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Theodore Roosevelt and the Divided Character of American Nationalism

Gary Gerstle

Any examination of American nationalism must, sooner or later, contend with its contradictory character. On the one hand, it offers a civic creed promising all Americans the same individual rights irrespective of color, religion, or sex. That creed has strongly influenced American politics and society, imparting social cohesion to a sprawling, heterogeneous population and inspiring countless democratic movements. On the other hand, American nationalism has long harbored racial ideologies that define the United States and its mission in ethnoracial ways and have sought to prove American racial superiority through economic might and military conquest. As Rogers Smith, Matthew Jacobson, and others have shown, racialized constructions of American nationalism were present from the early days of the Republic: in the Constitution itself, which legalized slavery, and in a 1790 law declaring that naturalization would be limited to those individuals who were free and white. And such constructions persisted well into the twentieth century.[1]

This essay explores the contradictory character of American nationalism. It does so not by identifying groups, such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), espousing one principle or the other, but by examining how both principles often coexisted in the minds of single individuals. No individual better illustrates this phenomenon than Theodore

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[1] For an eloquent definition of the American civic creed, see Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (1944; 2 vols., New York, 1972), I, 3–25. On racialized notions of American nationality, see Rogers M. Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History* (New Haven, 1997); Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998); Michael Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Berkeley, 1996); David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London, 1991); Ronald Takaki, *Iron Cages: Race and Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley, 1971); and Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981). Smith and John Higham analyze how these contrary impulses influenced American politics and public policy. Smith, *Civic Ideals;* John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism* (1955; New Brunswick, 1992).

Roosevelt, historian, dude rancher, civil service commissioner, police commissioner, governor, soldier, president, explorer. Few figures of any age have matched his devotion to the American nation or his influence on the form and content of American nationalism. Regardless of the task Roosevelt was carrying out, the office he had assumed, or the adventure he had undertaken, he was always looking for ways to strengthen the American nation and intensify the nationalist ardor of the American people.

Roosevelt's nationalism expressed itself as a combative and unapologetic racial ideology that thrived on aggression and the vanquishing of savage and barbaric peoples. From the perspective of that ideology, it was vital that "Americans" cultivate their racial superiority and expel or subordinate the racial inferiors in their midst. Yet, Roosevelt also located within American nationalism a powerful civic tradition that celebrated the United States as a place that welcomed all people, irrespective of their nationality, race, and religious practice, as long as they were willing to devote themselves to the nation and obey its laws. Moreover, Roosevelt loved the idea of America as a melting pot—a "crucible"—in which a hybrid race of many strains would be forged. Mixing of this sort, Roosevelt believed, had created and would sustain American racial superiority. His affection for the melting pot expressed, too, the personal delight he took in crossing social boundaries and meeting diverse groups of people.

Most of the time, Roosevelt found ways to reconcile his commitments to the racial and civic traditions of American nationalism. He disciplined his celebration of hybridity by insisting that certain kinds of boundary crossing would damage the racially superior character of the American nation, and he expended much effort to explain why blacks, in particular, could not participate in America's great melting pot. But Roosevelt's efforts at reconciliation were not always successful. In particular, his commitment to the civic tradition sometimes filled him with anxiety and uncertainty about America's racial order and caused him to violate that order in sensational and politically damaging ways. The civic and racial traditions, in other words, sometimes pulled Roosevelt in such different directions that he could not easily encase them both within the national identity he was laboring so hard to create. Building the American nation from such contradictory materials turns out to have been exceptionally difficult political and personal work.

Roosevelt never stopped trying to reconcile his civic and racial beliefs or to construct his nation, as his extensive writings amply attest. Nor did he ever question the need to build a nation. But the sheer arduousness of his nation-building efforts allow us to glimpse the problem of trying to yoke divergent human aspirations to a nationalist ideal. Roosevelt celebrated racial conquest but also admired certain forms of racial mixing; he prized social order as a paramount political good but also thirsted for adventure and the thrill of the unexpected and the chaos that so often accompanied it. The very complexity of his strivings, in other words, may have rendered one nation too limiting a space for personal exploration and aspiration. The case of Roosevelt suggests, then, that the desire to escape or to transcend the nation lurked not only in the minds of international migrants, such as the Italian sojourners about whom Donna Gabaccia writes, but in the minds of leading nationalists themselves.

Roosevelt's Racialized Nation

In the late nineteenth century, nationalist ideologies grounded in race strengthened their hold on the peoples of many countries, including those of the United States. These were the years of a remarkable global capitalist expansion. Societies in disparate geographic and cultural regions were interpenetrating each other, their peoples looking variously for work, raw materials, markets, and, at least the missionaries among them, souls ripe for salvation. The resulting jostling of peoples, often under adverse economic conditions—poverty-level wages among workers, production costs that exceeded revenues among farmers, the eclipse of small business by corporations—generated fears of social disintegration and a tendency to blame misfortune on social contamination. Groups within every industrial society began calling for racial purity as a way of strengthening their nations and of overcoming the problems that capitalist development had thrust upon them. International competition intensified, as nations sought to prove their economic, military, and racial superiority.

In the United States one can detect the growing prestige of racial ideologies in the victory over Spain in 1898 and in the acquisition of Spanish colonies in the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean. The war generated remarkable national unity, becoming an occasion when deep, seemingly intractable divisions—between North and South, capital and labor, native-born and immigrant—were at least momentarily overcome. But this unity depended on the reinvigoration of America's racial nationalist tradition. In the new American territories of the Philippines and Puerto Rico, the indigenous peoples were declared racially inferior and thus incapable of handling the responsibilities of American citizenship. At home, the formal subjugation of the South's African American population through Jim Crow allowed white southerners to believe that "their" nation had finally been redeemed. White westerners associated national greatness with their campaigns to "cleanse" their cities and states of Chinese and Japanese influence. A belief in the superiority of the American "race" underlay these efforts at racial exclusion and subordination. Drawing on internationalist and "scientific" racialist discourses, themselves the product of the modern age of capital, white Americans found the essence of their race in its "Anglo-Saxon," "English-speaking," or simply "white" character.[2]

In the 1880s, Theodore Roosevelt had turned his intellectual talents to identifying the historical origins of the American race and to tracing how it made itself the greatest English-speaking race the world had ever known. That was the purpose of his epic work, *The Winning of the West* (1889–1896), most of which focused on the conquest and settlement of the American West by people of European origin.[3]

[2] Higham, *Strangers in the Land,* 131–57; Cecilia Elizabeth O'Leary, *To Die For: The Paradox of American Patriotism* (Princeton, 1999), 129–49; Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York, 1990), 293–383; Andrew Gyory, *Closing the Gate: Race, Politics, and the Chinese Exclusion Act* (Chapel Hill, 1998).

[3] Theodore Roosevelt, *The Winning of the West: An Account of the Exploration and Settlement of Our Country from the Alleghanies to the Pacific,* in *The Works of Theodore Roosevelt,* ed. Hermann Hagedorn (20 vols., New York, 1926), VIII, IX. In addition to Roosevelt's own writings, the following account draws on Thomas G. Dyer, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Idea of Race* (Baton Rouge, 1980); George Sinkler, *The Racial Attitudes of American*

If for Karl Marx history was the history of class conflict, for Roosevelt history was the history of race conflict, of the world's various races struggling for supremacy and power. The history of racial conflict, in Roosevelt's eyes, pointed in the direction of civilization and progress: more often than not, the higher, civilized races triumphed over the lower, savage or barbaric ones. But this tendency was not an iron law; there had been shattering reversals—the Dark Ages being the most notable—when the forces of barbarism had overwhelmed the citadels of civilization. No race, no matter how civilized its people or how superior their mental ability, could afford to become complacent about its destiny. Racial triumph came only to those peoples willing to fight for it. Success in battle required the cultivation of manly, warlike, even savage qualities: physical toughness and fitness, fearlessness, bravery, single-mindedness, ruthlessness. Thus, Roosevelt found the formative experience of the American race neither in the godly Puritans who settled New England, nor in the virtuous farmers of the mid-Atlantic states who diligently worked the land, nor even among the Boston, New York, and Philadelphia merchants who made great fortunes by acquiring and trading the continent's abundant resources. Rather, he found it in the backwoodsmen who bravely ventured forth into the wilderness to battle the Indians and clear the land. The backwoodsmen, in Roosevelt's eyes, like the Germans who had invaded Britain and fashioned a super-Teutonic race there, were warriors above all, and their primary task was not placid husbandry but relentless war against the savage Indians who claimed the lands as their own. Roosevelt had no use for Frederick Jackson Turner's view of the frontier as a sparsely inhabited place awaiting cultivation by diligent bands of husbandmen. "A race of peaceful, unwarlike farmers," Roosevelt argued, "would have been helpless before such foes as the red Indians, and no auxiliary military forces could have protected them or enabled them to move westward. . . .The West would never have been settled save for the fierce courage and the eager desire to brave danger so characteristic of the stalwart backwoodsmen."[4]

Roosevelt loathed the savage red man but admired him, too, for his bravery, cunning, and, most of all, ferocity. The backwoodsman achieved his greatness as a result of the battles he fought to subdue the remarkable Indian foe. Roosevelt regarded the conquest of the Indians and the winning of the West as "the great epic feat in the history of our race." The relentless westward march was "a record of men who greatly dared and greatly did, a record of wanderings wider and more dangerous than those of the Vikings; a record of endless feats of arms, of victory after victory in the ceaseless strife waged against wild man and wild nature."[5] The war to exterminate the Indian created the "Americans."

Presidents: From Abraham Lincoln to Theodore Roosevelt (Garden City, 1971), 308–73; Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (New York, 1992), 29–122; Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917* (Chicago,1995), 170–215; and Saxton, *Rise and Fall of the White Republic,* 349–83.

[4] Roosevelt, *Winning of the West,* in *Works of Theodore Roosevelt,* ed. Hagedorn, VIII, 100–101. See Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History,* ed. Harold P. Simonson (New York, 1980), 29–58; and Richard White, "Frederick Jackson Turner and Buffalo Bill," in *The Frontier in American History,* ed. James R. Grossman (Berkeley, 1994), 6–65.

[5] Theodore Roosevelt, "Manhood and Statehood," 1901 address, *ibid.*, XIII, 455.

That war, Roosevelt believed, had set in motion a critical assimilatory process, one that fashioned a single American people out of many European races. The backwoodsmen, according to Roosevelt, were primarily the descendants of two British races—the Scotch-Irish and the English—but included in their ranks significant numbers of Germans, Huguenots, "Hollanders," and Swedes. Although those distinct "racial" groups were still conscious of their differences when they arrived in the wilderness, they became oblivious to them within the lifetimes of the first settlers. "A single generation, passed under the hard conditions of life in the wilderness," Roosevelt wrote, "was enough to weld [them] together into one people." And so, "long before the first Continental Congress assembled, the backwoodsmen, whatever their blood, had become Americans, one in speech, thought, and character." "Their iron surroundings," Roosevelt continued, "made a mould which turned out all alike in the same shape." Here, for the first of many times, Roosevelt referred in a positive way to the melting-pot origins of the American people.[6]

But Roosevelt included in his American brew only races emanating from Europe. What to do, then, with non-European races residing on American soil? Roosevelt did not worry much about the proper place of Indians in the nation, for the savage wars with the Americans had culminated in their expulsion or extermination. But he was troubled by the place and role of blacks. Roosevelt regarded the importation of African slaves to the North American continent as a racial and national catastrophe. The European races who conquered America, Roosevelt intoned, "to their own lasting harm, committed a crime whose short-sighted folly was worse than its guilt, for they brought hordes of African slaves, whose descendants now form immense populations in certain portions of this land." Those "hordes" could never truly be assimilated into American society: the distance separating them from the white races was simply too great. Nor could they provide the proud savage foe against whom American warriors defined their race and peoplehood, for the Africans were already a bowed and conquered people when they arrived, forced to obey their masters' every command. Regrettably, the black man could "neither be killed nor driven away." He had to be found a place in the nation. But where? Giving blacks an equal place would violate the racial order of things, while hemming them into a subordinate status vitiated the American commitment to democracy and equal opportunity.[7]

Roosevelt blamed this dilemma, not on his heroic backwoodsmen, but on the "trans-oceanic aristocracy" of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that had allegedly created and sustained the international slave trade. The racial crime committed by those aristocrats had already triggered one national disaster—the Civil War—that almost destroyed the mighty nation that the backwoodsmen had so painstakingly and courageously built. And even emancipation—an act that

[6] Roosevelt might have claimed that the American culture was essentially English or Anglo-Saxon; at times, he came close to labeling the backwoodsmen's culture Scotch-Irish. But he pulled back from both claims, perhaps because either would have implied that his own heritage—mixed, but primarily Dutch—lay outside the core American culture. Roosevelt, *Winning of the West, ibid.*, VIII, 89.

[7] *Ibid.*, 8; Theodore Roosevelt to Albion Winegar Tourgee, Nov. 8, 1901, in *The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt*, ed. Elting E. Morison (8 vols., Cambridge, Mass., 1951), III, 190–91.

Roosevelt heartily supported—provided no simple cure to the race problem because Negroes, Roosevelt believed, would not take well to democracy, a form of government that depended on a self-control and mastery that only the white races had attained. As president, Roosevelt struggled to devise what were, in his eyes, decent remedies to the race problem. But he always regarded the Negro as an indelible black mark on the white nation that had so gloriously emerged in the mid-eighteenth century, a constant reminder of America's racial imperfection, of an opportunity compromised by the nefarious dealings of corrupt, antidemocratic, and immoral aristocrats. There would never be, Roosevelt once conceded in private correspondence, a true solution to "the terrible problem offered by the presence of the negro on this continent."[8]

The 1890s: Crisis, War, and Nationalist Renewal

The Winning of the West brims with confident superiority. But, even as he was writing this treatise, Roosevelt was beset by worry that past achievements had set in motion processes that could yet ruin the American race. By the early 1890s, the wild frontier of the eighteenth century had vanished and the Indians had been routed. The conquest of the West and the invention of democracy had triggered technological and cultural revolutions that were rapidly making America into an urban, industrialized society. While the backwoodsmen had set the changes in motion, their very success had forced them to the margins of American society. Roosevelt worried that America, as a result, would lose its racial edge. "A peaceful and commercial civilization is always in danger of suffering the loss of the virile fighting qualities without which no nation, however cultured, however refined, however thrifty and prosperous, can ever amount to anything."[9]

Everywhere, Roosevelt spotted signs of racial degeneration: in an overly refined elite that had abandoned "the strenuous life" for the effete manners and habits of European aristocrats; in a falling birth rate among this same elite, an unmistakable sign to Roosevelt that the vigor of this mighty race was slipping; in the impoverished urban masses whose loyalty to the nation was questionable and whose growing involvement in lawless strikes Roosevelt regarded as signs of barbarism; in a society so preoccupied with material gain and "ignoble ease" that it no longer knew how to pursue the heroic life. In short, the unique and racially superior civilization that the backwoodsmen had assiduously created was in danger of going the way of Rome: opulence, complacency, effeminacy, military collapse.[10]

Roosevelt conceived of his personal life as a crusade against the enervating effects of excessive civilization. He was determined to excel at hunting and ranching, to

[8] Theodore Roosevelt, "National Life and Character," 1894, in *Works of Theodore Roosevelt,* ed. Hagedorn, XIII, 212–13; Roosevelt to Tourgee, Nov. 8, 1901, in *Letters of Theodore Roosevelt,* ed. Morison, III, 190–91. Roosevelt's class analysis of the slave trade was shared by many white laboring men and sanctioned a racialized class consciousness. See Saxton, *Rise and Fall of the White Republic.*

[9] Theodore Roosevelt, "The Manly Virtues and Practical Politics," 1894, in *Works of Theodore Roosevelt,* ed. Hagedorn, XIII, 32.

[10] Theodore Roosevelt, "True Americanism," 1894, *ibid.*, 19. See also Theodore Roosevelt, "The Strenuous Life," 1899, *ibid.*, 319, and *passim.*

develop the qualities that made the Scotch-Irish backwoodsmen such a vigorous race. His two wives and six children were ample demonstration of his own virility and, he hoped, an example that other members of his race would emulate. He preached against the complacent life, whether that of the beggar content to live off charity or of the railroad tycoon obsessed with counting his money. He called incessantly for the pursuit of a "higher life" of glory, as achieved by George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Ulysses S. Grant. Each of those heroes had distinguished himself in war, and Roosevelt believed that true eminence would elude him until he, too, had proved his worth on the battlefield.[11]

Just as he expected his program for a strenuous life to bring him personal greatness, so Roosevelt believed that an emphasis on muscular and racialized nationalism would reinvigorate America. By the early 1890s he had cast his lot with Adm. Alfred Thayer Mahan and other imperialists who argued that the United States should vie with Britain, France, Germany, Russia, and Japan for territory, military might, and world power. Social Darwinist to the core, the imperialists believed that America had to prove itself the military equal of the strongest European nation and the master of the "lesser" peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Hankering for a fight, they strove to turn emergent power struggles in the Caribbean and the Pacific into armed confrontations. Fights with barbarian races abroad could replace the fight with the savage Indians at home and thus keep Americans racially fit. As Roosevelt declared in 1897, "No triumph of peace is quite so great as the supreme triumph of war." The imperialists' opportunity came in 1898, when the explosion of the battleship *Maine* in Havana harbor set Spain and the United States on the path to war. [12]

At the first opportunity, Roosevelt resigned as assistant secretary of the navy to accept the lieutenant colonelcy of the First Volunteer Cavalry, a regiment that would soon be immortalized as the Rough Riders. More than 20,000 men applied for the 1,000 available places, and Roosevelt filled a majority of places with cowboys, hunters, and prospectors from the West and Southwest—men who bore the closest resemblance to his fabled backwoodsmen. "They were a splendid set of men," Roosevelt would later write, "tall and sinewy, with resolute, weather-beaten faces, and eyes that looked a man straight in the face without flinching." "In all the world," he added, "there could be no better material for soldiers than that afforded by these grim hunters of the mountains, these wild rough riders of the plains." Having come from lands that had been "most recently won over [from the savage Indians] to white civilization," these men were among the few remaining Americans who still possessed the ferocity, the independence, and the war-making skills of the Kentucky backwoodsmen. [13]

Just as the predominately Scotch-Irish backwoodsmen had benefited from the admixture of minority streams from France, Germany, and elsewhere, so the quality of the Rough Riders was enhanced by the inclusion of complementary American strains. Most important were the fifty men, most of them athletes, who had come from Har-

[11] Theodore Roosevelt, "American Ideals," 1895, *ibid.*, 3–4; "Grant," 1900 speech, *ibid.*, 430–41.

[12] Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860–1898* (Ithaca, 1963), 80–101; William H. Harbaugh, *The Life and Times of Theodore Roosevelt* (New York, 1975), 99.

[13] Theodore Roosevelt, *The Rough Riders* (New York, 1902), 22–23.

vard, Princeton, and Yale universities and who possessed a worldliness and a capacity for leadership that many of the rowdy southwesterners lacked. Roosevelt chose an equal number of Indians (segregated in their own company), a few of pure blood but most a powerfully disciplined mixture of red and white. He selected a smattering of Irishmen and Hispanics, at least one Jew, one Italian, four New York City policemen, and a group "in whose veins . . . blood stirred with the same impulse which once sent the Vikings overseas." Like the frontier, the regiment created the conditions for a carefully regulated process of racial mixing, one meant to generate the finest possible American fighting force. Three cups of southwesterners, a leavening tablespoon of Ivy Leaguers, a tablespoon of Indians, and a sprinkling of Jews, Irish, Italians, and Scandinavians yielded, in Roosevelt's eyes, a sterling, all-American regiment.[14]

The inclusion of even limited numbers of Indians, Jews, and Italians made the regiment more diverse than the bands of backwoodsmen who had conquered the West had been—a sign, perhaps, that Roosevelt was becoming more liberal in his racial attitudes than he had been when he wrote *Winning of the West.*[15] Yet, Roosevelt was not prepared to welcome every racial type into the Rough Rider crucible: he had neither sought nor accepted any black or Asian American volunteers, demonstrating once again his conviction that the inclusion of the "most inferior" racial ingredients would pollute the American brew. The melting pot continued to depend for its success as much on exclusion as on inclusion.[16]

The Rough Riders quickly achieved a camaraderie that, in Roosevelt's eyes, justified his efforts to regulate the racial mixing. The Ivy Leaguers brought civility to a regiment full of rowdy spirits, while the roughness and physicality of the southwesterners compelled the elite easterners to abandon their aversion to hard and "disagreeable" labor. The regiment somewhat uneasily absorbed the few Irishmen, Italians, and Jews, giving them belittling (although affectionate) nicknames such as Sheeny Solomon and Pork-chop. The social equality that Roosevelt encouraged also shaped relations between officers and enlisted men. Roosevelt craved a close relationship with his troops. He got to know each of his thousand men by name, greeted them with waves rather than formal salutes, bought them beer after a long march, took his sergeants to dinner at a restaurant reserved for the army's top brass, and commandeered officers' rations for his enlisted men. Often reprimanded by his superiors for such transgressive fraternizing, Roosevelt was quick to offer the authorities the necessary apologies. But, in truth, he loved flouting the rules of military conduct. Here was a way for him to recreate a frontier environment, where social distinctions and rank counted for little. A man was judged for his ability as a man, and that was all.[17]

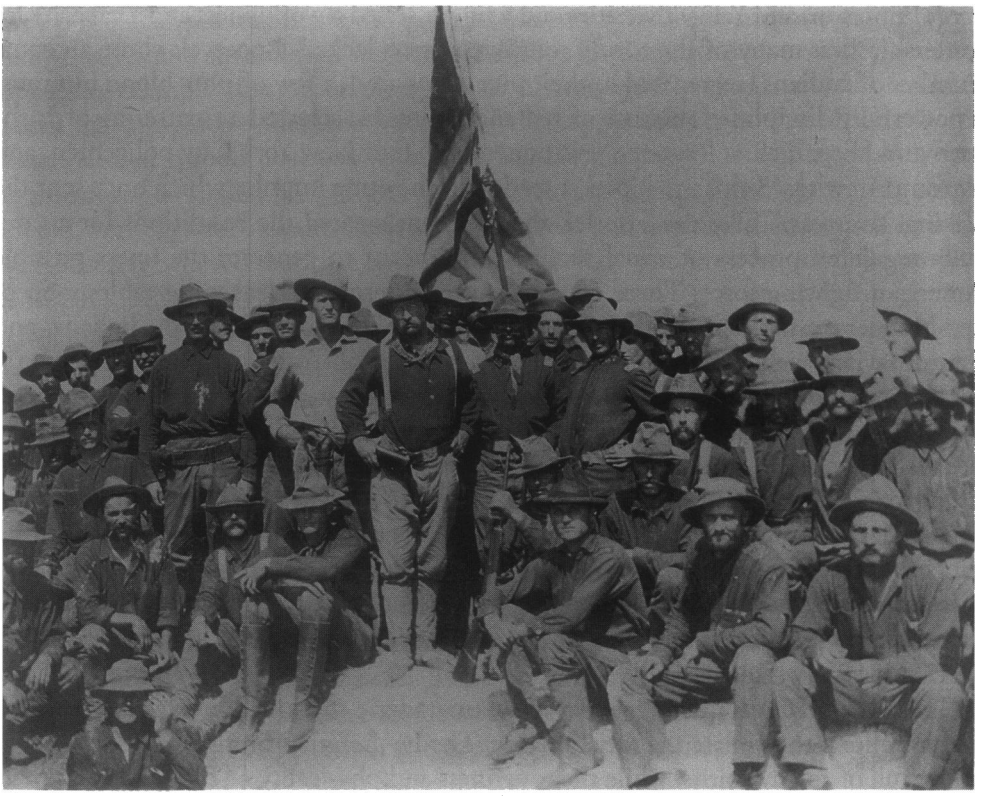
Roosevelt wanted his regiment to shine. Using all of their organizational abilities

[14] *Ibid.*, 17–22, 28–32, 50, 52, esp. 17; Roosevelt to Henry Fairfield Osborn, Dec. 21, 1908, in *Letters of Theodore Roosevelt,* ed. Morison, VI, 1434–36; Edmund Morris, *The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt* (New York, 1979), 618; Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation,* 103.

[15] Here my interpretation diverges from that of Slotkin, who sees in the Rough Riders a replication of the racial mix that conquered the frontier. Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation,* 104.

[16] The one black in the regiment was Roosevelt's bodyservant, Marshall. Roosevelt, *Rough Riders,* 67.

[17] *Ibid.*, 18, 51, 52, 116–17; Morris, *Rise of Theodore Roosevelt,* 620–21, 639–40, 647; Harbaugh, *Life and Times of Theodore Roosevelt,* 106.



This photo was taken on a hill overlooking Santiago, Cuba, in July 1898 after the Rough Riders had taken Kettle and San Juan hills. Theodore Roosevelt is where he wants to be, at the center of it all but also one of the guys.
Courtesy Library of Congress.

and Washington influence, Roosevelt and his superior, Col. Leonard Wood, made sure that the Rough Riders were among the first troops to disembark at Daiquirí in June 1898 and to begin marching toward the expected engagement with Spanish troops in the heavily fortified hills east of Santiago. The Spanish, as it turned out, were in no mood for a long war and gave up after only three weeks and four rather small battles. But the Rough Riders played important roles in three of the four—Las Guásimas, Kettle Hill, and San Juan Hill—and came home military heroes. Roosevelt, by muscling his way to Cuba, had literally willed his regiment to the battlefield and to glory.[18]

It had taken considerable propaganda to turn the light-complexioned and highly cultured Spanish enemy into the dark and savage foe, but the American tabloids, led

[18] Morris, *Rise of Theodore Roosevelt,* 623; Roosevelt, *Rough Riders,* 46–78. See David F. Trask, *The War with Spain in 1898* (New York, 1981); and Philip S. Foner, *The Spanish-Cuban-American War and the Birth of American Imperialism, 1895–1902* (2 vols., New York, 1972).

by the Hearst and Pulitzer papers, proved equal to the task. These newspapers fed American civilians and troops a steady diet of sensational stories about atrocities that the Spanish had committed against the freedom-loving Cubans, and they focused on the sinister Catholicism of the Spanish as a way of explaining to their Protestant nation the autocratic and ruthless character of Spanish rule. Visually, the Spanish were often depicted in the simian form that Americans used to portray the races they most despised.[19]

The Rough Riders' first encounter with Spanish troops seemed to confirm the latter's savage racial nature. The Americans had expected to meet the Spanish in a civilized engagement on an open field of battle; but instead they were ambushed in heavily forested terrain at Las Guásimas. The battle revealed that the Spanish army had adopted the guerrilla tactics favored by their Cuban adversaries, an intelligent adaptation of military tactics to the Cuban terrain and foe that the Americans would come to respect. But initially it seemed to Roosevelt and others steeped in frontier lore that at Las Guásimas they had encountered a savage enemy. Roosevelt's recounting of the battle resembled the narratives he had already written about eighteenth-century Indian attacks in the Kentucky backwoods. Victory came to the Rough Riders, in Roosevelt's telling, because they demonstrated the same pluck, resourcefulness, and courage as the Kentucky backwoodsmen. And just as the tough conditions of the American wilderness had welded the frontiersmen, "whatever their blood," into one superior people, so too the rough encounter at Las Guásimas had forged the motley Rough Riders into a truly American shape.[20]

Las Guásimas was only a prelude to the furious battles at Kettle and San Juan hills, the high and heavily fortified ridges that guarded the approach to Santiago. The Rough Riders had been assigned a support role behind several regiments of regular troops, but as the casualties mounted and as communications between the generals in the rear and frontline troops broke down, Roosevelt moved his Rough Riders into the thick of the action. Roosevelt demonstrated extraordinary heroism and recklessness. He inspired a wild charge up Kettle Hill that overran Spanish defenses. He then organized the fragments of several regiments that had made it to the top into a reserve force that provided critical support to the regulars who were assaulting the adjacent San Juan Hill. Roosevelt spent much of the battle on horseback, riding among his troops, urging them up the hill, disregarding danger and death. His daring and impulsiveness resembled those of Gen. George Armstrong Custer; but Kettle and San Juan hills were to be the sites of no last stands. Sheets of bullets rained down upon the American troops; shells exploded everywhere. All around, Roosevelt saw men being killed and wounded or collapsing from exhaustion. By the time the fighting had ended, 90 of the 450 Rough Riders who had entered the battle lay killed or wounded. Many more would later succumb to sickness. One bullet grazed Roosevelt's wrist, but

[19] Gerald Linderman, *The Mirror of War: American Society and the Spanish-American War* (Ann Arbor, 1974), 114–73.

[20] Roosevelt, *Rough Riders,* 79–118, esp. 110, 115.

none wounded him; virtually alone among the officers and men, he escaped sickness. In this climactic battle that Roosevelt had long wished for, he seemed as immortal as a Greek god, especially to the awestruck journalists who were reporting this fight to the millions of avid newspaper readers back home. "Mounted high on horseback, and charging the rifle-pits at a gallop and quite alone," wrote Richard Harding Davis, the famed *New York Herald* and *Scribner's* reporter, Roosevelt "made you feel that you would like to cheer."[21]

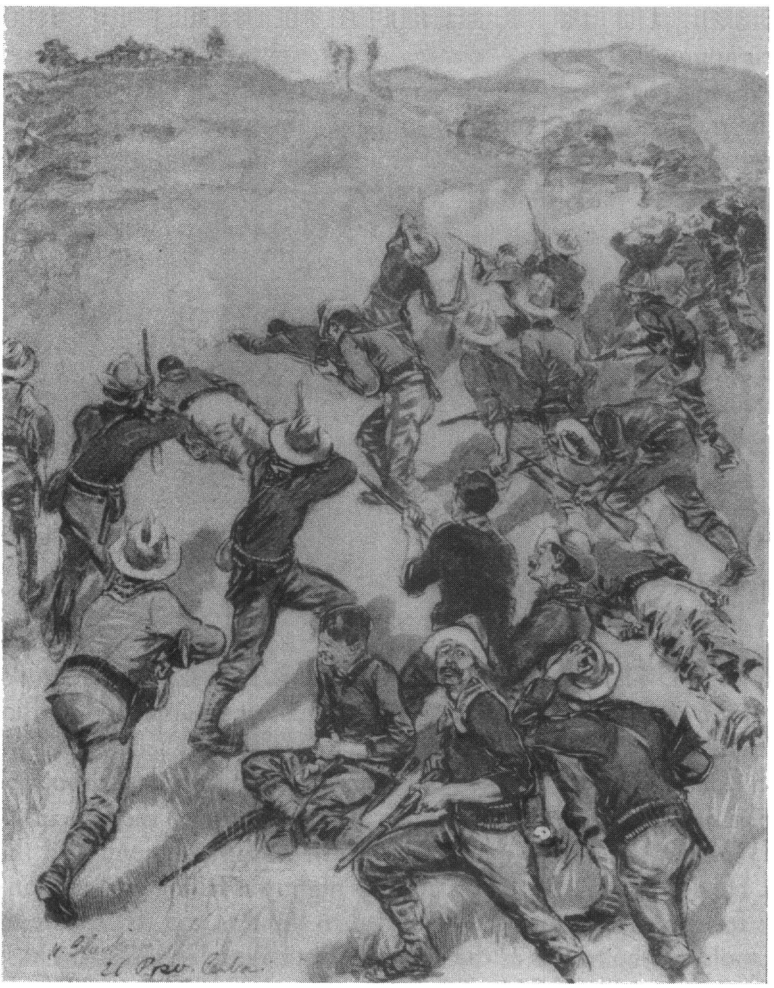
In the Cuban campaign, Roosevelt brought to life the mythic past that he had invented for the American people in *The Winning of the West.* In the climactic Kettle Hill–San Juan Hill battle that symbolized the triumph of America over savagery and the forging of the many streams of humanity into one American people, Roosevelt himself played the starring role. But there was a problem. Just as the arrival of the black man on the North American continent had compromised the great white nation taking shape there, so, too, the presence of black United States troops on Kettle Hill and San Juan Hill interfered with the nation's triumph—or at least with Roosevelt's enjoyment of that triumph.

Roosevelt had been able to keep blacks out of the Rough Riders, but he could not keep them out of Cuba. Four regular regiments—a substantial percentage of the United States Army—were all-black (although commanded by white officers), and they were among the most experienced and reliable American troops. The Negro Ninth and Tenth cavalry regiments fought well at Las Guásimas and played an even more vital role in the taking of Kettle and San Juan hills. The Tenth Cavalry had been the frontline troops on Kettle Hill and there lost more of their officers (eleven of twenty-two) than any other regiment. When Roosevelt called for a charge up the hill, they eagerly joined in; meanwhile, several platoons of the Ninth Cavalry reached the summit of Kettle Hill from a different direction at the same moment as Roosevelt. Black troops from both regiments and, even more important, from the Twenty-Fourth Infantry Division, fought hard for San Juan Hill as well.[22]

When Roosevelt reached the top of San Juan Hill, he found himself the effective commander of the Rough Riders, the Ninth and Tenth Negro cavalries, and three other cavalry regiments. The chaos of battle had mischievously produced a true American melting pot—the heterogeneity of the Rough Riders further diversified by the presence of both white and black regulars—and the pot had worked its magic, as all these diverse troops had fought as a single, cohesive unit. White regulars, the heavily southwestern Rough Riders, the journalists, and even Roosevelt himself all heaped praise on the black soldiers, who returned to the United States as heroes. The Tenth

[21] Richard Harding Davis, *Notes of a War Correspondent* (New York, 1910), 96; Roosevelt, *Rough Riders,* 119–64; Morris, *Rise of Theodore Roosevelt,* 650–56.

[22] William H. Leckie, *The Buffalo Soldiers: A Narrative of the Negro Cavalry in the West* (Norman, 1967); Albert L. Scipio II, *Last of the Black Regulars: A History of the Twenty-Fourth Infantry Regiment, 1869–1951* (Silver Spring, 1983); Anthony Lukas, *Big Trouble: A Murder in a Small Western Town Sets Off a Struggle for the Soul of America* (New York, 1997), 118–32; Roosevelt, *Rough Riders,* 132–64; Theophilus G. Steward, *The Colored Regulars in the United States Army* (1904; New York, 1969); Marvin Edward Fletcher, "The Negro Soldier and the United States Army, 1891–1917" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1968), ch. 8.



In this painting, William J. Glackens portrays the heroism of the Rough Riders who, despite heavy casualties, push their way up a deadly hill commanded by Spanish forces. Black troops have been excluded from this depiction, as they were from most, helping to ensure that the charge would be remembered as the work of white troops alone.
Reprinted from McClure's, *October 1898.*

Cavalry participated in a parade down Washington's Pennsylvania Avenue and received President William McKinley's salute. When Roosevelt bid farewell to the Rough Riders in October, he toasted the black soldiers: "The Spaniards called them 'Smoked Yankees,'" he said, "but we found them to be an excellent breed of Yankees. I am sure that I speak the sentiments of officers and men in the assemblage when I say that between you and the other cavalry regiments there exists a tie which we trust will

never be broken." The Rough Riders, reported a black soldier of the Tenth Cavalry, roared their approval.[23]

Roosevelt might have seized on evidence of intermixing of black and white troops to celebrate the melting pot as a mechanism that could fashion a single nation out of all the different racial, ethnic, and regional groups who resided in the United States. But Roosevelt had never been entirely comfortable with the presence of blacks fighting alongside whites in the climactic battle on Kettle and San Juan hills. In fact, he had been alarmed by the mixing, by "the different regiments being *completely intermingled*—white regulars, colored regulars, and Rough Riders." He believed that complete and unregulated mixing—as had gone on in Mexico and other Latin countries—produced mediocre races. The indiscriminate mingling of black and white troops in the heat of battle, moreover, threatened to explode the myth that regulated assimilation produced racially superior Americans and to disrupt the reenactment of assimilation carefully orchestrated by Roosevelt himself. The black troops had to be put in their place—a place separate from, and subordinate to, that of white Americans. [24]

Roosevelt took on this task when he began publishing his history of the Rough Riders in *Scribner's Magazine* in 1899. In recounting the seizure of San Juan Hill, Roosevelt interrupted his triumphalist narrative to criticize the shortcomings of the Negro troops. While these troops were excellent fighters, they were "peculiarly dependent upon their white officers"; left on their own—as many had been by the time they arrived on the summit of San Juan, given the high casualty rate among the officers of the Ninth and Tenth—they faltered, even ran. Roosevelt recalled having to draw his revolver on black troops who seemed to be leaving their positions without permission. Only after he had threatened to shoot them did they return to the forward lines.[25]

Presley Holliday, a black soldier of the Tenth Cavalry, remembered the incident differently. He described a chaotic situation as night was falling on San Juan Hill amid many calls for soldiers to carry the wounded to the rear and to procure rations and trenching tools for the troops at the summit. Both Rough Riders and black soldiers responded to those calls, which created the impression of many soldiers leaving the battle scene. That is what Roosevelt apparently saw when he drew his revolver and aimed it at the black troops. But, according to Holliday, Lt. Robert F. Fleming of the Tenth (a white officer) quickly reassured Roosevelt that the black soldiers had been following orders; the next day, Roosevelt even visited members of the Tenth Cavalry and apologized to them.[26]

[23] John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss Jr., *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans* (New York, 1988), 271; Roosevelt, *Rough Riders,* 145–52; Willard B. Gatewood Jr., *"Smoked Yankees" and the Struggle for Empire: Letters from Negro Soldiers, 1898–1902* (Urbana, 1971), 76–77; Lukas, *Big Trouble,* 137; Frank Friedel, *The Splendid Little War* (Boston, 1958), 173; Herschel V. Cashin et al., *Under Fire with the Tenth Cavalry* (1899; New York, 1970); Edward A. Johnson, *History of Negro Soldiers in the Spanish-American War, and Other Items of Interest* (1899; New York, 1970), 39–81; Steward, *Colored Regulars in the United States Army,* 191–220, 236–55.

[24] Roosevelt, *Rough Riders,* 145. Emphasis added. Amy Kaplan, "Black and Blue on San Juan Hill," in *The Cultures of United States Imperialism,* ed. Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease (Durham, 1993), 219–36.

[25] Roosevelt, *Rough Riders,* 149, 150–152.

[26] Presley Holliday to editor, *New York Age,* May 11, 1899, in Gatewood, *"Smoked Yankees" and the Struggle for Empire,* 92–97.

The soldiers pictured above belonged to one of the four African American United States Army regiments—the Ninth and Tenth cavalries, the Twenty-fourth and Twenty-fifth infantries—that played indispensable roles in the victories at Kettle and San Juan hills.
Courtesy National Archives.

It is, of course, difficult to know exactly what went on at dusk, when all the soldiers, including Roosevelt himself, were exhausted from the fight and may have had difficulty seeing and thinking clearly. It is possible that some black troops may have been too quick to leave the still insecure summit for the safety of the rear when the opportunity arose. Holliday admitted that some of the Tenth Cavalry's newer recruits became nervous at being separated from the bulk of their regiment and at being in such close proximity to white soldiers. But even if nervousness prompted them to look for opportunities to leave the summit, it was not adequate reason for Roosevelt to challenge the worth of the black fighting man. There had been many instances in Cuba of white soldierly cowardice and of blacks proving themselves to be the more stalwart and reliable troops; indeed, the colored Twenty-Fourth Infantry had been called upon to charge San Juan Hill—and did—only after the white Seventy-First New York had panicked and refused to attack. Roosevelt ignored this and other incidents of white cowardice and black valor, determined as he was to charge that only black troops lacked the self-reliance and hardy individualism to become their own men, to become true Americans. In that chaotic and confusing moment on San Juan Hill, Roosevelt was certain that he had uncovered incontrovertible evidence of the black soldiers' "peculiar dependence" on white officers. Whereas the Rough Riders, in

Roosevelt's eyes, had shown themselves equal to the Kentucky backwoodsmen in every respect, the black cavalry troops had demonstrated once again what Roosevelt had viscerally believed: that blacks were not truly fit for combat, that they lacked the qualities needed to participate as equals in the great nation that Daniel Boone and his fellow frontiersmen had willed into existence in the eighteenth century. [27]

These were devastating charges in 1899, especially when leveled by a person of Roosevelt's stature. Emboldened by the 1896 Supreme Court decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson,* the South was disfranchising blacks and excluding them from institutions that had been designated white—schools, restaurants, stores, parks, and many places of employment. In the North, whites were pushing blacks out of the skilled trades and service jobs that had long supported a small but vibrant black middle class. The Spanish-American War took on special significance in this context, for it gave blacks an opportunity to demonstrate their loyalty to the United States and to demand an end to discriminatory treatment. African Americans hoped that their impressive record of service would compel the United States military to open officer ranks to them, and that the achievement of that status could then become a powerful symbol in their quest for equality, integration, and belonging. How could a nation permit officers of its own army to be denied the right to vote, to sit on juries, or to use public accommodations? Most whites, Roosevelt among them, evidently agreed that the nation could not tolerate such a blatant contradiction. They sought to resolve it, however, not by tearing down racial barriers, but by reinforcing and justifying the ones already in place. Just as most blacks could not successfully discharge the responsibilities of citizenship, so, too, Roosevelt and others argued, they could not be entrusted with leading troops into battle. The black demand for officer status was rebuffed. In this climate of racial separation and discrimination, it did not take long for whites to challenge the fighting abilities of black soldiers, even when they were commanded by white officers. By World War I, few blacks were given combat roles. The nation had stripped virtually all blacks of the right to fight and die for their country. The sacrifices and heroism of the Ninth and Tenth cavalries had become but a dim memory to whites. White southerners, meanwhile, were reintegrating themselves into the military. As a result of the Spanish-American War, efforts to re-create the United States as a white nation had borne fruit.[28]

The centrality of race to the definition of Roosevelt's America was apparent, too, in the treatment of the Cubans and Filipinos, ostensible American allies in the fight against the Spaniards. Finding a savage foe in the Spanish-American War proved a more

[27] *Ibid.*, 95–96, 97, 72–73, 76–81; Lukas; *Big Trouble,* 134–35.

[28] *Plessy v. Ferguson,* 163 U.S. 537 (1896); John W. Cell, *The Highest Stage of White Supremacy: The Origins of Segregation in South Africa and the American South* (New York, 1982); Kenneth L. Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape: Black Cleveland, 1870–1930* (Urbana, 1976), 53–90; Gatewood, *"Smoked Yankees" and the Struggle for Empire,* 79–81, 87. On the hopes invested by African Americans in military service, see Willard B. Gatewood Jr., *Black Americans and the White Man's Burden* (Urbana, 1975); Bernard C. Nalty, *Strength for the Fight: A History of Black Americans in the Military* (New York, 1986), 78–124; Ann J. Lane, *The Brownsville Affair: National Crisis and Black Reaction* (Port Washington, 1971). On the Spanish-American War as a spur to North-South unity, see O'Leary, *To Die For,* 129–49; and Theodore Roosevelt, "The Reunited People," 1902 speech, in *Works of Theodore Roosevelt,* ed. Hagedorn, XVI, 27–32.

difficult task than Roosevelt and others had anticipated. Despite their "savage" behavior at Las Guásimas, the Spanish soldiers soon revealed that they were far whiter and more civilized than the Americans had expected. Meanwhile, United States troops were unnerved by their encounters with Cuban troops. The latter were often poorly dressed, inadequately provisioned, and lacking discipline. American soldiers were particularly upset by the Cuban troops' practice of stripping corpses—of friend and foe alike—of clothing, food, guns, and any other usable items and by their annoying penchant for begging. And they were stunned that Cuban troops were overwhelmingly dark in complexion. The United States troops knew little of the Cubans' long struggle for independence, of the hardships they had had to endure, and of why they had chosen guerrilla tactics against the Spanish. The Americans, influenced by Hearst and Pulitzer newspapers, had imagined that Cubans were a people much like themselves—freedom loving, civilized, and white. Hence, they were shocked to discover that the Cubans exhibited traits they could define as primitive and undignified. The black Cubans, not the Spanish, were the island's true savages![29]

The Cubans themselves, however, never became a savage foe against whom the Americans felt compelled to fight a war of extermination—that honor went to the Filipinos. The Cubans instead became a childlike ally in need of American mentoring, assistance, and protection. On these grounds, the United States justified its refusal to grant the Cubans the political independence they so desperately sought. Instead, it made the island into a virtual colony, taking on the "white man's burden" of uplifting a darker and more savage race. In such ways the Spanish-American War reinforced Americans' sense of themselves as a white and superior people.[30]

Roosevelt's Civic Nationalism

It is tempting to interpret Roosevelt's nationalism as simply an American expression of what European scholars label ethnic, or romantic, nationalism. Such nationalism locates the essence of the nation in the *Volk,* defined as a people who share the same blood, history, language, and land. The *Volk,* in the eyes of ethnic nationalists, did not change much over time; it was thought of as an entity standing outside history, a force of moral and biological purity that could eradicate the alleged evils of modernity: corruption, materialism, promiscuity, and racial mixing.[31]

Many individuals and groups in the United States subscribed to such ethnoracialist notions, the Ku Klux Klan being the best known and most successful example. But

[29] Roosevelt, *Rough Riders,* 81; Morris, *Rise of Theodore Roosevelt,* 646; Kaplan, "Black and Blue on San Juan Hill," 223–26; Linderman, *Mirror of War,* 114–47.

[30] Stuart Creighton Miller, *"Benevolent Assimilation": The American Conquest of the Philippines, 1899–1903* (New Haven, 1982); Richard Drinnon, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire Building* (Minneapolis, 1980), esp. 307–51; Paul Kramer, "U.S. Anthropology and Colonial Politics in the Occupied Philippines, 1898–1916" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1998); Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation,* 106–22; Foner, *Spanish-Cuban-American War;* James H. Hitchman, *Leonard Wood and Cuban Independence, 1898–1902* (The Hague, 1971); Louis A. Perez, *Cuba under the Platt Amendment, 1902–1934* (Pittsburgh, 1986).

[31] On the history of ethnic nationalism in Europe, see Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992); and Michael Ignatieff, *Blood and Belonging: Journeys in the New Nationalism* (New York, 1993).

Roosevelt was not among them. The notion that the European peoples represented pure biological entities made no sense to him, for he keenly understood that war and conquest had made the Europeans far more hybridized than most cared to admit. Roosevelt celebrated hybridity: the world's greatest peoples, after all—the English, the Americans, the Australians—had emerged from melting pots. Even prior to the Revolution, Roosevelt had once written, "we were then already, what we are now, a people of mixed blood." The smelting, Roosevelt believed, had to be controlled by a skilled puddler if it were to produce the best and most efficient result; but racial mixing would then always produce peoples superior to those that had remained pure. In his celebration of hybridity, Roosevelt was very much a modern and deeply at odds with members of his gentry class, such as Henry Cabot Lodge, Madison Grant, and Frederic Remington, who longed for a pure Anglo-Saxon America. Nowhere in Roosevelt's voluminous writings, neither in his published work nor his private letters, is it possible to find the kind of indiscriminate revulsion against "outsiders" expressed by Remington in a letter: "Jews, Injuns, Chinamen, Italians, Huns—the rubbish of the earth I hate—I've got some Winchesters and when the massacring begins, I can get my share of 'em, and what's more I will."[32]

Roosevelt instead was a civic nationalist who imagined the nation, to use Michael Ignatieff's words, "as a community of equal, rights-bearing citizens united in patriotic attachment to a shared set of political practices and values." Such a national community was open, in theory at least, to all those who resided in a nation's territory, irrespective of their ethnicity, race, or religion. It was democratic, for it vested "sovereignty in all of the people."[33] In practice, Roosevelt's national community was open to anyone who could claim European origins or ancestry. Roosevelt paid little attention to whether those Europeans had come from eastern or western Europe, from Catholic, Protestant, or Jewish backgrounds, or from the ranks of the rich or the poor; to all he extended the invitation to become American. He assumed a different posture toward blacks, Asians, and other nonwhites. He did not attempt to exclude them from the political community as thoroughly as he had excluded them from his nationalist mythology. In fact, on numerous occasions he passionately defended the political rights and aspirations of selected African Americans and Asians who, to his thinking, had achieved a requisite level of intellectual and moral competence. But he also believed that the vast majority of nonwhites would not achieve those levels during his lifetime or for several lifetimes thereafter.

Although racism compromised his civic nationalism, it would be a mistake to dismiss the sincerity of his civic declarations. He felt his civic nationalism, what he called "true Americanism," deeply, and it allowed him to welcome into American society "lowly" and "racially inferior" European immigrants whom most people of his class

[32] Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation,* 97; Roosevelt, "True Americanism," 24–25; Roosevelt, *Winning of the West,* VIII, 17. See also G. Edward White, *The Eastern Establishment and the Western Experience: The West of Frederic Remington, Theodore Roosevelt, and Owen Wister* (New Haven, 1968). On Lodge and Grant, see Higham, *Strangers in the Land,* 68–157 and *passim.* I disagree with Alexander Saxton, who argues that the Remington passage expressed Roosevelt's views as well. Saxton, *Rise and Fall of the White Republic,* 343–44.

[33] Ignatieff, *Blood and Belonging,* 5.

and cultural background despised. It is easy to belittle the progressive character of Roosevelt's inclusionary attitudes toward European immigrants, now that anti-Catholicism and anti-Semitism have largely vanished as significant American ideologies and all Euro-Americans are thought to belong to the same white race. But Roosevelt's embrace of Catholic and Jewish Europeans was not popular among many native-born Protestant Americans of his time. In fact, the arrival of so many of them, especially from "primitive" regions in eastern and southern Europe, generated hysteria among large numbers of native-born Protestants.[34] Many immigrants, in turn, responded to Roosevelt's warmth with appreciation, enthusiasm, and votes. His civic nationalism also gave nonwhite Americans something to work with, for its democratic and egalitarian ethos allowed them to believe that they could yet find a way to gain full citizenship rights and thus to include themselves in the great national experiment. The American creed of a Gunnar Myrdal and the integrationist dream of a Martin Luther King Jr. sprang from the same taproot of civic nationalism that Theodore Roosevelt espoused in the early years of this century.

Roosevelt's civic nationalism was rooted both in his Republicanism and in his love of the cosmopolitan city in which he had grown up. Since the 1860s, the Republican party had cast itself as the implacable foe of discrimination and favoritism. From the earliest days of his political career, Roosevelt had wanted to purge government of favoritism, cronyism, and corruption and to ensure that government appointments would be reserved for the best qualified. That meant adopting civil service procedures that relied on impartial merit tests rather than on ties of party, friendship, or nationality.[35]

For Roosevelt, a commitment to merit uncompromised by prejudice or cronyism was more than abstract principle; it also reflected what he had learned as a denizen of what he called "huge, polyglot, pleasure-loving" New York, where people from all walks of life had found a way to live together. Roosevelt valued what he saw as New Yorkers' inclination to put aside their prejudices, and he believed that city leaders ought to encourage this broad-mindedness. He was proud to call himself a friend of Otto Raphael, a Jewish policeman, who, like Roosevelt, was "'straight New York.'" As police commissioner (1895–1897), Roosevelt became famous for his midnight strolls with Jacob Riis (himself an immigrant), ostensibly to catch deadbeat cops who were asleep on the job or otherwise neglectful of their duties; but Roosevelt loved just as much the exposure these excursions gave him to the hidden communities and activities of New York City life. "These midnight rambles are great fun," he once wrote. "My whole work brings me in contact with every class of people in New York. . . . I get a glimpse of the real life of the swarming millions."[36]

There was a voyeuristic element to this, just as there had been in Riis's sensationalist exposé, *How the Other Half Lives.*[37] But there was also a strong desire to break down the barriers that had separated New Yorkers from each other and to prod all citi-

[34] Higham, *Strangers in the Land,* 52–105, 158–93.

[35] Harbaugh, *Life and Times of Theodore Roosevelt,* 13–49, 69–92.

[36] Roosevelt, *An Autobiography* (1913; New York, 1927), 175, 179–80; Roosevelt to Anna Roosevelt, June 16, 1895, in *Letters of Theodore Roosevelt,* ed. Morison, I, 463.

[37] Jacob A. Riis, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York* (1890; New York, 1971).

zens of the "great city" to cross neighborhood and ethnic boundaries. Some scholars have argued that Roosevelt's openness to immigrants extended only to the so-called old immigrants from Great Britain, Germany, and Scandinavia who supposedly belonged to superior and easily assimilable races. The "new immigrants" from eastern and southern Europe, in this view, received no welcome from Roosevelt, for they were considered to lack the racial makeup to succeed in America.[38] While some evidence supports this view, other evidence does not. It cannot account, for example, for Roosevelt's enthusiastic embrace of Israel Zangwill's play, *The Melting-Pot,* when it opened on Broadway in 1908. The protagonist, David Quixano, belongs to a Russian Jewish family that can only be described as new immigrant. David's mother, father, and sisters have been slain during the 1903 Kishinev pogrom. David flees to New York, where he is taken in by his uncle, Mendel Quixano, who is portrayed by Zangwill as the stereotypical eastern European Jewish immigrant, "wearing a black skull-cap, a seedy velvet jacket." Mendel lives with his mother, Frau Quixano, a forlorn soul who speaks only Yiddish and for whom America is a cultural and emotional graveyard. Mendel and David, both talented musicians, desire to escape the provincialism and tragedy that envelop Frau Quixano. While Mendel is too old and too tied to his mother to succeed in this quest, David possesses the necessary talent, drive, and independence. He seizes the opportunity that America gives him, writes his American symphony, marries the gentile girl of his dreams, and becomes a proud American.[39]

Roosevelt, of course, endorsed Zangwill's depiction of America as a land of unlimited opportunity. But, even more important, he applauded Zangwill's insistence that even immigrants such as David, whose origins lay in the allegedly inferior races of eastern Europe, could become the most successful and best of Americans. It mattered, too, that David succeeds in America, not by maintaining his Jewish heritage, but by assimilating to American culture. The words that Zangwill puts in David's mouth could have come from Roosevelt's own pen: "America is God's Crucible, the great Melting-Pot where all the races of Europe are melting and reforming! . . . Germans and Frenchmen, Irishmen and Englishmen, Jews and Russians—into the Crucible with you all! God is making the American." No wonder Roosevelt wrote Zangwill, "I do not know when I have seen a play that stirred me as much."[40]

An even more impressive demonstration of Roosevelt's comfort with the new immigrants occurred in 1913, in the midst of a strike by women garment workers in New York City. Roosevelt traveled to Henry Street and St. Mark's Place to witness the strike firsthand and to interview the strikers about their grievances and ambitions. On Henry Street he encountered young women whom some observers would have described as the most pathetic examples of the new immigration: They were the "lowest and poorest paid workers that we saw," Roosevelt noted. Their "racial" background was equally base, for many were Turkish Jews who could not even speak Yiddish, let alone English.

[38] See, for example, Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation,* 189–92.

[39] Israel Zangwill, *The Melting-Pot: Drama in Four Acts* (1909; New York, 1923), 2 and *passim.*

[40] *Ibid.*, 33; Roosevelt to Israel Zangwill, Oct. 15, 1908, in *Letters of Theodore Roosevelt,* ed. Morison, VI, 1288.

They were thus cut off not only from American culture but also from the Yiddish-speaking Jewish community and labor movement in New York City.[41]

It would have been easy for Roosevelt to find fault with these women and to deplore an immigration policy that had let them in. A Henry Cabot Lodge or a Madison Grant would probably have responded to a close encounter with these Turkish Jewish women with horror rather than empathy, with demands for their deportation or exclusion rather than for their protection. But that was not Roosevelt's reaction. He was moved by their plight, feeling "deep sympathy for them personally." Moreover, Roosevelt noted, "there is the larger question of the social good of the whole race." We must take care of them, he argued, for they represent the "mothers of . . . *our* American citizenship for the next generation." One can discern in Roosevelt's reaction a Victorian paternalism that stressed the need to save these poor damsels from their distress (although his preferred remedy, unionization of the women, was not paternalist at all). Such a judgment, however, too readily ignores Roosevelt's unambiguous invitation to these women to become part of the American nation. In going out among these poor Turkish Jewish women, mixing easily with them ("gather around me and tell your stories," he implored at one point), and treating them as the mothers of future Americans, Roosevelt was showing ample solicitude and ease with a group of new immigrants.[42]

Roosevelt's willingness to grant those immigrant women, or any women, the rights and duties of men was another matter. The centrality of the warrior to Roosevelt's narratives of nation building, his admiration for muscular individuals willing to use force, and his abhorrence of effeminacy in men underscore the gendered character of his nationalism. Men, Roosevelt believed, were society's natural leaders; nations rested on the intense homosocial bonds arising among men sharing the perils of combat. Women's nature did not allow them to succeed at men's work, and the admission of females to the army and other sacred institutions of male comradeship would only compromise nation building.

But women's inferiority did not mean that they, or at least the Euro-Americans among them, were to be excluded from the nation. Their contributions as wives and mothers were essential both to the creation of new male citizens and to those citizens' moral education; women were, as Roosevelt had declared of the New York City women strikers, the "mothers . . . of our citizenship." An interesting ambiguity attaches to Roosevelt's use of the word "our" in that phrase. Perhaps Roosevelt meant "our" to refer to all Americans, male and female, but it seems more likely that "our" refers only to men and expresses Roosevelt's belief that women's primary role was to create male citizens while accepting their own exclusion from citizenship.

Roosevelt enlarged his conception of women's role over the first two decades of the twentieth century. His interest in the conditions of workers and the immigrant poor not only led him to advocate unionization for women workers but also brought him

[41] Roosevelt to Michael A. Schaap, Jan. 24, 1913, in *Letters of Theodore Roosevelt,* ed. Morison, VII, 696–701.

[42] *Ibid.*; Annelise Orleck, *Common Sense and a Little Fire: Women and Working-Class Politics in the United States, 1900–1965* (Chapel Hill, 1995), 77–78. Emphasis added. Madison Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race; or, the Racial Basis of European History* (New York, 1916).

into contact with women Progressives such as Jane Addams and Florence Kelley who advocated woman suffrage and other reforms likely to increase women's political influence. And when Roosevelt formed the Progressive party in 1912 (a subject that this essay will later take up), he welcomed into it a large contingent of women reformers, who were prominent at the convention and in the campaign. Roosevelt's embrace of the women activists reflected more than expediency, more than his desperate need for all the support, male or female, he could muster. At a time when many men, in Roosevelt's estimation, were suffering from effeminacy and thus failing as fathers, leaders, and soldiers, the female role in building the nation assumed greater importance. By improving the living and familial conditions in which male children were born and raised, women reformers could help ensure that the next generation of men would be inculcated with manly virtues. Roosevelt at times accepted the need for a modified conception of masculinity that accorded with the female reformers' emphasis on cooperation, service, and social welfare, qualities that other men of Roosevelt's time derided as fatal to men's "rugged individualism." As a sign of the growing political role that Roosevelt envisioned for women, he became a supporter of woman suffrage. Suffragists and feminists, in turn, found in Roosevelt's civic nationalism the language to justify their struggle for equality.

But Roosevelt never became a feminist, nor a believer in the fundamental equality of men and women. He supported suffrage because he believed that by enlisting women to cleanse politics of corruption and vice, it would ultimately strengthen men, enhancing their ability to pursue national virtue and glory. Thus while Rooseveltian conceptions of nationhood held sway, feminists would find full equality an elusive goal. Roosevelt's civic nationalism retained its gendered cast, reserving for men the opportunity and responsibility to become free and self-governing individuals.[43]

Civic Nationalism and the Problem of Race

In the abstract, the task of reconciling civic nationalism with racial nationalism was straightforward. Roosevelt simply argued that certain races—notably Asians and African Americans—could not meet the fundamental requirements of American citizenship. "Only the very highest races have been able" to make a success of self-government, he wrote in a 1908 letter, and it would be foolish, even contemptible, to assume that "utterly undeveloped races" could function on an even footing with whites in a democracy.[44]

The practical work of exclusion was in some cases as easily accomplished as the

[43] Arnaldo Testi, "The Gender of Reform Politics: Theodore Roosevelt and the Culture of Masculinity," *Journal of American History,* 81 (March 1995), 1509–33; Robyn Muncy, "Trustbusting and White Manhood in America, 1898–1914," *American Studies,* 38 (Fall 1997), 21–42; Paula Baker, "The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780–1920," *American Historical Review,* 89 (June 1984), 620–47; Theodore Roosevelt, *Theodore Roosevelt: Autobiography,* 161–67; Theodore Roosevelt, *The Foes of Our Own Household* (New York, 1917), esp. 232–73; Kristin L. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven, 1998); Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization,* 170–215; Nancy F. Cott, "Marriage and Women's Citizenship in the United States, 1830–1934," *American Historical Review,* 103 (Dec. 1998), 1440–74.

[44] Roosevelt to Arthur Hamilton Lee, March 7, 1908, in *Letters of Theodore Roosevelt,* ed. Morison, VI, 965.

ideological work. That was certainly true in regard to the Chinese, whom Roosevelt despised. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which barred Chinese immigrant laborers from entering the country, insured that the Chinese American population would not become large enough to pose a real problem for American democracy. Congress kept this 1882 exclusion in place until the 1940s. Roosevelt did not want to exclude the Japanese, a people whom he admired, but he rather easily engineered a policy of exclusion once anti-Japanese agitation in California made one, in Roosevelt's eyes, a political necessity. [45]

The work of reconciling civic and racial nationalist principles in regard to black Americans was another matter altogether, because the relatively easy remedy of an exclusionary immigration law could not solve the "Negro problem." The corollary to immigration exclusion—the repatriation of blacks to Africa—seemed too impractical by the early 1900s even to propose as public policy.

That Roosevelt tolerated blacks' subordination to whites and thought of them as an inferior race is beyond dispute. He never deviated from the words he wrote to his good friend Owen Wister in 1906: "I entirely agree with you that as a race and in the mass they are altogether inferior to whites."[46] He rarely protested the segregationist regime that, during the years of his presidency, reshaped social relations in the American South. As president, he actually appointed fewer blacks to federal positions than had his predecessor William McKinley. During these years, Roosevelt continued to denigrate the fitness and honor of black soldiers, as he had done since the Spanish-American War. In 1906, he ordered the dishonorable discharge of 167 men of the all-black Twenty-fifth United States Infantry Regiment, alleging that they were covering up for a few soldiers who may have assaulted a white woman and participated in a raid against the white residents of Brownsville, Texas. The facts of the case were hotly debated and were never truly clarified. But this did not stop Roosevelt from dismissing scores of black soldiers, including five who had been awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for their heroism in Cuba and the Philippines. It is unlikely that Roosevelt would have meted out equally harsh treatment to white soldiers accused of a cover-up.[47]

Yet this same man earned the loyalty of blacks and the enmity of southern whites because on occasion he violated the color line in sensational and highly publicized ways. He enraged southern whites when he appointed a black man, William D. Crum, to the collectorship of the port of Charleston, South Carolina, a prestigious federal post, and he infuriated them again when he shut down the post office in Indianola, Mississippi, to punish local whites who had run their African American postmaster, Minnie M. Cox, out of town. Roosevelt's greatest racial "crime" occurred within months of his inauguration, when he invited Booker T. Washington to the White

[45] Lucy Salyer, *Laws Harsh as Tigers: Chinese Immigrants and the Shaping of Modern Immigration Law* (Chapel Hill, 1995), 94–138; Gyory, *Closing the Gate;* Roy L. Garis, *Immigration Restriction* (New York, 1927), 308–54. On Roosevelt's admiration for the Japanese, see Roosevelt to George Otto Trevelyan, Sept. 12, 1905, in *Letters of Theodore Roosevelt,* ed. Morison, V, 22.

[46] Roosevelt to Owen Wister, April 27, 1908, in *Letters of Theodore Roosevelt,* ed. Morison, V, 226.

[47] Alfred Holt Stone, *Studies in the American Race Problem* (New York, 1908), 313; Lane, *Brownsville Affair.*

House for lunch. Not only did he thus become, in the words of the *Washington Bee,* "the first President of the United States to entertain a coloured man." He also committed, in the words of one keen observer, "the one unpardonable violation of the Southern racial code"—"the breaking of bread between the races on equal terms." With the exception of interracial sexual intercourse, there could be no more "ultimate and positive expression" of a commitment to social equality. Many southern whites never forgave Roosevelt for the transgression.[48]

Why did he do it? Recently, historians have treated Roosevelt's high-profile meetings with, and appointments of, blacks as part of an elaborate and cynical political game in which Roosevelt was attempting to secure his southern base among black Republicans; once he decided that the political payoff from that base was too small, he stopped appointing blacks and began courting southern whites instead.[49]

Roosevelt no doubt made such calculations, but it would be a mistake to interpret his entire approach to the race question through this Machiavellian lens. If Roosevelt, in general, endorsed the notion that the white race was supreme, he was nonetheless impatient with the idea that the two major American races ought to have no contact with each other. In personal terms, Roosevelt was an adventurer and boundary crosser who wanted no restrictions on his freedom of association. If he wanted to meet with a black—or a Jew or a Catholic—under conditions of equality, he would not tolerate anyone telling him he had no right to do so. In political terms, Roosevelt grounded this right in his civic nationalist belief that Americans ought to respect—and open their homes and businesses to—anyone willing to work hard and live honorably, regardless of his or her racial or religious background. That is why Roosevelt, on many occasions and at great length, declared his commitment to treating "each black man and each white man strictly [according to] . . . his merits as a man, giving him no more and no less than he shows himself worthy to have."[50] Roosevelt, in other words, could not entirely contain his behavior within the boundaries called for by the racialized nation he had labored so hard to imagine and create. This was true even of his efforts to redirect American politics through the New Nationalism he unveiled in 1910, which became the ideological foundation of the Progressive party he founded in 1912. Roosevelt worked hard in this campaign to do what he had done on San Juan Hill—to bring European immigrants closer to the center of American life while keeping blacks and other racial minorities on the periphery. And by many measures he was successful in doing so. But Roosevelt continued to violate the southerners' racial code in other ways, revealing yet again his discomfort with what he judged arbitrary racial boundaries.

[48] Stone, *American Race Problem,* 243–49, 315, 319. Those wanting to believe in Roosevelt's commitment to racial equality could find other examples of good deeds. As civil service commissioner, he had eliminated from exams given in southern cities questions regarding applicants' religion, political orientation, and race; the result was that greater numbers of black applicants entered government service. As governor of New York, he outlawed racial discrimination in the state's public schools and prohibited individual towns from placing white and black children in separate educational institutions. *Ibid.*, 312; Harbaugh, *Life and Times of Theodore Roosevelt,* 127–28.

[49] Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South since Emancipation* (New York, 1984), 354.

[50] Roosevelt to Tourgee, Nov. 8, 1901, in *Letters of Theodore Roosevelt,* ed. Morison, III, 190. See also Roosevelt to Owen Wister, *ibid.*, V, 221–30, esp. 228.

The New Nationalism

The New Nationalism, a political program invented by the Progressive journalist Herbert Croly in 1908, was intended to offer class-torn America a thoroughgoing plan of economic and political reconstruction. Croly called for a large state to regulate the predatory practices of big industry and to reinvigorate American life with a spirit of cooperation and selflessness. Croly's program gave Roosevelt a name for the efforts he had already taken as president to enlarge the federal government in order to control the corporations and to offer all ordinary Americans, no matter how impoverished or disadvantaged, a "square deal." Just back from an African safari in 1910 and looking for a way to reenter American politics after his premature retirement from the presidency in 1909, Roosevelt embraced Croly's New Nationalism as his own.[51]

Croly's New Nationalism also allowed Roosevelt to address a glaring weakness in his earlier formulations of civic nationalism. Roosevelt's nationalism had always contained within it the promise of economic opportunity and advancement to those who worked hard and lived honorably. But the civic nationalist philosophy that he had formulated in the 1890s, with its focus on equal civil and political rights for all citizens, could not deliver on that promise. Politically, this philosophy owed a great deal to classical liberalism, especially in its insistence that individual emancipation would follow upon the removal of artificial constraints on political and civic participation. Thus, Roosevelt had believed that the ending of discriminatory treatment in public and private life would give European immigrants and other disadvantaged Americans ample opportunity to partake of the American dream. But Roosevelt had failed to gauge the negative effects of industrialization on individual opportunity and virtue. Belatedly, and after much prodding from New York City's vigorous labor movement, Roosevelt acknowledged that grinding poverty was preventing workers, even those with full political and civil rights, from achieving economic security or the leisure necessary to cultivate their civic virtue. The poor needed what the English economist T. H. Marshall would later call social rights: rights to limits on the hours of work, to a decent wage, to compensation for work-related injuries, and to social insurance against sickness, old age, and death for themselves and their families. Once they possessed such social rights, citizens could gain economic security and reach their fullest moral and intellectual potential. The New Nationalism made the attainment of social rights central to its program. Every man, Roosevelt declared, would then be able "to make of himself all that in him lies" and "to reach the highest point to which his capacities . . . can carry him." In this way the promise of civic nationalism would be fulfilled. [52]

As a New Yorker, Roosevelt understood how large a proportion of the working class were immigrants and their children. His New Nationalist program was meant to bring them into the nation, not just politically and culturally, but economically as well.

[51] Herbert Croly, *The Promise of American Life* (1909; Boston, 1989); George E. Mowry, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Progressive Movement* (Madison, 1946); Arthur S. Link, *Woodrow Wilson and the Progressive Era, 1910–1917* (New York, 1954), 1–24.

[52] Howard Lawrence Hurwitz, *Theodore Roosevelt and Labor in New York State, 1880–1900* (New York, 1943); T. H. Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class and Other Essays* (Cambridge, Eng., 1950), 11; Theodore Roosevelt, *The New Nationalism* (New York, 1910), 11, and *passim.*

As his movement gathered momentum, Roosevelt attracted to it leading social welfare Progressives, such as Paul Kellogg, Jane Addams, Frances Kellor, Robert Woods, and Lillian Wald, who had labored intensively with immigrants in their neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces. For these reformers, the plight of the European immigrants—the inadequate wages, the slum conditions in which they lived, the infectious diseases from which they suffered, and the urban vices to which some of them had succumbed (prostitution, gambling, and political corruption)—symbolized much that was wrong with the United States. They called for better working conditions, higher wages, improved housing and sanitation, playgrounds to give children more wholesome recreation, Americanization programs to teach immigrants English, and public museums and libraries to cultivate immigrant minds. As they gathered with Roosevelt in Chicago in 1912 to found the Progressive party, these reformers were giddy with the belief that their concerns had moved from obscure charity and academic conferences to the very center of American politics. "A great party," Jane Addams exclaimed in her speech seconding Roosevelt's nomination, "has pledged itself to the protection of children, to the care of the aged, to the relief of overworked girls, to the safeguarding of burdened men." The Progressive party had become "the American exponent of a world-wide movement toward juster social conditions." In the process, it helped define an agenda that would remain central to American reform for fifty years.[53]

But the issue of race intruded on this program of nationalist renewal. The Progressive party had raised black hopes, drawing many African American voters to Roosevelt. Even those who remained suspicious of Roosevelt found in the Progressive pledge to help the most disadvantaged Americans a compelling reason to throw their support behind this new movement. In the summer of 1912, black Republicans in several southern states left their party and put together delegate slates to send to the Progressive party's convention. But Roosevelt and his supporters refused to seat them, choosing to honor the credentials of lily-white delegations from those states instead.[54]

The black delegates were the properly elected ones, but Roosevelt, seeing an opportunity to build a Progressive base among southern whites dissatisfied with the Democratic party, brushed propriety aside. The southern whites whom Roosevelt wanted to woo would join the Progressive party only on the condition that the party endorse the principles of white supremacy, and that meant an acceptance of segregation and black disfranchisement in the South. Roosevelt acquiesced in that demand, prevail-

[53] Daniel Levine, *Jane Addams and the Liberal Tradition* (Madison, 1971), 190–91; John Allen Gable, *The Bull Moose Years: Theodore Roosevelt and the Progressive Party* (Port Washington, 1978), 6, 40; Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull House* (New York, 1910); Rivka Shpak Lissak, *Pluralism and the Progressives: Hull House and the New Immigrants, 1890–1919* (Chicago, 1919); Catherine Kerr, "Race in the Making of American Liberalism, 1912–1965" (Ph.D. diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1995), ch. 1. On the Progressive reformers' engagement with the new immigrants and their problems, see also two volumes of the Pittsburgh Survey, an exhaustive examination of the lives of immigrants in Pittsburgh: Margaret Byington, *Homestead: Households of a Mill Town* (New York, 1910); and Paul U. Kellogg, ed., *The Pittsburgh District: Civic Frontage* (New York, 1914). For a brief introduction to this project, see Paul U. Kellogg, "The Pittsburgh Survey," *Charities and the Commons,* 21 (Jan. 1909), 517–26.

[54] Gable, *Bull Moose Years,* 60–74.

ing upon the Progressive convention committee to deny southern black delegates their seats.[55]

From the perspective of his civic nationalism, this should not have been a difficult move for Roosevelt to make or justify. He could have stressed how few southern blacks had raised themselves to a level where they would be capable of handling the political responsibilities already vested in whites. But Roosevelt felt compelled to mount a far more complex defense, for his decision to subordinate blacks had drawn a fire storm of criticism within and beyond the Progressive party.[56]

Roosevelt stressed the impotence and corruption of black Republicanism in the South, the base from which the Progressives would have drawn their support. He emphasized his support for black participation in the North and proudly pointed to the black men who had been elected members of delegations from thirteen northern and border states. "The Progressive Party," Roosevelt declared, "is already, at its very birth, endeavoring in these States, in its home, to act with fuller recognition of the rights of the colored man than ever the Republican party did." Finally, he insisted that racial progress in the South would come, not from high-handed northern attempts to force a new racial order on that recalcitrant region, but from the many well-intentioned "white men in the South sincerely desirous of doing justice to the colored man." Only these "men of justice and of vision as well as of strength and leadership," Roosevelt wrote, can do for the colored man "what neither the Northern white man nor the colored men themselves can do": secure the right of free political expression "to the negro who shows he possesses the intelligence, integrity, and self-respect which justify such right of political expression in his white neighbor." The white delegates to the Progressive convention, Roosevelt implied, were precisely the sort of wise southern men who would work on the Negro's behalf.[57]

Roosevelt's rationalizations could not hide how much his actions had violated the spirit of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments, which forbade discrimination against citizens on the basis of color, nor how much southern white Progressives—even those of them whom Roosevelt considered the wisest—wanted to perpetuate white supremacy, not upend it. And to ask southern blacks to trust their fate to well-intentioned white neighbors was not only to insult their capacity for political self-mobilization but also to demand that they acquiesce in their own subordination.

Roosevelt's fellow Progressives attacked him on all these grounds, as well as others. But Roosevelt stuck to his guns, and a majority of Progressives assented to Roosevelt's policy. Yet, despite his victory, Roosevelt had hurt himself with the white South. His public pronouncements on the decision to exclude the black delegates were agonizingly apologetic and long-winded; they all included lengthy iterations of his civic

[55] *Ibid.*; George E. Mowry, "The South and the Progressive Lily White Party of 1912," *Journal of Southern History,* 6 (May 1940), 237–47; Dewey W. Grantham Jr., "The Progressive Movement and the Negro," *South Altantic Quarterly,* 54 (Oct. 1955), 461–77; Arthur S. Link, "The Negro as a Factor in the Campaign of 1912," *Journal of Negro History,* 32 (Jan. 1947), 81–99.

[56] Grantham, "Progressive Movement and the Negro"; Link, "Negro as a Factor in the Campaign of 1912."

[57] Arthur S. Link, ed., "Correspondence Relating to the Progressive Party's 'Lily White' Policy in 1912," *Journal of Southern History,* 10 (Nov. 1944), 483–88; Theodore Roosevelt, "The Progressives and the Colored Man," 1912, in *Works of Theodore Roosevelt,* ed. Hagedorn, XVII, 304–5.

nationalist conviction that every American be guaranteed "his right to life, to liberty, to protection from injustice" without regard to creed, birthplace, social station, or color. In his communications and speeches, Roosevelt also listed the many efforts by the Progressive party in the North to guarantee blacks their political rights. None of this went over very well with white southerners who were contemplating joining Roosevelt's crusade. And then, on the eve of the election, Roosevelt further alienated his potential white southern supporters by committing another "unpardonable violation of the Southern racial code": He dined with two blacks in a Rhode Island hotel, reminding white supremacists everywhere of his original sin—his White House lunch, more than a decade earlier, with Booker T. Washington. The Progressive party's southern campaign was a fiasco, netting Roosevelt many fewer votes than he had won as a Republican in 1904.[58]

There are at least two ways to interpret the events of 1912. The first is to emphasize the hold that the racial nationalist tradition exercised over the imagination of Roosevelt and others. Throughout his life, Roosevelt believed that most nonwhites belonged to inferior races with limited capacities for self-government. Only the few individuals within those races who demonstrated that they had lifted themselves to the level of Europeans were to be rewarded with a full complement of civil and social rights. This kind of thinking permitted Roosevelt and his supporters at the Progressive party's 1912 convention to reinscribe African American subordination into their liberal politics; this particular act takes on added significance because of the convention's role in defining modern American liberalism. It is not too much to say that the refusal to seat black delegates set a precedent that would haunt liberal politics for much of the rest of the twentieth century.

But it is equally striking that, in upholding racial nationalism in 1912, Roosevelt created a political and personal mess for himself. Unlike his excision of black soldiers from the Rough Rider narrative, an act he had executed in 1899 without shame or hesitation, Roosevelt was troubled by his exclusion of black delegates from the 1912 convention. In the uncertain terms in which he rationalized this exclusion and in the inconsistency of his behavior on the "race question," we can detect the influence of the civic nationalist ideal. This ideal could—and did—destabilize Roosevelt's racial myths and practices, even as it failed to undercut them altogether.

In Roosevelt's actions in 1912, then, we can discern the true American dilemma—a national identity divided against itself. On the one hand, Roosevelt and others conceived of America as a land meant for Europeans in which blacks had either a subordinate place or no place at all. On the other hand, they subscribed to a civic nationalist ideal that welcomed all law-abiding residents into the polity and disavowed distinctions based on race. How were the opposing conceptions of national identity to be reconciled into a single American creed? Sometimes this dilemma came into full

[58] Link, ed., "Correspondence Relating to the Progressive Party's 'Lily White' Policy in 1912," 482; Mowry, "South and the Progressive Lily White Party of 1912," 246; Link, "Negro as a Factor in the Campaign of 1912," 97–98.

view, as it did in 1912; other times it was obscured, as images of the two Americas developed separately from each other, dominating different political and cultural forms. But both sprang with equal force from the same source—American nationalism—and both animated American politics with equal intensity.

Eventually, the contradiction between the civic and racialized forms of American nationalism became too great for large numbers of Americans to tolerate. But that moment took a long time to arrive. Only in the 1960s did a great battle erupt over the desirability of upholding a nation so steeped in racialized notions of belonging. We are still, today, endeavoring to figure out whether we want a strong American nation and whether one can be built without resuscitating racialized patterns of exclusion. But equally puzzling is the question of how American nationalism flourished for so long in such a divided state. One answer is easy: that, when push came to shove, racial nationalism was the only tradition that mattered to white Americans. As much as these Americans, even the liberals among them, expressed a commitment to equal rights, they always believed that whites were better and more deserving than were people of color.

Roosevelt's case, however, suggests a more complex and confusing answer: that the kind of restrictive definition of social order called for by the racial nationalist tradition proved too constraining to human imagination. As committed as Roosevelt was to celebrating the United States as a white nation, he never felt entirely comfortable living within such racially rigid borders. Roosevelt had always been an adventurer, drawn to frontiers, whether they were located in the American West, in Cuba, or in immigrant districts in New York City. In his historical writing he celebrated the mixing of peoples; in his personal life, he enjoyed his encounters with the Turkish Jewish women workers in New York, with Booker T. Washington in the White House, and even, initially, with the black soldiers on San Juan Hill. For such an individual, having two nations—a racial nation and a civic nation—may have been better than having one, for it allowed him to satisfy quite different strivings. He could pursue social order through racial hierarchy even as he found personal satisfaction through his freedom to associate with individuals of widely divergent nationalities, races, and vocations. From this perspective, the divided or double character of American nationalism poses much less of a problem; while it undoubtedly caused moments of embarrassment and political failure, it also may have helped to sustain nationalists like Roosevelt who could not find in only one conception of the nation satisfaction for their ambitions and needs.

One can discern in this need to inhabit "two nations" an implicit critique of the very notion that nationhood was an effective vehicle for social bonding and personal fulfillment. In Roosevelt's own mind, this critique could never have become explicit. He was a man of his time, which meant that he associated absolute devotion to one nation with the highest civic virtue. He would have regarded the notion that he himself inhabited two nations as abhorrent, much as he detested those Americans, ranging from nostalgic immigrants to anglophiliac would-be aristocrats, who dared to suggest that they loved some European nation as much as they loved America. But Roosevelt was also human, and his humanity regularly overflowed the vessel—the nation—into which he so insistently poured all his strivings and aspirations.