

CHAPTER 1.

TOWARD A SOCIAL JUSTICE
HISTORIOGRAPHY FOR
WRITING ASSESSMENT

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Research Problem: Scholars recently have begun the work of explicitly theorizing writing assessment and/as social justice, but this social justice turn has not yet found equally explicit expression in writing assessment historiography. Social justice historiography is needed to complement and support the promotion of social justice in—and-through writing assessment.

Research Questions: What would it look like to (re)write assessment history by foregrounding social justice? Providing one racial justice-centric example, this chapter asks: How did racial injustice and assessment intersect within the pages of *The English Journal* (*EJ*) between 1912 and 1935? Specifically, this chapter interrogates assimilation and Americanization practices discussed or promoted in *EJ*, a journal that provides one site for examining the disciplinary preoccupations and commitments of early twentieth century English educators and writing experts.

Literature Review: To outline social justice historiography, this chapter interweaves insights from justice theorists John Rawls and Iris Marion Young, from historiography, and—with respect to this chapter's example—from critical race theory. Taken together, these insights frame justice/injustice as structural, underlining the importance of historiography for making justice/injustice structures more visible. To provide background for my consideration of *EJ*, I review scholarship on Progressive Era assimilation initiatives in education—work clarifying the context for assimilation-related classroom assessment practices featured in *EJ*.

Methodology: Using JSTOR, I identified relevant *EJ* articles by reading titles and conducting keyword searches. Analyzing select articles, I attended to articulations between race, immigration, lan-

guage, writing, and assessment. To provide an in-depth look into the intersection of these ideas, I conducted detailed readings of two *EJ* articles. Close textual engagement at this level helps excavate injustices and assumptions potentially less visible under different, more distant methods of scrutiny.

Conclusions: For some *EJ* contributors, assessment was freighted with assumptions about racialized deviance, with standard language use and writing indexing a (white) racialized standard that immigrants and “foreigners” needed to be conditioned to meet. Informal classroom assessments of writing (including peer assessments) provided mechanisms for refashioning students according to this standard.

Qualifications: This chapter’s account is necessarily partial: It neither comprehensively documents the intersection of race, assimilation, and informal classroom assessment in *EJ* between 1912 and 1935, nor represents all of the ways *EJ* contributors participated in (or militated against) racial injustice. Moreover, this chapter focuses on racial justice within the confines of one journal during a specific period; it does not provide a full, multidimensional account of the relationship of social justice to writing assessment inside (much less outside) that journal.

Directions for Further Study: This chapter is intended as one exchange within a broader conversation that locates social justice at the heart of writing assessment historiography. Future work from a range of critical perspectives is needed to provide a more inclusive and textured understanding of the historical relationship between writing assessment and social justice.

INTRODUCTION

Questions of social justice are, to some extent, questions of history. The advancement of social justice necessarily rests on the diagnosis of past injustices and on the appraisal of the present, relative to previous events and future possibilities. In the disciplinary spaces of Writing Studies and English Language Arts education, there is perhaps no site for historical reappraisal more promising than *writing assessment*, because assessments have been envisioned, alternatively, as causes of or cures for injustice (e.g., Stein, 2016). To move forward, we must assess the history of our assessments (e.g., Elliot, 2005; Serviss, 2012). The time has come for a *social justice historiography* for writing assessment.

In this chapter, I define and provide an example of social justice historiography for writing assessment. I agree with Hayden White (2005) that “history-writing is more about meaning than about knowledge” (p. 338). No telling of history is merely a neutral and objective recounting of events. All historiography is rhetorical, inflected (explicitly or implicitly) with beliefs, values, and narrative choices (Weiler, 2011; White, 2010). Social justice historiography for writing assessment (re)appraises and re-presents the past with a normative commitment to identifying and interpreting injustices (or efforts to combat them). As one means (among many) of instantiating historiographic commitments to social justice, I provide a racial justice-focused example of social justice historiography, looking back to the intersection of racial injustice and writing assessment in the United States through articles published in *The English Journal* (*EJ*) between 1912 and 1935. Specifically, my chapter considers *progressive racism*, a term I adapt from Walter Benn Michaels (1995) to designate attempts to contain or eradicate racial difference through assimilation or “Americanization.” Beginning my analysis in 1912—when *EJ* emerged as an outgrowth of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)—promises insights into *EJ*’s founding preoccupations. The year 1935 provides a useful cut-off for my analysis; Samantha NeCamp (2014) selected this year as the terminal point for her recent examination of Americanization discourse, and notes that “the rhetoric of immigrant literacy crisis waned in the 1930s thanks to the advent of the Great Depression and restrictive immigration policies” (p. 9).

As the immediate progenitor of *College English* (and, more distantly, other NCTE publications), *EJ* has been the site of several backward glances, with scholars drawing on *EJ*’s past to better understand, among other things, the disciplinary history of English (e.g., Brass, 2012). While recent writing assessment scholarship has invited deeper critical consideration of race and racism (e.g., Inoue, 2015; Poe & Cogan Jr., 2016), existing histories of *EJ* have paid only cursory attention to race or racial injustice (e.g., Brass, 2012). Furthermore, scholars have documented the complicity of large-scale assessment and standardized testing in Progressive Era anti-immigration restriction efforts (e.g., Elliot, 2005; Serviss, 2012; Tucker, 1994), but, to date, our histories remain comparatively silent on the relationship of local assimilation-oriented assessment to white supremacy during this same period. Academic exemptions like these risk leaving long-standing injustices in place. Color-blind historiography will not do; we need a commitment to excavating historical injustices and the assumptions, mindsets, and actions that made them possible. This chapter brings visibility to classroom assessments and racial injustices that have, to date, remained largely invisible in our historical scholarship on *EJ*.

My intention is *not* to paint every aspect of progressive education with the

broad brush of (progressive) racism; there is much inspiration we can draw from progressive education (e.g., Cremin, 1961; Gallagher, 2002). It is important we bring historical attention to injustices that lurk within even our most promising and humane projects. Speaking of the “need to look backward,” Iris Marion Young (2011) tells us, “The purpose of such backward-looking accounts . . . is not to praise or to blame, but to help all of us see relationships between particular actions, practices, and policies, on the one hand, and structural outcomes, on the other” (p. 109). To this end, I begin the next section by outlining a social justice historiography for writing assessment; I then discuss racial justice-oriented historiography as one critical means of engaging in social justice historiography. Following this work, I provide historical context for my examination of progressive racism, and draw on *EJ* examples to indicate how progressive racism informed classroom assessment practices that assigned value to student language use—and to writing, specifically. I conclude by considering the broader importance of social justice historiography.

SOCIAL JUSTICE HISTORIOGRAPHY

With John Rawls (2001), I believe social justice inquiry should focus on structural justice promotable through attention to “the basic structure of society”—Rawls’ phrase for “the background social framework within which the activities of associations and individuals take place” (p. 10). A *fair* basic structure ensures “equal basic liberties” and “fair equality of opportunity” to all (Rawls, 2001, p. 42), with “[s]ocial and economic inequalities” permissible only when “they are to be to the greatest benefit of the least-advantaged members of society” (pp. 42–43). For Rawls (2001), the basic structure has an important educational dimension:

Educated and trained abilities are always a selection, and a small selection at that, from a wide range of possibilities that might have been fulfilled. Among what affects their realization are social attitudes of encouragement and support, and institutions concerned with their early discipline and use. (p. 57)

Structures shape educational development and opportunity. In this vein, Zachary Stein (2016) claims “[m]easurement infrastructures form a part of society’s basic structure” (p. 47), such that “[t]ests structure access to basic goods—educational goods—which are prerequisites to the exercise of liberties” (p. 52). Relatedly, Norbert Elliot (2016) defines “[f]airness in writing assessment . . . as the identification of opportunity structures created through maximum construct

representation. Constraint of the writing construct is to be tolerated only to the extent to which benefits are realized for the least advantaged” (§3.1). Taken together, these extensions of Rawls into assessment direct our ethical attention to *what* and how we assess as well as *the consequences* of these choices.

While Rawls’ structural justice centers on formal institutions and frameworks, Young (2011) helpfully reformulates structural justice in terms of social relationships and positions, including “everyday habits and chosen actions” (p. 70), such that individuals—even unintentionally—can “contribute a great deal to the production and reproduction of structural injustice” (p. 73; see also Poe & Inoue, 2016). Social injustices—which for Young (1990) include all manifestations of oppression and domination (pp. 33-65)—are not located exclusively in the large-scale institutional background, but are found also in individual behaviors and relationships that promote inequality. Social justice inquiry for writing assessment requires attention not only to injustices enabled by institutional norms and large-scale assessment structures, but also to the ways local assessments and individual actors participate in (or work against) those injustices. In keeping with recent work by Asao B. Inoue (2015), this approach regards “writing assessment as an *ecology*, a complex system made up of several interconnected elements” (p. 9, emphasis mine)—examining structural justice in terms of large-scale structural formations and their articulations to individual actors, groups, events, artifacts, and contexts.

Historical work is essential to the promotion of social justice. Young (2011) argues, “Understanding how structural processes produce and reproduce injustice requires having an account of how they have come about and operated in the past coming up to the present” (p. 109). Bearing this requirement in mind, the role of social justice historiography for writing assessment is, as I define it, to shed historical light on writing assessment ecologies, in terms of a) constructions and representations of students, teachers, other stakeholders, and the aims of assessment, and b) the underlying assumptions, uses, and consequences of measurement infrastructures (e.g., assessment artifacts/technologies; administration, scoring, and validation practices) and constructs (e.g., intelligence; writing), so their effects on opportunities and inequalities can be better understood. The sphere of social justice historiography extends also to c) critical reflection on the assumptions, absences, and presences characteristic of existing accounts of writing assessment history, and d) reflexive and speculative engagement with the ways histories of writing assessment do/can/should inform disciplinary practice or thinking. These *four aspects of social justice writing assessment historiography* aid us in accounting for the origins of assessment-related injustices and afford a critical vantage for re-appraising our present practices.

How we write our histories matters. Kathleen Weiler (2011) claims,

What is at stake in the writing of history . . . is not a reflection of a prior reality, but an intervention in the creation of a *sense of reality*. In this sense history contributes to an “imagined community” in Benedict Anderson’s phrase. In their narratives of the past, historians delimit, include, and exclude who counts as members of that community. (p. 252, emphasis mine)

Social justice historiography for writing assessment is premised on the assumption that this sense of reality is altered not just by *whom* we represent (e.g., Glenn & Enoch, 2009), but also *how* we represent—or—construct them, the structures they inhabit, and the writing assessments with which they engage. Representation can expose structural violences or—as Josh Lederman and Nicole Warwick (Chapter 7, this collection) suggest—it can exacerbate them. We shape history and reality through the narratives we choose to depict (or not) and the details we foreground (or elide). Historiography is “always partial and always interested” (Glenn & Enoch, 2009, p. 331), its edges sharpened to carve the past at joints specified by our critical commitments. Our tellings of history are not neutral—they are *incisive*. White (2010) holds that

a specifically *historical* inquiry is born less of the necessity to establish *that* certain events occurred than of the desire to determine what certain events might *mean* for a given group, society, or culture’s conception of its present tasks and future prospects. (p. 230, emphasis in original)

Where history is concerned, “[t]he ‘facts’ do not ‘dictate’ at all but are subject to the specific choices, inclinations, and prejudices of the historian, which are inevitably moral and aesthetic rather than simply epistemic” (Doran, 2010, pp. xxiii–xxiv). Facts are voiceless when left unvoiced, and take on new shapes and meanings when articulated to (and through) new contexts.

Our work as historians is to recover or reconstruct pasts, situating them in ways that clarify the significance we believe them to have. When undertaking social justice historiography for writing assessment, this situative act poses assessment artifacts, events, and ecologies against the backdrop of social justice, throwing their relationships to injustices into relief. Beyond this shared point of departure, though, specific instances of social justice historiography can differ radically—conforming to the principles espoused by the historiographer and, by extension, the significance those principles assist in drawing out. Even when converging on the same event, or engaging with the same archival materials,

scholars approaching their work from different critical angles will arrive at different (albeit, perhaps, compatible) interpretative destinations. In this way, we could claim the writing of history as one terrain where we can have “validity without reliability”—to borrow, from the educational measurement context, Pamela A. Moss’ (1994) turn of phrase.

As sketched here, social justice historiography is by design an open and plural project, accommodating diverse critical traditions and local historiographic needs, while also remaining broadly inclusive in the research methods it embraces. Consulting White, we are informed that inclusivity of this sort is a feature endemic to historical scholarship generally, in that “there is no such thing as *the* historical method” (as cited in Domanska, 2008, p. 10, emphasis in original). One general methodological constraint focuses social justice historiography for writing assessment: In making clear the social justice stakes of writing assessment, scholars must adopt and disclose some principled basis for appraising the past relative to social justice and injustice. However much of historical work is idiosyncratic and unreplicable, it is within our power not only to document where we have sought out historical data, but also, crucially, to describe the kinds of critical scrutiny we have placed those data under. What beliefs about justice or injustice have guided our work? What theories are we bringing to bear in our analysis? To be sure, making explicit the principles underpinning our analyses will not guarantee generation of identical histories. Instead, what it will guarantee are historical accounts that explicitly and legibly center the social justice stakes of writing assessment, rather than deemphasize or ignore those stakes. The unifying methodological feature of social justice historiography is to be found not in the specific methods used to bound or assemble archival datasets (though, of course, this work is foundational to any historical scholarship), but instead in the kinds of questions we ask of those datasets—in the critical standards against which we assess our disciplinary pasts. Our commitments are the stuff social justice historiography is made of.

This point is worth dwelling on, if only briefly. No two researchers step into the same archive, so to speak: “Archival acts of reading . . . are tethered to the researcher’s perceptions and prejudices as well as the theoretical frame used to approach his or her work” (Glenn & Enoch, 2009, p. 331). The same events can be imagined and described multiple ways, corresponding to the critical commitments and analytic focus of the historian. For this reason, social justice historiography methodologically requires we (re)examine the history of writing assessment through analytic lenses calibrated to identifying justice or injustice along one—or—more social axes (e.g., theoretical perspectives on class, decoloniality, disability, gender, race, sexuality, and intersectionality). Historiography for social justice runs parallel to what Christie Toth (Chapter 4, this collection) dis-

cusses, in the context of validity, as “validation for social justice.” For Toth, social justice validation entails engagement with one (or more) social formation(s). Social justice historiography entails no less, highlighting assessment-related injustices (or efforts to counter them), and making explicit for readers the social justice stakes involved and insights gleaned. Attention of this kind supports the work of identifying, mapping, and interpreting unjust assessment ecologies, so we can subvert and supplant them. It supports, too, the work of detailing and exploring initiatives that foster inclusion, support diversity, and promote more socially just practice.

As a place to begin, social justice historiography for writing assessment might take, as its substantive focus, assessment ecology-relevant questions like the following (corresponding, sequentially, to the *four aspects* of social justice historiography outlined above):

1. How have students, teachers, other stakeholders, and the aims of assessment been constructed or represented? What assumptions are embedded in these definitions? Whom do they advantage or disadvantage?
2. What beliefs/assumptions have authorized or animated assessment infrastructures and constructs? How have uses of these measurement infrastructures and constructs contributed to unjust consequences?
3. How have writing assessment-related injustices been highlighted or elided in our histories? Whose experiences/perspectives have been represented and discussed? To what effects? What assumptions undergird these choices?
4. How does/can/should our historiography foreground questions of justice? How do/can/should our histories and historiographic methods challenge injustice and promote justice?

These general questions engage social justice concerns about writing assessment ecologies, their histories, and how those histories are (or should be) written. They shed light on beliefs and values that undergird, and are advanced by, our writing assessments; they target our historiographic “sense of reality” by interrogating who and what we represent, how, and to what ends. Questions like these resonate not only with the objectives of politically oriented revisionary historiography (Skinnell, 2015) and “archival research that ‘trouble[s]’ histories of rhetoric and composition” (Glenn & Enoch, 2009, p. 323), but also with recent writing assessment scholarship that explicitly and methodologically takes up questions of social justice and fairness (e.g., Elliot, 2016; Inoue, 2015; Poe & Cogan Jr., 2016). Assessing the history of our assessments affords us the opportunity not only to (re)define our disciplinary history relative to the project of social justice, but also to rethink assessment. In this way, social justice histo-

riography assists not only in (re)writing the past of writing assessment, but also its present and future.

RACIAL JUSTICE AS A SOCIAL JUSTICE HISTORIOGRAPHIC LENS

A diversity of critical approaches is needed to support this work. To illustrate and explore one such approach, the remainder of this chapter focuses on racial justice—an historiographic focus also found in the work of Keith L. Harms (Chapter 3, this collection) and Sean Molloy (Chapter 2, this collection). For those of us committed to promoting racial justice, historical inquiry has particular significance in light of the roles that purportedly objective assessment ecologies have played in producing or reproducing structural inequalities along the axis of race (e.g., Inoue, 2015). Inevitably, our assessments (like our histories) are inflected with our assumptions, biases, and goals. The role of social justice historiography is to excavate these sometimes subtle influences. Critical race theory (CRT) draws attention to the analytic power of this work: “Current inequalities and social/institutional practices are linked to earlier periods in which the intent and cultural meaning of such practices were clear” (Matsuda, Lawrence III, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993, p. 6). Social justice historiography provides a window to the nature and origin of injustice, affording much-needed perspective on the ubiquity and diversity of race-related injustices normalized in the present day.

Gloria Ladson-Billings (1998) reminds us, quoting Richard Delgado, that “CRT begins with the notion that racism is ‘normal, not aberrant, in American society’ (Delgado, 1995, p. xiv), and, because it is so enmeshed in the fabric of our social order, it appears both normal and natural to people in this culture” (p. 11). Racism is, in other words, *structural*, in Young’s (1990) broader sense of that term (see also Inoue, 2015). Within American society and schooling, whiteness is hierarchically privileged and regularly taken as an unexamined standard, with departures from it coded as deficits or defects (e.g., Chambers, 1996; Inoue, 2015; Young, 2011). Put differently, “race, within the scheme of whiteness, is seen as a malady. That is, if we accept the notion of whiteness as normal, then any person who is *not white* is abnormal” (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005, p. 16, emphasis in original). Young (1990) describes this oppressive approach to marking and examining difference as “cultural imperialism” (pp. 58-61, 122-124).

Under present day regimes of cultural imperialism in the United States, my identification as a white, straight, cisgender, middle-class man provides me an intersectionally privileged, unmarked status. I share in the *responsibility* (Gomes, Chapter 6, this collection; Poe & Inoue, 2016; Young, 2011) for publicizing and dismantling the inequalities my intersectional privilege participates in. Critical

examination of whiteness by means of social justice historiography is one part of this project. This is not to say that “whiteness”—or any racial classification—has fixed, essential content. Race is a historically contingent construction (e.g., Omi & Winant, 2015) and “is (at least partially) constructed through spaces and discourses” (Dolmage, 2011, p. 29)—an idea consonant with the work of Michael Sterling Burns, Randall Cream, and Timothy R. Dougherty (Chapter 8, this collection) on “white habitus” (see also Inoue, 2015). Critical historical inquiry is necessary to understand the nature of these constructions, including the hierarchies they endorse and norms they establish.

As CRT suggests, racial injustices in education are—at least in part—invisibilized, normalized, or authorized by master narratives that pitch education and assessment as neutral, color-blind, and objective. These narratives are sometimes discussed as “majoritarian narratives,” which “are stories in which racial privilege seems ‘natural’” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 28; see also Love, 2004). We might count, as popular manifestations of majoritarian storytelling, narratives characterizing racially disparate educational outcomes (or “achievement gaps”) as the neutral—and-natural effects of innate, essential group differences (e.g., intelligence disparities) and/or meritocracy (Love, 2004), rather than as byproducts of structural injustice. Helpfully, CRT critically questions assumptions of “neutrality, objectivity, color blindness, and meritocracy” (Matsuda et al., 1993, p. 6)—key components of race-centric master narratives concerning American education and testing (Love, 2004) that have recently been called into question in writing assessment scholarship (e.g., Inoue, 2015).

Social justice historiography works to dislodge majoritarian (hi)stories that authorize and excuse structural injustices. Harms (Chapter 3, this collection), for example, engages in this kind of work by questioning commonly circulated narratives about the United States’ occupation of the Philippines, uncovering colonial violences lurking within even putatively “progressive” pedagogies. Too often, historical attention to past racial injustices is dismissed as a “presentist” error, “illegitimately assessing historical figures based upon contemporary [i.e., present day] values and goals” (Cho, 1998, pp. 79-80). This shielding of past racial injustices from critical scrutiny underwrites the perpetuation of majoritarian narratives; Sumi Cho (1998) argues, “A critical race historiography, to the contrary, would ensure that the context of the majority does not trump the context of the minority through the allegedly context-sensitive, anti-presentist critique” (p. 81). Historiographic attention to injustice is context-sensitivity by other means, attentive to violences that majoritarian narratives work to erase. This attentiveness to injustice is at the core of what I take to be a social justice historiography for writing assessment. My consideration of progressive racism in *EJ* is but one approach to undertaking a social justice historiography for writing

assessment: a (re)writing of the history of writing assessment that foregrounds—rather than de-emphasizes or ignores—social justice concerns.

In the case of early twentieth century progressive education, scrutiny of this kind helps us understand how informal classroom assessments—even when imagined by educators as benevolent—can (re)produce structural inequalities by sponsoring white normativity. (This work iterates the first two aspects of social justice historiography for writing assessment, described in the previous section.) In at least this limited sense, social justice historiography is itself an active means of promoting social justice: Chipping away at master narratives exposes injustice to more vigorous critique and helps make unthinking participation in injustice less tenable. It is to this reconsideration of racial injustice in *EJ* that I turn to next.

PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION AND PROGRESSIVE RACISM

Spanning from the 1890s through the first decades of the twentieth century, the United States' Progressive Era witnessed landmark efforts to stimulate social and political progress through justice-promoting activism (e.g., the women's suffrage movement). This same period saw rapid industrialization and efforts—led by figures like Frederick W. Taylor and Henry Ford—to systematize labor through scientific management and social engineering, refashioning workers into interchangeable parts (Marcus & Segal, 1999). The era's progressive education reflected these commitments to democratizing reform and systematizing uniformity. On one hand, progressive education is often remembered in terms of its democratizing inclusivity, child-centered pedagogy, and commitment to social reform in—and-through education (e.g., Cremin, 1961). On the other, educational measurement expertise—embodied in figures like Edward L. Thorndike and Ben D. Wood—emerged during this period as an extension of the belief that education can be improved through managerial systematization and assessment (Cremin, 1961; Elliot, 2005). These conflicting Progressive Era pressures, Chris W. Gallagher (2002) contends, foundationally influenced the disciplinary development of composition—including the creation of *EJ*, “the self-identified ‘progressive’ publication of the National Council of Teachers of English” (p. xviii).

What is often not emphasized in narratives about progressive education is that it emerged alongside, and is implicated in, efforts to contain or eradicate “foreign” racial difference. The late nineteenth century lead-up to the Progressive Era “saw a dramatic increase in the number of students at all educational levels—largely as a result of massive waves of immigration” (Gallagher, 2002, p. 11). Reflecting the commonly held idea that Americans “believe in the full inclusion of all, ‘without regard for race, creed, or color’” (Omi & Winant, 2015, p. 22), majoritarian narratives about this increase in immigration suggest

that America gazed upon its “latter-day pilgrims” (Cohen, 1913, p. 618) with color-blind eyes, granting them access to meritocratic opportunity through education—provided they assimilate (through hard work) into the normal American collective (see also Jacobson, 1998; NeCamp, 2014).

To be sure, Progressive Era educational regimes might have *included* immigrants—yet we ought not to equate inclusion with unconditional “color-blind” acceptance. Born partly from industrial-capitalist pressures to render the workforce uniform and efficient, Progressive Era assimilationist projects also bore marks of hostility to difference and a desire for “cultural and even racial defense” (NeCamp, 2014, p. 84). European immigrant groups were among those considered racially suspect (Dolmage, 2011; Jacobson, 1998). Racial belonging was (and is) constructed and regulated rhetorically; we can think of Ellis Island, for instance, as a kind of “operating theater” policing national entry through a “racializing and normalizing process” of screening (Dolmage, 2011, p. 27). While “[w]hite privilege in various forms has been a constant in American political culture since colonial times” (Jacobson, 1998, p. 4), for early twentieth century European immigrants, white racial membership was often contingent on prevailing prejudices and (at least in part) on exhibitions of successful assimilation—a kind of *theater of sameness* we might think of as dramatizing progressive racism.

Described by Michaels (1995), “Progressive racism was nationalist, concerned with eliminating sectional differences and deploying racial identity on behalf of both the nation and the state. It was hierarchical and assimilationist: white supremacy made possible the Americanization of the immigrant” (p. 67; see also Jacobson, 1998). Revising this description, I use the term *progressive racism* to more expansively designate efforts to contain, eradicate, or rehabilitate racionational alterity by means of education and assimilationist inclusion, rather than nativist exclusion. To be clear, not all early twentieth century inclusionary or educational practices count as emanations of progressive racism. Assimilation and education are *progressive racist* in character when they assume and pursue a white standard, assessing “foreign” difference against a rubric of whiteness. Progressive racist assimilation is both an ideal and a (potentially indefinite) process. This process need not be formal and it need never be completed; rather, it includes informal, recursive efforts to curb or rehabilitate “foreign” speech and thinking. These efforts target not only recent immigrants, but perceived foreign elements within the American body—or, as *EJ* contributor George Philip Krapp (1918) might present them, the “great masses of people of foreign tradition” (p. 89) believed by educators to be “imperfectly assimilated” (p. 90).

Juxtaposed against the history of nativist exclusionary efforts in the United States (Dolmage, 2011; Elliot, 2005; Serviss, 2012; Tucker, 1994), we might be forgiven for thinking of any assimilationist efforts (formal or informal) as

a kind of unproblematic good. Social justice historiography works to complicate this portrait by highlighting affinities between (nativist) exclusionary and (progressive racist) inclusionary approaches to difference. Both are strategies for promoting and policing sameness; both take a white standard as a starting place and goal. According to the progressive racist view, national health and progress required a kind of ideological and linguistic uniformity. Immigration was permissible, provided immigrants were refashioned to more closely resemble the “native” white population.

This is not to suggest equal treatment across immigrant groups, nor is it—in Jacobson’s (1998) words—“to argue that race is freighted the same way from period to period or from case to case” (p. 9). Indeed, intense majoritarian attention to assimilating European groups into mainstream (white) American society suggests these groups occupied a position of comparative racial privilege, adjacent to “native” whiteness. My aim is, instead, to show that under progressive racism, the racial identity and status of immigrant students—even when members of these comparatively privileged groups—was intertwined with, and partly predicated on, English classroom performance. Terminology is important here: Because these immigrant groups and ethnoreligious minorities were often explicitly constructed as distinct *racial* groups—including by *EJ* contributors (e.g., Brown, 1931; Moriarty, 1921)—my analysis treats them as such, referring to the targets of progressive racism as “racional” groups. This categorization is intended to capture the conflation of national origin with race during this period, and includes not only recent immigrants but any “foreign” group within the United States believed “imperfectly assimilated” (Krapp, 1918, p. 90) or presumed plagued by “foreign language errors” (Brown, 1931, p. 470).

One important stage for progressive racism’s theater of sameness was language (NeCamp, 2014), with the classroom serving as rehearsal space and performance hall. As Amy Dayton-Wood (2008) notes:

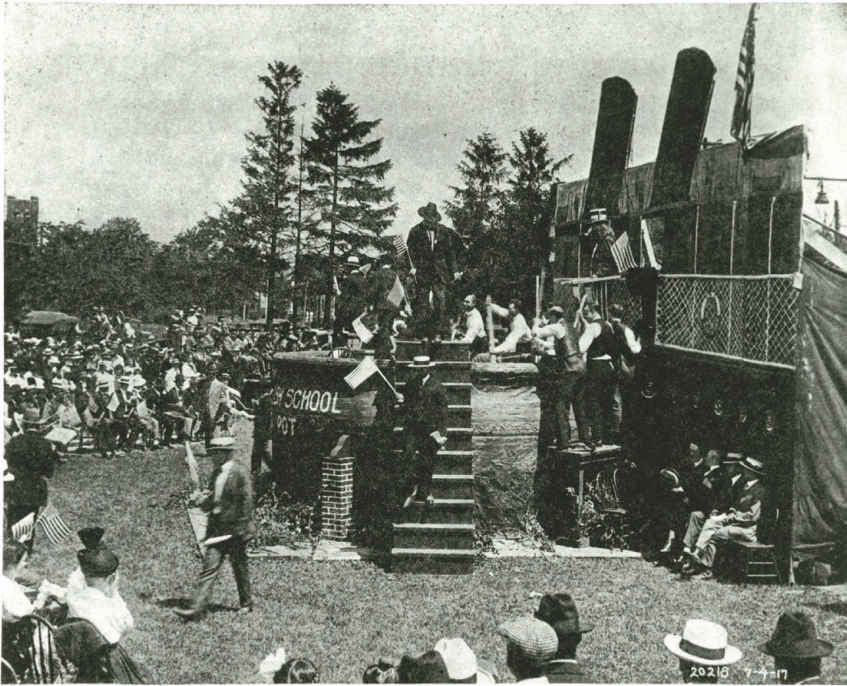
The English classroom has historically been an important site for addressing the conflicts brought on by increasing linguistic and cultural diversity. . . . Americanization workers embraced a vision of the US as a culturally homogenous and monolithic nation, and they encouraged the immigrant to embrace this vision too. (pp. 401-402)

The positioning of linguistic difference as an affront to American homogeneity is something CRT scholars might view as a linguistic front for advancing white normativity and supremacy. In the minds of many Americanizers, “[i]lliteracy is a marker of foreignness; therefore, eliminating illiteracy became in many ways synonymous with eliminating foreign thoughts, languages, and beliefs” (Ne-

Camp, 2014, p. 82). Literacy instruction and assessment served as eliminative technologies within broader progressive racist ecologies, purging foreign difference; or as disciplinary mechanisms of “linguistic containment” geared toward “quarantining” linguistic difference (Matsuda, 2006, p. 641) and promoting what Mathew Gomes (Chapter 6, this collection) describes as monolingualist “English linguistic imperialism.” In Nick Otten’s (1980) account, “the public schools were, in the cities, filled with immigrants, who were treated like deviant persons or patients who had to be made undeviant or cured” (p. 42). Assimilation efforts provided a means of regulating and recuperating otherwise “alien” populations. Progressive racism *neutralizes* the non-native threat, in the sense both of disarming that threat and of recreating the foreign in the image of a neutral “native” standard.

This homogenizing impulse is well-represented in the Ford English School. Seeking to “engineer” worker efficiency, Henry Ford established in 1914 an on-site English-language school for immigrant workers at his Highland Park manufacturing complex, working “to weld systematically the diverse groups comprising Ford’s labor force into a standardized, dependable cohort” (Marcus & Segal, 1999, p. 194; see also NeCamp, 2014). Completion of this process was staged through a melting pot-themed graduation ceremony (Figure 1.1): Immigrant workers—wearing “their national garbs and carrying luggage”—descend into an enormous “melting pot,” only to emerge transformed, their clothing replaced with matching suits, their luggage substituted with hand-held American flags (Marcus & Segal, 1999, p. 194). The Ford English School becomes the forge in which immigrant difference is burned away, refashioned to match Ford’s specifications for American sameness. This process parallels Michael Omi and Howard Winant’s (2015) observations about the complex and conditional promise of inclusion in the United States: Framings of inclusion may “seem to liquidate racial difference and thus freedom and democracy, to deny deep historical injustice, and to insist on universalizing the dominant—white—culture. . . . The offer of inclusion may be a Faustian bargain, in which one (or even a group) achieves acceptance at the price of deracination” (p. 23). As the Ford English School demonstrates, the English classroom is one historical space in which this “liquidation” can occur.

Along these lines, Gallagher (2002) observes that early *EJ* featured content that was part of “the Americanization movement, which aimed to enact the ‘melting pot’ myth by extracting or suppressing difference in favor of a homogeneous ‘Americanness’” (endnote 10, p. 200; see also Brass, 2012; Dayton-Wood, 2008; NeCamp, 2014). In the sections that follow, I build on this observation: A social justice-oriented reconsideration of *EJ* between 1912 and 1935 reveals the presence of progressive racist assumptions at work in classroom literacy instruction and assessment described in that journal.



THE "MELTING POT" OF THE ENGLISH SCHOOL OF THE FORD MOTOR COMPANY AT DETROIT

Figure 1.1. Melting Pot Ceremony at Ford English School, July 4, 1917. Photo reprinted from the Collections of The Henry Ford. Gift of Ford Motor Company. All rights reserved.

JOURNAL INFORMATION AND METHODS

From 1912 through 1935, *EJ* published 24 volumes (240 issues, total). *EJ*'s content included research articles, commentaries, NCTE meeting proceedings, committee reports, letters, reviews, round tables, editorials, periodical digests, short stories, plays, and poetry—content composed by public and private school educators (and occasionally students), as well as college professors. To identify relevant articles through JSTOR, I read the titles of *EJ* articles published between 1912 and 1935, and also identified relevant articles through keyword searches, using terms related to progressive racism (e.g., “race,” “native,” “foreign,” “alien,” “Americanization”). My work was further supported by existing scholarship identifying assimilation-relevant articles within *EJ* (e.g., Dayton-Wood, 2008; Gallagher, 2002; NeCamp, 2014). Reading through select *EJ* articles, I attended to progressive racist content *and* its relationship to assessment. Importantly, relevant *EJ* articles often discussed “writing” as part of “literacy,” or as an

extension of “reading” and “speaking” (e.g., Thorngate, 1920, p. 127). To more closely reflect the textured ways assessment was discussed within *EJ*, my analysis references not only “writing,” but also “reading,” “speech,” and “language use.”

Because of the wide (and subtle) variety of ways that assessment, assimilation, race, ethnicity, immigration, and nationality can be represented or referenced, it is difficult (perhaps impossible) to identify precisely the full number of relevant texts within *EJ*. (For instance, a search for “native” within JSTOR’s *EJ* holdings yields 403 results; “examination,” 848.) For this reason, the analysis undertaken below aims at being suggestive rather than comprehensive, providing a nuanced (albeit partial) textually grounded account of the ways progressive racism is manifested or supported within the pages of *EJ*; it does not cover all the ways *EJ* contributors participated in (or militated against) racial injustice. This account is supplemented by in-depth readings of two *EJ* articles—Helen Louise Cohen’s (1913) “The Foreigner in Our Schools: Some Aspects of the Problem in New York,” and Carroll Edgar Brown’s (1931) “Foreign Language Errors of Chicago Children”—each providing a useful case for sustained analysis.

RACE, LANGUAGE, AND IMMIGRATION IN *EJ*, 1912-1935

Between 1912 and 1935, *EJ* featured content associating race, language, and progress (or regress) that might be thought of as providing a supportive conceptual infrastructure for progressive racist sentiment. For example, Claudia E. Crumpton (1917) of Girls’ Technical Institute in Montevallo, Alabama, claims that putative errors in (white) language use can be partly blamed on non-white speech:

We found that the most embarrassing deficiency, even among many of our cultured people, is a tendency toward slovenliness of speech. I might say in passing that, while much of this is due to mere public tolerance, much is also due to the influence of negro dialect, to the imitation of the negro just for fun, and to the children’s imitation of the nurse’s speech. (p. 96)

Positioned as a kind of linguistic contagion, “negro dialect” infects “even . . . our *cultured* people” with cultural deficiencies and defects. Something like the opposite process is suggested by Philip Stevens (1916), a teacher at Santa Monica High School in Santa Monica, California, who treats his Filipino students’ written responses to English poetry as indicative of “the possibilities of English literature for stimulating the intellect of eastern peoples” (p. 253) or, as Stevens later puts it, “the oriental mind” (p. 256)—commentary consistent with the co-

lonialist mentality described at greater length by Harms (Chapter 3, this collection). Despite their differences, Crumpton (1917) and Stevens (1916) converge on a shared vantage: Whether writing from the perspective of the English-using “occident” or discussing the speech of “*our* cultured people,” they take whiteness as a baseline and benchmark.

It might not surprise us, then, that during this same period, *EJ* featured content describing immigrants and “foreigners” in terms of linguistic or racial-national deficits to be managed—even provisionally overcome—through education. Here, racial-national difference constitutes deviance from (or threat to) the “native” white norm; linguistic sameness affords a correction for this deviance, a response to the threat of alterity (NeCamp, 2014). As Dayton-Wood (2008) writes, “Educators believed that English language instruction would serve as a cultural unifier to bring immigrants and native-born Americans together, creating a coherent national identity through ‘the use of one language and of the same ideals’ (Thorngate 124)” (p. 404; see also Cody, 1918). In discussing this homogenization project, some contributors to *EJ*, like Omaha, Nebraska educator Ella Thorngate (1920), referenced the image of the “melting pot” (p. 123; see also NeCamp, 2014).

While many *EJ* contributors describe the monolingual, monocultural aspirations of Americanizing assimilation as a kind of benevolent good, it is not hard to detect a note of nativist anxiety underlying their goals. Frank Cody (1918)—an Assistant Superintendent of Schools in Detroit, Michigan—sounds this note of menace:

These [foreigners] have rapidly colonized among previous arrivals of their race and have changed nothing but their habits of work. Ignorant of the English language, of American customs and ideals, they have helped to swell the so-called “hyphenated” class. These conditions existed before, but it took the present world-conflict to bring forcibly home to thinking Americans *the danger within the country*. (pp. 615-616, emphasis mine)

Writing after America’s entrance into World War I, Cody is sensitive to the violent threat of nationalist factionalism. He appears to locate this danger in the incomplete linguistic and cultural assimilation of immigrants, who remain “hyphenated” Americans (in contrast, apparently, to “full” or “native” white Americans). This line of thinking was not Cody’s alone. NeCamp (2014) reminds us that the Great War coincided with “a call that framed immigrants as actual threats to American democracy but that displaced this threat onto immigrants’ literacy. . . Because ‘illiteracy’ and not ‘immigration’ was marked as the problem,

immigrants' education was a matter of national and cultural security" (p. 34).

Cody (1918) holds ("native" white) Americans partly accountable for national dis-integration: "The development of these foreign colonies [within America] was natural. The American, even under the guise of benevolent paternalism, seldom offered anything more encouraging than *words* to the newcomers" (p. 616, emphasis mine). Cody's text seems to imagine the "foreign colonies" of immigrant-dominant communities established within the United States as neutral or benign masses within the American body politic—masses which, without intervention, might metastasize into insurgencies. Schooling provides the socio-cultural machinery for domesticating and neutralizing this foreign-born danger (see pages 616 and 622). The idea of offering little more "than words to the newcomers" is intended to underscore the insubstantial nature of (white) American outreach to immigrants, but when viewed within the context of the English classroom as an Americanization apparatus, Cody's words appear freighted with unintended meaning. Within the Americanizing vision, immigrants *are offered words* as the keys to assimilation: Instruction in and assessment of reading, writing, and speaking provided the basis for reversing what Cody might consider immigrant ignorance of English. This knowledge of *words*, in turn, afforded access to American culture, believed by some commentators to be locked away in English-language literature (e.g., Cohen, 1913; Moriarty, 1921). Linguistic sameness, it seems, was believed to pave the way to racionational sameness.

The corollary of this belief is important: Because differences in language are imagined not as natural and normal sites of difference, but instead as malfunctioning opportunities for sameness, departures from Standard English were viewed by some scholars as signs of immigrant deficiency or under-development. Frederick Martin (1921), Director of Speech Improvement for the New York City Board of Education, identifies "foreign accent" as a speech defect—in fact, "the largest class [of speech defect] with which we have to deal in the public schools of our great city" (p. 27). Linguistic difference is reified as a kind of disability; sameness is the treatment, and the sign one has been cured.

Relatedly, in outlining a general program for the improvement of American speech, Columbia University professor Krapp (1918) excludes outright as special cases "persons who cannot be said actually to have acquired American speech" (p. 89). "In all our cities," Krapp tells readers,

there are great masses of people of foreign tradition who apparently speak English, but who often speak it with traces of German, or Polish, or Yiddish, or of any one of a dozen tongues, in their manner of speech. These persons are imperfectly assimilated, and are *like children* in the sense that they

are still in the process of acquiring the language. (pp. 89-90, emphasis mine)

Assimilation, for Krapp, is a function of the removal of traces of foreign tongues and manners of speech. Krapp's infantilizing rhetoric, which casts "imperfectly assimilated" language use as childlike, is shared by Mary L. Moriarty (1921)—an educator at the South Philadelphia High School for Girls in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania—who describes "foreigner[s]" as "embryo Americans" (p. 576). Tellingly, Moriarty celebrates Americanization in colonialist terms:

There are hundreds of foreign families represented in our school. The books brought yearly into these hundreds of homes . . . number over 16,000. Think of it! 16,000 books, largely by English and American writers, 16,000 books dealing with Anglo-Saxon ideals, Anglo-Saxon institutions, Anglo-Saxon modes of thought, Anglo-Saxon attitudes toward life, brought into the very heart of the foreign colony! Do you think we can possibly overestimate the value of such a factor as an Americanizing influence? (p. 580; see also Gallagher, 2002)

Through this framing of foreign-language communities as "foreign colonies" within American borders—a framing adopted by other *EJ* contributors (e.g., Cody, 1918; Thorngate, 1920)—immigrants are imagined as linguistically, socially, and culturally bringing with them a foreign land. Their very unassimilated presence territorializes American space, (re)claiming it for an Old World in which Anglo-Saxon language and culture have little power or purchase. Benevolent paternalism, as Cody (1918) might put it, requires rescuing the benighted foreigner from ignorance. Words are the means of rescue, harboring within them ideals, institutions, modes of thought, and attitudes toward life. Through instruction in English, and assessment that detects and roots out foreign language "errors," the foreign colony is brought under American(ized) control.

CASE 1: PROGRESS AND SUPER-PERFECTION IN COHEN'S "THE FOREIGNER IN OUR SCHOOLS: SOME ASPECTS OF THE PROBLEM IN NEW YORK"

Progressive racism need not advocate total eradication of immigrant culture. Cohen (1913)—a teacher at Washington Irving High School in New York City—provides an example of what we might consider a less virulent strand of progressive racism in early *EJ*. Dayton-Wood (2008), for instance, seems to cite Cohen's work as one example of "the humanitarian branch of the American-

ization movement, which treated immigrants' existing knowledge and cultural heritage as important classroom resources" (p. 408). Indeed, Cohen's work *does* appear in many ways to match this description. Yet as I will show, belonging to the Americanization movement's "humanitarian branch" does not preclude the presence of progressive racist roots.

At the outset of her text, Cohen (1913) makes clear that, "Foreigners arrive and remain in our city at the rate of 800 every twenty-four hours. It is our problem to assimilate these latter-day pilgrims" (p. 618). Cohen does not consider illiteracy a problem endemic to immigrants; she also does not advocate a wholly eliminative approach to assimilation. Speaking of "the immigrant," Cohen submits, "He [sic] is always encouraged to conserve the best of his own heritage for the benefit of the country which he is to make his home" (1913, p. 619)—an idea recalled in Cohen's concluding line: "The conservation of all that is worthy in the old life is undertaken as a foundation on which to base the structure of the new" (p. 629). Nested within this promise, though, is an implied caveat. Immigrants themselves are not fully at liberty to determine what is best or of value within their heritage. Student language use and thought must be externally assessed and remediated. Further, while the "best" of an immigrant's heritage is permitted (or extracted) for national benefit, the *rest* is promised no such protection. Speaking of the "foreigners" in her classroom, Cohen cites "peculiar idioms" and "a very marked distortion of certain English sounds" (1913, p. 621) as characteristic problems of "the speech of the young people with whom we have to deal" (pp. 620-621). Quoting Joseph Villiers Denney, Cohen announces the *raison d'être* for her course as "the creation of *universal intelligibility*, on high levels of thought, among the multitudes who are to be self-governing" (1913, p. 621, emphasis mine). Against this universalizing backdrop, the problem of assimilating "foreigners" requires (among other things) elimination of language errors—defined against an undisclosed standard of "universally intelligible" English.

Importantly, Cohen (1913) does not restrict her work to inculcating linguistic correctness, but prizes also "the development in the pupil of habits that will *fit* him [sic] to be of most service to the community" (p. 622, emphasis mine). Concerned that formal examination practices can undermine "the community motive in classroom instruction" (1913, p. 621), Cohen maintains that "such examinations become less harmful as they are recognized as an administrative device, or as they are framed to test habits of mind and character, rather than to call for some arbitrarily determined body of information" (p. 622). Factual recall fails as a standard for examination because it is not thorough (or invasive) enough to account for *student mindsets*—a more proper target for managing the "problem" of the "foreigner in our schools." This distinction might not surprise

us, insofar as historically “[l]iteracy instruction was closely associated with larger cultural goals, and writing teachers were as much or more interested in *whom* they want their students to be as in *what* they want their students to write” (Faigley, 1992, p. 113, emphasis in original). Cohen (1913) is by no means alone in her concern for what Lester Faigley (1992) calls “subjectives—the selves we want our students to be” (p. 114): “habits of mind” are also advocated by the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* (CWPA et al., 2011). While closer consideration of the *Framework’s* “habits” is beyond this chapter’s scope, we might pause—in light of Cohen’s “habits”—to question where they might be guided by the assumption that students are unfit or deficient, save for the curative effects of the classroom.

Cohen (1913) seems to view classroom writing tasks as more appropriate sites for monitoring and assessing student thinking, and she presents excerpts of two such tasks, each detailing “What the Foreign Child Can Contribute to the English Work in American Schools” (pp. 625-626). Of the “foreign child,” the first student-composed excerpt judges that, “He [sic] is a problem to the teacher, for she must drive away the foreign idioms to which he clings. But the *determination* with which the foreign child sets about his work is marked” (as cited in Cohen, 1913, p. 626, emphasis in original). Here, we see that Cohen’s student has internalized one of the key precepts of progressive racism. Societal belonging and successful schooling are predicated on the discipline or removal of the “foreign” tongue. As the title of Cohen’s article suggests, the “foreign” student—no matter how *determined*—is a “problem” for the teacher to solve.

Students appear to be trained by Cohen (1913) both to devalue non-Standard aspects of their own speech and to root out these “errors” in the speech or writing of their peers: “The girls correct one another whenever they are conscious that a mistake has been made, and the teacher is able to set matters straight in the same spirit as the girls without too much of the *ex cathedra* attitude” (pp. 626-627, emphasis in original). Students internalize the search for perfection—something we might associate with the “habits of mind and character” foundational to progressive racism. In the words of the second student excerpted by Cohen:

The purpose of the study of English, as of every other branch, is the progress of civilization, and civilization will attain its culmination only when the perfect things, the traditions, the ideas, and the customs of every corner of the world are combined to form what might be called super-perfection. (as cited in Cohen, 1913, p. 626)

Expressing reservations about her student’s prose style, Cohen endorses its under-

lying sentiment, writing that “under the fustian there is an idea” (1913, p. 626). And, indeed, the idea is one that harmonizes with Cohen’s own assimilationist work: In this passing description of the purpose of English, Cohen’s student presents something like a global variant of progressive racism. Progress, in this description, is not a function of heterogeneity and cosmopolitanism, but instead *sameness* at greater scale. (At its most concentrated, progressive racism—as I have been discussing it—could be thought of as a kind of local super-perfectionism, recalibrating difference in pursuit of an imagined “perfect” or “universal” white ideal.) The aim of super-perfection is (perfect) cultural homogenization—with the seizure and synthesis of what is “perfect” and, presumably, with the removal of all that falls short of that standard.

This pursuit of super-perfection strikes a chord with Cohen’s (1913) reminders that “the best” of the “old life” can be preserved. The symbol of this seemingly more inclusive model of assimilation might well be not a melting pot but a sieve, straining out of students all that is deemed linguistically or culturally inferior—all that is less than “the best.” Consider: Cohen appears to offer, as an example of valuable heritage, “a knowledge of European literature” (read: non-English “foreign” literature) possessed by some of her students, and mentions that “occasionally this familiarity is evident in their composition work” (1913, p. 629). Even here, though, such knowledge can prove double-edged. “Unfortunately,” Cohen recalls of one student’s composition,

the young writer had read Gorky’s dismal *Nachtasyl*. Not exactly food for the growing girl, you will say, but the gray art had passed into her soul, along with a great deal of literature of similar content, and there was no way of erasing these ugly phases of society from her consciousness. (1913, p. 629)

Note how student writing is imagined as a window into the “soul” or “consciousness” of the student; not just *what* students write but *who* they are. Note, too, how progressive racism—even at its most tolerant—remains deeply ambivalent about “foreign” culture. Knowledge of European literature can be enriching; it can also act as a cultural contagion, infecting student mindsets. Put in Moriarty’s (1921) idiom, the wrong foreign (literary) substance can have a teratogenic influence on “embryo Americans” (p. 576)—an outcome in stark contrast to proposed uses of *English-language* literature in promoting “Anglo-Saxon ideals” and “modes of thought” (p. 580), or providing “race ideals on which to work” (Cohen, 1913, p. 623), or (to revise Stevens, 1916) “stimulating the intellect of [foreign] peoples” (p. 253). Under progressive racism, the classroom becomes cultural quarantine and crucible for fear that, without proper supervision and expert assessment, the Old World might contaminate the New.

CASE 2: “LOW I. Q., STREET-PLAYING LIVE WIRES” IN BROWN’S “FOREIGN LANGUAGE ERRORS OF CHICAGO CHILDREN”

A more forbidding approach to progressive racism is evident in the work of Chicago educator Brown (1931), who takes assessment as central to effective instruction and student success in composition:

It is important for the teacher to know the mistakes his students make in order to teach what they need, and if the students find that they are getting what they need enthusiasm can be developed that will materially improve writing and lessen the teacher’s burden. (p. 469)

Asserting that “[f]oreign language errors are the chief difficulty of city children” (1931, p. 469), Brown not only assesses his students’ language use by cataloguing perceived errors in writing, he also taxonomizes these errors by race. Apparently drawing data from student compositions and speech over a six-year period (1931, p. 469), Brown assures readers that “[m]istakes of various racial groups have been classified as well as possible” (p. 470). These classifications map not only the foreign idioms Brown believes necessary to drive away, but also what Brown regards as innate or essential characteristics of each racial group—characteristics offered, seemingly, as partial explanations for the errors identified in student writings.

Brown’s (1931) language is laden with hereditarian assumptions about innate intelligence: “They [Brown’s students] were low I.Q., street-playing live wires whose names read like the list of European delegates to the League of Nations” (p. 469). Disaggregating students into racionational types, Brown’s analysis is filled with racist caricatures of, for instance, “[t]he temperamental, hard-working Polish” (1931, p. 472), “[t]he grinning, fighting, likeable Irish” (p. 472), and “[t]he soft-spoken, energetic, and more or less hard-boiled Italian” (p. 473). Adding to these implied racial explanations for linguistic deficiency, Brown sometimes offers an analysis of student English-language errors rooted in foreign language use itself. For example, Brown not only argues, “It is probably more difficult for the slow, sociable Chinese to learn how to write acceptable English than for any other race,” but also explicitly alleges that familiarity with Chinese language impairs English-language learning: “Any child who can talk volubly in Chinese will find the use of any tense but the present very difficult” (1931, p. 470). Along these lines, Brown claims, “Of all races, the children *who speak Jewish or hear it much* make the greatest number of mistakes” (1931, p. 470, emphasis mine)—gauged partly by “errors . . . from student papers” (p. 471). The slippage here is important: Race is defined by Brown in terms of linguistic participation (children are raced “Jewish” by “speak[ing] Jewish”), and

the very fact of hearing “Jewish” degrades or pollutes English language use by increasing error frequency. This view of speech as racial(izing) corruption echoes Crumpton’s (1917) anxieties about “negro dialect” (p. 96): Linguistic intermixing endangers the purity or correctness of language and culture.

The racialized classification scheme promoted by Brown (1931) both facilitates teacher-led correction of student writing, and also provides a basis for students to pursue local super-perfection by correcting (to say nothing of publicly debasing) the work of their peers. Brown informs his readers that his “low I.Q.” foreign language students are painfully aware of their own linguistic infirmities, and believe language difference results in poverty and incites racist antipathy:

They [students] were quite sensitive about foreign language mistakes because they knew their parents’ lack of ability to speak English properly was one of the major causes of their low incomes. They agreed that one of the reasons such opprobrious names as Wop, Honyock, and Greaser were applied to their peoples was that others outside their racial groups found their peculiar language expressions so difficult to understand, and that it irritated them. The class enthusiastically undertook to teach each other about foreign language errors. (pp. 469-470)

The method of this enthusiastic peer-teaching, Brown makes clear, is publicly shaming the foreign-language errors of others, possibly while voicing invectives. The underlying logic of Brown’s approach to assessment, then, appears to be that it enables teachers to pursue more (racially) targeted strategies for driving out student errors, while also inculcating in students a) the belief that non-Standard language use signifies inferiority, and b) the drive to police and eradicate imperfections in the language use of their peers. Like Cohen, Brown cultivates in students a kind of progressive subjectivity, invested in correcting (or, we might say, *perfecting*) others. Here, each embryo American becomes a taunting pedagogue, not only internalizing Brown’s discriminating tastes, but also theatrically externalizing them.

In this regard, Brown’s (1931) concluding paragraph is worth quoting in its entirety:

In our mixed city classes there are few mistakes common to the whole group, and after some drill on these, especially verb tenses and prepositions, students may help each other when compositions are written under the laboratory method during class time. Each student becomes so sensitive about making mistakes that others do not make that improvement comes naturally and promptly, especially if sufficient publicity is

given to the errors. There is so much privacy about teacher markings that are not followed up, that it can never be as effective as a corridor call, “Jimmie’s a Bohunk. Jimmie’s a dumb Bohunk. He said, ‘. . .’” (p. 474)

Shame and shaming are, in Brown’s account, important techniques for an assessment-instruction cycle that isolates, publicizes, and discourages non-Standard language use. The “corridor call” branding “Jimmie a Bohunk” for something undisclosed that “[h]e said” is explicitly positioned as a public complement to the private markings teachers (perhaps inefficaciously) provide as feedback to student writing. Students, sensitive to the censure accompanying language errors, self-regulate so as to not “mak[e] mistakes that others do not make”; where this self-regulatory system fails, teacher markings and student corridor calls provide the necessary corrective.

Readers never learn what Jimmie said. Instead, Brown elides Jimmie’s words, recounting only his peer’s public rebuke. This, I think, provides an appropriate figure for the erasure of student voice under progressive racism. The words of Jimmie’s accuser are recorded; after all, these words supplement, and maybe stand in for, the kind of racist marking of language Brown advocates. In place of Jimmie’s words, though, we are left only with a void—a written absence speaking to the notion that “foreign language errors” render communication unintelligible, emptied of linguistic meaning. Under progressive racism, Jimmie is silenced.

CONCLUSION: “PEOPLE WHO CAN’T SPEAK AMERICAN”

Cohen (1913) and Brown (1931) structure their classrooms around a kind of inclusion. Social justice historiography aids us in seeing that, appearances to the contrary, these models of inclusion resonate, in at least one key respect, with exclusionary nativism. Both, in their way, pivot around the axis of sameness, assessing difference and deviance against an imagined “native” white norm or ideal. More generally, returning to early *EJ* articles clarifies that the management of racionational difference can be counted among the founding preoccupations of that journal and, by extension, the emerging discipline it was created to support. Revisiting this period in our disciplinary history affords us a trenchant reminder that even ostensibly tolerant approaches to difference in writing instruction and assessment can rehearse the lesson of Ford’s Melting Pot: Acceptance is no antidote to injustice, when by *E Pluribus Unum* we mean that the diverse many must be melted down to match a homogenizing standard.

Social justice historiography of this kind can support the growing movement in writing assessment scholarship to attend sensitively to questions of race and

racism; it can also assist us in engaging critically with more general questions about literacy and educational inequality—to say nothing of continual anxieties about American educational underperformance—that have long been fixtures of public, legal, and policy debates about schooling. This chapter is intended as one exchange within a broader conversation that locates social justice at the heart of writing assessment historiography. In focusing on the journal as a kind of disciplinary space, the example of social justice historiography undertaken in this chapter—a partial re-examination of race and (progressive) racism in *EJ* from 1912 to 1935—provides one methodological avenue for exploring questions of justice and injustice in the history of writing assessment, but this avenue is not the only one available to us. For instance, Keith L. Harms (Chapter 3, this collection) and Sean Molloy (Chapter 2, this collection) demonstrate what is possible when we direct our justice-oriented historical inquiry to other sites, such as specific assessment practices and institutions.

Furthermore, the kind of work undertaken here in my example could profitably be extended forward in time (considering *EJ* after 1935), broadened to include other disciplinary sites (e.g., other NCTE publications), or reoriented toward disciplinary coverage of particular events, figures, artifacts, or ecologies believed by scholars deserving of deeper scrutiny. Alternatively, scholarship building on the example provided here could return to the period of *EJ* discussed, broaden the terms of inquiry to more fully consider injustices along other axes of identity, and examine how they intersect with what I have discussed here as progressive racism. More capaciously, historical engagement with racial injustice and writing assessment could include detailed consideration of a host of adjacent developments and debates in law, policy, politics, and popular culture—developments like the famous Ann Arbor “Black English” case and decision (e.g., Ball & Lardner, 1997), the so-called “Bell Curve Debate” (e.g., Jacoby & Glauberman, 1995), or the race- and testing-related history of immigration restriction in the US (e.g., Schrag, 2011). Without rehearsing these connections at length, though, I conclude by briefly discussing one way a social justice historiography for writing assessment can help us engage with questions of social justice confronting us in the present.

Recent years testify to the popular re-emergence (or endurance) of rhetorics explicitly advocating the quarantine of racionational difference. For this reason, there remains a pressing need for scholarship that identifies, explicates, or challenges progressive racism and nativism. Consider this recent example from the 2016 United States presidential election cycle, documented in *The Boston Globe*:

“Trump said to watch your precincts. I’m going to go, for sure,”
said Steve Webb, a 61-year-old carpenter from Fairfield, Ohio.

“I’ll look for . . . well, it’s called racial profiling. Mexicans. Syrians. *People who can’t speak American*,” he said. “I’m going to go right up behind them. I’ll do everything legally. I want to see if they are accountable. I’m not going to do anything illegal. I’m going to make them a little bit nervous.” (Viser & Jan, October 15, 2016, emphasis mine)

Setting aside Webb’s apparent endorsement of race-based voter intimidation, his construction of “racial profiling” offers important insights. Like some *EJ* contributors discussed above, Webb a) collapses national origin with racial identity, and b) treats language use as an index of racial belonging and—as Cody (1918) might have put it—“the danger within the country” (p. 616). And while decidedly extra-educational, what Webb discusses is, in its own way, a form of assessment: scrutinizing linguistic performance to draw inferences about the performer, to guide intervention, and to test accountability (i.e., “see if they’re accountable”). Webb’s shibboleth for racial belonging is *American* language use: Failure to speak English, it seems, brands one an interloper. For Webb, language betrays group belonging, much in the way that, for Brown (1931), “speaking Jewish” discloses racial affiliation.

Social justice historiography provides one means of excavating long-standing assumptions about language, race, and assessment that authorize and normalize perspectives like these—assumptions foundational to progressive racism and to the nativist profiling Webb advocates. The advancement of social justice requires our thinking be ecological (Inoue, 2015; Molloy, Chapter 3, this collection)—concerned with the diffuse assumptions, practices, relations, and background structures that shape (and are shaped by) assessment. Our critical focus cannot be limited to our classrooms alone—a point persuasively made by Burns, Cream, and Dougherty (Chapter 8, this collection). Questions of racial belonging and assessment have grave importance inside *and outside* the academy. The promise of social justice historiography is that it not only draws attention to writing–assessment–based injustices, but that it also affords us insights into the structures and assumptions underpinning those injustices—structures and assumptions that extend beyond our classroom walls.

Racial justice-oriented scholarship, though, is only one historiographic approach of many necessary, if we are to rewrite the past, present, and future of writing assessment. Even the dullest historiography cannot help but be incisive, carving in the direction of its assumptions and commitments. For this reason, additional critical perspectives (including those focused on class, decoloniality, disability, gender, sexuality, and intersectionality) are needed to help ensure our historiography can cut to the core of injustices experienced along multiple over-

lapping and intersecting social axes. Our assumptions and commitments matter. Social justice historiography for writing assessment intervenes productively in our “sense of reality” (Weiler, 2011), redefining *who* counts in our assessments and in society—and *how*. If it is true that injustice is structural—evident in, and normalized by, everyday assumptions and practices—then the ways we write and remember history can support the work of subverting unjust assessment ecologies by undercutting the (hi)stories sustaining them.

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