Midterm exam

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Option 1

“The saga of European immigration has long been held up as proof of the openness of American society … and the robust health of American democracy. ‘Ethnic inclusion,’ ‘ethnic mobility,’ and ‘ethnic assimilation’ on the European model set the standard upon which ‘America,’ as an ideal, is presumed to work; they provide the normative experience against which others are measured. But this pretty story suddenly fades once one recognizes how crucial Europeans’ racial status as ‘free white persons’ was to their gaining entrance in the first place; how profoundly dependent their racial inclusion was upon the racial exclusion of others … and how completely intertwined were the prospects of becoming American and becoming Caucasian.”

--Matthew Frye Jacobson, Whiteness of a Different Color

In this quote Jacobson is making the point that being a white male and being American are different because of the different background of these people. He is saying that although the Europeans are white that moved to America they faced many problems with racial profiling. For example, during that time in American you can be white but would be treated in a worst way just because of your culture’s background. Like being Irish or Jewish you would be decimated against by other whites as they held more power in the country during that time. This is extremely against what the American Dream is all about as those people left their home land to find a better life in American only to be decimated against. This puts them at a disadvantage as they don’t have the same opportunity as others just because of their culture and that is very much against the American Dream. This work by Jacobson makes me think of The Way We Never Were by Stephanie Coontz as both works made me think of the American dream in a darker way as people tried to come to America to make a better life they faced the challenge of having to overcome decimation. As Coontz believed that racism and greed was park of the American life and Jacobson’s work supports this as he describes how people had to face racism in everyday life in America. Also both works use examples of how the European families had to face problems with Coontz going into more details about how

OPTION 2

“Between 1800 and 1850, the proportion of servants to white households doubled, to about one in nine…

“For every nineteenth century middle-class family that protected its wife and child within the family circle, then, there was an Irish or a German girl scrubbing floors in that middle-class home, a Welsh boy mining coal to keep the home-baked goodies warm, a black girl doing the family laundry, a black mother and child picking cotton to be makes into clothes for the family, and a Jewish or an Italian daughter in a sweatshop making ‘ladies’ dresses or artificial flowers for the family to purchase.”

--Stephanie Coontz, The Way We Never Were

In this quote Coontz is explaining how the middle class family of American was a close family that protected the children, then this goes into how the European families had to have their children work. The end of the quote is interesting as its saying the European and African American families would be the ones that make the products for the other family so its saying that the white family makes the others do the work they don’t want to do. This quote relates to later parts of Coontz work as she goes more into how people during that time use to think that the immigrants would ruin their way of life and traditional values. It’s interesting that those immigrants were the ones doing all the heaving lifting while the traditional families complained thinking that was somehow going to ruin their way of life. I think nostalgia plays a big role in keeping the American Dream alive as people tend to view things of the past in a positive way so they tend to think that everything use to be great. I think a lot of people think the American Dream is dead because they are looking at the past with too much nostalgia. I think there is a way as in my personal belief that the American Dream is still alive and it hasn’t change that much it’s just that people are looking too fondly at the past. This work by Coontz reminds me of the reading on Columbus as people want to look back with nostalgia of good times and not really look into what really happened. Both are great examples of how when you let nostalgia control the way you think you will always ignore the facts to make the past look better.