

“Typical of Her Race”: Cultural Pluralism and the Editorial Records of *Survey Graphic*

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Figure 1: “Maris Pacifici,” *Survey Graphic*, May 1, 1926.

American progressives opened the May 1, 1926 issue of *Survey Graphic* to an unfamiliar view of their world, a map of “Maris Pacifici.” Bearing the caption, “The Pacific Vortex,” the map presented a cartographic perspective centered on the Pacific rather than the Atlantic Ocean. The magazine’s editors claimed that the map was a conscious “reversal of [the American] point of view,” an attempt to re-orient a public accustomed to seeing things from a Eurocentric perspective.

Looked at from the Japanese or Chinese perspective, editors said, the United States was after all the eastern-most rather than western-most point of the world.¹

This cartographic reorientation in *Survey Graphic*—a social work magazine funded and owned by a collective of two thousand educators, missionaries, social workers, and philanthropists called the Survey Associates—symbolized a paradigm shift in progressive race relations that occurred in the first decades of the twentieth century.² Scholars see the publication as representing a shift in the progressive discourse on race relations from one that cataloged and ordered the world from a Eurocentric set of norms to a pluralist one that framed that world in decidedly more relativistic and cosmopolitan terms. That reorientation in the progressive community—while never fully completed—marked the early stirrings of a multiculturalist movement in the United States, as well as the maturation of a set of anti-imperialist and pro-immigration policies that publicly challenged the raucous ethnocentrism of these years. While not necessarily the first episode in the nation's culture wars, which occurred during earlier debates over immigration in the 1840s and '50s, this birth of cultural pluralism in national politics and letters was a major event in the battle to define the substance and texture of American nationalism and the nation's position in a cosmopolitan world. It was also, as scholars like David Hollinger have pointed out, an "important precursor" to later debates over the meaning of the nation's identity and its understanding of the phrase *e pluribus unum*.³

Cultural pluralist thought was not a unitary phenomenon.⁴ The slew of writers, teachers, and social activists associated with that movement, like Horace Kallen, Randolph Bourne, Rachel Dubois, Alain Locke, John Collier, Margaret Mead, and W. E. B. Dubois, each had their own ideas about what pluralism, or in contemporary parlance cosmopolitanism, meant and how it might be put into practice on either the national or global stage in their writing and politics. But over and above such differences ran this consistently multiculturalist ideal that sought to celebrate the world's racial and ethnic diversity without giving up on the project of national and even global unity. As the critic Everett Akam puts it, pluralism meant, at least in the national context, resolving "how Americans might achieve a sense of racial and ethnic diversity while still retaining the common ground of shared traditions and citizenship," or as Werner Sollors has put it, learning to balance out, in effect, one's given ethnic *descent* (over which there is no choice) with one's *consenting* to become an American.⁵

The nation was not the end point, however. In this earlier progressive tradition pluralism also meant striving towards a global community and a more self-conscious human universalism so as to transcend even these lines of national kinship. Historically, that pluralist ideal took root in the progressive community during the 1920s as a reaction to a nasty racial environment characterized by the rabid nativism of World War I, the rise of the second Ku Klux Klan, and the birth of eugenics and its debates over dysgenic immigrants; and it gained firm footing in the 1930s during the great cultural shakeup of the Great Depression.

Of course, this birth of pluralism in the United States is not a new subject. Works like Akam’s *Transnational America: Cultural Pluralist Thought in the Twentieth Century*, Louis Menand’s *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America*, Diana Selig’s *Americans All: The Cultural Gift’s Movement*, and Sollors’ *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent & Descent in American Culture* have documented for us the institutional and discursive formation of the pluralist movement.⁶ From such writings we have acquired a clear understanding of the role that American pragmatism played in breaking down Victorian assumptions about culture and racial evolution. Additionally we now recognize the impact that a new generation of anthropologists and sociologists had on rethinking the link between race and biology, the influence of immigrant activists on reimagining the nation’s racial tapestry, and the roles that progressive educators, editors, and artists all played in institutionalizing pluralism. What the scholarly discussion of pluralism lacks, with the notable exceptions of George Hutchinson’s and Anne Carroll’s excellent studies of the Harlem Renaissance,⁷ is a concrete examination of the textual production processes that shaped pluralist texts as they wended their way through editor’s offices to publication. In short, we know plenty about the key figures and institutions of this earlier pluralist movement, but we know very little about the unpolished editorial debates and backroom discussions that ultimately determined the public formation of pluralism in the United States.

The editorial records of *The Survey* help to fill that void by providing us with a rare—if incomplete—glimpse behind the scenes to the editorial process where we can see the type of problems that progressive editors, journalists, and artists struggled with as they attempted to formulate a more complex and (what they thought to be) less oppressive racial politics. What is clear from the extant records of a magazine like *The Survey* is that the most vexing problem faced by these earlier pluralists was learning how to craft a grammar and a politics that simultaneously promoted the cause of human unity (a cause to which progressives had long been committed) while, at the same time, celebrating the virtues of racial and national difference that were at the center of modern social life. These earlier progressives struggled, that is, to chart a way between the familiar Scylla and the Charybdis of liberal identity politics—on the one hand, the flattening of all difference into a bland assertion of human universalism that replicated existing patterns of domination, and on the other, the casting of racial and ethnic difference in terms so ironclad that the world’s people seem to be irredeemably *different* from one another.

The shift towards a pluralist politics arrived officially at *The Survey* in 1921. That was the year that the magazine launched a series of annual “Race Issues.” In its illustrated monthly edition *Survey Graphic* set out to document and celebrate the world’s different races, nations, and tribes in special editions of the magazine. Famous for its path-breaking publication of “Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro” in 1925 (a special double edition of the magazine that helped to canonize the Harlem Renaissance), *The Survey*’s race series amounted to a major anthropological undertaking that ran for more than a decade and that introduced

progressives to the nation's major scholars and activists like John Collier, Robert Park, Alain Locke, and W. E. B. Dubois and their foreign counterparts like the Mexican painter Diego Rivera, Jose Vasconcelos, Manuel Gamio, Horace Plunkett, A.E. and even, after a manner, Benito Mussolini. With special issues devoted to the American Pueblo, the Gypsy, the Oriental, the African American, the Mexican, the Gael, the German, the Italian, the Russian, and several other groups, *The Survey's* race series fleshed out for the magazine's readership, which was comprised of teachers, social workers, activists, and missionaries, a cosmopolitan portrait of their increasingly globalized world.⁸

Not every progressive made that shift, of course, at *The Survey* or elsewhere. The older politics of assimilation with its top-down emphasis on middle-class charity and Christian benevolence persisted for a long time to come alongside the newer politics of pluralism. Readers could see and feel it in the magazine's recurring tropes of crippled Indians, dirty immigrants, and ignorant "Negroes" crying out for missionary benevolence.⁹ Moreover, and more disturbingly, some progressives also followed down the path of a 100% Americanism that saw little room for cultural differentiation and that, in its ugliest formulations, imagined weeding out bad racial seed through sterilization and racially restrictive immigration laws.¹⁰ But what was indeed new in *The Survey's* racial discourse was the deliberate effort on the part of progressives to supplement and even displace the ugly assumptions of the eugenics movement and the condescending language of the assimilationists with new narratives of racial genius, ethnic beauty, and subaltern empowerment.

What we see in looking beyond the public sources, however, is that this new pluralist politics came with its own tensions and troubles. Records like those at *The Survey* illustrate that the pluralist movement as it took shape under the terms of a white middle-class progressivism came out of a tortured psychology and a very troubled political terrain. What those records can do for us is give us an unadulterated glimpse of both the raw racial unconscious that fueled this earlier pluralist movement and insight into the type of political constraints and aesthetic challenges that progressives faced behind the scenes in making the pluralist turn.

"He is an enduring critter!": Pluralism's Racial Unconscious

The first example, which derives from an editorial exchange between the magazine's editor-in-chief, Paul Kellogg, and one of his associate editors, Sara Merrill, sheds light on the political unconscious that drove the progressive shift to a pluralist stance on race relations. The case in question concerns this editor's proofing of a special edition of *The Survey* dedicated to the European gypsy and to its diasporic fragments in the United States. The editorial burden in this case centered on concerns that this junior editor had about the accuracy and authenticity of the magazine's reporting on this ethnic group. What we can learn from her private correspondence is that the new pluralist politics caused progressives like her to struggle—at least a little bit—with the problem of being a white,



Figure 2: “A.D. 1630, ‘Aren’t Those Foreigners Funny?’” *Survey Graphic*, January 7, 1922.

middle-class journalist claiming the right to represent another race in print. That struggle turned out to be meaningful enough that in a precious moment of candor, Merrill wrote it down and left us with a rare window onto the racial unconscious of the pluralist project.¹¹

What we see in this example is the familiar story of the Western gaze being adapted to the new pluralist politics. That is, we see a journalist struggling with the new pluralist imperative to let the subaltern speak and then going ahead and ignoring what she heard because it did not suit her psychic needs. The ex-

change between these two editors confirms the suspicion articulated by Edward Said that the psychology and politics behind the Western gaze—even in its most benevolent manifestations—tends to be self-serving and tends to constrain the portrait of racial otherness to that of a mirror image of the Western self.¹²

Merrill’s problems in this case were logistical rather than exclusively theoretical. It turns out that she and her reporters had encountered difficulties in collecting material for the Gypsy Issue of the magazine. As she explained to her editor, *The Survey’s* reporters had not been given full access to the gypsies’ culture and thus could not write about them with the type of “first-hand experience” that the magazine’s readers and editors expected. The Romany had simply not wanted nosy reporters hanging around during their sacred Easter festival. What that meant, Merrill explained, was that the magazine’s coverage in the upcoming issue derived from a single conversation that her reporters had done while “feast[ing] alone with one gypsy man” who had not attended the ceremony. Merrill knew that such reporting did not amount to very compelling material, but she told Kellogg that she still wanted to publish the material for political and psychological reasons.¹³

To assuage her conscience, Merrill checked the articles she was editing with the one gypsy friend that she had, a woman named Louise Rice. When Merrill was reporting in the 1920s, the practice of consulting a “racial insider” was becoming increasingly common at *The Survey*. The editors felt an imminent new pressure to authenticate their race stories with racial insiders. Taken to its logical conclusion, that rationale led *The Survey*, a few years prior to Merrill’s assignment, to hand the editorial reins of the magazine over to an African American for the first time in its history. In this earlier instance (to which we will return in the next section), Paul Kellogg and his staff decided that they were unqualified to speak about the black experience in America. In this case, they chose Howard University philosopher Alain Locke as guest editor to represent his “race.” The relative humility marked by Merrill’s editorial actions and by earlier decisions

represented a sea change in attitude from the standard reporting practices of the magazine.

In the case at hand, however, there were no plans to turn over the magazine's editorial reins to a gypsy editor. And, in lieu of that decision, Merrill decided to approach her gypsy friend to ask if she would read and authenticate the material that Merrill had in hand. In making that decision, however, Merrill found herself thinking about the politics of racial representation. She assumed that a person's claims to racial or national authenticity gave them a privileged vantage point from which to speak as a representative. For her, race was simply embodied by the person who was different in complexion. In practice this meant attempting to discover her friend's racial pedigree to prove to herself and to Kellogg that Louise Rice was indeed an authentic gypsy who could speak for all gypsies.

In a letter she wrote to Kellogg, Merrill documented Rice's racial genealogy. She explained that Rice's great-grandmother had been "of the true blood, a Romany Lee in England," but that later in life she had "married 'out'" and that her "half-and-half children, 'pash and pash'" (as she put it) had again married out, leaving her of mixed blood. Rice was "didikai," as Merrill explained, "more or less Romany, recognized and admitted to tribal festivities, but not to be venerated like the true blood that has never been adulterated." To Merrill, that meant that Rice had imperfect but also secure biological claims to be Romany. Even so, Merrill felt the need to reinforce her case by pointing out that Rice had cultural claims to being a gypsy as well. She told Kellogg that Rice carried "a gypsy talisman" wherever she went. And further that Rice lived and identified as a gypsy in addition to having gypsy blood.¹⁴ The long and the short of the matter is that Merrill decided that Rice was the type of *bonafide* gypsy that she needed to validate the magazine's material on the Romany. The thought process she went through, we might note, was a far cry from the sort of ontological universe we live in today wherein notions like racial hybridity and heterogeneity allow for more complex notions of identity.

But leaving behind for a moment the troubling issues raised by this notion of racial authenticity (to which we will return) and the reliance on a single subject to represent an entire group, we might still consider what Rice (as a racial other) had to say about the articles that had been written. It turns out that Rice's criticisms of the magazine's reporting were blunt. She expressed mostly "grunts of displeasure" in reading the articles and she told Merrill that the magazine's writers had "perpetuated most of the mistakes . . . already . . . made about the Rom[any]"—including the remedial error of lumping together "nomads and Romanies" under the same rubric. The term Romany (an ethnic term) and the term nomad (a cultural term), she explained, were not synonymous. In fact, she explained to Merrill that the racial terrain within gypsy culture was much more complex and hierarchical than the "uninitiated" supposed. (On a positive note, Rice pronounced one of the essays in the bunch to be "real.") This brief exchange is unfortunately all we have from their conversation, but it is enough to satisfy us that the magazine's reporting on the gypsies was inadequate in some basic ways

and that the magazine’s editors had been informed of the flaws in its reporting.¹⁵

Merrill still wanted to publish the articles over Rice’s displeasure, but she felt anxious enough about the material to leave behind an explicit rationale for doing so. Merrill managed to convince herself, while “playing around with the gypsy material” in her office, that the articles written by her reporters were “honest and true—and intriguing” and that they provided “a fair picture...of the *real* gypsies” taken from “first-hand experience.”¹⁶ For both political and psychological reasons, she concluded that the material was appropriate for the upcoming race series issue of the magazine.

Part of the rationale that Merrill offered Kellogg for moving forward with the series was rooted in a familiar, although dimly recognized, cultural politics. She thought that the articles gave “a lovely, colorful picture” of the gypsies and that, as such, they would prove useful in making a “romantic appeal” for the gypsies with the magazine’s readers.¹⁷ Of course, what Merrill meant in describing the gypsy (and the articles about the gypsy) as lovely and colorful was that they were strange and exotic. This was in keeping with the progressives’ aestheticized portrayals of racial diversity. As any number of scholars have pointed out, the psychological and cultural demands of a pluralist logic in these years ultimately determined that such racial others as the gypsy would serve in a dialectical relationship to the progressive, as something like his or her alter ego: the one a presumably historical species, a proselyte of change, and a modern achievement who had broken with the past, and the other a dark, timeless, original, and immutable species straight out of humanity’s prehistory.¹⁸ Such a generic pattern of racial representation is perfectly predictable given what we know about the cultural politics of difference in this period with its overweening tendencies to exoticize the other.

But Merrill did not leave the matter at that. She also indicated, in confidence, to Kellogg that she had more selfish reasons for wanting to publish the material. She articulated in a rare gesture of self-awareness the racial unconscious of the pluralist project. “May I tell you how the Gypsy looks to me in relation to the *Survey Graphic*?” she asked him. “Candidly?”

[The gypsy] is a touchstone of civilization, having survived in full integrity of language, customs, and blood all the rise and fall of Egypt, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, and modern European and American culture. Historically, the Gypsy has passed through, an onlooker, adapting himself enough to get along, but standing aloof for some unknown reason from all the current tides of progress. He is *an enduring critter*! It is impossible to make much impression on him. He is *useful to keep alive* a sense of continuity in history, in life. He does in this way keep *us* steady when we think of him. The Gypsy does not change, inwardly. He has perspective . . . which we lack. [italics mine]¹⁹

While Merrill's unwitting bigotry concerning the gypsy in this passage took on a predictable form, what is most telling about her letter is that dreadful phrase—"He is useful to keep alive"—along with the zoological referent—"an enduring critter!" Those unfiltered comments revealed the racial unconscious that drove some of the staff at *Survey Graphic*. Merrill's letter makes clear that progressives wanted this lovely and colorful gypsy image because it had a psychological utility to them born of stereotypes that readers found to be familiar and comforting. As an authentic and prehistoric race, which had presumably stood "aloof" from time itself, the gypsy was worth keeping around to serve, that is, as a sort of racial Archimedean point of the species. Gypsies were a steady gauge against which progressives might measure their own progress in the world, a reminder of the supposed primitivity that progressives had shed as moderns.

The simplistic portrait of racial groups by the magazine spoke volumes about progressive anxieties. Historians tell us that progressives in the early twentieth century were undergoing a number of traumatic changes that stirred up such racialist fantasies, including the painful erosion of a Victorian self in the wake of the new consumer culture and its growing cult of personality,²⁰ the trauma of having to adjust in body and in mind to a crowded, boisterous, and unstable industrial landscape,²¹ the disillusionment with western progress and technology that followed the First World War,²² the loss of independence and autonomy that attended the corporate consolidation of labor and capital,²³ and the terror that came with looking into the epistemological chasm opened up by the shift to relativism in philosophy, law, psychology, and the arts.²⁴ Whatever the precise source of the progressives' own restlessness in the world, Merrill's letter indicates that they depended on such racial stereotypes to keep them "steady," in effect, giving them a "perspective" that allowed them to rest easier knowing that someone, somewhere else, was real, intact, and whole. What Merrill's conversation with her editor confirms is that progressives in these years were driven, as Said has suggested, by the observer's own unconscious anxieties and needs. The readers who flipped through the magazine's race series might not have learned very much about a particular culture but they could at least put down the issue knowing that it was his or her job to keep these other "races" alive as an antidote to the progressive's own troubled mind.

"A Serious Slip": Pluralism's Political Consciousness

Merrill went off the deep end in this view of racial difference. But the politics of a progressive pluralism are not so easily packaged in such a conclusion. Stopping with Merrill's case makes the story overly simplistic, stripping it of its complexity and forcing the facts to fit into our theoretical models. Routinely, editors, journalists, and artists at *The Survey* and elsewhere struggled, more earnestly than did Merrill. The sort of racial unconscious that we can unpack from Merrill's letter is but one part of the story, albeit a decidedly important one.

A second set of examples helps us to understand the more complex political considerations that informed the production of *The Survey*. In this second

instance, which concerns the landmark publication of “Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro,” the fifth edition in the magazine’s race series, the editorial records of Paul Kellogg and his guest editor Alain Locke demonstrate that the magazine did not always stand on so simplistic of a racial epistemology as did Merrill. These next examples provide us with a portrait of two editors caught up in a more complex race politics as they struggled to define racial difference adequately in the terms available to them and in the midst of a tense racial climate. Three heated episodes in their correspondence (all of which are of passing familiarity to scholars of the Harlem Renaissance) provide a perspective on the editorial politics that went into announcing the birth of a New Negro to a white, middle-class audience. The first centers on the public criticism that *The Survey* came under for having published two series of racial portraits entitled “Harlem Types” and “Negro Women.” The second centers on a private exchange between the African American intellectual James Weldon Johnson and Kellogg over a seedy article the magazine had published entitled “The Grim Side of Harlem.” And the third centers on the private criticism that Locke came under from the poet Claude McKay over the editorial decisions that he had made in framing the New Negro to suit the sensibilities of *The Survey*’s readership.

This fifth edition in the magazine’s race series was dominated by two sets of portraits of African Americans done by a German immigrant artist named Winold Reiss. Published under the titles “Harlem Types” and “Negro Women,” Reiss’s illustrations portrayed various African Americans from different walks of life ranging from the world-renowned tenor, Roland Hayes, to an anonymous young man identified simply as “Congo: a familiar of the New York studios.” An arresting series that fronted the magazine’s cover page and comprised the bulk of its illustrated mid-section, these Harlem images followed a form of racial portraiture that was familiar to readers at *The Survey* and that had become a standard feature of the magazine’s pluralist politics. Reiss’s images of African Americans in this issue of *The Survey* paralleled the ethnic tropes previously used to portray Italians, Irish, Mexicans, Chinese, Japanese, and others. But the motivations and politics of Reiss’s work came under heightened scrutiny in the Harlem issue. The criticism they generated turned out, in fact, to be serious enough to get them purged from the historical record and replaced with the now-famous illustrations of Aaron Douglass. They “created a furor” in the Harlem community, as one contributor put it.²⁵

Racial portraiture at *The Survey* was meant to serve two ends. First, by regularly printing portraits of non-white and marginally white individuals, the magazine’s editors hoped to visually chip away at the perceived notion that America was an Anglo-Saxon nation. In this respect, Reiss’s portraits simply added another layer of texture to the growing multicultural fabric of the magazine. But racial portraiture like Reiss’s also had a less obvious purpose, which was to counteract the type of venomous racial typecasting that was being done by conservatives who affixed racial categories and ranked racial attributes in derogatory ways.²⁶ Perhaps counter-intuitively, a series like Reiss’s which documented

these so-called racial types, directly interrogated the notion of race by displaying the physical differences characteristic of members in the supposedly same racial group. For example, Reiss's "Orientals in America" introduced readers to a variety of individuals who fell within the category of the Oriental, differentiating clearly between Chinese Americans and Japanese Americans, between the young and the old, between men and women, and between traditionalists and modernists. In other words, in its progressive context, this genre of racial portraiture, as Anne Carroll writes, which was in one sense a "dehumanizing" convention that implicitly reinforced racial difference, also compelled readers to acknowledge the vast diversity within racial groups by actually "attacking rigid categories of identity."²⁷

"Harlem Types" and "Negro Women" were of this same order. The two series were comprised of eleven different portraits of African Americans who ranged from a light-skinned black woman named Elise McDougall who typified the conservative black middle class to an anonymous dark-skinned youth named simply "Congo" that represented black "Africanness." Taken as a whole, the visual syntax of the series worked to train readers to see both racial difference and human commonalities, moving, as Carroll argues, from the exotic expression of racial difference in the opening images of the series to the more familiar humanity of the subjects in the last.²⁸ *The Survey's* lead portrait of the singer Roland Hayes was thought to be especially effective in this regard. Hayes, who had brought black spirituals onto the classic concert stage in the 1920s, struck the magazine's editors as embodying the principle of unity in difference. For that reason, Locke had proposed him for the cover page with a caption that stressed Hayes' value as a symbol of both human and racial identity:

Roland Hayes. Artist—ambassador of the cultural expression and recognition of the Negro—human symbol of the attainment and promise of our younger generation, happy exponent of their racial task of adding spiritual self-achievement and freedom to physical freedom.

Hayes himself was not oblivious to this symbolic role. He explained in a letter to Locke that he felt a personal responsibility to use his interracial appeal to improve race relations by coaxing people towards a more tolerant cosmopolitanism and globalism. But not everyone saw Reiss's portraits in the same light. While Kellogg and Locke might have thought them to be "stunning" portraits of African Americans, Reiss claimed that he heard mostly negative comments about his artwork.²⁹

Reiss's racial portraiture came in for intense criticism at a public meeting held in Harlem marking the publication of "Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro." Following a speech that Kellogg gave to the audience, a man in the crowd stood up to object to the Reiss portraits on the grounds that they gave a bad impression of his people. They were, he told Kellogg, simply "not beautiful," and he "was

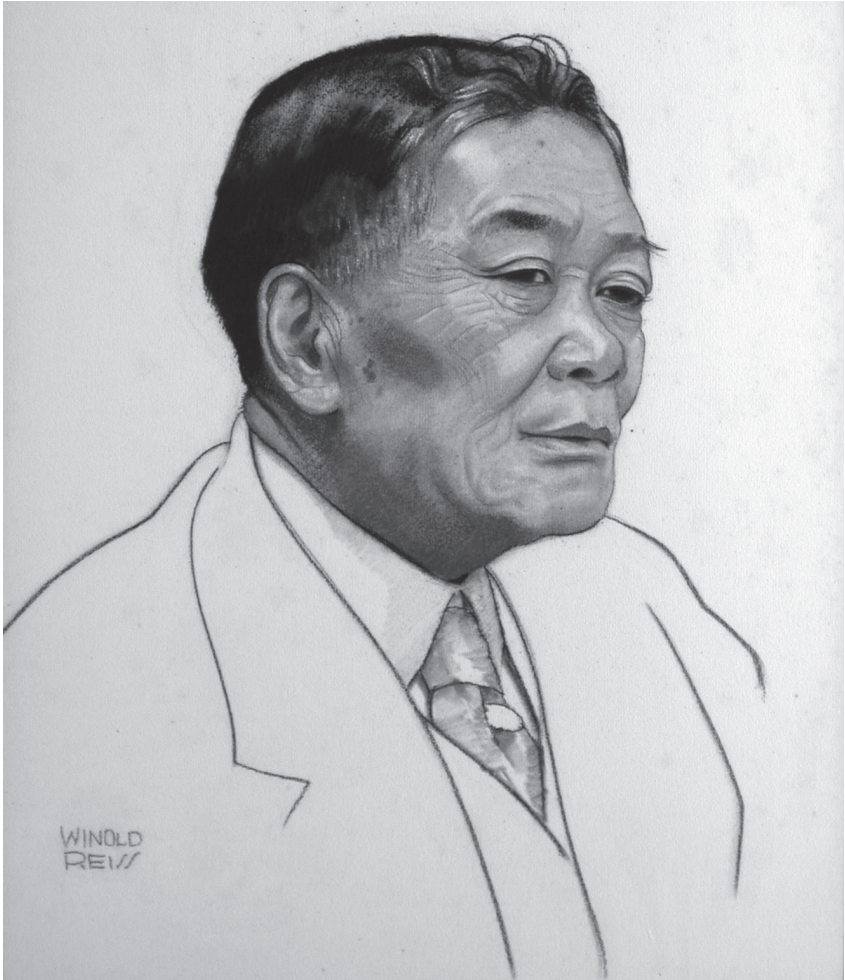


Figure 3: “Oriental Types,” Winold Reiss (1886-1953), Chinese Businessman (Mark Ten Sui) 19 7/8" x 15", pastel on Whatman board, 1926 Image courtesy of The Reiss Archives.

sorry” that the magazine had chosen to print them. That criticism emboldened another man in the audience to speak up as well. The latter found one image in the series, entitled the “Two School Teachers,” to be especially distasteful. He told Kellogg that he thought that the portrait was a “forbidding” representation of black women and that, as such, it could only work to “prevent the appointment of Negro school teachers.” No employer, he said, would want to hire black women, if they believed that they “looked that way,” and he himself would “be afraid” of such women were he to meet them on the street. The “whole art side”

of the magazine's special issue on the New Negro seemed to him, he said, to be a form of "subtle propaganda to prejudice the white reader" against the black community—"a sinister move" on the part of its editors. To at least some of the magazine's Harlem readership, the images were the edition's most salient and indefensible feature.³⁰

Those critical remarks were, however, not left unanswered. According to both Kellogg and Elise McDougall (one of Reiss's subjects), the discussion reached an uncomfortable climax minutes later when one of the teachers in the portrait stood up to claim that Reiss's portrait of her was a "pretty good likeness" and that she regretted that "she would frighten" anyone should she meet them on the streets. Kellogg claims that the audience rose to a standing-applause on her behalf and that the Harlem community decided in favor of the magazine's pluralist aesthetics that night, but *The Survey's* records suggest that the story was not that simple. Reiss's own correspondence with the editors indicates that his portraits were not at all well received in Harlem. He wrote to Kellogg in the weeks following that he had heard "mostly 'cons'" about his work.³¹

The story is instructive. One does not have to accept the criticism of the particular portrait to understand the logic that drove that criticism. Representing black images among black denizens of Harlem amid a hostile and white supremacist national cultural was a delicate business in this era. African American Harlemites, who were divided along class, gender, religious, regional, and color lines, were never quite as naïve about the ways in which racial images circulated nationally as were *The Survey's* editors. Intent and reception were decidedly different matters.

This is the point that James Weldon Johnson raised in his criticism of "Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro." In a private letter to Alain Locke and Kellogg, Johnson castigated the editors for making what he called "a serious slip" in their editing decisions. Johnson's concern centered on one particular article entitled "The Grim Side of Harlem" that addressed issues of crime, prostitution, and gambling in Harlem. Johnson did not dispute that Harlem, like all poor communities, had its illegalities and vices, but he informed the editors, with an anxiety born of black respectability, that it had been naïve to believe that such truths could be put into print without repercussions to black America. The *Memphis Commercial*, the *Savannah Morning News*, and the *Sunday World*, he said, had already written editorials that took that story out of context. Johnson stated that he suspected "the majority of the white papers in the South" would soon follow. "Thousands of Negroes," he told Kellogg, "will see these editorials and be affected by them," without ever having even heard of *Survey Graphic*. The many "good and important things" that the magazine had done for the black community had, in short, been defeated in "very large measure," he said, by this one serious slip in the magazine's reporting.³²

Johnson's critique of "Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro" reminds us of what we already know—that race is a social construction and that racial representation is always a politicized act framed by particular contexts. Johnson tried,



Figure 4: “Two Public School Teachers,” *Survey Graphic*, March 1, 1925.

albeit in a different language, to make that point in writing to the magazine’s editor, but Kellogg was not quite prepared for such a proposition. Progressives like Kellogg clung, however tenuously, to the notion of objectivity in reporting. Kellogg, for his part, defended the article. He wrote back to Johnson that he

hoped the author would come around to his viewpoint. Kellogg's position was fraught with racial privilege. It was the position of a white, middle-class editor in sympathy with the Harlem community but ultimately not of it, a privileged position that was dismissive of the long history of racial caricatures that African Americans had experienced.

A final set of examples from this issue further complicates the messy politics of representing the "New Negro" by illustrating the intense disagreement that existed among black contributors to the magazine.³³ If Johnson interpreted Locke's and Kellogg's editing of the New Negro edition to be overly free and loose, the West Jamaican poet Claude McKay saw their decisions to be overly conservative and autocratic. As one of a younger generation of radical artists, McKay wanted to introduce readers to the black psychological alienation that he believed to be a fundamental facet of the New Negro awakening. McKay found out, however, that Locke had a different project in mind. He privately accused the magazine's editors of intentionally denuding black resentment to make the New Negro Movement more palatable to a white middle-class audience.³⁴

McKay's criticisms stemmed from two personal affronts that he experienced at the hands of Locke's editing.³⁵ First, Locke had rejected one of his poems entitled "Mulatto" as being too edgy for the magazine; and second, Locke had, without McKay's permission, altered the title of another poem to soften its political message. McKay was "suicidally frank," and found this type of "playing [it] safe attitude" loathsome. He thought it only undermined the progress of race relations and obfuscated the true feelings that black men and women felt about racial oppression in the United States.³⁶

McKay was correct about Locke's decisions. The poem that Locke had edited out of the magazine was one that would have made white readers uncomfortable. It was an openly angry poem on the subject of miscegenation.³⁷ "Mulatto," spoke frankly about the "bastard birth-mark" that mixed races bore in their bodies and the "searing hate" that only a forsaken son could have for a father. In this case, Locke's decision to edit McKay's poem out of the edition was an exercise at least in part in the type of editorial caution that Johnson had urged in his letter to the editor in the previous instance. In the instance at hand, Locke chose to omit the raw anger of McKay's poetry because it both risked alienating white (and even some black) supporters and also because its angry tone and propagandistic nature were out of step with his own aesthetic principles, including Locke's sense of decorum and his growing conviction that it was more useful to assume that the Negro was not a so-called problem than to portray him as such.³⁸ McKay, who had a very different perspective on the matter, saw clearly through the implications of Locke's decision and accused him privately of being dishonest and pandering in his editorial politics, contending that only a brutal poetic honesty could break through entrenched racism:

[A]s you know Locke, I am an artist...not concerned with placating public opinion, white or black, vicious or sympa-

thetic. [Forget] the blessed public. What I want to show is the feelings of a certain type of New World mulatto—to lay bare his soul. How he feels toward the white man. . . . I can’t help if white fools make bad propaganda of a psychological truth. The truth will gain in time.

The editors, McKay claimed, simply did not have “the guts” to orchestrate a real revolution in race relations, and they were perpetuating the type of accommodationist politics of Booker T. Washington and William Braithwaite in literature—“the ultimate reward of which was dry husks and ashes!”³⁹

In a second more egregious incident, Locke changed the title of one of McKay’s poems to align it with the type of white middle-class pluralism that defined the magazine’s race politics. The poem in question was entitled “The White House,” although Locke changed that title to “White Houses” in the published edition.⁴⁰ According to McKay, Locke knew what he had done with that slight alteration. He had turned an angry poem of political protest—for which “The White House” stood as a synecdoche—into a self-pitying poem about social exclusion. McKay complained that the poem’s opening line, which began “Your door is shut against my tightened face,” would no longer be read as a statement of moral outrage at a government that denied black participation in politics, but as a poem about black men feeling sensitive about white men’s refusal to let them into their private homes. McKay had meant to capture the sort of “superhuman control” that many blacks exercised over themselves in order to contain their anger, but his poem had been revised, he complained, into a trite expression of black men “hankering after the unattainable flesh-pots” of white women. Locke’s editing choices, McKay concluded, were a form of “flunkeyism” that had subjected the artist to an “intellectual imprisonment” for the sake of the magazine’s more squeamish bourgeois readership.⁴¹

These incidents illustrate the difficulties that came with representing racial difference under the terms of a white, middle-class pluralism. More specifically, they point to the contextual determinants that shaped the decisions that Locke made in framing black difference for a broader national public. Clearly, power and racial knowledge, as George Hutchinson has explained, were inseparable in the cases presented here.⁴² While Locke as editor of this special edition of *The Survey* had the immediate authority to determine how white and black readers met this New Negro in print, even that privileged position was circumscribed by his status as the guest editor of a white, middle-class progressive magazine. He too clearly felt burdened by the anticipated reception among the magazine’s staff and readership. It is clear that Locke thought carefully (as many scholars have pointed out) about how best to situate claims to racial difference within a broader human and national identity that extended beyond and transcended race.⁴³ Both the choices that he made and the criticisms that he endured indicate that building a cosmopolitan politics around the image of a “New Negro” was a very delicate business.

But what is also clear from this second set of examples in *The Survey's* editorial records is that when the magazine invited blacks to speak more freely in its pages (and behind the scenes) it also opened itself up to larger debates on the meaning of race in American culture. The vast diversity of experiences and opinions within the black community, the pressures imposed by interracial collaboration and expectations, and the politics of Jim Crow ensured political and ideological contentiousness. In this case, the feedback that Locke and Kellogg received from the black community forced them to think about the social construction of racial representation within the magazine. While the choices they made raise thorny questions about the relationship between editorial power and racial knowledge, they also point us to a more complex politics behind progressive editorial practice. Pluralism's political consciousness took shape within a tense racial climate in which progressive editors were always aware of the limits of their white middle-class readership and increasingly beset by the insoluble problem of representing difference in a way that was satisfactory to all stakeholders.

**“Typical of her race . . . and of marked individuality”:
Pluralism's Ontology and Syntax**

The final example of this essay turns from the private correspondence of the magazine's staff to a caption that the editors gave to a series of illustrations of immigrant women done by the artist Joseph Stella. This obscure caption serves as a fitting ending to this essay in that it provides an unusually explicit articulation of the type of political and ontological balance that the magazine's staff intended to uphold in formulating this new politics of difference. In this final case, the tortured syntax to which the staff's editors appealed in interpreting Stella's portraits exemplifies (in a distilled form) the representational difficulties and tensions that came with celebrating racial difference within the universalist framework (informed by Christianity and the Enlightenment) that was espoused by early twentieth-century progressives. In it, we see a direct statement of what *The Survey's* editors thought they were doing in one of those occasional moments when they were, in fact, most deliberately thinking about what they were doing.

Stella, who is better known to us as a futurist painter, had earlier in his career worked for *The Survey* doing racial portraiture similar to that of Winold Reiss. The sketches considered here entitled “Earth's Noblest Thing” were intended (like Reiss's) to represent the range of physiognomy within the category of the immigrant. The series included, for instance, distinctive portraits of a Serbian peasant woman, an Irish grandmother, an elderly Sicilian woman, a Roman donna, and various younger Americanized immigrants.⁴⁴ As a panoramic cross-section of the nation's rich ethnic composition, the series was a deliberate effort to capture what the staff called the “beauty and drama” of the nation's “melting pot.” The cover sketch titled the “Immigrant Madonna,” set a universalist tone to the portraits. Presenting the reader with a nameless immigrant woman staring warmly into the eyes of her cradled child, the image, with its religious connota-

tions of the Virgin Mary and its emphasis on the primary relationship between mother and child, attested to the basic humanity that was embodied in even the most common of immigrants and that resisted division by race, religion, color, or creed. The gendering of that message—evident in the archetype of mother and child—carried both a deeply humanist and a scriptural resonance that worked to preempt the viewer from attaching too quickly to the subjects' race or ethnicity in the drawings. But having struck that humanist note, the series went on to urge the reader to a more complex racial politics.⁴⁵

"Earth's Noblest Thing" was accompanied by a prefatory text that aligned Stella's portraits to the magazine's pluralist agenda in a very explicit way. The preface urged the reader to view the women in the portraits as being several things at once—as being "typical of her race . . . typical of the 'eternal feminine' that is above race—and also . . . of marked individuality."⁴⁶ The awkward syntax of the preface urged the reader to uphold simultaneously three basic, and different, propositions with regards to these women's identities, each of which was important to the pluralist project: a liberal individualist proposition which assumed that each of us is a unique individual marked by our own personal histories, a racist proposition which presumed that our color and our ethnicity encoded our collective identity, and a universalist proposition that presumed that all men and women embodied archetypal roles outside of any particular culture, time, or space, albeit with gender serving to split that category down the middle. Each of Stella's subjects was meant, in other words, to represent simultaneously the individual, the (racial) type, and the archetype, with race serving as the intermediary category in this series—a part of the subject's identity that lay somewhere between the universal and the individual.⁴⁷

It is hard to know if Stella's portraits (with their accompanying text) actually succeeded in communicating such a complex notion of ethnic identity to their wider audience, but each image did clearly attempt to represent the type of tensions that the staff sought to reinforce. Each woman in the images, whether Romanian, Sicilian, Irish, or Serbian, was portrayed in such a way as to suggest the archetypal—eyelids lowered in one portrait, hands in prayer in a second image, a contemplative posture in yet another—indicating that each of these women might indeed be evidence of the eternal. And yet running immediately counter to that universalist message were the clear and distinctive ethnic features exemplified in each of the drawings, features which the staff termed the women's "inherited . . . racial traits." Whether it was the aquiline nose of an Italian grandmother, the high cheekbones of a Serbian peasant, or any of the other physiological and psychological traits that the staff thought it saw in these portraits, such supposedly racial markings actually highlighted for the reader the message of difference more than it did that of universality. And, yet again, on a third level, the visual syntax of these portraits worked, according to the editors' text, to emphasize the distinctive features that marked these women as being uniquely individual. The sunken cheekbones and lips of one woman, the furrowed wrinkles around the mouth of another, and the heavy eyelids of yet a



Figure 5: “A Sicilian Refugee,” *Survey Graphic*, December 1, 1922

third attested to the more personal set of pains and experiences of these women as individuals. The style of portraiture that we see in this series, in other words, stressed the fact that these were sketches of actual immigrants who had their own unique stories, sufferings, and histories.⁴⁸

What makes this final set of drawings and editorial text a suitable ending to this essay is that they capture the pain to which the magazine’s editors went in formulating their pluralist politics. They show the *Survey* staff’s attempt at striking a delicate, and difficult, balance among the different ontological categories of the individual, the race, and the human. We get a glimpse in this instance of the most complex phrasing of the ontological and representational politics that grounded the magazine’s shift to a pluralist politics. While progressive editors, artists, and writers at *The Survey* might have failed to sail successfully between

the Scylla and Charybdis of liberal identity politics in the Progressive era, it is clear from the examples in this essay that they were both consciously and unconsciously working through a new set of editorial practices, epistemological stances, aesthetic forms, and political principles that might give adequate form to the pluralist project.

It is worth pointing out, however, that their project was always a decidedly over-determined one. The premise that races and nations needed to be named and fleshed out in the first place—a premise that was widely accepted across a wide spectrum of politics—was an assumption that drove the progressives’ racial epistemology. At its best and most lucid, a progressive pluralism in these years could not amount to more than an earnest effort on the part of sympathetic writers, artists, and editors to turn a bad idea—the concept of race—into a source of strength and value for ethnic and racial communities, the nation, and humanity at large. It is not surprising that this troubling idea of race, which grounded the pluralist project, gave rise to a tortured syntax, a troubled set of representations, and an unstable political ontology that never seemed to find a place of rest. In such a context, re-orienting our literal and metaphorical maps so as to revalue diversity and to cultivate empathy across ethnic and racial lines is probably as good of a starting point as we will ever have.

Notes

1. “East by West,” *Survey Graphic*, May 1, 1926: 132-33.
2. Clarke A. Chambers, *Paul U. Kellogg and the Survey: Voices for Social Welfare and Social Justice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), 44-45. Also see Cara Finnegan’s essay “Social Welfare and Visual Politics: The Story of *Survey Graphic*” at the New Deal Network, <http://newdeal.feri.org/sg/ack.htm>, September 7, 2007.
3. David Hollinger, *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism* (New York: Basic Books 2000), 11.
4. See, for instance, Everett Helmut Akam’s discussion of the similarities and divergences in the pluralist writings of Horace Kallen, Alain Locke, John Collier, and Randolph Bourne. In *Transnational America: Cultural Pluralist Thought in the Twentieth Century* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002).
5. Akam, *Transnational America*, 1; Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent & Descent in American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 7-8.
6. See, for example, Akam, *Transnational America*; Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2002), esp. chapters 13-15; Diana Selig, *Americans All: The Cultural Gifts Movement* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), and Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity*.
7. Anne Carroll, *Word, Image, and the New Negro: Representation and Identity in the Harlem Renaissance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 122-90; and George Hutchinson, *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).
8. For an expanded discussion of *The Survey’s* race series, see Bob Johnson, “Globalizing the Harlem Renaissance: Irish, Mexican, and ‘Negro’ Renaissances in *The Survey*,” *Journal of Global History* 1 (2006): 155-75 and “American Modernity and the Cultural Politics of Progressivism: *The Survey* and *Survey Graphic*, 1919-1929 (dissertation, University of California, Irvine, 2002).
9. As an example, see Frederick Collett, “Undelivered Potage,” *Survey Graphic*, April 29, 1922., 134-39.
10. See, for instance, chapter 4, Keith Fitzgerald, *The Face of the Nation: Immigration, the State, and National Identity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).
11. Sara Merrill to Paul Kellogg, July 27, 1926, Box 656, Folder 658, Survey Associates Records.
12. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979).
13. “Sara Merrill to Paul Kellogg,” July 27, 1926, Box 656, Folder 658, Survey Associates Records
14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.* (italics mine)

17. *Ibid.*

18. The early twentieth-century fascination with primitive cultures, as Adam Kuper has explained, stemmed from the discursive dialectic created by the birth of the concept of the modern in the industrial age. The assumption was that “modern society had evolved from its antithesis” (4-5). In Adam Kuper, *The Invention of Primitive Society* (New York: Routledge, 1988). See also Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Subject* (New York: Columbia, 2002), x-xi, 71-97; and scholarship on the pluralist motives for representing Native Americans, including Eliza McFeely, *The Zuni in the American Imagination* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001) and Lawrence Kelly, *The Assault on Assimilation: John Collier and the Origins of Indian Policy Reform* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983).

19. Sara Merrill to Paul Kellogg, July 27, 1926 (italics mine).

20. Richard Fox and T. J. Jackson Lears, *The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon, 1983) and Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1986).

21. Among others, the sociologist Emile Durkheim documented the sociological conditions of alienation in the modern world in what are now classical texts such as *Suicide* and *The Division of Labor in Society*.

22. This was the lament of the so-called “lost generation” of post-war survivors who emerged from the trenches and the home front disillusioned with western values, western civilization, and western technologies.

23. T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

24. John Patrick Diggins, *The Promise of Pragmatism: Modernism and the Crisis of Knowledge and Authority* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

25. Winold Reiss, “Harlem Types,” *Survey Graphic*, March 1, 1925. See Carroll’s detailed discussion of this series and of racial typecasting in general in *Word, Image, and the New Negro*, 138-48 and 167-70; see also Hutchinson, *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White*, 393, and Arnold Rampersad, “Introduction,” in Alain Locke, *New Negro Anthology*, edited by Arnold Rampersad (New York: Touchstone, 1992), ix-xxviii. The quotation can be found in Elise J. McDougall to Locke, n.d., Box 164-115, Folder 4, Alain Locke Papers.

26. Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York: Norton, 1996) and Lee Baker, *From Savage to Negro: Anthropology and the Construction of Race* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

27. Carroll, *Word, Image, and the New Negro*, 143. Winold Reiss, “Five Portraits of Orientals,” *Survey Graphic*, May 1, 1926.

28. *Ibid.*, 138-47.

29. “Roland Hayes,” n.d., Box 164-139, Folder 31, Alain Locke Papers; Hayes to Locke, October 4, 1924, 164-35, Folder 28, Alain Locke Paper; and Telegram, Paul Kellogg to Alain Locke, February 5, 1925, Box 164-88, Folder 6, Alain Locke Papers; and Alain Locke to Kellogg, n.d., Box 94, Folder 710.

30. Paul Kellogg, “Communication Among Men: A Talk Before Teachers Union, Hudson Guild Farm,” October 1926, Box 3, Folder 28, Paul Kellogg Papers: 9-12. See also Letter, McDougall to Locke, n.d. The term “implicit othering” is Carroll’s from *Word, Image, and the New Negro*, 125.

31. Kellogg, “Communication Among Men.”

32. Hutchinson, *Harlem Renaissance in Black and White*, 394. James Weldon Johnson to Locke, March 9, 1925, Box 164-40, Folder 41 and Kellogg to Johnson, March 11, 1925, Box 164-40, Folder 40, Alain Locke Papers.

33. For a genealogy of the “culturally willed myth” of the “New Negro” and a discussion of the tensions within the changing concept of the New Negro between 1895 and 1927, see Henry Louis Gates, Jr., “The Trope of the New Negro and the Reconstruction of the Image of the Black,” *Representations* 24 (Autumn 1988): 129-55.

34. Rampersad, “Introduction,” in *New Negro Anthology*, xxii.

35. Leonard Harris and Charles Molesworth discuss these exchanges in *Alain Locke: Biography of a Philosopher* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 201-03.

36. Claude McKay to Alain Locke, October 7, 1924, Box 164-67, Folder 8, Alain Locke Papers.

37. The invention and dissemination of the term “miscegenation” began sometime in the 1860s when the premise of white supremacy joined forces with the assumption that interracial marriage was unnatural. The result was a quickly intensifying and enduring legal and cultural regime that classified sex and marriage across the so-called color line as a loathsome and unnatural act. See Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

38. Leonard Harris and Charles Molesworth, *Alain L. Locke: Biography of a Philosopher* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 201-17.

39. Hutchinson, 394; Claude McKay to Alain Locke, December 4, Unknown Year, Box 164-67, Folder 8.

40. See, for instance, Hutchinson, *Harlem Renaissance in Black and White*, 414.

41. Letter, Claude McKay to Alain Locke, April 18, 1925, Box 164-67, Folder 9, Alain Locke Papers.

42. In *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White*, Hutchinson has reconstructed in great detail the literary construction of the New Negro movement, offering a complex story of how the Harlem Renaissance was filtered through a variety of relationships with white progressive magazines and publishing houses. He offers an invaluable compendium of the multifaceted intellectual and editorial relationships among various artists and publishing outlets.

43. On Locke’s pluralism, see, for instance: Akam, *Transnational America*, 139-66; Hutchinson, *Harlem Renaissance*, 40-50; Menand, *The Metaphysical Club*, 388-400; Harris and Molesworth, *Alain Locke*, 196-234.

44. See also Carroll’s interpretation of Reiss’s Mexican portraits in *Word, Image, and the New Negro*, 127-28.

45. Joseph Stella, “Earth’s Noblest Thing,” *Survey Graphic*, December 1, 1922, 296-99. Katrina Irving views this trope as symbolizing a middle-class cult of true womanhood and argues that such images in *The Survey* and elsewhere were often also part of a narrative of the intractability of immigrant women to American influences. In Katrina Irving, *Immigrant Mothers: Narratives of Race and Maternity* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 73-75.

46. “Earth’s Noblest Thing: Drawings by Joseph Stella,” *Survey Graphic*, December 1, 1922, 296-299.

47. *Ibid.*

48. *Ibid.*

