

## RESEARCH NOTE / NOTE DE RECHERCHE

# “These French Canadian of the Woods are Half-Wild Folk”: Wilderness, Whiteness, and Work in North America, 1840–1955

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IN 1853 THE BROWN COMPANY was a small water-powered sawmill in Berlin, New Hampshire, but by the turn of the century it had become a highly successful lumber and paper-processing company which made some of the largest timber cuts in the Northeast US.<sup>1</sup> Its success depended largely on the French Canadian immigrant labourers employed to cut and drive logs. The company found that these workers could be hired cheaply, worked long hours, and, perhaps most importantly, it regarded them as innately suited for logging work. According to company officials, French Canadians were of a “hardy type, accustomed to the work in the bush, such as portaging, running rapids, etc., ... [and were] as a rule, pretty high-grade men.” The French Canadian affinity for logging work was recognized all over North America. Adirondack scholar Alfred Donaldson wrote in the 1920s that these people “seemed naturally endowed with the agility, recklessness, and immunity to exposure that must combine to make them expert. They have always predominated as a race in the lumbering operations.” The French from “the settlements,” one Canadian sociologist wrote, “[have] the lure ... of the woods tingling in their blood down through the generations.”<sup>2</sup>

1. William Robinson Brown, *Our Forest Heritage: A History of Forestry and Recreation in New Hampshire* (Concord: New Hampshire Historical Society, 1958), 187; James Elliott Defebaugh, *History of the Lumber Industry of America* (Chicago: American Lumberman, 1906), 70.

2. “First Annual Conference of the Woods Department,” Berlin Historical Society (1903), 47, 43; Brown, *Our Forest Heritage*, 241, 317; Edmund W. Bradwin, *The Bunkhouse Man: A Study of*

From 1850 to 1930 one million Québécois migrated to the US, pushed by rapid population growth, a shortage of good agricultural land, and slow industrial development in their home country. By the 1870s, new rail lines, specifically the Grand Trunk, Québec Central, and the Canadian Pacific accelerated their immigration. By 1901 almost one quarter of the entire population of Québec moved to New England. Ninety-two per cent of these immigrants settled in urban areas in the “border states or in states immediately south of them.”<sup>3</sup> Even though most settled in urban areas, in the forests along the border and in inland lumber regions of New England and New York there were logging camps composed entirely of French Canadian workers.<sup>4</sup> By 1890, a congressional report found that “American farmers’ sons no longer follow wood chopping for a business, and their places have been filled by the French Canadians.”<sup>5</sup> In 1900, 33.6 per cent of New England “woodchoppers,

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*Work and Pay in the Camps of Canada, 1903–1914* (1928; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 95–96.

3. Stephen J. Hornsby, Richard William Judd, and Michael J. Hermann, *Historical Atlas of Maine* (Orono: University of Maine Press, 2015), plate 42; Yves Roby, “The Economic Evolution of Quebec and the Emigrant (1850–1929),” in Claire Quintal, ed., *Steeple and Smokestacks: A Collection of Essays on the Franco-American Experience in New England* (Worcester: Assumption College, Institut français, 1996), 7; Marcus Lee Hansen, and John Bartlet Brebner, *The Mingling of the Canadian and American Peoples*. Vol. 1, *Historical* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940), 180–181; Gerard J. Brault, *The French-Canadian Heritage in New England* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1986), 52–53; Gary Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism: the Politics of Labor in a Textile City, 1914–1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 21; Bruno Ramirez and Yves Otis, *Crossing the 49th Parallel: Migration from Canada to the United States, 1900–1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 1; Victor Bushey (b. 1900) interview by Sue Dauphinee, 1970, p. 719069, transcript, Lumberman’s Life Collection, Maine Folklife Center, University of Maine at Orono (hereafter LLC, MFC).

4. Some evidence for the high percentage of French Canadians in lumber camps can be found in Raymond J. Smith and Samuel B. Locke, “A Study of the Lumber Industry of Northern Maine,” Master’s thesis, University of Maine Orono, 1908, 13; David Nathan Rogers, “Lumbering in Northern Maine,” Master’s thesis, University of Maine Orono, 1906, 25; William James Henry Miller, James Plummer Poole, and Harlan Hayes Sweetser, “A Lumbering Report of Work on Squaw Mountain Township, Winter of 1911–1912,” Master’s thesis, University of Maine Orono, 1912, 14–15; Frank Carey (b. 1886), interview by Rita Swidrowski, 1970, p. 6980117, transcript, LLC, MFC; Andrew Chase (b. 1888) interview by Linda Edgerly, 1971, p. 6970094, transcript, LLC, MFC; John F. Flanagan, “Industrial Conditions in the Maine Woods,” *First Biennial Report of the Department of Labor and Industry* (Waterville: Sentinel Publishing, 1912), 220; Maine Department of Labor and Industry and Maine Division of Research and Statistics, “Working Conditions in Lumber and Pulpwood Camps August 1955–March 1956” (1956), Labor Standards Documents, Paper 313; Ferris Meigs, *The Santa Clara Lumber Company*, Vol. 1, (unpublished manuscript, typeset 1941) Santa Clara Collection, Adirondack Museum, Blue Mountain Lake, New York (hereafter AdkM).

5. United States Senate, *Report of the Select Committee on Immigration and Naturalization: and Testimony Taken by the Committee on Immigration of the Senate and the Select Committee on Immigration and Naturalization of the House of Representatives Under Concurrent Resolution of March 12, 1890* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1891), 324.

lumbermen [or] raftsmen" were French Canadian immigrants and the percentage was much higher in the northern portion of the region. Their affinity for the woods made them useful for specific tasks in other rural industries as well. On railroad grades, one sociologist found, the French "prefers to be in the vanguard. The space and freedom of the trail and water routes appeal to him ... assisting with ready axe to erect the big log company camps." When it came to technical work, however, the experts claimed they were useless.<sup>6</sup> These comments on French Canadian loggers are evidence of how the perceived racial hierarchies that were constructed in the US by academics, government, and business officials pushed immigrant workers into specific industries based on their perceived racial characteristics.

These rural immigrant workers were especially vulnerable to exploitation. They were isolated on wilderness tracts, separated from urban French Canadian communities and Church support. They were also unfamiliar with the English language and American labour laws. In northern New York, the Emporium, Santa Clara, and A. Sherman lumber companies conspired to set wages lower for immigrant workers than native "white" workers. Referring to immigrant logging labour, one 1911 government report found that "there has probably existed in Maine the most complete system of peonage in the entire country." The preference for French Canadian loggers in American camps evolved from an informal and exploitative cross-border contracting system in the 19th century into a federal government sponsored contract labour program in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. During the labour shortages of World War II, the Canadian and American governments allied to create a system which "bonded a specific number of Canadian woodsmen to their American employers for fixed terms."<sup>7</sup> Large paper and lumber companies utilized a mode of production known as "shacking," in which entire "bonded" Canadian families were hired to go into an isolated forested area and produce logs on a piece rate in rough, dangerous conditions. A violation of child labour laws, shacking also often led to debt peonage.<sup>8</sup>

6. Bradwin, *The Bunkhouse Man*, 96–97.

7. W.C. Sykes to C.H. Sisson, 1 May 1919; C.H. Sisson to W.C. Sykes, 2 May 1919; W.C. Sykes to C.H. Sisson, 3 May 1919, box 13; E.L. Stables to Mr. Sykes, Mr. Caflish and Mr. Turner, 7 November 1912, box 5, Emporium Forest Company Records, AdkM; William P. Dillingham, et al., *Abstracts of Reports of the Immigration Commission: With Conclusions and Recommendations and Views of the Minority* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1911), 447–448; Bill Parenteau, "Bonded Labor: Canadian Woods Workers in the Maine Pulpwood Industry, 1940–55," *Forest & Conservation History* 37, 3 (1993): 113–115.

8. Stacy Warner Maddern "Bonded Labor and Migration, United States" in Immanuel Ness, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Global Human Migration* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 3; Fred Alliston Gilbert Papers, F.A. Glibert to G. Schenck, 20 December 1925, box 7, Correspondence, 1924–1925 Special Collections, Raymond H. Fogler Library, University of Maine; United States, *Report of the Select Committee on Immigration and Naturalization*, 322–325; United States, *Importation of Canadian Bonded Labor: Hearings before the Subcommittee on Labor of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, United States Senate, Eighty-fourth Congress, First*

Italian immigrant workers were employed in the Canadian and American wilderness as well, but they rarely worked in logging camps. Logger Arnold Hall said that he only ever saw “one or ... two Italians in the woods in my life. They don’t work in the woods much. Pick and shovels all right, but they don’t seem to go for the woods.” The Maine Department of Labor found that “Italians who work on our dams, railroads, and other construction operations in the summer are not to be found in [logging] camps. It is too cold for them.” An Adirondack area newspaper from 1883 reported that “excepting the French-Canadians the Latins have an insurmountable aversion to the ax.”<sup>9</sup>

The supposed French Canadian affinity for logging work and odd exclusion of Italians exemplifies how North Americans in the late 19th and early 20th centuries connected their ideals about race with the realities of industrial work. By the early 20th century, eugenic and racial thinking had become “so pervasive ... that it attained the state of common sense,” and experts asserted that even “economic virtues ... [were] a function of race.”<sup>10</sup> As “white” Northern Europeans pushed west to civilize supposedly free, wild land, industries in the East were “directed to attracting to their workshops people representing almost static civilization.”<sup>11</sup> These immigrants from the “static civilizations” of Eastern and Southern Europe were considered a “mobile army of cheap labor,” and – in order to maximize industrial production – progressive thinkers constructed racial taxonomies that dictated which races best fit different types of production.<sup>12</sup> This extended beyond logging work. The American government

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*Session, on S. Res. 98, A Resolution to Authorize a Study of the Policy and Practice of the United States with Respect to Permitting Bonded Laborers from Canada to Enter and Work in the United States* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1955), 56.

9. Arnold Hall (b. 1892) interview by William Bonsall, 1970, p. 580038, transcript, LLC, MFC; Flanagan, “Industrial Conditions in the Maine Woods,” 220; “Among the Woodcutters,” *Chateaugay Record* (Chateaugay, NY), 11 May 1883.

10. Daylanne K. English, *Unnatural Selections: Eugenics in American Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 1, 33; Edward Alsworth Ross, *Foundations of Sociology* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1905), 377; Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 88; Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010), 252; Thomas F. Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea in America* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1963); Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 156–157.

11. Theresa Schmid McMahon, *Social and Economic Standards of Living* (Boston: D.C. Heath, 1925), 134.

12. Gunther Peck shows that bosses and labour agents used race to help decide what groups would do different types of labour. There were particularly large racial divisions in skilled vs. unskilled positions. Gunther Peck, *Reinventing Free Labor: Padrones and Immigrant Workers in the North American West, 1880–1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 166–169; Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 137–138.

found regular patterns in the type of work that different immigrant groups engaged in:

The Austrians have gone principally into construction work and to the iron ore fields. The Finns have been furnished with about the same class of labor. The Greeks and Italians almost without exception have gone into section work for some railroad system. The Scandinavians and Americans have gone into almost every kind of work, but the largest percentage of them have gone into the logging camps.... The Poles and Bulgarians, almost without exception, have gone into construction work.... The Cuban and Spanish races are employed exclusively in the manufacture of cigars and tobacco ... North and South Italians are most extensively employed in silk dyeing, railroad and other construction work, bituminous coal mining, and clothing manufacturing ... the Slovaks seem to be industrial laborers rather than farmers.<sup>13</sup>

Similar sentiments were expressed by Canadian academics and officials.<sup>14</sup> Though historians of immigration now realize that there were several reasons for the consistent occupational streaming patterns illustrated above, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries these patterns were attributed to racial characteristics. At their most extreme, immigration policies that followed racial dictates led to draconian exclusionary laws, such as the Chinese exclusion acts in Canada and the US. In America before the 1924 Johnson Reed Act, however, less than two per cent of immigrants were denied entry. When immigrants were rejected, it was most often because it was presumed they would become a drain on the nation's economy – because they couldn't work.<sup>15</sup> Racial thinking

13. William P. Dillingham, *Immigrants in Industries: Part 21; Diversified Industries*, Vol. 2 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1911), 342.

14. Canadian sociologist Edmund W. Bradwin wrote "[e]ach nationality on a frontier work seems to fit into some particular form of activity: the Slavs ... become laborers' helpers, the English-speaking delight in machinery, the Finn ... in blasting ... [Italians] work with cement...." Bradwin, *The Bunkhouse Man*, 110.

15. The US passed a Chinese exclusion act in 1882, and Canada passed one in 1885 and another in 1923. Even exclusion policies were tied to economics. The argument was that Chinese bare minimum subsistence would lower the living standards of all Americans. Lawrence B. Glickman, *A Living Wage: American Workers and the Making of Consumer Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 86; McMahon, *Social and Economic Standards of Living*, 131–155; Lucy E. Salyer, *Laws Harsh As Tigers: Chinese Immigrants and the Shaping of Modern Immigration Law* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 12, 18; Rosanne Currarino, "'Meat vs. Rice' The Ideal of Manly Labor and Anti-Chinese Hysteria in 19th-century America," *Men and Masculinities* 9, 4 (2007): 476–490; Vincent J. Cannato, *American Passage: The History of Ellis Island* (New York: Harper, 2009), 6, 11; Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 39, 95; Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 77; Peck, *Reinventing Free Labor*, 167. In his analysis of this rhetoric Jacobson found immigrants were judged by their "relative merits." Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 8–9, 69, 78.

Historians disagree on the extent to which "irrational" nativism influenced American exclusionary and restrictive immigration policy. Oscar Handlin and John Higham argued that, while economic exploitation was a factor in immigrant exploitation, racism was the primary

was a major factor in deciding how the tens of millions of immigrants who were allowed into the country were treated and directed once they got here.

Reflecting popular opinion, labour leaders like Samuel Gompers, Terence Powderly, and Frank P. Sargent (the latter two of whom also doubled as public immigration officials) were against allowing immigrants of questionable “whiteness” to compete with real white Americans for jobs. If questionably white people were allowed into the country, some justification was needed for why they should work the type of undesirable jobs that American labourers were leaving: monotonous factory jobs and grueling manual work like logging. The argument not only involved a debate over the low standard of living of immigrant workers, but also whether their labour was, in a fundamental way, worth less than real white peoples’ labour. One way to justify routing immigrants into demeaning, low-paying jobs was by interpreting the valuable types of labour – clearing and civilizing supposedly wild land, for example – as work that only real white people could do.<sup>16</sup>

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culprit. In *Nation by Design*, Aristide Zolberg argues that US immigration policy dipped in and out of periods of irrational nativism. Mae M. Ngai, “Oscar Handlin and Immigration Policy Reform in the 1950s and 1960s,” *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 32, 3 (Spring 2013): 64; Aristide R. Zolberg, *A Nation by Design: Immigration Policy in the Fashioning of America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 6–7; John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860–1925* (New York: Atheneum, 1963).

Award-winning historian Mae Ngai has added evidence to Handlin’s and Higham’s argument. Her recent *Impossible Subjects* shows how US policies discriminated against and exploited Asian and Mexican people in order to establish a “desired composition ... of the nation” which was European and white. According to Ngai immigration laws like the Johnson Reed Act “put European and non-European immigrant groups on different trajectories of racial formation” The *bracero* program was an extension of that thinking. It was, Ngai argues, “imported colonialism” and based on “the subordination of racialized foreign bodies,” a legacy of “[w]estern expansion” and notions of “Anglo-Saxon superiority.” The *bracero* program and the bonded labour system relied on similar legal precedent and so the exploitation of seemingly white French Canadian immigrants in non-western states challenges Ngai’s understanding of immigration policy and labour. Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 5, 13, 94.

Robert F. Zeidel’s *Immigrants, Progressives, and Exclusion Politics: The Dillingham Commission, 1900–1917* found that American immigration policies were less reliant on racial assumptions that Handlin, Higham, and Ngai assume. Instead, Zeidel argues that immigration policy was designed to allow for maximum economic productivity in American industry. The argument posed in this article is that the imperatives of industrial capitalism were difficult to disentangle from the racial thinking. Robert F. Zeidel, *Immigrants, Progressives, and Exclusion Politics: The Dillingham Commission, 1900–1927* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2004), 5.

16. David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1991); Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States* Vol. 3 (New York: International Publishers, 1964), 256–258; Luis L.M. Aguiar and Tina I.L. Marten, “Shimmering White Kelowna and The Examination of Painless White Privilege in the Hinterland Of British Columbia,” in Audrey Kobayashi, Laura Cameron, and Andrew Baldwin, eds., *Rethinking the Great White North: Race, Nature, and the Historical Geographies of Whiteness in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011), 136.



In his book *Barbarian Virtues*, Matthew Jacobson focuses on how Americans created and reacted to what he calls the "image" of the immigrant, "[seemingly] unshakable demonstrations of this or that ethnological truth about this nation and the nature of the world's diverse populations." One of the many ways that these images were formed was through the observation of immigrant workers as they attempted to transform wild land into arable or valuable land, an activity that proved a worker's degree of whiteness and aptitude for citizenship.<sup>17</sup> Wilderness has been defined by Americans in a number of ways. Areas designated wilderness received that designation by the fictions that were created about them. In the narrative of industrial capitalism of the late 19th and early 20th century, before preservationism became a mainstream cultural phenomenon, most North Americans of European ancestry thought of wilderness as an isolated tract of unproductive land that required improvement to become valuable or productive. Influential conservationist and forestry expert Gifford Pinchot was famous for saying "wilderness is waste." In this utilitarian view, the pastoral landscape was the desirable landscape.<sup>18</sup> Immigrants of questionable whiteness who proved capable at improving wilderness land might be more than just expendable industrial workers; they might have the ability to become independent agriculturalists, the bedrock of American democracy. Nativism was built into this tautology: any person descendant from a group with a long history of free citizenship in the country was presumed to have descended from pioneering, wilderness conquering people and was therefore *de facto* white. The constructed history of the white conquest of the American wilderness explains how wilderness became a space exclusively for white middle-class men in the first two decades of the 20th century. Observing immigrants' adeptness at creating civilization on wilderness land allowed state, federal, and business officials to judge their whiteness and

17. Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876–1917* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), 97; Peck, *Reinventing Free Labor*, 18, 166, 169–170; Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 31; Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 253; Glickman, *A Living Wage*, 25; Joyce Appleby, "Commercial Farming and the 'Agrarian Myth' in the Early Republic," *Journal of American History* 68, 4 (1982): 833–849; Rossell Dave, "Tended Images: Verbal and Visual Idolatry of Rural Life in America, 1800–1850," *New York History* 69, 4 (1988): 425–440; David Danbom, *Born in the Country: A History of Rural America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

18. Quoted in Richard White, "From Wilderness to Hybrid Landscapes: The Cultural Turn in Environmental History," in Douglas Cazaux Sackman, ed., *A Companion to American Environmental History* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 185. The government equated wilderness land with idle land and worthless land. William P. Dillingham et al, *Immigrants in Industries: Part 24; Recent Immigrants in Agriculture*, Vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1911), 95, 359, 263; Louis S. Warren, "Paths Toward Home: Landmarks of the Field in Environmental History," in Sackman, ed., *A Companion to American Environmental History*, 11; William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness; Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," in William Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995), 69–91.

sort immigrants into different types of work based on their displayed racial characteristics.<sup>19</sup> Because of the messiness of the “racial sciences” there were people who were “in between” white and non-white, groups whose whiteness remained in question even after being tested by wilderness work. This was where the French Canadians fit into the scheme and these racial discourses are the primary reason they were exploited in the woods for more than a century.<sup>20</sup>

This type of racial thinking was applied to all immigrant groups coming into America and was responsible for other ethnically based labour systems like the Italian *padrone* system, tenement sweating in New York City and, by the 1940s and 1950s, federally sanctioned guest worker arrangements like the *bracero* Mexican farm worker program.<sup>21</sup> The discourses that formed about French Canadians in Northeastern logging camps were distinctly rural, however, and therefore have not been the target of historical investigation to the same extent as urban discourses on race and industry have been.<sup>22</sup> This is unfortunate because until the 1920s most Canadians and Americans lived in the countryside where the transition to industrial capitalism often had its most dramatic effects.<sup>23</sup> The images of immigrants in the rural Northeast had a profound effect on where foreign workers settled, how they were treated, and how they adapted to industrial capitalism.

As Canadian social historian Béatrice Craig found, opinions on the French Canadians depended on “whether [writers] took their cue from Longfellow or Darwin.”<sup>24</sup> Though this point was just an aside for Craig, it reveals an

19. Paul Outka, *Race and Nature from Transcendentalism to the Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 3, 31–33, 154; James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World, 1783–1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

20. The absence of black, Mexican, or other obviously “coloured” workers in the forests of the Northeast meant that the whiteness of new immigrant groups was scrutinized closely. Peck, *Reinventing Free Labor*, 169; David R. Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White: the Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 13.

21. Peck, *Reinventing Free Labor*, 16–18; Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the United States and Mexico* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*; 31. On ideas of immigrants' low standard of living driving down wages see Lawrence B. Glickman, *A Living Wage*, 78–91.

22. Those historians who have discussed industrialization, immigration, and whiteness have usually done so using the American West or the Southwest as their setting. See Peck, *Reinventing Free Labor*; Elliott Robert Barkan, *From All Points: America's Immigrant West, 1870s–1952* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007); Ava F. Kahn, ed., *Jewish Life in the American West: Perspectives on Migration, Settlement, and Community* (Los Angeles: Autry Museum of Western Heritage in association with University of Washington Press, Seattle, 2002).

23. Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015), 441.

24. Beatrice Craig, *Backwoods Consumers and Homespun Capitalists: The Rise of a Market*



important change in the way that North Americans thought about whiteness, wilderness, and work. In the 1840s, as an influx of Irish, German, and Canadian immigrants began to complicate the US understanding of whiteness, a distinctive rhetoric emerged that allowed Americans to group immigrants into different racial categories.<sup>25</sup> The first section of this article discusses French Canadian images in literature from the 1840s to 1893. In these works, racial differences were noted by the authors and were often an important part of the text, but the causes of these differences remained obscure to the audience. Ideas about whiteness began to change as Darwinian interpretations of human evolution merged with the American fixation on a vanishing frontier, and concern over the effects of industrialization – a time most clearly denoted by Frederick Jackson Turner’s presentation of “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” in 1893.<sup>26</sup> From the 1890s into the 1930s, the images of French Canadians and other immigrants were elucidated by academics and government officials as a scientific racial consensus solidified in the minds of most Americans. This is the topic of part two. The lingering effects of the racialized French Canadian image were still apparent in the 1950s when the bonded labour and shacking system became well documented. More than a century before the bonded labour system, however, the French Canadian image was perpetuated by an influential American writer living in a shack in Massachusetts.

## Literature and the Early French Canadian Image

ONE OF THE FEW PEOPLE who visited Henry Thoreau at Walden Pond was the French Canadian woodchopper and post maker Alek Therien, a character who represented nearly all the attributes of the French Canadian image before 1893. In *Walden* (1854), as in the other works discussed in this section, the French Canadian image depicts a people who are unperturbed by modernity and almost indistinguishable from the trees they work among. Though his name is never given in the original text, Therien is introduced to the reader as a “true ... Paphlagonian man,” a reference to an ancient region along the

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*Culture in Eastern Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 148.

25. On increased Canadian migration into the US in the 1840s see James P. Allen, “Migration Fields of French Canadian Immigrants to Southern Maine,” *Geographical Review* 62, 3 (1972): 369; Ralph Dominic Vicero, “Immigration of French Canadians to New England, 1840–1900: A Geographic Analysis,” PhD Dissertation, University of Wisconsin – Madison, 1968, 132; Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 7, 42–43; Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*, 118; Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 166, 225.

26. The presentation of the Turner thesis also coincides with a period of extensive French Canadian migration to New England. Yves Roby, *The Franco-Americans of New England: Dreams and Realities* (Sillery: Septentrion, 2005), 12; Carl N. Degler, *In Search of Human Nature: The Decline and Revival of Darwinism in American Social Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

Black Sea that was “rugged and mountainous with dense forests.” Dressed in homespun cloth, “a more simple and natural man it would be hard to find,” Thoreau wrote. Therien was a wage worker who owned no land and did not have the ambition to become a proprietor. He lived in a log house in the woods, and admitted to Thoreau that if he could live off of hunting alone, he would. He imbibed nature by drinking spruce, hemlock, or checkerberry tea, and by taking balls of bark from trees and chewing them. “In physical endurance and contentment,” Thoreau wrote, “he was cousin to the pine and the rock. I asked him once if he was not sometimes tired at night, after working all day; and he answered ... ‘Gorrappit, I never was tired in my life.’” Thoreau wrote that “in him the animal man chiefly was developed.” He was a skillful woodsman capable of making more posts in a day than the average person. When chopping a tree his cuts were clean, level, and close to the ground, and his cordwood was piled right. Though attentive to his work, Therien didn’t have the “anxiety and haste” of Yankee workers. When working he was in a constant state of elation. To the French Canadian, pleasure and work were the same thing. “I can enjoy myself well enough here chopping,” he reportedly said. “I want no better sport.”<sup>27</sup>

Therien was almost the embodiment of Thoreau’s ideal austere life, a person who rejected modern civilization for the natural world. He was so “simple,” however, that he was unable to engage in the type of deep thought that was so important for Thoreau.<sup>28</sup> For Americans in the middle of the 19th century, the French Canadian simplemindedness, connection to nature, and lighthearted passivity were partially caused by their devout Catholicism:

[his] strength skill and endurance came at the expense of intelligence, a flaw bolstered by his education.... He had been instructed only in that innocent and ineffectual way in which the Catholic priests teach the aborigines, by which the pupil is never educated to the degree of consciousness, but only to the degree of trust and reverence, and a child is not made a man, but kept a child.<sup>29</sup>

27. Henry David Thoreau and Jeffrey S. Cramer, *Walden: A Fully Annotated Edition* (1854; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 139, 143, 141.

28. Robert W. Bradford, “Thoreau and Therien,” *American Literature* 34, 4 (1963): 501; Edward Watts, *In This Remote Country: French Colonial Culture in the Anglo-American Imagination, 1780–1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 48; Thoreau and Cramer, *Walden*, 142, 143, 144–145; David E. Shi, *The Simple Life: Plain Living and High Thinking in American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 147–149; Philip Cafaro, *Thoreau’s Living Ethics: Walden and the Pursuit of Virtue* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 36, 37, 87, 118, 119, 210, 211.

29. Thoreau and Cramer, *Walden*, 139–144.

In his survey of French Canadians in early American literature, Edward Watts found that the French were depicted as a group "meant to be governed, not to govern themselves."<sup>30</sup>

In Thoreau's early life, the racial sciences were in a nascent state. The superiority of the Anglo-Saxon-Teutonic people was commonly understood, but hierarchies of racial characteristics that extended beyond a dichotomy of white and black were, according to historian Reginald Horsman, "confused" and "jumbled." There was also no "sharp separation between a precise scientific racialism and literary racial nationalism," Horsman found.<sup>31</sup> Understanding Thoreau's influences will explain the type of sources that perpetuated immigrant images for American audiences before 1893. Thoreau read John Springer's *Forest Life and Forest Trees* (1851), a popular account of logging labour in which French Canadians were represented as "demi-savages" with a propensity for woodwork.<sup>32</sup> Like other Americans, Thoreau likely read Alexis de Tocqueville's works, including "Two Weeks in the Wilderness," in which the French settlers are "carefree," "cheerful," men of "instinct" who submit to "life in the wild." "He clings to the land," De Tocqueville wrote, "and rips from the life in the wild everything he can snatch from it."<sup>33</sup> One text that had a strong influence on how Americans thought of French speaking Canadians was Henry W. Longfellow's epic poem *Evangeline, A Tale of Acadie* (1847), a work that historian Naomi Griffiths found "was the most powerful cultural tool available to those constructing an Acadian identity." Although French Canadians and Acadians were distinct people, many Americans conflated the two groups. In *Evangeline*, the idyllic "forest primeval" of Acadia was the birthplace and a safe haven for the French who were forcefully expelled by the British. The French people were viewed as part of the landscape, their lives gliding on "like rivers that water the woodlands." Like the landscape, these people's society yielded slowly to time. The pine trees sang the tale of *Evangeline*.<sup>34</sup>

The Therien character also reflected circulating ideas of the familial and communal connection between the French and First Nations people. This connection partially explained their "swarthy" complexion and affinity with

30. Watts, *In this Remote Country*, 118.

31. Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 159, 301.

32. John S. Springer, *Forest Life and Forest Trees* (1851; New York: Harper, 1856), 246–247.

33. Alexis de Tocqueville, quoted in Watts, *In This Remote Country*, 40–41.

34. The first printing of *Evangeline* in 1847 sold out and in the following century the poem went through 270 editions and was translated into 130 languages. Naomi Griffiths, "Longfellow's *Evangeline*: The Birth and Acceptance of a Legend," *Acadiensis* 11, 2 (1982): 28, 37; Andrew J.B. Johnston, "The Call of the Archetype and the Challenge of Acadian History," *French Colonial History* 5, 1 (2004): 78; Eric L. Haralson "Mars in Petticoats: Longfellow and Sentimental Masculinity," *19th-Century Literature* 51, 3 (1996): 343, 344; Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *Evangeline, A Tale of Acadie* (1847; Boston: Leach, Shewell, & Sanborn, 1896), 15–16; Watts, *In this Remote Country*, 88.

the forest. Thoreau read James Fenimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales*, in which the French and First Nations are not only allies, but also people who share a connection with the forest. Early and mid-century nonfiction works by Zadok Cramer, Francis Parkman, and George Bancroft furthered this idea. According to Parkman, "the French became savages" in early America.<sup>35</sup> "Hundreds [of French settlers] betook themselves to the forest, never more to return," Parkman wrote in his *The Conspiracy of Pontiac* (1851). After his stay at Walden, Thoreau visited Therien's homeland and wrote *A Yankee in Canada* (1850). He found that, like the First Nations people, "the French ... had become savage."<sup>36</sup> There was truth to the history of French and First Nations linkage. Historian Richard White found that "there is no need to romanticize this relationship ... [French and First Nations'] knowledge of each other's customs and their ability to live together ... had no equivalent among the British." Even though most French Canadians were not of mixed heritage, by 1911 this belief was so widespread that the United States Immigration Commission felt the need to address it in a *Dictionary of Races*, stating "the French Canadian race is not widely intermingled with Indian blood, as some misinformed persons think." At mid-century, American attention was fixated on the expansion of Anglo-Saxon peoples westward and on the domination and disappearance of Native peoples. Like the seemingly weak Mexicans that the US fought a war against in the late 1840s, the French Canadians were assumed to be spoiling their bloodline by intermingling with First Nation peoples. People who were associated with First Nation blood were on the wrong side of history. They would need to assimilate or be destroyed.<sup>37</sup>

35. Wayne Franklin, *James Fenimore Cooper: The Early Years* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), xxix; Allan M. Axelrad, "Historical Contexts of The Last of the Mohicans: The French and Indian War, and Mid-1820s America," paper presented at the 17th Cooper Seminar, "James Fenimore Cooper: His Country and His Art at the State University of New York College at Oneonta," July 2009, accessed, 20 August 2014, <http://external.oneonta.edu/cooper/articles/suny/2009suny-axelrad.html>; James Fenimore Cooper, *The Deerslayer* (1841; New York: Dodd, Mead, 1952), 23, 41; James Fenimore Cooper, *The Pathfinder* (1840; New York, NY: Dodd, Mead, 1953), 164; Zadok Cramer, *The Navigator* (1801; Pittsburgh: Cramer & Spear, 1824), 44, 254, 388; Fulmer Mood and Frederick J. Turner, "An Unfamiliar Essay by Frederick J. Turner," *Minnesota History* 18, 4 (1937): 393; Peter Cook, "Ontario Gives Birth: How the French in Canada Became Fathers to their Indigenous Allies, 1645–1673," *Canadian Historical Review* 96, 2 (2015): 165–193.

36. Quoted in Watts, *In this Remote Country*, 72; Henry David Thoreau, *A Yankee in Canada with Anti-Slavery Reform Papers* (1866; Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1866), 60, 61; Charles Hallock, "Aroostook and the Madawaska," *The Harper's Monthly* 20 (October 1863): 695.

37. Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 60–75, 316; Carolyn Podruchny, *Making the Voyageur World: Travelers and Traders in the North American Fur Trade* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 1, 2, 71, 98; William P. Dillingham, et al., *Dictionary of Races or Peoples* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1911), 29; Jean Charlemagne Bracq, *The Evolution of French Canada* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1924), 206; Madison Grant, *The Conquest of a Continent; or, The Expansion of Races in America*

The French Canadian connection to nature and First Nation peoples was reinforced by the popular image of the French *voyageurs* and *coureurs de bois*, frontier workers who defined the early Canadian experience in the wilderness. Importantly, 19th-century texts on the *voyageurs* depicted them as blending into, rather than civilizing, the frontier. The French entered the woods not to "clear and colonize," but to range. The only enduring marks they left on the land were "names upon the map." Thoreau wrote that they had "overrun the great extent of the country ... without improving it."<sup>38</sup> One American author, reflecting on the settlement of the US wrote, "if these countries had continued to belong to the French, the population would certainly have been more gay than the present American race ... but it would have had less comforts and wealth, and ages would have passed away, before man had become master of those regions...." Clearly American thinkers were quick to forget the real French contribution to the settling of North America when it supported their narrative of Anglo-Saxon superiority. French Canadians, like Native people, were a "vanishing" part of the landscape. Unlike Native peoples, however, French Canadians remained valuable to the growing American economy because, as Therien demonstrated, they fit into a specific industrial niche.<sup>39</sup>

The idea that French Canadians were a people who uniquely fit into woodwork was a common theme in late 19th- and early 20th-century popular fiction. A romanticized view of the arboreal and agrarian life of the French Canadians was part of *la survivance*, a repatriation and cultural preservation movement which gained momentum after the accelerated influx of French Canadians into the US in the late 19th century. A popular example of *la survivance* literature was Louis Hémon's 1916 book *Maria Chapdelaine*.<sup>40</sup> In the book, clearing the forest was the passion of these people: "Make land! Rude phrase of the country, summing up in two words all the heart-breaking labor that transforms the incult woods, barren of sustenance, to smiling fields..."<sup>41</sup>

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(New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1933), 310–311; Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 183, 216, 240, 241, 272.

38. Mood and Turner, "An Unfamiliar Essay," 395; Watts, *In This Remote Country*, 37; Konrad Gross, "The Voyageurs: Images of Canada's Archetypal Frontiersmen," in Hena Maes-Jelinek, Gordon Collier, Geoffrey V. Davis, and Anna Rutherford, eds., *A Talent(Ed) Digger: Creations, Cameos, and Essays in Honour of Anna Rutherford* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996), 411–422; Thoreau, *Yankee in Canada*, 62; Béatrice Craig and Maxime Dagenais, *The Land in Between: The Upper St. John Valley, Prehistory to World War I* (Gardiner: Tilbury House, 2009), 48.

39. Quoted in Watts, *In This Remote Country*, 15, 8–9; Thoreau, *Yankee in Canada*, 62; See also Zadok Cramer, *The Navigator*; Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 218; Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 156, 198, 200, 230, 291.

40. The book was translated into English multiple times and adapted into several movies. Louis Hémon, *Maria Chapdelaine*, trans. W.H. Blake (1913; Toronto: MacMillan, 1921), 45; Brault, *The French-Canadian Heritage*, 34, 158.

41. Hémon, *Maria Chapdelaine*, 46; Paul Socken, "Maria Chapdelaine" in Eugene Benson and William Toye, eds., *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*. (Oxford: Oxford

Félix-Antoine Savard's popular *Menaud Maître-draveur*, depicts the forests and rivers of Québec under the thrall of an Anglo-Canadian lumberman and the French take their place in the river crews, using their innate skill to bring the logs to market. There is a long list of other Canadian authors who employed similar depictions of French Canadian woodsmen.<sup>42</sup> French Canadians are similarly depicted in American literature. In Jack London's popular *The Call of the Wild*, the Québécois Francois and Perrault are idealized frontiersmen who are fundamentally important to the protagonist Buck's reconnection with nature. Characters similar to Francois and Perrault appear in the plethora of lumbermen novels and pulp fiction which were popular in the US from 1900 into the 1950s. In his famous *The Blazed Trail* (1902), Edward Stewart wrote that French supporting characters "typified the indomitable spirit of these conquerors of a wilderness." Similar characters are found in White's other popular books and in Maine writer Holman Day's forest fictions.<sup>43</sup>

## Hard Race Science

IN THE LITERARY AND FICTIONAL works written in the middle of the 19th century the French Canadian idiosyncrasies were thought to have been caused by their Catholicism, their intermingling with Native peoples, and their history

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University Press, 1997) accessed 27 August 2014, <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/alltitles/docDetail.action?docID=10334814>.

42. These include William Henry Drummond, Gilbert Parker, Cornelius Krieghoff, George Boucher, Rosarie Dion-Levesque, Reine Malouin, Camille Lessard, and Jacque Durcharme. Félix-Antoine Savard, *Boss of the River* (1937; Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1947); Jules Tessier "Menaud, Maître-draveur," in Benson, and Toye, eds., *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*; Armand Chartier, "Towards a History of Franco-American Literature: Some Considerations," in Quintal, ed., *Steeple and Smokestacks*, 295–306; Richard S. Sorrell, "'History as a Novel, the Novel as History': Ethnicity and the Franco American English Landguar Novel," in Quintal, ed., *Steeple and Smokestacks*, 361.

43. Jack London, *The Call of the Wild* (1903; New York: Macmillan, 1963), 17; Stewart Edward White, *The Blazed Trail* (New York: McClure, 1907), 13, 41, 46, 65. White's other books with stereotypical French Canadian characters include *The Westerners* (New York: McClure, Phillips, 1901), *Conjuror's House: A Romance of the Free Forest* (New York: McClure, Phillips, 1903) and *The Forest* (New York: Outlook Company, 1903). Day's books include *Joan of Arc of the North Woods* (New York: Harper, 1922) and *The Landloper: The Romance of a Man on Foot* (New York: Harper, 1915). There are many other examples, including, Sara Ware Bassett, *The Story of Lumber* (Philadelphia: Penn Publishing Company, 1912); Levi Parker Wyman, *The Golden Boys Among the Lumberjacks* (New York: A.L. Burt, 1923); Stephen W. Meader, *Lumberjack* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1934); Frank Gee Patchin, *The Pony Rider Boys in New England: Or, An Exciting Quest in the Maine Wilderness* (Philadelphia: H. Altemus, 1924); Capt. Charles A.J. Farrar, *Through the Winds: A Record of Sport and Adventure in the Forests of New Hampshire and Maine* (Boston: Estes & Lauriat, 1892); David C. Smith, "Virgin Timber: The Maine Woods as a Locale for Juvenile Fiction" in Richard S. Sprague, ed., *A Handful of Spice: A Miscellany of Maine Literature and History* (Orono: University of Maine Press, 1968), 194–195, 196.



of work in the wilderness. There were few clues in these works as to why French Canadians were ostensibly predisposed to these activities. After the US census declared the official closing of the Western frontier in 1890 and Frederick Jackson Turner published his thesis on that topic in 1893, North American elites increasingly attempt to fit immigrants into a scientific "hierarchy of evolutionary economic stages," which helped explain their behaviour. Just as the African American predisposition to slavery was supposedly a result of race, French Canadian Catholicism, affinity to the First Nations, and connection to the forest became, not the cause of racial difference, but the consequence.<sup>44</sup> In this period the most useful tools to use in determining racial traits were not works of fiction (though these still helped perpetuate the images) but the social scientific disciplines of sociology, history, and anthropology.<sup>45</sup>

As the racial sciences developed, experts like anthropologist Franz Boas posited that peoples were shaped by their environment, and shaped their environment in turn as part of the progression of human evolution.<sup>46</sup> Observing how different cultures were able to make civilization from wilderness land, historically and in the present, revealed their innate racial characteristics. Popular travel writer Richard Harding wrote in 1903 that "there is no more interesting question of the present day, than that of what is to be done with the world's land which is laying unimproved, whether it shall go to the great power that is willing to turn it to account, or remain with its original owner, who fails to understand its value." Supposedly "civilized" races used wild land to make a profit, and to bring forth culture and free government. Those who were controlled by nature, or lived in harmony with it, were more "savage."<sup>47</sup> Savage societies like the First Nations were wasteful because they did not create as much value from wilderness land as civilized people did. By not retaining the same amount of value from their labour as white people, lesser races were always working at a loss and could never be completely economically independent. White races were more bodily efficient than inferior races,

44. Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues*, 50–51, 145. Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 31; Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 48, 70; John S. Haller, *Outcasts from Evolution; Scientific Attitudes of Racial Inferiority, 1859–1900* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971).

45. In his *Working Toward Whiteness* Roediger argues that readers should be skeptical of any history that presents the racial thinking of the time as "elegant." Peck calls the racial thinking of the time "unstable." In retrospect it was clear that these were "messy" sciences but around the turn of the century there was a clear, collective attempt to make the racial sciences more precise. Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness*, 7–8, 37; Painter, *The History of White People*, x; Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 33; Peck, *Reinventing Free Labor*, 169; Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 6.

46. Roediger, *Working Towards Whiteness*, 68; Degler, *In Search of Human Nature*, 65.

47. Quoted in Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues*, 112, 145, 171; Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 7; Adam Kuper, *The Reinvention of Primitive Society: Transformations of a Myth* (London: Routledge, 2005); Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 113–114.

a US government report found. The Germans, for example, were better able to “apply their industry and energy” than Southern Europeans.<sup>48</sup> Racial characteristics, then, innately determined the type of professions to which racial groups were predisposed. In his popular *Passing of the Great Race*, Madison Grant discussed the “racial aptitudes” of different people: “The Alpine race is always and everywhere a race of peasants, an agricultural and never a maritime race.... The Nordics are, all over the world, a race of soldiers, sailors, adventurers and explorers, but above all, of rulers, organizers and aristocrats.”<sup>49</sup>

The history of North America as it was written by the “conservative evolutionist” and “progressive” historians of the late 19th and early 20th centuries supported these racial taxonomies. Proponents of the “germ theory” of historical progression argued that, in the civilizing of the North American wilderness land, “the inherent superiority of the Anglo-Saxon ... Germanic ... Teutonic or the Aryan race was a common intellectual assumption of the day.” The “free land” of America was “an Anglo-Saxon theatre, an empire which only the ‘old stock’ Americans could have developed and in which the new immigrants played no part.” Theodore Roosevelt, Frederick Jackson Turner, Herbert Baxter Adams, Edward Perkins Channing, and George Bancroft all agreed that “when Germanic people were placed in a forest environment they tended instinctively to evolve ... free political institutions” and economic success.<sup>50</sup> It was the prerogative of true white people to bring about civilization wherever there was free wild land. Racial thinking of the time suggested that to civilize wilderness land a racial group needed three crucial characteristics: 1) to be bodily able, 2) to have familiarity (actually or hereditarily) with forest land, and 3) to be self-directing or have independent inclinations. These characteristics come up again and again in texts on race and wilderness. For example, Turner described these pioneering traits as “coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness; that practical, inventive turn of mind, quick to find expedience; that masterful grasp of material things, lacking in the artistic but powerful to effect great ends; that restless, nervous energy; that dominant individualism.” The last attribute, individualism, was particularly important.

48. Dillingham, et al., *Immigrants in Industries: Part 24; Recent Immigrants in Agriculture*, Vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1911), 424.

49. Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race*, 227–228.

50. Gilman M. Ostrander, “Turner and the Germ Theory,” *Agricultural History* 32, 4 (1958): 259; Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 81; Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 43; Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 25; Bronwen J. Cohen, “Nativism and Western Myth: The Influence of Nativist Ideas on the American Self-image” *Journal of American Studies* 8, 1 (1974): 28–29; Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 71, 206–207; Madison Grant, *The Conquest of a Continent*; Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1987); Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 457.

Even slaves could clear land under direction, but true white pioneers tamed the wilderness individually, civilized it, and eventually lorded over others who did the manual labour. Americans on Canadian frontier rail grades expressed their dominance by quickly rising up the ranks to become "pushers," "drivers," or "foremen-bullies." "They take hold of a group of workers and get something done," sociologist Edmund Bradwin wrote.<sup>51</sup>

The forest was a crucial part of creating civilization because it gave pioneering races vast resources while also imposing a substantial barrier to weed out weaker peoples. According to Turner, "American democracy came from the forest." When white people turned forest into farms, "culture" emerged. The axe was a metaphor for the advancement of civilization, but there was a presumed literal element to the metaphor. Only those capable of sustained manual labour and ingenuity were capable of creating civilization. Northern Europeans had a propensity for "unbroken forest land" and naturally avoided slavish, urban, industrial work.<sup>52</sup> They were always owners and their own bosses. The Norwegian, for example had "never known the steamroller of feudalism." The Scandinavian "insisted on getting his living in connection with soil, water and wood," and looked for "good land rather than for land easy to subdue." The German "chopped his homestead out of the densest woods" because, according to early sociologist Edward A. Ross, he knew "heavy forest growth proclaims rich soil." Ross' comments on the issue carried weight. A renowned academic, his popular audience widened in 1900 when he was fired from Stanford University for supporting Chinese exclusion, which, he argued, would prevent "race suicide" (a phrase he coined).<sup>53</sup>

51. Attribute number three was an economic and a political virtue. On the frontier, immigrants and citizens were making free markets and making free government at the same time. It is difficult to divide citizenship and economic viability into separate discursive categories like Jacobson seems to want in *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 72; Peck, *Reinventing Free Labor*, 166–169; Dillingham, et al., *Immigrants in Industries: Part 24; Recent Immigrants in Agriculture*, Vol. 2, 175; Turner, *The Frontier in American History*, 37; Bradwin, *The Bunkhouse Man*, 98; Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 72.

52. Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (1920; Project Gutenberg, 2007), 154, accessed 7 May 2015, [http://www.gutenberg.org/files/22994/22994-h/22994-h.htm#Page\\_157](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/22994/22994-h/22994-h.htm#Page_157); Michael J. Pikus, "Chopping Away at the New World: The Metaphor of the Axe in The Prairie. The Axe as a Symbol of Destruction, in *The Pioneers and The Prairie*" (SUNY seminar: 2001) accessed 5 November 2015, <http://external.oneonta.edu/cooper/articles/suny/2001suny-pikus.html>; Cohen, "Nativism and Western Myth" 25; Dillingham, et al., *Abstracts of Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 547–549, 551; Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 47. On the importance of the forest in the myths that propagated proper whiteness see Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 72, 75, 83, 108, 169, 281; Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 8–13; Della Hooke, *Trees in Anglo-Saxon England: Literature, Lore and Landscape* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2010).

53. Ross, *The Old World in the New* (1913; New York: Century, 1914), 82, 73–74, 52; Dillingham, et al., *Immigrants in Industries: Part 24; Recent Immigrants in Agriculture*, Vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1911), 424; Cohen, "Nativism and Western Myth," 37; Painter, *The History of White People*, 251–252; James C. Mohr, "Academic Turmoil and Public Opinion:

The harshness of the American wilderness weeded out the weak, it was thought, forging a unique American race. In Roosevelt's words "there was scant room for cowards and weaklings in the ranks of the adventurous frontiersmen ... who first hewed their way into the primeval forest."<sup>54</sup> Historian George Bancroft wrote that the "the century-training in backwoods life" gave white Americans advantages over the immigrant germ. Boas, who typically argued against some of the most harmful racial science of his time, found to his own surprise that the "American soil" could change people bodily in only a few generations.<sup>55</sup>

Since Darwinian evolution occurred over time, the study of ancient and medieval history provided important evidence to support the racial sciences. In the early 20th century there was a growing alliance between the profession of history and the newer social sciences. Historical evidence was used to help explain the habit of races in the present day. For example, Ross found that Scandinavian people were drawn to "Northern lumber camps, where they wield another pattern of ax than did their forebears, who, eight centuries ago, were known as 'ax-bearers' in the Eastern emperor's body-guard." Scandinavia was, according to Ross, "the mother hive of the swarms of barbarians that kept southern Europeans in dread a thousand years."<sup>56</sup> They brought to the frontier of America "the spirit of the Viking race," Bradwin found. He continued: "let us think of these things as we watch their descendants ... gather in groups on some isolated work, loitering, skulking ... men of massive frames, slouch about some obscure Canadian camp." Like the Scandinavians, the Germans were a race forged in the "Hercynian forest." Modern Germans were "descendants from the tribes that met under the oak-trees of old Germany," making them "strong like the oak."<sup>57</sup>

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The Ross Case at Stanford," *Pacific Historical Review* 39, 1 (1970): 39–61.

54. Ross, *The Old World in the New*, 21; Theodore Roosevelt, *The Strenuous Life: Essays and Addresses* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1906), 242.

55. Quoted in Ostrander, "Turner and the Germ Theory," 258; William P. Dillingham, et al., *Reports Of The Immigration Commission: Changes In Bodily Form Of Descendants Of Immigrants* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1911), 5, 72, 75; Degler, *In Search of Human Nature*, 63–64; Painter, *A History of White People*, 238.

56. Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 90; Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 184; Ross, *The Old World in the New*, 72, 73–74; Barkan, *From All Points*, 257, 346. On the importance of ancient and medieval history in this discourse see, Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 9–24; Meyer Reinhold, *Classica Americana: The Greek and Roman Heritage in the United States* (Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1984); Andrew F. West, F. F. Abbott, Edward Capps, Duane Reed Stuart, Donald Blyth Durham, and Theodore A Miller, eds., *Value of the Classics* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1917); T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880–1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981) 141–167.

57. Bradwin, *The Bunkhouse Man*, 101; Quoted in Painter, *The History of White People*, 182; Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues*, 157.

Still influential at the end of the 19th century, the works of historian of the classics Edward Gibbons reinforced these ideas. The Gallic, Nordic, or Teutonic people surpassed Mediterranean people in vigour and manliness, partly because of their ability to thrive in frontier environments. These environments bred in them physical vitality and size. Living in the wilderness was directly linked to their bellicose nature. To various degrees, these warlike people resisted the decadence of the Roman metropolis and were better off for it: "the true mission of the Germanic peoples was to renovate and reorganize the western world. In the heart of the forest, amid the silences of unbroken plains ... [they] re-infuse[d] life and vigor and the sanctions of a lofty morality into the effete and marrowless institutions of the Roman world."<sup>58</sup> Although he became famous for his ideas on the environment, George Perkin Marsh was inspired by ideas of race and nature. According to Marsh's *Man and Nature or, Physical Geography as Modified by Human Action*, Roman decadence and weakness had caused the culture to become out of sync with the environment, leading to the fall of the Empire. In a similar vein, Ross wrote that some Slavic people were destroying American soil, leaving "Death's-head in the landscape." He argued that North Americans would have to pay for these mistakes just like "France paid for the reckless ax work that went on under the First Republic."<sup>59</sup> According to Marsh and Ross the ability to make land profitable in the long term was an inheritable racial trait.

With a few exceptions, the logic of the time dictated that races whose ancestral homeland was outside of Northwestern Europe had less ability to civilize wilderness, and thus less aptitude for citizenship. Immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe carried with them this presumed racial burden. As they inhabited the seat of metropolitan decay in ancient times, Italians attained effete racial characteristics. Russian and Romanian Jews, sometimes assumed to have Mongolian blood, sometimes Mediterranean, were always a bad racial type and thus bad pioneers. Lacking physical stamina and frugality, they were a city people by nature. Journalist Jacob Riis, author of the popular *How the Other Half Lives*, reported that "the great mass of them [Jews] are too gregarious to take kindly to farming, and their strong commercial instincts hamper" their ability to cultivate the land. According to Ross, "they came from cities and settled in cities.... No other physiques can so well withstand the toxins of urban congestion. Not one Hebrew family in a hundred is on the land.... They

58. Gilbert F. LaFreniere, *The Decline of Nature: Environmental History and the Western Worldview* (Bethesda: Academica Press, 2007), 55–56; Ostrander, "Turner and the Germ Theory," 260; Painter, *The History of White People*, 17–18; 27; Quoted in Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 34, 66, 68, 69.

59. Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 181; George P. Marsh, *Man and Nature or, Physical Geography as Modified by Human Action* (1864; Project Gutenberg, 2011) accessed 20 May 2015, <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/37957>, 6, 7, 49, 279; LaFreniere, *The Decline of Nature*, 55–57; Ross, *The Old World in the New*, 203.

contrive to avoid hard muscular labor.”<sup>60</sup> Ross observed that the second generation improved, but suggested that “it will be long before they produce the stoical type who blithely fares forth into the wilderness, portaging his canoe, poling it against the current, wading in the torrents living on bacon and beans, and sleeping on the ground.” The comedy films *Der Yiddisher Cowboy* (1910) and *Der Yiddisher Kauboy* (1911), mocked Jewish ineptitude on the frontier and popularized these stereotypes.<sup>61</sup>

US government reports and racial scientists agreed that perceived French Canadian racial deficiencies were caused by the evolution of French society in ancient and medieval Europe, though there was mixed opinion on their exact racial genealogy. It was assumed by some that the French were Celtic or Gallic people who shared the bellicose nature of other ancient frontier peoples. Dillingham’s *Dictionary of Race* along with a few other sources defined the French as Teutonic, or purely white. The Gauls and Celts, however, had given into the Roman conquest easier than German, Teutonic, Nordic, or Anglo-Saxon people, demonstrating their weakness. One visitor to the Acadians of Madawaska found they were clearly “distinct in tastes, habits and aspirations from the Anglo-Saxon race.” Still other racial thinkers saw the French as a bifurcated people, the peasant class comprised largely of Roman slave blood, while the aristocracy maintained Teutonic traits. This unstable genealogical position meant that French Canadians could not immediately be considered proper white citizens.<sup>62</sup>

American investigations into the active settling of wilderness land reinforced the idea that immigrants of questionable whiteness were unfit to create civilization from wilderness. Collected under the direction of Vermont senator William P. Dillingham (R), *The Federal Reports of the Immigration Commission* of 1911 constituted a series of studies on American immigration that focused on industry and agriculture. Two volumes on “Recent Immigrants in Agriculture” explored how new immigrants took to “pioneer farming” or

60. Dillingham, et al., *Dictionary of Races or Peoples*, 74, 75; Ross, *The Old World in the New*, 145, 209, 289, 290; Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 6, 174; Grant, *The Conquest of a Continent*, 227; Joseph Jacobs, *Studies in Jewish Statistics, Social, Vital and Anthropometric* (London: D. Nutt, 1891), Iv.

61. Ross, *The Old World in the New*, 209; Ava F. Kahn, “American West, New York Jewish,” and Ellen Eisenberg, “From Cooperative Farming to Urban Leadership,” in Kahn, ed., *Jewish Life in the American West*, 37, 117–118; Edward Paul Merwin, “In their Own Image: New York Jews in Jazz Age American Popular Culture,” PhD dissertation, City University of New York, 2002, 190–197.

62. Painter, *The History of White People*, 100–101; Watts, *In This Remote Country*, 9, 24; John Davidson, “The Growth of the French Canadian Race in America,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 8 (1896): 20; Dillingham, et al., *Dictionary of Races or Peoples*, 28–31; Bradwin, *The Bunkhouse Man*, 92–95; Painter, *The History of White People*, 232; Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 45, 162; Edward H. Elwell, *Aroostook: With Some Account of the Excursions Thither of the Editors of Maine, in the Years 1858 and 1878, and of the Colony of Swedes, Settled in the Town of New Sweden* (Portland: Transcript Print, 1878), 26.



the clearing and civilizing of wild land.<sup>63</sup> The site of investigation was the wilderness of Northern Wisconsin, but according to the study, wild land was any land that was valueless until hard work rendered value from it. Wild land could be swamp, sand, brush, cutover land, second growth, grassland, and any type of forest. They even referred to "wild lands" in New Jersey.<sup>64</sup>

The land in Wisconsin, however, like much of the forests of the Northeast, Pacific Northwest, and the Canadian Boreal Shield was a type of landscape that was imagined to have improved the Northern European races in early America. It also mimicked some of the features of the landscape of ancient Northern Europe.<sup>65</sup> In a growing industrial economy, this type of land had two primary uses: lumber and other natural resources could be extracted from it and the land could be put into cultivation. This type of work was the first step in creating civilization and was only suited for the most fit races. "It is just such land as this ... that hundreds of Germans, Scandinavians, Poles and Swiss have been buying, clearing and making good living on since the early [eighteen] nineties" the report found.<sup>66</sup> The Dillingham studies found that immigrants of Southern Italian lineage were naturally ill equipped for this pioneer agriculture. They were urban "industrial workers" by nature and "ordinarily the city-bred immigrant does not make a good pioneer farmer."<sup>67</sup> Italians proved to be better pioneer farmers than Jewish settlers, however. One local Wisconsin man commented after watching the Jewish workers that "No

63. The authors of the studies on agriculture exposed their racial bias in the abstract, writing that they selected for study only those "races ... which we are accustomed to consider inclined to industrial rather than to agricultural pursuits." They included only those "races which come from southern or eastern Europe, and the Japanese." Ostrander, "Turner and the Germ Theory," 258; Dillingham, et al., *Abstracts of Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 543; Zeidel, *Immigrants, Progressives, and Exclusion Politics*.

64. Dillingham, et al., *Abstracts of Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 595; Dillingham et al., *Immigrants in Industries: Part 24; Recent Immigrants in Agriculture*, Vol. 2, 555, 96, 212.

65. Ostrander, "Turner and the Germ Theory," 259–260; Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 87; Herbert Baxter Adams, *The Germanic Origin of New England Towns* (Baltimore: N. Murray, publication agent, Johns Hopkins University, 1882), 33.

66. Poles inhabited a space in the racial hierarchy that was similar to the Canadian French. Their whiteness was questionable, but they exhibited many white racial characteristics. Dillingham, et al., *Immigrants in Industries: Part 24; Recent Immigrants in Agriculture*, Vol. 2, 145, 175, 190, 213, 265, 346, 262; Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness*, 44; Ross, *The Old World in the New*, 120; Painter, *The History of White People*, 289; Dillingham, et al., *Dictionary of Races or Peoples*, 104.

67. Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York* (1889; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1890), 48; Dillingham, et al., *Abstracts of Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 565, 574; Dillingham, et al., *Immigrants in Industries: Part 24; Recent Immigrants in Agriculture*, Vol. 1, 41–42, 399, 431; Ross, *The Old World in the New*, 97, 102; There was, however, "[a] sharp cleavage" between Northern and Southern Italians, proving how specific the racial sciences had become. Dillingham, et al., *Dictionary of Races or Peoples*, 82; Peck, *Reinventing Free Labor*, 169; Cohen, "Nativism and Western Myth," 31.

one could handle or sharpen an ax or a saw, or milk a cow, care for stock or conduct any sort of farming operations.... 'Ask one to dig a post hole and he would likely dig a well.'" Ross stated the prevailing attitude bluntly: "the Hebrews are the polar opposite of our pioneer breed."<sup>68</sup>

French Canadians were not included in these Dillingham studies because their history in the New World proved that they excelled at many aspects of improving wilderness land, yet this did not mean their whiteness was unquestioned. The French Canadians were perceived to have white people's physical aptitude and ability in the woods, but were lacking in the third crucial element required to bring civilization to the land: an independent inclination. The collection of essays edited by James George Aylwin Creighton, *French Canadian Life and Character: With Historical and Descriptive Sketches* (1899), demonstrates the common conception of French Canadian workers at the time: "[the] Canadian experiences developed in the old French stock new qualities, good and bad, the good predominating ... *such men needed only a leader* [emphasis added] who understood them to go anywhere into the untrodden depths of the New World, and to do anything that man could do." The shortcomings of the French Canadians and Southern Italians in the realm of independence was attributed to their Catholicism, adherence to which was now a sign of racial inferiority. To Creighton, the French Canadian was "a genuine survival of the Old Regime ... smoke-dried into perpetual preservation" and their devotion to religion was likewise outdated.<sup>69</sup> Gerald Morgan argued in the pages of *The North American Review* in 1917 that the will of the French Canadian people was the same as the will of their priests who had it in their best interest to keep the laity ignorant, isolated, and bound to tradition. The result, according to Morgan, was the "stoppage of national progress." Convinced by the French Canadian image, Americans and British Canadians alike depicted these people's agriculture as backwards. Conveying both the French Canadian inability to properly render profit from the land and their racial inferiority, popular author on race Madison Grant wrote they were "a poor and ignorant

68. There were a few exceptions, the report noted, and these exceptional Jewish settlers were able to clear a "large quantity of timber." Dillingham, et al., *Immigrants in Industries: Part 24; Recent Immigrants in Agriculture*, Vol. 2, 93, 143, 146–147; Bradwin, *The Bunkhouse Man*, 108–109; Ross, *The Old World in the New*, 145, 289.

69. George Monroe Grant, ed. *French Canadian Life and Character; With Historical and Descriptive Sketches of the Scenery and Life in Québec, Montreal, Ottawa, and Surrounding Country* (Chicago: A. Belford, 1899), 73. Catholic French Canadians supposedly brought to the new world a Norman predisposition to tyranny and absolutism. Northern Europeans were depicted as the "purest Protestants" and thus the most free-thinking, free-acting, and capable people. According to Turner, Scotch-Irish were also great frontiersmen because they were not Catholic Celts, but Saxon Protestants. Barkan, *From All Points: America's Immigrant West*, 185; Watts, *In This Remote Country*, 9; Mood and Turner, "An Unfamiliar Essay," 393, 397; Ross, *The Old World in the New*, 13, 71, 82; Ostrander, "Turner and the Germ Theory," 28, 206; Watts, *In This Remote Country*, 3; Grant, ed., *French Canadian Life and Character*, 12; Craig and Dagenais, *The Land in Between*, 298, 327–337; Elwell, *Arroostook*, 25.

community of little more importance to the world at large than are the Negroes in the South."<sup>70</sup> The French proved they could clear wilderness land, but, like "Negroes" they could never truly bring high civilization to it.

In 1904 one northern New York newspaper published an article on logging in the region proclaiming "these French-Canadian inhabitants of the woods are half-wild folk." This article encapsulated the prevailing attitudes on the French Canadian race at the time. The common belief was that First Nations made the wild their home and they had no desire to civilize it. This had made them wild and savage. French Canadians had an affinity for wild land like First Nations but they also had an affinity towards clearing it. If left on their own, however, their racial weaknesses meant they were forever stuck in the process of civilizing the wilderness. Given the fact that they were also seen to have mixed their blood with First Nations people, it is easy to understand how they were understood to be in between white/civilized (or civilizing), and savage (non-white)/wild. Therefore they were "half-wild folks."<sup>71</sup>

By the 1950s the explicit racial thinking of the first two decades of the 20th century had been almost completely abandoned.<sup>72</sup> Stereotypes of immigrants remained, but they were explained using different analytical methods. Mid-20th century "Chicago School" anthropologists and sociologists created narratives of the French Canadian transition into modernity that reinforced all the characteristics of the French Canadian image. Even with their fixation on data and ethnographic observation, these experts were not able to evade reifying commonly held beliefs. Anthropologists Robert Redfield and Horace Miner argued that French Canadian peasants, or *habitants*, were primitive people. They were not land owners like American farmers; instead they worked on behalf of another, and the full product of their labour was not their own. They had an affinity with nature that most modern people did not possess because they worked so closely with it daily. For habitants, the seasonal cycles of life and in agro-forestry repeat year after year, generation after generation, with little change unless change was brought from the outside. Sociologist Everett C. Hughes wrote in his *French Canada in Transition* (1943)

70. Gerald Morgan, "The French Canadian Problem: From an American Standpoint," *The North American Review* 205, 734 (1917): 77–80; Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race*, 81; Outka, *Race and Nature*, 3.

71. According to Jacobson it was part of the imperative of imperial nations to see foreign people as "wilderness in human form." Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues*, 111; "Lumbering Operations in the Adirondacks," *The Watertown Re-Union* (Watertown, NY) 9 March 1914; Jocelyn Thorpe, *Temagami's Tangled Wild: Race, Gender, and the Making of Canadian Nature* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2012), 15; Nast, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 260; Colin Fisher, "Race and US Environmental History," in Sackman, ed., *A Companion to American Environmental History*; Outka, *Race and Nature*, 33.

72. The Holocaust and a retrospective understanding of America's eugenic policies towards African Americans had proven the dangers of these ideologies. English, *Unnatural Selections*, 177, 182; Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 95–96, 98–99.

that the small French Canadian farmers were “bound by sentiment, tradition, and kinship to the ... countryside.” According to Hughes, when the French did industrialize it was because of British Canadian or American catalysts not because of their own ability.<sup>73</sup> As depicted in Savard’s *Menaud Maître-draveur*, the natural transition for these peasant lumberers in an increasingly industrial world was work in commercial logging interests.

The French Canadian image made these workers specific targets for labour agents in the lumber hubs of the Northeast. Immigrant workers were often dependent on these middle men to find work in American camps. The Foran Act of 1885 banned immigration of contract labourers but the Immigration Act of 1917 allowed “skilled workers” to be imported if there was no native labour available to do the work. Under the 1917 act immigrant workers were subject to an eight to ten dollar head tax, a charge that was often factored into the labour agents’ fees.<sup>74</sup> Workers who took the jobs from labour agents often accumulated debt of around \$30–\$35 from fees, transportation, and advances. If they spent liberally at the wangan, or camp store, they might accumulate \$40 or \$50 of debt to different parties. With wages between \$25 and \$30 a month some indebted workers needed to work nearly 2 months before they were even and the logging season was only between 4 and 6 months long.<sup>75</sup> Once in camp, there is evidence that French Canadians were subject to very harsh treatment. Tough bosses in wilderness camps pushed foreigners hard and disciplined them severely, hoping to weed out unfit workers. A boss in charge of a lumber operation in St. Lawrence County, New York shot and killed a French Canadian worker in 1908 after a disagreement about camp food.<sup>76</sup> This type of

73. Robert Redfield, *Peasant Society and Culture: An Anthropological Approach to Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), 25–29, 116, 144; Horace Miner, *St. Denis: A French-Canadian Parish* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 20, 158–159; Brigitte Lane, “Three Major Witnesses of Franco-American Folklore in New England,” in Quintal, ed., *Steeple and Smokestacks*, 416; Everett C. Hughes, *French Canada in Transition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1943), 2; Marlene Shore, *The Science of Social Redemption: McGill, the Chicago School, and the Origins of Social Research in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 253–260.

74. Fred Alliston Gilbert Papers, “F.A. Glibert to G. Schenck, 20 December 1925,” box 7, Correspondence, 1924–1925 Special Collections, Raymond H. Fogler Library, University of Maine; Meigs, *The Santa Clara Lumber Company*, 113–114.

75. Farm Labor National Agricultural Statistics Service, United States Department of Agriculture, Agriculture Marketing Service, 12 January 1940, accessed, 31 March 2015, <http://usda.mannlib.cornell.edu/MannUsda/viewDocumentInfo.do?documentID=1063>; William F. Fox, *A History of the Lumber Industry in the State of New York* (Washington, DC: US Dept. of Agriculture, Bureau of Forestry, 1902); Meigs, *Santa Clara Lumber Company*, 56; Flanagan, “Industrial Conditions in the Maine Woods,” 219, 223–226; Paul H. Douglas, *Real Wages in the United States, 1890–1926* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1930) 41, 130, 177; James H. Blodgett, *Wages of Farm Labor in the United States: Results of Twelve Statistical Investigations, 1866–1902* (Washington, DC: US Dept. of Agriculture, Bureau of Statistics, 1903), 14.

76. Bradwin, *The Bunkhouse Man*, 163; Robert E. Pike, *Tall Trees, Tough Men* (New York:

rough treatment may have even led to the famous French Canadian "jumping" disease, a type of post-traumatic stress disorder reported among immigrant workers in a few Northeastern camps.<sup>77</sup>

Rough treatment was one of the many reasons why some workers jumped camp and returned to Québec without working off their debt, a practice that became known as taking the "French Leave" or "jumping the line."<sup>78</sup> In 1907 the Maine legislator followed the lead of Minnesota and Michigan and enacted a statute which allowed authorities to arrest loggers and river drivers who did not pay off advances. If found guilty of "intent to defraud" they faced up to 30 days of jail or a \$10 fine even though most debts did not exceed \$10 or \$20. Many rural justices either did not understand, or willingly misinterpreted, the "intent to defraud" provision and punished any worker caught with outstanding debt who left camp, even those with legitimate reasons for leaving. The threat of punishment pressured many workers to continue to work and few cases ever made it into the courts. When workers were arrested "in nine cases out of ten the men are made to go back to work" according to one labour agent. A rural justice in Maine admitted that he would wait for debtors to get drunk in mill towns and when they were arrested for some related offense he would check to see if they had any unpaid debt with an operator. If so the justice forced the man to work off both the state fine and the debt in camp. Labour advocate John Clifton Elder studied debt peonage around 1907 and he testified that "the Labor Law of Maine ... make virtual slaves of the labouring classes."<sup>79</sup>

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W.W. Norton, 1967) 57; Bradwin, *The Bunkhouse Man*, 163; White, *The Blazed Trail*, 218–219; Wyckoff, *The Workers*, 236; "Telephones After Murder" *Chateaugay Record and Franklin County Democrat*, 5 June 1908, Page 6, Image 6, Northern New York Library Network, accessed 31 March 2015, <http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org/lccn/sn87070301/1908-06-05/ed-1/seq-6/>.

77. Robert Howard and Rodney Ford, "From the Jumping Frenchmen of Maine to Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: the Startle Response in Neuropsychiatry," *Psychological Medicine* 22 (1992): 700, 702; George Beard, "Remarks upon 'Jumpers or Jumping Frenchmen,'" *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Diseases* 5 (1878): 526; Marie-Hélène Sainte-Hilaire, Jean-Marc Sainte-Hilaire, and Luc Granger, "Jumping Frenchmen of Maine," *Neurology* 36 (1986): 1269–1271; George M. Beard, "Experiments with the 'Jumpers' or 'Jumping Frenchmen' of Maine," *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 7 (1880): 487–490.

78. John F. Flanagan, "Industrial Conditions in the Maine Woods," *First Biennial Report of the Department of Labor and Industry* (Waterville: Sentinel Publishing: 1912), 209, 224; Victor Bushey (b. 1900) interview by Sue Dauphinee, 1970, p. 719069, transcript, LLC, MFC.

79. John Clifton Elder, "Peonage in Maine (A Manuscript Report sent to the Attorney General of the United States)," 28 March 1910, RG 60, Department of Justice file 50-34-0, 13-21, pg. 5–7, 10, 15, 16–17, 20, 21, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; "Does peonage Exist in the Maine Lumber camps?" *Paper Trade Journal*, (November 1915): 16; Robert J. Steinfeld, *Coercion, Contract, and Free Labor in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 279; Flanagan, "Industrial Conditions in the Maine Woods," 225; "May Repel Law Protecting Lumbermen," *Paper: A Weekly Technical Journal for Paper and Pulp Mills* 20 (New York: Paper, 1910); "Is it a Feats or a Famine?: Symposium by High and Low Authorities on the Epicurean Delights of Maine Logging Camps – Forestry Student Refutes Vile Slanders," *Bangor Daily News*, 8 March 1910.

The shacking system of lumber production that was documented in the 1950s likely evolved from the system of debt bondage described above.<sup>80</sup> Between 1951 and 1955 an average of 5,920 French Canadian workers were “bonded” to logging companies throughout New York, New Hampshire, Vermont, and Maine, though some years there were more than 7,000.<sup>81</sup> In Maine during these years the pulpwood cutting force was on average 78.4 per cent French Canadian and a portion of these were shackers. The shacking system mimicked the way that French Canadian *habitants* were thought to have lived in Québec. An employee of Maine’s Great Northern Paper Company described it thusly:

A shacker is a man, usually with a family, and one or two relatives who will move onto company land, build himself a shack to live in, cut pulp through the cutting season and haul it to the designated hauling point ... Usually the whole family, regardless of age, works with the father in the woods. The children rarely attend school ... The shacker invariably is semi-literate.... If a contract can be drawn that will make these shackers independent contractors we will be able to relieve ourselves of a great deal of responsibility and will be able to produce wood much cheaper....<sup>82</sup>

The French Canadian image from Thoreau to Miner inspired this labour exploitation, but the image did not reflect any innate characteristics of French Canadians. Instead the image was a reflection of the shallow understanding that many people in the US had of the political, economic, and religious history of Québec. Historian Bruno Ramirez found in his comparative study of immigration in Canada that “clearing forest land in Québec required work techniques and an endurance that not all prospective settlers were willing to endure.” Thus Italians, Jews, and even many French Canadian and Northern European settlers failed at civilizing wild land simply because of the “physical and mental difficulty it entailed.” In Québec, frontier colonization efforts led by clergy, lumber companies, and the Canadian government put many French Canadian families in a position that disallowed economic or educational advancement. It was just these types of small pioneer farmers who tended to migrate to the US, bringing with them pioneering skills. Approximately 62 per cent of French Canadian textile workers in New England had been farmers or farm labourers before coming to the US.<sup>83</sup> Many French Canadians were not able to own land right away so their “supreme resource, as a release from ... poverty ... was to take to the ax ...” It is also possible that the perpetuation of

80. On the various types of debt bondage see Félix Albert, *Immigrant Odyssey: A French-Canadian Habitant in New England—a Bilingual Edition of Histoire D’un Enfant Pauvre*, (Orono: University of Maine Press, 1991), 68–69, 95–97.

81. Parenteau, “Bonded Labor,” 113.

82. On the standard of living of peasants see Glickman, *A Living Wage*, 82–84; Quoted in Parenteau, “Bonded Labor,” 115.

83. Bruno Ramirez, *On the Move: French-Canadian and Italian Migrants in the North Atlantic Economy, 1860–1914* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991), 77–79; Bradwin, *The Bunkhouse Man*, 95; Vicero, “Immigration Of French Canadians To New England,” 214.



the French Canadian image within this immigrant community created what social psychologists call "stereotype lift," whereby exposure to positive stereotypes causes "an elevation in their self-efficacy or sense of personal worth [and] performance." Whatever caused the French Canadian affinity for logging work, the contradiction in depicting French Canadians as a primitive peasant class is glaring, since moving to American lumber camps proved their adaptability toward modernization and progress at a time of economic trouble in their home country.<sup>84</sup>

It is important to note, however, that the racial discourse on whiteness, wilderness, and work was not as strong a factor in deciding where immigrants would work as was the iron law of supply and demand. Most immigrants coming to the US, regardless of their race, settled in factory towns and cities. By 1900 French Canadians made up 50 per cent or more of the entire population of Southbridge and Spenser Massachusetts; Biddeford, Lewiston and Old Town, Maine; Woonsocket, Rhode Island; Danielson, Connecticut and Suncook, New Hampshire.<sup>85</sup> It was estimated that only 10 per cent of all the French Canadians in New England lived in rural areas and as few as one per cent of workers went into "forest work" (there are problems with this latter figure, however).<sup>86</sup> A majority of French factory workers were immigrants. While the lumber industry had the second highest percentage of French Canadians as a portion of the workers employed in 1900, the brick and tile making industries had an even larger number – more than 50 per cent.<sup>87</sup>

84. Albert, *Immigrant Odyssey*, 34–37, 40, 56; Richard William Judd and Patricia A. Judd, *Aroostook: A Century of Logging in Northern Maine* (Orono: University of Maine Press, 1988), 194–195; Ramirez and Otis, *Crossing the 49th Parallel*, 5, 8, 63; 11–12, 16; Vicero, "Immigration Of French Canadians To New England," 70, 197–198; J.I. Little, *Nationalism, Capitalism and Colonization in Nineteenth-Century Quebec: The Upper St. Francis District* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989), 7, 16, 31–35, 47, xii–xiii; J.I. Little, *Crofters and Habitants: Settler Society, Economy, and Culture in a Quebec Township, 1848–1881* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991), 149, 154; Brault, *The French-Canadian Heritage*, 34, 158; Ramirez, *On the Move*, 47; Gregory M. Walton and Geoffrey L. Cohen, "Stereotype Lift," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 39, 5 (2003): 456–467; Margaret Shih, Todd L. Pittinsky, and Amy Trahan, "Domain-specific Effects of Stereotypes on Performance," *Self and Identity* 5, 1 (2006): 1–14.

85. Vicero, "Immigration of French Canadians to New England," 119, 121; Hornsby, Judd, and Hermann, *Historical Atlas of Maine*, plate 42; Brault, *The French-Canadian Heritage*, 54–55.

86. These figures are drawn from Vicero, "Immigration of French Canadians to New England." The nature of logging in eastern North America make precise employment figures in the lumber camps difficult to surmise. Logging was inseparable from the agricultural sector, it was seasonal work, most workers took up other jobs when they were not logging, and loggers rarely self-identified as such. By combining figures from several categories of work in Vicero's study which were closely allied with logging (agriculture, forest workers, pulp and paper, saw and planing mills, general labour, teamsters, railroad and street railway workers, and other occupations) we see the figures could have been as great as 31 per cent. Vicero, "Immigration of French Canadians to New England," 298.

87. Vicero, "Immigration of French Canadians to New England," 347.

In urban areas another French Canadian image developed which reflected the type of work found there. It was assumed that the French habitants who moved to cities were a simple people who would work for below subsistence wages. Their strong nationalism, and adherence to traditional culture, language, and religion worried Protestant New Englanders. In cities like Lewiston, Maine and Woonsocket, Rhode Island immigrants were able to virtually reconstruct the social, religious, and political order of Québec in immigrant enclaves. The *la survivance* movement made many New Englanders worried that the Québécois had no desire to assimilate or nationalize and were only present for quick monetary gains.<sup>88</sup> In 1891 the state of Maine passed a constitutional amendment targeting French Canadians by disallowing anyone who could not “read the constitution in the English language, or write his name” from voting or holding office.<sup>89</sup>

As in rural logging areas, the French Canadian adherence to Catholicism seemed to prove they had a greater devotion to the tenets of their religion than to the tenets of Republicanism. Finding Irish Catholic churches disagreeable, the first thing that many French Canadian settlers did when they came to New England was build their own churches. By 1900 there were at least 82 parishes in the region. Some French immigrants were comfortable settling political and workplace problems within the Church, giving the Québécois a reputation as an insular and clannish people. The rise of the second Ku Klux Klan in the US in the 1920s was a time of rampant anti-Catholicism and anti-Semitism. During this period French Canadian workers were publicly intimidated by members of the Klan in two different cities in Maine because of their adherence to Catholicism.<sup>90</sup>

As obedient female Catholics the Québécois factory workers were seen as a people who followed orders well and respected authority. “They are industrious in the extreme” one employer wrote and they “do not grumble about pay, are docile, and have nothing to do with the labour agitations.” Their large family size, and their need to send their children into the factories young worried

88. Brault, *The French-Canadian Heritage*, 67; Roby, *The Franco-Americans of New England*, 58–59, 66–67; Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism*, 27; Michael J. Guignard, “The Franco-Americans of Biddeford Maine,” in Quintal, ed., *Steeple and Smokestacks*, 128.

89. The law was on the books until 1982–83. Rebecca Dirnfeld, “Research Note: Maine ‘Jim Crow’? The Forgotten Maine Constitutional Amendment of 1891,” in Nelson Madore and Barry H. Rodrigue, eds., *Voyages: A Maine Franco-American Reader* (Gardiner: Tilbury House, 2007), 370.

90. Brault, *The French-Canadian Heritage*, 68–69; Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism*, 35–37; Mark Paul Richard, “This Is Not a Catholic Nation’: The Ku Klux Klan Confronts Franco-Americans in Maine,” *New England Quarterly* 82, 2 (2009): 296–297; Philip T. Silvia, Jr., “Neighbors from the North: French-Canadian Immigrants vs. Trade Unionism in Fall River, Massachusetts” in Quintal, ed., *Steeple and Smokestacks*, 145; David H. Bennett, *The Party of Fear: From Nativist Movements to the New Right in American History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 223–225.

Progressive reformers but were a boon to factory owners.<sup>91</sup> A representative of a Fall River company testified in a Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics of Labor (MBSL) report that he sought these workers out because "they are not so apt to rebel as others ... They are quiet; they don't raise much disturbance around the factory village." Through the leadership of their priest, Rev. Pierre J.B. Bedard, French Canadians in Massachusetts became strikebreaker during the Fall River strike of 1879, perpetuating the idea that they were an anti-labour group.<sup>92</sup>

These distorted views of French Canadian immigrants in factory towns led the MBSL to famously condemn them as "the Chinese of the Eastern States" in an 1881 report. Comparing the Chinese with French Canadians conveyed the perceived chasm between native white Americans and Québécois immigrants and shows how pervasive the hierarchies of whiteness were at the time. Almost immediately after the report was issued coalitions of Franco Americans from Cohoes, Fall River, Lewiston, Manchester, Nashua, Woonsocket, and Worcester publicly refuted these claims in a meeting, the views of which were published as *The Canadian French in New England*. They hoped to distance themselves from undesirable immigrants.<sup>93</sup>

The "Chinese of the Eastern States" comments shows that the rhetoric on whiteness, wilderness, and work in the logging woods was not the only way that French Canadian immigrants were defined in America. Images of immigrants were adaptable and worked symbiotically with specific industries. The images also reflected the gender of the workers in different industries, as most factory workers were women and all loggers were men. The image of the French as "half-wild" was supported in rural industries and it was used to help fill isolated work camps with a racially desirable type of labour. This image ensured that all the industrial niches of this vast heterogeneous economy would be filled efficiently.

## Conclusion

IDEAS ABOUT WILDERNESS, whiteness, and work evolved out of a long process of immigrant image formation which began in the 1840s as Americans struggled to comprehend different European immigrants. After 1893, Americans meshed their ideas about race with an industrializing economy, a disappeared frontier, and a large population of exotic immigrants. Bolstered by evidence from history, sociology, and anthropology, characters from literature like

91. Quoted in Vicero, "Immigration of French Canadians to New England," 119; Guignard, "The Franco-Americans of Biddeford Maine," in Quintal, ed., *Steeple and Smokestacks*, 137; Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism*, 23; Brault, *The French-Canadian Heritage*, 62–63; Roby, *The Franco-Americans of New England*, 65.

92. Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics of Labor, *Thirteenth Annual Report* (Boston: Wright & Potter Printing, State Printers, 1882), 64; Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism*, 22–23, 37; Guignard, "The Franco-Americans of Biddeford Maine," in Quintal, ed., *Steeple and Smokestacks*, 153.

93. Brault, *The French-Canadian Heritage*, 68.

Alex Therien or London's Francois and Perrault came to represent categories of workers in the minds of many American businessmen. The racial world-views that formed made the rapidly changing world of modern America more digestible for many "white" Americans. Under the dictates of this racial logic almost every group of immigrants had a unique place in this new industrial economy, and native white peoples' standard of living was ensured. The objectives of government and business officials were not strictly nativist, however. In creating these immigrant images they were attempting to fit different types of workers into industries where they would be economically efficient and most likely to succeed. From this vantage point it is clear that the chronology of American immigration is not characterized by successive dips into "irrational" nativist thinking, as some historians have argued, but instead there was a consistent goal of advancing the American economy by whatever means necessary. Applying "common sense" racial science to immigration and industrial policies simply helped improve the economy. Nativism was not at odds with capitalism because the desire for a "white republic" was synonymous with a desire for an economically robust republic. By 1950s systematic racism had been a part of American political and economic thought for more than a century so its effects on immigrants remained even as the explicit discussion on racial whiteness began to disappear. The French Canadian image, with its "unshakable demonstrations ... of ... ethnological truth," made the label of savage/wild hard to dislodge, and the exploitation of French Canadians in the woods remained a problem into the 1970s.<sup>94</sup>

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94. Zolberg, *A Nation by Design*, 3, 7; Cannato, *American Passage*, 9; Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 165. Jacobson's assertion in *Whiteness of a Different Color* that "Economics alone ... cannot explain why this government was made on the 'white basis'" needs to be reexamined because it is clear that the economic imperatives shaped immigration policy and even ideas of race. Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 18–19; Michael Hillard and Jonathan Goldstein, "Cutting off the Canadians: Nativism and the Fate of the Maine Woodman's Association, 1970–1981" *Labor: Studies in the Working Class History of the Americas* 5, 3 (2008): 67–89; William C. Osborn, *The Paper Plantation: Ralph Nader's Study Group Report on the Pulp and Paper Industry in Maine* (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1974), 159–163.