

WHITE SUPREMACY, AMERICAN STYLE

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Abstract: This essay considers the dynamic relationship between immigration, migration, national identity, and racial formation in United States history, with a close focus on the early twentieth century, when these phenomena were dramatically mobilized. More specifically, it focuses on a set of interlocking social and intellectual movements – immigration, internal migration, and intellectual connections – that shaped an early phase of immigration restriction, and draws upon the biographies of several prominent eugenicists to showcase the relationship between social movements, intellectual currents, and national borders. This history, the author concludes at the end, is especially relevant right now, with the effort to re-establish hard walls along national borders to achieve eugenic, bio-political ends.

The 2010 film *Monsters* is about walls and borders, migrants and immigrants. A few years before the film begins, a satellite returns to the Earth, and unwittingly releases a host of alien creatures who proliferate rapidly and grow big and scary, posing an existential threat to the human race. A quarantine zone is created. A massive wall is built along the US/Mexico border, a wall that is meant to keep the contagion at bay, to protect the republic and free it from worry and concern.¹

The film is, in a way, a story of migrants. At least two migrants, to be specific: Andrew, a struggling photojournalist, and Samantha, a rich American girl, whose sojourn through the “Infected Zone” – 125 km wide and towards the safety of the United States – is, of course, also a love story. Samantha needs to return to the North for a wedding to someone else, and Andrew has been pressured to provide her with safe passage. It is inevitable that they will become a thing.

¹ *Monsters*, dir. Gareth Edwards (Vertigo Films, 2010). All quotes herein are from that film.

Their journey is difficult, staged on the uneven ground of a Mexico that has been erased from political memory on maps we are shown, but that still conforms to stereotype. Everything is saturated with colour, decayed, and strewn with garbage, with homes of mud and stone, and weeds sprouting up everywhere. Ruined tanks and abandoned military hardware remind us that it took a war to save what is left of Mexico. The soundscape is all mariachis, heavy accents, and tinkling tequila shots.

On the evening before Samantha boards an authorized ferry to circumvent the zone, a grifter steals their passports, and she is forced to trade her engagement ring for a more direct and dangerous passage home, overland through the terrain that is now “infected.” A rogue’s gallery of dark-skinned, Spanish-speaking dangerous types lurks at the margins of their route, a reminder of the “real” global South that is, for viewers of the film, just barely off-screen. Through the story of Samantha and Andrew, then, *Monsters* becomes the story of white migrants moving through monstrous and racialized space, seeking out the safety of the white republic to the North.

Interestingly, the southern border of the infected zone – the Mexican side – is marked by only a few indicators of nationalism – small and rusting signs, a loose electrified fence, a handful of local police. We see a couple of helicopters in the air, but not much security and very little intensity. Our protagonists slip over *this* border easily. To travel through the quarantined area, they walk a route well understood to be illegal, hustling into this liminal space in the beds of pick-up trucks and in the bowels of low-slung boats while cash changes hands and automatic weapons sit nearby. With little comment, they pass through the ruins of Mexican civilization, from pyramids to dilapidated and forgotten hospitals, escorted at first by heavily armed men with an air of gentleness about them and then alone. They see – and we see – a land transformed – “infected,” in the language of the film – by the violent alien masses.

In contrast, the American wall, on the north side, is built of stone and concrete and is comparatively immense and gleaming white. Even standing on top of an ancient Mexican temple, they cannot see over it. “That’s the biggest man-made structure I’ve ever seen,” Andrew says. “I thought I’d be a lot happier to see it,” she replies. “It is different looking at America from the outside. Just sitting right outside and looking in. When you get home, it is so easy to forget all of this.” All of this, we are left to surmise, means Mexico, the borderlands between the two nations. Tomorrow, he closes, we will be right back in “our perfect suburban homes.” Twisting with the landscape, the wall’s towering ramparts mirror the Rio Grande, which flows lazily in front of it. To those on the

other side, to the Americans we cannot see, all of whom are presumed to be white, such a wall erases Mexico and the Infected Zone from memory.

As the film closes, with the migrants' journey complete, we learn that the wall is ineffective. Samantha and Andrew make their way home past abandoned Homeland Security outposts and tour a small Texas town that has clearly been stomped and smashed to near oblivion.

Lost in this ending is the troubling and implicit geopolitics of US/Mexico relations: everyone assumes that the monsters of the movie's title have no interest in staying where they are or in heading further south. Like Samantha and Andrew, the monsters, it seems, are drawn only north. Drawn to technology and feeding on electric light, they, too, are migrants seeking a better life. Mexico, represented as dilapidated and backward, has nothing to offer them.

A wall is a border brought to material life, and, in the movies as in history, no wall has ever kept the monsters out. Not Hadrian's Wall, nor the Great Wall of China. Not the Jerusalem Wall of World War Z. Not the Wall of Westeros. Not the Peace Walls of Belfast, nor the 8-mile wall of Detroit, meant to keep African Americans out of the white core. The same, of course, is true of the wall in *Monsters* – a “seventh wonder” of the world, as Samantha calls it when viewing it from the top of an ancient pyramid.

There has been a lot in the news these days about walls, and specifically about the sudden need to build one over the 700 miles of the United States that runs between the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean. Major defense department priorities have been shuttered to enable the redistribution of funds, so that a campaign promise of the past President can be completed – a campaign promise that has weaponized the southern border of the world's most dangerous superpower.

There was not always a wall, though. Such a concept did not really exist until the 1980s, when anti-immigration returned as a national political platform, and the first section of the wall – that which divides the US city of San Diego from its Mexican neighbour, Tijuana – was not completed until the early 1990s, when it quickly became known as the “Tortilla Wall,” and was festooned with graffiti. What exists now across the full expanse of these 700 miles is an incomplete patchwork of fencing and bollards. Hardly a wall at all.

A wall, then, is also misdirection.

In this article, I want to consider the dynamic relationship between immigration, migration, national identity, and racial formation in the United States. I'm going walk us through three different kinds of movements – immigration, internal migration, and intellectual connections – that shaped one chapter of US history. I'll turn to consider the lives of three avowed scientific racisms with complicated international connections. I'll close by bringing this story up to the present.

I

In United States history, the dynamic of race has been shaped, for several reasons, by the settler colonial experience. A former ward of European powers, the nation's drive westward was marked, at every step, by a determination to encode and control race and racialized bodies – and in particular by its protracted effort to eliminate or confine the indigenous peoples of the continent, to expand the slave trade west and also to limit it to the South, to recruit Asian labour while stripping it of any chance of citizenship, to calibrate the national origins of its white immigrant populations, and to micro-manage the location of black populations after slavery. Then, as the twentieth century dawned, the nation explicitly sought to mimic the overseas empire of the Old-World rivals it hoped to supplant, building up a collection of possessions in the Caribbean and the Far East, and drawing other former colonies and nominally free republics into its sphere of influence and dependency. This gives white supremacy, American style, a unique history, echoing, on the one hand, the stories of other settler societies like South Africa and Australia, and, on the other, the European empires of the so-called long nineteenth century, from the Belgian Congo to the Raj.

To make sense of all of this, we might divide the racial history of the United States into five periods, each marked by distinctive politics of immigration. The first, running from the Northwest Ordinance of 1790 through the mid-nineteenth century, was marked by immigration largely from England, France, and Germany, as well as by the expansion of slavery, through sale and forced migration, into the deep South, and by the removal of Native Americans from this same space. By the end of this period, citizenship was guaranteed to white men, and whiteness was defined in broad, nearly universal terms. In the second period, commencing roughly with the arrival of Irish famine exiles and continuing through the immigration of Italians, Poles, Jews, and others, whiteness fractured, and interior hierarchies – interior to whiteness, that is – were created and operationalized. Slavery was ended, and the expanding labour needs of the country were met by increased arrivals from Asia, arrivals who were by and large denied citizenship immediately and whose immigration was carefully managed. These tensions were resolved in the third period, commencing in the 1920s, when new federal laws prioritized immigration from the so-called “best” nations in Europe, and as the African American population increasingly left the South, nationalizing the black/white racial conflict and mitigating the fractures within whiteness. This social and legal effort to reverse the effects of unlimited “bad” immigration lasted until the 1950s and 1960s, when – in the wake of the Holocaust and in the midst of decolonization and the

Civil Rights movement – immigration laws were reformed once more. In this fourth period, new immigrants from the global South arrived in vast numbers, until concerns about the looming minority status of whites prompted the dawn of the fifth age of American racism: the anti-immigrant, anti-urban conservative counterrevolution that has dominated the nation's history and tilted our politics to the right from Ronald Reagan's presidency to the current moment.²

To focus this overview, let us walk through the cultural and intellectual history of race in early twentieth century New York, perhaps the most important immigrant city in the country at the time. Across this period and in this city, we see the inchoate, internationalist beginnings of the civil rights movement, the maturation of global white supremacy into a science, the final transformation of the Irish and others, once imagined as a separate race, into whiteness, and the erasure of hybrid possibilities from the language of race. In 1900, there was general scientific agreement in the United States that there were dozens of races. Some scientists marked the number at 50, some at 70, others at 100. These included Finns and Letts, Gaels and Gauls, Anglo-Saxons and Teutons, all of whom were all understood as biologically discrete races, their differences visible to the naked eye. As a result, whiteness became fragmented in this period.³

Biologists and ethnologists offered encyclopaedic knowledge of the whole of the white racial family tree, but such knowledge was less well grounded in law and in society, where local and regional dynamics could often shape whiteness in unique ways. The result was a great deal of confusion and disagreement about where to draw the lines of race and which lines mattered most. To illustrate the complexity, in the same period, we see the irregularities of whiteness litigated in the courts in the cases of Baghat Singh Thind – an Indian émigré who successfully sued to be seen as white, based on the Aryan theory of race; Takao Ozawa – a Japanese immigrant who unsuccessfully tried to use an early 1906 naturalization law to justify his status as a “free white person”; and Kip Rhineland, a wealthy scion of a famous Manhattan family who sued for divorce from Alice Jones, a light-skinned woman whose blackness was proven to a jury's satisfaction when she was forced to disrobe to reveal her bare shoulders

² This is roughly the timeline sketched in Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999) and Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People* (New York: Norton, 2010).

³ See Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, and also Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Special Sorrows: The Diasporic Imagination of Irish, Polish, and Jewish Immigrants to the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

and ankles, which were presumed to show “negroid” features. In short, this is a period of a radical crisis of definition prompted by the arrival of so many people from all around the world, by the disaggregation of national interest into local and regional zones, and by the very complexity of human life that race – as a fiction with consequences – effects to explain.⁴

By 1930, though, the science had largely flipped. There were, a strong consensus agreed, mostly five races: the black and the white, the red and the brown, and the yellow. Between 1900 and 1930, then, a comparatively uniform sense of whiteness and blackness came to dominate the national conversation about race-relations – supplanting the older, complicated, and contradictory systems of classification, so that, for example, the historic divisions between “Anglo-Saxon” and “Celt” were replaced by a more uniform sense of the singular white race. We are basically talking about the standardization of racial discourse in the United States, as national debates began to centre on anti-blackness at the expense of any other racial questions.

What had changed? I see a cascading and interlocking series of social, demographic, and political changes at the root of this transformation. These include the Great War – which centralized the nation-state, mobilized tens of thousands of Americans, and washed away the last vestiges of sectionalism; European immigration – which dwindled as a consequence of the war and was eventually severely curtailed by federal legislation – enabling, it was thought, a faster and more thorough assimilation and the arrival of “better” immigrant stocks; and the Great Migration – the movement of tens of thousands of African Americans from the deep South, nationalizing the “race problem,” as it was called, and unifying both blackness and whiteness. The first gasps of anti-colonialism were important, too, enabled by the war and movement throughout the European theatre, as relevant in Europe as in the United States, where black veterans marched down 5th Avenue after the war.

If we are looking for an origin point to the Civil Rights movement, this is one possibility, as were new technological changes, shrinking the globe, making the span of the Atlantic seem tiny, and allowing people to imagine new racial connections between, say, the fate of all white people after the war, or between what the scientific racist Lothrop Stoddard called the *Rising Tide of Color against White World Supremacy*. The arrival of a truly national mass culture – a wellspring of anti-blackness in myriad forms, from *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) to *The Jazz*

⁴ Ian Haney Lopez, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York: New York University Press, 2006); Elizabeth M. Smith-Pryor, *Property Rites: The Rhinelander Trial, Passing, and the Protection of Whiteness* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

Singer (1927) and from *King Kong* (1933) to *Gone with the Wind* (1939), along with the epistemic elimination of hybrid peoples and hybrid categories – including the removal of the category of mulatto from the US Census, and the invention of ethnicity as a non-biological category of difference within whiteness. Personally, I'm most struck by the Irish, who staged massive "race conventions" during the Great War as a part of an effort to shore up difference only to be subsumed into whiteness, especially after the establishment of the Irish Free State.

As a historian, I am drawn to the use of biography as a scaffold for a story of this complexity, so let me consider, for a little while, the life of Madison Grant. Grant was an armchair scientist and author of the war's biggest blockbuster, *The Passing of the Great Race*, published in 1916 – a book so vile that it was later translated into German and served as a direct connection between American eugenics and Nazi policies of *Rassenhygiene*.⁵

Grant's main contribution to the science of race was threefold. First, he scrambled up national divisions to suggest that there were only a few white races, and the war effort inevitably drew in the best recruits from the so-called Nordic race and was effectively race suicide. He blamed Jews and low-browed Eastern European types, whom he saw as racially distinct and nearly Asiatic. Second, he applied newly recovered theories in genetics – specifically, a misapplication of Gregor Mendel's work with peas – to suggest that any racial mixture inevitably reverted to the inferior type, simplifying and popularizing the conversation at a moment where many social scientists and policy makers were eager for shovel-ready solutions to the nation's immigrant population. Grant spent these decades mobilizing his considerable influence – including his close friendship with Teddy Roosevelt, his prominent role at the Bronx Zoo and the American Museum of Natural History – to press for new policies of immigration restriction, meant to target Jews especially but also Eastern Europeans. He achieved a huge victory in 1924, with the passage of the National Origins Act, which limited the numbers of entries for each European country to match an earlier period of time, when the origins of migrants were different. He helped, as well, to advise the state of Virginia on the Racial Integrity Act, which defined blackness through the one-drop rule and forbade marriage across the colour line. Third, he sponsored a set of protégés who would play an equally significant role in the 1920s.

⁵ Stefan Kuhl, *The Nazi Connection: Eugenics, American Racism, and German National Socialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). On Grant specifically, see Jonathan Peter Spiro, *Defending the Master Race: Conservation, Eugenics, and the Legacy of Madison Grant* (Burlington: University of Vermont Press, 2008).

One of these protégés, Virginian Earnest Sevier Cox, could trace his family to William the Conqueror. His intellectual roots were at the University of Chicago, where he studied “the Negro problem” with Frederick Starr, E.A. Ross, and other scholars of race in America. Armed with this formidable lineage, he set out in 1910 to explore the world, hoping to discover the secret to racialized labour controls. He spent a year working in the Kimberley diamond mines in South Africa, studying apartheid at its founding moment, and earning venture capital for visits to his “racial kin” around the world. Modelling himself after Henry Morton Stanley, he travelled the “Cape to Cairo” route, offering a comparative assessment of the European colonies and showing a preference for those administered by Germany. He surveyed the global colour line in all its fullness, including the settler societies of Australia and New Zealand, the new American colony in the Philippines, the major port cities of the Far East, and much of South America.⁶

Along this route, Cox presented himself as an expert on the race problem and a student of “Negro” psychology. On the road or on rail, at sea or in port, he wrote newspaper articles, granted interviews, and proselytized over dinner or lunch. Often, he would present his famous slide show: a panorama of the world’s darkest peoples, often naked or in tribal dress. After completing his travels in 1914, he explained that his years of social scientific study had confirmed what he knew already to be true: that “the Negro” needed stricter, potent and even deadly control, if “he” was to serve as captive labour, that blacks would have to be “returned” to Africa at some point soon or they would “outbreed” whites, and that whites needed to better manage their own racial capital. The fate of the world and of “civilization,” Cox insisted, was at stake.⁷

With connections to Chicago and Vanderbilt – and a heavy file of press clippings from his sojourns – Cox was no minor figure in white supremacist circles. After a chance meeting in Washington, he became an occasional collaborator with James K. Vardaman, the man who turned Mississippi’s Parchman Farm prison into something “worse than slavery,” establishing debt peonage and forced labour for the state as a southern rite. Later, he supported the Garvey movement, which he understood as a literal “back to Africa movement,” and advertised *White America*, his first book, in Garvey’s publications. When Marcus Garvey was imprisoned, Cox successfully petitioned

⁶ Ethel Wolfskill Hedlin, “Earnest Cox and Colonization: A White Racist’s Response to Black Repatriation, 1923-1966,” PhD dissertation (Duke University, 1974).

⁷ Earnest Sevier Cox, *Black Belt around the World at the High Noon of Colonialism* (Richmond, VA: Mitchell & Hotchkiss, 1963).

the president to have him released. Cox was not a diplomat or a statesman, though. He never held an elected office. He was not an academic or entrepreneur. He was a means of knowledge circulation within and among settler societies and colonies “plagued” with versions of “the Negro problem” and he was an angry and prolific champion of white racial unity around the world. When he returned from his travels, he also helped to author Virginia’s 1925 Racial Integrity Law – the first law to fully enshrine the “one drop rule.”

It is not possible, after charting the course of Cox’s life, to claim that the “one drop rule” was a purely American, or “southern,” invention, nor is it easy to measure the wider impact of his slide shows, dinners, and YMCA talks at “the high noon of colonialism,” when almost all the world was under white control. He shaped – and was shaped by – world history, and so, too, was the racial policy that he helped to devise in the United States.

Lothrop Stoddard was another protégé. In this same decade, the African American writer, organizer, and public intellectual, W.E.B. Du Bois was at the peak of his authority, presiding over the NAACP’s authoritative *Crisis* magazine, orchestrating the Harlem Renaissance, and scornfully assaulting Jim Crow. His elegiac poem, “Credo,” hung in black parlours around the nation, and his column on race-relations was required reading in many black middle-class homes. But he was also witnessing yet another downturn in American race-relations. Efforts to pass an anti-lynching bill in Congress had failed, and civil rights organizations had been buffeted left and right during the “Red Scare” of 1919 – the same year that Chicago had been bloodied by a massive, white-led race riot. This was the decade in which the Ku Klux Klan was reborn as a nationwide, middle-class phenomenon, and in which the nation continued to rely on rape and murder, segregation and disenfranchisement to keep white supremacy afloat.

Du Bois decided to confront one of the chief architects of white supremacy head-on, initiating a set of debates with Stoddard, a journalist-cum-racial-scientist. A determined champion of racial justice, Du Bois wanted to stand toe-to-toe with the enemy, to bring the full force of his mind and his wit to bear upon and to hollow out and humiliate an avatar of white racism. But it was no simple matter, in those days, for a black man to debate a white man on stage. The event would have been legally impossible in some states and dangerous or socially imprudent in others. Of course, one also needed the right sort of white person to debate: someone hungry for fame and deeply, darkly, even wildly racist.

No writer was more associated with the decade’s racial positions than Stoddard, a skilful, prolific sensationalist. Popularizing the work of the eugenicist crowd, his first major blockbuster was the dystopic barnburner of

1920, *The Rising Tide of Color: The Threat against White World Supremacy*. Like his mentor Grant, Stoddard excelled at predictions of terrible racial doom looming just around the corner.

The white race, he argued in 1920, was not fecund enough, at least when compared to the darker races of Asia, the Near East, and Africa. It was losing ground genetically. As the darker-skinned denizens of those regions of the world gained access to technology and civilization, Stoddard continued, they seemed certain to overtake whites. A strict adherence to segregation – locally and globally – was the all too obvious solution. This was all standard racist boilerplate, but the book was well-timed and struck a nerve. No fool, Stoddard sensed that he had a tailwind and generated a quick follow-up: 1922's *The Revolt against Civilization: The Menace of the Under-Man*, a book that so potently argued for the segregation and sterilization of “the unfit” (and especially immigrants into white nations) that it was quickly translated into German.

That the two men should debate made sense – they were opposites. But there was more to it: they became a pair of duellists. Du Bois and Stoddard began their surprising fellowship in 1925, at a panel organized by Will Durant of the Labor Temple School. Two years later, the black Brahmin offered a comment on Stoddard's debate with the African American philosopher Alain Locke, conducted in the pages of *The Forum*. A radio debate followed, and found the two men courteously exchanging drafts of their remarks before the event. Finally, to cap off the relationship, a big public debate was scheduled for the Chicago Coliseum in 1929.

Stoddard was a publicity hound, an early version of those carnival barkers presently provoking the American campus into fits. He was a big personality with a gift for taking a paper-thin idea, lacing it with fearful paranoia, and stretching it until almost everyone could understand the immediate, personal stakes. He had eagerly and steadfastly popularized some of the past century's most noxious, deadly, and consequential ideas about race. He surely believed that he could best Du Bois in debate, and by doing so embody white supremacy in the flesh. Still, both men were from Harvard and both from New England, with all the relevant regional and class-inflected prejudices. Both were accomplished writers, well-known in thinking-person's magazines as leading intellectuals. Madison Grant, writing confidentially to Stoddard, argued that it was “a shameful thing” to have educated “the Negro,” and refused to debate the NAACP editor, but on some level – despite all of his work to shore up the racial hierarchy – Stoddard must not have completely agreed. To even be willing to debate Du Bois, Stoddard had to concede a certain degree of equality: at the very least, equal time on stage, in print, or at the microphone.

The 1929 debate was held before a racially mixed audience, organized by the newly established, nonpartisan think-tank the Chicago Forum Council. Du Bois privately confessed that he was not sure that Stoddard would show up, but when he did, the Council's director, Fred Moore, reminded that audience that Stoddard had shown "courage" in agreeing to present his "unpopular point of view," a fairly astonishing reminder, given that white supremacy was still as popular as apple pie. The event went off without a hitch and the notes indicate that the audience gave both speakers equal applause. There were no angry interruptions, no clamorous shouts from the crowd, not even, as best as we can tell, when Du Bois daringly told Stoddard that it was one thing to theorize white world supremacy and quite another to win it, to hold back that "rising tide" from swamping the boat and seizing the globe. Other crowd-pleasers have the feel of payback: "Who in the hell," Du Bois asked incredulously at one point, disputing one of the baseline fears of residential segregation, "said we want to marry your daughters?" Stoddard did not, even then, storm off the stage.⁸

The event might well be the first public black/white debate of truly opposing positions, modelling an elite practice of gentlemanly courtesy that seems foreign to our present, where flamethrowers abound and courtesy seems nearly extinguished. Tellingly, it left a permanent imprint on the memory of Stoddard, who could never quite shake the sensation of having been bested by – or even equalled by – a black man in a free and fair exchange of ideas in front of a mixed public. Writing to me in 2000, Stoddard's son noted that Du Bois had earned his father's sincere respect; no small feat, I suppose, when one considers Stoddard's longstanding, rock-solid faith in white supremacy. We might, then, celebrate this peculiar fellowship as a nostalgic reminder of a day when people could actually debate, actually listen and learn, and not merely spout off a pre-determined position in support of a soon-to-be-published screed.

I see this differently, though. Ian Frazier, writing in the *New Yorker* recently, argues that the *Crisis* editor "won" the debate with his cleverness and his gift for metaphor,⁹ but this is wrong: truly, Stoddard won in the short term. We should know this because Stoddard's ideas played a role in shoring up Jim Crow, in enabling white world supremacy and the expansion of settler colonialism, and in justifying the deaths of six million Jews in Europe. By the time Du Bois claimed his pyrrhic victory, Stoddard's views had already swept the table.

⁸ This description of the debate is drawn from Matthew Pratt Guterl, *The Color of Race in America, 1900-1940* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

⁹ Ian Frazier, "When W.E.B. DuBois Made a Laughingstock of a White Supremacist," *New Yorker*, 19 August 2019. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/08/26/when-w-e-b-du-bois-made-a-laughingstock-of-a-white-supremacist> (accessed 12 October 2020).

Reflecting on this narrative of three lives – those of Grant, Cox, and Stoddard – let me summarize four takeaways: first, despite this history, there is no straightforward or simplistic relationship between actual demographic movement – migration or immigration – and the rise of right-wing authoritarianism. Though such political expressions are often framed as a response to the failure of the state to protect citizens against outsiders, or to ensure the survival of tradition in an age of supposedly cataclysmic demographic change, it is often the case that that there is no actual crisis on the ground at all. In 1920, despite all the melodrama, there was no real crisis of immigration – there was only the perception, the racial argument that “certain people” could not be assimilated into the citizenry. The roots of American fascism in this period are more intellectual than demographic, more political than economic. More than anything, what men like Grant required in order to operationalize and institutionalize their beliefs was a robust federal state and a set of political panics, concerns that anarchist plots and Bolsheviks and black radicals were emboldened, and that only the weaponization of the state could stave off revolution. The same could be said of today’s farcical focus on the border wall in the American south.

Second, demographic change and movement, or social changes like the emergence of new media, can also produce the inverse of authoritarianism – radicalisms, for instance, like those of Du Bois and Garvey. But these oppositional social movements are invariably pushed underground, are marginalized from national histories, left out of the historical record. Then as now, we need to be working as archivists, mindful that evidence of oppositional movements is likely being erased or displaced and that we have an obligation to preserve and recover it. Both Garvey and Du Bois, for instance, were victimized by the state multiple times. Du Bois ended up preserving his own archive in his house, buying up the book plates for his works because he feared their loss. Garvey was ultimately expelled from the United States, and his record was scattered.

Third, studying the literal border is often a lot less revealing than studying switching points like cities, official sites of transition, or points of entry, which are often nestled hundreds of miles away from the usually unmarked landscapes that, on a map, seem to be clearly divided. This whole story was set in NYC: a world city, an official entry point, a draw for immigrants and migrants, not at a literal border. Madison Grant, once more, was not particularly upset about the presence of Ellis Island, a disembarkation point for immigrants. What he was concerned about was that he began to encounter Greek-speaking immigrants and Jewish residents of the city on his block, that he might see Du Bois in midtown. That is less about border controls and more about the social life of cities, or the particular ways that they act as metaphors for the nation’s relation

to transnational migrants. When we focus on the social life of cities, we can more clearly see the interplay of international immigration with factors like domestic migration, residential segregation patterns, and the racial structure of social services and public spaces. The city, for Grant, was a monstrous and racialized space, not the border, and it was the city that needed to be re-engineered racially.

Fourth, the networks matter. Understanding the movements of people is important, but so too are the intellectual connections made across borders that make for policy revolutions and political campaigns. In this particular story, Madison Grant and W.E.B. Du Bois – lifelong antagonists – share something in that they both represent emerging new networks, polyphonic affiliations across global region on the basis of shared racial and political position. It would be wrong to see Du Bois as the transnational cosmopolitan and Grant as the “America first” nationalist. In Grant’s case, the network results not only in immigration restriction, mixed-race marriage bans, and other eugenic reforms, but also in a close and enduring connection to Nazi racial science that would further weaponize his anti-Semitism and his broad racial theories of *Rassenhygiene*. Hitler, historian Sarah Churchwell reminds us, “is not fascism’s only test case: he was neither its beginning nor its ending.”¹⁰ Churchwell goes on, then, to consider the cultural roots of the 1924 Johnson-Reed immigration act, which radically trimmed immigration for those parts of Europe that were deemed genetically dangerous. Grant and Stoddard were closely involved in building an intellectual edifice that supported the law, and they promoted it globally too, earning praise from a young Hitler himself.

II

At the start of his term, US president Donald Trump’s White House rolled out the RAISE Act – an immigration bill noteworthy for its barely disguised roots in American racism. The rejected bill would cut the number of green card visas issued by the US in half. It failed to offer amnesty or a path to citizenship to the millions of undocumented people presently living and working inside the United States. It would introduce a prejudicial points system that would determine whether potential immigrants could gain entry. Listing the sorts of questions that would be asked of green card applicants, Trump’s senior policy advisor Stephen Miller focused on four: “Does the applicant speak English? Can

¹⁰ Sarah Churchwell, “American Immigration: A Century of Racism,” *The New York Review*, 26 September 2019, <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2019/09/26/american-immigration-century-racism/> (accessed 12 October 2020).

they support themselves and their families financially? Do they have a skill that will add to the US economy? Are they being paid a high wage?"¹¹

The RAISE Act, in essence, was a part of the Trump administration's broader efforts to shore up the racial character of the US – to repeat what is seen as the success of the National Origins Act. It is of a piece with Trump's Mexican border wall, his Muslim travel ban, his reduction of aid to Puerto Rico, his refusal to grant refugee status to survivors of Hurricane Dorian in the Bahamas, and his enhancement of the robust deportation regime inherited from the Obama presidency. It is also tied to the announcement that the Department of Justice is gearing up to investigate whether whites have been subject to racial discrimination in college admissions.¹²

Miller, known as a champion of alt-right causes, presented the bill as a gift to African American and immigrant workers already in the country, who have suffered, as he described it, from "displacement" and wage depression when pitted against newer arrivals. But despite his assertion, there is no measurable proof that halving immigration and encouraging only Anglophone petitioners would produce tangible benefits for the most marginalized members of our community. What it would most certainly do, however, is to increase the white share of the population.¹³

There are strong echoes here of the 1920s – of the work of Stoddard, Grant and Cox. These echoes are not accidental, as many of those in the far right are quite familiar with the work of both men. When I started working on Stoddard and Grant in the mid-1990s, it was rare to find a mention of either man online. These days, one can find their entire archive on the Internet, where white supremacists dutifully share it with anyone who has interest and a computer. If scientific racism travels, it is now increasingly difficult to trace its steps.

Trump himself seemed more interested in "winning." With few exceptions, white people dominate every industry and institution in the US, control state and federal governance, and are over-represented in every niche of popular

¹¹ Philip Bump, "Under Trump's New Immigration Rule, His Own Grandfather Likely Wouldn't Have Gotten in," *Washington Post*, 3 August 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/politics/wp/2017/08/03/under-trumps-new-immigration-rule-his-own-grandfather-likely-wouldnt-have-gotten-in/> (accessed 12 October 2020).

¹² Naomi Paik, *Bans, Walls, Raids, Sanctuary* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2020).

¹³ Philip Bump, "A Reporter Pressed the White House for Data. That's When Things Got Tense," *Washington Post*, 2 August 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/politics/wp/2017/08/02/a-reporter-pressed-the-white-house-for-data-thats-when-things-got-tense/?hpid=hp_hp-top-table-main_pp-reporter-6pm%3Ahomepage%2Fstory (accessed 12 October 2020).

culture. Yet many white voters say they are exhausted by diversity and diminished, psychologically, by the mere presence of people of colour who press for equal access to civil society. It was tough for Trump to resurrect the moribund coal industry, but he could more easily conjure up the *feeling* of white dominance, if only he could alter – or propose to alter – the racial composition of the country.

The RAISE Act, then, was about changing the demographics of the US, ensuring a white majority, and – when coupled with ongoing, pernicious voter suppression efforts – ensuring the most conservative kind of GOP dominance for the foreseeable future. It was not about immigration reform, except along those narrow lines, and it certainly has done nothing to improve wages and job security for working people, to beef up benefits for poor families, to foster a safer working environment, to ensure job security, or to do anything else that might actually expand the material conditions for a better life for the people who pluck chickens, punch cash registers, sew clothing, pick apples, and wash dishes. Its emphasis on English language competency and a strictly limited notion of “family” were meant, instead, to appeal to an alienated white constituency that sees immigrants from Asia and Latin America as dangerously and permanently foreign and fecund, lazily depending on public benefits.

In short, the bill – and other proposals put forth since – envisioned immigrants as Monsters, having strayed far from their quarantine zone, infecting the republic. The infamous wall does the same symbolic work and we should see it as a monument to white supremacy and nothing more.

In a visit to San Diego, Trump promoted the thirty-foot high wall. “You can fry an egg on that wall,” he noted, describing a barrier that was built of concrete-filled steel bollards so that Border Patrol agents can see through it. “It’s the Rolls-Royce version,” Trump said, gushing that he had made changes to the original plans for a solid concrete wall only after consulting with the agents. He had originally wanted to paint the wall black, too, because the colour absorbs heat, but agreed with himself that now, without the paint, the wall was “a good, strong rust color.” Perhaps, he noted, it could be painted later on.¹⁴

Though the overwhelming bulk of immigrants arrive through recognized ports of entry – switching points like New York, Los Angeles, and Miami, for instance – the wall is being built far from these locations. Deep in the desert,

¹⁴ John Fritze and Michael Collins, “‘Fry an Egg on That Wall’: Trump Touts Design, Signs Wall during Visit to U.S.-Mexico Border,” *USA Today*, 18 September 2019, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2019/09/18/donald-trump-signs-border-wall-during-stop-u-s-mexico-border/2366099001/> (accessed 12 October 2020).

crossing over privately-held land, national parks, and tribal reservations, it will be a symbol and not a structure, an object that erases and hides what lies beyond it.

In a way, the wall is also a source of misdirection.

What is lost, in this moment, are the connections between the Trump administration and its near fascist peers in Brazil, Britain, Turkey, and India. Despite all the emphasis on national sovereignty, there is a hidden history of the present that mirrors what I have discussed about the 1920s, one in which state actors – people like Stephen Miller, for instance – engaged in policy sharing conversations with other right-wing governments. More radical anti-statist white supremacist movements, as Kathleen Belew notes in her insightful book, *Bring the War Home*, bury their history on purpose.¹⁵ This international history of fascism is similarly hidden below ground. It will take a generation of effort to unearth these histories on the move. Histories of the border wall in the United States need to take this into consideration as we plod forward, hoping to make sense of what is left behind after Trump.

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¹⁵ Kathleen Belew, *Bring the War Home: The White Power Movement and Paramilitary America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018).

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