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## Article Title: Who Are We? Race & Ethnicity in a 1950s Nebraska Town

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Photographs / Images: illustration from *The Marvelous Exploits of Paul Bunyan* (W B Laughead, Red River Lumber Company, 1934); Paul Bunyan stamp issued by the US Postal Service, Folk Hero Commemorative Series, 1996; Elizabeth Eckford taunted by white students at Little Rock, Arkansas, Central High School, September 1957 (Will Counts, *Arkansas Democrat*); two illustrations from *Your Town and Mine* (Eleanor Thomas, Ginn & Co, 1960); three illustrations from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Harriet Beecher Stowe, John C Winston, 1897); students in a Nebraska school hallway, 1945; Martin Luther King (Library of Congress); fourth grade class, Bayard, Nebraska, 1952 (private collection); advertisement for pancake mix and illustration of correct way to display the flag from *Handbook for Boys*, Boy Scouts of America, 1952; students at prom, 1953; child dressed for confirmation; six images of "The Races of Man" (Noah Webster, *American Dictionary of the English Language*, CG Merriam, 1884)

# Who Are We?



BY DEBORAH FINK

Winter 1957, Albion, Nebraska. I am fidgeting my way through seventh grade reading class as we talk over the story “Paul Bunyan’s Great Flapjack Griddle.”

# Race & Ethnicity

## in a 1950s Nebraska Town



IT IS SET IN A LUMBER CAMP in the Dakotas, where, at the request of a senator, Bunyan and his fabulous axmen are clearing the countryside of trees. On the level Dakota land Bunyan can use his three-mile-long crosscut saw, which cuts down trees the same way a mower would cut grass in a hay field. After putting in a hard day's work, the lumber crew returns to base camp, where the cook, Sourdough Sam, and his three hundred helpers have fired up an enormous flapjack griddle to feed the workers.

This griddle is so big that Sam has Negro "cook-boys" strap whole hams or sides of bacon to their feet and skate across the hot surface to grease it. They have to be Negroes, because no white man could stand the heat of Sam's mighty flapjack fire. When the batter is ready to flow, a whistle sounds and the "darkey" cook-boys race for the edge of the griddle and scramble up the side. Occasionally one of them doesn't make it, getting caught in the batter and turning up as a raisin in a flapjack. This happens only two or three times a month.<sup>1</sup>

The teacher pulls up this passage for a general chuckle, in case any of us has missed the joke. Darkey raisins in pancakes! Like the crosscut saw that moves across the land annihilating trees to prepare for the farmers, the huge and efficient flapjack apparatus sweeps over the surface of the land, eliminating extraneous material and fueling the workers who matter.

Where is the seventh-grader supposed to place himself? Or herself? Imagine onlookers chortling as you race for your life over a slippery surface, get tangled up and maybe fall down, and then get

drowned in pancake batter and cooked over a blazing fire. What about all the effort you had put into getting your life started and building up your dreams? What would your mother do when she got the news? What an arbitrary erasure of you.

I am probably not the only seventh-grader to picture myself as a casualty and to pack away the piercing memory of the sacrificed Negroes to carry with me over the decades, but none of us bring this up. We don't have much confidence in our gut reactions, and we know the story is supposed to be funny, not nightmarish. I am out of line in having perversely flipped the narrative over, and I need to grow up and think the way I am supposed to. We seventh-graders are learning to stifle excess sensitivity and to adopt the right take on the world. As young Albionites we are learning to be the eaters, not the eaten, and not to stew over it. Imagining not being white is so scary that I blur the thought and try to dismiss it as soon as it raises its ugly head.

Our charge is to step into our slots in history by putting our shoulders to the great work of the Paul Bunyans, Daniel Boones, and Davy Crocketts who have gloriously tamed the mid continent and bequeathed it to us, not that we need to look too closely at what that entailed. We pledge allegiance to the flag the first thing in school every morning, even though none of us knows or cares what "pledge" or "allegiance" means. A number of us say "invisible" rather than "indivisible," which makes as much sense and doesn't matter as long as we stand straight and don't falter. Strength through unanimity is the basis of post-World War II American nationalism, which is, without question or comment, white and European-based. Not that others have not contributed, but they have been the raisins in the pancakes, the supporting cast, whose job it was to prepare the way for the true

Opposite: W. B. Laughead, *The Marvelous Exploits of Paul Bunyan*, Red River Lumber Company, 1934



U.S. Postal Service, Folk Hero Commemorative Series, 1996

Below: Elizabeth Eckford taunted by white students at Little Rock (Arkansas) Central High School, September 1957. Will Counts, *Arkansas Democrat*

all had European ancestors, which I had found improbable, if oddly intriguing. Only a couple of my fifth-grade classmates had had any knowledge of ancestors from Norway, Ireland, or some other northern European country. Nor is our Albion whiteness ever named. The phenomenon of race does not apply to us. Of course, as raceless and cultureless as I and others in the majority European

American culture of rural Nebraska thought of ourselves, we carry a genealogy that is particular to ourselves and to the decade. The silence on our racial and cultural specificity only strengthens our assumptions of world dominance, leaving them unexamined and uncontested. This paper flushes out this hidden racial and cultural load and its significance.<sup>2</sup>

**WHITE.** Our seventh grade reading teacher did not have to worry about the Paul Bunyan story bothering her Negro students, there being no Blacks in the town of Albion, or even in Boone County at the time. While the story reveals insensitivity to Blacks, this did not translate



inheritors of the wealth of the country. The heroes in battle, in politics, on the movie screen, and in the business world are European Americans, who are so standard that they become Americans, unmodified.

Hyphenated Americans do not exist in my childhood. In 1950s Nebraska, immigrant identities have been largely left behind, and the later cultural introspection has not coalesced. The decade is the crease of amnesia between early twentieth century scorn for immigrants and late twentieth century ethnic pride in immigrant roots. We think of ourselves as just regular kids, some tending toward the weird, but all of the same generic order.

We are Americans, of course. Our fifth-grade teacher had told us that a long, long way back we

into any apparent racial animosity on the part of the citizens of Albion. In my memory, the general 1950s climate in Albion was not hostile to Negroes. The minority who followed national news knew about the desegregation movement that had erupted in 1954 with the Supreme Court's *Brown versus Board of Education* ruling. We followed civil rights in the same way that we distantly followed the World Series rivalry between the Yankees and the Dodgers. Just as almost everyone in Albion picked the Dodgers to root for, we rooted for the underdog Negroes who were knocking on doors somewhere in the South.

The *American Legion* magazine, which reached many veterans' homes, advocated integration in the military, and the editor of the *Albion News* also

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*Being white was normal, standard, and unremarkable.*



Eleanor Thomas, *Your Town and Mine*, Ginn & Co., 1960

came out against prejudice. I followed the indignant civil rights reporting and editorials in *The New Republic*. Teachers talked about the immorality of segregation, and we sneered in unison at the photographs of the fat and ugly segregationists that appeared in *Life* magazine. Discrimination became a negative word in Albion, as throughout most of the country.<sup>3</sup>

Beneath the huzzahs, however, was caution. Many of Albion's veterans had come in contact with Negroes during military service and were quietly not sure we should jump to conclusions about them. A home economics text on personal adjustment and marriage cautioned that interracial marriages "do not achieve a high degree of happiness." You had to be careful. Outside the classroom, a high school teacher confided to my parents that he had known Negroes in the Army, and they stunk. Casual racial humor was a sign of sophistication, excused because there were no local Negroes to have their feelings hurt. When I thanked a boy for opening a door for me, he tossed off a put-down: "That's okay, I'd do the same for a white girl." A quip, when someone asked where you got your jacket or notebook was, "I stole it off a dead n——." Mostly we didn't connect this fun to our consensus on integration in those far-off places where there were Negroes to integrate. Open-minded individuals might reason that just because Negroes had some strange smells or habits, that didn't mean they shouldn't be allowed to go to school—in the South.<sup>4</sup>

Growing up in Albion, my cohorts and I learned to be white without whiteness ever being explicitly named. Although our teacher did not mention the fact that we were to identify with Paul Bunyan and his lumbermen rather than with the darkey raisins,

we knew it. Nell Painter, writing of the American legacy of slavery, states, "The abuse of slaves pained and damaged nonslaves, particularly children, and forced those witnessing slave abuse to identify with victim or the perpetrator." A parallel, though less immediate reaction could well have occurred as we read about the casual killing of Blacks in the Paul Bunyan story. Identifying with the victim would have been too traumatic. Our knowledge of racial others was almost entirely vicarious, yet the imperative of whiteness was real and beyond debate.<sup>5</sup>

The work of Mary Ellen Goodman on race awareness in young American children, published in 1952, established that race was not a parallel reality for white and black. While black children were uneasily aware of their skin color, white children were not. The racial curiosity of white children was not about themselves, but rather about why black children were different. Their own whiteness was given and unmarked. Negroes were a race; whites were not. The vast majority of us in Albion had seen Blacks in magazines and in infrequent trips to cities; but being white was normal, standard, and unremarkable. If some of us felt the occasional quibble in such material as the Paul Bunyan story, it did not break through surface uniformity. Towns like Albion in the mid twentieth century really were almost entirely innocent of race, as it was defined at the time.<sup>6</sup>

The invisibility of whiteness underscores, rather than negates its power. The mightiness of Paul Bunyan was implicitly reinforced by the contrasting insignificance and expendability of the non-white. Ruth Frankenberg, discussing the empty space of whiteness, writes, "The extent to which identities can be named seems to show an



Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, John C. Winston, 1897

*Their own whiteness  
was given  
and unmarked.  
Negroes were a race;  
whites were not.*



*Boredom plagued us in school and outside. . . a possible side effect of the unstated colorlessness and our mission of being generic.*

NSHS RG2183-1945-10-25-9

inverse relationship to power in the U.S. social structure. . . The self, where it is part of the dominant cultural group, does not have to name itself.”

While the Paul Bunyan story identified the unfortunates who were written out of the realm of pity, the media reports that reached us about desegregation in the South brought mostly distant and disengaged notice. Implicitly identifying unfortunates who would be grateful recipients of selected gifts from the American bounty, the civil rights stories excused us from any wrenching involvement.

Even those favoring benevolence toward Negroes were wary about going overboard. Our whiteness enabled Olympian detachment as we surveyed the world and its resources. If some of those others got unfairly kicked or drowned in pancake batter, too bad; but we were learning that that was the way the world worked. There was nothing we should or could do about it. We were the ones who would write the laws and symphonies, own the soil, and make the wars and apple pie that confirmed the rightness of our cause. We were what America was about. This was the unnamed advantage that whiteness conferred on us. My classmates and I learned it better because we inferred it ourselves without consciously addressing it or giving it a name.<sup>7</sup>

Boredom plagued us in school and outside as we grew up in 1950s Albion, a possible side effect of the unstated colorlessness and our mission of being generic. It was hard to figure out the road-

map, to grasp what we were supposed to do to get from Albion to the place where we could be protagonists in Paul Bunyan’s adventure or the U.S. national project as a whole. We went to school in order to become somebody (or, for girls, marry somebody) who would succeed in the large world of American life. But how would our directions be revealed to us, and what actually was it that was special and necessary about our existence? Why were we the chosen?

Notwithstanding the absence of Blacks in Albion, the subject of civil rights, race, and especially Negroes captivated many of us, both youth and adult. This was particularly true of the minority who read about and kept up with current national events. *American Legion* magazine discussed race relations in the light of military experience. My father had once known a Black when he was in the Army, so he understood. A sophisticated and impressively intellectual Albion high school teacher declared in an interview published in the student newspaper that he read two books per week, his special interest being any material on race relations. One of my classmates wrote an eighth grade information paper on the subject of Negroes. In 1958, when a “colored quartet” of young Mississippi men entertained an all-school assembly with songs and commentary on race relations, their caustic remarks on Orval Faubus, the racist governor of Arkansas, drew hearty applause and sympathetic laughter. The four travelers had beautiful rhythm and sound, and many of us wanted to reach out to them and in some way align ourselves with them and their distant cause. This felt curiously insubordinate and bad, in a good way. For at least some of us, following sports and watching television further fed our fascination with Negroes.<sup>8</sup>

My interest in Negroes led me to check out Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* from the public library when I was in junior high. Reading this book aroused strong passions. Popular with white youth in the 1950s, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is no longer widely read or recommended; but it is anything but a simple book, having multiple subplots and moral messages. Uncle Tom was a gentle, loving Negro who passed up escape and let himself be sold south rather than sacrifice his family to be dispersed by slave traders. Loyal to his comrades in chains, he rejected chances to escape in order to stay with his suffering fellow slaves and ease their pain. Finally meeting the devil incarnate in the slaveholder Simon Legree, Uncle Tom died at his hand without succumbing to hatred. In a

*Finally meeting the devil incarnate in the slaveholder Simon Legree, Uncle Tom died at his hand without succumbing to hatred.*



Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, John C. Winston, 1897

parallel-but-opposite narrative, George and Eliza Harris and their son, gifted and enslaved, braved dangers and outwitted slave hunters to make a heroic escape to Canada, where they prospered while gathering their kin to them. In the end they set sail for Liberia. While the book is permeated with descriptions of personal traits acquired through racial bloodlines, it also attributes the



Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, John C. Winston, 1897

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***George and Eliza Harris...  
braved dangers and outwitted  
slave hunters to make  
a heroic escape to Canada.***

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cruelty and insensitivity of white men to their overweening political and economic power. I believed it all.

Without any significant real life experience of Blacks, my composite adolescent picture of Blacks was as a breed with superhuman virtue and talent.

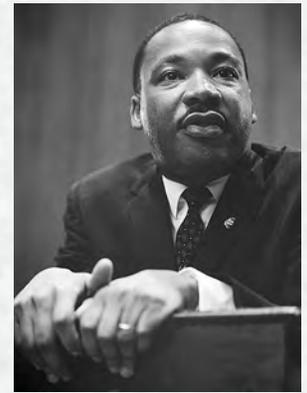
An early celebrity crush was Martin Luther King, whom I saw as brave, gallant, handsome, and powerful. My Walter Mitty dream, shared with no one, was that I would march at his side, standing up for Negroes, maybe appearing with him on the cover of *Life*, and being especially remarkable because

I would be the first white person, a young one at that, to notice the injustice and speak out. All this would have to happen a long way from Albion, where there was no race.

Wini Breines, writing about being a white girl in the 1950s, parses the attraction that black people and black culture had for young whites like her who had little direct exposure to racial others. These youths saw black people as “alive” and “genuine,” in contrast to their own boring and artificial lives: “Otherness was of interest to young white people. . . Undoubtedly by projecting their own needs and desires onto those who were different, white youth remained as ignorant, and in many cases racist, as they were when they began to be interested . . . [but] if they were racist in their objectifications. . . they were also drawn to it respectfully.” I believed that Blacks knew an immediacy of purpose that eluded those like me, who were groping for direction. They had better stories and truer voices. Appropriating their uncompromising and righteous civil rights struggle would be a shortcut to figuring out my own baffling life.<sup>9</sup>

Unlike our filtered and contradictory experience of Blacks, young Albionites of the 1950s might have known a more grounded and direct historical connection to the native peoples of the Plains. The land on which we lived was not yet one hundred years away from being the hunting and battlegrounds of Pawnee, Omaha, and Dakota peoples.

While not counted as such by census takers, Albion had at least two individuals in the 1950s who were considered to be Indians of undetermined origin. One was an advanced alcoholic. Her son, cognitively disabled, was removed to an institution before he reached junior high. Most of us had little understanding or even any real curiosity about Indians beyond the stereotype of the drunken Indian and the caricatures of savages we saw in Saturday afternoon movies. Our identity as European Americans in relation to the recently displaced Native Americans was limited to an unstated but unanimous conviction that our way of life was better than theirs. Why would we otherwise have displaced them?<sup>10</sup>



Library of Congress 01269

## Where we walk to school each day



Eleanor Thomas, *Your Town and Mine*, Ginn & Co., 1960

By the 1950s, the story of Indian removal from “our” land was mental wallpaper rather than a cause for anguish or spur to action. I cannot remember not knowing that Indians had once held Nebraska, although I may not have realized how recently this had been. A fifth grade song, which I have never forgotten but cannot locate for citation, went, “Where we walk to school each day/ Indian children used to play/ . . . All about our native land/ Where our shops and houses stand.” In 1942 Nebraska writer Mari Sandoz had published one of the early sympathetic views of Plains Indians, a historical biographical novel of the Oglala leader Crazy Horse, who was killed in 1877 while in captivity at Fort Robinson in western Nebraska. Unlike her locally popular 1945 book about her pioneer father, Jules Sandoz, neither the story of Crazy Horse nor her 1953 novel about the displacement of the Cheyenne nation was widely read in Nebraska at the time.<sup>11</sup>

The *Nebraska History* journal would have been a basic source for the compilation of state history materials for public schools. Scanning the 1950s issues of this journal provides a window on the academically current perspective on Native Americans. While Indians were not a dominant theme in Nebraska history in that decade, there were scattered 1950s articles about them. In 1957, for example, two *Nebraska History* articles out of sixteen, and two of twenty reviewed books, were about Native Americans. Both of the articles were about different approaches that white men took to solving the Indian problem in Nebraska, the Indian

problem being understood as how to acculturate them.

An article about early Indian missions stated, “The nation early recognized a responsibility for educating and civilizing the red man” and proceeded to catalog nineteenth century Christian missions set up with government aid, the eventual withdrawal of this aid, and the abandonment of the missions. Concluding with a tribute to early missionaries, the author stated, “A few of the churches, built in the nineteenth century, are still standing as memorials to the efforts of the missionaries.” Even this article, ostensibly about Indians, was essentially a tribute to the whites who were trying to teach them how to be.

Another example of the accepted understanding of the relationship between European Americans and Native Nebraskans was the 1950 *Nebraska History* chronicle of the work of Robert Furnas, later Governor, as Omaha Indian Agent from 1864 to 1866. Omitting the detail that the Omaha had, only ten years before, ceded their large northeastern Nebraska territory (including part of Boone County, in which Albion is the county seat) in exchange for a small tract on the Missouri River, the articles on the career of Furnas emphasized the patience that he exhibited and the futility of his project of getting the Omaha to “improve themselves to act as white men.”<sup>12</sup>

The Indians in these writings were objects of forbearance for white government and religion. Rather than lending insight into the culture and history of Native Nebraskans and how we might

## Indian children used to play.

understand our relations, responsibilities, and debts to them, the accounts of the Christian missions and of Robert Furnas did the opposite. By emphasizing the beneficence and sacrifice of the white man and the obstinate refusal of the Indians to respond appropriately, the articles obscured any sense of interrelationship that we might have nurtured with the descendants of those who had so recently occupied the same plot of earth that we did. The Indian story was significant only in that it pointed out the magnitude of the triumph of the brave white men who civilized Nebraska. In this, the *Nebraska History* material on Indians constituted a sub-chapter in the master historical narrative. Just as darkeys were raisins in Paul Bunyan's flapjacks, Native Americans were bumps for noble white men to straighten out as they made Nebraska history. Elementary teachers could be forgiven for glossing over the details of each structurally similar episode of the white conquest.

Learning bits and pieces about the history of Blacks and Indians, we who were the youth of Albion were simultaneously, if indirectly and incompletely, learning who we were as whites. We were not even to think of the possibility that we could experience the misfortunes of the others. As whites, we were rational, capable, advanced, favored by destiny, magnanimous, and superior. Our task was to live up to our heritage of greatness and to ignore the gap in the details about where we had come from, who we were as a people, and where we fit into history.

**A M E R I C A N .** The cultural identities of 1950s white Nebraskans were mixed and ambiguous. Without doubt, some Nebraska communities fostered cherished European ethnic identities. For example, the town of Wilber in southeastern Nebraska evolved as a center of Czech-American population and culture. In the 1950s the Czech language was spoken on the streets of Wilber; gymnastics and social activities at a Sokol Hall celebrated and preserved Czech values; garlicky sausages and sweet kolaches were real Czech food served to both visitors and locals, and the Saint Wenceslaus Catholic Church provided a spiritual underpinning for the whole. Notwithstanding numerous "bohunk" jokes and ridicule from surrounding communities, many young Czech Americans from Wilber were bilingual, would unapologetically demonstrate their impressive gymnastic feats and explain precisely why the cultivation of physical fitness was integral to their Czech identity. This was genuine and unforced,

but atypical of Nebraska communities.

The frontier thesis of historian Frederick Jackson Turner is the early and classic argument against cultural diversity in Middle America. Writing in 1893, Turner claimed that Europeans migrated to America and faced the challenges of the frontier, which transformed them into new beings who were distinctively American, not European. He wrote that the frontier produced "a composite nationality for the American people." Such cultural difference as remained would be mere ornamentation, unrelated to the core American character. Turner believed that to study this character, one should look to American rather than European factors, because the American frontier experience was overpowering and homogenizing.

Regarding the 1950s Czech Americans, a proponent of Turner's frontier thesis might have maintained that their farming practices, architecture, political ideology, and schools were in essence more American than Czech, and that their life in Nebraska had transformed them more than was obvious. The Czech Americans of the 1950s would no longer be the people who had emigrated. They might have carried some residual Czech style, but their substance had become American. Further, insofar as Wilber did maintain a semblance of Czech culture, the Turner thesis might allow that it was a curious enclave that would not define the American experience as a whole any more than a three-legged dog would define the nature of dogs.<sup>13</sup>

Among the many historians who have taken issue with the Turner thesis is Jon Gjerde. In his 1997 book *The Minds of the West*, Gjerde claims that the free or cheap land of the Middle West afforded fertile ground for the re-rooting of pockets of European cultural patterns in the nineteenth century. Admittedly, European patterns could not be transferred without alteration; but the result was an assortment of cultures, or "minds," that were fundamentally different from the Yankee mentality that prevailed among those settlers who migrated from the eastern United States. Immigrant communities, while not uniform, tended to maintain the importance of family and the church community, while Yankees valued freedom of individual action. Ethnic identity was consistent with, rather than contradictory to an allegiance to America. The resulting pattern was a patchwork of Midwestern communities, many of them oriented inward and centered on conservative family and religious values, while others were liberal and



*As whites,  
we were rational,  
capable, favored  
by destiny,  
and superior.*



outward-looking. This, rather than Turnerian frontier homogenization, was the essence of the rural Midwest of the nineteenth century, according to Gjerde.<sup>14</sup>

Of note in considering either of these positions, or others in the spectrum of arguments for pluralism or singularity of rural Midwestern culture, is the fact that the evidence in either direction is largely anecdotal. One of my great-grandfathers, a Prussian who emigrated in 1889 and reached rural Nebraska in 1892, anglicized his German name from “Walther” to “Walters” as he discarded his German identity to better seek his fortune in the United States. Another great-grandfather, who emigrated from near Stuttgart, moved his children out of their rural Nebraska school to ensure that they would speak only English and not German. On the other hand, my husband’s grandfather, who emigrated to South Dakota from the same Stuttgart area, maintained his German language and culture, so that my husband, a third-generation German American, spoke German in his home until he was fourteen years old. For every anecdote demonstrating Americanization in the rural Midwest, a skeptic would produce another showing a prevailing European orientation, and vice versa. Indeed, Gjerde carefully notes that his model applies to *elements* of the immigrant population and *segments* of the American-born.<sup>15</sup>

Further difficulty in sorting out ethnic identities of historical Nebraskans has been the tendency to conflate ethnicity, nationality, and country of birth, which sidesteps Turner’s assertion that immigrants shed their European traits as they adapted to the frontier. Census data reveals only limited clustering of European immigrant populations in Nebraska and the Middle West, either in the settlement period or later. Such clustering as is apparent provides a map of likely places to look for flourishing European ethnic identities, but most of the concentrations were weak. For example, data from Boone County indicate that in 1900 only 15 percent of the population was foreign-born, and this 15 percent was divided among eighteen different countries of origin. Early settlement in Nebraska consisted of westward migration of native-born Americans, with the majority of the foreign-born coming later. This suggests a smattering of ethnic flavors, with a dominant Yankee mood; but it does not prove anything. Third-generation immigrants sometimes cherished their roots; new immigrants sometimes discarded or denied them.<sup>16</sup>

Although the strength of European cultural traits

in nineteenth-century Nebraska may continue to be debated, there is little question that such holdovers as existed were considerably diluted in the first half of the twentieth century. Gjerde enumerates some of the homogenizing factors that appeared with World War I, which he labels “transfigurative.” Immigrants were among those conscripted into the U.S. Army, which forced European conscripts, many of them German, to choose their new country, fight their kin, wear standard issue military clothing, and eat army food. In the spirit of war support, Americanism and un-Americanism became topics of debate on the home front, as foreigners were pressed to become naturalized, buy war bonds, and plant their gardens for American victory. Nebraska was among twenty-one states passing English language laws, forbidding the speaking of foreign languages in



## *The word 'ethnicity' was not used in the 1950s.*

most public spaces. In the process, immigrant minds became American minds. In Gjerde's view, it was World War I, rather than the frontier experience, that forged European minds into American minds.<sup>17</sup>

Even more uniformity came in the following decades. In 1921 and 1924, immigration was drastically curtailed and quotas were instituted to restrict the growth of the immigrant population. The Ku Klux Klan targeted immigrants in their 1920s Midwestern incarnation, with some of the second generation immigrants themselves enlisting to deny proximity to their European roots. The Great Depression and the government's role in relief and social welfare was a further centralization and standardization of functions that were previously accomplished locally, thus limiting the power of family and local communities to control the

distribution of wealth. Fair labor laws and steadily increasing levels of public education weakened traditional family and community norms. World War II was even bigger and more totalizing than World War I in drawing human and material resources into the uniformity of the war machine. Such European ethnic character as remained in rural Nebraska after World War II was quite different from earlier forms.<sup>18</sup>

In the 1950s the immigrant settlers who had come before World War I were passing on. In Boone County, the small number of foreign born decreased by nearly two-thirds between 1950 and 1960. The majority of those immigrants allowed into the United States under the immigrant quotas of 1924 made their homes in cities rather than rural areas. But even early immigrants had often married outside of their sub-groups, and the children of



Fourth grade class, Bayard, Nebraska, 1952. Private collection



Advertisement, *Handbook for Boys*, Boy Scouts of America, 1952

*Ethnicity is more than what kind of cookies people eat at Christmas.*

these mixed marriages were likely to settle on English rather than the different languages of their grandparents, thus laying the ground for their separation from immigrant identities. World War II had disrupted what contact remained between rural Nebraskans and their European relatives, and re-establishing ethnic roots in the immediate post-war period was not a high priority. On the contrary, few in Boone County fully respected those with even a hint of foreign accent or old-country ways; ridicule of trace cultural holdovers was accepted and common.<sup>19</sup>

Contrary to the founding vision of America, the 1950s saw the coalescing of the ideal of what was frankly termed an “American culture,” or a “national culture” based on the English language and the Anglo Saxon template set out historically by the founders. In his 1951 book, *The Uprooted*, Oscar Handlin posed displacement as the defining American condition and the bitter price of freedom and opportunity. Mid-twentieth-century Americans could be appropriately grateful to their ancestors who had broken the chains of tradition, and nothing could be gained from holding onto the miserable past. Once the European umbilicus was cut, individuals were ready to prosper as true Americans.

Sociologist Milton Gordon, in laying out a theory of acculturation, differentiated between cultural blending and structural separation. In his 1964

book on assimilation, he wrote: “The United States . . . is a multiple melting pot in which acculturation for all groups beyond the first generation of immigrants. . . has been massive and decisive, but in which structural separation on the basis of race and religion. . . emerges as the dominant sociological condition.” While allowing for separate organizations for such minorities as Jews, Negroes, and possibly Catholics, a strong and defining American center was the standard to which these subgroups did or did not match up.<sup>20</sup>

In Albion, the public school was key to shaping and enforcing American cultural norms. All instruction was in English, and Latin was the only non-English language taught until 1958, when Spanish was inserted into the high school curriculum. No one in Boone County had Spanish-speaking ancestors. Career days explored prospects for making money by becoming useful in the national military-industrial system. Success in life was measured by how far one might rise in this national system. To this end, besides being monitored through grades, students followed an exacting dress code, studied textbook courtship and marriage principles, and participated in American Legion government days. When our ninth grade English class was thrashing around for ideas for essay topics, our teacher told us not to write about the backgrounds of our ancestors. A grade school teacher had already cautioned us that some of our grandparents might not use proper English. She told us to be aware of their peculiarities and avoid adopting their speech, without necessarily holding this deficiency against them.

Some theorists of ethnicity and assimilation believe that proponents of ethnic preservation in the United States have exaggerated minor details of ethnic survival while neglecting clear patterns of assimilation. Ethnicity is more than what kind of cookies people eat at Christmas. Milton Yinger discusses four dimensions of assimilation: structural, cultural, psychological, and biological. Structural assimilation refers to the extent to which members of a particular group are integrated into organizations and institutions that reach beyond group boundaries. Cultural assimilation concerns the degree to which members of the group adopt the language, norms, and values of the overall population. Psychological assimilation is about whether members of the group carry a sense of belonging to the larger whole. Biological assimilation means intermarriage and gene mixing.

Along these axes the case for broad assimilation

in Boone County and the rest of rural Nebraska in the 1950s is strong. While some Protestants and Catholics might have tried to keep a prudent distance from each other, both were thoroughly mixed in terms of national backgrounds, except in such limited areas as Wilber. As the 1950s wore on, more of my cohorts were ignoring even religious boundaries by falling in love, marrying, and working out on their own whether to be Catholic or Lutheran. Only the degree of integration in psychological identity is realistically open to question.<sup>21</sup>

The word “ethnicity” was not used in the 1950s, and scholarly works on Nebraska history from the period included little on immigrant culture. A comprehensive 1995 bibliography of sources on Nebraska history includes 134 entries under the heading “Immigrants and Ethnicity,” but only seven of these works date from the 1950s. Of the seven, five were unpublished or had very limited, local distribution. The other two appeared in *Nebraska History*, both biographical essays on prominent Swedish men. Biographical material on statesmen and entrepreneurs was a dominant topic in *Nebraska History* in the 1950s, a pattern reflected in these two articles. More typically, as with accounts of such figures as William Jennings Bryan, George

Norris, and John J. Pershing, historians did not dwell on European roots.<sup>22</sup>

One of the *Nebraska History* articles on immigrants appeared in 1950 and was written by noted Nebraska folklorist Louise Pound. Although it was primarily about the life of an early state promoter and entrepreneur, Olof Bergstrom, it included pieces of information about German and Swedish immigration and settlement in Nebraska and about communication and travel between Nebraska and Sweden. Given this attention and her lifetime of research into the folk culture of Nebraska, it is telling that the 1959 publication of her folklore essays, which she was editing at the time of her death the previous year, included nothing that would suggest ethnic culture as a significant presence in Nebraska history. In fact, her essay on the possibility of English-Scottish roots in western cowboy songs rejected the assertion of European origin, claiming instead that the songs were either adaptations of popular American songs or improvisations based on the life of the cow trail.<sup>23</sup>

In sum, the 1950s (and the 1940s) marked a low point of explicit awareness of specific European connections and identities in Nebraska. The following decades have seen a revaluing of immi-

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as lost love.*

grant culture in Nebraska, as in the United States as a whole. Part of this was an attempt to revitalize ethnic roots that were presumed present and shaping the beliefs, values, and outlook of Nebraskans, even if they were not acknowledged at mid-century. Another aspect of the raising up of ethnicity has been the attempt to understand what it was about the 1950s that would have led to such widespread erasure of the immigrant past. Many later considered that neglect of Nebraska's ethnic diversity had been a bad turn.

In 1973, twenty-two years after publication of *The Uprooted*, which had applauded European Americans' break with their past, Oscar Handlin appended what was essentially an apology for his youthful arrogance. Over time, immigrant ancestors, once deemed quaint and irrelevant to the bold national venture, came to be pursued as lost love. Increasing numbers of Americans, including third-generation-and-beyond immigrants, began to claim a non-English mother tongue after the 1950s. Paul Olson, who in 1976 wrote the introduction to the first published work in Nebraska salvage ethnicity, was direct: "The melting pot vision never did work. This book is written in celebration. . . of those peoples and cultures which did not melt." Perhaps some Nebraska immigrant group identities had persisted underground through the consensus years and were being invited out of the closet when the time was ripe.<sup>24</sup>

What exactly is ethnicity? Richard Rodriguez, who was born to Spanish-speaking, Mexican-American parents, captures the poetry of ethnicity by calling it "memory, response, attitude, mood, coded in the soul, transmitted through generations." Having proffered this airy image, he proceeds to deflate it: "Defined this broadly, I suspect, ethnicity is only a public metaphor, like sexuality or age, for a knowledge that bewilders us." Milton Yinger expresses nearly the same meaning as Rodriguez, but in the language of sociology: "An ethnic group [is] a segment of a larger society whose members are thought, by themselves and/or others, to have a common origin and to share important segments of a common culture and who, in addition, participate in shared activities in which the common origin and culture are significant ingredients." Ethnicity is about the heart and how people experience themselves.<sup>25</sup>

To an anthropologist, the prefix "ethno-" means culture. All people have culture to the same degree, although the content of culture varies widely. While this would suggest that each person also has an ethnicity, the origin of the word lends validation

to a more limited usage. The early Greek term *ethnos* was related to a pejorative term used by Jewish people for gentiles, thus carrying the sense of a disparaging view that insiders have for outsiders. Early English burdened the word with negative overtones of superstition, barbarism, and strangeness. In medieval Europe ethnic identity meant tribal affiliation, associated with those who lived as minorities apart from their dominant regions.

The term "ethnic," defined as something pertaining to a culture, still carries a connotation of someone or something that is special or different, perhaps exotic or dangerous, but in any case not ordinary or colorless. Politicians who court the ethnic vote are going for pockets of unassimilated persons, maybe uneducated, but definitely divergent from the presumed American norm. Ethnicity exists in tension with a central consensus and is dependent on this center for its meaning: The center and the nonconformist ethnic complement and shape each other. In this sense, it is possible to imagine a group of people without an ethnicity. In fact, the non-ethnics could be the majority. Unpalatable this may be to those with a vision of democratic plurality, it nevertheless uncovers something about how Americans have attempted to define themselves and how identities shift.<sup>26</sup>

Ethnicity, where it exists, is artificial, not natural. It is created or invented rather than discovered. It joins race in being a socially constructed set of meanings that materially affects the way a category of people confronts the world and the way the world confronts these people. As Werner Sollors asserts, the phenomenon of ethnicity is a set of power relations that creates a pseudo-historical explanation of itself. It involves a search for meaning in both the center and the periphery. Ethnicity may be about language, dress, art, eye color, occupation, residence, lineage, education, or ear shape; but it is never reducible to any of these. Whether a group of people defines itself or is defined by others according to a particular configuration of traits has to do with historical process that proceeds according to a particular logic that may run its course, recreate itself, or blend into the center. Ethnicity is a contrived puzzle to be decoded and read for what it reveals about a social system and people's place in it.<sup>27</sup>

How did rural Nebraska of the 1950s sort its people? Was there a muted pattern of European immigrant identity waiting to be brought forth later as ethnicity? How did the 1950s carry people like me from the first half of the twentieth century to the second half?

The white ethnicity that rose in the late twentieth century was quite different from the patchwork of immigrant cultures that existed in the early years of the century. The cultural particularity of earlier European immigrant communities, insofar as it existed, came with an historically specific configuration of costs and benefits for its members. Unlike early immigrant community culture, late twentieth century white ethnicity, which Mary C. Waters terms “symbolic ethnicity,” could be evoked situationally and disregarded most of the time. U.S. census protocol inserted a general question about ancestry in 1980, but it was a controversial addition because of the unreliability of the data.

Testing indicated that a person might specify an ethnic identity at one time, only to answer the question differently when asked again. A 1977 study of ethnic salience in Nebraska found that most northern and western Europeans, even if they knew their ancestral background, attached little importance to it, even when they wished for stronger roots. Waters identified what she called a “hunger for ethnicity,” a desire for an idealized version of a close community that would provide a sense of belonging and security without suffocating rules. Romanticism allows soft and blurry edges and smoothed-over surfaces, the opposite of the splinters and sharp corners that poke through in real life. White ethnicity called for obfuscation as well as memory, thus a sufficient space of time as separation from raw experience.<sup>28</sup>

Growing up in Albion in the 1950s, I understand the “hunger for ethnicity,” ill-defined and unrealistic as it was for me. The dominant Albion understanding of immigrant culture more nearly matched that of the ignorance, stink, and grime associated with immigrants in the early twentieth century than the romantic complex that would coalesce later, which is undoubtedly why I dreamed of aligning myself with distant Blacks rather than characters out of my actual family history. Albion, as an aspiring piece of mainstream American culture, was the antithesis of ethnicity. Although we were aware, to varying degrees, of immigrant ancestors, this knowledge was suppressed and did not overtly inform our values and aspirations.

Culture provides indispensable wisdom about what constitutes nobility, beauty, sanctity, humor, ugliness, and abomination. It specifies when it is appropriate to celebrate and when and how to grieve. A culture has rites of passage that lead an individual from birth through coming of age, marriage, and death. Culture defines goals and the frequently painful and arduous sacrifices that

these goals require. In my skepticism about the salience of immigrant cultural identity in Albion in the 1950s, I doubt not the reality of culture, but rather its ethnic content.

In Albion, Americanism and the flag were dominant symbols that everyone was required to respect and salute; no one questioned this. Military sacrifice for America was a high calling, and there were periodic rites and ongoing habits of remembrance of soldiers, both living and dead. Further centralizing and aligning ourselves with mainstream America was our measuring of life progress by standard milestones of starting kindergarten,

*Americanism and the flag were dominant symbols that everyone was required to respect and salute.*



graduating from junior high and high school, getting college degrees if we could swing it, making money, and retiring from making money. School spirit was expected; cheerleaders and athletes were seen as the most promising comers. Movie star beauty was a goal for all girls; boys wanted shiny cars. In short, we were mid-century mainstream Americans, not ethnics. If we were rustic and small townish around the edges, it was a fault to be hidden and corrected, not embraced. Young Albionites were trying to work out how we could navigate the American system. No viable alternatives to the national consensus existed.

World War II cast a long shadow on the children of 1950s rural Nebraska, but few of us had known the emotional intensity and purpose that had shaped our parents' lives. Unlike our parents, we



American.



Arctic.



Australian.

had no clear memory of the privations of war or the Great Depression of the thirties. While these may have hung in the air we breathed, we didn't acknowledge them as shaping our lives. Our looming task was finding our way through the new opportunities and constraints of the post-war period. We had inherited the forms of patriotism and unanimity of the 1940s, and some of us were moving toward the 1960s culture of discontent, self-expression, and critique. Seeking an understanding of the world that was life size, within our grasp, and transformative, we embodied American culture aching to break itself down into more genuine, more textured, less artificial components.

**WHITE AND AMERICAN.** Race was commonly understood as a biological classification in the 1950s, and most believed that the classification was unambiguous and identifiable by sight. With the dissolution of its biological underpinnings, the concept of race has fused analytically with ethnicity, as an invented method of classification. While ethnicity arises in people's heads, it is sustained (or muted) in varying ways by legal and customary processes and economic inequalities.<sup>29</sup>

Ethnicity, as counter culture, varies inversely with the force and scope of the central culture. When the national consensus is strong and comprehensive, as it was during and after World War II, ethnic identification wanes; when consensus cracks or breaks, ethnic identities flourish. The 1950s was a low point of ethnic awareness in the United States and rural Nebraska.

As an Albion child, I learned that some characters in fiction and in history had substantially less claim to mercy and fairness than I was being taught to assume. Only indirectly and diffusely did it become clear that the crucial difference was between European and non-European ancestry. European ancestry was so unanimous in Albion that it seemed as if we were the world and that non-Europeans inhabited an alien reality that operated according to inferior laws and principles. We did not name this as either ethnicity or race. While race was a topic in the news at the time, we did not believe this was about us or about the privileges and resources that we took for granted as rightfully belonging to us.

The imposed acquiescence of the decade bred festering dissent. Some of us coming of age in Albion began to be restless and impatient with the lives we were given. Soon there would be small and hesitant moves out of the mainstream culture.

Our hunger for roots was real, if unnamed. Our 1950s attempts at breaking through the consensus were fanciful and conventional, if earnest. While romantic identification with exotic others violates their integrity as well as our own, our real hunger was for substance, not fantasy.

Integral to claiming roots in rural Nebraska is claiming the period when the salience of these roots was weak. The 1950s was such a time, to be understood in historical and cultural perspective. As hard-luck Chrissy said in 1986 in "Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe,"

*All my life I've always wanted to be somebody. But I see now I should have been more specific.<sup>30</sup>*  
Me too. 📷

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Wallace Wadsworth, "Paul Bunyan's Great Flapjack Griddle," in *Beacon Light of Literature, Book Seven*, ed. Rudolph W. Chamberlain (New York: Iroquois Publishing, 1945), 339-349.

<sup>2</sup> The mid-century ebb in Nebraska ethnic identity is discussed in Paul A. Olson's introduction to *Broken Hoops and Plains People* (Lincoln: Nebraska Curriculum Development Center, University of Nebraska, 1976). The term "rural" in this paper is used according to the census definition of areas outside population aggregates of 2,500 or more. The town of Albion and all of Boone County were thus rural.

<sup>3</sup> *Brown v. Board of Education* was the 1954 Supreme Court decision that declared public school segregation to be a denial of constitutionally guaranteed equal protection under the law. It unleashed a flood of civil rights action.

Living in Albion, I never saw a Negro in the town until some of the young people who went away to college started bringing their black friends home with them in the 1960s. The federal census turned up no Negroes in Albion in 1950 or 1960. The two Negroes outside of Albion living in Boone County in 1950 had disappeared by 1960. Although the population of Nebraska was approximately 50 percent rural in the 1950s, only 4 percent (781) of its small 1950 Negro population was rural. Nebraska has historically been among the whitest states in the country. In 1950, 1.5 percent of the population of Nebraska was Negro; 0.3 percent was Indian (Native American), these being the only numerically significant groups of non-European descent. These numbers come from the 1950 and 1960 federal census reports. For the American Legion, see John L. Sullivan, "You Are Your Brother's Keeper," *American Legion*, Feb. 1950, 28, 41-42. Examples of anti-discrimination editorials in the *Albion News* are May 28, 1959, which scored Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus, and June 1, 1950, which espoused the cause of an "American-Jap" who was born and educated in Nebraska.

<sup>4</sup> Judson C. Landis and Mary G. Landis, *Personal Adjustment, Marriage and Family Living*, 2nd ed. (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1955), 124.

<sup>5</sup> Nell Painter, *Southern History Across the Color Line* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 32.

<sup>6</sup> The work of Mary Ellen Goodman, *Race Awareness in Young Children* (1952), is cited in Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks, "The Comedy of Domination: Psychoanalysis and the Conceit of Whiteness," *Discourse* 19 (1997), 138-9. The concept of race is historically defined, and it was only after World War II when recent European immigrants came to be grouped with Anglo-Saxons as being unquestionably Caucasian. Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immi-*

grants and the Alchemy of Race (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 109.

<sup>7</sup> Ruth Frankenberg, *White Woman, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 196.

<sup>8</sup> The interview with the teacher, Herbert Knutson, was published in the *Cardinal*, May 4, 1956, a student newspaper, copy at Albion School. The account of the quartet comes from my memory and from the *Cardinal*, Nov. 16, 1958.

<sup>9</sup> Wini Breines, *Young, White and Miserable: Growing Up Female in the Fifties* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 19.

<sup>10</sup> The Native American population of the Great Plains was in flux, especially after the westward movement of Eastern Woodland nations brought largely by European colonization. An overview of Nebraska peoples in place at the time of European settlement can be found in Bradley H. Baltensperger, *Nebraska: A Geography* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1985), 37–44. For a detailed ecological and political analysis of the frontier phase of Plains history, see Elliott West, *The Contested Plains: Indians, Goldseekers, & the Rush to Colorado* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998).

<sup>11</sup> Mari Sandoz, *Crazy Horse: The Strange Man of the Oglalas* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1942); *Old Jules* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1935); *Cheyenne Autumn* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1953).

<sup>12</sup> Ray H. Mattison, "Indian Missions and Missionaries on the Upper Missouri to 1900," *Nebraska History* 38 (1957): 127, 154; Berlin B. Chapman, "The Nemaha Half-Breed Reservation," *Nebraska History* 38 (1957): 1–24; Roger T. Grange, Jr., review of *A Sioux Chronicle* by George E. Hyde; Philip S. Holmgren, review of *A History of the Dakota or Sioux Indians*, by Doane Robinson, *Nebraska History* 38 (1957), 69, 71; Robert C. Farb, "Robert W. Furnas as Omaha Indian Agent, 1864–1866 (I)," *Nebraska History* 32 (1951), 192.

<sup>13</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," in *Frontier and Section: Selected Essays of Frederick Jackson Turner* (Englewood Cliffs, NY: Prentice-Hall, 1961), 51.

<sup>14</sup> Jon Gjerde, *The Minds of the West: Ethnocultural Evolution in the Rural Middle West, 1830–1917* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

<sup>15</sup> Gjerde, *Minds*, 22.

<sup>16</sup> Gjerde, *Minds*, 6; Baltensperger, *Nebraska*, 73–85; James C. Olson and Ronald C. Naugle, *History of Nebraska*, 3rd ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 175; Frederick C. Luebke, "Time, Place, and Culture in Nebraska History," *Nebraska History* 69 (1988): 160; Deborah Fink, *Agrarian Women: Wives and Mothers in Rural Nebraska, 1880–1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 40–42; James Sellers, "Nebraska—One Hundred Years," *Nebraska History* 34 (1953): 259.

<sup>17</sup> Gjerde, *Minds*, 321–325; see also Burton W. Folsom, Jr., "Immigrant Voters and the Nonpartisan League in Nebraska, 1917–1920," *Great Plains Quarterly* 1 (1981): 159–168.

<sup>18</sup> Walter Johnson, "Politics in the Midwest," *Nebraska History* 32 (1951): 13.

<sup>19</sup> *The Letters of Louise Ritter From 1893 to 1925: A Swiss-German Immigrant Woman To Antelope County, Nebraska*, ed. Darlene M. Ritter (Fremont, NE: Siegenthaler-Ritter Publishers, 1980) records Ritter's intense homesickness, pain, and eventual reconciling to Nebraska as her sons and grandchildren abandoned her language. After her death in 1925, a son notified her sister in Switzerland and then ceased the correspondence. In 1910, 30 percent of Nebraskans had foreign-born or mixed parentage, while only 19 percent had both parents born in the same foreign country. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Population: Nebraska-Wyoming*, Vol. III of *Thirteenth Census of the United*

*States, Taken in 1910* (Washington, D.C. 1913), 50.

<sup>20</sup> Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted* (New York: Little, Brown, 1951); Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 234–5.

<sup>21</sup> J. Milton Yinger, "Ethnicity," *Annual Review of Sociology* 11 (1985): 151–180. Peter Thaler, who has examined the case of Norwegian Americans in the Midwest, declares Norwegian Americans assimilated, on the basis of loss of the Norwegian language and structural assimilation to mainstream America. See Peter Thaler, *Norwegian Minds—American Dreams: Ethnic Activism Among Norwegian American Intellectuals* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1988), 120–139.

<sup>22</sup> Michael L. Tate, *Nebraska History: An Annotated Bibliography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995), 323–336.

<sup>23</sup> Louise Pound, "Olof Bergstrom: Swedish Pioneer," *Nebraska History* 31 (1950): 64–74; "Cowboy Songs and English-Scottish Ballads," in *Nebraska Folklore* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1959), 170.

<sup>24</sup> Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973), 274; Joshua A. Fishman, "Mother-Tongue Claiming in the United States Since 1960: Trends and Correlates," in *The Rise and Fall of the Ethnic Revival: Perspectives on Language and Ethnicity*, ed. Joshua A. Fishman (New York: Moulton, 1985), 136; Olson, introduction to *Broken Hoops*, xii.

<sup>25</sup> Richard Rodriguez, "An American Writer," in *The Invention of Ethnicity*, ed. Werner Sollors (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 8; Yinger, "Ethnicity," 159.

<sup>26</sup> Joshua A. Fishman, "Language, Ethnicity, and Racism," in *Rise and Fall of Ethnic Revival*, 11–12; Thaler, *Norwegian Minds*, 121.

<sup>27</sup> Werner Sollors, introduction to *Invention of Ethnicity*, xvi. In this book, Kathleen Conzen gives an example of nineteenth century German American ethnicity defined by festivities that presented German culture to the American public and then ran its course as this complex transformed mainstream patterns of celebration and thus blended itself into the larger culture. See Kathleen Neils Conzen, "Ethnicity as Festive Culture: Nineteenth-Century German America on Parade," in *Invention of Ethnicity*, 44–76.

<sup>28</sup> Mary C. Waters, *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 9, 152; J. Allen Williams, Jr., David R. Johnson, and Miguel A. Carranza, "Ethnic Assimilation and Pluralism in Nebraska," in *Ethnicity on the Great Plains*, ed. Frederick C. Luebke (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), 210–229.

<sup>29</sup> David Roediger is among the scholars who take vehement exception to equating race and ethnicity, pointing out that race has its own separate American history, apart from ethnicity, and that blending the two concepts obscures the central and enduring reality of race in America. Disputes over definitions rarely yield incisive points, but it seems reasonable to me to refer to different kinds of ethnicity rather than to field periodic claims of biological determinism in race, as opposed to ethnicity. See David R. Roediger, *Colored White: Transcending the Racial Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 140–150.

<sup>30</sup> Jane Wagner, *The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), 35.



Caucasian.



Mongolian.



African.

"The Races of Man" from Noah Webster, *American Dictionary of the English Language*, C. G. Merriam, 1884