

## Introduction: Perpetual Foreigners and Model Minorities: Naturalizing Jewish and Asian Americans

*At the front end of the American meritocratic machine, Asians are replacing Jews as the No. 1 group. They are winning the science prizes and scholarships. Jews, meanwhile, at our moment of maximum triumph at the back end of the meritocracy, the midlife, top-job end, are discovering sports and the virtues of being well-rounded. Which is cause and which is effect here is an open question. But as Asians become America's new Jews, Jews are becoming . . . Episcopalians.*

—NICHOLAS LEHMANN

*Over the last few years, Asian Americans have come to be known as the New Jews. The label is honorific. It is meant to accentuate the many parallels between these two groups of immigrants-made-good: Jews started out as outsiders; Asians did too. Jews dedicated themselves to schooling; Asians too. Jews climbed the barriers and crowded the Ivies; Asians too. Jews climbed faster than any other minority in their time; Asians too. Jews enjoy Chinese food; Asians—well, you get the picture. Somewhere in the half-lit region between stereotype and sociology, the notion has taken hold that Asian Americans are “out-Jewing the Jews.”*

—ERIC LIU

Two years after the first Persian Gulf War, Robert Olen Butler's *A Good Scent from a Strange Mountain* was awarded the 1993 Pulitzer Prize in fiction.<sup>1</sup> Centered on Vietnamese refugees, Butler's debut collection of fifteen short stories was praised by critics for its revision of a then-established Vietnam War script. As *New York Times* reviewer George Packer averred, each first-person story “is told . . . from the viewpoint of a Vietnamese transplanted from the Mekong Delta to the Louisiana bayou. . . . The Americans have become foils; it's the Vietnamese who are now at the center, haunted by the past, ambivalent about their hosts, suffering sexual torments, [and] seeking a truce in their various wars.”<sup>2</sup> If the Mekong Delta functions as the geographic epicenter not only for the American War in Vietnam but also for a 1960s Vietnamese civil war

between north and south, then the Louisiana bayou is an analogously apt site, reminiscent of an 1860s North/South American Civil War.<sup>3</sup> And, if Americans were haunted by the unresolved Vietnam conflict, then the Vietnamese protagonists in *A Good Scent from a Strange Mountain* are similarly traumatized by war and relocation. By concentrating on the embodied remnants and affective reminders of war, Butler, a Vietnam War Army linguist-turned-author, joined the cultural ranks of other late-century Vietnam War-inspired productions like Michael Herr's *Dispatches* (1977), Oliver Stone's *Platoon* (1986), *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989), *Heaven and Earth* (1993), and Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* (1993).

Even so, the *New York Times* review underscores a theme that is not war-specific in *A Good Scent from a Strange Mountain*. Specifically, at stake is a transplantation motif, epitomized by the collection's eleventh story, "Snow," which features a Vietnamese refugee and a relocated Jewish lawyer. Principally focused on two separate conversations that take place on Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve, respectively, "Snow" is nostalgic, bittersweet, and sentimental. In many ways an ideally coordinated pair, Giàu (the Vietnamese female protagonist) and Mr. Cohen (a Jewish émigré) share multiple coherences. They have both lost fathers in war; they are each without a partner; and, most significant, they are two U.S. "transplants." Combining interior monologues with back-and-forth dialogues about homelands, migration, and familial loss, "Snow" begins with a meeting of strangers and concludes with a possible love match. And, though the story takes place in the United States, the discussions between Giàu and Mr. Cohen are chiefly concerned with their respective countries of origin.

Hence, "Snow" is a conversational tale, and its plot is accordingly driven and characterized by "refugee talk." Through two geopolitical conflicts, the Vietnam War and the Second World War, Giàu and Mr. Cohen forge a connection by means of displacement and relocation. At the same time, the non-Asian American, non-Jewish American Butler accesses a legible, comparative ethnoracial frame of socioeconomic "kinship" that goes beyond the purview of foreign policy conflict or domestic negotiation. In so doing, Butler's "Snow" employs an oft-used ethnic comparison that marries "perpetual foreigners" and "model minorities."

## “Free White Persons”: Naturalized Subjects and Ineligible Aliens

Giàu and Mr. Cohen are “transplants” (or foreigners) who—with the exception of a brief interruption—remain uprooted and unrooted, despite distance, the passage of time, and their American relocation. This uprootedness is foreshadowed by Giàu’s workplace, “The Plantation Hunan,” which “does not look like a restaurant” and is “an old plantation house.”<sup>24</sup> This built palimpsest—an emblem of the antebellum South—is the story’s principal setting and functions as its primary transnational referent. For example, “Hunan” (Mandarin for “south of the lake”) refers to a southeastern central province in the People’s Republic of China. Thus, the Plantation Hunan carries a “southeasterly name” that geographically complements the narrative’s Lake Charles, Louisiana location.

Such cartographic linkages correspond to the protagonist’s own Vietnamese location and U.S. relocation. Indeed, if the Plantation Hunan hearkens back to the American Civil War, then Giàu’s existence as a refugee underscores the dissolution of her former nation-state (South Vietnam/Republic of Vietnam) after the fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975. For World War II refugee Mr. Cohen, the 1939 Nazi invasion of Poland, which is alluded to in “Snow,” renders impossible a consideration of his former home through non-Holocaust frames. Within this dislocated milieu of Louisiana, the Vietnamese protagonist fittingly opines, the Plantation Hunan “must feel like a refugee. It is full of foreign smells, ginger, and Chinese pepper and fried shells for wonton” (126).

Filled with foreign smells, the Plantation Hunan is witness to profound demographic shifts, and its transformation from an “American” to a “Chinese American” site brings to light late twentieth-century immigration and refugee flows composed of an increasing number of Asian bodies (à la Neil Diamond’s *The Jazz Singer*). Like Giàu, the building is a doubly foreign (and alienated) subject. Following suit, though her employers are “very kind,” they “know we are different from each other. They are Chinese and I am Vietnamese . . . but we are both here in Louisiana and they go somewhere with the other Chinese in town” (126). Accordingly, as a “stranger” among “foreigners,” Giàu’s alienated personhood (or alienhood) intersects with an unresolved selfhood vis-à-vis Vietnam and the United States.

Giàu’s sense of nonbelonging foregrounds Mr. Cohen’s seemingly “obvious” naturalized affiliation to the United States. In particular, Mr. Cohen’s perceived Americanness is racially apparent early in the

narrative. At the beginning of “Snow,” Mr. Cohen places a take-out order at the Plantation Hunan, and this act sets the conversational stage for Vietnamese refugee and Jewish exile. Realizing that the order is delayed, Giàu apologizes, telling Mr. Cohen that he “should not have to wait for a long time on Christmas Eve” (129). Mr. Cohen responds, “It’s okay . . . This is not my holiday.” Giàu does not initially comprehend Mr. Cohen’s ethnoreligious allusion, even though he clarifies, “I am Jewish. . . . A Jew doesn’t celebrate Christmas.” Giàu answers, “I thought all Americans celebrated Christmas,” to which Mr. Cohen responds, “Not all. Not exactly.” Giàu then asserts, “It felt a little strange to see this very American man who was not celebrating the holiday” (129). Collectively characterizing “all Americans” and insistent on Mr. Cohen’s “very Americanness,” Giàu unintentionally underscores a principal difference between the two refugees along past naturalization lines.

Expressly, Giàu’s initial reading of Mr. Cohen’s “very Americanness” attests to a proscribed physical “whiteness” (reminiscent of snow), which operates in contrast to Giàu’s own racial identity. Indeed, “Snow” (like *A Good Scent from a Strange Mountain*) is by and large shaped by multiple allusions to Vietnamese culture, practices, and sites, which accordingly mark Giàu as “foreign protagonist.” On another level, Giàu temporarily naturalizes Mr. Cohen, foregrounding a brief reconsideration of the original 1790 Naturalization Law. In particular, Giàu’s naturalization of Mr. Cohen brings to bear the historic conditions that undergird how Americans are legislatively “made” from “foreign material.” What is more, Mr. Cohen’s reaction (“Not all. Not exactly”) underscores asymmetrical (and probationary) relationships between ethnicity, race, and nation.

Such inequalities outline the ethnoracial politics at play in the 1790 Naturalization Act. Focused on converting “aliens” into “citizens,” the first naturalization law stipulated that:

any Alien being a free white person, who shall have resided within the limits and under the jurisdiction of the United States for the term of two years, may be admitted to become a citizen thereof on application to any common law Court of record in any one of the States wherein he shall have resided for the term of one year at least, and making proof to the satisfaction of such Court that he is a person of good character, and taking the oath or affirmation prescribed by law to support the Constitution of the United States, which Oath or Affirmation such Court shall administer, and the

Clerk of such Court shall record such Application, and the proceedings thereon; and thereupon such person shall be considered as a Citizen of the United States.<sup>5</sup>

As is clear in the above passage, the 1790 Naturalization Act establishes residency requirements and legal processes, and necessitates an admittedly open-ended determination of “good character.” In the face of explicit bureaucratic and legal frames, the original naturalization law appreciably commences with race: “free white personhood.” If being “made American” is at once racially inflected, then Giàu’s initial emphasis on Mr. Cohen’s “Americanness” is forged through a *de facto* whiteness. Indeed, Giàu does not ascribe those same terms to her own personhood, which consequently places her outside a white imaginary. In the same way, Giàu indirectly models the exclusionary nature of American citizenship, which from the beginning was constructed via “free white persons” and concomitant whiteness.

Equally significant, though Giàu and Mr. Cohen are “kindred spirits,” they are not so because of equivalent assimilation. Instead, the two are joined through parallel trajectories of alienation as well as divergent historic paths to U.S. naturalization. In this regard, “Snow” introduces the comparative frames at work in the present book, which examines the interplay between citizenship, performance, and immigration policy in the literatures of these two “kindred” groups. Robert Olen Butler’s “outsider” position enables a dominant reading of Jewish and Asian Americans through connective histories of migration, relocation, and citizenship. In turn, affective performances in “Snow” foment an expansive exploration of how seemingly natural affinities between Jewish and Asian Americans are largely constructed (or modeled) through immigration law. In related fashion, Nicholas Lehmann’s declaration that “Asians are replacing Jews” and Eric Liu’s observation that “Asians are ‘out-Jewing the Jews’” bring to light modes of social performance (or modeling). Taken together, Butler, Lehmann, and Liu make visible the ethnic and racial contours through which Americans and “model minorities” are both constructed and made.

To be sure, the 1790 Naturalization Act privileged the “free white person” over the indentured servant, the slave, and the Native American.<sup>6</sup> Whereas the Three-fifths Clause in the Constitution (along with the 1808 Importation Clause and the Fugitive Slave Clause) clearly delineated the role of slavery in the practice of antebellum enfranchisement, the original 1790 naturalization law depended on the category “free white

person” as a *prima facie* requirement for citizenship. In so doing, the first naturalization law excluded particular groups through discourses of liberalism, rubrics of whiteness, and rhetorical omission. That is, the 1790 Naturalization Act relied on the narrative omission of other ethnoracial groups (such as Native Americans and Africans/African Americans). Within the legally fictive space of federal naturalization law, then, the requirement of “good character” masks a decidedly racist citizenship matrix, replete with innate moral values and assessments of racial inferiority. Indubitably, this racialized logic was used to deny Asian immigrant applicants until 1952, when the McCarran-Walter Act eliminated racial prerequisites from naturalization law. As Gary Okihiro argues, when “imposed upon [a racial binary],” Asian Americans “required a revision of categories from white and black to ‘white’ and ‘nonwhite’ that is equally arbitrary and hierarchical.”<sup>7</sup>

Notwithstanding the overt exclusionary politics at work in the original 1790 Naturalization Act, the use of whiteness as a standard for U.S. selfhood benefited one ethnoracial group that had for centuries been denied naturalized citizenship in the former colonizer, Britain: Jewish immigrants. Expelled during the reign of King Edward I in 1290 and banned from settling in Britain and the territories until the latter part of the sixteenth century, British Jews, their descendents, and other Jewish subjects were largely rendered stateless.<sup>8</sup> This stateless condition changed during the pre-Revolutionary period, with improved British-Jewish relations. Such relational recuperation is apparent in the passage of the 1740 Parliamentary Act that allowed Jews naturalization access after seven years in a British territory or colony.<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, absent from the colonial structure was a universal policy of naturalization.

Unquestionably, a potential impediment to Jewish naturalization in the territories could be found in colonial citizenship oaths, which frequently included the phrase “upon the true faith of a Christian.”<sup>10</sup> For the Jewish would-be citizen in the years immediately following the Revolutionary War, to naturalize before the 1790 law was potentially tantamount to religious conversion. Further, in the pre-Revolutionary War period, this “citizenship matter” was mostly left to the discretion of independent colonial courts. The omission of a religious requirement in the 1790 law enabled Jewish access to U.S. naturalization as “free white persons,” simultaneously signaling their legal selfhood status as “whites” within a nascent, foundational U.S. political imaginary.<sup>11</sup> If Jewish applicants for citizenship were—at the level of naturalization law—made “white,” then their Asian counterparts in contrast were by and large

rendered “not-white.” Returning to “Snow,” if Giàu’s assumption of Mr. Cohen’s “Americanness” hearkens back to the 1790 Naturalization Act, then her fundamental “foreignness” foregrounds a discussion of ineligibility via the citizenship franchise.

Emblematically, more than a century after the passage of the first naturalization law, Japanese applicant Takao Ozawa petitioned for American selfhood in the nation’s highest court. Naturalization law had shifted slightly with an 1870 amendment that allowed both “free white persons” and “those of African descent” access to the citizenship process. Admittedly, Ozawa was not the first Asian applicant to petition for citizenship.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, Ozawa’s case is noteworthy precisely because of the applicant’s affective argument and naturalization rhetoric. For example, in his self-authored 1922 brief, Ozawa at length declared:

In name, General Benedict Arnold was an American, but at heart he was a traitor. In name, I am not an American, but at heart I am a true American. I set forth the following facts that will sufficiently prove this. 1) I did not report my name, my marriage, or the names of my children to the Japanese Consulate in Honolulu; notwithstanding all Japanese subjects are requested to do so. These matters were reported to the American government. 2). I do not have any connection with any Japanese churches or schools, or any Japanese organizations elsewhere. 3) I am sending my children to an American church and American school in place of a Japanese one. 4) Most of the time I use the American (English) language at home, so that my children cannot speak the Japanese language. 5) I have lived continuously within the United States for over twenty-eight years. 6) I chose as my wife one educated in American schools . . . so it is my honest hope to do something good to the United States before I bid farewell to this world.<sup>13</sup>

Understandably, much of the scholarship about *Ozawa v. United States*, including Ian Haney Lopez’s *White by Law* (1997) and *Whiteness of a Different Color* (1999) by Matthew Frye Jacobson, convincingly uses naturalization law to underscore the reification of whiteness as a shifting racial category.<sup>14</sup> Such a reading is undeniable given Ozawa’s own appeal, which begins with his assertion that he was indeed a “free white person” and therefore a viable citizen subject.

Still, little scholarly attention is paid to the affective rhetoric Ozawa employs in his citizenship case. As I argue here, naturalization is in part a public, sentimental performance, requiring the “would-be American”



to declare affiliation and loyalty. Without a doubt, such patriotic feelings are discernible in Ozawa's opening declaration of true Americanness. Ozawa's enthusiastic patriotism operates in stark (and deliberate) contrast to the situation of infamous turncoat Benedict Arnold, a stock villain of the Revolutionary War narrative. Regardless of Benedict Arnold's *jus solis* status (he was born in Norwich, Connecticut), Ozawa strategically emphasizes Arnold's heart-centered dislike of country to bolster a traitorous personhood. In juxtaposition, Ozawa argues that "at heart" he is a "true American," a point substantiated through a multivalent repudiation of his country of origin.

On another level, Ozawa's Benedict Arnold allusion fulfills one of the basic tenets of naturalization, which includes a demonstrable patriotism and knowledge of U.S. history. And in a more administrative vein, Ozawa recounts the bureaucratic and legal actions he has taken to demonstrate his loyalty to the nation. Imbued with tropes of "country love," and sentimental claims about "America," Ozawa is willing and able participant in a U.S.-specific bureaucracy of citizenship (full of American titles, marriage, and birth announcements). To be sure, the Supreme Court was convinced of Ozawa's affective "citizenship potential," evident in the juridical disclaimer that Ozawa "was well qualified by character and education for citizenship is conceded."<sup>15</sup> Even so, the Court ruled such patriotic attributes did not overturn the primacy of race in the making of Americans. In the end, though Ozawa was "well qualified," and despite Ozawa's assertions of Americanness, he was still Japanese and a member of the "Asiatic race." Neither a free white person nor someone of African descent, Ozawa was deemed an "alien ineligible for citizenship."

Earlier in the same year that Ozawa was denied naturalized citizenship on the grounds of racial ineligibility, the *New York Times* published a piece titled, "Americanizing Immigrant Jews." As suggested by the title, the January 15, 1922 article was primarily focused on the naturalization of Jews within the U.S. body politic. Drawing on sociologist Charles S. Bernheimer's essay in the contemporaneously released *Jewish Year Book*, "Americanizing Immigrant Jews" maintains that the "history, ethics, and ideals of the Jews have made them particularly impressionable to American ideals." Further, "Americanizing Immigrant Jews" details efforts by community organizers and educators to naturalize an estimated one million foreign-born individuals through rudimentary lessons in U.S. citizenship and English.<sup>16</sup> Though seemingly disconnected from the Ozawa case, the article's articulation of Americanization through the tenets of U.S. naturalization employs an analogous naturalized rhetoric.



To that end, Jewish immigrants are not only “impressionable”; they are deemed politically pliable because of innate “history, ethics, and ideals” that neatly correspond to dominant U.S. citizenship frames. Accordingly, the article casts immigrant Jews in the roles of romanticized, would-be American subjects. Indeed, such bodies become “model minority” holders of an “Americanization dream.” Like their “good character” counterpart Ozawa, these agreeable, willing citizens fulfill the basic requirements of naturalization law. However, unlike Ozawa, such an Americanization dream is racially in reach for them.

Nevertheless, despite claims that Jewish immigrants were fit (and fitted) for naturalization, they still faced mounting nativism and persistent anti-Semitism. For example, a year before “Americanizing Immigrant Jews,” Congress passed the alarmingly named Emergency Quota Act. Responding to rising native-born anxiety increasingly centered on the “perpetual foreignness” of immigrant bodies, U.S. senators and representatives reduced via legislative decree the number of eastern and southern European immigrants by 75 percent from previous years.<sup>17</sup> Given that eastern Europe was a point of origin for a majority of Jewish migrants, the Emergency Quota Act had dramatic effects on Jewish immigration. A precursor to the even more restrictive 1924 Johnson-Reed Act, the Emergency Quota Act signals a significant rupture in the idealized characterization of the United States as a heretofore open-door “nation of immigrants.” Such restrictions would incontestably prohibit access to European Jews seeking asylum during World War II. In a similarly exclusionary vein, immigrants from the Asia-Pacific Triangle (including individuals from East Asia, Southeast Asian, and South Asia) were barred from entering the United States, reconfirming past anti-Asian immigration measures such as the 1875 Page Act, the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, and the 1917 Asiatic Barred Zone Act.

Taken together, despite nonparallel “racial access” to naturalization, both Jewish and Asian immigrants were expressly configured in and impacted by nativist law and policy. Situated within a reactionary anti-immigrant rubric, Jewish and Asian would-be Americans were therefore caught in what Gary Okihiro observes is fundamental to binaried citizenship characterizations. According to Okihiro, such nonwhite/white and native/foreign-born binaries in the United States “offer coherence, especially during times of social upheaval. They preserve rule amidst chaos, and stability amidst rapid change, such as during the late eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries.”<sup>18</sup> Focused on particularly frenzied periods in U.S. immigration policy, the texts examined in

*Modeling Citizenship* are organized alongside contemporaneous debates over immigrant bodies. Drawing on such “ends,” *Modeling Citizenship* analyzes Jewish and Asian American writing produced during fin de siècle nativism, mid-century cold war model minoritization, and late twenty-first-century immigration amnesty and reform.

Within this late-century milieu, in the aftermath of war, amnesia, and reform, Robert Olen Butler’s “Snow” is produced within the interstices of naturalization policy and immigration law. Further, a rereading of Mr. Cohen as both naturalized subject and concomitant “foreigner” reflects a concurrent and connective exclusionary history. All things considered, Mr. Cohen is a Polish Jew who has two other “homes”: Poland and then England (132). After Mr. Cohen tells Giàu his migration story, the protagonist notes, “I was thinking how he was a foreigner, too. Not an American really” (133). Following suit, Giàu’s revised declaration of foreignness and non-Americanness bespeaks the transnational conditions and affects that contextualize Mr. Cohen’s migration from Europe to the United States. Simultaneously, Butler’s strategic employment of foreign frames reinforces an outsider commonality between Vietnamese narrator and Jewish subject. As “perpetual foreigners,” Giàu and Mr. Cohen are therefore socially and politically matched vis-à-vis expansive discursive and legal structures of U.S. immigration.

### “Old” and “New” Model Minorities: Jewish Americans and Asian Americans

If Robert Olen Butler’s “Snow” ends with two matched minorities, then Eric Liu’s *The Accidental Asian* (1998) underscores like coherences between Jewish/Asian “foreigners” and Jewish American/Asian American “model minorities.” From the outset, Liu’s collection of essays autobiographically furthers Butler’s cartographic narrative, for *The Accidental Asian* maps each group’s migration from “outsiders” to presumably “insider” U.S. subjects. Indeed, prior to the “New Jews” chapter (from which the opening epigraph is taken), Liu recalls a past history of Asian exclusion from naturalization. Expressly, Liu evocatively asks, “What maketh a race?” He answers by briefly recounting a series of naturalization cases involving South Asian applicants. As Liu maintains: “To the judiciary system of the United States, Asian Indians were held to be: probably not white (1909), white (1910), white

again (1913), not white (1917), white (1919 and 1920), not white (1923), still not white (1928), probably never again white (1939 and 1942).<sup>19</sup> Undeniably circumscribed by whiteness, the abovementioned cases make visible the rise of nativism in the first half of the twentieth century. And though the judiciary system of the United States vacillated between “white” and “not white,” Liu’s list concludes with the decidedly pessimistic “probably never again white,” signaling a concomitant perpetual foreignness.

Alternatively, within the racialized milieu of U.S. naturalization law, Liu’s question of “what maketh a race” is indistinguishable from “what maketh a citizen.” Alluding to *United States v. Thind* (the 1923 case), Liu emblematically underscores the primacy of race in the manufacturing of U.S. citizens. A Punjabi Sikh and World War I veteran, Thind claimed (vis-à-vis ethnology) that he was “Aryan” and therefore a member of the “Caucasian” (or white) race. Consequently, the Oregonian resident argued that he was an “alien eligible for citizenship.” Revising the racialized logics of the *Ozawa* case, the Supreme Court nonetheless denied Thind’s application. Notwithstanding Thind’s “scientific whiteness,” Associate Justice George Sutherland premised his rejection on “the [racial] understanding of the common man.” Accordingly, the justice avowed that “It is a matter of familiar observation and knowledge that the physical group characteristics of the Hindus render them readily distinguishable from various groups of person in this country commonly recognized as white.”<sup>20</sup> Focused on “common knowledge” and “familiar observation,” the court summarily ruled that Thind’s *prima facie* nonwhiteness was grounds for ineligibility.

In line with recent legislative action, the Supreme Court’s verdict substantiated the constitutionality of the 1917 Asiatic Barred Zone Act, which banned immigration from East, South, and Southeast Asia. Simultaneously, as restricted foreign bodies, Asian Indians became non-naturalizable domestic subjects.<sup>21</sup> Just as significant, Justice Sutherland’s ruling included an intergenerational comparison between “the children of English, French, German, Italian, Scandinavian, and other European parentage” and those with “Hindu parents.” Distinctively, the Supreme Court justice argued that the children of European parentage “quickly merge into the mass of our population and lose the distinctive hallmarks of their European origin.” In contrast, Justice Sutherland observed, “it cannot be doubted that the children born in this country of Hindu parents would retain indefinitely the clear evidence of their ancestry.”<sup>22</sup>

Legally, of course, both types of “children” enjoyed *jus solis* citizenship by sheer fact of birthplace.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, Justice Sutherland’s

homogeneity/heterogeneity binary foregrounds a specific child “problem” via dominant anxieties over nonwhite, second-generation U.S. subjects.<sup>24</sup> In particular, “Hindus” are not only “aliens ineligible for citizenship”; their American-born children were (according to early twentieth-century logics) racially non-naturalizable because they would “retain indefinitely” their ancestry. Hence, first-generation Asian bodies are cast as “perpetual foreigners,” whereas second-generation Asian Americans are racially demonized minorities. In so ruling, Justice Sutherland articulates the uneasy, contradictory terms through which the mid-twentieth-century model minority myth is constructed.

If Asian ancestry proves to be a problem in the first half of the twentieth century, it is configured as a “solution” in the latter half.<sup>25</sup> As a second-generation Asian American, situated in the “in the half-lit region between stereotype and sociology,” Eric Liu simultaneously embodies a problematic past and a solution-oriented present. Indeed, as Min Hyong Song convincingly argues,

in . . . *The Accidental Asian*, the former speech writer for the Clinton administration and graduate of Harvard Law . . . repeats what has already been said about the most visible of his generation: they are uniformly privileged and well-educated; little makes them different from their professional white peers; race is only a residual concern for them (not having felt the sharp pain of *de jure* discrimination nor in some cases *de facto* prejudice); being perceived as Americans is more important than whatever attenuated ties they might have to Asian countries from which their forebears may have departed, and their experiences are merely the most contemporary nay, albeit accelerated, iteration of the immigrant narratives as told by successive waves of ethnic Europeans.<sup>26</sup>

As Song maintains, Liu is in many ways an archetypal “child of 1965,” the holder of a post-1965 Immigration Act “American dream” forged in civil rights-era reform. In dramatic fashion, this mid-century act eschewed nation-state quotas in favor of hemispheric designation. Such a shift marked the first time that en masse Asian migration to the United States was legally possible.

This “immigration possibility” in part foregrounds Song’s argument about second-generation Asian Americans influenced less by resistance politics and shaped more by model minoritization schemas and professionalization frames. These concurrent “model” concerns prompt the “iteration of the immigrant narratives as told by successive waves of

ethnic Europeans,” foregrounding Liu’s two-group juxtaposition. Correspondingly and indubitably, *The Accidental Asian* is predominantly focused on a mid-century, post-1965 Immigration Act imaginary despite brief mentions to early-to-mid-twentieth-century exclusion and naturalization. To be sure, this “after” space is typified by naturalized observations about U.S. selfhood. Particularly, such model minorities (including both Jewish and Asian Americans) are imagined through an amnesiac teleology of progress. Likewise, in tautological fashion, *The Accidental Asian* is invested in “honorific immigrants-made-good.” Correspondingly, Liu’s essay/memoir both gestures toward and emerges from the “model minority” stereotype.

Specifically, if Asian Americans are “out-Jewing” their principally eastern European predecessors, they are necessarily characterized (by means of the “model minority” label) as paragons of democratic and economic virtue. These “virtuous” frames are diametrically opposed to those of other groups of color, which remain undesirable. This divisive strategy is evident in an early articulation of the stereotype in a December 1966 article titled, “Success Story of One Model Minority Group in the U.S.,” from the *U.S. News and World Report*:

At a time when Americans are awash in worry over the plight of racial minorities—one such minority, the nation’s 300,000 Chinese-Americans, is winning wealth and respect by dint of its own hard work. In any Chinatown from San Francisco to New York, you discover youngsters at grip with their studies. Crime and delinquency are found to be further minor in scope. Still being taught in Chinatown is the old idea that people should depend on their own efforts—not a welfare check—in order to reach America’s “promised land.”<sup>27</sup>

Conservatively couched and redolent of a late civil rights movement shift from integrationist to self-deterministic agendas, the *U.S. News and World Report* contrasts worrisome racial minorities with “winning” Chinese Americans. Explicitly, unlike those who allegedly depend on a welfare check, Chinese Americans rely on their own efforts, are by and large without vice, and are successful because of hard work. Drawing together a Protestant work ethic, self-reliance, and American exceptionalism, the *U.S. News and World Report* contends that Chinese Americans (and by extension, all Asian Americans) have the necessary “ingredients” to “reach America’s ‘promised land.’” Patient and persevering, Chinese Americans have overcome discrimination without

protest and have achieved socioeconomic success (that is, the American dream).

Armed with Confucian determination, Chinese Americans have an extra edge in the “promised land.” This cultural proclivity is akin to early twentieth-century claims of “impressionable” Jewish immigrants, who are willing and able Americanization subjects. If this comparative model minoritization is suggested in the *U.S. News and World Report* article, an earlier Asian American “success story” is more overtly comparative. In a *New York Times Magazine* piece from January 1966 titled, “Success Story, Japanese-American Style,” sociologist William Petersen unequivocally states,

Asked which of the country’s ethnic minorities has been subjected to the most discrimination and the worst injustices, very few persons would even think of answering: “The Japanese Americans.” Yet if the question refers to persons alive today, that may well be the correct reply. Like the Negroes, the Japanese have been the object of color prejudice. Like the Jews, they have been feared and hated as hyperefficient competitors.<sup>28</sup>

Arguing that Japanese Americans faced “the most discrimination and the worst injustices,” Petersen (like the *U.S. News and World Report* article) at once relegates antiblack discrimination to the realm of nonexceptional “color prejudice.” Cohering with the politics of “Success Story of One Minority Group in the United States,” Petersen’s discrimination declaration tactically locates Japanese Americans alongside other minorities, specifically Jews and African Americans.

At the same time, Petersen makes the larger claim that Japanese Americans were subjected to the most discrimination and the worst injustices, codifying a particularly troubling hierarchy of oppression. Though Japanese Americans are like African Americans and Jewish Americans, they nevertheless superlatively operate as the “most discriminated,” making their success story all the more exceptional. In the process, the Berkeley sociologist mobilizes a now familiar divisive construction wherein Asian Americans have—despite a very real racist past—transcended de facto discrimination without making substantive demands for systemic change.<sup>29</sup>

Though brief, Petersen’s allusion to anti-Semitism and Jewish personhood accesses the histories of two groups who referentially function within “model minority” frames. And, like Associate Justice George Sutherland, Petersen employs the figure of the naturalized European

immigrant to illustrate a flattened ethnic futurity. Even so, Petersen revises this characterization to fit the perimeters of Asian American model minoritization. Indeed, Petersen maintains,

Each new nationality from Europe was typically met with such hostility as, for example, the anti-German riots in the Middle West a century ago, the American Protective Association to fight the Irish, the national quota laws to keep out Italians, Poles, and Jews. Yet, in one generation or two, each white minority took advantage of the public schools, the free labor market and America's political democracy; it climbed out of the slums, took on better-paying occupations and acquired social respect and dignity.<sup>30</sup>

The bulk of Petersen's argument in "Success Story, Japanese-American Style" relies on an opportune comparison among white ethnic groups (Italians, Poles, and Jews) that fails to individualize asymmetrical histories of whiteness and political struggle. Moreover, Petersen's successional narrative is premised on a typically American understanding of discrimination. In other words, Petersen argues that such systemic modes of oppression can be conquered by means of group agency, faith in capitalism, and patriotic allegiance.

On another level, such model minority characterizations render hyper-visible Jewish and Asian Americans within the dominant U.S. body politic. Nicholas Lehmann's turn-of-the-twenty-first-century pronouncement that Asians are at "the front end of the American meritocratic machine . . . replacing Jews" reminds us that ethnoracial frames of romantic selfhood and U.S. exceptionalism are alive and well. Indeed, if Liu's Asian Americans are the "New Jews," then Lehmann's Jewish Americans are undeniably even more naturalized, having become "non-Jews" or "Episcopalians." In so doing, Liu and Lehmann's collective characterization of Asian Americans as "New Jews" expressly confirms the "model minority" stereotype. In the face of such exceptionalist allegations, the model minoritization of Jews and Asians unavoidably intersects with a bifurcated U.S. racial logic that involves both "good" and "bad" subjects. Though the mention of "model minorities" makes seemingly stereotypical sense in the twenty-first century, it nonetheless elides an expansive history of anti-Semitism, nativism, and ethnoreligious/ethnoracial violence. To reiterate, as Liu notes, Jews and Asians "started out as outsiders," a point legislatively made clear in turn-of-the-twentieth-century calls to "shut the door" by means of exclusionary immigration policy. Jewish Americans and Asian Americans thus occupy



a paradoxical selfhood position. Within the popular and political U.S. imaginary, they are both idealized citizens and marginalized minorities.

Reminiscent of Robert Olen Butler's "Snow," Liu's concluding articulation of identity—grounded in that "half-lit region between stereotype and sociology"—indubitably harnesses a long-standing comparison between Jewish Americans and Asian Americans. Such comparisons make visible connected ethnoracial logics and connective demographic correspondences. And, as evidenced by the comparative currency this frame holds, this tale of two model minorities continues into the twenty-first century. Indeed, almost ten years after the publication of *The Accidental Asian*, this relationship is apparent in a *New York Times* commentary from 2007 titled, "In Jews, Indian-Americans See Role Models in Activism."<sup>31</sup> In a more popular vein, these ethnoracial intersections are perceptible in the popular films *Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle* (2004) and *Harold and Kumar Escape from Guantanamo Bay* (2008), authored by two Jewish American screenwriters, Jon Hurwitz and Hayden Schlossberg, and featuring two Asian American male leads, Kal Penn and John Cho.

Notwithstanding such comparative currency, relatively little scholarship has taken up the comparative task of examining the connected literary productions of these two groups. Returning to Liu's *The Accidental Asian*, Jonathan Freedman rightfully reminds us that the "discursive criss-crossings evident in Liu's . . . reflections are just one of the many repeated moments of intersection between the experiences, real and imagined, of Jewish- and Asian-Americans for the last century. These crossings are both remarkably extensive and surprisingly understudied."<sup>32</sup> Such "crossings" are undeniably present in past U.S. immigration policy and contemporary model minority characterizations. As important, these "crossings" occur at the legislative point at which immigrants are made into U.S. citizens via naturalization law and process. Taken together, the history of immigration and model minoritization underscore the racialization and deracination of Jewish and Asian Americans.

## Writing Naturalization: Jewish and Asian American Literature

In drawing to a close, it is precisely the role of immigration and naturalization in U.S. nation building that structures *Modeling Citizenship's* interdisciplinary analysis of Jewish and Asian American literature. In

this analysis, *Modeling Citizenship* makes visible the contested terrain of citizenship, nationhood, and belonging. Concomitantly, the focus on immigration practice, policy, and discourse through legislation and representation coheres with Yen Le Espiritu's recent work on Filipino America, wherein she notes,

The production of discourses of immigration, both popular and intellectual, is important because modes of representation are themselves forms of power rather than mere reflections of power. Immigration has become a key symbol in American culture, a central powerful concept imbued with a multiplicity of myths and meanings, capable of rousing highly charged emotions that culminate in violently unfair practices.<sup>33</sup>

Arguing that popular and intellectual representations "are themselves forms of power," Espiritu makes possible a reading of immigration as both a "key symbol in American culture" and an affective touchstone.

Turning to affective frames, immigration rouses highly charged emotions because it carries mythic meaning and prompts strong political reaction. From turn-of-the-twentieth-century nativist claims of Anglo-Saxon nationhood to turn-of-the-twentieth-century multiculturalist allegations of a U.S. nation of immigrants, the foreigner as would-be American undeniably marries past, present, and future notions of ethnicity, race, gender, and nation. Indeed, as is evident in immigration debate and policy, the question of how to make Americans out of foreign material necessarily brings to the fore a discussion about what culturally, socially, and politically constitutes the "right material." This evaluative rubric encompasses the naturalization processes through which non-native-born Americans are legally and bureaucratically "made." Often employed as a synonym for "assimilation," "naturalization" operates in divergently politicized fashion, connecting immigrant to both country of origin and settlement nation.

Both transnational and national, "naturalization" becomes a multi-sited means through which to configure different types of citizenship. To be sure, as Priscilla Wald argues, naturalization has "evolved as a keyword along with the modern conceptions of political belonging that we have come to associate with the nation."<sup>34</sup> Corresponding to "modes of political belonging," naturalization is defined through frames of personhood and selfhood that require a repudiation of past country affiliation and a declaration of commitment to present-nation civic practices.

What is more, as an "American keyword" (like Raymond Williams's

notion of a viable and critical sociocultural vocabulary), Wald's "Naturalization" entry in Bruce Burgett and Glenn Hendler's edited *Keywords for American Cultural Studies* (2007) makes even more visible the multivalent function of the term within an ever-shifting U.S. cultural, political, and social imaginary. As Wald maintains:

In this modern concept of the nation, political affiliation (citizenship) and common descent (kinship) are interfused rather than sedimentary modes of belonging. Kinship, no less than citizenship, is a taxonomic construction that registers, even as it masks, social and political hierarchies. The interweaving of the two is evident in early-twentieth-century debates over topics ranging from eugenics to migration policy. . . . Naturalization laws and policies register change not only in the legal contours of political belonging, but also in the terms by which that belonging is articulated.<sup>35</sup>

If naturalization—including "political affiliation and common descent"—is indeed taxonomic, then it functions as a focal point for examining the ways in which citizens are identified, read, and performed. Characterized by a particular grammar and patriotic rhetoric, naturalization becomes a heretofore underexamined literary trope. When considered in relation to two "model minority" groups, naturalization's affective and performative dimensions become potent poles upon which to evaluate idealized selfhood and exceptionalist nationhood. In other words, analyzing the specter, practice, and role of naturalization in Jewish and Asian American literary production makes such work taxonomic and indexical in scope.

Hence, *Modeling Citizenship* investigates a particular U.S. idiom of citizenship, inclusive of ethnic, racial, and national metaphors, which are then rearticulated and revised through the public act of writing. Accordingly, naturalization emerges as a useful signpost to measure the extent to which immigrant writers—particularly Jewish American and Asian American writers—negotiate shifting characterizations of monolithic U.S. selfhood through previously held affiliations. From Edith Maude Eaton's (Sui Sin Far's) short stories about Chinese immigrants to Abraham Cahan's novella, *Yekl*; from Israel Zangwill's *The Melting-Pot* to C.Y. Lee's *The Flower Drum Song*; from Mary Antin's *The Promised Land* to Gish Jen's response, *Mona in the Promised Land*; and from Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* to Eva Hoffman's *Lost in Translation*, Jewish American and Asian American writing has been compellingly read through discourses of assimilation that evaluate the immigrant and refugee body

through majority paradigms of U.S. selfhood. Focused on the literary negotiation of American selfhood via immigrant subjectivities, the inclusion of Zangwill despite his British citizenship highlights his work's resonance in contemporary immigration discourse, emblemized by his most famous dramatic (and U.S.-focused) production, *The Melting-Pot*.

Historically organized, the texts included in *Modeling Citizenship* speak to the multivalent and polyvocal role of cultural production in making visible the contested nature of citizenship at distinct moments in U.S. immigration policy and law. The final body chapter—which focuses analytical attention on two neoconservative model minorities—gestures toward a twenty-first-century reading of both groups vis-à-vis “War on Terror” logics, progressive resistance, and the ongoing immigration debate. This return to the political imaginary corresponds to the back-and-forth nature of U.S. immigration policy and ethnoracial formation, wherein immigrant and refugee subjects are considered either ideal American subjects or aliens ineligible for citizenship. Therefore, critical to *Modeling Citizenship* is the relocation of such Jewish and Asian American cultural productions from the margins of exclusively assimilative analyses to naturalized readings that necessarily take into account demographic upheaval and shift.