Hygiene, Whiteness, and Immigration: Upton Sinclair and the "Jungle" of the American Health Care System

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Transnational American Studies as a Paradigm Change

Over the last two decades, the way in which we read American literature, it could be argued, has been transformed. First, the paradigm of "transnational American studies," inaugurated by Shelley Fisher Fishkin in 2004, has changed the ways in which we conceive of both Americanness and American literature.[1] Second, the emerging field of medical humanities has sensitized us for the ways in which literary texts, too, can serve as patient narratives. They can highlight and express what it means to receive a diagnosis, to experience illness or pain, to navigate one's way through a specific health care system, and to develop strategies for coping, healing, and resilience.[2] In this essay, I will try to map the intersection of transnational American studies and medical humanities onto Upton Sinclair's 1906 novel, *The Jungle*. My aim is to show that while Sinclair's narrative has been hailed as one of the masterpieces of American naturalism, the relevance of the transnational and the medical has received significantly less scholarly attention. [3] What happens, I would like to ask in this essay, if we were to read *The Jungle* through the lenses of both transnational American studies and medical humanities? I will argue that even as critics have noted that the discourse of hygiene looms large in *The Jungle*, the implicit link to immigrants as a potential "health menace" to the nation has received less attention, as have the novel's references to the US health care system and its depiction of patient narratives. [4] In my attempt to show how the discourses of transnational American studies and medical humanities can fruitfully intersect in the analysis of Sinclair's literary masterpiece, I will contrast Sinclair's novel to another literary narrative from the period of American naturalism, namely Frank Norris's *The Octopus* (1901). Norris's literary narrative, I will try to show, dismisses immigrant labor in its focus on California wheat farmers.

Sinclair's *The Jungle*, by contrast, focuses precisely on the role of immigrant workers in upholding the US American economy. At the same time, I will argue that these narratives about immigration and immigrant labor are also undergirded by descriptions of health. For this reason, I will draw on historical accounts on both immigration and hygiene to show that in the nineteenth century, medical discourses about both cleanliness and contagion were being marshalled against immigrant naturalization.

Locating *The Jungle* at the Intersection of Transnational American Studies and Medical Humanities

Upton Sinclair's novel *The Jungle* is remarkable in a number of ways. First and foremost, it chronicles the complexity of migratory patterns in the US of the early twentieth century. Focusing on the Lithuanian family of Jurgis Rudkus, it highlights migrants' economic plight and their struggle for survival. Remarkably, it also shows how American capitalism has pitted different migrant groups against each other in a veritable struggle of the survival of the fittest. Immigration, as it is portrayed in Sinclair's award-winning novel, is also depicted with regard to the shades of racial difference. In the urban jungle in which immigrant groups are made to fight for their own survival, whiteness comes in all shades: from Irishmen to Germans and Lithuanians.[5] Even as these migrant communities, given their mooring in whiteness, may fare significantly better than the African Americans who are trapped in their non-whiteness, their hold on Americanness is nevertheless a tentative one.

As a novel about immigration, whiteness, and unfettered American capitalism, *The Jungle* may be a key text for the investigation of transnational American studies. Crucially, Sinclair's narrative shows not only how the US is seen through immigrant eyes, but also how migrant labor has been instrumental in making and remaking the American economy. In acknowledging and documenting immigrants' contribution to the building of the US American nation and its economy, the methodology of transnationalizing American studies has been crucial. In a project that was inaugurated in 2012, Shelley Fisher Fishkin and Gordon Chang have linked these considerations to the history of the transcontinental railroad. As they describe in their recent edited volume *The Chinese and the Iron Road: Building the Transcontinental Railroad*,

> The completion of the transcontinental railroad in May 1869 is usually told as a story of national triumph and a key moment for American Manifest Destiny. The Railroad … helped speed America's entry onto the world stage as a modern nation that spanned a full continent. It also created vast wealth for its four owners, including the fortune with which Leland Stanford would found Stanford University some two decades later. But while the Transcontinental has often been celebrated in

> national memory, little attention has been paid to the Chinese workers who made up 90 percent of the workforce on the Western portion of the line. The Railroad could not have been built without Chinese labor, but the lives of Chinese railroad workers themselves have been little understood and largely invisible.[6]

What Fishkin and Chang demonstrate is that while the completion of the trans-continental railroad marks the heyday of the flourishing of the US nation and its economy, there has been virtually no mention in history books of the immigrant labor that made the railroad possible in the first place. In order to fully understand the history of the transcontinental railroad, Fishkin and Chang argue, Chinese immigrant history and the history of the US economy need to be linked. The gap to which they point in their research, is that accounts by Chinese railroad workers themselves have been completely absent from the archive, including the archives of Stanford University. According to Fishkin, "no library in the United States has any first-person account from a Chinese person who worked on the railroad."[7]

It is in this context that Upton Sinclair's novel *The Jungle* seems particularly significant. Even though it is not a life writing account but a novel, the text can nonetheless be said to imagine the building of the US economy in the early twentieth century from the perspective of an immigrant laborer. At the same time, however, it must be acknowledged that even as *The Jungle* provides the reader with an immigrant perspective on the US economy of the early twentieth century, this is the perspective of a white immigrant. As I will try to show as this essay progresses, it is hence important to link the novel's discourse on immigration to other sources depicting immigrant lives, and to move include the perspective on non-white immigrants.

To be sure, *The Jungle* has often been read as a strident critique of American capitalism by a writer who sympathized with Marxism.[8] Seen from a perspective of transnational American studies, however, it would by no means be accidental that this capitalist critique should be articulated, in the novel, from an immigrant's perspective. While studies have lauded Sinclair's narrative for providing the perspective of the working-class lives on whom the rising economy was predicated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the fact that this has also been the perspective of immigrant laborers may require more attention. It is this perspective that the framework of transnational American studies may help us envision in all its different nuances.

At this juncture, however, our reading of *The Jungle* may arrive at an impasse. As Fishkin and Chang have pointed out, a truly transnational investigation of immigrant labor needs to be multi-lingual: US American, English-language archives must be complemented through, for instance, letters written by Chinese railroad workers in Cantonese or Mandarin. It is at this point that the present article can only gesture towards such other sources with regard to Sinclair's immigrant history in *The Jungle*.

Historical documents—letters or diaries written by Lithuanian immigrants in Lithuanian—would thus provide an important supplement to Sinclair's novel about Lithuanian immigration. Even as this paper cannot provide these documents, it will nonetheless try to highlight their importance at crucial points in its argument.

In many different ways, *The Jungle* can thus be read through the framework of transnational American studies. What may at first be more surprising, however, is that Sinclair's narrative can also be understood as a text that sits squarely within the realm of medical humanities. It is here, this article sets out to propose, that transnational American studies and medical humanities may intersect in powerful ways. Anticipating medical humanities long before this concept was ever coined, Sinclair's novel engages the domain of medicine in three significant ways. First, it draws attention to the ways in which the history of US citizenship and the discourse of hygiene have historically intersected. In court ruling after court ruling, immigrant petitioners were said to be "unfit" for naturalization because they were assumed to lack hygienic standards and medical knowledge. It is this civic and hygienic "unfitness," I will suggest, that Sinclair's novel can be said to contest. Second, *The Jungle* can also be read as a strident critique of the American healthcare system. The cutthroat capitalism that the novel criticizes in all parts of US American life is also mapped onto the US healthcare system as an economic enterprise. In both instances—the medical reading of immigrants' situation at the beginning of the twentieth century and the taking stock of the US healthcare system—*The Jungle* seems uncannily prophetic. For this reason, my aim in this article will be to map continuing, twenty-first-century discussions of human health and of the US healthcare system onto a novel that was written more than a century ago. In so doing, I suggest that Sinclair anticipates concerns that are as current today as they were at the time of the novel's first publication in 1906.

The Stomach of the Nation: Whiteness and Hygiene in *The Jungle*

With regard to notions of health and nutrition, Upton Sinclair's novel could not have been more influential for the development of the US American healthcare institutions. One of the most central narratives which have surrounded the publication and the reception of Sinclair's novel is the idea that this was the book that ultimately led to the creation of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The protagonist of Sinclair's novel, Jurgis Rudkus, works in a meat factory. What the novel depicts in such excruciating detail is not only the inhumane work conditions that immigrant laborers were subject to at the opening of the twentieth century, but also the horrific state of US American hygiene. The narrative could not be more vivid, and it could not be more detailed in its description of all the ingredients that should never have made it into a sausage:

> [T]he meat would be shoveled into carts, and the man who did the shoveling would not trouble to lift out a rat even when he saw one—there were things that went into the sausage in comparison with which a poisoned rat was a tidbit. There was

> no place for the men to wash their hands before they ate their dinner, and so they made a practice of washing them in the water that was to be ladled into the sausage. There were the butt-ends of smoked meat, and the scraps of corned beef, and all the odds and ends of the waste of the plants, that would be dumped into old barrels in the cellar and left there. Under the system of rigid economy which the packers enforced, there were some jobs that it only paid to do once in a long time, and among these was the cleaning out of the waste barrels. Every spring they did it; and in the barrels would be dirt and rust and old nails and stale water—and cartload after cartload of it would be taken up and dumped into the hoppers with fresh meat, and sent out to the public's breakfast.[9]

It is at this juncture that the novel's aesthetics and its political mission intersect. *The Jungle* is a key text of American naturalism; as such, it is clearly related to the aesthetics of realism.[10] Both realism and naturalism set out to demolish what is generally taken to be "reality." In keeping with its naturalistic agenda, *The Jungle* exposes official reality—the master narrative of the dominant culture's superior claim to hygiene—as hypocritical. Just as the American dream turns out to be a false promise for Jurgis Rudkus, the Lithuanian immigrant, the promise of US American hygiene seems equally flawed. At the beginning of the novel, Jurgis and his family stare with open eyes at the promises that the US hold; they buy a house only to realize that they will be unable to pay the mortgage, and they discover that the land of plenty only offers a better life—including the promise of health and well-being—for those who can afford it. As Jurgis thinks, "They were beaten; they had lost the game … . They had dreamed of freedom, of a chance to look around them and learn something; to be decent and *clean*… ."[11]

The above-cited passage about the abhorrent conditions in the meat factory has been one of the most quoted passages of Sinclair's novel. It has been read as a critique of a capitalist system that stresses profit over hygiene in the US food industry; it has also been seen as a strident critique of US capitalism and labor exploitation. What happens, however, if we were to read this passage through the framework of transnational American studies, the history of citizenship and naturalization, and medical humanities? Such a perspective, it could be argued, could also serve to expand the field of medical humanities: It would include not only patient narratives, which have been at the core of medical humanities, but also the ways in which "medicine" and the discourse of hygiene have historically used to target immigrant groups as "unhygienic" and "contagious." This mechanism is as true historically as it is contemporary, and it links US discourse on immigration to other parts of the globe.

In nineteenth-century America, immigrant communities were often said by both legislatures and public sentiment to be lacking in hygiene. As Natalia Molina points out, referring to the city of Los Angeles, there was "a long tradition among city health officials of tracing any blemish on the pristine image of Los Angeles—including

all forms of disease and any manner of disorder—to the city's marginalized communities … . [Between] 1879 and 1939, areas home to L.A.'s Chinese, Japanese, and Mexican populations were separately and serially targeted as 'rotten spots.'"[12] Crucially, Sinclair's novel *The Jungle* can be said to *reverse* this perspective on the immigrant as "health menace." It portrays the hygienic status of the American food industry as severely lacking and nothing short of abominable. Arguably, then, the above-cited passage from the novel which details the ingredients of sausage-making gains additional depth when read through the history of naturalization. This history, as Molina and many other critics and historians have pointed out, hinged on a central question: the question whether immigrant groups were *hygienically* compatible with the US American nation.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, immigrant groups were portrayed both by scientists and political rhetoric as a health menace to the American nation.[13] In the strife of the US nation for modernization, the discourse of "hygiene" soon began to reign supreme. From the very beginning, moreover, this discourse also had racial undertones. The reference to hygiene was pivotal to the narratives that were being employed to maintain the whiteness of the US American nation. As Molina has noted, "Cleanliness became something more than a way to prevent epidemics and make cities livable—it became a route to citizenship, to becoming American."[14]

Sinclair's novel *The Jungle* maps this relationship—the intersection between hygiene and citizenship—onto the domain of the US American food industry. As I have suggested above, in Sinclair's novel, the food industry of the nation is exposed as unhygienic; and it is exposed as unhygienic through immigrant eyes. The dominant culture, which flaunts its progress, technological prowess, and medical sophistication in front of immigrant eyes, is revealed to be profoundly unhygienic. This revelation relies, what is more, on the perspective of the immigrant who has produced the meat that is then put on white tables. What is at stake here is nothing short of a re-reading of the nation's whiteness. In myriads of literary texts as well as in public discourse, whiteness is celebrated as the essence of cleanliness and hygiene. Whiteness as the pivot and prerequisite for US citizenship, in turn, is also closely related to the concept of superior hygiene to which the "white," dominant culture lays claim. What Sinclair's novel so eloquently highlights is that white Americans pride themselves on their superior lifestyle, while immigrants are condemned to living in squalor. Little do white Americans know, however, that the food that they daily consume is anything other than fit for human consumption.

This equation of whiteness with superior hygiene can be seen not only in Sinclair's *The Jungle*, but also in another canonical text from the period of naturalism, Frank Norris's *The Octopus*. In Norris's narrative, the unnamed Chinese cook prepares the dinner that Norris's white farmers then proceed to eat: "The Chinaman had made a certain kind of plum pudding for dessert, and Annixter, who remembered other dinners at the Derrick's, had been saving himself for this, and had meditated upon it all through the meal. No doubt, it would restore all his good humour, and he believed his

stomach was so far recovered as to be able to stand it."[15] The cook, like the factory worker, hovers on the margins of the white American table; he would never be invited to have dinner with the white American family once the food has been put on the table. This is true for all immigrant groups that populate naturalism's mainstream narratives, from the Chinese cook in *The Octopus* to the Lithuanian meat worker in *The Jungle*.

The question of who is "fit" to sit at the table and who has prepared the food and is then forced to eat in the kitchen is one of the primal scenes of ethnic American literature. Norris's *The Octopus* notes, as if in passing, that the Chinese cook prepares the food and then disappears from the narrative. Ethnic American writers, on the other hand, go on to describe this very disappearance as both racialist and deeply unethical.

What would happen if we were to read the above-cited passage in *The Octopus* through the work of Langston Hughes? Twenty years after the publication of Norris's naturalistic novel, in 1926, Langston Hughes would write in his poem "I, Too," "I am the darker brother. / They send me to eat in the kitchen / When company comes."[16] Norris's naturalistic narrative and Hughes's Harlem Renaissance poem, published twenty years later, revolve around one and the same key scenario: the feeding of white families. Yet, they chronicle this primal scene from two opposing perspectives. In *The Octopus*, there is a vivid description of the community of white farmers sitting around the dinner table, with little reflection of the person who has both prepared the food and laid the table. This missing perspective, on the other hand, is supplied by Langston Hughes's description of the servant's perspective: The African American servant, Hughes notes with bitter irony, can prepare the food and set the table, but is seen as unfit to eat in the living room.

If only in passing, however, Norris's novel can at least be said to recognize that fact that the table does not lay itself, and that the food needs to be prepared before it can be set on the table. The narrative would never contemplate, however, the Chinese cook's sitting down at a white table. He is fit to serve the food, but never to eat it. What happens, however, if we read this passage about the nameless Chinese cook in *The Octopus* through Langston Hughes's poem? Twenty years later, an African American poet supplies a perspective that may also help us reconsider the role of the Chinese cook. What Hughes writes about the pain of the African American servant who is sent to the kitchen "when company comes," may thus also help to elucidate the life of the Chinese cook who remains almost unseen in *The Octopus*. There is a twofold potential in juxtaposing Frank Norris's naturalistic novel with Langston Hughes's Harlem Renaissance poem. First, such a reading would be multi-ethnic in that it relates Hughes's description of an African American servant to the half-effaced presence of the Chinese cook in Norris's novel. Second, it shows how ethnic American literature can serve to provide the missing links in the narratives that focus only on US American whiteness.

While Norris can be said to write the perspective of the Chinese cook *out* of his narrative,[17] Hughes's poem may enable us to bring this perspective back in. At the same time and moving beyond Hughes's description, it must be noted that this immigrant

perspective is not only a national, but also a transnational one. As Norris's *The Octopus* can be said to note even if it does not dwell on this information, is that the nation also prospers on the basis of immigrant labor. Chinese laborers built the railroad on the basis of which the US economy can the proceed to flourish; the Chinese cook literally feeds the farmers who then supply the nation with their wheat—a wheat whose celebration is at the core of Norris's narrative in *The Octopus*.

From Immigrant Labor to Immigrant Health: Where Does the Chinese Cook Eat?

How else might we imagine the presence of the Chinese cook, who is considered a mere extra in Norris's narrative? It is crucial to note here that public discourse on hygiene and citizenship separates, to paraphrase Vijay Prashad, the labor of the Chinese cook from his life. As Prashad points out in *The Karma of Brown Folk*,[18] the nation recognizes that it is in need of immigrant labor, but, paradoxically, it simultaneously wants to exclude from the civic order the immigrant bodies that provide this labor. The "polity," Prashad notes, "wants their labor but does not care too much for [the] lives" of its immigrant workers.[19]

This scenario, I would argue, is no different in Norris's fictional narrative. As a servant in a white home, the Chinese cook in *The Octopus* is seen as "fit" enough to prepare the food that is then put on white tables. Once he leaves the home of his employer, however, he disappears from view. Norris's narrative revolves around the white lives of American farmers; in keeping with Prashad's observation, it wants the labor, but does not want to contemplate the life of the Chinese cook. If *The Octopus*, as a naturalistic novel, portrays civic life by providing an intimate account of the lives of white farmers, the nameless Chinese cook is excluded from this life. To the extent that civic inclusion is coterminous with naturalization, then, *The Octopus* could be said, through its narrative fabric, to deny naturalization to the cook.

This dismissal of the Chinese cook from US citizenship inside the pages of Norris's narrative parallels the history of naturalization outside the realm of fiction. In nineteenth and early twentieth-century courtrooms, Norris's cook would simply have been a Chinese immigrant who would have been seen as unfit for naturalization. This alleged unfitness for US citizenship, in turn, would have been predicated on a purported lack of hygiene in Chinese immigrant communities. In his study *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown*, historian Nayan Shah describes health inspector Dr. Hart, whose depiction of Chinese laundry workers gave rise to one of the most notoriously racialist stereotypes about Chinese immigrant communities. According to Shah, Hart "warned that the 'consumptive Chinese' soaked their patrons' laundry with 'Chinese mouth spray.' This purported practice of Chinese workers preparing clothes for ironing by spraying water from their mouths onto the clothes became a signature feature of transfer of disease through suspect conduct. The supposed moth spray exacerbated anxieties about the role of leaking Chinese orifices in spreading vicious contagion such as tuberculosis and syphilis."[20] What happens, then, if we were to link this passage to the portrayal of the Chinese cook in

The Octopus? Arguably, the dominant culture finds itself in an impasse at the turn of the twentieth century. There is a need for immigrant labor in white homes, a need that accounts for the passing presence of the Chinese cook in Norris's naturalistic novel. At the same time, however, the community from which the cook emerges is seen as hygienically unsuitable. Cynically speaking, it is hence necessary for a white public to divorce the cook's labor from his life: The racialist assumption of Chinese immigrant community as lacking in hygiene can be reconciled with the hiring of a Chinese cook in a white kitchen only if the cook simply disappears from view once he has finished his work. The cook, paradoxically, does not re-enter his life once he has finished his work; his labor and his life are forever seen to be separate. Such is the paradox of the racialization of immigrant labor in hygienic terms.

The same held true outside the pages of fiction as well. In the early twentieth century, the discourse about immigrant labor as "health menace" put politicians and health officials in a paradoxical situation. There was a need for immigrant labor in white homes; yet the ethnic neighborhoods in which the servants or laborers lived (with Chinatown as the most emblematic and most despised of such neighborhoods) were seen to be supremely unhygienic.[21] In late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century discourse about Chinese servants in white homes, it was precisely the "circuit" between the white employer's home and Chinatown as the servant's presumable living quarters that was seen to constitute a "health risk" for white Americans. As historian Nayan Shah observes, "White labor politicians fixated on the medical monstrosity generated by the Chinese servants's daily circuit between the 'American household' and the Chinatown slum. The traffic of Chinese servants produced 'a perfect network of contagion … a veritable octopus of disease, having its seat in Chinatown and its infectious arms thrust into every home of the city.' The metaphor of the 'octopus of disease' conveyed a horrific image of masses of faceless Chinese servants totalized into a monstrous disease machine, and it reframed the innocuous presence of 'obedient' servants and laundrymen as the source of domestic contamination for the white middle-class family."[22]

In this context, it may be interesting to link the literature of naturalism to the legal discourse of naturalization.[23] In 1878, twenty-eight years prior to the publication of Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* and twenty-three years before Frank Norris's *The Octopus* appeared, a Chinese immigrant by the name of Ah Yup applied for naturalization. The ensuing court case *In re Ah Yup*, in 1878, was the first case of the so-called racial prerequisite cases. In these cases, immigrants had to prove their right to be naturalized[24] Since naturalization was predicated on whiteness, however, they first had to prove their claim to whiteness.[25] Whiteness, in other words, was the "racial prerequisite" for naturalization. In 1878, then, the court turned down the petition by Ah Yup, a Chinese immigrant to become a naturalized American citizen[26] This court ruling, it must be noted, was entirely in line with public discourse and popular sentiment, which viewed Chinese immigrants as a "cesspool" of both hygiene and morality.[27] As Shah notes, "Chinatown was the preeminent 'notorious' site that presented the yardstick of

sanitary aberration for the rest of the city."[28] The above-cited passage in Frank Norris's *The Octopus*, in which the Chinese cook prepares the food, lays the table and then disappears from view, is thus highly significant with regard to the link between hygiene, citizenship and whiteness. Intriguingly, however, this passing reference, in a naturalistic novel, to a Chinese cook who, the dinner guests know, prepares a supremely delicious desert, could in fact be seen as proof that the Chinese are in fact "fit" to be naturalized.[29] The very fact that the unnamed cook is fit enough to be hired for a white kitchen, refutes the court's idea, in *In re Ah Yup*, that the Chinese are unsuitable for naturalization because they are culturally and hygienically incompatible with the dominant culture.

It is hence important to note that historically, references to immigrants' presumable lack of hygienic standards were used to ward off their naturalization. In such scenarios describing immigrants as a threat to the health of the nation, references to "contagion" were ubiquitous. As Priscilla Wald has argued, the discourse of contagion and of epidemics has often been marshalled against social change. She notes, "Contagion is more than an epidemiological fact. It is also a foundational concept in the study of … society, with a long history of explaining how beliefs circulate in social interactions. The concept of contagion evolved throughout the twentieth century through the commingling of theories about microbes and attitudes about social change."[30] In the recent Covid-19 pandemic, such scapegoating of immigrants and of non-Western countries as the origin of the virus has recurred with a vengeance. Not incidentally, former president Donald Trump referred to Covid-19 as the "Chinese" virus.[31] The unholy alliance between the discourse of keeping the health of the nation safe and rallying against non-Western immigrants is thus by no means only a marker of the historical past.

What becomes evident here is that as the twentieth century opens, anti-immigrant sentiment was being expressed in medical terms. Precisely as immigrants were said to be "hygienically unfit" for naturalization, the boundaries of the (white) nation were being redrawn in terms of health and hygiene. This aspect, in turn, may be key for linking of transnational American studies to medical humanities. Transnational American studies has long been concerned with the link between immigration and definitions of "Americanness."[32] In the context of discourses of naturalization and citizenship, the definition of "Americanness," as I have suggested above, is reframed in terms of medical hygiene. The medical humanities, on the other hand, have mostly been concerned with patients' perspectives. What may be interesting to consider, however, is that the field might also come to concern itself with those who are seen, not as patients but as "medical menace." In this vein, the medical humanities might be expanded to encompass not only patients' narratives but also narratives about health as such. This perspective, in turn, might include accounts which stigmatize those who are perceived by the dominant culture as being either "unhealthy" or "contagious."

It is at this point that I would like to return to *The Jungle*. As Sinclair's novel vividly demonstrates, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the boundaries of the

nation were being redrawn in terms of hygiene. Whereas Norris's *The Octopus* implicitly confirms the discourse of whiteness by never once considering the perspective of the Chinese cook, Sinclair's narrative can be said to re-write this discourse of health and cleanliness from an ethnic perspective. It is in this sense, moreover, I. Both Sinclair and Hughes contemplate where the immigrant worker or the African American laborer proceeds to go—and where he proceeds to eat—when his work is done.

To return to the Chinese cook, we might thus re-read Norris's *The Octopus* through Sinclair's *The Jungle*: By dwelling on the immigrant laborer's life and not only on his work, Sinclair provides his readers with the immigrant's perspective that Norris can in fact be said to write *out* of his narrative. Where Norris dwells on the Chinese cook only until he has put the perfect pudding on a white table, Sinclair accompanies Jurgis Rudkus, the Lithuanian meatpacker from his workplace back to his home. Unlike *The Octopus*, *The Jungle* does not divorce the meat packer's labor from his life.[33]

Even more significantly, however, Sinclair's narrative exposes the equation between immigrant neighborhoods and contagion as being profoundly cynical. As Molina has noted, the stigmatization of ethnic communities as causes of contagious disease failed to take into account the actual reasons for the emergence of communicable diseases in these neighborhoods, namely poverty and a lack of sanitary infrastructure. She suggests, "Portraying [ethnic communities] as threats to public health and civic well-being obscured the real causes of communicable disease and illness—inadequate medical care, exposure to raw sewage, and malnutrition."[34] The point that Molina makes here is that immigrant neighborhoods ran the risk of becoming sites of illness and contagion *not* because of immigrants' lack of hygienic knowledge but because they lacked the means to live a hygienic life. Jurgis's own perspective on his family's living quarters is marked by his abhorrence of the lack of hygiene. When Jurgis and his family first come to the US, this is their first abode, a rented room in a boarding house; sadly, this will turn out to be a foreshadowing of many of their homes to come, especially after they have been evicted from the house they had wanted to buy but for which they were ultimately unable to pay the mortgage. The family's first "home" is described in the narrative as follows: "[When] they saw the home of the Widow Jukniene they could not but recoil, even so, in all their journey they had seen nothing so bad as this… . [The landlady] Mrs. Jukniene was a wizened-up little woman, with a wrinkled face. Her home was unthinkably filthy …; when you tried to go up the backstairs you found that she had walled up most of the porch with old boards to make a place to keep her chickens. It was a standing jest of the boarders that Aniele cleaned house by letting the chickens loose in the rooms… . Such was the home to which the new arrivals were welcomed. There was nothing better to be had … ."[35] Crucially, it could be argued that this abhorrence at the uncleanliness of his home marks Jurgis, the Lithuanian immigrant, as being *fit* for naturalization. In nineteenth- and early twentieth-century anti-immigrant rhetoric, references to immigrants' alleged lack of hygiene were marshalled against

immigration. Sinclair's depiction of Jurgis Rudkus, the Lithuanian immigrant, on the other hand, shows that immigrants may have been well aware of hygiene and cleanliness. Jurgis's abhorrence at the squalor of the "home" that he and his family have been forced to live in thus in fact demonstrates that is anything but hygienically "illiterate."

The Jungle can thus be said to profoundly interrogate the dominant culture's discourse on hygiene. Jurgis is revolted by the squalor of his own home because of its uncleanliness which, in turn, is a direct outcome of the immigrant family's economic destituteness. Jurgis's gaze, the disgust with which he looks at the shabbiness of his family's abode, is a gaze that can be said to be a literary racial prerequisite: he *becomes white*, arguably, because he demonstrates both hygienic knowledge and a desire for cleanliness.

It is with this potentially white gaze, in turn, that Jurgis, the Lithuanian immigrant, goes on to inspect white tables and finds them severely lacking in hygiene. It is through Jurgis's eyes that we realize that, contrary to public discourse, whiteness is by no means coterminous with hygiene. If the white gaze, as it is commonly understood, is defined as the dominant culture's scornful look at immigrants' presumed lack of cleanliness, Jurgis Rudkus can be said to return this white gaze. In this act of looking back, it is the immigrant who exposes the dominant culture's cleanliness not even as a white lie, but as complete fiction.

What is so remarkable in all these instances, I would propose, is that the Chinese cook, the African American servant and the Lithuanian meatpacker actually *know* just what their white employers will be eating. What emerges in *The Jungle* is an act of turning the tables on the assumption of US American whiteness as infallibly hygienic. The American family prides itself on its superior morality, hygiene, and cleanliness; it is suspicious of the hygienic standards of the Chinese cook or the Lithuanian meat packer. Yet, in *The Jungle*, it is a Lithuanian immigrant who will ultimately expose this hygienic self-confidence as both delusional and flawed. Crucially, Jurgis Rudkus could hence be said to become an immigrant health inspector of white tables and of the American food industry. At a time when historically, health inspectors such as Dr. Hart would have denounced immigrant neighborhoods as "cesspools," Sinclair invents in *The Jungle* an immigrant health inspector who exposes the fact that the meat produced in American factories is unfit for human consumption. The character of Jurgis Rudkus may thus be read as a literary intervention, by a fictional narrative, into the US system of health and hygiene. In reality, as Natalia Molina and Nayan Shah have so eloquently demonstrated in their historical studies, health inspection was being used to closely monitor and often to scapegoat immigrant communities.[36] Jurgis Rudkus, I propose, can be read as an immigrant health inspector who reverses such practices, and who demonstrates both immigrant knowledge of hygiene and the fact that "white tables," too, may need inspection.

Yet, in *The Jungle*, there is one more twist to this argument about hygiene and whiteness. As I have noted at the beginning of this paper, Sinclair's is not a narrative

written by a Lithuanian immigrant; it is a novel in which a white American writer calls for hygienic reform through the eyes of an immigrant character. *The Jungle* might hence be read as a case of "ethnic ventriloquism"[37]: an instance in which a white writer calls for social reform by adopting the voice of an immigrant protagonist. This act of "ethnic medical ventriloquism," I would like to argue, does not necessarily invalidate Sinclair's call for social and hygienic reform; it would be important, however, to supplement this "white" voicing of medical complaint through ventriloquized ethnic voices by dwelling on ethnic representations that are not ventriloquized.

It is at this point that we may want to return to Fishkin's and Chang's project about the perspective of Chinese railroad workers. What may be needed as a supplement of Sinclair's narrative is a turn to the archives: In what archives, in what format or media might we find accounts of Lithuanian meat packers? What would they write home to their loved ones, in letters composed in Lithuanian? There would hence be a need for further research on Lithuanian immigrants' perspectives on American hygiene at the turn of the twentieth century; and this research, as Fishkin and Chang remind us, would have to be multilingual.[38]

There is yet another twist to this argument about Sinclair's castigating the US food system in an immigrant's voice. It is significant that in Sinclair's novel—and in the legal reality which surrounds its publication—, Lithuanians would have been considered white or at least as being on the brink of whiteness. One question which can only be hinted at in the present paper is the relevance of this near-whiteness for the act of ethnic ventriloquism: If Sinclair's novel had called for social and hygienic reform in an African American voice, or in the voice of a Chinese immigrant, would it have had the same consequences? Arguably, Jurgis, as a potentially white and definitely Christian protagonist of a naturalistic novel, invites a dominant US American culture to identify with his perspective. To the extent that he would have been seen by the US reading public as being potentially assimilable, it would have been all the more facile for this audience to identify with his plight.

Moreover, it is at this point that we may also want to return to the issue of immigrant naturalization. In 1878, the court turned down Ah Yup's petition for naturalization. If *The Jungle* is read as a literary petition for a Lithuanian claimant's naturalization, what would have been the outcome of this literary court case? Crucially, it could be argued that the court may well have decided Jurgis Rudkus's claim in his favor. Precisely because whiteness and hygiene have historically worked in tandem, Jurgis would have been granted US citizenship precisely because he was abhorred at the food industry's lack of hygiene, and at the squalor of his own home. Jurgis's disgust, within the novel, would hence be a literary reason for naturalization: To the extent that Jurgis has to retch at the sight of US meat production, he becomes white. This whiteness, finally, might also be linked to the politics of canon formation. *The Jungle* may have come to be considered a "masterpiece" of American literature also because his protagonist is at least potentially white. It is this potential whiteness, in turn, that he may share with the protagonists of other naturalistic novels: with the Irish

immigrant woman in Stephen Crane's *Maggie* (1893) or the German protagonists of Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900). As I have argued elsewhere, there is hence a striking parallel between the politics of naturalism and those of naturalization.[39] The protagonists of naturalistic novels come in all "shades"; they are Irish, German, Lithuanian or Bohemian, as in Willa Cather's *My Antonía* (1918). In ways that cannot be elaborated on in this paper, all of these immigrant groups would historically have been considered as being potentially white or "probationary" whites.[40] What marks their whiteness, I argue here, is also their disgust at a lack of hygiene, wherever they may encounter such hygienic deficiency.

It is in the voice of a potentially white Lithuanian immigrant and through his immigrant eyes, then, that Sinclair wrote a critique that would lead to real-life reform. Contrary to the myths that have surrounded Sinclair's novel, the publication of *The Jungle* did not lead directly to the establishment of the Food and Drug Administration; and yet, it has been closely connected to its inception: "The most famous, influential, and enduring of all muckraking novels, *The Jungle* was an exposé of conditions in the Chicago stockyards. Because of the public response, the U.S. Pure Food and Drug Act was passed in 1906, and conditions in American slaughterhouses were improved."[41] Crucially, however, Sinclair himself saw this success as a failure. As he famously noted, "I aimed at the public's heart and by accident I hit it in the stomach."[42] Sinclair's goal in writing his "muckraking" narrative had been social reform: the need to bring about profound changes in the lives of immigrant whom Sinclair showed to be on the rock bottom of the social ladder. Hygienic reform, Sinclair noted bitterly, was by no means coterminous with social change.

Naturalism and Malnutrition: What Does the Lithuanian Meat Packer Eat?

What is remarkable, however, is that Sinclair's novel establishes a connection between malnutrition and individual health that is also at the core of current life science research. Seen from this perspective, the narrative is hence medically prophetic. Sinclair's argument about the "stomach of the nation" hence appears in multiple ways in *The Jungle*. First, as I have outlined above, at it lays to scorn the dominant culture's claim to whiteness as superior hygiene. Second, the narrative establishes a direct connection between poverty, malnutrition, and human health. Here, too, the notion of whiteness recurs. The point that the novel makes, is *not* that Lithuanian migrants seek to be naturalized by adopting white habits and eating white food. Rather, the narrative drives home the idea that the bland, processed and unhygienic food on white American tables was the only diet that Lithuanians were able to afford. As a figure that might be read as an immigrant health inspector of white American tables, Jurgis Rudkus is not only aware that white families eat sausages that are unfit for human consumption, but he also evidences a superior knowledge about both food hygiene and nutrition. By inventing an immigrant health inspector of the US food industry, then, Sinclair's narrative can also be said to chronicle—and to critique—the process that led to a consolidation of US American medicine. In this development, as I will

illustrate below, ethnic medical cultures were systematically marginalized. It is this process that *The Jungle* can be said to chronicle. Just as it shows us *where* the immigrant worker eats once he has left his workplace, restoring the immigrant's labor to his life, Sinclair's narrative also proceeds to tell the reader just *what* the worker will then proceed to eat.

At this juncture, the novel also pits folk medicine and traditional knowledge of nutrition against what is portrayed as the American way of life. Jurgis's family clearly knows better than to eat what is ultimately a mixture of meat scraps and sawdust; it is just that traditional herbs—working both as a healthy diet and as herbal medicine—are nowhere to be found in this urban jungle: "They might have [made] it, if only they could have gotten pure food, and at fair prices … . But they had come to a new country, where everything was different, including the food. They had always been accustomed to eat a great deal of smoked sausage, and how could they know that what they bought in America was not the same—that its color was made by chemicals, and its smoky flavor by more chemicals, and that it was full of 'potato flour' besides? Potato flour is the waste of potato after the starch and alcohol have been extracted; it has no more food value than so much wood … ."[43] It is at this point that we might observe another facet in Sinclair's idea of the immigrant health inspector looking at white tables. The notion of this immigrant health inspection of white hygiene also implies that immigrants have *medical* knowledge. The claim, by politicians, institutions and the public, that immigrants were uncleanly could thus not have been farther from the truth. As Sinclair's novel vividly demonstrates, it is their medical knowledge and their knowledge of hygiene that enables the Lithuanian community to expose grievances in the American food industry to begin with.

This same medical knowledge, however, was systematically being discredited at the turn of the twentieth century. As Paul Starr and Stephanie Browner have noted, the consolidation and standardization of medical education also involved a marginalization of other forms of medical knowledge, including folk medicine and immigrant medical cultures.[44] Before the standardization of medical education towards the end of the nineteenth century, Stephanie Browner has suggested, the practice of medicine in the US was characterized by a high degree of diversity: "Lay practitioners, using native herbs and folk remedies, flourished in the countryside and towns, scorning the therapies and arcane learning of regular physicians and claiming the right to practice medicine as an inalienable liberty, comparable to religious freedom."[45] As Browner goes on to elaborate, the emergence of American medicine as a standardized profession depended on the marginalization of these alternative medical practices. Browner writes, "the distinct and remarkable success of nineteenth-century US physicians both in marginalizing other medical paradigms and in becoming the most prestigious and well-paid profession in the nation has shaped U.S. healthcare ever since."[46]

This dismissal of immigrant medical knowledge, in turn, can be seen as working in tandem with the allegation that immigrant communities were per se unhygienic. It is characteristic of Sinclair's narrative, then, that it exposes both these assumptions as

flawed. By depicting in such detail Jurgis's disgust at the squalor of his home and the situation in the meat factory, and their discomfort with the low quality of American food, *The Jungle* demonstrates not only Lithuanian immigrants' hygienic know-how, but also their medical knowledge. At the time that *The Jungle* was published, however, immigrants' medical knowledge and forms of alternative and traditional medicine were systematically discredited by the strife of the medical profession for standardization.[47] At a time in which the medical profession can be said to "write out" immigrant medical cultures, then, *The Jungle* can be said to write these forms of medical knowledge back in. At this juncture, however, the Lithuanian immigrant community is once more caught in a trap: Just as immigrants may be subject to contracting contagious diseases because of their adverse living conditions, Jurgis's family knows about herbal remedies but lacks the means to procure them: "How could they know that the pale blue milk that they bought around the corner was watered, and doctored with formaldehyde besides? When the children were not well at home, Teta Elzbieta would gather herbs and cure them; now she was obliged to go to the drug store and buy extracts—and how was she to know that they were all adulterated? How could they find out that their tea and coffee, their sugar and flour, had been doctored; that their canned peas had been colored with copper salts, and their fruit jams with aniline dyes? And even if they had known it, what good would it have done them, since there was no place within miles of them where any other sort was to be had?"[48] Through the eyes of the fictional Lithuanian immigrant character of Jurgis Rudkus, Sinclair could hence be said to describe, from a fictional perspective, two interlocking processes: the standardization of American medicine and the discrediting of immigrant medical knowledge as "folk medicine" or even superstition.[49] By addressing the chemicals that US American food has been "doctored" with, Sinclair's narrative supplies a perspective that is also key to an understanding of the US health care system at the beginning of the twentieth century. As Paul Starr has noted, the standardization of American medicine involved the dismissal of the alternative forms of medicine that immigrants brought with them.[50] In its crediting of the medical and hygienic knowledge of immigrant families such as Jurgis's, *The Jungle* can thus in fact be said to critique the standardization of US medicine as being implicitly biased against immigrant knowledge.

As the narrative progresses, Jurgis's life falls apart: When his wife Ona is lying in childbirth, he is in need of a physician and has no money to pay for such medical service. The pregnancy-related complications that she experiences, moreover, are implied by the narrative to be the direct consequences of the living conditions that immigrants have to face in urban centers such as Chicago at the turn of the twentieth century. Ona's health, the narrative emphasizes, has been severely compromised through stress and adverse economic and hygienic conditions. It is here that we may want to return to Molina's description of immigrant communities as "medical menace" in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century mainstream discourse on hygiene. As Molina emphasizes and as I have noted above, the "real causes" of disease and illness

that erupted in immigrant communities were "inadequate medical care" and "malnutrition."[51] In a way that could not be more emblematic of the parallelism between literature and medical history, it is these twin evils that recur in Sinclair's narrative. Ona's plight, the novel makes clear, is a direct consequence of a lack of hygiene and of malnutrition; and when she needs it the most, she has no access to medical care. It is at this point that the narrative converges with medical humanities in one more dimension: in its portrayal of what it means to be sick in a medical system that is governed only by cost.

The Jungle of American Healthcare

In *The Jungle*, capitalist critique is also a critique of the American healthcare system. It is here, moreover, that the "jungle" of immigration converges with that of medical care. The system is such, the novel argues, that it pits different immigrant groups against one another not only in the struggle for survival, but also in the strife for economic mobility. In *The Jungle*, the new arrivals, the Lithuanian family, is at the mercy of their Irish employer. Jurgis's wife Ona is forced into prostitution by her husband's boss Phil Connor, an Irishman who threatens to fire Jurgis unless Ona complies with his demands.

Here, too, the novel anticipates contemporary life science research in the idea that stress can lead to the deterioration of individual health.[52] Forced into prostitution by her and her husband's Irish employer and unable to confide in Jurgis, Ona watches her health deteriorate. When she is lying in childbirth with her second child, Jurgis is horrified to realize that the capitalist system which has already been holding his family hostage has also spread to encompass the medical system. When Ona is lying in labor and there seem to be severe complications, Jurgis realizes that he cannot afford a doctor; a midwife is all he can settle for: "There was no arguing with him. They could not tell him that all was going well—how could they know, he cried—why, she was dying, she was being torn to pieces! Listen to her—listen! Why, it was monstrous—it could not be allowed—there must be some help for it! Had they tried to get a doctor? … . Marija went on to tell how she had tried to find a midwife, and how they had demanded ten, fifteen, even twenty-five dollars, and that in cash."[53] Not only can Jurgis not afford a doctor and has to settle for a midwife, but the German midwife he actually finds seems dubious in terms of both hygiene and professionalism. This German midwife, moreover, turns out to be a superior capitalist. Sinclair's portrayal of "Madame Haupt" describes the "economization" of US healthcare in terms that could not be more blatant. Realizing the despair of her potential client, the German midwife proceeds to bargain: "She followed him, arguing with him. 'You vill be foolish not to take such an offer,' she said. 'You von't find nobody to go out on a rainy day like dis for less. Vy, I haf never took a case in my life so sheap as dot. I couldn't pay mine room rent—.'"[54] It would be too simple to read Sinclair's portrayal of the German midwife simply as an unflattering caricature of German immigrants. Rather, it could be argued that the worst habits of the nation—in terms of both capitalism and a lack of hygiene—

are epitomized by those who seek to emulate the dominant culture. It is in the capitalist acts of Madame Haupt[55] that medical capitalism rears its ugly head in *The Jungle*. Just as the dominant culture prides itself on the correlation of whiteness with superior hygiene and eats filth, the Americanized German midwife could not be more lacking in terms of medical hygiene: "he had a glimpse of her, with a black bottle turned up to her lips. Then he knocked louder, and she started and put it away. She was a Dutch woman, enormously fat—when she walked, she rolled like a small boat on the ocean… . She wore a filthy blue wrapper, and her teeth were black."[56] Madame Haupt is not only filthy, however, but she is also inhumane and ruthlessly capitalist. She charges Jurgis for her services even as she is unable to help Ona. As the midwife's capitalist clock is ticking, all Jurgis can do is watch his wife die: "At this moment she chanced to look around, and saw Jurgis. She shook her finger at him. 'You understand me,' she said, 'you pays me dot money yust the same! It is not my fault dat you send for me so late. I can't help your vife … . I haf tried all night, and in dot place vere it is not fit for dogs to be born … . She will die, of course,' said the [midwife], angrily. 'Der baby is dead now.'"[57]

At the death of his wife, Jurgis is plunged into an abyss of alcoholism, despair, and self-hatred. It is at this juncture that the novel may once again be read through the framework of the medical humanities. At its most central, the field of medical humanities explores what it means to live with illness, but also how the suffering or loss of a loved one may be experienced by relatives or caregivers. Seen from this perspective, *The Jungle* can also be read as a narrative about loss and mourning. Where Sinclair's novel is so powerful, however, is that it links this notion of mourning to a critique of the medical system and its capitalist underpinnings. Ona would not have died, the narrative implies, had her Lithuanian immigrant family been able to afford a doctor, as well as the money to pay for the food and housing that would have been more conducive to maintaining a person's health. It is in this sense, I would claim, that the novel not only anticipates the medical humanities, but also intervenes in this field by stressing potential dialogues between medical humanities and studies of social justice.

Jurgis's disbelief that capitalism should have pervaded even the field of medical care is thus described in the novel as a mixture of common sense and the belief in human decency. As Paul Starr has noted in his history of American medicine, "The contradiction between professionalism and the rule of the market is long-standing and unavoidable. Medicine and other professions have historically distinguished themselves from business and trade by claiming to be above the market and pure commercialism."[58] As Starr goes on to note, then, the consolidation and standardization of US American medicine was accompanied by medicine's embracing the logic of the market rather than resisting it. According to Starr, "The transition from the household to the market as the dominant institution in the care of the sick—that is, the conversion of health care into a commodity—has been one of the underlying movements in the transformation of medicine."[59] In this sense, then, *The Jungle* can also be read as a literary history of medicine, a companion piece to Paul Starr's sociological account of

The Social Transformation of American Medicine. Years after his wife Ona has passed away, Jurgis is still struggling to make up for the money that he had to pay to Mme Haupt, despite the fact that her "services" were useless and ultimately failed to save his wife. The plight that Sinclair's narrative describes is thus directly born from the "conversion of health care into a commodity," as Starr puts it.[60]

At the same time, the issue of immigration has further fueled this debate, in the nineteenth century as much as in the twenty-first. In twenty-first-century legislative measures and propositions, politicians and citizens have rallied against extending healthcare benefits to undocumented migrants.[61] Migration is hence central to the idea of American healthcare in many different ways. Here, too, transnational American studies and medical humanities can be said to intersect.

In its reference to Ona's death due to an absence of health care coverage, *The Jungle* is uncannily current. By making the reader imagine what it would feel like to have no health care plan in the moment of a medical emergency, *The Jungle* anticipates Barack Obama's recent autobiography *A Promised Land* (2020). As the twenty-first century moves into its second decade, the US is still torn in the debate about whether or not healthcare should be universally available to all its citizens.[62]

It is crucial to note here, however, that this question of the access of immigrants to the US healthcare system has often been framed in highly abstract terms: in terms of cost, of eligibility, and of a danger to the social status quo. As Barack Obama has emphasized in *A Promised Land*, however, such abstraction may ultimately be flawed. What may be at stake, Obama notes, is to imagine a situation when the medical system could have saved one's child, parent or friend, if only one had had access to healthcare. In his autobiography, Obama recalls his long-time friend, Teddy Kennedy:

> Through seven Presidents, Teddy had fought the good fight. But, for all his power and legislative skill, the dream of establishing universal health care—a system that delivered good-quality medical care to all people, regardless of their ability to pay—continued to elude him… . My interest in health care went beyond policy or politics; it was personal, just as it was for Teddy. Each time I met a parent struggling to come up with the money to get treatment for a sick child, I thought back to the night Michelle and I had to take three-month-old Sasha to the emergency room for what turned out to be viral meningitis. I remembered the terror and the helplessness we felt as the nurses whisked her away for a spinal tap, and the realization that we might never have caught the infection in time had the girls not had a regular pediatrician we felt comfortable calling in the middle of the night. Most of all, I thought about my mom, who had died in 1995, of uterine cancer.[63]

What is so uncanny, then, is that the very situation described by Obama is at the core of *The Jungle*. Here, too, Sinclair's novel turns out to be prophetic. What both Obama and Sinclair argue, is that the US healthcare system may be marred by its capitalist underpinnings. Both invoke the plight of a system where capitalism overrides human decency. This prophetic quality of *The Jungle* may be cause for both surprise and alarm. An entire century later, the US is still struggling to extend healthcare to disenfranchised communities. What would have happened, Barack Obama asks himself, if he had not had the financial means to take his baby daughter to the emergency room? This is a fate that *The Jungle* imagines a hundred years earlier. When Ona is lying in childbirth, all Jurgis can do is to watch his wife die. In both Obama's autobiography and in Sinclair's fictional narrative, transnational American studies and medical humanities can be said to converge. It is not, Obama and Sinclair reiterate, that there is no healthcare system in the US; it is just that immigrant and poor communities may not have access to this healthcare. It is here that the novel converges with the medical humanities on two levels. It portrays the fate not only of Ona, the patient who cannot afford a doctor, but also the plight of Ona's husband who is unable to help here in a medical system that is so capitalist that it has become inhumane. In this vein, *The Jungle* anticipates recent developments in medical humanities and narrative medicine, which have stressed the intersection of these fields with questions of social justice. As Rita Charon has recently argued, narrative medicine, as a specific methodology within the medical humanities, "emerged to challenge a reductionist, fragmented medicine that holds little regard for the singular aspects of a patient's life and to protest social injustices of a global healthcare system that countenances tremendous health disparities and discriminatory policies and practices."[64]

Conclusion: Immigrant Health Inspectors in a Capitalist Nation

In this article, I have tried to trace the link between transnational American studies and medical humanities on a number of levels. In this attempt, I have also tried to expand the notion of medical humanities itself. While the field has largely focused on patient narratives and the representation of the experience of illness, I have suggested that it might also come to encompass other concerns. In this vein, it may also interrogate the ways in which historically, references to "medicine"—of medical knowledge, of hygienic knowledge—were used to stigmatize and exclude ethnic communities. It is in this sense that I have linked Sinclair's novel to the nineteenth-century debate on immigrant naturalization. This debate, I have argued, hinges on whiteness and the idea that whiteness has a superior claim to hygiene–an idea that Sinclair's novel exposes as false. At the same time, I have suggested that Sinclair's narrative reverses this perspective. Focusing on Jurgis Rudkus and his Lithuanian family, he "invents" the figure of an immigrant health inspector looking at white tables with abhorrence. Moreover, the novel highlights the fact that immigrants, too, possess medical knowledge, including knowledge about malnutrition and its effects on the immune system.

At this juncture, I have suggested, Sinclair's narrative is groundbreaking in another sense. It can be seen as a literary account of the historical development through which US American medicine became professionalized and standardized.[65] In the course of this development, alternative forms of medical knowledge, especially the "folk medicine" practice by immigrant groups, became marginalized. It is in this context, too, that *The Jungle* can be said to reverse perspectives: It describes Lithuanian medical knowledge as legitimate, and as having been marginalized by the process of the consolidation of American medicine. Finally, it is towards the end of Sinclair's narrative that the novel may be said to be most closely aligned with medical humanities in its original sense: the representation of patient narratives. Through the fate of Ona, Jurgis's wife, it shows not only what it means to be sick, to lie in childbirth with no medical support, but also what it is like to face a medical system in which money, not empathy reigns supreme.

This, I have proposed in this essay, is the solace of transnational American studies: It views not only the US American nation, but also its healthcare system through immigrant eyes. These eyes, as Upton Sinclair reminds us, upset not only the dominant culture's habits and claims, but also its pride in its healthcare system. It is in calling for a more humane healthcare system that in 1906, Upton Sinclair anticipates Barack Obama's call for a more just, more equitable and more perfect union. This union, in whose description Obama deliberately echoes the words of Abraham Lincoln, can be read not only with regard to the nation's social demography, but also to its system of healthcare.

Notes

1 Shelley Fisher Fishkin, "Crossroads of Cultures: The Transnational Turn in American Studies," *American Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (2005): 17–57; Morgan, Nina, Alfred Hornung, and Takayuki Tatsumi, eds. *The Routledge Companion to Transnational American Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

2 Danielle Spencer, *Metagnosis: Revelatory Narratives of Health and Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

3 In a previous study entitled *Color Me White: Naturalism/Naturalization in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (2013), I have been concerned with the parallelism between the discourses of legal naturalization and literary naturalism. In the current article, I move beyond these considerations to focus both on the transnational dimension of immigrant narratives and on the link to health care and patient narratives.

4 One of the reasons why the link between *The Jungle* and nineteenth-century xenophobic discourses that agitate against immigration as a health menace to the US American nation does not seem apparent may be the fact that as a Lithuanian, Jurgis

may be considered white. By contrast, the references to the notion of "hygiene" were often targeted at immigrants from Asia and from Mexico (Molina 1). In this article, my aim is twofold: I am applying the scholarship on Asian immigrants as an alleged threat to public health to a literary depiction of a Lithuanian immigrant, and I am suggesting that Jurgis, as an immigrant from Lithuania, may actually have been on the verge of whiteness at the time that *The Jungle* was published.

[5] Mita Banerjee, *Color Me White: Naturalism/Naturalization in American Literature* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2013).

[6] Gordon H. Chang and Shelley Fisher Fishkin, eds., *The Chinese and the Iron Road: Building the Transcontinental Railroad* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2019).

[7] Shelley Fisher Fishkin, "'Deep Maps': A Brief for Digital Palimpsest Mapping Projects," *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 3.2 (2011): sec. 5, para. 4.

[8] Robert Myers, *Reconciling Nature: Literary Representations of the Natural, 1876–1945* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2019), 70; Charity Samantha Fitzgerald, "Literary Theories and Social Justice," in *Social Justice and Social Work: Rediscovering a Core Value of a Profession*, ed. Michael Austin (Berkeley: Sage, 2013): 46.

[9] Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle* (New York: Signet, 2001; 1906), 156.

[10] Edd Applegate, ed., *American Naturalistic and Realistic Novelists: A Biographical Dictionary* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002).

[11] Sinclair, *The Jungle*, 157. Ellipsis and italics mine.

[12] Natalia Molina, *Fit to Be Citizens: Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1878–1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 1.

[13] Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Molina, *Fit to Be Citizens*.

[14] Molina, *Fit to Be Citizens*, 2.

[15] Frank Norris, *The Octopus* (New York: Penguin, 1986; 1901), 102.

[16] Langston Hughes, "I, Too," *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes: The Poems, 1921–1940*, ed. Arnold Rampersad (University of Missouri Press, 2001; 1926), 61.

[17] For a fully-fledged discussion of the role of "Asianness" in Norris's *The Octopus*, see Colleen Lye's article "American Naturalism and Asiatic Racial Form" (2003), 73–99.

[18] Vijay Prashad's title thus deliberately references W. E. B. Du Bois' account, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) and hence constitute what Heike Raphael-Hernandez and Shannon Steen have called an "Afro-Asian encounter" (Raphael-Hernandez and Steen 2006).

[19] Vijay Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), xi. Changes mine.

[20] Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 68.

[21] Vanessa Künnemann and Ruth Mayer, eds., *Chinatowns in a Transnational World: Myths and Realities of an Urban Phenomenon* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

[22] Shah, *Contagious Divides*, 63.

[23] For a more detailed discussion of the intersection between naturalism and naturalization, see my study *Color Me White*.

[24] Ian Haney López, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Whiteness* (New York University Press, 1996), 3–4.

[25] Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1999).

[26] López, *White by Law*, 5–6.

[27] Shah, *Contagious Divides*, 41.

[28] Shah, *Contagious Divides*, 54.

[29] Molina, *Fit to Be Citizens*, passim.

[30] Priscilla Wald, *Contagious: Cultures, Carriers, and the Outbreak Narrative* (Durham: Duke UP, 2007), 2.

[31] I am indebted to Alfred Hornung for this point.

[32] Claudia Sadowski-Smith, "US Border Ecologies, Environmental Criticism, and Transnational American Studies," *American Studies, Ecocriticism, and Citizenship: Thinking and Acting in the Local and Global Commons*, eds. Joni Adamson and Kimberly Ruffin (New York, Routledge, 2013): 145.

[33] Vijay Prashad. *The Karma of Brown Folk*, xi.

[34] Molina, *Fit to Be Citizens*, 2.

[35] Sinclair, *The Jungle*, 30–31. Ellipsis mine.

[36] Shah, *Contagious Divides*, 68; Molina, *Fit to Be Citizens*, 39.

[37] Mita Banerjee, *Ethnic Ventriloquism: Literary Minstrelsy in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2008). In this previous study, I looked at the literature of the American Renaissance to argue that writers such as Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville "ventriloquized" an ethnic voice to call for national reform. In this essay, I am moving beyond this study to look at how in the case of *The Jungle*, a white US writer uses the perspective of a Lithuanian immigrant to critique US capitalism.

[38] Fishkin, "'Deep Maps': A Brief for Digital Palimpsest Mapping Projects," sec. 5.

[39] Banerjee, *Color Me White*.

[40] Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 95.

[41] Kate Lohnes, "The Jungle," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, last accessed Aug 10, 2023, https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Jungle-novel-by-Sinclair.

[42] Sinclair, quoted in A. F. Kantor, "Upton Sinclair and the Pure Food and Drugs Act of 1906. 'I aimed at the public's heart and by accident I hit it in the stomach'," *American Journal of Public Health* 66, 12 (1976): 1202–5. doi:10.2105/ajph.66.12.1202.

[43] Sinclair, *The Jungle*, 134. Ellipsis mine.

[44] Paul Starr, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine: The Rise of a Sovereign Profession and the Making of a Vast Industry* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 30; Stephanie Browner, *Profound Science and Elegant Literature: Imagining Doctors in Nineteenth-Century America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 13.

[45] Starr, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine*, 30–31.

[46] Browner, *Profound Science and Elegant Literature*, 13.

[47] Starr, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine*, 30.

[48] Sinclair, *The Jungle*, 87.

[49] Starr, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine*, 30–31.

[50] Starr, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine*, 31.

[51] Molina, *Fit to Be Citizens*, 2.

[52] David Khansari, Anthony Murgo, and Robert Faith, "Effects of Stress on the Immune System," *Immunology Today* 11 (1990): 170–170.

[53] Sinclair, *The Jungle*, 207.

[54] Sinclair, *The Jungle*, 211.

[55] Even though she is said to be a German or "Dutch" character in the novel, Madame Haupt is given a French title ("Madame" instead of "Frau"). This is somewhat incongruous; yet one reason for this mixture of languages and nationalities may be that "Madame" is in keeping with the implication that Mme Haupt is a pretentious midwife with "allures," and believes herself to be superior—it is this "pretense" that the novel may refer to through its use of French.

[56] Sinclair, *The Jungle*, 209.

[57] Sinclair, *The Jungle*, 217.

[58] Starr, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine*, 23.

[59] Starr, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine*, 22.

[60] Starr, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine*, 22.

[61] Starting in 2019, California Governor Newsome has called for extension of health care benefits to undocumented young adults between the ages of 19 to 25. See Vanessa Romo and Dani Matias, "California's Budget Proposal Would Expand Health Care to Some Undocumented Immigrants," National Public Radio (June 10, 2019), https://www.npr.org/2019/06/10/731311422/californias-budget-proposal-would-expand-health-care-to-some-undocumented-immigr.

[62] Romo and Matias, "California's Budget Proposal."

[63] Barack Obama, *A Promised Land* (New York: Random House, 2020), 374–378.

[64] Rita Charon et al., *The Principles and Practice of Narrative Medicine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 1.

[65] Starr, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine*, 19.

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