

# Whiteness Limited: Racialization and the Social Construction of “Peripheral Europeans”

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*In a brief critical analysis of recent problematizations of whiteness, I suggest that feminist theory and anti-racism often revert to essentialist understandings of “race”, whereas the new social history is more consistent with a constructionist approach. Considerable literature on the racialization of Irish immigrants in the United States and the analysis of how the Irish “became white” should not necessarily form the template by which other peripheral Europeans responded to their “racial” assignment. Racial assignments do not automatically produce racial identities, and in some cases they lead to the creation of national identities. The Ukrainian diaspora in North America serves as an illustrative example. Even though they were constructed as racial others by dominant elites in North America during the early years of the twentieth century, Ukrainians responded to their racialized status by asserting claims to a national identity. This argument raises large issues regarding the articulation of racism and nationalism.*

*Dans une brève analyse critique des récentes problématiques de la blancheur, l’auteur est d’avis que la théorie féministe et l’antiracisme se réduisent souvent à des notions essentialistes de « race », alors que la nouvelle histoire sociale vibre davantage au diapason d’une démarche constructionniste. Les écrits sur la racialisation des immigrants irlandais aux États-Unis et l’analyse de la façon dont les Irlandais sont « devenus blancs » ne devraient pas nécessairement faire office de modèle applicable à d’autres Européens périphériques d’Amérique du Nord. L’imposition du substantif « race » par d’autres ne génère pas automatiquement des identités raciales, aboutissant parfois à la création d’identités nationales. La diaspora ukrainienne d’Amérique du Nord est un exemple typique à cet égard. Bien*

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*que les élites dominantes d'Amérique du Nord les ait caractérisés d'« autres raciaux » au tout début du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, les Ukrainiens réagirent à leur statut racialisé en s'appropriant une identité nationale. Cet argument soulève de grandes questions sur l'articulation du racisme et du nationalisme.*

WITHIN THE SOCIAL sciences and humanities there is an emerging consensus that there is no biological reality to “race” and that understandings of “racial” categorizations and differences are most properly cast within a broadly defined social constructionist tradition. Within this tradition, “race” is not something that *is*, but rather is something that is socially created, negotiated, and reproduced. The conceptual focus of this approach is probably best captured by the concept of *racialization*, which refers to processes by which meanings and social significance are “attributed to particular biological features of human beings, as a result of which individuals may be assigned to a general category of persons which reproduces itself biologically”.<sup>1</sup>

The main focus of the early constructionist approaches to “race” and racialization was the analysis of how and why certain groups were defined as “racially” different from, and inferior to, whites. Research tended to focus on how, why, and with what consequences certain groups were defined as black, non-white, and racially inferior. Recently, however, whites and whiteness have been added to studies of “race” and racialization. Increasing attention has been paid not only to racialized processes of inferiorization, but also to racialized processes of superordination. Whiteness has come to be recognized as a socially constructed category of both “racial” assignment and “racial” identity. As one of many writers has now put it: “racial identities are not only Black, Latino, Asian, Native American and so on; they are also white.”<sup>2</sup> Thus, new questions have been posed regarding how and why certain groups assert whiteness as an identity, how and why groups become accepted as white, and the correlates and consequences of whiteness.

Three scholarly strands have helped contribute to the problematization of whiteness: feminist theory, anti-racism, and the new social history of “race” and immigration. The brief critical analysis of these presented here is not comprehensive, but is instead meant to point to some of the conceptual difficulties, as well as opportunities, associated with recent problematizations of whiteness. As part of that critical analysis, I suggest that feminist theory and anti-racism often revert to essentialist understandings of “race”, whereas the new social history is more consistent with a constructionist approach. The considerable literature on the racialization of Irish immigrants in the United

1 Robert Miles, *Racism* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 76; Stephen Small, *Racialized Barriers: The Black Experience in the United States and England* (London: Routledge, 1994); Vic Satzewich, *Racism and the Incorporation of Foreign Labour: Farm Labour Migration to Canada* (London: Routledge, 1991).

2 Fusco (1989), cited in David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 6.

States and the analysis of how the Irish “became white” should not necessarily form the template by which other peripheral Europeans responded to their “racial” assignment. Drawing on literature on the articulation of racism and nationalism, I argue that racial assignments do not automatically produce racial identities, and that in some cases racial assignments lead to the creation of national identities. The case of the Ukrainian diaspora in North America is an illustrative example. Even though they were constructed as racial others by dominant elites in North America during the early years of the twentieth century, Ukrainians responded to their racialized status by asserting claims to a national identity. The statelessness of Ukrainians and the diaspora condition led first-wave Ukrainians to assert a national origin rather than a racial identity based on their presumed whiteness.

### **Problematizing Whiteness**

For much of the twentieth century, whiteness has been “positioned as existing outside of the political and economic forces that seem to shape other racialized identities”.<sup>3</sup> Whiteness was rarely understood as a particular form of racialized identity that was worthy of scholarly analysis, let alone in need of explanation. As David Roediger points out, however, there was an exception.<sup>4</sup> The scholarly problematization of whiteness actually goes back at least 70 years to the writings of Cyril Briggs, W. E. B. DuBois, and other African-American writers who tried to reverse the discourse about the source of the so-called “colour problem” in the United States. Among other things, they pointed out that “race” in the United States was not a “Negro problem” but rather a “white problem”, and that white identities, attitudes, and values needed to be explained as much as black identities, attitudes, and values. It is unclear why this problematization of whiteness did not become dominant in the United States, but it likely had something to do with the messengers. Since black scholars and intellectuals were advancing these arguments, it was easier for white academics to marginalize and dismiss their ideas as self-serving. Thus, for many years, talking about and analysing “race” was usually reserved for people defined as non-white. While considerable research was done on the prejudicial and racist attitudes and discriminatory practices of white people,<sup>5</sup> discussions of “race problems” tended to be dominated by questions surrounding the way in which negatively racialized groups’ cultures, attitudes, histories, and behaviours limited social integration into dominant societies. Whiteness was therefore rendered as both invisible and natural.

Over the past decade and a half there has been a virtual explosion in the

3 Alastair Bonnett, “Construction of Whiteness in European and American Anti-Racism”, in Rodolfo D. Torres, Louis F. Miron, and Jonathan Xavier Inda, eds., *Race, Identity and Citizenship: A Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), p. 200.

4 Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*.

5 Annie Phizacklea and Robert Miles, *Labour and Racism* (London: Routledge, 1980).

amount of discussion and research on and about whites and whiteness, and part of the reason for this is the larger shift away from categoric analyses to historical and processual ones. Indeed, "through the efforts of literary and film critics, historians, sociologists, and ... anthropologists, whiteness, as an analytical object, is being established as a powerful means of critiquing the reproduction and maintenance of systems of racial inequality."<sup>6</sup> There are a number of different ways in which whiteness has recently been made more visible, and problematic, within both the academic world and socio-political debate.

In the early 1980s, the concept of whiteness gained further legitimacy, and in a certain sense illegitimacy, in debates within feminist theory and politics. Feminist thinkers recognized the social reality of whiteness as a racialized identity. White identities were conceptually on par with other racialized identities. The recognition of the social significance of racialized white identities led to complex debates about representation, voice, and meaning.<sup>7</sup> In many of these debates, black, non-white, and third-world feminists voiced serious concerns about the interests, attitudes, and values of white feminists. Within certain circles of both feminist research and praxis, white women came to be seen as the carriers not only of class privilege, but also of false universalism and inherent racism. White women were seen by some women of colour, and by some white women themselves, as incapable of breaking out of their own racist assumptions about black and other racialized women; as pursuing issues that they claimed were for the promotion of the interests of all women but which in fact reflected the more narrow interests of white women; as illegitimately speaking on behalf of black women; as appropriating the voice of women of colour; and as incapable of understanding the weight of racial oppression.<sup>8</sup>

As Alastair Bennett argues, these arguments within the feminist movement helped contribute to a literature of "white confession". One of the most powerful confessions was contained in Peggy McIntosh's 1988 article "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Women's Studies". In that article, McIntosh likened whiteness and white privilege to an "invisible backpack" consisting of "unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which

6 John Hartigan, Jr., "Establishing the Fact of Whiteness", in Torres *et al.*, eds., *Race, Identity, and Citizenship, and Racial Situations: Class Predicaments of Whiteness in Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 184; Tom Dunk, "Racism, Ethnic Prejudice, Whiteness and the Working Class", in Vic Satzewich, ed., *Racism and Social Inequality in Canada* (Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishers, 1998).

7 See Allison Jagger and Paula Rothenberg, eds., *Feminist Frameworks* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993).

8 Radha Jhappan, "Post-Modern Race and Gender Essentialism or a Post-Mortem of Scholarship", *Studies in Political Economy*, vol. 51 (Fall 1996), pp. 15–63; Diava Stasiulis, "Feminist Intersectional Theorizing", in Peter Li, ed., *Race and Ethnic Relations in Canada*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1999).

I was 'meant' to remain oblivious".<sup>9</sup> Certainly when students read the article in my courses on race and ethnicity, many come away with intense feelings of discomfort, guilt, and shame. Many claim that they never realized how their whiteness was so socially significant and proceed to reinterpret selected aspects of their own biographies in terms of their newly discovered white privilege. Others come to the realization that, even though they may not possess or express overtly racist attitudes, they nevertheless participate in highly racialized narratives of social life.

The debate about whiteness within the feminist movement has been bitter<sup>10</sup> and has led to casualties on both sides. It has led some self-defined white women to withdraw from the feminist movement and certain fields of analysis; alternatively it has led others to adopt "a sort of vicarious essentialism featuring self-effacement and deference to those who claim the relevant identities".<sup>11</sup>

During the late 1980s and 1990s, whiteness also became problematized within the anti-racist movement in Europe and North America.<sup>12</sup> In that movement, "whiteness is ... employed as both the conceptual center and the 'other' of anti-racism; the defining, normative term of anti-racist praxis and theory". As in feminist debates, being white is inscribed with considerable social significance. In fact, in certain formulations, whiteness tends to be seen as a fixed and immutable attribute that is accompanied by a clearly identifiable culture.<sup>13</sup> As Bonnett puts it, some of the standard cultural correlates of whiteness tend to include "being racist; not experiencing racism; being an oppressor; not experiencing oppression; silencing; and not being silenced".<sup>14</sup>

These ways of problematizing whiteness have been positive insofar as they have contributed to the recognition that whites and whiteness are also inherent aspects of racialized processes, discourses, and ideologies. Placing whiteness on the same conceptual terrain as other racialized categories and identities has also led to greater sensitivity surrounding the dynamics of power and privilege. However, these ways of highlighting the social significance of whiteness are also troubling because of how they tend to frame "the problem". One of the main difficulties with these renderings of the social significance of whiteness is that they tend to fall back on old essentialist and reified understandings of "race". Ironically, at the same time as social constructionist understandings of "race" are now the norm and scholars are crit-

9 Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women's Studies", *Working Paper No. 189, Wellesley College for Research on Women* (Wellesley: Wellesley College Center for Research on Women, 1988), p. 1.

10 Vijay Agnew, *Resisting Discrimination: Women from Asia, Africa and the Caribbean and the Women's Movement in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).

11 Jhappan, "Post-Modern Race and Gender Essentialism", pp. 54-55.

12 Bonnett, "Constructions of Whiteness", p. 200.

13 Hartigan, Jr., "Establishing the Fact of Whiteness", p. 187.

14 Bonnett, "Constructions of Whiteness", p. 206.

ically deconstructing notions of “race” and blackness, in these areas whiteness tends to be seen as a fixed, natural, taken-for-granted, and largely negative attribute. The delineation of the many negative attributes of whiteness that has been such an important part of feminist and anti-racist discourse seems to imply that the consciousness, experiences, and attitudes of white people are identifiable, predetermined, and immune to change.<sup>15</sup> As Hartigan notes, the notions of white culture that form part of the discourse of whiteness come “dangerously close to undermining the basis of social constructionist views of race because the conviction that there are no inherent affinities between people sharing a collective racial identity is destabilized by such a singular, unified definition of whiteness”.<sup>16</sup> In other words, whiteness has become a stigmatized birthmark that is seen to structure many aspects of individual experiences, consciousness, and identity.

These are not the only ways in which whiteness has been problematized. Yet another, arguably more productive way in which whiteness has become part of both scholarly and political debate comes from the new social history of immigration and “race”.<sup>17</sup> In this literature whiteness is analysed as both an assigned “racial” category and a “racial” identity.<sup>18</sup> Whiteness is not regarded as a monolithic, permanent, and enduring racial category and identity, but rather as a category and identity that is historically, geographically, and socially contingent and made up of various gradations and meanings. In this problematic, questions of how and why some groups get access to the private club of whiteness take precedence over the delineation of the attributes of whites and assessments of their inherent abilities and limitations as racialized subjects. In other words, interesting historical and sociological questions are posed regarding how and why certain groups become accepted as “white”, how and why they adopt white identity claims, and what consequences those identity claims have for social relations.

Much of the stimulus to this approach owes its debt to the recognition that the current tendency to equate “white” with “European” masks a complex social and historical process of racialization. Omi and Winant claim that the

15 Bonnett, “Constructions of Whiteness”.

16 Hartigan, Jr., “Establishing the Fact of Whiteness”, p. 185.

17 Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*; Theodore Allen, *The Invention of the White Race* (New York: Verso, 1994); Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (London: Routledge, 1995); Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1998). But for slightly different angles, see also Franca Iacovetta, *Such Hardworking People: Italian Immigrants in Post-War Toronto* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992); Panikos Panayi, ed, *Racial Violence in Britain: 1840–1950* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1993), especially Panayi, “Anti-German Riots in Britain During the First World War” and “Anti-Immigrant Riots in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Britain”; Panikos Panayi, *Immigration, Ethnicity and Racism in Britain, 1815–1945* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994); Phizacklea and Miles, *Labour and Racism*; Kenneth Lunn, “Immigration and Reaction in Britain, 1880–1950: Rethinking the Legacy of Empire”, in Jan Lucassen and Leo Lucassen, eds., *Migration, Migration History, History* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1997).

18 Brodtkin, *How Jews Become White Folks*.

processes of class formation and racial formation in American political culture produced "the institutionalization of a racial order that drew a colour line *around* rather than *within* Europe".<sup>19</sup> However, as Jacobson suggests, in the United States between the 1840s and the 1920s, "it was not at all clear just where that line ultimately *would* be drawn".<sup>20</sup> Many of the European groups that are now routinely thought of as white were far from being considered white as little as two or three generations ago. For much of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, scholars, politicians, trade union leaders, captains of business, and members of the public in North America and Europe thought of Europe as being made up of a plurality of "races" that were inherently different from each other.<sup>21</sup> Whether one analyses the images and discourses of science, common sense, politics, or popular culture (categories that are not mutually exclusive), there was considerably less certainty about the "racial" homogeneity of Europeans than seems to exist now. Groups from the southern and eastern periphery of Europe were particularly prone to racialized othering, but so too were members of the working class and peasantry in western Europe.<sup>22</sup> The subsequent transformation of "Europeans" into whites was neither natural nor inevitable, and in many ways it was the outcome of political, economic, and ideological struggle.

The racial otherness of peripheral Europeans has been long recognized by American scholars. Historian John Higham noted that, during the late nineteenth century, there was an "extension to European nationalities of that sense of absolute difference which already divided white Americans from people of other colors. When sentiments analogous to those already discharged against Negroes, Indians, and Orientals spilled over into anti-European channels, a force of tremendous intensity entered the stream of American nativism."<sup>23</sup> Higham's classic study sought to demonstrate that the "racial ferment" of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in the United States infected both popular culture and the world of science and left no groups from the southern and eastern periphery of Europe untouched. However, as Jacobson argues, Higham was incorrect in emphasizing that the late nineteenth century saw a shift "toward racism". In questioning Higham's

19 Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States* (London: Routledge, 1986), p. 65.

20 Matthew Fryc Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 7.

21 Douglas A. Lorimer, *Colour, Class and the Victorians: English Attitudes to the Negro in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1978); Michael Banton, *Racial Theories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Robert Miles, *Racism After "Race Relations"* (London: Routledge, 1993); Panayi, ed., *Racial Violence in Britain*.

22 Collette Guillaumin, *Racism, Sexism, Power and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1995); Robert Miles, *Racism* (London: Routledge, 1989); Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation and Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London: Verso, 1991).

23 John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism* (New York: Athencum Press, 1955), p. 132.

characterization of the timing of the racialization of Europeans from southern and eastern Europe, Jacobson argues that “race” was central to the entire history of European migration to the United States.

“Fitness for self-government”, a racial attribute whose outer property was whiteness, became encoded in a naturalization law that allowed Europeans unrestricted immigration and their unhindered male civic participation. It is solely because of their race that they were permitted entrance. But the massive influx borne of this “liberal” immigration policy, in its turn, generated a new perception of some Europeans’ *unfitness* for self-government, now rendered racially in a series of sub categorical white groupings — Celt, Slav, Hebrew, Iberic, Mediterranean and so on — white Others of a supreme Anglo-Saxondom.<sup>24</sup>

Much of the recent literature on the social and historical transformation of peripheral Europeans into whites comes from the United States. So far, Irish immigrants seem to be archetypes of the process of becoming white, although other research has also focused on Italians<sup>25</sup> and Jews.<sup>26</sup> There are a number of major studies in which Irish immigrants and their descendants in the United States are central characters in the analysis of whiteness: David Roediger’s *Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*; Noel Ignatiev’s *How the Irish Became White*; and Theodore Allen’s *The Invention of the White Race*. The story of the Irish in the United States is now reasonably familiar. In the early nineteenth century, the social, intellectual, cultural, and political capacities of Irish immigrants and their descendants were racially defined in ways that were little different from those in which the black population of the United States was defined. In popular culture, politics, and racial science of the day, the Irish were regarded as racial others whose presence constituted a significant threat to American democracy. As Roediger puts it: “*low browed and savage, groveling and bestial, lazy and wild, simian and sensual* — such were the adjectives used by many native born Americans to describe the Catholic Irish ‘race’ in the years before the Civil War.”<sup>27</sup>

As we know from the work of Roediger and Ignatiev, the Irish underwent a rather remarkable transformation during the course of the nineteenth century. They were able to renegotiate their externally imposed label, assert a white identity, and come to be accepted as members of the “white race”. Once having been accepted as white, they turned around and became some

24 Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, p. 42.

25 Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*; Donna Gabaccia, “The ‘Yellow Peril’ and the ‘Chinese of Europe’”: Global Perspectives on Race and Labour, 1815–1930”, in Lucassen and Lucassen, eds., *Migrations, Migration History, History*.

26 Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks*.

27 Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*, p. 133.



of the most vigorous defenders of whiteness. In many cases, their defence of their newly acquired whiteness put them at the forefront of hostilities and conflicts with black people. In explaining the way in which the Irish became accepted and then protected their status as whites, Roediger focuses on a combination of political and social psychological considerations.

The making of the Irish worker into a white worker was thus a two-sided process. On the one hand ... Irish immigrants won acceptance as whites among the larger American population. On the other hand ... the Irish themselves came to insist on their own whiteness and on white supremacy. The success of the Irish in being recognized as white resulted largely from the political power of the Irish and other immigrant voters. The imperative to define themselves as white came but from the particular "public and psychological wages" whiteness offered to a desperate rural and often pre-industrial Irish population coming to labor in industrializing America.<sup>28</sup>

The case of the Irish in the United States offers a compelling account of how and why a racialized group of peripheral Europeans was able to renegotiate their status within the white/ non-white racial dichotomy. But to what extent should the Irish experience of whiteness in the United States form the template by which we understand the social construction of whiteness for other peripheral Europeans? Was whiteness a universal aspiration for the peripheral Europeans who were subject to various kinds of racisms in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries?

David Roediger himself expresses caution about over-generalizing from the Irish case.<sup>29</sup> He and Barrett argue that, while in the United States the Irish became leaders in the crusade for white supremacy,

New immigrant leaders never approximated that path. With a large segment of both [political] parties willing to vouch for the possibility of speedy, orderly Americanization and with neither party willing to vouch unequivocally for their racial character, Southern and Eastern Europeans tried to change the subject from whiteness to nationality and loyalty to American ideals.

They suggest that "what might be termed an *abstention from whiteness* ... characterized the practice of rank-and-file East Europeans".<sup>30</sup>

While not fully developed, their observation raises important questions about the role of the "homeland" in the politics of identity for racialized groups from the southern and eastern periphery of Europe. Their observation

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 137.

<sup>29</sup> James Barrett and David Roediger, "Inbetween Peoples: Race, Nationality, and the 'New Immigrant' Working Class", in N. Yetman, ed., *Majority and Minority: The Dynamics of Race and Ethnicity in American Life* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1999).

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 158.

also raises questions about the theoretical relationship between racism and nationalism.<sup>31</sup> Theorists like Benedict Anderson and Tom Nairn argue that racism and nationalism are contradictory ideologies.<sup>32</sup> They suggest that racism speaks of inherent and eternal differences between peoples, despite class, gender, or other similarities; nationalism on the other hand speaks of the inherent unity of a people, despite class, gender, or other differences. Miles, however, notes the possibility of the articulation of racism and nationalism. In other words, in some historical circumstances, nationalist identity claims can be overlaid with racism, suggesting that the two ideologies may be more complementary than allowed by Anderson and Nairn. However, Barrett and Roediger's observation suggests yet another form of articulation of racism with nationalism.<sup>33</sup> In some circumstances, externally imposed racial assignments may lead to the development of self-generated claims to national identity. In other words, the social construction of a group as a racial "other" does not necessarily lead members of that group to develop an identity that seeks inclusion within the dominant racializing group. Their observation can be illustrated in more detail by the case of Ukrainians in North America, which indicates that whiteness was not necessarily a universal aspiration of all racialized peripheral Europeans.

### **Peripheral Europeans and the Abstention from Whiteness:**

#### **The Case of Ukrainians**

The case of Ukrainians in North America is interesting because it raises questions about how national identity claims seemed to take priority over "racial" identity claims for a group that was constructed as a racial other. Much of the struggle over Ukrainians' identity in North America focused on national identities that legitimized larger claims for statehood rather than on their "race". In struggling to assert national identities, their main opponents tended to be groups of other peripheral Europeans who came from the same regions and territories. Rather than seeking inclusion in the larger category of "whites", they sought to differentiate themselves from other groups which laid competing claims for their identities, loyalties, and resources. Often, the most bitterly fought battles were not over whiteness, but rather over how they were different from others who asserted alternative claims to national identity. While more research is needed on this issue, I suggest that Ukrainians were rather indifferent to debates about whiteness and about where they "fit" within larger racialized cosmologies. For first-generation Ukrainians and their descendants in North America, one main concern was to establish "Ukrainian" as a legitimate identity.

Political, economic, and labour elites within North America displayed

31 Miles, *Racism*.

32 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983); Tom Nairn, *The Break-up of Britain* (London: Verso, 1981).

33 Barrett and Roediger, "Inbetween Peoples".

considerable ambivalence regarding the long-term desirability of Ukrainian immigrants. The stateless Ukrainians — incorporated into the Tsarist Russian empire — were at the physical and symbolic periphery of Europe, and thus there was plenty of ambiguity about who they were and the long-term implications of their presence in North America. In both Canada and the United States, pre-existing racialized discourses were superimposed upon the Ukrainian immigrants to make sense of who they were.

At the time, “race” cut both ways. Supporters and opponents alike framed their commentary on Ukrainian immigrants and immigration in highly racialized terms. Perhaps the best-known and most influential booster of the Ukrainian immigrant within Canadian government circles was Clifford Sifton, the Minister of the Interior between 1896 and 1905.<sup>34</sup> Sifton likened Ukrainian peasants to beasts of burden, but, for people like Sifton, even beasts of burden had their place in the process of the expansion of the frontier of settlement. A number of years after he left his Department of Interior portfolio, while debates about “the quality” of immigrants were still raging in Canada, Sifton justified his earlier promotion of Ukrainian immigration in the following terms:

When I speak of quality I have in mind something that is quite different from what is in the mind of the average writer or speaker upon the question of immigration. I think a stalwart peasant in a sheepskin coat, born on the soil, whose forefathers have been farmers for ten generations, with a stout wife and half-dozen children, is good quality.<sup>35</sup>

Among opponents, despite the scanty knowledge about who these people were, there was almost universal agreement that they were “racial” others. One influential Canadian commentator, drawing on an observation made by a like-minded American, explained in considerable detail where people from southern and eastern Europe fit into the larger racial cosmology:

A line drawn across the continent of Europe from northeast to southwest, separating the Scandinavian Peninsula, the British Isles, Germany, and France from Russia, Austria-Hungary, Italy, and Turkey, separates countries not only of distinct races but also of distinct civilizations. It separates Protestant Europe from Catholic Europe; it separates countries of representative institutions and popular government from absolute monarchies; it separates lands where education is universal from lands where illiteracy predominates; it separates manufacturing countries, progressive agriculture, and skilled labour from primitive hand industries, backward agriculture, and unskilled labour; it separates an educated, thrifty peasantry from a peasantry scarcely a single generation removed

<sup>34</sup> John Lehr, “Peopling the Prairies with Ukrainians”, in Lubomyr Luciuk and Stella Hryniuk, eds., *Canada’s Ukrainians: Negotiating an Identity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991).

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

from serfdom; it separates the Teutonic race from Latin, Slav, Semitic, and Mongolian races.<sup>36</sup>

A politically significant portion of the Anglo-Canadian and American elites wanted to keep these North American countries white, and so were sceptical of whether Ukrainians could ever think, be, or act white. The main point of contention between those who voiced concerns over immigration flows was whether Ukrainians' racial otherness was permanent, or whether they could eventually be transformed into Canadians and Americans. Supporters like Sifton felt that they could be assimilated, but detractors felt that the "hordes" of Galicians, Bukovynians, and Ruthenians were of decidedly inferior "racial" stock, and any government policy that facilitated their entry would spell ruin for North America.

In Canada, these racialized anxieties focused particularly on the dangers of the bloc settlements.<sup>37</sup> In 1897 the *Nor'Wester* newspaper explained:

It is a positive misfortune for an enlightened community to be handicapped by having a cargo of these people settled in or near it. Both economically and socially they will lower the standard of citizenship. If they are put in colonies by themselves, they will be still less susceptible to progressive influences; and the districts where the colonies are located will be shunned by desirable immigrants. Not only are they useless economically and repulsive socially, but they will constitute a serious political danger. They are ignorant, priest ridden and purchasable. In the hands of a practical politician, a few thousand of such votes will decide the political representation of the province.... All who are interested in the progress of Manitoba should protest more vigorously against the further importation of such a dangerous element.<sup>38</sup>

Thus, while bloc settlements were regarded favourably within government circles, for the wider Canadian public and many Canadian politicians this style of settlement was a recipe for disaster. It was believed that Ukrainians and other peripheral Europeans who settled in such close physical proximity to each other would never have to assimilate into an Anglo-Canadian way of life. The bloc settlements would enable members of these groups to continue to interact in their own language, maintain traditional patterns of culture and behaviour, and remove any reason to rub shoulders with, and learn from, superior races.<sup>39</sup>

In the industrialized, coal-mining centres in the eastern United States, hostility directed toward Ukrainian and other eastern European immigrants was

36 Cited in Brian Osborne, "'Non-Preferred' People: Inter-war Ukrainian Immigration to Canada", in Luciuk and Hryniuk, eds., *Canada's Ukrainians*, p. 85.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 95.

38 Cited in Lehr, "Peopling the Prairies with Ukrainians", p. 39.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 38.

no less vicious than on the Canadian prairie.<sup>40</sup> While much of the American anxiety over Ukrainians was rooted in labour market competition, some concern also stemmed from their socialist and left-leaning politics. However, both forms of hostility took a racialized form, and, not unlike the case of Canada, Ukrainian immigrants were often regarded as “the scum of the continent” who “diseased” the upstanding communities within which English, Scottish, Irish, Welsh, Germans, and Americans lived.<sup>41</sup>

This kind of hostile ideological climate often became translated into “everyday racism” directed against Ukrainians and other eastern European immigrants. As for other racialized groups, biographical and autobiographical accounts of the first wave of Ukrainian immigrants are full of stories of racist insults, slights, and degradations when it came to interpersonal interactions with members of majority groups, as well as various kinds of social exclusions and discriminatory treatment. Some Ukrainians responded to these degradations by trying to shed the remnants of old-world culture, language, and identity as soon as they could. Others responded by turning inwards and finding comfort and a positive identity by only participating in a narrow range of activity with the ethnic community.<sup>42</sup> In fact, this larger climate of hostility is often seen as part of the reason for the particularly vibrant community life within the diaspora during the first half of the twentieth century. Rejected by mainstream institutions and society, Ukrainians in North America formed their own organizations, churches, dance groups, reading rooms as a way of solidifying and maintaining their identity.

Their racialization by labour, political, and economic elites in North America did not necessarily lead Ukrainians to assert a racial identity based on claims to whiteness. Instead, the main identity claims asserted by first-wave immigrants in North America emphasized their being “Ukrainian”. In many ways, the early part of the twentieth century is a postmodernist’s dream in which multiple, overlapping, and shifting identities of “Ukrainians” were the norm. Most of the Ukrainian workers and peasants who migrated to North America during the first wave of immigration did not arrive with a clear sense of themselves as Ukrainians. In fact, it took nearly two decades after their arrival in North America for the term Ukrainian to become a major part of these immigrants’ self-definition. Much of the first wave of immigrants only developed a consciousness of themselves as Ukrainian while in the diaspora. Indeed, like other European peasant-based migrants at the turn of the century, when they arrived in North America they tended to have local identities that rarely extended beyond the confines of their village or region. At the turn of the century, when pressed by immigra-

40 Wasył Halich, *Ukrainians in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1937).

41 Myron B. Kuropas, *The Ukrainian Americans: Roots and Aspirations, 1884–1954* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), pp. 33–34.

42 Frances Swyrypa, *Wedded to the Cause: Ukrainian-Canadian Women and Ethnic Identity, 1891–1991* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993).

tion officials in United States and Canada to identify “who they were”, some responded with their country of origin. Thus, depending on where they came from, some Ukrainians thought they were, and came to be considered as, Austrians, Hungarians, or Russians. Some responded by referring to a regional identity as Galician, Bukovynian, or Lemko. Yet others responded with their religious background, so that Ukrainian Greek Catholics came to be thought of as “Greeks”.

If a larger ethno-national identity was articulated by immigrants upon their arrival in North America, it tended to be “Rusyn”.<sup>43</sup> But further complications arose when it came to translating these terms into English. The first immigrants to North America initially translated the term “Rusyn” into English as “Russian” or “Little Russian”. By 1900 “Ruthenian” came to be the more common English translation. By the First World War, Ukrainian increasingly came to replace “Ruthenian”.

More research on the transformation of Rusyns, Galicians, and Bukovynians into Ukrainians in Canada is necessary. However, there are some indications of how this transformation occurred in the United States, and the American experience gives us a way to begin to understand the politics of identity.

As historian Myron Kuropas notes, by World War I, the Ruthenian population of the United States split into three ethno-national designations: Ukrainian, Carpatho-Rusyn, and Russian. Twenty per cent of Ruthenians adopted a Russian identity, 40 per cent adopted a Carpatho-Rusyn identity, and the other 40 per cent adopted a Ukrainian identity.<sup>44</sup> These were not natural divisions and identities within the Ukrainian community, but rather were socially created.

In the United States, the transformation of Rusyns and Ruthenians into Ukrainians, Russians, and Carpatho-Rusyns was largely the result of the self-conscious work of clerical elites and their associated nationalizing agencies such as churches, fraternal benefit associations, newspapers, reading rooms, and clubs. Much of the stimulus for the development of a specifically Ukrainian national identity in the United States seemed to come from “The American circle” of Greek-Catholic priests from Galicia. The American circle, formed in 1890 in Galicia, initially consisted of seven seminarians from Lviv. At that time, they had self-consciously planned to take up their pastoral duties in the United States, remain celibate in order to avoid conflict with the Roman Catholic Church, and organize the Ruthenian community in the United States along Ukrainian ethno-national lines.<sup>45</sup> The seven migrated to the United States between 1895 and 1898 and settled in communities in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Connecticut, and New York that had large concentrations of Ruthenians.<sup>46</sup> Despite friction with the Roman Catholic hierar-

43 Kuropas, *The Ukrainian Americans*.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 124.

45 *Ibid.*, p. 76.

46 Halich, *Ukrainians in the United States*.

chy, which was reluctant to recognize the legitimacy of “Greek Catholics” in part because priests could marry, they took up their initial pastoral duties in a number of Catholic churches. They soon established the Ruthenian National Union (RNU), a fraternal benefit society which offered life insurance for Ruthenian workers, and adopted the newspaper *Svoboda* (Liberty) as their organ. These “Ukrainophiles” cohered around the development of a distinctly Ukrainian national identity.<sup>47</sup> The RNU was established, in part, to counter the influence of what was perceived to be the excessive influence of the Hungarian-oriented Greek Catholic Union and its organ *The American Ruthenian Messenger*.<sup>48</sup>

The development of a specifically “Ukrainian” national identity in the United States occurred between 1895 and 1914. In April 1894 *Svoboda* published what it defined as the “Ten National Commandments” of the “Ruthenian” American population. Shortly after its takeover by the RNU, *Svoboda* began to introduce the terms “Ukraine” and “Ukrainian” “unobtrusively, and almost casually, to the Ruthenian community”.<sup>49</sup> It also began to introduce Ukrainian national symbols to the Ruthenian population. Among other things, it printed stories about Taras Shevchenko, one of the leading poets of the Ukrainian national revival in the late nineteenth century. It also published yearly almanacs which contained articles on the history of Ukraine, literature by Shevchenko and Ivan Franko, articles on Ukrainian language and religion, and calendars that noted dates of particular ethno-religious significance to Ukrainians.<sup>50</sup>

Ukrainianization also occurred through a number of other organizations and mechanisms. Reading rooms were encouraged by priests, the fraternal benefit societies, and their related newspapers as ways to promote both literacy and Ukrainian national consciousness. *Prosvita* (or Enlightenment) Societies, initially established in Ukraine to raise the intellectual level of the peasantry, were also established in several centres. Women’s organizations, youth organizations, choirs, orchestras, bands, dance ensembles, and heritage schools for children also formed an important part of the processes whereby Ruthenian identity in America was transformed into a Ukrainian and American identity.<sup>51</sup>

By 1914 the “Ukrainophiles” within the Ruthenian-American community felt confident enough to assert a specifically Ukrainian ethno-cultural identity. At its 1914 convention the Ruthenian National Union changed its name to the Ukrainian National Association (UNA). Shortly after, *Svoboda* put forward the eleven “national commandments” of Ukrainians in the United States:

47 Bohdan Procko, *Ukrainian Catholics in America: A History* (Washington: University Press of America, 1982), p. 54.

48 Kuropas, *The Ukrainian Americans*, p. 57.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 82.

50 *Ibid.*, p. 84.

51 *Ibid.*, pp. 86–105.

- 1) The Ukrainian child should associate with Ukrainian children and speak only in Ukrainian when in their company.
- 2) Parents or older members of the family should teach children to read and write Ukrainian during the child's preschool years.
- 3) Homes should be beautified with Ukrainian religious and historical paintings and pictures.
- 4) The Ukrainian child should learn Ukrainian sayings, as well as Ukrainian verses, songs, and games.
- 5) Let Ukrainian tradition live in the Ukrainian family. The father or older members of the family should always remember the important national dates from our history.
- 6) The family should read Ukrainian books in unison during the long winter evenings.
- 7) Every Ukrainian home should have *Svoboda*, the truly Ukrainian national newspaper.
- 8) The treasure of each family should be its library containing the best Ukrainian books.
- 9) The Ukrainian family should take advantage of every opportunity to attend a Ukrainian play, concert or a commemoration of a national holiday.
- 10) Every father, mother, and older member of the family should belong to the Ukrainian National Association and they should enroll their children in the juvenile division.
- 11) Every family should try to bring back those members who have fallen away from Ukrainian traditions.<sup>52</sup>

Part of the challenge faced by the Ukrainian ethnic elite was to carve out a Ukrainian identity for the Ruthenian population that distinguished between the Ruthenian Russophiles and Magyarophiles. Developing a specifically Ukrainian ethno-national consciousness in the United States was therefore complicated by the fact that leaders of other ethno-national orientations competed for the hearts, minds, identities, and resources of the Ruthenian population. The nationally conscious Ukrainians who were promoting a Ukrainian identity found themselves in conflict with the two other strands of identity within the Ruthenian population: the Carpatho-Rusyns and Russians.

The Hungarian-oriented Greek Catholic Union and its newspaper *Viestnik* played a leading role in the conflict with Ukrainophiles. Carpatho-Rusyns fought tooth and nail to deter and discredit the Ukrainophiles who were trying to promote a Ukrainian-oriented Ruthenian identity. A 1908 article in *Viestnik*, for example, declared:

Ukrainian priests are pushing the lying *Svoboda* into the hands of peasants instead of the lives of the saints who they themselves haven't read. Ukrainian

52 Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 86.



priests are leading the way to Ukrainian slavery, one in which our national ideals will be lost. “Ukrainchiks” are confusing our meetings. We have reached a time when our “Ukrainchiks” offer division, robbery and thievery.... A priest is supposed to spread the Kingdom of God and not the Kingdom of Ukraine.... Ukrainians are ripping our Christian faith from our hearts. The Pole is stealing our rite. The Ukrainian is stealing our very faith.... Ukraine is separating children from parents, brothers, sisters, priests from parishes.... Evil and diabolical hatred burns in the hearts of Ukrainians.... Our tattered, hungry sons of Ruthenian soil run to America but even here they are caught by the Ukrainians.<sup>53</sup>

Equally scathing rebukes of the Magyarophiles can be found in the Ukrainian publications of the same time.

The Magyarophiles within the Greek Catholic Union and *Viestnik* were not successful in their push to establish a Hungarian identity for Ruthenians from sub-Carpathia, in part because most of the immigrants from that region could not speak Hungarian. Priests could therefore not communicate in Hungarian to the wider community. The Greek Catholic priests from sub-Carpathia eventually worked to establish a distinct Carpatho-Rusyn language and identity in the United States. Thus, the Magyarophiles’ identity marker became a more narrow regional designation, Carpatho-Rusyn. They did this, in part, by distancing themselves from the Ukrainophiles.<sup>54</sup> In commenting on efforts on the part of the Ukrainophiles to Ukrainianize the “Greek Catholics of Hungary/ Russians of Hungary”, the Carpatho-Rusyn clergy claimed that the main difference between the “Russians of Galicia” (Ukrainians) and the “Russians/ Greek Catholics of Hungary” was as follows:

The Greek Catholics of Hungary are inclined towards refinement and exhibit an honest, sincere, open-hearted, and active nature. This cannot be said of those from Galicia. The reason for this is that the Russians of Hungary were not as politically and religiously oppressed as were those of Galicia. The Russians of Hungary enjoyed quite enough liberty while those of Galicia for many hundreds of years were almost slaves under the power of the Poles. For this reason, the Greek Catholics of Galicia are more responsive to political and social campaigns than either the Magyars or Russians of Hungary. ... [T]he Russians of Hungary and those of Galicia never had anything in common until they came to America. It was here that an attempt was made to bring them together and to make them one in religious and national matters. These attempts were not only unsuccessful but in some ways serve to widen the breach between them....<sup>55</sup>

53 Cited in *ibid.*, pp. 115–116.

54 *Ibid.*, pp. 113–120.

55 Cited in *ibid.*, p. 117.

Ukrainophiles also faced competition from a Russian ethno-national stream in the United States. When the United States purchased Alaska from Russia in 1867, many Russians chose to stay in America. Many in turn moved to California, and in 1872 the seat of the Russian Orthodox diocese in the United States moved from Sitka, Alaska, to San Francisco, California. Growth in the church was slow, however, until the late 1890s. The Russo-ophile orientation within the Ruthenian-American community was promoted by a former Greek Catholic priest from Carpatho-Ukraine, Father Alexis Toth. In 1891 Toth and his financially strapped Minneapolis Greek Catholic parishioners from Carpatho-Ukraine were persuaded to join the Russian Orthodox Church.<sup>56</sup> Toth's charismatic personality, coupled with the hostile response that Greek Catholic priests and churches were receiving from the Roman Catholic hierarchy and the financial support of the Czarist government, combined to produce some astounding successes in conversion from Greek Catholicism to Russian Orthodoxy. By the time of his death in 1909, Toth was credited with bringing more than 25,000 Carpatho-Rusyns into the Orthodox fold in the United States.<sup>57</sup> The Russian Orthodox Church established its own fraternal benefit society, newspapers, and reading rooms. According to Kuropas, the "Ruthenians who joined the Russian Orthodox church in America rarely returned to the Ruthenian fold". They were absorbed by the Russian ethno-national stream and became, "in both religious belief and national orientation, thoroughly and irrevocably Russian".<sup>58</sup>

The Russians promoted the ideal of an indivisible Russian state and saw all of the Slavic peoples within Czarist Russia as "Russians" of one sort or another. They called Ukrainians their "Little Russian" brothers and thought that "Ukraine", as a political-historical entity, and Ukrainians, as a national entity, were both fictions being promoted by self-aggrandizing "priest-radicals".

The subsequent history of Ukrainian identity in the United States and Canada becomes even more complicated insofar as conflicts over the *kind* of Ukrainian one was took the place of conflicts between the related national designations. Between 1920 and the late 1970s, religious, political, and economic divisions and differing attitudes towards the legitimacy of Soviet Ukraine led to pitched battles over who were the most authentic Ukrainians. That story must be left for another time. Although this outline of the formation of a Ukrainian identity in the United States is only a brief sketch, it is instructive for what it says about the some groups' abstention from the politics of whiteness. While not fully theorized by Barrett and Roediger, the diaspora experience may hold the key to some of the variation in the extent to which racialized peripheral Europeans were interested, and compelled to take part, in the politics of whiteness. For groups without a national state, or

56 *Ibid.*, p. 55.

57 Robert Magosci, *Our People: Carpatho-Rusyns and their Descendants in North America* (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1994), p. 30.

58 Kuropas, *The Ukrainian Americans*, pp. 124, 125.

whose national state was in the process of formation, the desire and craving to be accepted as "white" or "Caucasian" in North America may have been trumped by the desire to have a legitimate and recognized national identity. At least some groups tended to make identity claims that were part of larger efforts to legitimize emerging conceptions of statehood. Identity claims put forward by elites within the Ruthenian *cum* Ukrainian communities tended to be part of wider efforts to lend legitimacy to the emergent struggles for statehood. It is not that they did not care about their whiteness, but rather they found homeland politics and the clarification of their national identity, both for themselves and for elites within North American society, to be far more pressing concerns.

### **Conclusion**

Historical research on the social construction of whiteness needs to pay more attention to the diversity of ways in which peripheral Europeans responded to their "racial" assignment. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many groups of people from the European periphery were defined as racial others who were fundamentally different from and inferior to dominant groups in North American society. Despite their assignment as racialized others, it is unclear whether "whiteness" was a universal aspiration or compelling goal for all racialized peripheral Europeans. For at least some first-generation immigrants from the European periphery, claims to national identities that developed as part of the diaspora condition were also a way of lending further legitimacy to the process of state formation in Europe. For stateless members of diaspora communities, the politics and identities in the homeland may have led them to be less concerned about their place within racial hierarchies in their new homelands and more concerned about the place of their imagined community on the map of Europe.

Some critics maintain that this argument is self-evidently obvious since "white" identities only emerge in opposition to "black". Some have suggested that Ukrainians did not develop a white identity because they did not need or want to differentiate themselves from "black" people. In the United States more research is needed on the relationship between peripheral Europeans like Ukrainians and the black population in Northern cities. This criticism, however, misses the point: that a particular group of peripheral Europeans who were initially assigned to a racial category as "non-white" did not seem to try to assert a counter-identity that sought inclusion in the larger white race. Even though privileges of whiteness were palpable in the United States at the time, what is interesting is that Ukrainians did not seem to partake in the discourse of "race" or "whiteness". Contrary to the Irish, who responded to their racial assignment by asserting a racial identity, Ukrainians responded by creating and asserting an ethnic identity that legitimated claims to statehood in Europe.