Chapter V

E Pluribus Unum? The Myth of the Melting Pot

1. WHY THE MELTING POT?

> Imagine if you can, my dear friend, a society comprising all the nations of the world: English, French, German. […] All people having different languages, beliefs, and opinions. In short, a society without roots, without memories, without prejudices, without routines, without common ideas, without national character. […] What ties these very diverse elements together? What makes a people of all this?
> ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE TO ERNEST DE CHABROL, JUNE 9, 1831

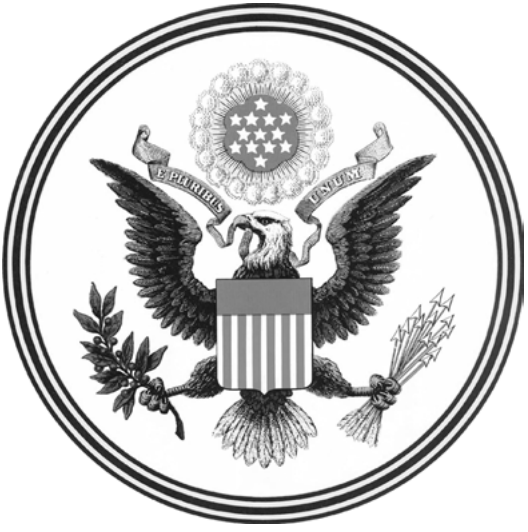
> Was it not possible, then, to think of the evolving American society not simply as a slightly modified England but rather as a totally new blend, culturally and biologically, in which the stocks and folkways of Europe were, figuratively speaking, indiscriminately mixed in the political pot of the emerging nation and melted together by the fires of American influence and interaction into a distinctly new type?
> MILTON GORDON, *ASSIMILATION IN AMERICAN LIFE*

A widely known rendering of the melting pot idea is the phrase *E Pluribus Unum*, on which the US Department of the Treasury provides the following information:

The motto "E Pluribus Unum" was first used on our coinage in 1795, when the reverse of the half-eagle ($5 gold) coin presented the main features of the Great Seal of the United States. "E Pluribus Unum" is inscribed on the Great Seal's scroll. The motto was added to certain silver coins in 1798, and soon appeared on all of the coins made out of precious metals (gold and silver). In 1834, it was dropped from most of the gold coins to mark the change in the standard fineness of the coins. In 1837, it was dropped from the silver coins,

marking the era of the Revised Mint Code. An Act of February 12, 1873 made the inscription a requirement of law upon the coins of the United States.
"E Pluribus Unum" does appear on all coins currently being manufactured. The motto means "Out of Many, One," and probably refers to the unity of the early States. (US Department of the Treasury website; cf. also below)

Illustration 1: Great Seal of the United States



Wikimedia Commons (Web, 4 May 2014).

E Pluribus Unum is also engraved on the globe at the feet of the Statue of Freedom, the classical female allegorical figure at the top of the US Capitol dome. It can be regarded as an unofficial motto of the United States, and has become a standard manifestation of the melting pot myth, which more than any other foundational myth evokes a vision of national unity and cohesion through participation in a harmonious, quasi-organic community that offers prospective members a second chance and a new beginning and molds them into a new 'race,' a new people. Whereas the myths discussed in the preceding chapters (Columbus, Pocahontas, the Pilgrims and Puritans, and the Founding Fathers) established a 'usable past' for the nation and commemorated heroic figures of 'new world' beginnings, the melting pot, just as the myths discussed in the remaining chapters (the West and the self-made man), is a myth about the making of American society. In its dominant version, it envisions the US in a state of perpetual change and transformation that is partly assimilation, partly regeneration, and

partly emergence, and emphasizes the continuous integration of difference experienced by both immigrant and longer-established sections of the population. As imagined communities (cf. Benedict Anderson's book of the same title), nations not only need narratives of origin, but also narratives of their future – in the case of the US, which looked upon itself as a nation of immigrants, such a forward-looking narrative needed to address how differences of origin and descent could be transcended, and the melting pot seemed to be the perfect model to describe the particular composition of US society:

> In general, the cluster of ideas [surrounding the melting pot] included the belief that a new nation, a new national character, and a new nationality were forming in the United States and that the most heterogeneous human materials could be taken in and absorbed into this nationality. (Gleason, *Speaking* 5)

Of course, from the beginning, the melting pot has been seen as an ambiguous symbol of American unity; it has been looked upon as a myth providing cohesion and a sense of evolving Americanness on the one hand, and as an instrument of forced acculturation and violent assimilation on the other. Several questions suggest themselves when assessing this myth: Who is in the 'pot' and who is doing the 'melting'? What exactly is melted down? Which elements would prove to be resilient or dominant in the process, and with what result? In my discussion of the melting pot myth, I will point to narrative variations, iconic symbolizations, and ritualistic practices that have shaped it across time. This reconstruction reveals, as we will see, that the melting pot myth emerges from a rather confused discourse: the melting pot has been used, first, as a phrase with which historical developments in the US have been described and projected into the future; it has been used, second, as a normative concept in order to affirm the melting pot at various moments in American history; and it has been used, third, as an analytic term in order to study cultural, social, and demographic processes in American society. These three different modes (descriptive, normative, and analytical) are usually not properly distinguished, which at times makes it difficult to keep them apart; normative frameworks in particular often appropriate a descriptive mode and/or immunize themselves against criticism by pretending to be analytical. The melting pot in all three modes (as history, program, and analytical category) appears to be infused with an exceptionalist logic and a civil religious dimension that invariably reinforce its mythic quality. Melting pot rhetoric often describes the overcoming of cultural and national differences in general, but at times it more specifically is about racial, religious, or class differences. These oscillations and variations contribute to the elasticity of the myth

even as they often render discussions of the melting pot quite ambiguous and contradictory.

In what follows, I will sketch several phases in the making, remaking, and unmaking of the myth of the melting pot. First, I will trace melting pot myth-making from the foundational phase of the United States in the second half of the 18th century, during which a number of now canonical texts articulated this myth in powerful ways, all the way through the 19th century. Second, I will address Israel Zangwill's play *The Melting Pot* (1908) in some detail, as it is a singularly important narrative of melting pot rhetoric and aesthetic and as such will serve as a touchstone for subsequent discussions of the myth of the melting pot. Third, I will reconstruct responses to the myth in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a period in which it became a central reference point for discussions of immigration and America's future and a highly contested metaphor of Progressivist thinking that was attacked from different positions on the political spectrum – from advocates of cultural pluralism on the left as well as from advocates of eugenics on the right. Fourth, I will look at sections of the population that have been regularly excluded by melting pot rhetoric: minority groups such as Native Americans, African Americans, and Asian Americans. If nation-building is intricately intertwined with racialization (cf. Weinbaum, "Nation"), then the melting pot metaphor – despite its ostensibly inclusivist orientation – implies exclusionary practices, just as any other model that constructs a homogenous national body from a racially diverse population. Debates around forms of "American Apartheid" (cf. Massey and Denton's book of the same title), taboos on miscegenation, and a new emphasis on religious difference within the melting pot discourse also need to be addressed in this section. Fifth, I will turn to the post-World War II period in order to show how the melting pot controversies were continued and renewed in the wake of the social protest movements and new immigration legislation in the 1960s and 1970s, particularly in discussions of Nathan Glazer and Patrick Moynihan's by now classic study *Beyond the Melting Pot* (1963). I will then outline how more recent discussions of the melting pot have been informed by notions of multiculturalism and ethnic diversity. In recent years, we have also seen a (re)turn to models of assimilation (cf. e.g. Salins, *Assimilation*) which often affirm and rehash older, rather conservative positions; at the same time, alternatives to the melting pot such as the mosaic, the salad bowl, cultural hybridity, etc. have been discussed in American studies and postcolonial studies scholarship.

The melting pot myth thus has been used in very different ways and for different political purposes. It has been the subject of sociological discussions as

well as of immigrant love stories; it is a model of literary aesthetics as well as a metaphor for change and hybridity, and it is also at the core of some strands of utopian thinking. Above all, one might say that it is a myth of cultural mobility and cultural sharing. Despite having lost mainstream popularity in recent years, melting pot rhetoric still enjoys some currency, as the issues that the melting pot myth tackles – i.e., processes of voluntary or coerced political, social, and/or cultural integration – are still on the agenda. In fact, recent scholarship stresses the "ideological variability of the melting pot" (Wilson, *Melting-Pot Modernism* 7) and identifies it with the first cultural turn in American history (cf. ibid. 198). However, the notion of culture and society that the metaphor of the melting pot conjures up remains problematic and does not lend itself easily to ideological rearticulations: alloying, the metaphor's source, always involves a primary constituent into which the other constituents are dissolved. Literalizing the melting pot metaphor thus points to built-in asymmetries, limitations, and pitfalls of the concept which the foundational and exceptionalist version of the myth has often successfully managed to camouflage.

2. "WHAT THEN IS THE AMERICAN, THIS NEW MAN?"

> The bosom of America is open to the oppressed and persecuted of all Nations and Religions. […] Whereas by an intermixture with our people, they, or their descendants, get assimilated to our customs, measures and laws: in a word, soon become one people.
> GEORGE WASHINGTON

> The time […] is anticipated when the language, manners, customs, political and religious sentiments of the mixed mass of the people who inhabit the United States, shall have become so assimilated, as that all nominal distinctions shall be lost in the general and honourable name of Americans.
> JEDIDIAH MORSE, *THE AMERICAN UNIVERSAL GEOGRAPHY*

The first author to be credited with describing American society as a melting pot is John Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur (1735-1813) (cf. Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity* 75), a French aristocrat who emigrated to North America in 1755. While back in Europe in 1782, he arranged for the publication of his *Letters from an American Farmer* in London, which is *the* key text for tracing the history and origin of the melting pot myth and may very well be looked upon as "the first sustained attempt by a European-born writer to define Americanness" (Moore,

Introduction ix). The *Letters* consist of semi-autobiographical accounts of rural life in 18th-century America, American flora and fauna, politics, family life, and culture; but most noteworthy in the context of my discussion of the melting pot myth is Crèvecoeur's description of the 'American' in the third letter:

> What then is the American, this new man? He is either an European, or the descendant of an European, hence that strange mixture of blood, which you will find in no other country. I could point out to you a family whose grandfather was an Englishman, whose wife was Dutch, whose son married a French woman, and whose present four sons have now four wives of different nations. *He* is an American, who leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds. He becomes an American by being received in the broad lap of our great *Alma Mater*. Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labours and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world. (43)

Crèvecoeur envisions the 'melting' of distinct Western and Northern European 'races' (French, German, Dutch, and Scandinavian) into a new American one. He "uses the word 'new' seventeen times in letter 3, often in company with such words as *metamorphosis*, *regeneration* and *resurrection*" (Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity* 75; cf. Nye, *American Literary History* 157). At various points in his letters, Crèvecoeur also includes Native Americans in his melting pot, a fact that has often been omitted in standard interpretations of the *Letters*. In a recent edition of Crèvecoeur's writings, we find the following description (rendered in the original version in which he wrote it):

> the Sweed the low the high dutch the French the English the scotch the Irish, Leaving behind them their National Prejudices soon Imbibe those of the new country they are come to Inhabit, they mix with Eachother or with the Natives as conveniency or chance may direct. (*More Letters* 137)

Whereas Native Americans became more and more identified in public discourses of the 18th and 19th centuries with savagery (in contradistinction to the 'civilized' white Europeans) and were thus increasingly excluded from white-authored melting pot visions of the future American (along with African Americans and Asian Americans), in Crèvecoeur's account of America/nization they are (still) included (albeit in a homogenized fashion). 'Mixing with each other and with the Natives,' Europeans are transformed into Americans by a process of biological hybridization that is invested in a heteronormative ideology of repro-

duction. Concerning the relations between Europeans and Native Americans, Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) in a similar vein and around the same time proposes "to let our settlements and theirs meet and blend together, to intermix, and become one people [i]ncorporating themselves with us as citizens of the U.S." (To Benjamin Hawkins Washington). Jefferson's semantics of 'blending' comes close to 'melting' and indicates the potential he sees for a kind of 'new race,' a potential that is also expounded by other founding fathers (George Washington, for instance; cf. this section's first epigraph). In fact, "several prominent southerners in the eighteenth century proclaimed intermarriage the solution to the Indian problem" (Dippie, *Vanishing* 260). However, Jefferson's utopian "vision of interracial nationhood" (Onuf, *Jefferson's Empire* 52) is ambivalent as it also prefigures and accepts the dissolution of the Native Americans and their cultures through racial mixing; ultimately, he did not favor the melting pot as an all-embracing model but instead argued for "the separation, or elimination, of disparate ethnic groups – Indians and blacks – who refused to disappear through civilization and assimilation, or were, in his view, incapable of participating as citizens in the republic" (Anthony Wallace, *Jefferson* 338). Today, Jefferson is seen as both "the scholarly admirer of Indian character, archaeology, and language and as the planner of cultural genocide, the architect of the removal policy, the surveyor of the Trail of Tears" (ibid. vii). When he tells the chiefs of the Upper Cherokee that "your blood will mix with ours" (qtd. in Roger Kennedy, "Jefferson" 105), it is not quite clear whether this is meant as a promise or a threat. In later scholarship, this vision will be explicitly connected to Anglo-American plans to annihilate the Native population *through* racial mixing. According to the phrenologist Charles Caldwell (1772-1853), the "only efficient scheme to civilize the Indians is to *cross the breed*" (qtd. in Haskins, *History* 111). This view was also shared by Lewis Henry Morgan (1818-1881), the founding figure of American anthropology, who noted that "the only way to tame him [the Indian] is to put in the white blood" (qtd. in Bieder, *Science* 225; cf. also Eggan, "Lewis H. Morgan"), and by cartographer and geologist John Wesley Powell, who thought that "mixing blood" was a way to avoid "spilling blood" and spoke out in favor of "rapid amalgamation" (qtd. in Dippie, *Vanishing* 248). As Brian Dippie points out, amalgamation fit very well with the larger programmatic notion of the 'vanishing Indian:' "Assimilation would effect the same end as extermination and more insidiously and more surely because it annihilates without raising a sword or a murmur of protest" (*Vanishing* 244). The notions of 'melting' and miscegenation in this melting pot design thus point to and justify what amounts to extermination policies – or what Matthew Jacobson in a different context has termed "malevolent assimilation" (cf. his essay of the

same title, esp. 154) – that were part of what white colonizers liked to call their 'civilizing mission' (cf. Bieder, *Science* 226, 231-33).

Echoes of the melting pot myth as a foundational narrative of the American experience and as an American ideal reverberate beyond Crèvecoeur's articulation of the idea of the melting pot and Jefferson's half-hearted (or even disingenuous) embrace of a mixed-race future America in essays, poetry, and historical works by a number of writers in 19th-century North America. These texts prefigure the immigration debate that was to gain momentum in the late 19th and early 20th centuries through melting pot imagery – referred to by this or any other name – that is often ambiguous, idiosyncratic, and impressionistic. Most of these articulations of the melting pot take a top-down rather than a bottom-up perspective and display the same kind of inherent tension and volatility that we have found in Jefferson and, to a lesser extent, in Crèvecoeur, especially as to questions of inclusion and exclusion and the potential or problems anticipated in the process of mixing. Whereas we can note that "[b]y the middle of the nineteenth century it was widely accepted in America that the nation had a cosmopolitan origin and that the unifying element of American nationalism for the time being was neither a common past, nor common blood, but the American Idea" and that "[t]he motto of American nationalism – *E Pluribus Unum* – stresses the ideal of unity that will arise out of diversity" (Lissak, *Pluralism* 2), the perspectives on just how this ideal was to be achieved varied greatly and were mostly inconclusive.

Philosopher and poet Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) is among the American writers of the 19th century who are often considered to be proponents of the melting pot. References to Emerson's usage of the (s)melting pot metaphor are linked to the following passage from a journal entry:

> Man is the most composite of all creatures. […] Well, as in the old burning of the Temple at Corinth, by the melting and intermixture of silver and gold and other metals a new compound more precious than any, called Corinthian brass, was formed; so in this continent, – asylum of all nations, the energy of Irish, Germans, Swedes, Poles, and Cosacks, and all the European tribes, – of the Africans, and of the Polynesians, – will construct a new race, a new religion, a new state, a new literature, which will be as vigorous as the new Europe which came out of the smelting pot of the Dark Ages, or that which earlier emerged from the Pelasgic and Etruscan barbarism. *La Nature aime les croisements*. (Entry 119, *Journals* Vol. 9, 299-300)

Emerson includes Europeans, Africans, and even Polynesians, but no Native Americans in his version of the melting pot. Although he seems to champion racial and cultural amalgamation and thus to contest notions of racial and cultural purity, as with Crèveceour and Jefferson, we need to look beyond the canonized passage quoted above to get a fuller sense of Emerson's 'smelting pot;' his American 'Corinthian brass' is informed as much by cultural exchange as by processes (and theories) of natural selection. Emerson's conceptualization of the "genius of the American race" is referred to by Luther Luedtke in an overall assessment of his oeuvre as harboring a "eugenics of American nationhood" ("Ralph Waldo Emerson" 7). While Emerson clearly speaks out against nativist and anti-immigration polemics, he also writes in a Darwinist spirit that "the Atlantic is a sieve" (qtd. in ibid. 10) through which immigrants on their passage to America are filtered to sort out the 'unfit.' Even though he refers to "the legend of pure races" (Emerson, "Race" 49) and to the fact that "all our experience is of the gradation and resolution of races" (ibid. 50), he still clings to a strict racial hierarchy: in reference to the chapter titled "Race" in his *English Traits*, Luedtke holds that for Emerson, "the emergence of higher forms of human life entailed not only the hybridization of races but also the extinction of existentially inferior forms" ("Ralph Waldo Emerson" 8; cf. also Nicoloff, *Emerson* 46-47), and John Carlos Rowe has pointed to Emerson's complicity in mid-19th-century discourses of race as well (cf. *At Emerson's Tomb*). Reading Emerson with Jefferson thus may shed light on why Native Americans are not mentioned in his smelting pot vision: Even though Emerson's metaphor of (s)melting is often placed in a smooth continuum between Crèvecoeur in the late 18th and Zangwill in the early 20th century, it reveals on closer inspection that it is based as much on processes of cultural transformation as on the discourses of biological determinism increasingly popular and accepted at that time.

In many ways, Emerson's vision is reflected in the works of Walt Whitman (1819-1892), whose writing has been credited as exemplifying the American melting pot by way of a "a new language" and "a new literary idiom appropriate to what Whitman saw as uniquely American experiences" (Archambeau, "Immigrant Languages" 79). In his preface to the 1855 edition of his magnum opus *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman refers to "the Americans of all nations" as a "race of races" and to the United States as not merely a nation but "the nation of many nations" (22). However, Whitman employs different melting pot metaphors in the various versions of *Leaves of Grass*: in the 1855 version, the speaker addresses the American "[o]f every hue and trade and rank, of every caste and religion, [n]ot merely of the New World but of Africa Europe or Asia" (23), while in the last version, now titled "Song of Myself" and newly organized in sections,

the speaker describes himself as an American "[o]f every hue and caste […], [o]f every rank and religion, [a] farmer, mechanic, artist, gentleman, sailor, quaker, [p]risoner, fancy-man, rowdy, lawyer, physician, priest" (87). Clearly, the 1855 text is more open and inclusive than the 1881 version, to which Whitman added a somewhat nativist streak: "Born here of parents born here from parents the same, and their parents the same" (71). The melting pot rhetoric is less radical in this final version, which stresses American sameness rather than immigrant difference. This change can be read as an indication of the larger ideological shift toward nativism in the period of mass immigration from Europe. Whitman's final version of his famous poem, then, appears to partially turn away from the melting pot idea and to emphasize an Ur-American genealogy.

Toward the end of the 19th century several historians offered various models of national amalgamation, all of which relied to some degree on melting pot imagery for conceptualizing the transformation of immigrants from Europe. The historian Francis Parkman (1823-1893) contended that

> [s]ome races of men seem moulded in wax, soft and melting, at once plastic and feeble. Some races, like some metals, combine the greatest flexibility with the greatest strength. But the Indian is hewn out of a rock. You can rarely change the form without destruction of the substance. (*Conspiracy* 45)

Racial difference thus figured prominently in Parkman's explanation of the failure of the "wilderness melting pot" (Saveth, *American Historians* 102); in addition to the supposedly unchangeable Natives, Parkman also dismissed in no uncertain terms as not fit for progress Catholic groups, especially North Americans of French descent.

The jurist, historian, and statesman James Bryce (1838-1922), who served as British Ambassador to the United States from 1907 to 1913, states in his voluminous treatise on the US titled *The American Commonwealth* (1888):

> What strikes the traveller, and what the Americans themselves are delighted to point out, is the amazing solvent power which American institutions, habits, and ideas exercise upon newcomers of all races. […] On the whole we may conclude that the intellectual and moral atmosphere into which the settlers from Europe come has more power to assimilate them than their race qualities have power to change it. (Vol. 2 922-23)

The image of America's "solvent power" affirms once more the idea of 'melting down' racial difference, even if race here (as in many 19th-century texts) refers to European groups such as the Nordic, Iberic, Anglo-Saxon, Celtic, Slavic, or

Teutonic races (cf. Jacobson, *Whiteness* 7) rather than to 'whites,' African Americans, Native Americans, or Asian Americans. Over all, the 19th century largely consolidated a racialized version of the melting pot idea and with it "the institutionalization of a racial order that drew the color line around, rather than within, Europe" (Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation* 65). The melting pot myth thus seemingly describes but actually produces an implicit and highly normative conception of whiteness that has become more inclusive over time but at the same time also continued to be profoundly exclusivist.

Following up on Bryce at the very end of the 19th century, historian Frederick Jackson Turner (1861-1932) used the melting pot metaphor to describe processes of Americanization at what he refers to as the 'frontier.' In his lecture on "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," Turner suggests:

> The frontier promoted the formation of a composite nationality for the American people […]. In the crucible of the frontier the immigrants were Americanized, liberated, and fused into a mixed race, English in neither nationality nor characteristics.

The claim that this "amalgamation is destined to produce a new national stock" (ibid.) here is obviously used to assert US distinctness from England and to bolster the notion of American exceptionalism. This new national stock, in which "no element remained isolated," again relates mostly to European immigrants, even if Turner refers to "immigrants from all nations of the world." Turner's frontier thesis – to be addressed in more detail in the following chapter – echoes Crèvecoeur's melting pot, yet Turner never mentions his name or quotes from his writings. By describing the frontier melting pot as a specifically rural phenomenon, Turner programmatically shifts the site of Americanization from the Eastern Seaboard to the Midwest and thus positions the West at the center of the nation (later critics would turn to the American city as the major arena of assimilation processes).

While historians, essayists, politicians, and poets in the 18th and 19th centuries, as we have seen, referred in their appraisals and critiques of the melting pot idea to the mixing, (s)melting, and blending of differences in America in very different ways and often quite unspecifically, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the melting pot emerged as a particularly prominent yet controversial and often very differently accentuated model to describe the potential effects of mass immigration. Turner (among others) was skeptical about the 'melting' of one immigrant group in particular: the Eastern European and, specifically, Jewish immigrants, since he saw them as a 'city people' who did not experience the transforming effects of the frontier in the same beneficial way as other immi-

grant groups. In view of this assessment, it may seem ironic that it is a dramatic text by a Jewish (and British) author that at the beginning of the 20th century fuelled public debates on US national identity with its rendering of an urban melting pot scenario of mythic proportions.

3. ISRAEL ZANGWILL'S *THE MELTING POT*: JEWISH IMMIGRANTS AND AMERICAN ALCHEMY

> [T]he real American has not yet arrived. He is only in the Crucible, I tell you – he will be the fusion of all races, perhaps the coming superman.
> ISRAEL ZANGWILL, *THE MELTING POT*

In the passage quoted above, the protagonist of Israel Zangwill's play *The Melting Pot* portrays the American experience as a process of amelioration through amalgamation out of which the future American will arise like a "superman." Zangwill's play widely popularized the idea of the melting pot and was "[a]dvertised as a 'Drama of the Amalgamation of Races'" (Goldstein, *Price* 99); it opened in Washington, D.C. on October 5, 1908 in front of an audience that included then-president Theodore Roosevelt and his family. It ran for six months in Chicago and ran for 136 performances in New York in 1908 and 1909. Whereas theater critics at first had little enthusiasm for the play due to its sentimentalism, the audience flocked to it: "[T]he public crowded the performances […]. It is a play of the people, touched with the fire of democracy, and lighted radiantly with the national vision" (review qtd. in Gleason, *Speaking* 7). From 1909 until the US entered World War I in 1917, it was republished yearly and widely read in schools and colleges (cf. Browder, *Slippery Characters* 149).

Israel Zangwill (1864-1926), the author of this huge success, was a playwright, journalist, essayist, and activist whose family emigrated from Czarist Russia and Poland to England. He was a central figure of Anglo-Jewish intellectualism and politics and was considered by many as "an interpreter of Jewish life" (Nahshon, Prologue 3) but was also seen as a somewhat controversial figure within the Jewish community because of his marriage with non-Jewish British writer and feminist Edith Ayrton. When his play *The Melting Pot* premiered in Washington, Zangwill traveled to the US to be in the audience.

Illustration 2: Celebrating Assimilation?

Cover of *The Melting Pot: The Great American Drama* by Israel Zangwill (1916).

The Melting Pot, Zangwill's best-known play, is a melodrama whose plot revolves around David Quixano, a Jewish-Russian musician who immigrates to the United States after his family has been killed in the Kishinev pogrom. In New York, he meets Vera Revendal, the daughter of wealthy Russian immigrants, who does charity work in a housing project; as their relationship progresses and they fall in love with each other, they learn that it was Vera's father who had been responsible for the brutal murder of David's family. At this point in the play, a shocked David leaves Vera, and it seems as if their budding relationship cannot overcome the trauma of the past:

David *(In low, icy tones)*: You cannot come to me. There is a river of blood between us.
Vera: Were it seven seas, our love must cross them. […]
David: Love! Christian love! For this I gave up my people – darkened the home that sheltered me – there was always a still, small voice at my heart calling me back, but I

heeded nothing – only the voice of the butcher's daughter. Let me go home, let me go home. (347-9)

Later on, David acknowledges that he has been wrong in rejecting Vera's love and embraces the redemptive influence of melting pot America, which in the play acquires the aura of the Redeemer Nation so cherished in exceptionalist rhetoric:

I preached of God's Crucible, this great new continent that could melt up all race differences and vendettas, that could purge and recreate, and God tried me with his supremest test. He gave me a heritage from the Old World, hatred and vengeance and blood, and said, "Cast it all into my Crucible." And I said, "Even thy Crucible cannot melt this hate, cannot drink up this blood." And so I sat crooning over the dead past, gloating over the old bloodstains – I, the apostle of America, the prophet of the God of our children. (360)

David interprets his tragic family history (Vera's father having murdered his parents) as a trial used by God to put his faith to the test. By mastering this religious crisis, repenting his skepticism, and converting once more, and firmly, to the American creed, David's faith in the melting pot is not only reassured but strengthened. In the last part of the play, David and Vera overcome the painful history of 'old world' anti-Semitism and make a new start in America; David creates a musical vision of melting pot America that moves the hearts of his immigrant audience, while Vera is "[m]elting at his touch" (315). The second chance offered to them by the American crucible does away with all past suffering and guilt and makes them literally new (cf. Browder, *Slippery Characters*).

In discussions of the play, it is mostly its happy ending that is quoted as evidence for its endorsement of melting pot ideology. The play concludes with the following lines:

It is the fires of God round His Crucible. There she lies, the great Melting-Pot – listen! Can't you hear the roaring and the bubbling? There gapes her mouth […] Yes, East and West, and North and South, the palm and the pine, the pole and the equator, the crescent and the cross – how the great Alchemist melts and fuses them with his purging flame! Here shall they all unite to build the Republic of Man and the Kingdom of God. Ah, Vera, what is the glory of Rome and Jerusalem where all nations and races come to worship and look back, compared with the glory of America, where all the races and nations come to labour and look forward! Peace, peace, to all ye unborn millions, fated to fill this giant continent – the God of our *children* give you Peace. (362-63)

With these words, which echo Promised Land rhetoric, the doctrine of Manifest Destiny, American exceptionalism, and American civil religion, the play fades out after allowing a final glimpse of the torch of the Statue of Liberty in the background while a patriotic song is played. Thus, the final scene calls for unconditional identification with the US, reaching out to the audience on all available channels.

Zangwill's play thus has been read and canonized as a programmatic illustration and optimistic confirmation of the workings of the melting pot in American society which dramatizes the 'new world' as a place of new beginnings that discounts the individual's past and affirms that "old ethnic loyalties would diminish in the face of an inexorable process which emphasised those values that Americans held in common rather than those which kept them apart" (Campbell and Kean, *American Cultural Studies* 54). Rather than focusing merely on the assimilation of immigrants, "*The Melting Pot* made an explicit bid for a more expansive sense of U.S. nationhood" (Browder, *Slippery Characters* 150) and was seen as an affirmation of a universal ideology of cultural mixing and cultural change.

Yet in contrast to this canonical reading of the play, it has been argued by some scholars that its conflict may be resolved a little too nicely at the end. Neil Shumsky for example finds the play's rendering of the melting pot myth more complex than is generally acknowledged, and more ambivalent than the final scene suggests; he points out that the play "does not merely present the melting pot theory" ("Zangwill's *The Melting Pot*" 36) but structurally calls into question the message of its ending. Shumsky sees the anti-climactic moment of the play in David's ultimate moment of crisis when he finds out about the murder of his parents at the hands of Vera's father and his belief in the melting pot is shaken. Vera affirms her love, but he cannot accept it; he is unable to eradicate the past and wants to go home. The melting pot is 'only a dream:'

> One could logically argue that *The Melting Pot* should end at this point. Its hero has admitted the futility of his dream and recognized that it cannot come true; but the play continues. It has a second conclusion which seems contrived and appears to contradict much of the play's development. In this anticlimax, David and Vera have finally realized that their futures lie apart and seem reconciled to that fact. Then suddenly, and for no apparent reason, David begs her to stay. (Shumsky, "Zangwill's *The Melting Pot*" 35)

Shumsky's reasoning that the play has two endings throws into doubt its ending's unequivocal affirmation of the melting pot myth: what if the myth *is* a

dream? Who is dreaming it? And whose agency and interest propel the dream-like vision?

Scholars have further complicated the picture by pointing to the role of Judaism in Zangwill's *The Melting Pot* and have argued that the play is not so much about Americanization but about the future of the Jewish people in the diaspora. The question then is: Do the characters become Americanized or do they become Judaized? According to Biale, all Americans in *The Melting Pot* become "crypto-Jews" ("Melting Pot" 20); Vera Revendal in the beginning holds anti-Semitic attitudes but sheds her prejudices as the play continues – ultimately, she even wants to convert to Judaism for David's sake. In so far as Vera feels that she should assume David's cultural heritage, Zangwill's play is a narrative of conversion rather than an affirmation of melting pot ideology. In discussing David with her father, she says that

> [I was] never absolutely sure of my love for him – perhaps that was why I doubted his love for me – often after our enchanted moments there would come a nameless uneasiness, some vague instinct, relic of the long centuries of Jew-loathing, some strange shirking from his Christless creed – […] But now, now, David, I come to you, and I say in the words of Ruth, thy people shall be my people and thy God my God! (347)

Like Vera, the Quixano's Irish Catholic maid Kathleen overcomes her prejudices against Jews, develops an appreciation for Jewish rituals, and even participates in them herself. Vera and Kathleen may serve as examples that the play prominently engages with anti-Semitic prejudices and turns them around. Non-Jewish characters in *The Melting Pot* want to become (like) Jews rather than Americans, it has been argued: "Zangwill's cosmopolitanism turned out to be something like a form of Jewish particularism" (Biale, "Melting Pot" 19). This way of reading the play would have been more acceptable to those Jewish American contemporaries of Zangwill who felt compelled to embrace the melting pot as a political strategy while in fact being opposed to intermarriage as a form of assimilation (cf. Goldstein, *Price* 101).

The influence of *The Melting Pot* cannot be overstated: "[m]ore than any social or political theory, the rhetoric of Zangwill's play shaped American discourse on immigration and ethnicity, including most notably the language of self-declared opponents of the melting-pot concept" (Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity* 66). The melting pot concept echoed in ethnic and immigrant literature of the 1910s and 1920s, a period in which nativist sentiments were on the rise as a reaction to mass immigration from Europe. Yet, the concept was neither uncontested, nor

did its appropriation always occur in the melodramatic mode of Zangwill's play. Quite the contrary: we find a number of attempts to critique the metaphor by taking it more or less literally. Orm Øverland has shown how the melting pot as a symbol of assimilation was contested rather than whole-heartedly embraced in Scandinavian immigrant fiction (cf. *Immigrant Minds*), for example by Waldemar Ager (1869-1941), Norwegian immigrant and author of *On the Way to the Melting Pot* (1917), who describes the road toward assimilation as a process of loss, not of gain or liberation. Lars, the protagonist of the novel, is portrayed as assimilated and as culturally and socially impoverished at the same time; the process leading to that condition is described by another character in the book as follows:

> First they stripped away their love for their parents, then they sacrificed their love for the one they held most dear, then the language they had learned from mother, then their love for their childhood upbringing, for God and man, then the sounds they learned as children, then their memories, then the ideals of their youth – tore their heritage asunder little by little – and when one had hurled from his heart and mind everything which he had been fond of earlier, then there was a great empty void to be filled with love of self, selfishness, greed, and the like. […] Thus they readied themselves for the melting pot's last great test. (197)

And Lars's employer, a factory manager, muses not without irony that "[h]e could not recall having seen a single typewriter, an electric motor, a usable sewing machine or piece of farm machinery wander into the melting pot" (173): obviously, valuable and fully functioning things would not be melted down. Perhaps it is not accidental that Ager's critique of the melting pot was originally published in the Norwegian language for the thriving Norwegian American community and was translated into English only in 1995. In Ager's view, "[t]he melting pot […] was primarily a metaphor of destruction, more about the killing of the old man than the creation of the new" (Øverland, "From Melting Pot" 53), a metaphor used "to denationalize those who are not of English descent" (ibid).

Almost two decades later, another immigrant writer includes a very unusual melting pot image in his work: In the climactic scene of Henry Roth's (1906-1995) novel *Call It Sleep* (1934), the protagonist, a young Jewish immigrant by the name of David Schearl (another David), touches the electrified rail of the trolley tracks on Avenue D in New York's East Village with a milk ladle, which results in "a surrealistic melting pot melange" (Sollors, *Ethnic Modernism* 140) accompanied by "lightning" and "radiance" (Roth, *Call It Sleep* 571). In literalizing the melting pot metaphor, David's experience with electricity is cast as an

epiphany in the Joycean sense, as a moment of total presence: "[h]e views the electric current as if it were a divine power" (Sollors, *Ethnic Modernism* 141); David's almost-fatal 'melting' however can be read more fruitfully as a personal *rite de passage* that gives his life another turn rather than as a ritual of Americanization.

Ager and Roth are only two exemplary cases that show how the melting pot myth is criticized, perhaps even ridiculed, in the writings of first generation immigrants to the US; far beyond the realm of fiction, however, the melting pot becomes fiercely contested in debates on the future of US society in the Progressive Era, which will be discussed in the next section.

4. CONTESTING THE MELTING POT: CULTURAL PLURALISM VS. RACIAL HYGIENE?

> America has believed that in differentiation, not in uniformity, lies the path of progress.
> LOUIS DEMBITZ BRANDEIS, "TRUE AMERICANISM"

> We in this country have been so imbued with the idea of democracy, or the equality of all men, that we have left out of consideration the matter of blood or natural inborn hereditary mental and moral differences. No man who breeds pedigreed plants and animals can afford to neglect this thing, as you know.
> HARRY H. LAUGHLIN

In the face of more than 18 million immigrants entering the US between 1891 and 1920, the idea of racial and cultural amalgamation was discussed controversially by intellectuals as well as the public at large at that time. In these discussions, the melting pot concept provided a kind of middle ground between irreconcilable perspectives on the left and on the right: while liberals such as Horace Kallen and Randolph Bourne criticized the melting pot idea as a model of assimilation that led to homogenization and suggested alternative models geared toward ethno-cultural plurality and diversity instead, nativist anti-immigration critics and specifically eugenicists such as Madison Grant and Theodore Lothrop Stoddard perceived the melting pot as an imminent threat to (Anglo-) American society, welcomed the restrictive immigration legislation that curtailed large-scale immigration in 1924, and called for measures to secure the 'national

health' on overtly racist grounds – proto-fascist notions of racial hygiene and racial purity are of central concern in their writings about American society.

Kallen, Bourne, and others perceived the melting pot as a repressive concept rather than as "genuine assimilation to one another," as John Dewey called it (qtd. in Wilson, *Melting-Pot Modernism* 14). Their critique of the melting pot as an ideology of Americanization grounded in coercive homogenization narrowly defined the melting pot as full assimilation to Anglo-Saxon culture. Horace Kallen (1882-1974), a Jewish American philosopher who had emigrated to the US as a child, proposed in his influential essay "Democracy versus the Melting-Pot" (1915) a democracy of various nationalities, a nation of nations, rather than a melting pot America:

> Thus "American civilization" may come to mean the perfection of the cooperative harmonies of "European civilization" – the waste, the squalor, and the distress of Europe being eliminated – a multiplicity in a unity, an orchestration of mankind. As in an orchestra, every type of instrument has its specific *timbre* and *tonality*, founded in its substance and form; as every type has its appropriate theme and melody in the whole symphony, so in society each ethnic group is the natural instrument, its temper and culture may be its theme and melody, and the harmony and dissonances and discords of them all make the symphony of civilization. (116-17)

Kallen argues that cultural pluralism (a term he has been credited with coining), ethnic affiliation, and national pride are indeed compatible; he envisions America as a "nation of discrete nationalisms" and identifies ethnic diversity as "a national asset" (Hansen, *Lost Promise* 95) rather than seeing immigrants' loyalties to their countries of origin as an obstacle to the national coherence of the US. To illustrate his position, Kallen repeatedly uses musical metaphors that he seems to have borrowed from Jane Addams's 1892 essay "The Subjective Necessity for Social Settlements:"

> If you have heard a thousand voices singing in the Hallelujah Chorus in Handel's "Messiah," you have found that the leading voices could still be distinguished, but that the differences of training and cultivation between them and the voices of the chorus were lost in the unity of purpose and the fact that they were all human voices lifted by a high motive. This is a weak illustration of what a Settlement attempts to do. (25)

Addams's use of Händel's oratorio to describe her settlement project Hull House is similar to the function of David's American symphony in Zangwill's *The Melting Pot* (which in fact has a non-fictional counterpart in Antonin Dvořák's

Symphony No. 9, which he composed in the US in 1893 – popularly known as the *New World Symphony*, it has since become one of the most popular symphonies in the romantic repertoire). That both advocates of cultural pluralism as well as melting pot advocates have used musical metaphors to stress the harmonious result of their respective approaches may be taken as indicative of how difficult it is at times to distinguish between the two positions.

In a similar vein to Kallen, writer and intellectual Randolph Bourne (1886-1918) argues in his essay "Trans-National America" (published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in July 1916) that Americanism should not be equated with Anglo-Saxonism and that immigrants should retain their languages and customs: "What we emphatically do not want is that these distinctive qualities should be washed out into a tasteless, colorless fluid of uniformity," he writes; immigrants "merge but they do not fuse." Bourne holds that US society consists of "a unique sociological fabric" which would allow it to become a "federation of cultures." Thus Bourne, like Kallen, criticizes the Anglo-Saxon elite for pushing their own culture as an American *leitkultur* and strictly opposes assimilation, which he deems undemocratic and even inhumane. He affirms the ethnic diversity of the US and defends the tendency of immigrants to maintain ties to their countries of origin against xenophobic and nationalist sentiments that in the context of World War I (which the US would formally enter in April 1917) had been on the rise. The pressure exerted on immigrants to conform and to assimilate in these years is enormous, but many of them do not bow to these pressures. While conservative critics lament this "failure of the melting-pot," Bourne, who values cultural difference and abhors uniformity, views it positively:

> The failure of the melting-pot, far from closing the great American democratic experiment, means that it has only just begun. Whatever American nationalism turns out to be, we see already that it will have color richer and more exciting than our ideal has hitherto encompassed. In a world which has dreamed of internationalism, we find that we have all unawares been building up the first international nation. The voices which have cried for a tight and jealous nationalism of the European pattern are failing. From that ideal, however valiantly and disinterestedly it has been set for us, time and tendency have moved us further and further away. What we have achieved has been rather a cosmopolitan federation of national colonies, of foreign cultures, from whom the sting of devastating competition has been removed. America is already the world-federation in miniature, the continent where for the first time in history has been achieved that miracle of hope, the peaceful living side by side, with character substantially preserved, of the most heterogeneous peoples under the sun. Nowhere else has such contiguity been anything but the breeder of misery. Here, notwithstanding our tragic failures of adjustment, the outlines are already

too clear not to give us a new vision and a new-orientation [sic] of the American mind in the world. ("Trans-National America")

Bourne advocates an American internationalism that leaves behind European factionalism and violent conflict; he is convinced that within the democratic framework of the US, all the cultures of the world could peacefully coexist. Bourne's views are articulated in the context of American Progressivism, a reform movement consisting "of shifting, ideologically fluid, issue-focused coalitions, all competing for the reshaping of American society" (Rodgers, "In Search" 114), and stand in stark contrast to more conservative positions that finally won the day.

Illustration 3: The Mortar of Assimilation

Ill. by C.J. Taylor (*Puck*, 26 June 1889).

Contrary to the reformist positions of Kallen, Bourne, and other leading intellectual progressive figures such as John Dewey, Jane Addams, Robert Park,

and Franz Boas, conservative critics were opposed to the melting pot idea for quite different reasons. Kallen for example expressly attacked one of them, the American sociologist and eugenicist E.A. Ross (1866-1951), for his Anglo-American conservatism:

> Kallen broke with Ross by interpreting America as a work in progress rather than a nation in the grip of cultural decline. Whereas Ross regarded the United States as the province of an Anglo-American cultural majority, Kallen advanced an ideal of cultural diversity. Where Ross delineated a program for cultural renewal that combined immigration restriction with assimilation to Anglo-American norms, Kallen discarded the metaphor of America-as-melting-pot in favour of the symbol of orchestral harmony. (Hansen, *Lost Promise* 92)

Kallen even addresses Ross in his essay "Democracy versus the Melting Pot" directly: "Hence, what troubles Mr. Ross and so many other Anglo-Saxon Americans is not really inequality; what troubles them is *difference*" (107). While the cultural pluralists Kallen and Bourne criticized the melting pot as assimilationist and homogenizing, conservative critics of the melting pot such as Ross found both pluralism and assimilation equally problematic and repulsive; their strict anti-immigration stance was motivated by a nationalist outlook based on the notions of white supremacy and racial purity, a position that denigrated all racial mixing as 'mongrelization.' Drawing on widespread xenophobic resentments, their message met with a lot of approval and became politically influential: After the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the so-called Gentleman's Agreement of 1907 (severely restricting Chinese and Japanese immigration, respectively), the likewise overtly racist Immigration Acts of 1917 and 1924 further restricted immigration, which reflects the then widespread acceptance of racist ideologies (cf. Gerstle, *American Crucible*).

Among the proponents of 'scientific' racism was Harry H. Laughlin (1880-1953), who as an "expert eugenics agent" delivered a report to Congress in 1922 in which he correlated so-called forms of social degeneracy (feeblemindedness, insanity, criminality, epilepsy, tuberculosis, alcoholism, dependency) with "racial degeneracy;" Laughlin "purported to find much higher levels of degeneracy among the new immigrants than among the old, and this finding became a central weapon in the restrictionists' arsenal" (ibid. 105). Laughlin's conjoining of the racist ideology of white supremacy with eugenicist principles enjoyed strong support from politicians: Calvin Coolidge himself, US president from 1923 to 1929, contended that "Nordics deteriorate when mixed with other races" (qtd. in Browder, *Slippery Characters* 146). It has been quite effectively erased from

public memory that there was a strong eugenics movement in the US which propagated what Daylanne English refers to as "a central national ideology" (*Unnatural Selections* 14). This movement, in which American scientists and intellectuals played a vanguard role, pushed for 'perfecting' the human 'gene pool' by controlling the process of reproduction (cf. ibid.). American biologists like Harry H. Laughlin and Charles B. Davenport claimed that most 'ailments,' including social problems such as poverty and criminality, were genetically programmed and thus hereditary in nature – therefore persons with a 'good genetic makeup' should be encouraged to have families, while 'inferior' people of allegedly poor genetic stock should be prevented from reproducing. Among those people regarded as inferior were epileptics, manic-depressives, prostitutes, alcoholics, the homeless, criminals, as well as non-white residents and immigrants. Under the eugenics laws, people who came to the negative attention of the social authorities could be branded as 'feeble-minded' by court order and were then forcibly sterilized. By the early 1930s, some 30 American states had adopted such eugenics laws. Most of them were modelled after the law which Laughlin had drafted for the state of Virginia in 1924, which also served Germany's National Socialists as a model for their 1933 Law for the Prevention of Genetically Diseased Offspring, on the basis of which at least 400,000 men and women were forcibly sterilized. The University of Heidelberg was apparently so grateful to Laughlin that it awarded him an honorary doctorate for his 'services on behalf of racial hygiene' in 1936. The influence of American eugenics on Nazism goes even further: The notorious term 'Untermensch,' a core concept in Nazi ideology, is a translation from the English term 'Underman,' which, as unidiomatic as it may sound today, was coined by the American journalist and historian Theodore Lothrop Stoddard (1883-1950) in his 1922 study *The Revolt against Civilization: The Menace of the Under Man* (Stoddard, who held a PhD from Harvard University, was extremely popular during the heyday of 'Pop-Darwinism' and the so-called 'eugenics fad' in the 1920s). The equally notorious term 'aufnorden,' which also relates to an integral concept of Nazi ideology, similarly is a translation of Madison Grant's term 'to nordicize,' which he used in his 1916 *The Passing of the Great Race*. Obviously neither Laughlin nor Grant nor Stoddard found the melting pot idea appealing, as to them it signified the downfall of the American nation through the 'degeneration' of the Anglo-Saxon 'race.'

Today Stoddard is very much forgotten, as are Grant and Laughlin; in canonical American literature however, we find a clue as to his enormous popularity in the 1920s:

"Civilization's going to pieces," broke out Tom violently. "I've gotten to be a terrible pessimist about things. Have you read 'The Rise of the Colored Empires' by this man Goddard?"
"Why, no," I answered, rather surprised by his tone.
"Well, it's a fine book, and everybody ought to read it. The idea is if we don't look out the white race will be – will be utterly submerged. It's all scientific stuff; it's been proved." (Fitzgerald, *Great Gatsby* 14)

Henry Fairchild (1880-1956) is another influential figure who makes a case against what he calls "unrestricted immigration" in his influential study *The Melting-Pot Mistake* (1926), in which he argues that "the consequence of non-assimilation [to Anglo-Saxon conformity] is the destruction of nationality" (253). Fairchild refers to the melting pot as an illusion and as dangerous wishful thinking: "The figure was a clever one – picturesque, expressive, familiar, just the sort of thing to catch the popular fancy and lend itself to a thousand uses" (ibid. 10). Like many of his contemporaries with similar political views, he metaphorically equates the American nation with a tree, and immigrants with parasites, "foreign forces," and "minute hostile organisms" that "sap the very vitality of their host" (ibid. 255):

In so doing the immigrants may be merely following out their natural and defensible impulses without any hostility toward the receiving nation, any more than parasites upon a tree may be considered to have any hostility to the tree. […] The simple fact is that they are alien particles, not assimilated, and therefore wholly different from the foreign particles which the tree rakes in the form of blood, and transforms into cells of its own body. (ibid.)

This kind of crude and simplistic organicist imagery together with racist rhetoric that draws on biology in general has lastingly influenced the discourse on immigration until today.

Illustration 4: The Melting Pot, Inc.

The Ford English School Graduation Ceremony of 1916 (The Henry Ford Collections).

As has been shown, the melting pot myth became a prime target of criticism by intellectuals on the left and on the right for contradictory reasons: the pluralists argued that it was too repressive, while for the nativists, it was too inclusive. Still, the melting pot myth is a singular vision in the way that it *de*-emphasizes difference while holding the middle ground between total assimilation on the one hand and racist exclusion on the other. American journalist, novelist, and cultural critic Ernest Poole (1880-1950) describes the city of Chicago in 1910 as a "mixing-bowl for the nations" (*Voice* 554) and hails the urban melting pot as the "Tower of Babel's drama reversed" (ibid. 555). Whereas the biblical story dramatizes the production of difference as tragic dispersal, the melting pot narrative promises unification through the creation of "a new race of men upon the earth" (ibid.). Socialist writer Michael Gold (1894-1967) argues in his essay "Towards Proletarian Art" that mass immigration could fuel a melting pot of new internationalist radicalism that he describes as a "cauldron of the Revolution" (62). Yet, as much as the melting pot myth could be used to critique white Anglo-Saxon social and political dominance, it was also used to enforce the conformity of immigrants entering the American workforce. Melting pot rituals performed for example at the Ford English School for immigrant automobile factory workers in Highland Park, Michigan reveal that the melting pot myth could also serve as an instrument of corporate self-fashioning and of Americanization in the corporate interest with a clearly *anti*-revolutionary impetus. More recently, Jeffrey Eugeni-

des's novel *Middlesex* (2002) offers a literary re-telling of this kind of ritual (cf. 103-05).

In the period between the 1880s and the 1920s, discussions of the melting pot as a societal model thus became increasingly polarized, and the concept lost much of its "original elasticity" (Wilson, *Melting-Pot Modernism* 15) and critical appeal. Yet reconstructing the melting pot myth of that time allows us to see how race and racial difference gained prominence in debates on national, social, and cultural cohesion, as Gary Gerstle writes:

> We do not usually think of the 1920s, the easygoing Jazz Age, as a time when the racialized character of the American nation intensified, reinforcing the barriers separating blacks and Asians from whites, eastern and southern Europeans from "Nordics," and immigrants from natives. Yet these developments were central to the age. That the proponents of these changes frequently justified their aims in the name of science underscores the modern character of the racial regime they implemented. Indeed this regime, backed by an edifice of race law, would remain in place for forty years, persisting through the Great Depression, World War II, the affluent 1950s, and John F. Kennedy's 1960 election. It must be seen for what it was: a defining feature of modern America. (*American Crucible* 114-15)

The melting pot myth in its hegemonic version has often obscured the role of racism in American society by projecting a colorblind vision of social harmony and by obscuring ongoing inequality. For the longest time, the democratic potential of the melting pot has clearly not been realized in American society.

5. MULTIPLE MELTING POTS AND MISCEGENATION

> When push came to shove, the color line between "the Negro" and everyone else mattered far more to patrician Americans than the markers within whiteness.
> MATTHEW PRATT GUTERL, *THE COLOR OF RACE IN AMERICA*

> There is a new race in America. I am a member of this new race. It is neither white nor black nor in-between. It is the American race, differing as much from white and black as white and black differ from each other. It is possible that there are Negro and Indian bloods in my descent along with English, Spanish, Welsh, Scotch, French, Dutch, and German. This is common in America; and it is from all these strains that the American race is being born. But the old divisions into white, black, brown, red, are outworn in this country. They have had their day. Now is the time of the birth of a new order, a new vision, a new ideal of man. I proclaim this new order.
> JEAN TOOMER, "A NEW RACE IN AMERICA"

Long after its heyday in the early 20th century, the melting pot concept continued to shape public and academic debates. Ruby Kennedy's research into patterns of intermarriage led her in 1952 to propose a triple rather than single melting pot theory, as she found that in American society, Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish "pool[s]" (in other words, 'pots') functioned as "fundamental bulwarks" into which different nationalities and ethnicities 'melted' ("Single" 56). These findings were corroborated by Will Herberg's study *Protestant – Catholic – Jew* (1955), in which religion also figures as a crucial sociological factor in processes of group identity formation in American society. George Stewart's concept of the "transmuting pot" (*American Ways* 23) on the other hand is more conformist, as it assumes that "as the foreign elements, a little at a time, were added to the pot, they were not merely melted but were largely transmuted, and so did not affect the original material as strikingly as might be expected" (ibid.). Building on the research of Kennedy, Herberg, and Stewart, Milton Gordon in 1964 reviewed the divergent positions on assimilation promoting Anglo-Saxon conformity, the melting pot, and cultural pluralism, respectively, with the intent to establish an empirical approach to processes of assimilation that would not rely on a normative ideal, a political doctrine, or a vague metaphor. He dismissed the "single melting pot" as an idealistic "illusion" (*Assimilation* 129), which led him to develop it into a theory of multiple melting pots or "subsocieties" that are com-

prised not only of different religious identities (Protestant, Catholic, Jewish) but also for example (and somewhat surprisingly) of "intellectuals:"

> All these containers, as they bubble along in the fires of American life and experience are tending to produce, with somewhat differing speeds, products which are culturally very similar, while at the same time they remain structurally separate. The entire picture is one which, with the cultural qualifications already noted, may be called a "multiple melting pot." And so we arrive at the "pluralism" which characterizes the contemporary American scene. (ibid. 131)

As this quotation shows, Gordon focuses primarily on structural divisions in the composition of American society, and in that context also points out that "Negroes, Orientals, Mexican-Americans, and some Puerto Ricans are prevented by racial discrimination from participating meaningfully in either the white Protestant or the white Catholic communities" (ibid. 129). Gordon thus explicitly addresses the exclusion of African American communities from white society at a time when marriage between African Americans and whites was still legally prohibited in 22 (mostly Western and Southern) states (cf. ibid. 165) – these and other Jim Crow laws regulating racial segregation were only abolished by the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (it should be noted, however, that recently several state legislatures announced their intention to pass what would amount to neo-segregationist laws after the Supreme Court decided in *Shelby County v. Holder* on June 25 2013 that important anti-discrimination measures provided by the Voting Rights Act of 1965 were unconstitutional). Yet, somewhat symptomatically, the categories 'black' and 'negro' are not further problematized in Milton's study. Due to the one-drop rule in US cultural and legal history, an example of hypodescent that classifies as black individuals with *any* African ancestry, African American communities are racially mixed in unacknowledged ways, which led some scholars to state that the 'black' segment of the US population constitutes the only genuine melting pot in American society:

> The melting pot is hardly a suitable metaphor for a system characterized by an unstable pluralism. But – bitter irony – isn't there a sense in which the melting pot notion is more applicable within the black American nation than within the white? There was great diversity in the African origins of American Negroes: regional, linguistic, and tribal differences, as well as in their prior condition of freedom. […] Despite this diversity, however, Africans were forcibly homogenized after several generations into a fairly singular Afro-American mold with common folkways. Thus, the only American melting pot has perhaps

been a black one, though in this case the putative pot has been reluctant to call the kettle black. (Kammen, *People* 82)

It is ironic, if not outright cynical that the exclusion of those considered 'black' from the national melting pot has led to the creation of this social category of the 'black' melting pot. The horrendous violence that fuelled this particular melting pot and created this 'new' identity by eradicating all prior cultural markers from forcibly uprooted individuals makes one wonder whether the melting pot is not, after all, a metaphor of destruction. At the very least it appears as a symbol of "renouncing – often in clearly public ways – one's subjectivity, who one literally was: in name, in culture, and, as far as possible, in color" (Goldberg, "Introduction" 5).

Historically, African Americans thus were excluded from the melting pot; participants in the envisioned amalgamation process have mostly been European groups (e.g. in Zangwill's *The Melting Pot*), and even as Crèvecoeur includes Native Americans in his account of racial and cultural mixing, Natives (as well as African Americans and Asian Americans) have been mostly absent from melting pot rhetoric. In a speech held in 1919, then-president Woodrow Wilson (1856-1924) "appealed for the extension of the melting pot principle to all the nations of the world" (Saveth, *American Historians* 147) "even as he segregated government employees by race" (Browder, *Slippery Characters* 146). The policing and prohibition of racial mixing in America has amounted to what some scholars have termed "American Apartheid" (cf. Massey and Denton's book of the same title) through Jim Crow legislation, segregation based on racial discrimination, and black ghettoization across the country – which is why subnational perspectives on the melting pot myth unsurprisingly have found it exclusive rather than inclusive. 'Racial' mixing (i.e., social/sexual relations between whites and blacks) was commonly referred to as miscegenation and as such was illegal in many parts of the US for most of its history. The term 'miscegenation' was first used in 1863 in a pamphlet titled *Miscegenation: The Theory of the Blending of the Races, Applied to the American White Man and Negro* (cf. Croly), which advocated the mixing of the races; supposedly published by the Republican Party, it turned out to have been an attempt by Democrats to discredit their political opponents. Before the term miscegenation was coined, the term 'amalgamation' was in common use, but whereas 'amalgamation' could also refer to the intermixing between non-racially defined groups (e.g. Irish Catholics and Protestants), 'miscegenation' has always referred specifically to black-white relations and can be considered to be part of a particular kind of American exceptionalism:

One theme that has been pervasive in US history and literature and that has been accompanied by a 300-year long tradition of legislation, jurisdiction, protest and defiance is the deep concern about, and the attempt to prohibit, contain, or deny, the presence of black-white sexual interracial relations, interracial marriage, interracial descent, and other family relations across the powerful black-white divide. Even the term "miscegenation" is an American invention. (Sollors, "Introduction" 3)

Laws prohibiting racial mixing were passed in the colonies as early as 1664 in Maryland and 1691 in Virginia. In 1883, the US Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of anti-miscegenation laws in *Pace v. Alabama*, a decision that was overturned only in *McLaughlin v. Florida* (1964) and *Loving v. Virginia* (1967). The latter case involved Richard and Mildred Loving, who in 1958 went to Washington, D.C. to get married because interracial marriages at that time were still illegal in their home state of Virginia, where they were prosecuted for and convicted of violating the state's anti-miscegenation laws in 1959. Their sentence of one year in prison was suspended after they agreed to leave the state. Forced to leave their home and families, the Lovings decided to challenge the constitutionality of Virginia's anti-miscegenation statutes in court; after the Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals affirmed the legality of the statutes, they were finally ruled unconstitutional by the US Supreme Court in 1967 (cf. Newbeck, *Virginia*). Barack Obama reflects on this history in his memoir, *Dreams from My Father*:

Miscegenation. The word is humpbacked, ugly, portending a monstrous outcome: like *antebellum* or *octoroon*, it evokes images of another era, a distant world of horsewhips and flames, dead magnolias and crumbling porticos. […] In 1960, the year that my parents were married, *miscegenation* still described a felony in over half the states in the Union. In many parts of the South, my father could have been strung up from a tree for merely looking at my mother the wrong way; in the most sophisticated of northern cities, the hostile stares, the whispers, might have driven a woman in my mother's predicament into a back-alley abortion. […] Their very image together would have been considered lurid and perverse, a handy retort to the handful of softheaded liberals who supported a civil rights agenda.
Sure – but would you let your daughter marry one?
The fact that my grandparents had answered yes to this question, no matter how grudgingly, remains an enduring puzzle to me. (11-12)

In the history of these legal statutes, the melting pot myth becomes undone. Throughout American literature, interracial figures appear as 'tragic mulatta/os,'

i.e. stereotypical characters who decide to 'pass' as white in order to evade being subjected to an exclusionary and frequently violent racism; passing in American literature is variably interpreted as loss or treason and as a tragic metamorphosis that destabilizes one's identity and oftentimes ends in death. Troping mixed-race individuals as tragic mulatta/os who do not fully belong to any group in American society went along with the notion that unions between blacks and whites should be prohibited, or in any case avoided. When the film *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (1967) featured Hollywood's first interracial kiss, it could only be shown in the mirror of a taxi, with the taxi driver gazing through the mirror at the couple in the backseat as the only (shocked and dismayed) eyewitness. Mary Dearborn has pointed out that the taboo on miscegenation furthermore has been coded in American cultural and literary history in a way that likens racial mixing to incest (cf. *Pocahontas's Daughters* 158).

Throughout American intellectual history, writers and activists have voiced opposition to segregationist laws and practices. 19th-century writer and activist Lydia Maria Child (1802-1880) and 20th-century philosopher Hannah Arendt (1906-1975) both advocated racial mixing as a means to overcome social and racial divisions in American society. Writing on the eve of the American Civil War, Child developed plots of miscegenation in which whites and non-whites could no longer be told apart, and racial conflicts were resolved through infinite racial mixing; she thus fictionally realized "a truly egalitarian society, one in which blacks and whites in all walks of life could mingle freely and easily" (Clifford, *Crusader* 280), even though her writings, like many abolitionist texts of the 19th century, clearly reflect a white middle class ideology (cf. Karcher, "Lydia Maria Child's" 81). In the decades after the Civil War, it was particularly African American writers like Charles Chesnutt who took up the notion of a 'new race' and questioned constructions of the color line (cf. Chesnutt, "Future American" and "What Is a White Man?;" McWilliams, *Charles W. Chesnutt*). In her famous essay "Reflections on Little Rock," published about one hundred years later, Hannah Arendt provocatively remarked that school desegregation could never bring about integration and social change as long as white and black adults were not allowed to marry each other, which at that time was still legally prohibited in 29 states by laws that Arendt considered "a much more flagrant breach of letter and spirit of the Constitution than segregation of schools" (231). Werner Sollors has reconstructed the uproar this essay caused among contemporary audiences for explicitly addressing a widely accepted taboo (cf. "Introduction"), and for criticizing

> [t]he reluctance of American liberals to touch the issue of the marriage laws, their readiness to invoke practicality and shift the ground of the argument by insisting that the Negroes themselves have no interest in this matter, their embarrassment when they are reminded of what the whole world knows to be the most outrageous piece of legislation in the whole western hemisphere. (Arendt, "Reflections" 246)

Both Child and Arendt each in her own way were advocates of a melting pot that included African Americans, yet their voices have been marginalized by sanctimonious segregationists who have been in denial about the realities of human relations – as the protagonist of Warren Beatty's *Bulworth* (1998) bluntly asserts: "Everybody's fuckin' everybody else till you can't tell the difference" (qtd. in Elam, *Souls* 9).

Within the African American community, we can trace different reactions to the melting pot myth over time: accommodation with racial segregation and acceptance of restricted access to the American melting pot; harsh criticism of the melting pot ideology and its mechanisms of exclusion; a clear rejection of racial mixing with whites in an inverted discourse of racial supremacy (for instance in many publications of representatives of the Nation of Islam) based on racial pride; and, last but not least, an affirmation of a more inclusive melting pot that is explicitly multiracial and moves past the tormenting "double-consciousness" and its "two unreconciled strivings" which W.E.B. Du Bois has diagnosed for African Americans in the US (*Souls* 2).

The first position – accommodation with segregation and African Americans' exclusion from the melting pot after the Civil War – has often been associated with former slave and black intellectual Booker T. Washington (1856-1915). In the so-called Atlanta Compromise Speech given by Washington on September 18, 1895, he stated in regard to black and white interaction and coexistence that "[i]n all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress" (*Up from* 100). This analogy accepts and affirms the cultural logic of racial segregation and opts for a strategy of gradualism for which Washington was sharply criticized by some of his African American contemporaries, because they considered his position to be submissive to whites and accepting of racial discrimination.

Melvin Steinfield similarly criticizes the hypocrisy of the melting pot myth in the context of the continued exclusion of African Americans from national models of cohesion and belonging in the mid-20th century by asserting that "[e]very instance of racism or discrimination was a vivid contradiction of the myth of the Melting Pot […]," or what he calls "cracks in the Melting Pot" in his

book of the same title (xvii, xx). In his well-known poem "The Melting Pot," Dudley Randall (1914-2000) contrasts the experience of European immigrants to the US with the experience of African Americans:

> There is a magic melting pot
> where any girl or man
> can step in Czech or Greek or Scot,
> step out American.
>
> **Johann** and **Jan** and **Jean** and **Juan**,
> **Giovanni** and **Ivan**
> step in and then step out again
> all freshly christened **John**.
>
> Sam, watching, said, "Why, I was here
> even before they came,"
> and stepped in too, but was tossed out
> before he passed the brim.
>
> And every time Sam tried that pot
> they threw him out again.
> "Keep out. This is our private pot.
> We don't want your black stain."
>
> At last, thrown out a thousand times,
> Sam said, "I don't give a damn.
> Shove your old pot. You can like it or not,
> but I'll be just what I am."
> (167, emphasis in the original)

In Randall's poem, the melting pot signifies assimilation to the dominant culture (as it commonly does in modern day usage) rather than a form of hybridity: all European immigrants regardless of their ethnic backgrounds become "Johns," i.e., their Americanization amounts to Anglicization. The African American's reaction to being rejected – "But I'll be just what I am" – anticipates the development of modern Black nationalism, whose proponents responded to racial discrimination and exclusion by programmatically rejecting racial fusion with whites and thus by rejecting the melting pot logic on their own terms. African American intellectuals in the Black Power movement of the 1960s and 1970s

thus negated and ridiculed notions of racial and cultural mixing. Malcolm X for example used black coffee as a symbol for racial purity and integrity:

> It's just like when you've got some coffee that's too black, which means it's too strong. What do you do? You integrate it with cream, you make it weak. But if you pour too much cream in it, you won't even know you ever had coffee. It used to be hot, it becomes cool. It used to be strong, it becomes weak. It used to wake you up, now it puts you to sleep. ("Message" 16)

In the last decades, in which American society has been labeled "post-racial" or "post-ethnic" by critics such as David Hollinger – who has also (half-seriously) suggested that American society may be described as a "quintuple melting pot" (*Postethnic America* 24) differentiated into Euro-Americans, Asian Americans, African Americans, Hispanics, and Indigenous peoples (cf. ibid. 23) – more inclusive versions of the melting pot have been articulated that attempt to bridge the divide between blacks and whites (cf. Randall Kennedy, *Interracial Intimacies*; Elam, *Souls*). Upon the founding of the Association of MultiEthnic Americans (AMEA) in 1988, activist Carlos Fernandez quipped:

> We who embody the melting pot […] stand up […] as intolerant participants against racism from whatever quarter it may come […]. We are the faces of the future. Against the travails of regressive interethnic division and strife, we can be a solid core of unity bonding peoples together in the common course of human progress. (qtd. in Kennedy, *Interracial Intimacies* 141)

Currently, the AMEA is one of the most influential mixed race organizations; it prompted the reform that in 2000 allowed census respondents for the first time to check more than one box for racial self-identification. Activists campaigning for the recognition of multiraciality assert that they are the outcome of the 'true melting pot:' "This then is my claim: I am in all America. All America is in me" (Taylor Haizlip, *Sweeter*, epigraph). The oftentimes uncritical celebration of multi-raciality in the new mixed race literature prompts Michelle Elam to ask what the much-touted "New Amalgamationism" and the "Mulatto Millennium" (Senna qtd. in Elam, *Souls* 12) imply for *black* people in US society; the arrival of this new melting pot 'in black and white' to her is a hollow emblem of *faux* cultural and racial hybridity that invokes an 'American multiracial democracy' which seems to be serving various ideological interests: the 'multiracial American' appears to be vested with a precarious domestic exoticism more than slightly at odds with the identity politics of its representatives.

Besides European immigrants and African Americans, whose ambivalent reactions toward the melting pot myth have so far been at the center of my discussion, other groups of course have also dealt with the topic: Native American, Asian American, and Mexican American critics and writers have articulated alternative models to the melting pot such as "mestizaje" (cf. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*) and "crossblood" (cf. Vizenor, *Manifest Manners*), which emphasize the hybridity, fluidity, and multidimensionality of American identities. Owing much to theories of cultural and racial difference that had been gaining ground since the 1960s, these more recent models have strongly influenced public debates around collective identity, especially in regard to American multiculturalism, which has been hotly debated in particular during the 1980s.

6. OUT OF MANY, MANY – AMERICAN MULTICULTURALISM

> The luck so far of the American experiment has been due in large part to the vision of the melting pot.
> ARTHUR M. SCHLESINGER, *THE DISUNITING OF AMERICA*

> The point about the melting pot […] is that it did not happen.
> NATHAN GLAZER AND DANIEL PATRICK MOYNIHAN, *BEYOND THE MELTING POT*

> Hyphen: Nation
> MATTHEW FRYE JACOBSON, *ROOTS TOO*

It is in the 1960s that the (multi)cultural turn marks a shift in the perception of the melting pot myth that subsequently tends to be lumped together with models of assimilation of all kinds, in the process of which the melting pot loses all of its utopian appeal because it has since been primarily seen as a form of standardization implying the destruction of cultural variety, and has been falsely equated with assimilation. The advent of multiculturalism thus precluded any further discussion of the melting pot among the cultural left. When Gordon suggests that the multiple melting pots in American society point to cultural pluralism rather than to homogeneous Americanness (cf. *Assimilation*), he is articulating the *zeitgeist* of the 1960s, which celebrated pluralism under the banner of 'multiculturalism.' The "dawn of the new pluralism" (Feldstein and Costello, *Ordeal* 415) and the beginning of the new "age of pluralism in American public discussion" (Landsman and Katkin, "Introduction" 2) are often dated back to the publication

of Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan's influential study *Beyond the Melting Pot* in 1963. Using the melting pot concept as a shortcut to refer to various processes of assimilation, its authors contend that there never was a melting pot in the history of the US, but only distinct and diverse groups and group identities. Focussing in their study on New York City's socio-cultural composition, Glazer and Moynihan argue that even though New York City cannot be equated with the United States at large because of its "extreme" heterogeneity (*Beyond the Melting Pot* 9), it can nevertheless be regarded as the country's cultural epicenter (cf. ibid. 6). The authors find that "the negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians and Irish of New York City" are all *distinct* ethnic groups with identifiable characteristics and life patterns; even though the melting pot may have been "an idea close to the heart of an American self-image" (ibid. 288), according to Glazer and Moynihan, it has neither been realized in New York City, nor elsewhere in the US: instead, it is the "pattern of ethnicity" (ibid. 310) that they consider to be at the heart of urban politics and institutions, which is why they suggest moving "beyond the melting pot" to account for the complexities of affiliation and loyalties in the ongoing formation of a US national identity. Glazer and Moynihan's study clearly constituted a paradigm shift in the discussion of the melting pot and paved the way for the discourse of multiculturalism, i.e. the explication of the "multicultural condition" (Goldberg, "Introduction" 1) on the one hand, and the political debate on the cultural heterogeneity of the US on the other. Multiculturalism, in its programmatic version, is positioned in clear opposition to the melting pot myth: First, like cultural pluralism, multiculturalism as a political program recognizes and seeks to retain cultural difference within the US as valuable and characteristic of a collective/national American identity; second, it considers "monoculturalism" (ibid. 3) and ethnocentrism as repressive and coercive; third, multiculturalism engages in identity politics and calls for the representation and recognition of individuals and groups formerly underrepresented; fourth, it formulates a clear political agenda in terms of citizenship and access to society's resources (such as education) through, for instance, affirmative action programs. Multiculturalism calls for a pluralism based on an "ethic of toleration" (Landsman and Katkin, "Introduction" 4) and the primacy of "recognition" (cf. Gutmann, *Multiculturalism*). In the 1980s and beyond, discussions around multiculturalism were so polarized – especially in regard to canon debates and controversies around school curricula – that they have often been called veritable 'culture wars.' Rick Simonson and Scott Walker's *The Graywolf Annual Five: Multi-Cultural Literacy* (1988) for example explicitly sought to challenge E.D. Hirsch's *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (1987), which the authors found "alarmingly

deficient in its male and European bias" (Simonson and Scott, *Graywolf* 191), as well as Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987), which claimed that American education was in decline. Hirsch's selection of what he thinks an American needs to know about – for instance, act of God, Adam and Eve, John Adams, John Quincy Adams, adultery, Adonis, and *The Aeneid* – is based on a very different (humanist/universalist) notion of cultural literacy than the multicultural literacy of Simonson and Walker, who think that an American should also be knowledgeable about, for instance, the Asian Exclusion Act, action painting, Agent Orange, Alcoholics Anonymous, and Chinua Achebe.

Conservatives have denounced initiatives such as Simonson and Walker's as an "attack on the common American identity" and as an "ethnic revolt against the melting pot" (Schlesinger, *Disuniting* 119, 133); they thought that multiculturalism was overcritical of the US and its history and bred a "culture of complaint" (cf. Hughes's book of the same title) defined by intolerance and political correctness. Other critics in contrast suggested that "we are all multiculturalists now" (cf. Glazer's book of the same title), since sensibilities do have changed, and quite ubiquitously, we find the rejection of the melting pot myth and assimilation policies in favor of a celebration of the diverse cultures of America's many racial and ethnic groups (cf. Gerstle, *American Crucible* 348). As the debates around multiculturalism in American academia have ebbed, the term itself seems to have done its part: recent American studies glossaries frequently even fail to include an entry for the term multiculturalism. Moreover, a re-evaluation and critical assessment of multiculturalism has been offered by scholars such as those of the Chicago Cultural Studies Group, who critique what they call "the flattening effect typical of corporate multiculturalism" ("Critical Multiculturalism" 540); Terence Turner, who engages with "difference multiculturalism" as an impoverished version of multiculturalism (cf. "Anthropology"); Michelle Wallace, who views multiculturalism as a new institutional logic that preserves the status quo (cf. *Invisibility Blues*); Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, who argue for a "polycentric multiculturalism" that takes into account "all cultural history in relation to social power" (*Unthinking* 48); and Richard Sennett, who suggests that diversity may eventually discourage solidarity and in fact breed indifference rather than tolerance (cf. *Conscience*). Sennett reflects on this matter in his description of a walk through a New York City neighborhood; whereas Glazer and Moynihan described New York City as a space differentiated along ethnic lines, Sennett holds that the city should be a space of interaction, of *civitas* and engagement rather than what he perceives as "[a] city of differences and of fragments of life that do not connect" (ibid. 125). In Sennett's story "of the races, who live segregated lives close together, and of

social classes, who mix but do not socialize" (ibid. 128), tolerance has turned into indifference, and multiculturalism into disengagement. Sennett's account of his New York City neighborhood points to the potential problems of multiculturalism and critically re-interprets the meaning of living "in the presence of difference" (ibid. 121).

The affirmation of ethnic, often hyphenated identities has also led to an ethnic revival among those groups in American society commonly categorized as 'white' or 'non-ethnic.' Thus, it almost seems as if the melting pot not only failed to 'melt' non-white ethnic groups, but also managed to 'melt' white immigrant groups only superficially, as their third or fourth generation descendants have been coming forward to identify themselves as ethnic Americans. Early on philosopher and journalist Michael Novak in *The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics* (1972) anticipated a (re)turn to ethnicity among the lower-middle-class whites of Irish, Polish, Italian, etc. descent that had no longer been perceived as ethnic. Yet, this book about the ethnic revival among white (Catholic) Americans had – much to the discomfort of its author – a curious career: As Novak had written his book in 1972 "to divert attention from 'blacks, women, and the poor'" (Novak, *Rise* xiii), he felt uneasy about the enlistment of his study by scholars and advocates of multiculturalism in the 1970s and 1980s – so uneasy, in fact, that he felt compelled to re-issue his book in 1996 with a new introduction in which he disclaimed any affiliation with the "multiculturalists," listed what he called the "Nine Perversions of 'Multiculturalism'" (e.g. "Anti-Americanism," "Tactical Relativism," "Censorship," and "Double Standards") (Novak, *Rise* xvi-xvii), and related his conversion from the cultural left to the cultural right and to a wholehearted embrace of capitalism.

Novak's unease notwithstanding, the discussion of those white ethnics who had only seemingly melted into American society continued in the context of multiculturalism and critical whiteness studies, which analyzed the power and the limits of white privilege. Sociologist Mary Waters points in her study *Ethnic Options* to the flexibility of the category of whiteness, which may accommodate Jewish Americans, Polish Americans, or Italian Americans (to name but a few groups), but may also lead them "to misconstrue the experience of their counterparts across the color line" (36; cf. also Jacobson, *Roots*) by over-emphasizing the voluntary character of ethnic identification. The latter also resonates in David Hollinger's idealistic vision of a "post-ethnic America" that has at its basis the notion that "the identities people assume are acquired largely through affiliation, however prescribed or chosen" (*Postethnic America* 7, 12).

The new popularity and acceptance of hyphenated identities in the context of multiculturalism encompass African American, Asian American, Hispanic Ame-

rican, Native American, as well as European American groups (e.g. Irish Americans, Italian Americans, and Norwegian Americans). Matthew Jacobson relates an episode in which members of an anti-racism workshop, one by one, disown their status as white ("'I'm not white; I'm Italian;' 'I'm not white; I'm Jewish,'" etc.), leaving the teacher to wonder: "'What happened to all the white people who were here just a minute ago?'" (*Roots* 1-2). Whether in the context of immigrant genealogies or mixed race identities, at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century, ethnicity is seen largely as a way of distinction and distinctiveness, as "a distinguishing from" rather than as a "merging with" (ibid. 36). However, subnational melting pot myth revisionism is somewhat polarized: For the multiculturalists on the left, the melting pot model is unattractive because it is perceived as "the cover for the domination of one [group]" over others (Appiah, "Limits" 52), whereas cultural critics on the right have ironically become its most outspoken defenders, and have celebrated it as a genuinely American invention. Yet, contemporary critics as well as defenders of the melting pot myth operate with a very simplistic notion that equates the melting pot with assimilation and Anglo-Saxon conformity rather than with a creative, continuous, and democratic process of hybridization – i.e., both strip the idea of its transformative power. On a somewhat different note, Richard Alba and Victor Nee have recently considered the "remaking [of] the American mainstream" through processes of migration and cultural change by applying the term "assimilation" to the mainstream rather than to minorities:

> Assimilation has reshaped the American mainstream in the past, and it will do so again, culturally, institutionally, and demographically. […] Through assimilation, the mainstream has become diverse in ethnic origins of those who participate in it; and the ethnic majority group, which dominates the mainstream population, has been reconstituted. (*Remaking* 282, 284)

In their "new assimilation theory" Alba and Nee stress that the incorporation of immigrant groups in the long run always involves a transformation of the mainstream, which as a result becomes increasingly heterogeneous itself; thus, they come close to a re-interpretation of melting pot dynamics which presupposes that cultural contact leaves no one unchanged.

7. CONCLUSION

> No modern state has been constituted by a single, coherent cultural group; all have incorporated disparate and even hostile ethnicities, each with its special history, some with their own language.
> RICHARD SLOTKIN, "UNIT PRIDE"

Even if Arthur M. Schlesinger in an attempt to identify the cornerstones of American exceptionalism has listed the melting pot among America's ten great contributions to civilization (cf. *Disuniting*), the melting pot myth was not an American invention: Israel Zangwill, who popularized the concept in the US and abroad, was a British Jew whose play *The Melting Pot* entails a transnational vision that negotiates Jewish identity in the diaspora and the role of Judaism in America.

In a scholarly context, a transnational perspective on the melting pot was articulated as early as 1911 in the writings of anthropologist Franz Boas, who did not question the American melting pot as such, yet doubted its exceptionality:

> It is often claimed that the phenomenon of mixture presented in the United States is unique; that a similar intermixture has never occurred before in the world's history; and that our nation is destined to become what some writers choose to term a "mongrel" nation in a sense that has never been equalled anywhere. When we try to analyze the phenomenon in greater detail, and in the light of our knowledge of conditions in Europe as well as in other continents, this view does not seem to me tenable. ("Race Problems" 320)

Boas points to historical evidence of intermixture as the rule rather than the exception in the European context, which could be traced as far back as the Migration Period (*Völkerwanderung*). In historical perspective, nation-building is quite a recent phenomenon, while intermarriage seems to be quite an old one.

On a transnational, i.e. comparative note, again, we may conclude that whereas the melting pot myth has been central to American self-representations throughout the centuries and into the present, it is by no means a concept that can only be found in the US; melting pot rhetoric has for example also been used in Russian and in Israeli political culture in the context of current immigration debates (cf. Nahshon, Introductory Essay 211). In Israel, "Mizug Galuyot," i.e. the integration of different communities of immigrants from the Jewish diaspora into Israeli society, can be considered to be the Israeli equivalent of the melting pot model, and the national policy of the "ingathering of exiles" has led to political and sociological discussions about cultural pluralism and ethnic separatism

in modern Israeli society with at times explicit reference to Zangwill's work (cf. Krausz, *Studies*).

Even if the melting pot already seemed to be "a closed story, an unfashionable concept, a version of repressive assimilation in the service of cultural homogenization" (Wilson, *Melting-Pot Modernism* 14), it has once again been revitalized in political and scholarly debates following 9/11. *Reinventing the Melting Pot*, an essay collection published in 2004, may serve as an example that relates the events of 9/11 directly to problems of American identity, society, politics, and culture; 9/11, according to the collection's editor, triggered intensified "soul-searching" about "what it meant to be American" (Jacoby, "What It Means" 293). Critics such as Peter Salins refer to "the need [post 9/11] to reaffirm our commitment to the American concept of assimilation" (*Assimilation* 103) and call for "a more forthright discussion of what needs to be done to sustain e pluribus unum for the generations to come" (ibid. 107). In Jacoby's strange collection, we also find the continued conflation of melting pot logic with assimilation to Americanism. Developments since 9/11 have clearly shown that US "racial nationalism" has not been laid to rest (cf. Gerstle, *American Crucible* 368-371) but has been merely reconfigured to create new patterns of exclusion (cf. Bakalian and Bozorgmehr, *Backlash 9/11*; Peek, *Behind the Backlash*). Post-9/11 racism and xenophobia clearly touch on the melting pot myth: In 2001, Gary Gerstle predicted that "tensions with […] Islamic fundamentalist groups abroad, could easily generate antagonism toward […] Muslim Americans living in the United States, thus aiding those seeking to sharpen the sense of American national identity" (*American Crucible* 371). A comment by rock musician and activist Ted Nugent titled "Multicultural Rot in the Melting Pot," which was printed in the *Washington Post* on March 4, 2011, confirms Gerstle's prediction, as Nugent claims that Islam seeks to dominate the West and warns that the "culture war is on, whether they [i.e. politicians] like it or not." Nugent rehashes some of the arguments brought forward by Samuel Huntington in his *The Clash of Civilizations*, a book which amounts to an antithetical configuration to the melting pot myth on a global scale. Huntington challenges and modifies the melting pot myth both for the US and for a transnational context as he declares the end, i.e. the failure of the melting pot with regard to Islam and Muslims in American society; Huntington's ideas, which "more closely resemble nativist ravings than scholarly assessment" (Glenn, "Critics"), uncannily return us to the discussions around cultural, racial, and religious differences that had already accompanied immigration processes one hundred years prior to Huntington's polemic.

The visions of the melting pot as a model for American society were radical at the time they were first articulated; as limited as they may have been in other ways, they put into question fixed and static notions of collective American identity as well as notions of Anglo-Saxon dominance and conformity. Presently, the critical potential of the melting pot needs to be reassessed as a model into which both subnational and transnational perspectives are inscribed. The melting pot is a myth that rejects narratives of purity and potentially also simplistic and one-sided notions of assimilation. As I have pointed out, the melting pot has become "the standard metaphor for cultural hybridization" (Hansen, *Lost Promise* 98); in postcolonial studies (cf. e.g. Bhabha, *Location*), the preoccupation with hybridity can be seen as a return to melting pot theories under the arch of poststructuralism. Over all, as a somewhat skewed metaphor for processes of individual and collective identity formation that are understood as dynamic, provisional, and without closure or final result, the melting pot seems to echo less in theories of assimilation than in theories of hybridization and creolization in an increasingly globalized world (cf. Hannerz, *Transnational Connections*; Appadurai, *Modernity*; Pieterse, "Globalisation").

To end on a lighter note: Philip Gleason lists many culinary manifestations and replacements of the melting pot, like stew, soup, salad, and salad bowl (*Speaking* 14), as well as Karl E. Meyer's "pressure cooker" (*New America* 119). The Melting Pot is now also a chain of franchised fondue restaurants which by picking that name literalized the metaphor and recharged the melting pot's culinary dimension that it has had all along. The melting pot as a corporate brand projects its name as a euphemistic symbol of a shared culinary feast engaged in by those who can afford to consume in rather than be consumed by a globalized world.

8. STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What are the key differences between the melting pot myth and foundational myths that focus on historical personae? Why should we consider the melting pot as a foundational myth of the US?
2. Describe different versions of the melting pot myth and contextualize them historically. Who is included and who is excluded when and why?
3. How does melting pot rhetoric describe the interaction between whites and indigenous populations in North America in the early republic, and how does it refer to the interaction between the American-born population and immigrants in the Progressive Era? Discuss similarities and differences.
4. Contrast the melting pot as a national model with notions of assimilation and ideas of cultural pluralism.
5. Zangwill's play *The Melting Pot* uses a romance plot to overcome 'old world' histories and differences. Discuss the suitability of romantic discourse for the affirmation of the melting pot myth.
6. What role does religion play in melting pot rhetoric, past and present?
7. Discuss the notion of a 'black' melting pot in the US in light of the one-drop rule, notions of 'passing,' and mixed-race discourses. Check and discuss the following websites: Eurasiannation.com, Mixedfolks.com.
8. Discuss the metaphors of musicality that have been used to evoke the melting pot idea. What are the implications of music, singing, orchestra, and symphony for the way a new collective is imagined? Listen to Dvořák's *New World Symphony* and reflect on its structure and instrumentation. Does it convey the idea of a 'melting' of differences?
9. How does the melting pot myth connect to postcolonial theories of hybridity with regard to its approach to difference?
10. Can you identify transnational dimensions of the melting pot myth and/or comparable concepts in other national and international contexts? Explore, for instance, the notion of "the cosmic race" envisioned by José Vasconcelos for the Americas in his "La Raza Cósmica" (1925). How can we relate it to the melting pot myth?

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