorer in Nordic blood,” or, as Madison Grant put it, “As in all wars since Roman times, from the breeding point of view, the little dark man is the winner” (quoted in The Rising Tide, 183). In The Sun Also Rises the little dark man is Robert Cohn (during the war he “stayed home” [Grant] and “had three children” [Hemingway]), and one might say that Jake’s war wound is simultaneously a consequence of the war and of unrestricted immigration since, as interpreted by the racial discourse of the ’20s, immigration and the war were simply two aspects of the same phenomenon, the rising tide of color.

The Vanishing American

Immigration and the war had been so devastating, Stoddard thought, that in the “two short generations” between 1890 and 1920, “the Nordic native American” had “in many of our urban areas become almost extinct” (Rising Tide, 165). Stoddard himself made no explicit connection between the disappearance of “the big, blond man”