



## INTRODUCTION

In 1899 Mark Twain published an essay, “Concerning the Jews,” that is rarely considered today because it confronts an embarrassing topic: the commercial expertise of the Jews. Responding to a letter from a Jewish lawyer seeking an explanation for anti-Semitism, Twain highlighted “the average Christian’s inability to compete successfully with the average Jew in business.”<sup>1</sup> It was not that Jews were uninterested in other pursuits; they cultivated money-getting, according to Twain, because in country after country they were systematically expelled from other trades. Now in America at the turn of the twentieth century, Jews had a strategic advantage in the financial and entrepreneurial activities that preoccupied everyone. They comprised such a social presence, Twain observed, that he was convinced their number was at least twice that confirmed by population figures. His essay was unusual in minimizing the religious causes of anti-Semitism and in attributing Jewish commercial aptitude to historical rather than essential factors. He was tentative about how far Jews as Jews might go in America but was confident that they would continue to thrive within limits.

This was not the first time that Twain had probed connections between ethnicity and economy.<sup>2</sup> The sign that the slave Jim in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is prepared for citizenship is Jim’s interest in capital and monetary speculation. Twain saw that blacks’ mastery of finance would be required in the turbulent years ahead, and he was one of the few who anticipated, after the broken promise of “forty acres and a mule” and the failure of the Freedmen’s Bureau Bank, that some of the most profitable opportunities for blacks in the post-Emancipation era would derive from

the effects of racism. W. E. B. Du Bois called this “the advantage of the disadvantage” in describing how some blacks made fortunes in the funeral industry by exploiting the prohibition against whites burying blacks.<sup>3</sup>

For these two quintessential groups of outsiders, Jews and blacks, capitalism provided the road to survival, however rocky, but by constituting them as aliens, or “others,” capitalism also circumscribed their relationship to society. The interplay between capitalism and ethnicity at this crucial point in the nation’s history, as Twain understood it, is dynamic: racial-ethnic others are defined through their economic behavior, which assists but also limits their social integration. Thus Twain sanctioned one of American capitalism’s conventions by codifying a Jewish propensity for commerce. But he remained critically aware of how American capitalism operated in relation to racial-ethnic others. Twain seemed to recognize that ethnicity and race would persist and be utilized by a capitalist system rather than be gradually erased by it.

While it has often been assumed that social mobility required giving up ethnic attachments, I will demonstrate that there was in fact much productive fusion of ethnic identities and economic aspirations. The pursuit of material bounty that inspired so many migrants and immigrants in America often demanded their toleration of demeaning stereotypes. But American capitalist energies also sponsored nuanced and creative conceptions of cultural difference. This was most obvious in advertising, “capitalism’s way,” in one commentator’s notorious phrase, “of saying I love you to itself.”<sup>4</sup> Ethnic figures in ads of the era were often represented with the sort of complexity that invited admiration and imitation: an ad for Waterman Pens featured Pocahontas and John Smith as mutual representatives of Indian and British aristocracies, while Sapolio hawked the cleansing powers of its soap by identifying it (in Hebrew lettering) with Judaic laws of *kashrut*.<sup>5</sup>

This book tells the story of a remarkable convergence of forces. Between 1865 and 1915, America underwent the most rapid corporate capitalist development in history and at the same time unparalleled rates of immigration.<sup>6</sup> The result was the first multicultural modern capitalist society. Cultural diversity and the ever-growing awareness of it provided one of the conditions of capitalist America that distinguished it from all other modern capitalist countries—such as Britain, France, and Germany.<sup>7</sup> Different aspects of the story have been recounted in such books as *Strangers in the Land*, *The Incorporation of America*, and *Creating Modern Capitalism*.<sup>8</sup> But the story has never been told in the terms set out here. This book explores and analyzes a momentous and enduring national metamorphosis through the lens of literary writers. I refer to authors, popular and elite, who played

pivotal roles in articulating the stakes of these enormous cultural and economic changes. Because this was a period of widespread literacy, when best-selling works of literature and magazines reached vast readerships and immigrants could find newspapers and magazines in their native languages, writers themselves assumed an unparalleled cultural authority.<sup>9</sup> They became mediators of modernization who were experiencing firsthand the dramatic historical transformations they were representing for others. Henry James, for instance, joined fellow writers in recognizing the need for international copyright protections for literature, even testifying before the United States Congress prior to the 1891 passage of the International Copyright Act. But he was equally alert to inadvertent opportunities in the modern marketplace, noting how the “pirating” of his *Art of Fiction* (originally published in London) in Boston accrued to his benefit by having “advertised my fictions.”<sup>10</sup>

The extraordinary interdependence between literature and other vocations in this period explains why this book is a literary-cultural study, also concerned with essays, memoirs, biographies, journalism, works of social reform, photography, and advertising. Corporate heads explaining their philosophy of business, novelists portraying financiers, advertisers selling soap to “ethnics,” and civil servants distinguishing Indian notions of property all joined a conversation about the effects of capitalist development and the role of racial and ethnic others. It was a dynamic and contradictory economic-literary-cultural conversation. On the one hand, an expanding capitalist industry, far from being inimical to cultural difference, welcomed it, taking advantage of the tremendous diversity of American society to identify and pitch products to consumer groups.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, American capitalism aggressively manipulated racial hostility, fanning the flames of nativism, devaluing and excluding through various means blacks and ethnic others, and defending the social Darwinism that legitimated claims of Anglo-Saxon superiority.

My use of the term “multicultural” is deliberately anachronistic. The term was not coined until the 1940s, and most historians place the advent of multiculturalism in the 1960s.<sup>12</sup> But hindsight can provide a valuable perspective for analysis. It allows us to see what in its own time was underappreciated. Racial and ethnic others, including immigrants, were not simply subsets of the native population; their numbers were equivalent to, and in some places higher than, those of the “natives,” whose feelings of embattlement paralleled similar attitudes today. I invoke “multiculturalism,” then, both to identify a certain historical moment and to underscore continuities between past and present.<sup>13</sup> Finally, this perspective serves to confirm the

homegrown characteristics of American multiculturalism. These have been seen as a direct reaction against modern European fascism, where intolerance toward racial and ethnic others began with stereotypes and ended in genocide.<sup>14</sup> But American multiculturalism did not need an external catalyst for its formation; it emerged, I will be arguing, in the late nineteenth century as the extremes of social diversity met an accelerating capitalist system.

The depth and range of the migrant and immigrant roles in American society during this period would be hard to overestimate. Whether one lived in an urban area, in the countryside, or in a small oil or mining town, places where immigrants were most numerous relative to other groups, it was impossible to avoid confronting a variety of languages and cultures. It was not simply that immigrants and former slaves and their offspring comprised increasingly significant percentages of the population. These “minorities” were responsible for some of the most important social transformations, they wrote significant works of literature, they founded schools, they launched magazines and industries, they framed the national discourse of incorporation, and they helped to formulate the interests of labor.

While most mainstream Americans resented immigrants, it was possible for the Irish-born Andrew Carnegie to come penniless to America and within forty years build a fortune through steel manufacturing. So, too, the Scottish-born Samuel McClure, by editing a magazine he identified with American ideals of justice, became one of the country’s most influential figures. Samuel Gompers immigrated to the United States from England with his Dutch-Jewish parents when he was thirteen years old and within twenty-three years had become president of the American Federation of Labor, a post he held for almost forty years. There were less happy experiences, of course.<sup>15</sup> Ely S. Parker, a Seneca Indian, contributed so substantially to anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan’s book on the Iroquois that he was attributed with coauthorship. Later, as secretary to Ulysses S. Grant, Parker drafted Robert E. Lee’s surrender at Appomattox. Then in 1871, he was unjustly dismissed as the first Indian commissioner of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and later died in obscurity. The unorthodox prosecution methods used to convict eight anarchists, most of them German immigrants, of the murder of a police officer in Chicago’s 1886 Haymarket Affair aroused worldwide furor. The controversy that ensued following the execution of four of them foreshadowed the Sacco and Vanzetti case forty years later.<sup>16</sup>

Major American writers bore witness to the problem of national solidarity; they highlighted the fissures in society and staged conflict among

cultural groups. American literature consistently exposed the divisions that prevented the country from dealing with the worst effects of industrial capitalism. Some of the literary works discussed in the following pages, such as John Hay's *The Bread-Winners* (1884) and Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906), reinforced these divisions, either by depicting them as irreparable or by excoriating a particular class. Other literary works, for example, Marie Ruiz de Burton's *Who Would Have Thought It?* (1872) and Albion Tourgée's *A Fool's Errand* (1879), challenged these divisions by showing that they served to weaken social ties, allowing for more general exploitation. Still others, like Mark Twain's *Extract from Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven* (1909) and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1915), depicted the reconciliation of such divisions through settings that were literally out of this world.

But whether they sought to enhance, redress, or reconcile, all these writers confirmed widespread perceptions of America as a nation of many cultures that were increasingly set against one another. As the economist Simon Patten observed in 1895, "Each class or section of the nation is becoming conscious of an opposition between its standards and the activities and tendencies of some less developed class. The South has its negro, the city has its slums. . . . Everyone is beginning to differentiate those with proper qualifications for citizenship from some class or classes which he wishes to restrain or to exclude from society."<sup>17</sup> This picture of an embattled social and economic system finds full expression in an expanding novelistic tradition, in the pages of widely circulating magazines, in best-selling works of social reform, in the new art of photography, and in the science of advertising. Some of these artists and social observers were themselves distrustful of racial and ethnic "strangers," others were deeply pessimistic about American society and its capacity for forging solidarity, and most worried about the nation's future even as they pursued the opportunities afforded both by capitalism and by cultural diversity.

In particular, the periodicals industry profited from these factors—from the availability of capital as well as from an increasingly diverse society.<sup>18</sup> Magazines revolutionized books and their marketing. They were critical arbiters of literary wares, and many writers contributed to them as often as they could, worked on them, and even started their own. Many American novelists serialized their works in magazines before publishing them in book form. This process not only supplied an important source of revenue for authors, who could earn large sums for serialization well before book profits accrued; it also enabled them to advertise to readers, who often bought the books after reading them serialized or excerpted in magazines.

As moneymaking enterprises, magazines pitched their contents at their

largest possible specified audience. General-interest magazines like the *Saturday Evening Post* and *McClure's* were most ambitious in their pursuit of readers, but more focused periodicals like *Atlantic Monthly* and *Crisis* were also eager to preserve and extend their circulation base. Magazines helped to define classes and cultures with sets of interests that they both anticipated and shaped, and advertisers adjusted their promotions accordingly. Thus magazines reflected and helped create America's great cultural variety. In some cases they presented racial and ethnic others through familiar stereotypes in ads and illustrations. In other cases they sought publications from writers of "different" backgrounds, including Paul Laurence Dunbar, who published in *Century* and *Harper's Weekly*, and Abraham Cahan, who published in *Atlantic Monthly* and *McClure's*. In still other cases, they openly confronted the favorable and unfavorable aspects of American multiculturalism.

The development of the American novel in this period is an intrinsic part of the multicultural laboratories created by magazines. Indeed, novels may be said to have functioned as advertisements themselves, locating and also creating a market for their goods. In selling their stories and novels to magazines, ambitious authors such as William Dean Howells, Mary Wilkins Freeman, Jack London, and Henry James were entering a continuum of promotion. At the same time that they were representing the world of business to consumers, they were also representing their insights into their consumer audiences and into American attitudes toward cultural multiplicity. For as William Dean Howells perceived, the attempt to sell cultural commodities, like magazines and the literature they featured, confronted the reader with the deep stratification of American society. The pursuit of markets implicated the pursuer, as a matter of course, in class and cultural analysis. American novelists were helping to shape attitudes toward cultural others, and they were well aware of this fact.

The challenge of this book is to convey the breadth and complexity of these developments, while at the same time capturing the variety of ways in which American writers responded. To this end, I have divided my narrative into eight chapters, each of which encompasses a large cross-section of cultural and economic activity. Chapters 1 (Remembering Civil War) and 4 (Indian Sacrifice in an Age of Progress) focus on the national confrontation of mass death during and especially after the Civil War and the forced migration and annihilation of Indian tribes. Chapter 2 (Racism as Opportunity in the Reconstruction Era) explores the economic and legal institutions that extended the subordination of American blacks well beyond the era of enslavement while offering, inadvertently, opportunities for personal advancement. Chapter 3 (Cosmopolitanism) examines the migration and

immigration that accompanied the late nineteenth-century experience of capitalist expansion. Chapters 5 (Marketing Culture) and 7 (Corporate America) trace the rise of advertising and media forms and the revolution in business methods, including the establishment of corporations and trusts. Chapters 6 (Varieties of Work) and 8 (American Utopias) represent different reactions (economic, political, religious) to capitalist growth.

Thus the book's early chapters cover the destruction initiated or sanctioned by the expanding nation in this period, while later chapters tell a largely triumphant story of economic progress, an arc that suggests the dependence of this progress on human casualties—casualties that were neither inevitable nor necessary. One of my principal claims in this study is that Americans at the time were dramatically engaged in debating the proposition that sacrifice was essential to rapid cultural and economic development. When W. E. B. Du Bois declared in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) that during Reconstruction blacks—whose social and political exclusion after the war overshadowed their emancipation during it—had been “sacrificed in [their] swaddling clothes on the altar of national integrity,” he was challenging the doctrine (adapted from Darwinian science and all major religions) that sacrifice was both indispensable and beneficial.<sup>19</sup> Yet despite the uses of sacrificial beliefs to rationalize the victimization of their peoples during this period, black and Indian intellectuals also confirmed the central place of sacrificial rites in their cultures. Du Bois outlined a “Gospel of Sacrifice” that obligated black elites to support their weaker brethren, and Charles Alexander Eastman described in his autobiography, *Indian Boyhood*, the Sioux initiation ceremony where he makes an offering of his beloved dog.

Moreover, Du Bois emphasized what *was* accessible to blacks at the time. And in another famous declaration from *Souls*, he claimed the ongoing vitality of a cultural inheritance at odds with more local prejudices. “I sit with Shakespeare and he winces not. Across the color line I move arm in arm with Balzac and Dumas.”<sup>20</sup> Du Bois's choice of British and European writers was undoubtedly a rebuke to his own country. But as one of the first genuinely global thinkers in history, Du Bois was familiar with the dismal records of these other empires in encounters with people of color. And his use of epigraphs from popular American writers like John Greenleaf Whittier and James Russell Lowell throughout his book, like his insistence on the African American roots of a considerable portion of *American* culture, confirms that he saw just as much untapped potential at home.<sup>21</sup>

In such optimistic moments, Du Bois might have found support in an unexpected source: advertising. For in their efforts to articulate the ambi-

tions of entrepreneurs in ever more sophisticated form, advertising professionals drew increasingly on the prospects of a genuinely multicultural society. Hence my second principal claim: that capitalism's romance with the exceptional diversity of American society dates back to this historical period. Like the culture industries I have described, American business from 1865 to 1915 capitalized on the nation's growing multiculturalism. This resourcefulness took many forms, including the incorporation of vast numbers of immigrants into the American workforce at low wages. At the same time, these immigrant populations provided a critical mass of new consumers, eager to spend their earnings on the magical commodities of the American marketplace, a development that became a generic trope in novels about immigrants. Advertisers directed their appeals to immigrant populations, sometimes even adopting foreign scripts. But they also exploited widespread nervousness about this immigrant influx by filling their ads with assorted racial and ethnic "aliens." By constantly invoking the source of anxiety and fascination, they sought to capture the attention of Americans by familiarizing what they feared.

Some of the most incisive responses to the spectacular turbulence of the period came from the American utopian novel. Acutely aware of widespread suffering, and just as aware of the excessive profits accruing to some, utopian and dystopian novelists, such as Edward Bellamy, Ignatius Donnelly, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman, set out renovation schemes that sought to equalize the proceeds of progress. Significantly, however, in these works and in others like them, the first step en route to a welfare system is the purification of the body politic. There are no aliens in the social worlds of these novels; Indians, blacks, and Jewish and European immigrants have disappeared. I argue, and this is my third principal claim, that these works register a key facet of American resistance to a full-fledged welfare system: that it was spurred by the threat of cultural diversity. At a time when other Western countries (England, Germany, France) were instituting extensive welfare systems—old-age pensions, workers compensation, and health coverage—American efforts lagged far behind. A powerful and persistent ideology of individualism, which throughout American history has energized antipathy toward taxation and "big government," was no doubt partly responsible. But the attractions of populism confirm that other stakes were involved. America's extreme cultural diversity was a critical barrier to welfare measures; most Americans were reluctant to support benefits for peoples unlike themselves who, they believed, were most likely to qualify for them. As my final chapter on utopian novels reveals, a theory long recognized by historians and social scientists had been for even longer embedded in a key literary

genre of the period.<sup>22</sup> Thus, in one American literary utopia after another, radical redistribution of wealth is accompanied by eugenicist measures designed to homogenize the citizenry. Alexander Craig's *Ionia* (1898), for instance, features a harmonious Anglo-Saxon socialist state where Jews are forbidden to marry and are sterilized if charged with a crime and where Asian invaders are exterminated.

The pages that follow tell the story of a literary culture that reflects a great economic transformation and represents a newly formed multiculturalism in all its variety and complexity—a literary culture that demonstrated a remarkable sense of obligation to bear witness and a remarkable capacity to predict both the perils and the possibilities of American capitalist expansion.