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Addams on Cultural Pluralism, European Immigrants, and African Americans

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Abstract: Addams wrote extensively on the significance and value of immigrant cultures of origin, both for immigrants themselves and for non-immigrant Americans. Her theory of cultural pluralism is democratic and cosmopolitan. However, in essays on culture and African Americans she does not extend her theory to encompass African American culture. In the paper I develop Addams's theory of cultural pluralism. I then point out resources in her theory of cultural pluralism that could have been extended to include African American culture and identify barriers in her theorizing to doing so.

Addams wrote movingly about how significant her immigrant neighbors' cultures were, both to the immigrants and to non-immigrant Americans. She lived in one of Chicago's many densely populated immigrant districts, with Italians, Greeks, Russians, Poles, Bohemians, and eastern European Jews in the immediate vicinity of Hull House.¹ Through countless interactions with these neighbors, Addams developed the empirical knowledge base and the perceptual sensitivities with which to reflect on the role of culture in sustaining and enriching human and community life. Addams spoke and wrote extensively on these issues.

Addams had fewer interactions with African Americans. When Hull House opened in 1889, immigrants and their children made up 78% of Chicago's population; blacks made up only 1.3%. By 1910, only 2% of Chicago's 2.2 million people were black; housing and employment patterns were less rigidly segregated than they would become in the next few decades (Spear 4,

11-15, 20-21). Nonetheless, Addams was consistently engaged with African American communities and issues. She criticized white racist attitudes, practices, and policies in the strongest terms.² She was a founder of the NAACP and an early leader of the Chicago branch (Reed 10, 17, 20-21, 32, 38-39; Knight, *Spirit* 151-153). Du Bois spoke at Hull House, and Addams and Du Bois shared the stage at events.³ With Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Addams fought to keep the Chicago public schools integrated (Giddings 444-445). She helped found and raised funds for several settlements in Chicago that served black populations,⁴ and she mentored and inspired African American settlement workers.⁵ Thus, while not immersed in black communities, Addams had enough interactions with African Americans to speak with some credibility. However, she wrote very little about race relations between African Americans and whites in the U.S. In two essays on culture addressed to African American audiences, Addams did not extend her theorizing on cultural pluralism to African Americans.

In this paper I will restrict the discussion to Addams's writings during the twentieth century's first decade, when she developed most of her thinking on cultural pluralism. By 1910 Dewey had not yet moved to cultural pluralism, Boas's cultural relativism had not yet penetrated the intellectual world, and Mendelian genetics had not yet replaced Lamarckian assumptions regarding heredity.⁶ The Great War was yet to shatter illusions about western civilization's strength and rightness.

During these years social evolution provided the reigning paradigm within which intellectuals worked. Using what was called the historical method, theorists charted humanity's progress from savagery to civilization, tracing the evolution of mind, morality, religion, cultures, and forms of social organization. Within this paradigm, they debated whether there was one path to civilization or many, and whether competition and violence were constant drivers of human

evolution or whether they were gradually being replaced by peaceful methods of cooperation. While most versions privileged Anglo-Saxon civilization, some theorists used the paradigm to fiercely critique western imperialism and materialism.⁷ While the paradigm itself was not benign, the toxicity of theories produced within it varied considerably. James, Royce, and Dewey, as well as Addams, worked within it.⁸

The structure of the paper is as follows: After briefly discussing how prominent white intellectuals at the time regarded recent European immigrants, I will describe the conception of culture Addams used during those years, and discuss how she thought immigrants' cultures of origin functioned for immigrants in the U.S. I then describe the many ways Addams thought non-immigrant Americans could benefit from immigrant cultures. This constitutes Addams's theory of cultural pluralism as democratic and cosmopolitan. Then, after summarizing her two essays on culture and African Americans, I point out resources in her theory of cultural pluralism that could have been extended to include African American culture and identify the stubborn barriers in her theorizing to doing so.

The Value of Immigrant Cultures of Origin in the U.S.

Addams's first two decades at Hull House corresponded to the height of immigration from non-Anglo-Saxon Europe. Numbers of immigrants from Great Britain, Germany, and Scandinavia declined relative to the rapidly increasing numbers of people from southern and eastern Europe, primarily Italians, Greeks, many Slavic peoples, and Eastern European Jews. While all these groups were classified as white, they were not considered to be of the same race as Anglo-Saxons. The meaning of race was deeper and more penetrating than notions of ethnicity are today. The definition of race was imprecise and flexible; in it cultural, national, and

biological features were conflated, often with underlying Lamarckian assumptions (Jacobson, *Whiteness* 6-7; Stocking 250-253; Jacobson, *Special Sorrows*, 186).

During this time, whites were differentiated into distinct white races. Wildly different numbers of white races were posited. The Dillingham Commission's 1911 Report on Immigration counted thirty-six European races among the forty-five racial groups then immigrating to the U.S.⁹ Many writers placed European races in a hierarchy of worth, with the Teutonic or Anglo-Saxon race being superior because of its members' inherited aggressive drive and capacities for self-control and self-government (Ross 71-85; Strong 165-180; Jacobson, *Whiteness* 22-31).

These racial mappings shaped the fundamental questions intellectuals asked about immigration: Are inferior white races suitable for self-government? Can they be made suitable, that is, do they have the capacity to assimilate to Anglo-Saxon cultural, social, and intellectual patterns? Opinions regarding African Americans were not far from the surface. Few white scientists and intellectuals doubted that people of African descent were members of an alien and much inferior race. Thus, the debate about immigrants from southern and eastern Europe included assessing whether they were closer to Anglo-Saxons, or to persons of African descent.

Prominent intellectuals of the day gave a range of responses. Harvard geologist Nathaniel S. Shaler regretted the damage done by slavery, primarily because it forced Anglo-Saxons into close, continuous contact with people of a vastly inferior race. Southeastern European peasants were, he claimed, incapable of changing their inherently inferior status, stating, "[The peasant] is in essentially the same state as the Southern negro" (647, 649, 653). Economist and MIT President Francis A. Walker echoed this theme, describing the peasants as "degraded below our utmost conceptions." To Anglo-Saxons, contact with these people is "foul and loathsome," and

seriously imperiled American institutions and standards of living (828, 829). Josiah Royce's position was less extreme. He thought southern and eastern European immigrant races, unlike the Chinese, Native Americans, and blacks, could be assimilated to the American version of Anglo-Saxon civilization. Unassimilated, however, they posed an evil and dangerous threat to the community ("Some Characteristic" 226-227; "Provincialism" 76)

Compared to such vitriol from the nation's leading intellectuals, Addams's stance was remarkable. She did refer to immigrants as "primitive" and "simple," yet her reasoning was in effect an argument that they were, right then, capable of self-government, as they were already participating democratically in municipal reforms and in labor union governance.¹⁰ She went beyond that, and enumerated the ways in which immigrants could make distinctive contributions to American democracy. Thus her conception of cultural pluralism worked in tandem with her theory of social democracy in projecting how the U.S. might move toward democracy as a way of life, conducive to social and individual flourishing.

When Addams opened Hull House in 1889, she identified culture with civilization's highest achievements, with Matthew Arnold's "pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know . . . the best which has been thought and said" (Arnold viii; Knight, *Citizen* 89, 402-403). A decade later, by contrast, she defined culture anthropologically as "an understanding of the long-established occupations and thoughts of men, of the arts with which they have solaced their toil."¹¹ Culture was a term for a group's traditions and customs derived from the past and embodied in present modes of thinking, feeling, producing, and acting in concert with others. Solace comes through connecting current activities with established cultural patterns of meaning, enabling one to "see life as a whole" (*Twenty* 139). These patterns of meaning are also patterns of fellowship, communally constructed and enacted.

All humans have culture, expressed through an infinite variety of activities and attitudes. In an unattributed quote from Royce's *The Spirit of Modern Philosophy*, Addams identifies "the human" as that which is "the poetical, the organic, the vital, in civilization" (Addams, "Recent Immigration" 15; Royce, *Spirit* 280). In his passage, Royce writes how the historical approach to the evolution of human nature replaced the 18th century's assumption that human nature was fixed. In tracing the past development of humanity, all cultural fragments, from fairy tales and superstitions to bits of peasants' dialects, are to be accorded dignity as relevant evidence (280). With this anthropological understanding of culture, Addams was able to articulate the value and functions of her neighbors' cultures of origin. She was most interested in how traditions and customs of cultures of origin functioned for the immigrants in the new environment. Many of the immigrants in Addams's neighborhood had previously been skilled, successful, rural peasants. Their transition to a densely populated, industrial city was difficult, as they lived in overcrowded, unsafe and unhealthy tenements, and did repetitive, mind-numbing work in noisy, dangerous factories.

If culture is the medium through which one's humanity is understood and expressed, then to be stripped of one's life patterns can have devastating consequences. Addams thought the old customs and habits could serve as a bridge as the immigrants reconstructed their experiences in the new environment. For many this bridging function was a matter of psychological stability. Addams tells of an alcoholic, abusive husband and father who committed suicide. His widow showed Addams an exquisitely crafted gold ring he had made, saying that when he did metal work, he was all right, but that "nothing else would do it." Addams comments, "We had forgotten that a long-established occupation may form the very foundations of the moral life . . . [and] may be the salvation of his uncertain temperament" (*Twenty* 144).

We all need to be respected by others as beings with dignity and worth. Maintaining respect was particularly difficult for immigrant parents of rapidly Americanizing children. Family cohesion was threatened as normal roles of authority were reversed. Children, as they learned English easily, became their parents' guides to American life and culture. In the process the children lost respect for their parents, thinking they had little value in the American setting. Again, old world cultural skills could serve to bridge these gaps. One of Addams's motivations for the Hull House Labor Museum was to give parents an opportunity to demonstrate their old-world craft skills at spinning, weaving, embroidery, metallurgy and wood working. By watching American museum visitors admire their parents' skills and the beautiful products they made, the children found new respect for their parents and accorded them dignity ("Humanizing" 272; *Twenty* 140-143).

Addams erupts: "All the members of the community are equally stupid in throwing away the immigrant revelation of social customs and inherited energy" (*Newer Ideals* 40). She gave many concrete suggestions for just what Americans could learn from immigrant cultures of origin. The resulting theory of cultural pluralism is democratic and cosmopolitan.

For Addams, social democracy as a form of associated living is characterized by reciprocity. Rather than being placed in hierarchical relations, people are willing to give to and learn from each other. Many dimensions of immigrant cultures could be used for fostering reciprocity, sometimes in a literal and personal way. Given her neighbors' interest in adult education and particularly in learning English, Addams hoped that the schools could be settings where immigrants and Americans could both function reciprocally as teachers and students. Businessmen could teach English to immigrants who would in turn teach them how to use the tools and materials of skilled handcraft work. Women's classes could be held in the school

kitchen, with the immigrants teaching how to make fine pasta and peasant soups in exchange for English lessons (“Humanizing” 271-272). Other examples were matters of noticing and reflection. Addams writes of Jews carrying out their old custom of “casting their sins upon the waters” in the Chicago River. The custom was “a refreshing insistence upon the reality of the inner life, and upon the dignity of its expression in inherited form” (*Newer Ideals* 40).

Addams did not advocate that Americans adopt immigrant customs wholesale. Instead their customs gave patterns of integrated lives where intellect, emotions, body, and social fellowship are intertwined. The imagination could work with these patterns in reconstructing American culture toward more human flourishing. These patterns stood as critiques of American materialism, with its “tin finish” culture (“New Social Spirit” 21). If immigrant customs could be received as models of integration and as critique, they—and the immigrants themselves—could advance movement toward social democracy.

Social democracy, “the real aim of popular government,” must be concerned with “primitive needs,” and with ensuring “a reasonable life and labor” to all its people (*Newer Ideals*, 57, 52). Many of Addams’s neighbors learned how to function as democratically engaged citizens, not in formal politics, but in labor unions. Using the 1904 Chicago stockyard strike as an example, Addams notes that city government, by supporting the concerns of stockyard owners over those of the unions, demonstrated that it cared more about protecting the rights of private property than of responding to people’s most basic needs (*Newer Ideals* 56-59). Immigrants in the unions demonstrated their democratic abilities as they raised concerns, negotiated, voted, and acted in solidarity for the common good of the working class.

The workplace itself, Addams hoped, could be made more democratic, that is, a place displaying patterns of integrated lives. In their enthusiasm for profits, owners had reduced labor

to mind-, body-, and emotion-numbing, repetitive tasks. In their enthusiasm to own more things, American consumers were willing to sacrifice craftsmanship and creative design for cheaply made products. Addams hoped the crafts skills many of the immigrants had could be patterns for industrial labor and its products, patterns in which intellect and hand, tradition and creativity, were integrated (*Newer Ideals* 80-83).

In social democracy the self is considered social, and people feel responsible to and for each other. By looking at immigrant customs, one sees alternative patterns to a culture built on the primacy of the atomic individual. Addams saw the Anglo-Saxon valuing of the individual, not as implying equal respect, but as reflecting British imperialism. Land use patterns dictated by private ownership are one manifestation.¹² Addams used the robust communal lives of rural Italian peasants and the Russian Doukhobors' tradition of communal land ownership as yielding a far richer community life than that experienced by individual American farm families, isolated in the center of their 160-acre farms (*Newer Ideals* 38-39).

This example points to the cosmopolitan character of Addams's theory. Immigrants' cultural patterns provided materials with which Americans could reconstruct the meanings of patriotism, nationalism, and internationalism. Addams points out that in succumbing to "the Anglo-Saxon temptation of governing all peoples by one standard" we "have persistently ignored the political ideals of the Celtic, Germanic, Latin, and Slavic immigrants" (*Newer Ideals* 28). An Italian child's enthusiasm for Garibaldi could enrich Americans' sense of patriotism. When Addams told the story of the pilgrims to some children, a Greek boy replied, in the words of his eleven-year-old Irish translator, "He says if that is what your ancestors are like, that his could beat them out." Addams comments that "creative imagination and historic knowledge" would yield "a more cosmopolitan standard" (Addams, "Recent Immigration" 14).

Addams's cultural pluralism was cosmopolitan in the sense that she envisioned a continual process of weaving and sustaining affiliations across national and state lines. Here I use 'nation' and 'national' to refer to groups whose members share a common history, language, literature, religion, and so on. A state is a geographical territory over which sovereignty is exercised. This distinction is particularly important for understanding pre-World War One southern and eastern European immigrants, many of whom had lived as oppressed minorities in the multi-national empires of Russia, Germany, and Austria-Hungary.

Addams's cosmopolitanism incorporates both strong national affiliation and commitment to all of humanity. She shared the vision of Italian nationalist and humanitarian, Giuseppe Mazzini, a childhood hero of hers (*Twenty Years* 13-14). On the 100th anniversary of his birth, Chicago members of the Society of Young Italy gave a bust of Mazzini to Hull House. Addams comments, "I found myself devoutly hoping that the Italian youth, who have committed their future to America, might indeed become 'the Apostles of the fraternity of nations'" (*Twenty Years* 150). Her response reflects Mazzini's vision of intense nationalistic patriotism embedded within an allegiance to all of humanity (Mazzini Chapters 4-5).

Many of the immigrant groups with whom Addams worked and lived identified closely with nationalist projects in their homelands. Her Irish, Italian, Polish, Bohemian, and Jewish neighbors viewed their own immigration, not as leaving these projects behind, but as giving them the opportunity to better serve these projects from abroad.¹³ Sometimes the immigrants' political activity was direct—raising funds, and publishing nationalistic stories and editorials in the immigrant press.¹⁴ Much of their work was cultural; their colorful parades and festivals, their art and literature, nurtured national commitment and identity among immigrant groups, as well as entertaining the public (Jacobson, *Special Sorrows*, 57-64, 75-82, Chapter 3). Addams

contributed to these political and cultural efforts. She collected folklore from her Irish neighbors for Irish poet, William Butler Yeats.¹⁵ She even permitted immigrant Greek battalions to do military drills in the Hull House gymnasium as they prepared to return to their homeland to fight in the Balkan wars.¹⁶

While valuing national affiliations, Addams also valued weaving connections across national lines. As discussed above, when Americans and immigrants meet in a spirit of reciprocity, their repertoire of social, political, and economic patterns of life is greatly enhanced. Friendships are forged across national lines. In the Stockyards strike, the workers constructed transnational affiliations, as Irish, German, Bohemian, Slovak, Polish and Lithuanian workers banded together.¹⁷ American men and women also came to view themselves differently as they fostered relationships with immigrants. Through democratic interactions with immigrants, Americans could broaden their own perceptions and understandings toward an international, cosmopolitan vision (“Humanizing Tendency” 272).

Even though Horace Kallen and Randolph Bourne wrote their famous essays on cultural pluralism later, during the war, a few points of comparison may be helpful. Addams does not predict that the U.S. will become a federation of nationalities, as Kallen and Bourne did. Kallen in “Democracy versus the Melting Pot,” and Bourne in “Transnational America,” observe that as members of various nationalities become more American, they also become more culturally nationalistic (Kallen 217, 218-219; Bourne 86). Kallen uses the metaphor of a symphony orchestra in which distinctive voices join together in harmony (220). Bourne envisions America as a “cosmopolitan federation of national colonies.” He uses the metaphor of a fabric whose threads weave together those in America with those in the homeland, a pattern Addams also stressed (93, 96).

Addams's cultural pluralism is distinctive in that she does not focus on cultural identity *per se*, nor does she speculate on what pattern America will or should come to exhibit. While Addams clearly valued the immigrants' cultures of origin, she did not reify them or claim they had intrinsic value. As a pragmatist, she was acutely aware that people function within given environments and that there needs to be mutual adjustment of people's ways of living with environmental conditions. Her focus was on process and function rather than cultural identity *per se*. Because cultural practices are always changing in response to particular environments, there is no "final pattern." While a federation of nationalities is one potential pattern, it is only one of an infinite variety of patterns that could be achieved at different points in time as people from various cultures interact and learn from each other.

Cultural Pluralism and African Americans

Addams wrote two essays on culture and African Americans during this decade. She delivered the first, "Advantages and Disadvantages of a Broken Heritage," at Atlanta University as part of Du Bois's 1908 conference on "The Negro American Family." According to Du Bois's biographer, Du Bois "immensely valued" her presence (Lewis 377).

Du Bois's study on the family has sections covering marriage, the home, and family economics, beginning with life in Africa, then under slavery, and then in contemporary black life. A repeated theme of the study is that slavery virtually eliminated African family customs. Only traces remained. Du Bois states that while a small number of slaves were taught European family morals as a replacement, "the great body of field hands were raped of their own sex customs and provided with no binding new ones" (*Negro* 21).

In her address, Addams told of her experiences with immigrant families, primarily with Italians from rural peasant backgrounds. These immigrants came to the U.S. possessing a wealth of traditions regarding family life. By contrast, because African Americans left slavery stripped of their African cultural patterns, their task as recently freed persons was to essentially invent their culture. Addams says to her audience,

The habits which you might have had from your ancestors were all broken into, they were all scattered, and especially the habits connected with family life. There are advantages and disadvantages in the lack of tradition and the lack of habits in those directions. The advantages are that you are much more ready to make your adaptation; you are much more ready to bring the results of education and the rationalistic side of life to bear directly upon the refining of the family. And the disadvantages are that you lack some of the restraints of the traditions which the people I have mentioned bring with them (“Advantages” 1).

Addams then spoke about how the Italian immigrants’ cultural background served to bridge their adjustment to the U.S (“Advantages” 2). She shared her stories in hope that her audience members would be able to use them as resources for their own purposes.

Addams essay, “Social Control,” appeared in the January 1911 issue of *Crisis*, the journal Du Bois edited for the NAACP. Du Bois’s biographer calls it a “fighting spirit editorial” (Lewis 416). The main point of the article was to encourage the NAACP to move aggressively in challenging lynching. Lynching, Addams asserts, is but an extreme manifestation of the contempt embedded in race antagonism (“Social Control” 22-23). The passage in which Addams makes this point contains language that is jarring to contemporary ears, so I will quote it at length.

The contemptuous attitude of the so-called superior race toward the inferior results in a social segregation of each race, and puts the one race group thus segregated quite outside the influences of social control represented by the other. Those inherited resources of the race embodied in custom and kindly intercourse which make much more for social restraint than does legal enactment itself are thus made operative only upon the group which has inherited them, and the newer group which needs them most is practically left without. Thus in every large city we have a colony of colored people who have not been brought under social control, and a majority of the white people in the same community are tacitly endeavoring to keep from them those restraints which can be communicated only through social intercourse (“Social Control” 22).

As illustrations Addams again refers to blacks’ lack of cultural resources compared to Italian immigrant families. By long tradition, Italian parents carefully guarded their adolescent daughters, and insisted on chaperoning them when they went out at night. African American teenage girls “are quite without this protection.” The difficulty was compounded by housing segregation, with blacks forced to live in undesirable neighborhoods. Addams comments, “The family in the community least equipped with social tradition is forced to expose its daughters to the most flagrantly immoral conditions the community permits” (“Social Control” 22).

This passage is frequently misinterpreted, so a few points of clarification are needed (Crocker 187; Philpot 299-302; Lasch-Quinn 16). First, the meaning of “social control” changed radically during the twentieth century. In the early twentieth century, social control referred to a wide range of social influences that shape individual behavior and social interactions. These included ideals from religion and literature, customary morals, feelings such as sympathy or shame, and public opinion. In a time of uncontrolled capitalism, the term also included

legislation and union efforts to regulate worker safety, wages, and working hours.¹⁸ Thus, in her reference to social control, Addams is not saying that whites should exercise control over blacks, or that blacks should be subsumed under white social and cultural traditions. What she is saying is that whites should extend to blacks the same legal protections, opportunities, and common courtesies that they extend to each other (“Social Control” 22-23). Lynching is but an extreme manifestation of the antagonism that arises when these forms of social control are not shared throughout the community.

Also, in both essays, Addams is not saying that blacks lack inner moral restraint, or that Italian parents are better parents than African Americans. Neither is she endorsing Italian parents’ tight regulation of their daughters.¹⁹ For Addams, morality includes social and cultural customs, and is only partially a matter of individual reason and will power. Italian immigrant families had historic family customs that could help them make the difficult adjustment from being rural peasants to being residents in an industrial city. Because of the brutality of the slave system, African Americans did not have comparable historic family customs to bridge the transition from slavery to freedom.

In the two essays, it is clear that Addams did not use her theory of cultural pluralism to understand African-American culture, but could she have done so?²⁰ I ask, not so much to blame Addams, but as a way to investigate her theory. I acknowledge that Addams may have been speaking from implicit racism or white privilege, but will not address that in this paper.²¹ It is true that Addams did not have the fine-grained knowledge of African American culture that comes from living directly among them. Nonetheless, she was not without resources. She knew personally several African-Americans who wrote extensively about their experiences. In this section I will use materials written before 1910 by African Americans with whom Addams

interacted, or whose work was so well known that she easily could have obtained it. The section is organized by these questions: What resources were available to Addams to critique the position she took in the two essays? How could her theory of cultural pluralism have guided her in seeking evidence of culture among African Americans? and, What barriers did her theory contain to doing so?

Addams's argument in the two essays was that Africans' cultures of origin were fragmented when Africans were enslaved. One could ask, what cultural fragments did the slaves bring with them and how did they use those fragments in constructing culture? Today, there is copious material for exploring this question; far less so in 1910 (Berlin; Levine; Gutman). Many nineteenth century sources for evidence of African cultures are suspect, coming from European explorers, missionaries, and other travelers, who had imperialist biases and assumed that African cultures were primitive and unchanging.²²

Many prominent white intellectuals at the time assumed that people of African descent had lived in a savage, nearly culture-less state in Africa. Slavery imparted to them some of the blessings of Anglo-Saxon civilization, such as a capacity for self-control and the ability to work in a persistent, organized way. They posited that since the end of slavery blacks were degenerating back toward their original, savage nature (Tillinghast 25-27; Frederickson 256-262.) Contrasted with this construction, Addams and Du Bois's view—that slavery *was* horrifically oppressive and that one of the crimes of slavery was in cutting people off from their cultures of origin—was considerably more enlightened. At her time it would have been difficult for someone to make a well-supported, scholarly case for significant carry over of African culture into the culture of enslaved people in the U.S.²³

Without settling the above issue, however, there were voices that countered the approach Addams took that could have given her pause. While Addams does not blame individual blacks for lack of moral restraint, she does say that they lacked those restraints that come from cultural customs and traditions. Fannie Barrier Williams, a Chicago colleague of Addams, addressed the 1893 Congress of Representative Women, in which Addams participated.²⁴ Spelling out the enormous strides African American women had made in education, religious life, family life, and community organization, she finds it offensive to even raise the question of black women's sexual morality. "It is proper to state, with as much emphasis as possible, that all questions relative to the moral progress of the colored women of America are impertinent and unjustly suggestive" (Williams 702-03).

In developing her theory of cultural pluralism Addams essentially did two things: she "spiritualized" the immigrants and she identified processes of interaction between immigrants and Americans that could help lead to a democratic, cosmopolitan pluralist society.²⁵ She spoke eloquently of the need to spiritualize the immigrants as an essential step toward fostering intercultural understanding. In her 1905 convocation address she chided University of Chicago immigration scholars, who, in spite of their vast data collections, "have furnished us with no method by which to discover men, to spiritualize, to understand, to hold intercourse with aliens and to receive of what they bring." Their data did not reveal the inner lives of the immigrants or how they interpreted life to give it meaning ("Recent Immigration," 10). That is, to spiritualize is to understand a people as they experience their own culture, from within their own lived experience.²⁶

In 1903 Addams eagerly read Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk*.²⁷ In the "Forethought" Du Bois writes, "I have sought here to sketch, in vague, uncertain outline, the spiritual world in

which ten thousand thousand Americans live and strive” (34). The book does exactly that: it spiritualizes African Americans in just the ways Addams sought to spiritualize her immigrant neighbors. Du Bois’s stories humanize black men and women and make plain their spiritual turmoil. He details the experience of double consciousness, “two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings” (38). He points out the gifts of music, folklore, and religious faith that African Americans bring (Chapters 10, 14; p. 43). As Addams presents immigrant experience as critique of American materialism, so Du Bois presents African American experiences as critique of American failure to live out its ideals. “The Negro Problem,” he points out, is “a concrete test of the underlying principles of the great republic” (43-44). Finally, Du Bois points out the cosmopolitan dimensions of the color line that extends throughout Africa, Asia, and America (45).

Addams was a visionary who considered herself a sociologist. Her method in *Democracy and Social Ethics* and in *Newer Ideals of Peace* was to identify on-going social processes of interaction, which, if encouraged and sustained, could lead to social democracy and cosmopolitanism (*Democracy* 7-9; *Newer Ideals* 5-8). The same is true of her theory of cultural pluralism. Arguing in the 20th century’s first decade for similar trends between blacks and whites would have been more difficult. The late nineteenth and early twentieth century has been called the nadir of race relations in the U.S. (Logan; Williamson 80). Jim Crow laws were enacted, segregation patterns hardened, and the KKK’s reign of terror was in full force. Yet there were threads. Addams herself participated in interracial projects with Du Bois, Reverdy Ransom, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, and others. Du Bois thought these sorts of efforts were one pattern that could contribute to racial understanding and harmony. He writes that justice and racial healing will

come through “point(s) of transference where the thoughts and feelings of one race can come into direct contact and sympathy with the thoughts and feelings of the other” (*Souls* 144).

There are points of disanalogy between the immigrants’ European cultures of origin and African American culture that make it difficult to extend Addams’s theory. Addams thought in terms of immigrants bringing their cultural traditions from “over there.” By contrast, African-American culture was thoroughly *American*. Initially, 400,000 enslaved Africans created themselves as African Americans by sharing the fragments of culture they brought with them and adapting cultural materials from Native Americans and white settlers. For many, this culture was again broken by the internal slave trade, when one million slaves were forced to migrate across the Deep South. And so they began the process of cultural creation again. Emancipation brought new opportunities and challenges for culture creation, as did the subsequent great northern migration of six million people (Berlin 5). Historian Ira Berlin describes the African-American experience this way: “The cumulative impact of the repeated interplay between movement and place has required continued innovation in black society: movement set loose the creative impulse and place gave it a platform to develop. Over the course of four centuries, cultural innovation—in language, cuisine, rhetoric, theology, music—became the signature of the African American experience” (239). Addams could not have read Berlin’s eloquent 2010 book, *The Making of African Americans*. But Frederick Douglass in 1854 stressed just how American black culture was. He told his audience that the “American” people were black and white, Negro and European. For blacks, this was visceral. “I know not what hardships the laws of the land can impose, which can induce the colored citizen to leave his native soil. He was here in its infancy; he is here in its age. Two hundred years have passed over him, his tears and blood have been mixed with the soil, and his attachment to the place of his birth is stronger than iron” (13, 35).

Anna Julia Cooper said as much in *Voices of the South*, emphasizing that the gifts African Americans bring are not simply fragments of African cultures, but are themselves uniquely American. We should recognize the gifts of “a race that has produced for America the only folklore and folk songs of native growth, a race which has grown the most original and unique assemblage of fable and myth to be found on one continent” (158). And since Addams was most interested in modes of labor as central to culture, then surely, as Cooper stresses, the enormous quantities and qualities of labor with which blacks built much of the United States figure large in the creation of American culture (Cooper 135-36). Addams criticized American materialism as too thin; Douglass and Cooper show how her conception of “American” was itself too thin.

Also, Addams’s anthropological understanding of culture followed the historical method. Structuring the historical method was the assumption that civilization’s evolution was the story of cultural development from savage to primitive to civilized. This assumption is embedded in the language Addams uses to describe immigrants’ cultures of origins. Despite the obvious respect Addams had for her neighbors’ cultures, she still placed them early on the evolutionary scale. Her immigrant neighbors were “simple people” and were “still in the tribal stage of knowledge” (Addams, “A Function” 47). In calling them simple and primitive, she was not using the vocabulary of the time loosely. These were technical terms. Addams regarded their customs as “survivals,” as “origins” (“Recent Immigration” 15). “Survivals” were customs left over from older cultures, whose cultural function had been lost, but they persisted as habits, as shadows (Tyler 16-17). In spite of her claim to use the historical method, there is something static about her sense of history. Berlin identifies the problem. Addams was assuming “the myth of stability—the timelessness of premodern society and fixity of peasant life” (Berlin 45). Likewise, she looked to Africa for survivals of African American culture rather than examining the on-

going development of their culture over time. Now Addams knew that many of her neighbors had lived under oppressive regimes. Many of her Jewish neighbors had been forced to live in the Pale of Settlement; many of her Slavic neighbors faced severe discrimination under Austria-Hungary's imperial rule. Yet she does not identify these immigrants' customs as examples of cultural adaptations made under conditions of oppression. Had she done so, she may have been able to recognize African American culture as an American culture created under conditions of oppression.

The structure of the Hull House Labor Museum, typical of the day, was organized according to the same historical method (Conn 5). Addams writes that the textile department, for example, traced "the orderly evolution from the spinning of the Navajo woman . . . to the most complicated machine" ("First Report" 7). Addams and Dewey discussed her idea for the Labor Museum at length (Addams, *Twenty Years* 139). Dewey's Laboratory School's curriculum showed the same pattern. Seven year olds started with the industrial occupations of the stage of savagery and then moved up to civilized societies. As at the Labor Museum, the emphasis was on "the progress of man" and "the way advance has been made." In fact, Dewey states that an ideal school would include "a complete industrial museum" (Dewey *School* 63, 53-54). Social evolutionary theory and the historical method kept Addams from according full respect and democratic reciprocity to immigrants' cultures of origin and kept her from recognizing the value and contributions of African American culture for all Americans.

So many aspects of Addams's theory of cultural pluralism show promise toward a more encompassing embrace of diversity. But troubling elements stemmed from the day's most deeply embedded intellectual paradigm. Could Addams and other white intellectuals have overcome the

strictures of social evolutionary theory and the historical method; could they have dug out its tentacles that reached into the most commonplace assumptions? I don't know. Paradigms are stubborn. They are Protean, and take many forms without going away. Even now, when I hear commencement speakers explain why young people should start technology companies or invent alternative energy sources, I hear again how the paradigm of civilization's linear progress needs only a few new patches. Understanding the limitations of Addams's theorizing should give us humility in examining our own.

Endnotes

1. See Holbrook 59-61 and the maps located just before p. 59.
2. See Addams "Respect for Law" and "Social Control." She condemned *Birth of a Nation* as a "pernicious caricature of the Negro race" in an interview published in the *New York Evening Post*. "Birth" 1.
3. For Du Bois's address at Hull House see Addams, *Twenty Years* 149. For examples of when Addams and Du Bois shared the stage see "Women Celebrate" and "The Fiftieth Anniversary."
4. These included Reverdy Ransom's Institutional Church and Social Settlement, the Frederick Douglass House, and the Wendell Phillips House. See Ransom 103-112; "Frederick Douglass Center," and Addams, "Letter to Anita McCormick Blaine."
5. For Addams's help to Lugenia Burns Hope, see Rouse 2, 16-17; for Ethel Cauton-Davis, see "Colored"; for Byrdie Henrietta Haynes, see "Operation."
6. On Dewey see Fallace 4-5. For Dewey's wartime essays on cultural pluralism, see "Nationalizing" and "The Principle." Boas's *The Mind of Primitive Man* was published in 1911. Frederickson writes, "Boas's views did not gain a wide following until the 1920s, when the new

discoveries in genetics had at last forced the Lamarckians from the field” 315. On Lamarckianism in U.S. social science see Stocking 117-122; Chapter 10.

7. See Hawkins for an overview of the range of positions held by social evolutionary theorists. For theorists who argued strongly against imperialism while holding social evolutionary views see Hobson and Hobhouse.

8. As examples, see James’s discussion of how primitive people lacked ability to generalize and synthesize, and so consequently their thought “has hardly any tincture of philosophy” 15. Dewey places the savage mind early in human mental development, saying it was limited by “incapacity in all that is impersonal, that is to say, remote, generalized, objectified, abstracted,” “Interpretation” 48. Royce discusses civilization’s slow, evolutionary growth in Lecture IX of *The Spirit*, “The Rise of the Doctrine of Evolution.”

9. A typical number was three: Teutonic (or Anglo-Saxon), Alpine, and Mediterranean. See Higham 154; Jacobson, *Whiteness* 78.

10. See Addams, *Democracy* 9. See also how Addams characterizes immigrant families in Chapter 1, “Charitable Efforts.” See also Addams *Newer Ideals*, Chapters 3 and 4.

11. Addams, “Social Settlements” 170; Farrell 83-84. Addams, *Twenty Years* 141. Similarly, Addams also defined culture as “a knowledge of those things which have been long cherished by men, the things men have loved because through generations have softened and interpreted life, and have endowed it with value and meaning” “Public Schools” 99-100.

12. See Jacobson, *Whiteness* 223-226, on the tight relationship in American history between whiteness and the right to own private property.

13. Jacobson’s *Special Sorrows* is an extensive argument for this position. He focuses specifically on Irish, Polish, and Eastern European Jewish immigrants to the U.S., and

documents how immigrant communities in the U.S. functioned as communities in exile that supported national struggles in the homeland in a myriad of ways. Addams makes a similar point about Italian immigrants when she writes, “Mazzini dedicated to the working men of Italy his highest ethical and philosophical appeal so that a desire for a republic had much to do with their coming to America,” “A Function” 39.

14. Jacobson, *Special Sorrows* 57-63. Josefa Humpal-Zeman and Alessandro Mastro-Valerio were both residents of Hull House. They published nationalistic immigrant newspapers for the Bohemian and Italian immigrant communities, respectively. See Schultz 8-10.

15. Addams, *Long Road* 14; Yeats visited Hull House; see Addams *Twenty Years* 225.

16. Addams, *Twenty Years* 254; Kopan 113. Kopan details how important Addams and Hull House were to the Greek community, 109-116. Many Greek mutual aid, business, and professional societies were organized at Hull House. Kopan writes, “She did much to help solidify ethnic solidarity and pride among the Greek immigrants of Chicago” 112.

17. Addams, *Newer Ideals* 54. Addams also criticized the unions for discriminating against blacks and the Chinese, 53.

18. Ross, see especially Chapter 30. See Leiby on how the meaning of the term changed in the middle of the twentieth century.

19. Addams, “Social Control” 22-23. Addams adds that Italian social traditions “often become a deterrent to progress through the very bigotry with which they cling to them” 22. See also Addams, *Twenty Years* 144-145.

20. There is little evidence of just how Addams understood African American culture at this time. It is possible that in these two essays she was referring primarily to family sexual mores. I may be exaggerating the extent to which she thought African Americans needed to construct a

new culture. Even if that is the case, the barriers I discuss below to Addams extending her theory of cultural pluralism to African Americans, would still hold.

21. See Hamington's review of authors who criticize Addams on these grounds, 119-125.

22. See Stocking Chapters 2-3 for a history of 19th century anthropology and the sources on which anthropologists relied.

23. Du Bois mentions fragments of African culture in terms of music and religion that were carried through, but he does not give a careful historical accounting of the steps of their transmission. Du Bois, *Souls* chapters 10, 14.

24. Deegan lists Williams as a Hull House sociologist and states that she visited Hull House frequently, 38.

25. Addams speaks of the need to spiritualize the immigrants in "Recent Immigration" 10, and "Chicago Settlement" 155.

26. Dewey gives a similar understanding of "spiritualize" when he writes, "The natural individual by entering as member into the larger individual [the social unit under consideration] and sharing its action is *spiritualized*. His function, (i.e., his natural capacities in *action*) is his spirit." Dewey, "Introduction" 220.

27. See Addams's letter to Sarah Alice Haldeman, June 5, 1903, where she writes, "I have just sent you a copy of Du Bois' "Souls of the Black Folk" [sic] which Mary Smith and I very much enjoyed reading on our way home from the Atlanta trip."

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