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Reproducing for the Race:
Eugenics, “Race Suicide,” and the Origins of White Replacement Conspiracy Theories, 1882-
1924

By

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THESIS

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Abstract

The past several years have seen a national increase in mass shootings by white supremacists, many of whom have cited their belief in the supposed “Great Replacement” as a motivating factor for their violence. The “Great Replacement” is a far-right, white supremacist conspiracy theory that argues that the white race is being replaced by people of color, immigrants, and Jewish people. While several scholars have attributed the theory’s origins to the rise of the internet age and subsequent online communities for white power activists, this paper argues that “Great Replacement” ideology continues a white supremacist tradition of conspiratorial thought that dates back over a century, originating with the similarly named theory of “race suicide.”

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, different trends in immigration and the simultaneous rise to prominence of pseudoscientific racism in the United States led many prominent nativists to claim that the white race was committing “race suicide,” killing off its own race by allowing immigrants into the country and by having interracial children. This theory was intertwined with the rise of the early eugenics movement, a large-scale effort to strengthen civilization by promoting white reproduction and attempting to impede reproduction among “undesirable” populations. I use the case studies of two leading U.S. political figures and eugenicists—President Theodore Roosevelt and conservationist Madison Grant—to demonstrate how the “race suicide” theory functioned as a pronatalist argument that encouraged white, “fit” women to reproduce. From the passing of the first Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 to the 1924 Immigration Act, this paper charts the four-decade influence of the race suicide theory, which I argue further speaks to a continued tradition of white supremacist groups relying on “narratives of victimhood” to justify racial and xenophobic violence.

On August 3, 2019, I awoke to a phone call from my sister: “Have you heard from Mom?” Frantic, she proceeded to tell me that there had been a shooting in our hometown of El Paso, Texas. At that time, there was not much information online yet, but I remember the mind-numbing anxiety a quick Twitter search gave me— seeing ambulances and huddled, crying people in front of a building I had grown up around. Two years later, the memory still makes me grit my teeth.

My close friends and family were safe that day. But twenty-three people were murdered; and my hometown was forever made a victim of mass violence. A border city, El Paso has long been a home for immigrants and their children; my own family is no exception. But in the days following August 3, it was revealed that El Paso was particularly targeted by the shooter because of its majority Latinx population. Twenty-one year old Patrick Crusius had driven over 9 hours from his home in Allen, Texas to specifically target people of Mexican descent.¹ In a detailed manifesto posted to the known white-supremacist-laden site 8chan, Crusius claimed to be acting in response to “the Hispanic invasion of Texas” and his fear of total “cultural and ethnic replacement.”² Particularly, he cited his belief in the “Great Replacement” conspiracy theory as his primary motivating factor for targeting Hispanics, echoing the New Zealand Christchurch shooter whose similar manifesto, explaining his reasoning for murdering fifty-one Muslims just five months before, was also titled “The Great Replacement.”

The “Great Replacement,” is, at its core, a conspiracy theory. It is a far-right, white supremacist conspiracy theory that argues that the white race is being replaced by people of

¹ “El Paso Suspect Said He Was Targeting ‘Mexicans,’ Told Officers He Was the Shooter, Police Say,” *Washington Post*, accessed November 22, 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/el-paso-suspect-said-he-was-targeting-mexicans-told-officers-he-was-the-shooter-police-say/2019/08/09/ab235e18-bac9-11e9-b3b4-2bb69e8c4e39_story.html.

² Patrick Crusius, “The Inconvenient Truth,” 1.

color. Some call this “white genocide” or “white replacement.” The theory of white racial replacement has been credited to French conspiracist Renaud Camus, whose 2011 book is eponymously titled *The Great Replacement*. It has also been credited to the “White Genocide Manifesto” writer, white separatist and neo-Nazi David Lane.³ Historian Kathleen Belew has noted that white supremacists have been “worried about their status as a majority” for “decades.”⁴ Other journalists and scholars have attributed the theory’s origins to the rise of the internet age and subsequent online communities for neo-Nazis and white power activists, the 1974 publication of the *Turner Diaries*, or, in one case, the rhetoric and publication of 1940s Democratic senator Theodore G. Bilbo.⁵ However, this paper argues that its roots lie even further back; specifically, that “Great Replacement” ideology continues a white supremacist tradition of conspiratorial thought that dates back over a century, originating with the very similarly named theory of “race suicide.”

My argument that theories of white replacement are conspiracy theories leans heavily on the way conspiracy theories have been professionally studied and defined. A conspiracy occurs when a group of people plan, secretly, to do something that is negative, illegal, or harmful. A conspiracy theory, then, can be most clearly defined as the unproven belief that a conspiracy has

³ The specific term “Great Replacement” was coined by Cramus in 2010 in his book *L'Abécédaire de l'in-nocence* (Abecedarium of No-Harm), and then later re-stated in his 2011 book *Le Grand Remplacement*. Cramus’s theory of the “Great Replacement” proposes that the French people are being overcome by non-European (often Muslim) “replacements” (Camus, Renaud. *Le Grand Remplacement*, Plieux: Chez l’auteur, 2011). His ideas heavily reflect those of U.S. white separatist Lane, who published his *White Genocide Manifesto* in 1995. Lane’s manifesto is more anti-Semitic, claiming that “all Western nations are ruled by a Zionist conspiracy to mix, overrun and exterminate the White race.” (Lane, David Eden. “White Genocide Manifesto.” Der Bruder Schweigen Archives. Accessed December 10, 2021.)

⁴ Kathleen Belew, “Opinion | The Long Game of White-Power Activists Isn’t Just About Violence,” *The New York Times*, May 17, 2022.

⁵ Nicholas Confessore and Karen Yourish, “A Fringe Conspiracy Theory, Fostered Online, Is Refashioned by the G.O.P.,” *The New York Times*, May 16, 2022, Alan Feuer, “How Buffalo Suspect’s Racist Writings Reveal Links to Other Attacks,” *The New York Times*, May 16, 2022, Martha M. Hamilton, “Long Before Charlottesville, ‘Great Replacement Theory’ Found Its Champion in a Racist Senator,” *Washington Post*, November 15, 2021.

occurred.⁶ In 1964, Richard Hofstadter famously coined the term “the paranoid style” to describe the seemingly fanatical rise of American conservatism surrounding the campaign of radical Republican Barry Goldwater. In an essay first published in *Harper’s Magazine*, he argued that the far-right has historically been susceptible to “heated exaggeration, suspiciousness, and conspiratorial fantasy.”⁷ Hofstadter borrowed the term “paranoia” from its clinical use in psychology, which diagnosed it as symptoms of “systematized delusions of persecution and of one’s own greatness.” The *paranoid style*, he argued, was categorized by the same delusions; however, while an individual suffering from paranoia would see themselves as the primary target of a conspiratorial plot, a spokesperson of the paranoid style would posit that an entire “nation, culture, [or] way of life” is the primary target of said plot.⁸ *The Paranoid Style* outlines the primary elements of what we would now term a conspiracy theory. Hofstadter defined the spokesperson of the paranoid style as someone who sees history itself as a malicious, intentional conspiracy against him. The paranoid style, by raising stakes to such a high level (often apocalyptic), is thus able to “arouse passion and militancy” among its believers.⁹ Although later scholars have recognized that not all of Hofstadter’s theses are applicable to conspiracy theories, the “paranoid style” still serves as a well-established framework from which to examine ideologies of the U.S. far-right.¹⁰ In particular, I have found it a useful application to understanding the history of white replacement theories.

⁶ Soterios Johnson featuring Kathryn Olmsted, “The Backdrop Episode 1: Conspiracy Theories,” *The Backdrop: A Podcast By UC Davis*, December 15, 2020.

⁷ Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics, and Other Essays*, 1st Vintage Books ed (New York: Vintage Books, 2008), 3.

⁸ Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*, 4.

⁹ Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*, 30.

¹⁰ Butler, Michael and Knight, Peter, “The History of Conspiracy Theory Research,” in *Conspiracy Theories and the People Who Believe Them*, ed. Joseph E. Uscinski (Oxford University Press, 2018).

My argument also employs a far more modern categorization of conspiracy theories. The European Commission and UNESCO have publicized various infographics in the last several years, identifying six fundamental characteristics that all conspiracy theories and their proponents have in common:

1. An alleged, secret plot.
2. A group of conspirators.
3. ‘Evidence’ that seems to support the conspiracy theory.
4. The implied or overt suggestion that nothing happens by accident and that there are no coincidences; nothing is as it appears and everything is connected.
5. The division of the world into good or bad.
6. The scapegoating of people and groups.¹¹

These characteristics are clearly exhibited in today’s “Great Replacement” ideology, which claims that immigrants, Jews, or people of color are purposely and knowingly collaborating to erase the white race; it is no coincidence that white people are losing their “majority” status. I demonstrate that several of these characteristics can also be found in the “race suicide” rhetoric espoused by early twentieth century eugenicists, therefore drawing a throughline of conspiratorial thought across a century of white supremacy.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the increase in immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe and the simultaneous rise to prominence of pseudoscientific racism led many prominent nativists to claim that the white race was committing “race suicide,” killing off its own race by allowing immigrants into the country and by having interracial children.¹²

¹¹ “Identifying Conspiracy Theories,” UNESCO and European Commission, European Commission.

¹² Throughout this paper, I use either “eugenicist” or “nativist” to apply to the groups I discuss. “Eugenicist” is the more current, American fashion, whereas “eugenicist” is more often used in British writing. I apply the older term “nativist” to supporters of “nativism,” which John Higham defined as “intense opposition to an internal minority on

This theory was both a cause and a result of the eugenics movement, a global “‘crusade’ to strengthen family and civilization by regulating fertility,” as Wendy Kline explains.¹³ In the United States, the eugenics movement was heavily influenced by elites and political figures, including President Theodore Roosevelt, who actively spread “race suicide” fears in his writings and speeches. It was also strongly influenced by the 1916 publication of conservationist Madison Grant’s *The Passing of the Great Race*, which utilized racist pseudoscience to retell the history and foreshadow the future of the “Nordic” race.¹⁴

Recent historians of the American eugenics movement have contributed greatly to the study of “negative” eugenics; that is, practices from which to stop reproduction among “unfit” populations, most often through forced sterilization. Wendy Kline, Alexandra Minna-Stern, and Simone M. Caron have each detailed the intertwined histories of eugenics and female sterilization and birth control politics.¹⁵ Many historians have also noted the connection between fears of white replacement, or “white extinction anxiety,” and the U.S. government’s racially-exclusive immigration policies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.¹⁶ Rachel St. John noted how Texas Democrat John C. Box campaigned for Mexican inclusion in 1920s U.S. immigrant quotas by claiming that “American racial stock” needed protection from “further degradation or change through mongrelization.”¹⁷ Erika Lee has demonstrated how Madison

the ground of its foreign (i.e., “un-American”) connections.” (*Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 4.)

¹³ Wendy Kline, *Building a Better Race: Gender, Sexuality, and Eugenics from the Turn of the Century to the Baby Boom*, 1. paperback printing (Berkeley, Calif.: Univ. of California Press, 2005).

¹⁴ Madison Grant, *The Passing Of The Great Race; or, The Racial Basis of European History*, 1916, 20.

¹⁵ See Kline, *Building a Better Race*, Alexandra Minna Stern, *Eugenic Nation: Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), and Simone M. Caron, *Who Chooses?: American Reproductive History Since 1830* (University Press of Florida, 2008).

¹⁶ This particular phrase is most often attributed to Charles M. Blow, “Opinion | White Extinction Anxiety,” *The New York Times*, June 24, 2018.

¹⁷ Rachel St. John, *Line in the Sand: A History of the Western U.S.-Mexico Border*, *America in the World* (Princeton ; Oxford [England]: Princeton University Press, 2011).

Grant advocated for strict immigration restriction by relying on the nativist claim that white Americans were being “submerged” by “foreigners.”¹⁸ More recently, Kathleen Belew and Ramón A. Gutiérrez directly argued that the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act and the 1924 National Origins Act were born directly out of nativist fears that “the country was being invaded by unsavory sorts who were diluting whiteness and undermining Protestant hegemony.”¹⁹ I agree entirely with these historians. The histories of state-sponsored forced sterilization, prohibition of interracial marriage, birth control politics, and immigration restriction have been and continue to be heavily influenced by fears of white replacement.

This work is extremely important; but there is also a need to further explain the connection of white extinction anxiety to histories of “positive” eugenics. Positive eugenics practices involved the active encouragement of “fit” humans to reproduce, usually through moralistic appeals. “Race suicide,” at the turn of the twentieth century, inspired such practices. Notably, positive eugenics-type language continues to be commonly used by contemporary white supremacists.²⁰ Further research on the development and spread of this ideology thus contributes not only to a greater contextualization of the eugenics movement in U.S. history, but also to a

¹⁸ Erika Lee, *America for Americans: A History of Xenophobia in the United States*, First edition (New York: Basic Books, 2019).

¹⁹ Belew and Gutiérrez, *A Field Guide to White Supremacy*, 171.

²⁰ Kathleen Belew discusses how organized white power groups in the late twentieth century actively encouraged white women to bear white children as a means of race preservation. Several of these groups, including David Lane’s The Order, went so far as to promote polygamy among members “in hopes of an increased birthrate among movement women.” (Kathleen Belew, *Bring the War Home: The White Power Movement and Paramilitary America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2018), 160-161). In 1986, white nationalist and modern eugenics supporter, John Tanton, noted his fear that whites were being “outbred,” thereby “los[ing] the battle” (John Tanton as quoted in Carly Goodman, “Unmaking the Nation of Immigrants” in Kathleen Belew and Ramón A. Gutiérrez, eds., *A Field Guide to White Supremacy* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2021), 216-217). In 2017, Republican Congressman Steven King doubled-down on his controversial anti-immigration tweet, “we can’t restore our civilization with somebody else’s babies” with the quote, “you’ve got to keep your birth rate up...In doing so, you can grow your population, you can strengthen your culture, and you can strengthen your way of life” (Theodore Schleifer, “Rep. Steve King Doubles Down on Controversial ‘Babies’ Tweet,” *The Philadelphia Tribune*, accessed March 15, 2022, https://www.phillytrib.com/ap/state/rep-steve-king-doubles-down-on-controversial-babies-tweet/article_fa08a959-e803-5b78-ace2-4512519ac887.html).

deeper understanding of the motivations for the continued prevalence of white supremacist organization, rhetoric, and violence from the nineteenth century to the present day.

Thus, my work is not meant to challenge existing histories of “race suicide’s” role in forced sterilization or immigration policy, but to add-on— a historical intervention in the form of “yes, and.” Yes, “race suicide” fears culminated in forced sterilizations of poor women, sex workers, and women of color. Yes, these fears were used to promote exclusionary immigration laws and racist immigration practices. *And*, simultaneously, the “race suicide” conspiracy theory functioned as a pronatalist argument that encouraged white, “fit” women to reproduce. The history of this argument is not as visible as the other two; perhaps, because there is no evidence that it actually influenced birth rates. Data from the Sixteenth U.S. Census shows a decline of about a single child per native-born white woman from 1910 to 1940.²¹ Still, I argue there is value to be found in this hidden history of encouraging white birth, specifically in how it has allowed white replacement conspiracy theorists to shift blame over time from immoral youth to a Jewish cabal and then again to malicious immigrants.

This paper also posits that the roots of an organized pronatalist movement can be found earlier than existing scholarship suggests. Wendy Kline has placed the rise of positive eugenics practices in the 1930s, whereas Laura Lovett locates them in the 1920s.²² I show that positive eugenics rhetoric existed as a foundational principle as early as the turn of the century, demonstrated by Theodore Roosevelt’s claim in a 1902 letter that a young person who chose not

²¹ Native-born white women from ages 15-74 had an average of 3.33 children per woman in 1910, versus 2.31 children per woman in 1940. Likewise, foreign-born white women, Black women, and women of “other races” also showed birth declines of 1-2 children on average per woman (Sixteenth U.S. Census, 1940)

²² See Kline, *Building a Better Race* and Laura L. Lovett, *Conceiving the Future: Pronatalism, Reproduction, and the Family in the United States, 1890-1938* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

to have children should be viewed as a “criminal of the race.”²³ And this rhetoric continues to exist among far-right extremists today, exhibited in New Zealand Christchurch shooter Brent Tarrant’s repetition of the phrase “birthrates” in his manifesto.²⁴ In both settings, it functions as a tool for white supremacists to exert power over women’s bodies.

Kathleen Belew has stated that, “[white] supremacy, as a web of belief, ideology, history, and systems that perpetuate racial inequality, relies on not one, but manifold structures of power”— one being racism and another being patriarchy.²⁵ These two structures are clearly visible in the ideology of “race suicide.” As Laura Lovett has shown, early twentieth century pronatalism “was not about reproduction per se but about racial reproduction and its regulation.”²⁶ White male elites in the early twentieth century saw immoral women as the reason for white “extinction;” young white women were too concerned with booze and promiscuity to commit to the selfless act of raising a child, even for the benefit of the greater white race. Later, white supremacists would pin the blame on plotting outsiders — Jews, immigrants, or Americans of color. Thus, the jump from white extinction anxiety to full-blown white replacement conspiracy theories can be seen to be contingent on both the U.S. systems of racism and patriarchy.

This paper examines extremist nativist sentiment from 1882 to 1924, primarily through the early eugenics movement. This story does not begin specifically in 1882, but I have chosen it as a start date because it is the year that the first Chinese Exclusion Act was passed: the first time

²³ Theodore Roosevelt, “Letter from President Theodore Roosevelt to Mr. and Mrs. Van Vorst,” in *Works: Presidential Addresses and State Papers, Dec. 3, 1901, June 1910, and European Addresses. 8 v* (Review of Reviews Publishing Company, 1092).

²⁴ Leo Chavez, “Fear of White Replacement,” in Kathleen Belew and Ramón A. Gutiérrez, eds., *A Field Guide to White Supremacy* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2021), 180-181

²⁵ Belew and Gutiérrez, *A Field Guide to White Supremacy*, 99.

²⁶ Lovett, *Conceiving the Future*, 8.

in the U.S. that an immigrant group was excluded based on race alone, which helped legally solidify a white supremacist tradition of Othering immigrants. The broader decade of the 1880s has been observed by Gail Bederman to be a time in which “middle-class white Americans were discovering an extraordinary variety of ways to link male power and race,” two ideologies particularly present in the “race suicide” theory.²⁷ Specifically, this paper argues that the “race suicide” theory spread by eugenics proponents throughout this time period instilled a tradition among white supremacists of crafting a “narrative of victimhood” through which to strengthen their cause, advocate for government legislation, and directly and indirectly justify violence. Through both historical study of the eugenics movement and theoretical examination of the “race suicide” theory, I posit that white fear of race replacement in the United States can be found as early as the late nineteenth century. Of course, white extinction anxiety is a global phenomenon; white supremacy is a global condition.²⁸ Eugenics was also an international movement. Yet, I have chosen specifically to focus on the proliferation of these ideologies and practices in the United States. I argue that the U.S. traditions of slavery, Manifest Destiny, and state-sponsored promotion of a heteronormative white family structure all imbued traditional white supremacy with a uniquely American essence, and thus necessitates a national framework.²⁹

Hofstadter’s “paranoid style” provides a strong framework from which to examine different aspects of American conservatism and is especially helpful in understanding the construction of white supremacist conspiracy theories. The idea that the white race is dying

²⁷ Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917*, Women in Culture and Society (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 21.

²⁸ Daniel Geary, Camilla Schofield, and Jennifer Ann Sutton, eds., *Global White Nationalism: From Apartheid to Trump*, Racism, Resistance and Social Change (Manchester: University Press, 2020), 4-5, 10.

²⁹ The enforcement of a white nuclear family structure on communities of color is detailed by historian Richard White in *The Republic for Which it Stands* (Richard White, *The Republic for Which It Stands: The United States during Reconstruction and the Gilded Age, 1865-1896*, The Oxford History of the United States (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 5).

prompts an immediate desire for action, a rhetorical method Hofstadter identifies as “time is forever just running out.”³⁰ White supremacy groups have also, throughout their history, relied on “narratives of victimhood” to attract members to their cause, inspire xenophobic legislation, and justify racial violence.³¹ Lee Bebout terms this “weaponizing victimhood;” a fundamental way for white supremacists and nativists to “maintain power and privilege in the guise of powerlessness and justice.”³² The “race suicide” theory, the first of a broader set of “Great Replacement” theories that continue to be spread throughout the twentieth and twenty-first century, is one such narrative. By viewing this conspiracy theory as a primary source that showcases both white anxiety and the creation of white victimhood, I can attribute its agency in white supremacist mobilization. I demonstrate that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, white leaders used the “race suicide” conspiracy theory to continue to enforce a racial hierarchy they felt was slipping out of their grasp post-Reconstruction. The supposed fear that the “white race” was in danger of being replaced signified its presumed importance over other races in the United States, especially new waves of immigrants and recently emancipated Black people. Therefore, white progressive pronatalism was a thinly veiled way to continue to uphold a white supremacist structure.

³⁰ Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*, 30.

³¹ In 2004, Thomas Frank noted how “lurid fantasies of victimhood” are often used to attract religious fundamentalists to the radical conservative cause. (Thomas Frank, *What’s the Matter with Kansas? How Conservatives Won the Heart of America*, 1st ed (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004), 159) In a similar vein, Federico Finchelstein (in 2017) attributed the rise of fascism to a dependence on “Nazi victimization”, especially regarding its “stress on myth” and “rejection of reason.” (Federico Finchelstein, *From Fascism to Populism in History* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2017), 67-68). In 2021, Joseph Darda proposed that white men used the Vietnam War to craft themselves into a “marginalized” population (Joseph Darda, *How White Men Won the Culture Wars: A History of Veteran America* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2021)).

³² Lee Bebout, “Weaponizing Victimhood: Discourses of Oppression and the Maintenance of Supremacy on the Right,” in *News on the Right*, ed. Anthony Nadler and A.J. Bauer (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 64.

Thomas G. Dyer has argued that Progressive Era racial thought was fundamental in building later twentieth century racial theory, but it had far more serious implications than that alone.³³ I argue that Progressive Era racism was fundamental in building a larger twentieth century white supremacist movement, laying the groundwork for the belief in and spread of conspiracy theories centered on white replacement. Simultaneously, I add to a historiography that asserts that white supremacy has not only existed on the fringes of American society—in fact, it was front-and-center in U.S. politics at the turn of the twentieth century.³⁴

The Rise of the Eugenics Movement

The end of the nineteenth century marked the beginning of what historian Edward Dickinson has termed a global “Scientific-Technical Revolution.”³⁵ Patterns of industrialization, urbanization, immigration, and imperialism led to serious cultural consequences. The simultaneous growth of wealth in the United States with the rise of class conflict and racial strife post-Reconstruction revealed stark divisions within American society. Elites, often newly equipped with university education, struggled to make sense of the rapidly changing world around them, and began to fear that the racial, gender, and class hierarchies that had long privileged them were beginning to shift.

At the same time, the exponential growth of Western industrialization and colonialism earlier in the nineteenth century had helped thrust the new field of science onto a global level.

³³ Thomas G. Dyer, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Idea of Race*, Louisiana paperback ed., 1. [Dr.] (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1992).

³⁴ See, for example: Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, Allan J Lichtman, *White Protestant Nation: The Rise of the American Conservative Movement* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2008), and Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2001).

³⁵ Dickinson, Edward Ross. *The World in the Long Twentieth Century: An Interpretive History*. Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2018, 98.

Biological sciences, in particular, became especially popular in Great Britain and the United States; practices of “classification and understanding” were seen as an important “part of the process of controlling and exploiting” other groups of people.³⁶ For academics and elites, science now provided a means through which to “diagnose, ameliorate, and perhaps even perfect society.”³⁷

Eugenics grew along with the burgeoning evolutionary theories of nineteenth century natural philosophy, the precursor to professional biology. One of the first such theories to acquire global traction came from a French scientist, Jean-Baptiste de Monet de Lamarck, in the early nineteenth century. The theory, eponymously named Lamarckism, introduced the concept of species evolution, as well as the idea of the inheritance of acquired characteristics from parent to offspring.³⁸ But, for Lamarck, evolution was influenced entirely by the environment and “forces internal” to an individual organism; there was not yet such a concept of “natural selection.”³⁹ Then, in 1859, Charles Darwin published *On the Origin of Species*, which first introduced the concept of evolution through “natural selection,” the theory that survivability and mate-attraction were actually the driving factors of evolutionary change. Many intellectual thinkers, in the following decades of the nineteenth century, subscribed to some form of Darwinism, Lamarckism, or both. Thus, the field of eugenics borrowed from both the theories of natural selection and the inheritance of acquired characteristics.

³⁶ Andrew Ede and Lesley B. Cormack, “Science and Empire,” in *A History of Science in Society: From Philosophy to Utility, Third Edition* (University of Toronto Press, 2017), 207.

³⁷ Alexandra Minna Stern, *Eugenic Nation: Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015), 21.

³⁸ Stern, *Eugenic Nation*, 21.

³⁹ Lamarckism is often explained through the example of short-necked giraffes: if a short-necked giraffe ancestor was placed in an environment where all food was on trees too tall to reach, the “internal forces” within that giraffe would lead, through generations, to giraffes with longer and longer necks. (Ede and Cormack, “Science and Empire,” 215, and Ronald L. Numbers, *Darwinism Comes to America* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998), 33.)

British scientist Sir Francis Galton first introduced his concept of *eugenics* in 1883 as a sub concept to genetic determinism: the idea that human traits are a direct result of their genes, rather than their environment.⁴⁰ Galton was the half-cousin of Charles Darwin, and his ideas were heavily based on Darwin's theory of natural selection, which introduced proof of organic evolution, the first scientific proof against theories of pure creationism. Specifically, eugenics advocated for the improvement of the human race through the control of their own evolution—put simply, “better breeding.”⁴¹

Then, in 1900, the genetic experiments of Gregor Mendel were rediscovered, and the global eugenics movement was fully launched. Mendel's hybridization experiments suggested a pattern of “strict hereditarianism,” where traits could be directly passed from parent to offspring with no modification.⁴² This reaffirmed Galton's hypothesis that organisms could be bred selectively to favor certain traits. Thus, the solution to the “decline” of the “fittest” (the population decline among whites) was for whites to “take charge of their own evolution.”⁴³ Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, the subsequent rise of neo-Lamarckism, and the rediscovery of Mendel's experiments all gave scientific validity to the ideology we now know as Social Darwinism.⁴⁴ Through the first decades of the twentieth century, Social Darwinist ideas were

⁴⁰ Stepan, Nancy. *The Hour of Eugenics: Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991.

⁴¹ This succinct definition was originally constructed by U.S. eugenicist Charles B. Davenport in his 1911 book, *Heredity in Relation to Eugenics* (New York: H. Holt, 1911, p.1)

⁴² Stern, *Eugenic Nation*, 21.

⁴³ Diane B. Paul, “Darwin, Social Darwinism and Eugenics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Darwin*, ed. Jonathan Hodge and Gregory Radick, 2nd ed., Cambridge Companions to Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 217.

⁴⁴ Paul, “Darwin, Social Darwinism, and Eugenics,” 239. In this paper, I retroactively label people as “Social Darwinists,” although those who believed these theories at the time would not have referred to themselves as “Social Darwinists” (224). Although the term “Social Darwinism” was being used among sociologists not long after Darwin's publication of *On the Origin of Species*, the application of the term to categorize a type of person (specifically, “they are a Social Darwinist,”) was not popularized in the U.S. until Richard Hofstadter published *Social Darwinism in American Thought* in 1944 (Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought, 1860-1915*, Reprint 2016, Anniversary Collection (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1944).

solidified into positive eugenics practices by white supremacists who sought to breed out undesirable traits in the race.

However, it is important to note that eugenics was not only influenced by scientific development. Certainly, eugenicists borrowed the language and theories of the burgeoning study of heredity, but they were just as heavily influenced by pre-existing sociological ideals of racial hierarchy. Sir Francis Galton had studied the lives of wealthy British elites, and his theory of eugenics proposed that it was their superior genetic makeup that made them wealthy and powerful. He had been the first to ask his cousin Darwin how theories of natural selection could be applied to humans, in 1865.⁴⁵ Prominent eugenicists in the United States had grown up benefitting from the implication and legacies of slavery, imperialism, and Indigenous removal. Thus, regardless of whether the science behind eugenics was factually sound, eugenicists could monopolize scientific language to legitimate their field.

Despite some debate regarding the ties of Social Darwinism to the broader Darwinist theories of evolution and anti-creationism, the first American political movement to widely back eugenics was the Progressive movement around the turn of the twentieth century.⁴⁶ In fact, it was American progressive Edward Ross who was the first to coin the term “race suicide.” Combining the pseudoscience of Anglo-Saxonism, which posited that the United States “belong[ed] in some sense to the Anglo-Saxon ‘race,’” with ideas of hereditary and environmental factors, Ross heavily influenced the early American eugenics movement.⁴⁷ For leading progressive thinkers, eugenics was a direct, convenient way to maintain racial hierarchy

⁴⁵ Paul, “Darwin, Social Darwinism and Eugenics,” 237.

⁴⁶ William Jennings Bryan, for one, saw a “straight line” from scientific evolution to selective breeding, and refused to endorse any type of practice associated with Darwinism (Paul, “Darwin, Social Darwinism and Eugenics,” 214).

⁴⁷ See: Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 5, Dyer, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Idea of Race*, 14-15, Lee, *America for Americans*, 120, and Julius Weinberg, “E. A. Ross: The Progressive as Nativist,” *The Wisconsin Magazine of History* 50, no. 3 (1967): 242–53.

and resolve social ills. American zoologist Edward S. Morse had predicted this in 1876, when he encouraged American scientists to use natural selection principles to “trace evil and corrupt passions to their source.” Morse proclaimed his hope that “common-sense w[ould] ultimately recognize that the imprisonment of a criminal for ten or twenty years is not simply to punish him or relieve the public of his lawless acts, but to restrain him from perpetuating his kind.”⁴⁸

The United States provided a uniquely fruitful breeding ground for the eugenics movement. In the U.S. at the turn of the twentieth century, Social Darwinism thrived in an environment of volatile, jingoistic nationalism. Nationality, both a “political project,” as well as a “cultural one,” had become ingrained with the American spirit following earlier nineteenth century ideas of Manifest Destiny.⁴⁹ It became highly racialized as a means for justifying the removal and genocide of Indigenous populations across the American west, as well as imperialist ventures in the Pacific (often associated with the belief in a supposed “white man’s burden”).⁵⁰ Following the end of formalized slavery in 1865, racial taxonomies became a standard means for enforcing Jim Crow segregation and justifying violence towards Black Americans. They were further entrenched in the 1890s, when new waves of immigrants began to settle in America’s urban spaces. Eugenics worked as a means to scientifically back these racial taxonomies, with many afraid to question practices based on scientists’ claim to “objective knowledge.”⁵¹

⁴⁸ Edwin Sylvester Morse, *1876 Address of Edward S. Morse to the Natural History Section of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Buffalo NY, 1876.*

⁴⁹ Dickinson, *The World in the Long Twentieth Century*, 100.

⁵⁰ An infamous example of this type of ideology is Senator Albert Beveridge’s 1900 speech, “In Support of American Empire,” in which Beveridge justifies American colonization of the Philippines as the “mission” of the American “race.” (*Record*, 56 Cong., I Sess., pp. 704-712.)

⁵¹ Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics*, 136.

Nativism, Racism, and Anglo-Saxon Superiority

Nativism, the practice of protecting and favoring the native-born in a country over immigrants or racialized Others, had existed on American soil since Revolutionary times. However, as John Higham has noted, earlier nativist traditions had focused more on what “America was not,” rather than what it was supposed to be.⁵² That is, early nativists emphasized that America was a white, Protestant nation, not a radical or Catholic one, and used these as anti-immigrant exclusionary principles. The twentieth-century nativist tradition became far more racialized than earlier variations. By the mid-1800s, the emphasis had shifted to a new “racial arrogance.”⁵³ As the Anglo-Saxon race molded itself from “great” to “superior,” U.S. nativism became infused with xenophobia and racism. The specific environment of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century United States, complete with the Gilded Age and the Progressive movement, led to the creation of a new, exclusionary type of whiteness (Nordic Anglo-Saxonism) which has continued to influence American white supremacy ever since. Concepts of whiteness in the United States have always upheld and been upheld by manifold power structures— racism, xenophobia, patriarchy, and classism— which were intrinsically cemented together at the turn of the twentieth century.

The start of the Gilded Age in the late nineteenth century had led to a newfound “pride of ancestry” among Americans hungry for economic success.⁵⁴ Ideas of national greatness, inflated by the display of exorbitant wealth by robber barons such as John D. Rockefeller or Cornelius Vanderbilt, became inflated with a supposed Anglo-Saxon lineage among the American people. This coincided with the growing concepts of Manifest Destiny and the desire for American

⁵² Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 9.

⁵³ Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 2.

⁵⁴ Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 32.

expansion in the Pacific. White Americans had long thought of themselves as “chosen people,” seemingly divinely confirmed with the survival of the thirteen colonies and the winning of the Revolutionary War. By the late 1800s, American leaders such as Henry Cabot Lodge and Theodore Roosevelt had agreed on the idea that Americans, “as members of a superior race, had not only an obligation but a sacred duty to extend their sway over lesser peoples.”⁵⁵

The late nineteenth century also saw shifting racial hierarchies between white, Indigenous, Asian, and Black Americans. Combined with the acquisition of newly colonized territories, many white Americans became convinced of the need to assert formal “proof” of white superiority. Racial pseudoscientific ideals dominated intellectual discourse and became a way to “justify the sufferings or deaths of blacks, Indians, or Mexicans.”⁵⁶ This first began to culminate in anti-immigrant sentiment against the Chinese in the United States in the 1870s. The Chinese were the first racial group to be constructed as “illegal immigrants.” Racist stereotypes painted them as “subhuman,” launching a national tradition of codifying unwanted immigrants as a “racialized” and “othered” category.⁵⁷ This growing trend of anti-Chinese racism and xenophobia culminated in the first Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.

By the 1890s, a new type of immigrant began to also be more broadly racialized—Southern and Eastern Europeans. Seeking refuge from economic hardship, these immigrants began to migrate in larger numbers toward the turn of the twentieth century. Gradually over the decade, dislike of these immigrants turned into volatile hatred, often even leading to violence. Put bluntly, these new Europeans had the “bad luck” of arriving in the midst of a strong nativist

⁵⁵ Dyer, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Idea of Race*, 10.

⁵⁶ Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 3-5.

⁵⁷ Erika Lee, “Enforcing the Borders: Chinese Exclusion along the U.S. Borders with Canada and Mexico, 1882-1924,” *The Journal of American History* 89, no. 1 (2002): 69.

movement that had begun to flourish in the post-Reconstruction years.⁵⁸ They were often peasants, and as such, sought refuge in slums and tenement homes. However, following Jacob Riis's 1889 publication of *How the Other Half Lives*, most Americans had come to associate tenement housing with social and economic ills. Southern and Eastern European immigrants soon became conflated with crowded and dirty homes, immorality, and peace disturbance, a low-class disturbance.⁵⁹ Because there were no "readily apparent" physical differences between these new immigrants and so-called native white Americans, racial pseudoscientific, Social Darwinist ideas became more heavily weaponized as a way of "manufacturing racial difference."⁶⁰ Jewish and Italian immigrants, who usually possessed slightly darker features, received the blunt end of this weaponization. White Americans saw "greedy Jews" and "dangerous Italians" as both representing a new domestic xenophobia, or "foreign peril."⁶¹ Progressive-era eugenicists were quick to conflate these new lower-class immigrants with racial degradation. Henry Cabot Lodge, for example, strongly distanced Southern and Eastern Europeans from true Anglo-Saxons, stating that what made a race was "their mental, and above all, their moral characteristics."⁶² Such ideas were used to push for greater immigration restriction. In 1891, Lodge pioneered a push for Congress to adopt a literacy test for all new immigrants, noting how,

Thus it is proved, first, that immigration to this country is increasing, and, second, that it is making its greatest relative increase from races most alien to the body of the American people and from the lowest and most illiterate classes among those races. In other words, it is apparent that, while our immigration is increasing, it is showing at the same time a marked tendency to deteriorate in character.

⁵⁸ Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 87.

⁵⁹ Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 88.

⁶⁰ Lee, *America for Americans*, 111.

⁶¹ Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 95.

⁶² Quoted in Gary B. Nash and Richard Weiss, *The Great Fear: Race in the Mind of America*.

He lamented the influx of “dangerous masses” which sought to disrupt Anglo-Saxon racial purity, a characterization of immigrants which has since come to dominate anti-immigrant discourse.⁶³ But for Lodge and other nineteenth century thinkers, the problem wasn’t just that immigrants were entering the country at never-before seen rates, it was that they were outbreeding whites. Fear that “foreign” births were outnumbering native births had been slowly growing over the second half of the nineteenth century. As early as 1867, elites were noting that a growing number of births in the U.S. were “wholly of those of recent foreign origin.”⁶⁴ The combined fear of immigrant transplant, miscegenation and fecundity led to the 1894 founding of the Immigration Restriction League (IRL), which specifically sought to differentiate between “different *kinds* of whiteness” and rank them.⁶⁵ The highest ranked of these white “races” were the Anglo-Saxons.

Notably, the so-called Anglo-Saxon race does not exist. It has never existed. Races itself, as Nancy Stepan has noted, are “not preexisting natural entities but social groups produced out of unequal power relations and discriminatory practices.”⁶⁶ The Anglo-Saxon race is fundamentally based on racial pseudoscience that claims Anglo-Saxons are part of a superior Nordic race, descended from Germanic tribes. These ideas, still echoed in white nationalist culture today, had existed in colonial England as early as the sixteenth century, and by the eighteenth century, had become conflated with a “mythical” ideology.⁶⁷ British colonists in North America also held these beliefs, whether passed through family members or through ready access to British books

⁶³ Henry Cabot Lodge, “The Restriction of Immigration,” *The North American Review* 152, no. 410 (1891): 27–36.

⁶⁴ Horatio Robinson Storer, “On the Decrease of the Rate of Increase of Population Now Obtaining in Europe and America,” in *American Journal of Science: The First Scientific Journal in the United States: Devoted to the Geological Sciences and to Related Fields* (1867), 145.

⁶⁵ Lee, *America for Americans*, 115.

⁶⁶ Nancy Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics: Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 136.

⁶⁷ Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 15.

and pamphlets that espoused Anglo-Saxon superiority.⁶⁸ Most believed Anglo-Saxons descended from an Aryan Germanic tribe known as the Teutons, who had, through acquired and hereditary traits, become the dominant race in Europe. Edward Ross noted how, by coming to America, descendants of the Teutons had become truly the most “*individualist*” race in the history of the world.⁶⁹ These descendants, called Aryans, Nordics, Caucasians, or Baltics, came to define what constituted Anglo-Saxon, the most superior form of whiteness. Madison Grant described these people as “long skulled, very tall, fair skinned with blond or brown hair and light colored eyes,” who were “representatives of Aryan language and culture.”⁷⁰

The creation of a standard racial hierarchy helped cement white supremacy deep into American social and political structure just at the moment many had thought it might not stand the test of time. Southern and Eastern Europeans sat a level below “native” American whites (of Northern and Western European background), classified as Slavs, Iberians, Hebrews, Mediterraneans, and Alpines. Most notably, these groups often did not contain light-colored eyes, which Grant noted was a “specialization” of only the Nordic race. Their dark-colored eyes and hair, “universal among wild mammals and entirely so among the primates,” showed the dangerous “direction” that the pure Nordic race was “tending under the influence of variation and selection.”⁷¹ Many, like Grant, believed miscegenation was breeding out the desired and superior traits of blond hair and light eyes.

⁶⁸ Early ideas of Anglo-Saxonism as a superior race descended from Germanic tribes can be seen in Tacitus’s *Germania*. Later popular texts that espoused Anglo-Saxon superiority and mythology were Paul de Rapin-Thoyras’s 1726 English translation of *Histoire d’Angleterre*, the 1771 pamphlet *Historical Essay on the English Constitution*, and Demophilis’s 1776 pamphlet *The Genuine Principles of the Anglo-Saxon, or English Constitution* (Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 17).

⁶⁹ Edward Alsworth Ross, *Social Control: A Survey of the Foundations of Order* (Transaction Publishers, 1901).

⁷⁰ Madison Grant, *The Passing Of The Great Race; or, The Racial Basis of European History*, 1916, 20.

⁷¹ Grant, *The Passing Of The Great Race*, 25-27.

African Americans, Native Americans, and Asians were relegated to the “lowest rungs” of the racial hierarchy. Madison Grant does not even address them in his *Passing of the Great Race*, claiming they fall “outside the scope” of his work.⁷² White supremacy over Black Americans had been strongly rooted in the practice of slavery. With emancipation came a desired need for whites to re-establish and reinforce white supremacy throughout the United States. In the Reconstruction era, the first Ku-Klux Klan used violence to do this. However, following the Enforcement Acts of 1870 and 1871, four decades would pass before the second Klan would emerge. During these “inter-Klan” years, overt white supremacy and its dangerous consequences existed not on the fringes of American society, but blatantly and unabashedly in the rhetoric of U.S. elites, most notably through the promotion of the growing pseudoscience of eugenics.

The Progressive movement also highly stressed the need for American culture to return to mid-century morality, a concept Gail Bederman has shown was heavily intertwined with standards of masculinity. Masculinity had long been linked to white supremacy; for most of American history, for example, African American men had been placed in the same political category as women.⁷³ But at the turn of the century, masculinity became even more prominently racialized through the concept of “civilization,” a stage of society Social Darwinists posited came after “savagery.” Civilized white women were “delicate, spiritual,” and most of all, “devoted to the home.” Civilized white men were “protectors of women and children.”⁷⁴ Progressive-era thinkers, Theodore Roosevelt included, worried that young Anglo-Saxon men and women were moving further away from these “civilized” roles and back toward “savagery,” consumed by leisure and whim. This, they thought, must be the reason behind the decline in the

⁷² Grant, *The Passing Of The Great Race*, 33.

⁷³ Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization*, 21.

⁷⁴ Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization*, 25.

white population- young white men and women were not prioritizing having children. Thus, the solution to “race-suicide” was for white men and women to re-devote themselves to traditional American ideals of morality, “civilization,” and the increase in white, rosy-cheeked children.

Thus, the American traditions of anti-Black racism, nativist xenophobia, Anglo-Saxon mythology, patriarchy, and Manifest Destiny-inspired nationalism all helped form new global sociological concept of Social Darwinism. The concept that some humans were *strong* and others were *weak* fit well into the Gilded Age environment, where capitalist class divisions were easier to see than ever before. Eugenics became a way of justifying racial, class, and gender hierarchies while maintaining the guise of treating social ills. Although by the late 1920s, these ideas had taken full vile form in the practices of forced sterilization and bans on interracial marriage (negative eugenics), their earlier form as racialized pronatalism begs more attention. Positive eugenics, the direct urging of “fit” (read: white and married) women to reproduce, heavily relied on fear tactics and social pressure, exemplified in the ideology of “race suicide.” The strong prevalence of this theory among the writings and speeches of notable and influential progressives at the turn of the twentieth century helps demonstrate the long-held tradition of white supremacy in the United States, as well as its dominance over American family structure. But more importantly, “race suicide” demonstrates the emergence of a more modern white supremacist tradition: the use of a narrative of victimhood to inspire action.

“Race Suicide” Through Theodore Roosevelt and Madison Grant

On March 13, 1905, President Theodore Roosevelt addressed the National Congress of Mothers. Firmly rooted in his progressive Republican stance by this time, Roosevelt had become consumed by worries about what he felt was an abandonment of moral principles among U.S.

youth, coupled with a declining birthrate. To the women gathered that day, Roosevelt declared what he felt should be the goal of the American woman:

Just as the happiest and most honorable and most useful task that can be set any man is to earn enough for the support of his wife and family, for the bringing up and starting in life of his children, so the most important, the most honorable and desirable task which can be set any woman is to be a good and wise mother in a home marked by self-respect and mutual forbearance, by willingness to perform duty, and by refusal to sink into self-indulgence or avoid that which entails effort and self-sacrifice.

This duty, he clearly defined moments later, should be the willingness “to bear, and to bring up as they should be brought up, healthy children, sound in body, mind, and character, and numerous enough so that the race shall increase and not decrease.” If young women decided to instead embrace frivolity and immorality, Roosevelt feared the Anglo-Saxon race would commit “race suicide,” and cease to exist.⁷⁵

The spread of “race suicide” ideology at the turn of the twentieth century, and its relation to later theories of white replacement, can be exemplified through the case studies of its relation to two influential American-bred white men: President Theodore Roosevelt and conservationist Madison Grant. In a way, the story of “race suicide” is also one of their collaboration over the years. Although Roosevelt and Grant demonstrate two very different manifestations of eugenics, each played an important role in framing the white race as a victimized population for the first time on a national scale, thus setting the stage for further manifestations of white replacement conspiracy theories. Yet while Roosevelt embraced pronatalism, or the encouragement of white women to have more white children, as the solution to “race suicide” at the turn of the twentieth century, Grant’s ideology reflected the more decisive move toward negative eugenics practices in the late 1910s. Furthermore, the story from Roosevelt to Grant demonstrates a move in the

⁷⁵ Theodore Roosevelt, “Remarks Before the Mothers’ Congress,” March 13, 1905, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-before-the-mothers-congress>.

direction of “blame” for white extinction—Roosevelt placed the fault on white youth, while Grant attributed it far more to “races of inferior value and civilization.”⁷⁶ By studying how Roosevelt’s ideas gave way to Grant’s as the favorite of American elite society over the first two decades of the twentieth century, we can see how a conspiracy theory began to take form, slowly but surely acquiring all six traits identified by the European Commission in the introduction.

When Theodore Roosevelt was born in 1858, “Anglo-Saxon nationalism...lacked both the intellectual and emotional pungency essential to a serious nativistic appeal,” as John Higham has explained.⁷⁷ Certainly, Roosevelt was raised in a racial hierarchical tradition, and had grown up reading several foundational texts of nineteenth-century Anglo-Saxon racial thought. His mother recalled to him stories of her youth in the antebellum South, which impressed the idea of racial hierarchies on him at a young age. But as Roosevelt grew older, ideas of Anglo-Saxon “superiority” began to dominate academia, as well. Both the scientific and sociological theories associated with eugenics were taught in classes at Harvard, where Theodore Roosevelt enrolled in 1876. There, he was educated in subjects such as “Teutonic germ theory, Darwinism, and...romantic Anglo-Saxonism.”⁷⁸ Racial theory heavy with white supremacy dominated higher academic study, and Roosevelt, as an academic, subscribed to many of these theories, becoming increasingly interested in intellectuals who studied racial “science.” Following his time at Harvard, Roosevelt studied briefly at Columbia, where he met political scientist John Burgess, a strong believer in “Teutonic” theory that posited Teutonic descendants as being particularly apt for political leadership. Roosevelt combined these theories with his own understanding of the Turner Thesis, which posited the conquering of the frontier had created American

⁷⁶ Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race*, 260.

⁷⁷ Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 11.

⁷⁸ Dyer, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Idea of Race*, 4-5.

exceptionalism. By the time Roosevelt had established the start of his political career, he held a strong view of Teutonic superiority specific to the American people.⁷⁹

From the late 1880s to 1890s, Theodore Roosevelt's ideas of Anglo-Saxon superiority translated most into his ideas of American nationalism and imperialism. He developed strong friendships with Henry Cabot Lodge and Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan, and the three often idealized an "American empire justified...on racial grounds."⁸⁰ Roosevelt's nationalism thrived on the idea of conquering "savage" or "barbaric" peoples, both abroad and at home. His Turner-influenced racial ideas are well exhibited in his epic *The Winning of the West* (1889-1896), where he plainly touted his belief in the superiority of the American "race," noting that there had never before been a race "whose expansion has been either so broad or so rapid."⁸¹ He further attributes the moment the American people began "their world of western conquest" as the moment they first "sprang into national life." For Roosevelt, the history of the United States was inherently tied to his ideas of a superior national race.⁸²

However, Roosevelt did not particularly distinguish between white "races" as much as later eugenicists. He was a Dutch descendant, and thus could not fully espouse pure Anglo-Saxon superiority. Instead, he embraced the idea of the United States as a "melting pot," a relatively inclusive environment "in which a hybrid race of many strains would be forged." He espoused the belief that hybridity would serve to strengthen the virility of the American race, often shifting in positions over who would be allowed to take place in said hybrid race.⁸³

⁷⁹ Dyer, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Idea of Race*, 7-9 and Lovett, *Conceiving the Future*, 111. See also Edward Alsworth Ross, *Social Control*.

⁸⁰ Dyer, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Idea of Race*, 10.

⁸¹ Theodore Roosevelt, *The Winning of the West* (G.P. Putnam's sons, 1889), 2.

⁸² Roosevelt, *The Winning of the West*, 22.

⁸³ Gary Gerstle, "Theodore Roosevelt and the Divided Character of American Nationalism," *Journal of American History* 86, no. 3 (December 1, 1999), 1281 and Rauchway, *Murdering McKinley*, Ch 5.

The two groups Roosevelt never saw fit to take place in the nation's "melting pot" were Asian or Black Americans, who he felt were fundamentally of a different racial type than white Americans. He supported the early eugenics movement because he believed in a Social Darwinist classification of races, which posited that white and black people were of fundamentally different races. When discussing Asians or African Americans, Roosevelt spoke about differences in blood quality. Yet, this same rhetoric did not apply to his discussion of other white ethnic groups or immigrants. He also did not specifically advocate for separation of the races, and still had contact with people he deemed racially inferior.⁸⁴ Roosevelt could not always reckon with his two values of civic behavior and racial hierarchy. As such, Theodore Roosevelt remains a contradictory character who is sometimes overlooked by historians for his racist ideology, including Thomas Dyer. Nevertheless, his almost thirty-year obsession with "race suicide" shows just how strong his nationalist, moralist, and white supremacist ideology was at the turn of the twentieth century.

For Roosevelt the progressive, "race suicide" showed both a decline in the traditional family structure and an adoption of hedonistic values of the youth. He strongly believed that the decline in birth rate was due to an adoption of "decadence" over traditional American values such as hard work or rugged individualism.⁸⁵ These ideas were also largely a result of his own embrace of ranch life following the death of his first wife, Alice. He applied the Lamarckian idea of acquired traits to the frontier, and therefore concluded that the new generation of young Americans was not embracing the same values of strength that earlier generations had. He hated the "weakling," the American who engaged in a lavish, lazy lifestyle. Rather, he encouraged

⁸⁴ Gerstle, "Theodore Roosevelt," and Rauchway, *Murdering McKinley*.

⁸⁵ Dyer, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Idea of Race*, 147.

young Americans to have qualities of “courage” and “hardihood.”⁸⁶ This meant settling down, moving out of cities and toward farmland, and, of course, having more children. Roosevelt utilized his position as a progressive to encourage white women to reproduce for the good of the race, using moralistic rhetoric. He attributed a woman’s value to the number of her children and saw childless women as racial “traitors.”⁸⁷ Therefore, while Roosevelt fundamentally feared “race suicide” for most of his later life, he never saw it as a malicious plot against whites by outsiders. Rather, he believed it was fundamentally due to white America’s loss of earlier nineteenth century values of hard work, morality, and traditional gender roles. He resolutely believed “race suicide” was a social ill that could be solved by a resurgence of dedication and return to the nuclear family structure. For Roosevelt, “race suicide” was only a narrative of decline; it would grow into a conspiracy theory under the influence of Madison Grant.

In 1887, Roosevelt established an association of wealthy, big-game hunters at a dinner party in his home, named “The Boone and Crockett Club” in honor of the former pioneers Daniel Boone and Davey Crockett. Six years later, Manhattan lawyer Madison Grant was admitted, beginning a long collaboration between the two men. Both were from Manhattan, from wealthy “Knickerbocker” families, were lifelong Republicans, and both had deep interests in natural history and big game hunting.⁸⁸ Under Roosevelt’s support, Grant and other club member George Bird Grinnell transitioned the Boone and Crockett Club “from a mere social lodge for wealthy hunters into the seminal conservation organization in America.”⁸⁹ Hunters were usually

⁸⁶ Theodore Roosevelt, “Address of President Roosevelt at Redlands, California, May 7, 1903,” May 7, 1903, TR Center Digital Library, <https://www.theodorerooseveltcenter.org/Research/Digital-Library/Record?libID=o289799>.

⁸⁷ Roosevelt to Hamlin Garland in 1903, as quoted in Dyer, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Idea of Race*, 153.

⁸⁸ Jonathan Peter Spiro, *Defending the Master Race: Conservation, Eugenics, and the Legacy of Madison Grant* (Burlington, Vt. : Hanover, NH: University of Vermont Press ; Published by University Press of New England, 2009), Chapter 1.

⁸⁹ Spiro, *Defending the Master Race*, 18.

in support of conservation movements at the turn of the twentieth century; as Jonathan Spiro notes, Grant and Roosevelt wanted to “save America’s animals in the present so that they could hunt them in the future.”⁹⁰ In the 1890s, Grant became increasingly concerned that the big-game American mammals he liked to hunt were dying out. He turned his ideas toward species preservation, a theme that he would later apply to the white race.

There exists hardly any archival information on Madison Grant. His relatives had his personal papers destroyed following his death, his quiet demeanor meant he rarely gave interviews, and he never wrote a memoir. Jonathan Spiro has crafted an immense biography out of the “historiographical desert” that is Madison Grant’s life, which I have relied upon to craft this narrative, as well as Grant’s infamous publication, *The Passing of the Great Race*. Still, there remain fundamental gaps that cannot be explained: for one, Grant never married despite his long-held belief in increasing birthrates as a solution for “race suicide.”

Spiro does posit his own theories about Grant’s life—that his racist ideology was influenced by the new stock of immigrants he saw in the United States in the 1880s, combined with his visit to the Moritzburg castle in Saxony, where he saw red deer who had bred out the gene for larger antlers, seeming proof that the “fittest” did not always survive on their own.⁹¹ I would also argue his similar Ivy league education to Roosevelt led the two to have similar backgrounds in white supremacist racial theory and pseudoscience that was canon in the academy in the late 1800s. No matter the exact origins of his ideology, Grant no doubt remains one of the most, if not *the* most, infamous figures of the eugenics movement. His 1916 *The Passing of the Great Race* proposed various solutions to Roosevelt’s fear of “race suicide,” some

⁹⁰ Spiro, *Defending the Master Race*, 19.

⁹¹ Spiro, *Defending the Master Race*, 155.

that would later be reflected in the rhetoric of the second Ku Klux Klan and the German Nazi Party.

Madison Grant believed that to understand the history of and the making of modern society, one must understand and conform to racial hierarchy.⁹² He heavily subscribed to “race suicide” ideology; his book spends considerable time lamenting the decline of Nordic Anglo-Saxon genetic purity that had resulted from the introduction of “immigrant labor” to colonial America. Because white Americans had allowed other races to enter the country in the first place, Grant believed, they were now being “threatened with extermination.”⁹³ For Grant, different from Roosevelt, the fault fell not on young white immorality, but rather on the “intrusion of hordes of immigrants of inferior racial value” who “lowered and vulgarized” the entire “tone of American life, social, moral and political.”⁹⁴ Here we see how “race suicide” begins to adopt the rhetoric of a conspiratorial plot— Grant saw immigrants as purposefully “steal[ing]” white American language, names, clothes, and women, all the while “elbow[ing]” the white American “out of his own home.”⁹⁵

Grant, like Roosevelt, felt strongly that Black Americans could never be allowed to be part of the American “race.” He lamented that the South had lost many white men in the Civil War and felt that now African Americans were threatening to “breed out their masters.” He feared that they would either completely replace white Anglo-Saxon Americans, or that they would “amalgamate and form a population of race bastards.” As such, he proposed separate colonies for African Americans that would allow them to leave only “as laborers,” an idea many

⁹² Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race*, xxii.

⁹³ Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race*, 11.

⁹⁴ Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race*, 86-89.

⁹⁵ Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race*, 91.

white supremacists and Klan members would adopt in the 1920s.⁹⁶ But unlike Roosevelt, Grant decried the “melting pot” ideology, noting it would lead to a “mongrel race” like that seen in Mexico. Unsurprisingly, he strongly supported the “one-drop rule.”⁹⁷

Fundamentally, Grant believed that no two races could exist in the same country harmoniously. Therefore, his entire ideology of “race suicide” was based on racial war; what Hofstadter identified as the “apocalypticism of the paranoid style.”⁹⁸ He claimed that a competition between two races would always lead to one being replaced or bred out. For this problem, he proposed several immediate solutions: the “increase in the desirable classes” (not simply a population increase for all), the “elimination of defective infants,” and state sterilization of “undesirables.”⁹⁹ His call for American whites to deliberately choose to breed for intellect and race virility reflected the earlier tradition of positive eugenics, but his simultaneous demands for state-sponsored infanticide and sterilization, as well as extended laws against miscegenation and immigration, showed the direction eugenics would move in the following two decades.¹⁰⁰

There is no doubt that Madison Grant was, at least rhetorically, much more blatantly racist than Theodore Roosevelt. White nationalism today is much closer to Grant’s ideology than Roosevelt’s. Still, Roosevelt’s racial ideology cannot be discounted in the history of white extinction anxiety. He was one of the first to bring it to a scale of national attention. And there is no doubt the two thinkers were influenced by each other’s ideas on racism, nationalism, and eugenics. Both applied typical progressive-style conservation rhetoric to what they feared was

⁹⁶ Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race*, Chapter VII.

⁹⁷ Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race*, Chapter II.

⁹⁸ Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*, 30.

⁹⁹ Grant showed a strong break with religious progressivism in his solutions- he lamented that “mistaken regard for what are believed to be divine laws and a sanctity of human life tend to prevent both the elimination of defective infants and the sterilization of such adults” (Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race*, 49).

¹⁰⁰ Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race*.

the “suicide” of their race, therefore entrenching fears of white replacement into a new culture of victimhood. For Roosevelt, the responsible parties were effeminate men and loose women, and the solution was white pronatalism. For Grant, the threat was far more serious: foreigners and Black Americans were stealing American culture and purposely replacing them; the solution had to be more extreme. Yet in the close study of both elites’ racial ideologies, we can trace the development of a conspiracy theory of white racial replacement, the origins of a white supremacist tradition that continues today.

Concluding Thoughts

The year 1924 is significant as an ending point for several reasons. One is the passing of the Immigration Act of 1924, which many historians view as an undoubtable win for eugenicists, nativists, and xenophobes. Another is the shift from “positive” eugenics practices that Roosevelt promoted to more “negative” practices, one being the aforementioned tightening of immigration policy and another being the adoption of Grant’s call for sterilization of “undesirables,” each demonstrated in turn by Erika Lee and Wendy Kline.¹⁰¹ And a third reason is a shift of virulent white supremacy from front-and-center in United States politics to more on the fringes of American society toward the mid-1920s. A major example of this is the adoption of many of Grant’s ideas by outright radical white supremacist Earnest Sevier Cox, who wrote in 1926 that women have long been the “race-preserving” half of the white race, and that white women must continue to “breed white children.”¹⁰² Similarly, Klanswoman Alma Bridwell Write wrote in 1928 that both white and Black races needed to be concerned with “race suicide,” claiming that

¹⁰¹ See Lee, *America for Americans* and Kline, *Building a Better Race*

¹⁰² Earnest Sevier Cox, “The South’s Part in Mongrelizing the Nation” (1926), Walter Goldwater Radical Pamphlets Collection, UC Davis Special Collections, 54.

the Ku-Klux Klan was a white organization “whose principles stand as much for the liberty and protection of the colored people as for the white race.”¹⁰³

The shift in Theodore Roosevelt’s version of “race suicide” to Madison Grant’s version of “race suicide” show a distinct move Hofstadter describes as the manipulation of fear of the un-American to make the “big leap from the undeniable to the unbelievable,” using a sure-enough truth to imitate legitimacy, and then quickly spiraling into delusion.¹⁰⁴ The modern “Great Replacement” theory further exemplifies this leap; there is legitimate evidence that the United States is experiencing demographic shifts in the twenty-first century, but there is no legitimate evidence this is the direct scheme of immigrants, people of color, or Jewish people.

Fears of white replacement have existed, both openly and covertly, in white supremacist ideology since the late nineteenth century eugenics movement. They demonstrate the continued reliance on far-right groups to mobilize with narratives of victimhood, seen especially through the still-prevalent use of conspiracy theories. What happened in El Paso, Texas on August 3, 2019 was not an anomaly, as the recent murders in Buffalo attest. Research shows that “about 56 percent of the extremist murders committed in the United States over the past decade were carried out by people espousing white supremacist ideology such as the great replacement.”¹⁰⁵ This work is important for this exact reason: further attention needs to be given to the mobilization and origins of white supremacist violence. By devoting more time to both learning and teaching the history of white supremacist conspiracy theories—including the American

¹⁰³ Alma Bridwell White, “Heroes of the Fiery Cross” (1928), Walter Goldwater Radical Pamphlets Collection, UC Davis Special Collections, 146.

¹⁰⁴ Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style*, 38.

¹⁰⁵ John Eligon, “The El Paso Scream, and the Racist Doctrine Behind It,” *The New York Times*, August 7, 2019, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/07/us/el-paso-shooting-racism.html>.

histories of racism, anti-immigrant sentiment, imperialism, and patriarchy that they stand on—
we can hope to prevent the further spreading of the “Great Replacement.”

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