

SETTLEMENT HOUSE SCENES:  
MIGRANTS AND THE PERFORMING ARTS  
IN TRANSATLANTIC PERSPECTIVE

by

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation examines the transatlantic history of the settlement house movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It has two foci. The first is the origin of the settlement movement, in Britain; its spread to countries such as France, Germany, Russia, Japan, and, especially, the United States; and the connections — in the form of the movement of ideas and people — among the settlement movements in various countries. The second focus is on U.S. settlement houses as performance spaces, particularly in regards to migrants (immigrants). In that context, this dissertation examines in detail the kinds of activities that migrants engaged in while at settlement houses and interactions between migrants and settlement house workers (residents). This dissertation argues for settlement houses as places of cultural production, consumption, or both, in some ways similar to, but also distinct from, ethnic theater and cinema.

Among the key issues discussed are the degree of control that migrants exerted in each type of venue and the cultural confrontations that took place in each type of venue between migrants and members of the native-born middle class, including residents and film censors.

To Luz —

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## INTRODUCTION

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were a period of mass migrations in the transatlantic world. In both Europe and the United States, millions of people left the countryside to swell urban populations, permanently or seasonally, while tens of millions crossed the Atlantic to settle or work for a while in the Western Hemisphere. Many, but far from all, of those migrants chose the United States, though a sizable fraction of them later returned to their native lands, either because that had been their plan from the start or because their new lives hardly improved on their old ones.<sup>1</sup>

With the important exception of Jews fleeing persecution, the vast majority of these migrations, both internal and transatlantic, occurred for economic reasons, and the greatest economic development of the era was the second industrial revolution. The first industrial revolution, characterized by textiles and steam power, had arrived in the late eighteenth century in Britain, which, partly because of its vast coal deposits, had become the first industrialized country in the world. By the second half of the nineteenth century, factories and mills powered by electricity were producing iron and steel in increasing quantities. And though there was plenty of industry on the Continent and Britain remained a world center of industry, the U.S. took the lead in industrial production. With its mineral wealth, railroad network, and weak government regulation, the U.S. was well-suited to industry, which had received a boost from

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<sup>1</sup> Historians of migration generally use *migrants* to refer to people who are called *immigrants* or *emigrants* in common, non-academic usage to better capture the complexity and multidirectionality of migration.

the production of matériel for the Civil War.

Because industry was concentrated in cities, they grew as migrants and the native-born flocked there for jobs. But urban areas were places not just of work but also of leisure, where new and old forms of entertainment co-existed. And just as migrants formed an important part of the urban workforce, they were also involved in leisure-time activities. Ethnic theater was especially important, not just in New York but nationwide. It offered entertainment as well as spaces to socialize with other migrants, relax, and have fun. Ethnic theater was something that migrants had a great degree of control over, writing and staging plays in their own languages or translating plays from other languages. Because of the language barrier, few of the native-born, except migrants' children, attended.

When cinema was invented, migrants took to the new medium right away, and it suited them well. As audience members, they could appreciate silent film, which put a premium on visuals, even if they had trouble understanding intertitles. Because migrants made up such a significant portion of early movie audiences, without their patronage, the industry might have been hobbled from the start and never taken off, or taken off much later. Silent film also offered migrants opportunities to write, edit, direct, and even act: in the absence of audible dialogue, accents did not matter, and actors had to know only enough English to take direction and read the script, if there was one. And migrants quickly got into the business of cinema ownership. Because the industry was new, barriers to entry — though not necessarily to success — were relatively low, so movies provided business opportunities to recent migrants who would have found it difficult or impossible to enter industries already dominated by more

established ethnic groups.

Settlement houses stood at the intersection of all the developments described above: migration, industrialization, urbanization, and leisure, especially the performing arts. In addition, because the settlement movement was worldwide and because it serve so many migrants, settlement houses participated in the transatlantic movement of people and ideas.

The settlement movement initially grew out of a desire to alleviate the misery caused by industrialization, which enriched a few at the expense of multitudes who were always on, or over, the edge of economic disaster and starvation. The world's first settlement, Toynbee Hall, opened in London in 1884, and the idea quickly gained traction and spread. Settlement movements arose in countries including the U.S., France, Norway, Denmark, Austria, the Netherlands, Germany, Russia, and Japan.

The U.S. settlement movement dated to 1886, when Stanton Coit founded the Neighborhood Guild on the Lower East Side of New York. The guild offered services and facilities such as a kindergarten, legal aid, loan office, library, rooftop playground, clubs, theatricals, lectures, and public baths.<sup>2</sup> There were about fifty settlement houses in the U.S. by 1895 and, depending on how a settlement house was defined, two hundred to four hundred by 1914.<sup>3</sup> Prominent settlements included Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr's Hull House in Chicago and Lillian Wald's Henry Street Settlement in New York.

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<sup>2</sup> Judith Ann Trolander, *Professionalism and Social Change: From the Settlement House Movement to Neighborhood Centers 1886 to the Present* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 9.

<sup>3</sup> Trolander, *Professionalism and Social Change*, 10.



The settlement movement's worldwide scope led to a transatlantic network of connections. In 1913 and 1914, for example, Alix Westerkamp, a German settlement worker, lived at the Chicago Commons and observed the settlement and American life in general. In 1922, the National Federation of Settlements opened an office in Paris to facilitate the sharing of ideas between U.S. and French settlements, and soon after that, Eleanor McMain of Kingsley House in New Orleans traveled to France to help organized a settlement house there. In 1924, the NFS and Toynbee Hall cooperated in the creation of a fellowship that would encourage settlement workers on both sides of the Atlantic to become better acquainted. Some U.S. settlements proved magnets for visitors from abroad, including prominent figures, who were not connected to settlement houses. Many were British: Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald and Scottish socialist and labor leader Keir Hardie. Others came from farther afield, such as Russian socialist Catherine Breshkovsky, who stayed at settlement houses during both of her trips to the U.S.

Help for the poor was available in a variety of forms, such as charity, housing, and government-sponsored social services. But settlement houses, besides providing material aid and services such as education and recreation, had a particular mission: to try to bridge the widening divide between the poor and the middle class. Central to that concept were shared physical spaces — settlement workers (residents) living among, and being visited by, the poor of a neighborhood (neighbors). Despite being shared space, however, settlement houses were hardly neutral territory. Rather, they were owned and controlled by residents, most of whom were native-born and middle-class. Residents thus

imparted, or tried to impart, their values to people who did not necessarily share those values or have much interest in them, which set limits on and helped shape the kinds of activities that went on in settlement houses and the experiences that neighbors could have there.

Migrants were integral to the life and mission of many settlement houses, especially in the Northeast and Midwest. Some settlement house residents were themselves migrants, though in most cases, migrants took part in settlement house life as neighbors. And there were good reasons for that participation, apart from material aid: social and educational activities such as meetings, debates, and lectures, for example, along with classes in English and other subjects, libraries, and charitable groups. But the presence of migrants also meant that residents had the task of bridging a gap not just of class but also of ethnicity and language and of helping migrants adjust to a profoundly unfamiliar environment. Residents were aided or hindered in that task by the knowledge they had gained through study both inside and outside settlement houses. That process was carried out in a number of ways: through lectures, scholarly papers, and books, and even through Hull House's Labor Museum, where migrants became, in effect, exhibits. The knowledge that settlement workers gained, or believed they gained, through such efforts may — in ways they were not necessarily aware of — also have helped residents control migrants, not just help them.

The arts, too, were important to settlement houses and linked them to the expanding world of urban leisure. Settlement houses not only screened movies but also created the space and opportunity for creative expression in the arts, especially live performances of music and drama. Migrants were heavily involved

in the arts programs offered by settlement houses. Lillian Wald, founder of the Henry Street Settlement, “firmly believed that all individuals should have opportunities in their lives for positive and creative expression,” as Rebecca Sayles writes. By putting on skits and plays, Wald believed, migrant children “were to be educated, socialized, and integrated into American culture.” Migrants also had the chance to take classes in set design, costumes and other aspects of stage production.<sup>4</sup>

The migrants’ own cultures were not entirely ignored, however: a 1913 pageant, for example, featured migrants from Russia, Poland, Italy, and Ireland in native costume, and in 1915, acting companies visited New York settlement houses to perform, in English and Yiddish, new works by American playwrights.<sup>5</sup> Settlement houses working with nearby Yiddish theaters helped the emergence of figures such as Irving Berlin and George and Ira Gershwin. As Sayles puts it, “Generally, the settlements provided a climate conducive to creativity by encouraging the talented and untalented alike, not only through training but also through sponsoring performances, providing places to exhibit, and nurturing camaraderie and artistic discourse.”<sup>6</sup>

Yet there was a more problematic aspect of migrants’ participation in the arts at settlements. Settlement houses in general, and settlement arts programs in particular, provided a context in which migrants and residents constructed

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<sup>4</sup> Rebecca A. Sayles, “Cultural development in an immigrant community: Arts education through the settlement movement,” *Journal of Arts Management, Law & Society* 23 (Spring 1993).

<sup>5</sup> Sayles, “Cultural development in an immigrant community.”

<sup>6</sup> Sayles, “Cultural development in an immigrant community.”

each other — that is, a context that allowed migrants to create for themselves an understanding of residents, and for residents to do the same with regard to migrants. That also made settlement houses not just performance spaces but contested spaces, in which residents, no matter their ideals, ended up having to modify those ideals in various ways to accommodate migrants, who had their own ideas about what they did and did not want from residents and settlement houses. Migrants, on the other hand, had, in settlement houses, nothing like the artistic and creative autonomy that they had in ethnic theater (though it too was sometimes subject to censorship). Because public performances constituted part of settlement houses' public image — which could shape public opinion of settlement houses and thus help determine fund raising — residents had every incentive to control these public performances, which meant controlling the performers, including migrants. Migrants had some say in what they performed and how they performed it, but residents were in charge — it was their space and equipment, after all. Migrants thus sacrificed a measure of creative autonomy in taking part in settlement arts programs.

### Historiography

I. At least partly because of the nature of the sources, historical accounts of the settlement movement have concentrated far more on settlement workers — especially on the movement's most prominent and outspoken leaders — than on neighbors. A central debate in the field is over motives: whether the workers were interested mainly in helping the poor, advancing their own careers (in the settlement movement or the wider field of Progressive reform), or maintaining

the status quo (the social control theory). In addition, historians have examined how issues such as race and gender affected the settlement movement.

Many historical accounts take settlement workers largely at their own valuation, emphasizing their pursuit of social justice and characterizing them as “quintessential Progressives” engaged in a “humanitarian crusade against social and industrial evils,” as Ruth Hutchinson Crocker puts it.<sup>7</sup>

A classic text in the field is Allen Davis’s *Spearheads for Reform* (1967). Davis is empathetic to the reformers’ efforts and takes them seriously as attempts to work toward greater social justice. Davis’s emphasis, however, is less on the settlement movement itself than on the connections between settlement house workers and wider Progressive Era reforms in Boston, Chicago, and New York. One result is that in *Spearheads*, settlement houses become more important as training grounds for reformers — not just for the wider reform movement but also for higher education, government, and industry — than as means of helping the poor.<sup>8</sup>

Historians of women formulated an alternative version of what Crocker calls the “heroic” account, though with its own heroes. It held that settlement houses, however helpful they may have been to the poor, gave women career opportunities outside the home that they otherwise would not have had and helped nurture a “brilliant generation of female social scientists, reformers, and

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<sup>7</sup> Ruth Hutchinson Crocker, *Social Work and Social Order: The Settlement Movement in Two Industrial Cities, 1889-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 1.

<sup>8</sup> Allen F. Davis, *Spearheads for Reform: The Social Settlements and the Progressive Movement 1890-1914* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1984), xix, xxiii.

intellectuals.”<sup>9</sup>

The traditional “heroic” account was subject to further revision in the 1960s and ’70s.<sup>10</sup> Social historians looked, or tried to look, at neighbors, not just residents, but a lack of sources created difficulties in telling the story from such a perspective. Other historians, meanwhile, interrogated settlement workers’ intentions: were they simply trying to help the poor, or was their real goal to use their settlement experience to help their careers and burnish their credentials in the reform movement? In the 1984 edition of *Spearheads*, Davis acknowledges that even when reformers’ intentions were humanitarian, they were, perhaps without realizing it, imposing middle-class values onto people whose lives the reformers didn’t understand. Reformers (and others, of course) saw the evils of alcohol, for example, but did not realize how essential it was to migrants’ social lives.<sup>11</sup> Reformers also considered prostitution a scourge and were especially shocked at its open practice in settlement neighborhoods, whereas some migrant women willingly had sex for money, considering it the most sensible way to make living that was open to them.<sup>12</sup>

Or perhaps reformers were attempting something more nefarious than the imposition of middle-class values: according to the social control theory, as set out by, among others, Francis F. Piven and Richard A. Cloward in *Regulating the Poor: Functions of Public Welfare*, reformers helped the poor not from

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<sup>9</sup> Crocker, *Social Work and Social Order*, 4.

<sup>10</sup> Crocker, *Social Work and Social Order*, 5.

<sup>11</sup> Davis, *Spearheads for Reform*, xxi.

<sup>12</sup> Davis, *Spearheads for Reform*, 136, xxi.

humanitarian motives but to keep the poor in their place by meeting their material needs just enough so the poor would not rebel and thus threaten the social position of the rich. The “reform” movement was thus not about reforming anything — certainly not about making any structural changes to society — but maintaining the status quo.<sup>13</sup>

Howard Jacob Karger takes a social-control approach in *The Sentinels of Order* (1987). Though focusing on settlement houses in Minneapolis, Karger argues that “social control was a covert part of the fabric of the general settlement house movement” and that historians have overemphasized workers’ altruism while often ignoring the “less than benign motives that undergird the institution of social service.”<sup>14</sup> Karger characterizes workers’ efforts as an expression of Progressive philosophy and as essentially paternalistic — the duty of the more privileged to help the less privileged, albeit so that the latter saw “the desirability of middle class American values.”<sup>15</sup>

Despite such challenges, however, the “heroic” account has remained, if bloodied, then unbowed. 1987 saw the publication not just of *Sentinels of Order* but also of Judith Trolander’s *Professionalism and Social Change*, which examines the settlement movement from the mid-1940s to the mid-1980s and how it was affected by concerns of gender, race, and professionalization. For Trolander, the settlement houses were not about social control but about

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<sup>13</sup> Davis, *Spearheads for Reform*, xx.

<sup>14</sup> Howard Jacob Karger, *The Sentinels of Order: A Study of Social Control and the Minneapolis Settlement House Movement, 1915-1950* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1987), vii, viii.

consensus and cooperation among classes — about settlement workers trying to bridge the gaps that developed in cities as “people separated into class-stratified neighborhoods,” meaning that settlement workers became “interpreter[s] of the poor to the well-to-do and to the larger community.” Migrants were right to see the United States as a land of opportunity, Trolander writes, “because of the economic expansion of the times,” and in exchange for such opportunity, migrants who availed themselves of settlement houses’ services were willing to be guided by the workers. Their “acculturation activities . . . might be regarded as paternalistic, but these activities were eagerly sought by the settlements’ clients.”<sup>16</sup>

Such a position tiptoes around the idea of social control, as does an earlier work by Trolander, *Settlement Houses and the Great Depression* (1975), which looks at the challenges faced by settlement houses in the 1930s, including greater centralization and the professionalization of philanthropy.<sup>17</sup> Sources of funding influenced settlement houses’ attitudes toward reform, according to Trolander. Houses supported by a Community Chest — which raised funds from businesses and workers and eventually became the United Way — were much more likely to be conservative and to ignore social issues than other houses were.<sup>18</sup> Business, in other words, was hostile to social change and had no intention of sponsoring it.

In the 1990s, the traditional “heroic” account was both endorsed and

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<sup>15</sup> Karger, *Sentinels of Order*, x.

<sup>16</sup> Trolander, *Professionalism and Social Change*, viii, 11, 18.

<sup>17</sup> Judith Ann Trolander, *Settlement Houses and the Great Depression* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1975), 15.



attacked. Mina Carson's *Settlement Folk* (1990) takes as its subject the key workers in the movement — those who articulated the settlement ideology and were recognized as the movement's leaders; and, not least important, those for whom enough sources to exist for historians to write about. *Settlement Folk* explains how workers adapted Victorian values to a “modernized’ social welfare paradigm” by testing and refining those ideas in the real-world settings of the settlement houses. Taking up the women’s history version of the “heroic” account, Carson also emphasizes the role of women in the settlement movement, explaining how greater opportunities for higher education for women helped promote the idea that women should play a public role in social services, including settlement houses.<sup>19</sup>

Eleanor J. Stebner takes a different approach to women in the settlement movement. She focuses on the friendships among women at Hull House and argues that through their work they found a spiritual or religious sense of vocation “within a society that severely limited women’s choices.” Men were part of Hull House, of course, but Stebner characterizes Hull House as “primarily women’s space,” with women, in most cases single women, as its “undisputed leaders.”<sup>20</sup>

*Social Work and Social Order* (1992), Crocker’s own challenge to the “heroic” account, examines settlement houses in Indianapolis and Gary that have

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<sup>18</sup> Trolander, *Settlement Houses and the Great Depression*, 9-10.

<sup>19</sup> Mina Carson, *Settlement Folk: Social Thought and the American Settlement Movement, 1885-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), xi, 22-26.

<sup>20</sup> Eleanor J. Stebner, *The Women of Hull House: A Study in Spirituality, Vocation, and Friendship* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 4-5.

received less attention from historians than prominent institutions and leaders such as Hull House and Jane Addams. Crocker takes a textured approach, noting both the range of meanings that “reform” could have — “honest government,” “regeneration of neighborhoods,” “redemption and salvation” — and the variety of the houses’ aims and activities and the variety of people that houses served, whether migrant, African-American or white, native-born and working class. Like Trolander, Crocker notes that funding sources could shape a settlement house’s mission. In houses started or supported by large corporations in the 1920s, for example, social services may have been on the menu, but social reform was not.<sup>21</sup> Few businesses or businessmen were interested in changing the status quo.

In most historical accounts of the settlement movement, the performing arts figure as marginal rather than central, and settlement houses are considered apart from histories of theater and film. One of the few historians to give extended treatment to the settlement movement in the context of the arts is Derek Vaillant, who devotes a chapter of *Sounds of Reform* to “Musical Progressivism at Hull House.” Vaillant argues for music as “an instrument of outreach and reform” at Hull House and a “critical connection between progressive reform and the changing politics of music and democratic culture in urban America.”<sup>22</sup> Sayles, too, contributes to the field with the article “Cultural Development in an Immigrant Community: Arts Education through the Settlement Movement” (1993). Examining the settlement houses on the Lower

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<sup>21</sup> Crocker, *Social Work and Social Order*, 6, 7.

<sup>22</sup> Derek Vaillant, *Sounds of Reform: Progressivism and Music in Chicago, 1873-1935* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 92.

East Side of New York, such as Henry Street, Sayles emphasizes the opportunities for creative expression — and, through that expression, the development of social identity — that the houses' arts programs provided migrants, as well as the way the houses nurtured talent.<sup>23</sup> Though useful, however, Vaillant's and Sayles's work is limited, the former because it focuses on only one settlement house, the latter because it is necessarily brief, narrow in its geographical scope, and only partially historical in approach.

Though historians of the settlement movement generally acknowledge its British origins, relatively little work has been done on the settlement movement as a transatlantic or global phenomenon. The major exception is *Hundred Years of Settlements and Neighbourhood Centres in North America and Europe* (1986), a collection of essays edited by Herman Nijenhuis. Even here, the number of countries covered — Germany, Finland, and the Netherlands, for example — is limited and the quality of the writing problematic (some of the essays read as if they were badly translated into English).

Apart from *Hundred Years*, Mina Carson discusses both British and American settlements in *Settlement Folk*, but her focus is not transatlantic connections. And Isabelle Dubroca relates Kingsley House resident Eleanor McMain's experiences in France in *Good Neighbor*, a biography of McMain, but the vast majority of the book necessarily focuses on the U.S., where McMain lived most of her life.

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<sup>23</sup> Sayles, "Cultural development in an immigrant community."

II. Early film has been a more popular subject of historical inquiry than settlement houses, and the role of migrants has not been neglected. Far more attention has been paid, however, to the production than the consumption of films. Part of the reason is that film historians can hardly ignore the fact that Hollywood was, to a great extent, the creation of Jewish migrants from Eastern Europe, including William Fox, Carl Laemmle, Louis B. Mayer, the Warners, and Adolph Zukor. The long paper trails that resulted from their public prominence, correspondence, and business records, to say nothing of the movies themselves, have given historians much to work with. The key issue here is one explored by Neal Gabler in *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood*, a central work in the field: the fundamental paradox of the American film industry being founded by migrants who were the targets of virulent anti-Semitism for “conspiring against traditional American values and the power structure that maintained them” even as “they were desperately embracing those values and working to enter the power structure.”<sup>24</sup>

Another important reason, however, that migrant film audiences have gotten less attention from historians is sources: in most cases, the thoughts and feelings of migrants who watched early movies have been lost forever. The work that has taken a social historical approach in this field focuses mostly on class or gender. Historians generally agree that, for a number of reasons, movies held a particular appeal for migrants. A number of historical accounts characterize movie theaters as social spaces for migrants but also explore the tension between

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<sup>24</sup> Neal Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1988), 2.

the standardization of commercial entertainment and the extent to which neighborhoods made movie theaters their own and maintained their own movie-going culture even though the entertainment did not originate locally.

Steven J. Ross, for example, notes that rather than segregating patrons based on ticket prices, movie theaters charged one price and let all patrons sit anywhere they wished. Members of the middle and upper classes who didn't want to mix with the working classes stayed away, but migrants and other working-class folk "warmly embraced" nickelodeons.<sup>25</sup>

At least some members of every class watched movies, Ross writes, but the working class was the most devoted: "in Manhattan, where Jews, Italians, Poles, and other immigrant wage earners religiously flocked to the movies, a survey conducted in 1910 found that 72 percent of audiences came from the blue-collar sector." Even in small towns, movies were largely the province of the working class before World War I. Movies were "cheap, convenient, easily understood, and, most important, fun," and because most theaters showed the same short films on a continuous loop, it was easy for workers to drop in during lunch or after work and stay as much or as little as they wanted.<sup>26</sup>

Silent movies, Ross argues, were well-suited for migrants because little knowledge of English was needed; and because the lure of movies cut across lines of ethnicities, a wide variety of migrants rubbed elbows, sometimes literally, in the dark, helping "break down long-standing patterns of ethnic isolation among

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<sup>25</sup> Steven J. Ross, *Working-Class Hollywood: Silent Film and the Shaping of Class in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 18.

<sup>26</sup> Ross, *Working-Class Hollywood*, 19, 20.

immigrant groups.”<sup>27</sup>

Unlike more traditional working-class leisure spaces, which men dominated, movie theaters were inviting to migrant women. The movie theater, Kathy Peiss argues, was “a public and commercial space that married women could incorporate into their own culture of kinship, neighborhood, and church ties,” and that included Italian mothers, “often the most home-centered of immigrants, who went to the movie after evening church services. . . . The casual and neighborly atmosphere of the movies contrasted to more formal occasions for leisure.”<sup>28</sup> Italian women who lived alone also liked movies. But movie theaters’ appeal crossed ethnic boundaries, according to Peiss; migrant parents who “traditionally restricted female activity” were more willing to let their daughters go to movies than indulge in other forms of entertainment.<sup>29</sup>

The ethnic nature of some movie theaters is also a crucial dimension of the literature. Roy Rosenzweig, for example, argues that “although theater managers mediated the audience’s self-determination, they were, like saloonkeepers, usually cut from the same cloth as their customers,” with “similar backgrounds, values, and perspectives, and even . . . a similar language disadvantage.”<sup>30</sup> Lauren Rabinovitz discusses how nickelodeons encouraged audience participation through sing-alongs and live entertainment geared to migrants who lived near

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<sup>27</sup> Ross, *Working-Class Hollywood*, 21.

<sup>28</sup> Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 150.

<sup>29</sup> Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, 152.

<sup>30</sup> Roy Rosenzweig, “From Rum Shop to Rialto: Workers and Movies,” in *Moviegoing in America: A Sourcebook in the History of Film Exhibition*, ed. Gregory A. Waller (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 32.

the movie theaters.<sup>31</sup> And Lizabeth Cohen discusses working-class attendance at movie theaters in Chicago as part of the rise of mass culture and its potentially homogenizing effects. The same movies were shown in cinemas across the city (and country), but, Cohen argues, cinema-going culture, including how the movies were interpreted, was embedded within the community's culture, so the fact that the same movies were shown in different places did not necessarily contribute to cultural uniformity: "working-class audiences were affected by the content" of movies, but "when people viewed movies in the familiar world of the neighborhood theater, identification with their local community was bolstered."<sup>32</sup>

In the cinemas, Cohen writes, "the ethnic character of the community quickly became evident. The language of the yelling and jeering that routinely gave sound to silent movies provided the first clue. . . . Stage events accompanying the films told more" — drama in the language of the local migrants (Polish, for example) or music from the migrants' home countries (Italian, for example), and performed by local talent in both cases.<sup>33</sup> Native-born audiences talked to the screen as well — the absence of audible dialogue in early films encouraged it — but migrants may have had a particularly strong reason for doing so.

Historians differ, however, in trying to figure out what migrants made of movies. Some see an educational function for movies: they were "a guide to . . .

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<sup>31</sup> Lauren Rabinovitz, *Electric Dreamland: Amusement Parks, Movies, and American Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 6.

<sup>32</sup> Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 124.

manners and customs of [their] new environment,” according to Garth Jowett; Ross argues that they gave migrants a “vision of the kinds of fashions, values, and politics that producers portrayed as typifying American life.”<sup>34</sup> According to Ross, intertitles, “often translated by a *spieler* hired by the exhibitor, may have encouraged many immigrants to achieve English-language skills and prepare them to participate in political life”; and movies could contribute to class consciousness and show migrants “whether strikes, labor unions, and radical organizations were needed in their new land.”<sup>35</sup>

Russell Merritt is more skeptical, however. He argues that the films were far removed from what migrants, or anyone else, would encounter in real life, and in any case, many were French imports. He considers movie theaters less important for the movies they showed than for the social space they provided for migrants.<sup>36</sup> Peiss also notes the French connection — companies such as Gaumont and Pathé Frères probably had little interest in creating, even if they could have, tutorials to life in another country. And while conceding that early movies were “filled with ordinary people and everyday street scenes,” Peiss argues that many movies with working-class themes assumed that audiences were “unfamiliar with immigrant ghettos and tenement quarters” and presented

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<sup>33</sup> Cohen, *Making a New Deal*, 123.

<sup>34</sup> Garth S. Jowett, “First Motion Picture Audiences,” in *Movies as Artifacts: Cultural Criticism of Popular Film*, ed. Michael T. Marsden, John G. Nachbar and Sam L. Grogg Jr. (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1982), 21. Ross, 21.

<sup>35</sup> Ross, *Working-Class Hollywood*, 21.

<sup>36</sup> Russell Merritt, “Nickelodeon Theaters 1905-1914: Building an Audience for the Movies,” in *The American Film Industry*, ed. Tino Balio (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1976), 65.



their subject matter “as glimpses of ‘how the other half lives.’ ” She concludes: “this suggests not so much a direct correspondence between the content of early movies and their audience as rather a more mediated response that played with familiar social relationships.”<sup>37</sup>

III. Like film, ethnic theater has attracted a good deal of historians’ attention. There is general agreement on ethnic theater’s most basic functions: “education, entertainment, and a focus for social and community life,” in the words of Maxine Schwartz Seller, editor of *Ethnic Theatre in the United States* (1983), perhaps the most wide-ranging survey of the subject.<sup>38</sup> John Koegel argues that “while the immigrant theater was always open to outsiders,” its main purposes were “the entertainment and cultural education of multiple generations of immigrants.”<sup>39</sup> And Sabine Haenni puts it in a more abstract and generalized way, writing of “immigrant entrepreneurs [who] created spaces of commercial entertainment that likewise functioned as alternative public spheres.”<sup>40</sup> Historians also agree that ethnic theater was sustained by successive waves of migration and that the slowdown in migration in the 1920s spelled the start of the end for most varieties of ethnic theater.

Beyond that, historians have taken a variety of approaches to

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<sup>37</sup> Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, 154.

<sup>38</sup> Maxine Schwartz Seller, “Introduction,” in *Ethnic Theatre in the United States*, ed. Maxine Schwartz Seller (Wesport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1983), 6.

<sup>39</sup> John Koegel, *Music in German Immigrant Theater: New York City, 1840-1940* (University of Rochester Press, 2009), 11.

<sup>40</sup> Sabine Haenni, *The Immigrant Scene: Ethnic Amusements in New York, 1880-1920* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 103-04.

understanding ethnic theater's other functions. Koegel, for example, sees theater as connected to general "patterns of cultural maintenance, conflict, and accommodation." Ethnic theater, he writes, was a community institution that encouraged migrants to retain their native languages and encouraged migrant communities to meet their own artistic needs rather than looking to more mainstream, and English-language, sources.<sup>41</sup> Haenni, on the other hand, sees ethnic theater, specifically Yiddish and Italian theaters in New York, as sites that fused the modern and the ethnic and where an "ethnic community could take shape as a modern, urban public." Haenni further argues that German-American theater in New York modeled the kind of "mixed-sex leisure culture" that middle-class Americans later embraced.<sup>42</sup>

According to Nahma Sandrow, Yiddish theater helped migrants cope with life in a new country profoundly different from their homeland by filling "the new psychological gap in immigrants' lives." Some plays relieved homesickness; others dramatized both problems that migrants faced as well as solutions to those problems. For some migrants, Sandrow argues, the theater became a substitute religion, "publicly affirming a cultural-ethnic Jewishness that was elastic and didn't require any observance or piety." Yet for other migrants, the theater "in a sense, reinforced organized religion by assuming many of its values."<sup>43</sup>

Thomas Postlewait, too, sees ethnic theater as providing a bridge for

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<sup>41</sup> Koegel, *Music in German Immigrant Theater*, 4.

<sup>42</sup> Haenni, *The Immigrant Scene*, 59, 138.

<sup>43</sup> Sandrow, *Vagabond Stars*, 77.

migrants between their former homeland and their new one.<sup>44</sup> He also notes its institutional function: “theatre, like church activities and folk festivals, provided the essential shape and meaning for community activities.”<sup>45</sup> And Postlewait argues for the significant influence of both Yiddish and German-American theater on the wider culture: producers, performers, and writers who got their start in German-American theater later worked not only in English-language theater but also in film.<sup>46</sup>

Nina Warnke, on the other hand, looks at the behavior and composition of Yiddish theater audiences in New York, especially the audience’s interaction with the performers. Warnke focuses on fans, or perhaps super-fans: the *patriotn*, whom Warnke defines as “those who loved, supported, and were willing to defend their stars with fists and bats.”<sup>47</sup> Whereas most historians see Yiddish theater, and ethnic theater more generally, as community-building or at least community-sustaining, Warnke looks instead at power relations and divisions in theater-going culture.<sup>48</sup>

Other historians have explored a different kind of relationship between power and theater. Some, for example, have noted connections between ethnic

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<sup>44</sup> Thomas Postlewait, “The Hieroglyphic State: American Theatre and Society, Post-Civil War to 1945,” in *The Cambridge History of American Theatre Volume Two: 1870-1945*, ed. Don B. Wilmeth and Christopher Bigsby (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 141.

<sup>45</sup> Postlewait, “The Hieroglyphic State,” 141.

<sup>46</sup> Postlewait, “The Hieroglyphic State,” 143-44.

<sup>47</sup> Nina Warnke, “*Patriotn* and Their Stars: Male Youth Culture in the Galleries of the New York Yiddish Theatre,” in *Inventing the Modern Yiddish Stage: Essays in Drama, Performance, and Show Business*, ed. Joel Berkowitz and Barbara Henry (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2012), 162.

<sup>48</sup> Warnke, “*Patriotn* and Their Stars,” 163.

theater and political and social activism. From 1890 to 1918, Maureen Murphy writes, Irish-American drama was closely connected to growing Irish-American urban political power and to the issue of Irish home rule or total independence.<sup>49</sup> Playwrights and plays took positions on the matter. “Irish-American and sympathetic general American interest in the Irish question made the nationalist movement in Ireland far stronger than it would otherwise have been,” Murphy argues. “At no time in the history of Irish drama in the United States were drama and politics so closely involved.”<sup>50</sup>

Italian-American theater, too, had a political dimension, as explored by Marcella Bencivenni and Jennifer Guglielmo. Bencivenni has traced the history of the *filodrammatiche rosse*, the radical theatrical groups created by *soversivi*, or “anarchists, socialists, syndicalists and, after World War I, anti-fascist and communists refugees.” Guglielmo focuses on Italian women anarchists, who, through theatrical productions, highlighted issues from their daily lives, such as poverty and arranged marriages.<sup>51</sup>

### A new approach

Unlike earlier work, this dissertation emphasizes the transatlantic and generally transnational aspects of the settlement movement, examining visits from other countries to U.S. settlement houses and travel abroad by U.S.

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<sup>49</sup> Maureen Murphy, “Irish-American Theatre,” in *Ethnic Theatre in the United States*, ed. Maxine Schwartz Seller (Wesport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1983), 227.

<sup>50</sup> Murphy, “Irish-American Theatre,” 228.

<sup>51</sup> Marcella Bencivenni, *Italian Immigrant Radical Culture: The Idealism of the Sovversivi in the United States, 1890-1940* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 128; Jennifer Guglielmo,

settlement workers. In addition, it argues that the arts were central to settlement houses and offer a perspective on the relationship between migrants and settlement workers. And this dissertation argues that settlement houses deserve to be considered alongside theater and cinema as important sites of migrant participation in the arts.

A major limitation for any project on this topic is the relative lack of sources that give the migrants' own perspectives on settlement houses. This dissertation tries to address this gap in a number of ways, each with its own drawbacks. First, it uses memoirs by migrants who experienced settlement house life as children. Despite the value of such recollections, they are inevitably colored by childhood nostalgia and made further problematic by the fact that children often misunderstand or only partially understand what they observe of the adult world. Second, visitors from abroad offered critiques, in some cases harsh ones, of U.S. settlement houses — a refreshing contrast to settlement workers' constant and sometimes wearying promotion of their (worthwhile) projects. At least one visitor, Alix Westerkamp, spent months at a settlement house, immersing herself in its life and rhythms, which makes her account of her experiences especially interesting and valuable. She was the exception, however: most such visitors' observations must be taken with a grain of salt, as the visits tended to be brief, and tourists tended to use their trips to confirm any prejudices (such as anti-Americanism) they may already have had and thus were perhaps determined to see, or at least report, only the negative.

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*Living the Revolution: Italian Women's Resistance and Radicalism in New York City, 1880-1945* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 172-174.

In addition, it is sometimes possible, through a close reading of the words used, to tease out or guess at migrants' attitudes based on what settlement workers said about them. The assumption here is that while residents did not fully understand migrants — what human being, after all, has ever fully understood another? — and, whether they realized it or not, tried to impose their values on them, residents did not fabricate or willfully distort migrants' views. What residents wrote about migrants, in other words, is taken to bear some kind of factual relationship to what migrants did, said, and thought. The assumption may be wrong, but it is the type that all historians must, at some level, make of their sources or give up studying the past. Thus, though this dissertation is unavoidably, given the nature of the sources, tilted more toward settlement workers than toward migrants, the latter still find a central place in it.

## CHAPTER 1

### TRANSATLANTIC TURMOIL AND TRANSFORMATION

Industrialization began in Britain in the late eighteenth century and spread to the Continent and the United States over the course of the nineteenth century. The jobs offered by industry drew large numbers of workers to cities; some were native-born and had lived in the countryside, but many others, especially in the U.S., were migrants from Europe. Industrialization brought fantastic riches to a tiny group of owners and moderate prosperity to middle managers and members of a new, expanding white-collar working class of clerks and salespeople. But the hottest, dirtiest, noisiest, and most dangerous work was done by a large working-class population that was ill-paid, had little or no power, and lived a precarious, hand-to-mouth existence. City dwellers with the time and money, meanwhile, took advantage of traditional forms of entertainment, such as theater, and a seemingly magical new medium made possible by electrification.

#### **Migration**

Though the origins, composition, volume, distribution, and legality of migrant flows into and out of the Americas have varied dramatically over the centuries, those flows have never ceased. During the colonial period, there was especially heavy migration into the British colonies, which had few or no restrictions on migrants. Spain, the other major colonial power in the Americas at the time, regulated migration more strictly, while the French had to work to

encourage migration to their North American settlements because there was relatively little incentive for the French to cross the Atlantic. Large numbers of migrants arrived voluntarily or semi-voluntarily (in cases where the only alternative was imprisonment, for example), and millions of Africans were forcibly brought across the Atlantic, many of them dying in the Middle Passage. After the American colonies of Britain and Spain had won their independence, migration continued, both free and slave. The United States, for example, received 600,000 European migrants in the 1830s, 1.7 million in the 1840s, and 2.6 million in the 1850s.<sup>52</sup>

Thus, in one sense, the migrants arriving in the U.S. in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries simply continued a centuries-long pattern. But there were crucial differences as well. For one thing, those migrants were part of a tsunami rather than just a wave: 11.7 million between 1871 and 1901, followed by 12.9 million between 1901 and 1914 — more than the combined migration into the British North American colonies and into the U.S. in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, plus the first seven decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>53</sup> Also, the overwhelming majority of European migrants who arrived during the tsunami came from southern and eastern Europe, rather than from northern or western Europe, as had been the case before the Civil War.

Broadly speaking, most migration to the U.S., and elsewhere, happened for economic reasons, and in the last decades of the nineteenth century, some

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<sup>52</sup> Daniel Rogers, *Guarding the Golden Door: American Immigration Policy and Immigrants Since 1882* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004), 9.

<sup>53</sup> Rogers, *Guarding the Golden Door*, 30.



Europeans saw it as an increasingly urgent need. Improved food production encouraged population increase, but the availability of land was finite, resulting in more landless laborers.<sup>54</sup> Also, the growth of capitalist enterprise brought a flood of manufactured products to rural markets, and artisans and household producers could not compete. And as industrial cities expanded, large-scale commercial agriculture to feed the cities became increasingly profitable, and traditional subsistence farming was squeezed out. People who could no longer make a living, or an adequate living, were driven to migrate in search of better opportunities. Rising literacy rates and technological innovations such as the telegraph, cheap printing, and mass transportation helped workers learn of employment opportunities and then reach those places.<sup>55</sup>

Some of those opportunities involved movement within Europe: families of shepherds migrated seasonally in Romania; industrial cities such as Graz drew Slovenes; mines and coke plants in Moravia and Silesia and Polish railroads and construction sites were staffed by some of the tens of thousands of people who had left Galicia by 1900; and by 1907, more than 350,000 migrants from Russian Poland and Galicia had found work in Germany. There was internal migration in Italy as well. During the 1880s, for example, several hundred residents of Cosenza spent each spring working in Italy's south or in Sicily.<sup>56</sup> Departing, for a while or for life, for a country thousands of miles away, across an ocean, was a

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<sup>54</sup> Aristide R. Zolberg, *A Nation by Design: Immigration Policy in the Fashioning of America* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), 202.

<sup>55</sup> Zolberg, *A Nation by Design*, 203.

<sup>56</sup> John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 43-44.

more formidable task, of course, but in line with what Europeans had been doing already.

Not everyone affected by difficult economic conditions migrated, however. Those most likely to migrate overseas were not the very poor, who lacked the means for long-distance travel, but rather those on the middle and lower middle rungs of their societies, such as artists, craftsmen, agricultural laborers, petty merchants, and small landowners. (The rich, meanwhile, were so invested in their native countries that they felt no need to leave.) Furthermore, rates of migration varied greatly not just among countries but also among regions within each country. Regions most affected by the rise of commercial agriculture and manufactured goods were the most likely to produce migrants, while regions that were unsuited to commercial agriculture or lacked the transportation infrastructure to bring in factory products yielded relatively few migrants.<sup>57</sup>

Social context, too, shaped Europeans' decisions about migration. Migration usually happened within family and village networks. Migrants who planned to leave farms made sure that they were not depriving their families of crucial labor — that enough people stayed behind so that their families would not starve. Many migrants intended to stay abroad only long enough to earn money to help their families or, if landless, to buy land upon returning. Not all migrants who intended to return did so, but most wanted to, and many did: about forty percent of Greeks, for example, and almost the same percentage of Poles. The European migrants most likely to return were Magyars (sixty-four percent),

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<sup>57</sup> Bodnar, *The Transplanted*, 13, 21, 55, 56.

Slovaks (fifty-nine percent), and migrants from southern and central Italy (fifty-six percent). Northern Italians were less likely to return, partly because of the greater availability of land in Italy's south than in the north — which also tended to reduce rates of return to Prussia and Austria.<sup>58</sup> Something like 4 million people, representing 25 to 33 percent of European migrants to the U.S. between 1880 and 1930, returned home and stayed there.<sup>59</sup>

Religion also figured into the issue of migration, especially in the case of the Jews. In 1880, the U.S. population of Jews was something like 250,000, consisting mostly of German Jews and their descendants, plus 50,000 from Eastern Europe. By 1924, the U.S. was home to about 4 million Jews, of whom more than 3 million had migrated from Eastern Europe or were the children or grandchildren of those migrants. Though not averse to bettering their lot in an economic sense, Eastern European Jews also fled persecution. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the Jewish population of Eastern Europe had gone from about 1.5 million to about 7 million, and Jews were perceived by their Christian neighbors as being rich, though, in fact, relatively few were. Both factors exacerbated the anti-Semitism that had been a part of Christian European life for eons. That anti-Semitism was not just present among the broader population but also encouraged by religious and secular authorities. After Alexander II was assassinated in 1881, the Russian government oppressed Jews even more harshly, sponsoring pogroms and limiting where Jews could live, work, and go to

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<sup>58</sup> Bodnar, *The Transplanted*, 52-54.

<sup>59</sup> Mark Wyman, *Round-Trip to America: The Immigrants Return to Europe, 1880-1930* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), 6.

school. Thousands of Jews were banished from Moscow, Saint Petersburg, and Kharkov. Thus, despite the expense, physical difficulty, and legal barriers (most Russian Jews lacked the papers needed for legally crossing borders), Jews fled by the tens of thousands. Those most likely to migrate from Russia were fourteen to forty years old and had industrial, rather than commercial, job skills — a group not representative of Russian Jews as a whole. Once Jews arrived in the U.S., only one in twenty returned to Europe, compared with the far higher rates, discussed above, for other migrant groups.<sup>60</sup>

Governmental and ruling-class policies and attitudes, apart from anti-Semitism, constituted a fourth factor in helping determine migration patterns, and such policies and attitudes fluctuated between considering population as (in economic terms) “valuable human capital” to be retained if possible and “accumulating human refuse” to be gotten rid of if possible, as Aristide Zolberg puts it. Thus, in some cases, migration meant a loss of workers and potential military recruits: the gentry in Russian Poland wanted peasants to stay so as to maintain a surplus labor supply. But governments and the ruling class sometimes encouraged migration, seeing it as a solution for the problems of “surplus” population and of taking care of the poor, despite the fact that few of the poor migrated. After 1815, for example, Britain favored departures because the birth rate was high enough for labor needs and because after the Napoleonic Wars, Britain needed settlers in newly acquired territories. The ideas of Thomas Malthus regarding population and food supply may also have had an influence.

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<sup>60</sup> Roger Daniels, *Coming to America: A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1991), 223-225.

Efforts to not only get people to leave but also have them go where the government wanted them to go, however, had mixed results. Still, other European governments also encouraged departures in the first half of the nineteenth century by, for example, lowering legal barriers. The major exception was France, though it did push for settlement in Algeria.<sup>61</sup>

Migration could also serve as a “safety valve for popular discontent,” and remittances by migrants could be a boon to sending societies — In Italy’s case, \$60 million a year from North America between 1901 and 1914. Companies benefited by providing transportation for migrants. Some liberals even spoke out for peasants’ rights to try to improve their material circumstances.

Despite the relaxation of migration policies, however, the governments of sending societies remained interested in, and exerted some control over, who left and the circumstances of departure. The Croatian government required all migrants to pay a fee before leaving and used the money to help Croats in the U.S. return home. Private citizens and governments created migrant aid groups, such as the Polish Emigration Society, established in 1909 and based in Krakow. Hungary arranged with Cunard to have migrants embark at Fiume rather than German ports, so that departing Hungarians would spend their money within the empire up to their last moments in Europe, rather than economically benefiting Germany.<sup>62</sup>

Receiving societies also, of course, had migration policies, and that

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<sup>61</sup> Aristide Zolberg, “The Exit Revolution,” in *Citizenship and Those Who Leave: The Politics of Emigration and Expatriation*, ed. Nancy L. Green and François Weil (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 36, 41, 51-52.

<sup>62</sup> Bodnar, *The Transplanted*, 50-51; Zolberg, *A Nation by Design*, 203.

included the U.S., one of the major receiving societies. Given the huge inflows of migrants into the U.S., it would have been surprising had there not been a strong negative reaction, even in the supposed “country of immigrants” whose native-born have, in practice, always greeted migrants with suspicion, if not hostility. However, one of the first laws restricting migration into the U.S. was directed not at Europeans entering on the East Coast but Asians entering on the West Coast: the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which created a precedent for migration restrictions based on ethnicity. Such laws were rooted in changing ideas of race and of fears among native-born whites descended from northern and western Europeans of being overwhelmed by supposedly inferior “races” that would ruin the country. (The fear of one race overwhelming another race may seem more comprehensible given that it had already happened on the territory of the U.S.: Europeans had largely wiped out Native Americans.) For many native-born Americans of European descent, the supposed racial differences among them, African-Americans, and Asian-Americans remained clear. But the native-born also wanted to differentiate themselves from the new migrants arriving from southern and eastern Europe and thus began thinking of them as racially distinct as well. They were not categorized with African- and Asian-Americans but were also “neither securely white nor nonwhite” and thus of dubious fitness for “certain kinds of jobs or for American citizenship.”<sup>63</sup> Such views were held not just by ordinary people but also by those who could influence federal migration policies. In an 1891 article, Henry Cabot Lodge, at the time a member of the

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<sup>63</sup> David R. Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White: The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 12.

House of Representatives, wrote, citing a State Department report, of the decline of migration by “races which had thus far built up the United States, and which are related to each other either by blood or language or both” and the simultaneous increase of migration of “alien races” that were “poorer and more ignorant than their predecessors, and also contain a high proportion of ‘birds of passage’ who display no interest in becoming American.” In the article, Lodge also called for “an intelligent and effective restriction of immigration.”<sup>64</sup>

Whether intelligent, effective, or neither, restrictions on migration were soon implemented. In the early 1890s, the position of superintendent of immigration was added to the Treasury, and a reception facility, controlled by the federal government, was built on Ellis Island, the U.S.’s main port of entry.<sup>65</sup> A number of other laws restricting various groups of migrants followed in the early decades of the twentieth century. In the 1920s, the U.S. started setting migration quotas, allowing in only a certain number of people from each country.

## **Urbanization**

In both Europe and the U.S., migrants and the native-born were part of a rapidly urbanizing transatlantic world. In 1910, Germany had forty-eight cities of 100,000 or more, accounting for twenty percent of the population; France had fifteen such cities, Britain and Ireland forty-one, and the U.S. fifty. There were seven cities of a million or more in the North Atlantic economy, including

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<sup>64</sup> Zolberg, *A Nation by Design*, 213-214.

<sup>65</sup> Zolberg, *A Nation by Design*, 223-224.

London, Berlin, and three cities in the U.S.<sup>66</sup> In 1860, one in six Americans lived in communities of 8,000 or more; by 1900, a third of Americans did so. In those decades, the rural population doubled but could not keep pace with the rise in the urban population: from less than 10 million in 1870 to more than 44 million in 1920. The urban growth was concentrated in the Northeast and Midwest and on the Pacific coast.<sup>67</sup>

The big cities, highly stratified socially and economically, offered spectacles of both size and heterogeneity: “a financial district here, mansion district there, tenderloin sections, factory towns, a concentration of warehouses and department stores, middle-class suburbs, and vast working-class regions subdivided by turn into neighborhood and ethnic territories,” all of it forming a “stark urban chiaroscuro.” Yet somehow, all those fragments functioned together, if not without friction, to create a “web of mutual dependency that was at once extraordinarily powerful and barely visible.” Large cities were also characterized by ceaseless turbulence as people entered and left, land values rose and fell, and property uses “shifted with the whims of markets and fashions.”<sup>68</sup>

The public and the private were in constant conflict in urban space. Cities were, on the one hand, dense agglomerations of private spaces and private interests, with city governments and businesses working to create favorable

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<sup>66</sup> Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), 47.

<sup>67</sup> Sean Dennis Cashman, *America in the Gilded Age: From the Death of Lincoln to the Rise of Theodore Roosevelt* (New York: New York University Press, 1984), 108; John Hannigan, *Fantasy City: Pleasure and Profit in the Postmodern Metropolis* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 17.

<sup>68</sup> Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings*, 48, 113-114.



environments for stores, warehouses, factories, and freight yards.<sup>69</sup> Cities were thus subject to the tragedy of the commons, in which the rational self-interest of individuals ends up depleting a resource and hurting the common interest. In the case of cities, that resource was space, which individuals and businesses commodified and sought to use to maximize profit or monetary value. Little space was left over for public use, which neither individuals nor businesses could directly profit from in a monetary way.

Yet cities could be greater than the sum of their private interests as the density created opportunities for public spaces, such as parks, and public services, such as municipalized police, fire protection, water, gas, and streetcars. Late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century urban reform efforts in the U.S., taking their cues from Western European cities, tried to control and improve cities and transform them into places of “shapely boulevards, healthful parks, comfortable and secure private habitations, and elegant public buildings.”<sup>70</sup> It was an attempt, that is, to sand down some of the working-class edges and make cities safer and more comfortable for the middle class; yet there were efforts to help the poor as well, and everyone could benefit from less disorder, corruption, and crime. But efforts at improvements that could benefit everyone were inseparable from efforts to impose greater control over cities, to regulate sprawling, chaotic urban spaces. So as “a middle-class version of the city emerged and became widespread,” partly in the form of “new neighborhoods, public

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<sup>69</sup> Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 116.

<sup>70</sup> Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America*, 104, 116.

buildings, redesigned downtown regions, and parks,” the idea that animated such efforts was redemption — large cities could be redeemed from crime and chaos by a greater sense of citizenship among the middle class, which “would turn to men of intelligence and specialized training, ‘experts,’ to reform city government and restore order and harmony to city streets.”<sup>71</sup> Among the most prominent of the experts was Frederick Law Olmsted, the city designer and landscape architect. Olmsted saw parks as an antidote to the “vile” streets, which meant, in part, the “communal culture of working-class and immigrant streets,” with its “offensive and disturbing foreignness,” as contrasted to the “middle-class norms of hearth and tea table.”<sup>72</sup> The “vile” streets were also the power base of ward bosses and political machines, so greater middle-class control of cities had political implications as well.

### **Cities at work: industrialization**

The main reason that so many people, native-born and migrants, flocked to U.S. cities was industrialization, which created jobs. Even before the Civil War, the North, though largely agricultural, had been more industrialized than the South, and during the war, demand for matériel promoted the growth of mills and factories as well as the expansion of railroads to transport the products. Trains carried people too, and the extension of rail lines to and through the West brought settlers of European descent who helped themselves not only to Native Americans’ land but also the mineral riches under the soil, including vast

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<sup>71</sup> Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America*, 107.

<sup>72</sup> Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America*, 110-111.

deposits of coal, iron ore, petroleum, gold, silver, and copper. Railroads also offered a preview of industrialization. Large corporations first appeared in the U.S. in the form of railroad companies, and trains were the first form of modern technology that large numbers of Americans became familiar with. Railroads also innovated modern corporate structures in the U.S., dividing “their business offices into central- and regional-sales, freight, passenger, and legal divisions” — a model that other companies would later adopt. And by forming monopolies, colluding in setting rates, bribing public officials, and buying legislatures, railroad owners became the first “robber barons on a grand scale.” Thus, in the commercial and industrial environment afforded by the United States — and given a small, weak central government; a national banking system; and a respect for private property and contracts — businessmen could do largely as they wished. By 1865, then, “the preconditions existed for an industrial economy of spectacular new proportions.”<sup>73</sup>

Industrialization in Britain, meanwhile, had been proceeding for decades. By 1870, Britain produced almost a third of all manufactured goods in the world, along with almost four times as much iron ore as its closest rival and two and a half times as much coal. Coal was crucial to industry for producing steam power, iron and steel, and Britain had large deposits of coal in southern Scotland, around Manchester in northern England, and around Birmingham in the midlands.<sup>74</sup> Manufacturing in Britain was concentrated mainly in the coal

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<sup>73</sup> Ron Chernow, *Titan: The Life of John D. Rockefeller, Sr.* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 98-99, 104; Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America*, 57-58; Cashman, *America in the Gilded Age*, 12.

<sup>74</sup> Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings*, 44-45.

regions: “the map of the British industrial revolution,” Sidney Pollard observes, “is simply the map of the coalfields,” the major exception being London, a manufacturing center that did not lie atop coal fields. Britain’s deposits of copper, tin, iron, lead, and salt also helped industrialization.<sup>75</sup>

Parts of the Continent were heavily industrialized as well, especially northern France and Belgium, whose “mines, factories, and densely packed industrial towns made it the most intensely industrialized nation of continental Europe — a region of strenuously overcrowded workers’ dwellings, low wages, intensive child labor, and startlingly high illiteracy rates.” In Germany, the Rhineland and the Ruhr industrialized so fast in the decades before World War I that Germany surpassed Britain in steel production and in manufactured goods. Germany also produced large quantities of coal, iron, textiles, and chemicals.<sup>76</sup>

When the industrial economy arrived in the U.S., it proved spectacular in its “speed, its scale, its thoroughness within a brief period.” In 1870, the U.S. was still a nation of farms: industrial production lagged behind agricultural production by some \$500 million. By 1900, however, industry — encompassing businesses as diverse as oil refineries, iron and steel mills, meatpacking plants, breweries, and clothing and shoe factories — had taken a huge lead, with \$13 billion in production, compared with agriculture’s \$4.7 billion.<sup>77</sup> The U.S. had also by that point surpassed European countries in productivity of items such as

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<sup>75</sup> Sidney Pollard, *Peaceful Conquest: The Industrialization of Europe 1760-1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 4.

<sup>76</sup> Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings*, 45-46.

<sup>77</sup> Cashman, *America in the Gilded Age*, 13.

raw steel and steel rails. New York and Philadelphia became manufacturing centers with the help of Pennsylvania's vast coal seams — “the Pittsburgh district was the American Ruhr.” Coal fields in Illinois, meanwhile, were crucial to the creation of an industrial belt from Pittsburgh to Cleveland and from Chicago to Milwaukee.<sup>78</sup>

Farm work also became increasingly mechanized. In 1896, for example, one farmer using the new technology of the period could reap more wheat than 18 farmers had been able to reap in 1836 using horses and hand machines. As farmland became more productive, the proportion of the U.S. under cultivation went from fifteen percent in 1850 to thirty-seven percent in 1900. Increasing efficiency also meant, however, that fewer people were needed for farm work, and people displaced from rural areas further swelled the already growing cities.<sup>79</sup>

At the same time, railroads expanded enormously, helped by the federal government's grants of vast acreage to rail companies. Thus, 35,000 miles of track in 1865 became 193,000 miles by 1900. Demand was high, not just for moving people but also for moving freight, and the increase hints at the vast quantities of cargo that industry required: in 1865, 10 billion tons of freight per mile of track; in 1890, 79 billion tons.<sup>80</sup> The first transcontinental railroad was finished in 1869, “as significant an event for Americans as was the contemporary completion of the Suez Canal for Europeans.”<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings*, 47.

<sup>79</sup> Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America*, 52-53.

<sup>80</sup> Cashman, *America in the Gilded Age*, 26.

<sup>81</sup> Cashman, *America in the Gilded Age*, 28.

Machines and intensive industrialization upended “the forms, rhythms, and patterns of physical labor” and brought other kinds of discontinuity as well.<sup>82</sup> Before the Civil War, industrial entrepreneurs had gained wealth and status through their ingenuity in mechanical skill, working with both their hands and their brains in the manipulation and marketing of physical objects, so that by the 1850s, “the practical Yankee inventor-entrepreneur, the tinkerer with an eye on profit, had come to seem an American type.” But a very different “American type” arose after the war. Inventions and improvements still mattered, of course: the steam boiler, telephone, electric lamp, telegraph stock ticker, linoleum, elevator, machine tools, typewriter, and newspaper linotype machine, for example, aided or accompanied industrialization.<sup>83</sup> Edison bridged “the world of the tinkerer and the world of modern industry,” but he was very much the exception, and the future did not lie in his working methods, no matter how brilliant.<sup>84</sup> Instead, technological invention and innovation became more and more the province of engineers and scientists trained at universities, while entrepreneurs — besides overseeing companies far larger than those that existed before the war — concerned themselves mainly with money, which the growth of banks and other financial institutions provided in abundance. Such entrepreneurs worked with their brains, not their hands, to manipulate abstractions rather than physical objects. “Moreover, they conducted their daily business through a growing system of managers, accountants, supervisors, lawyers: a burgeoning structure of

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<sup>82</sup> Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America*, 46.

<sup>83</sup> Cashman, *America in the Gilded Age*, 14.

<sup>84</sup> Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America*, 66.

business offices increasingly removed from machines and labor in the factory itself.”<sup>85</sup>

Some people benefited from industrialization. Incomes rose by more than 50 percent between 1870 and 1900 for non-farm workers, and the cost of living, based on the consumer price index, fell by the same percentage. Meanwhile, the average workweek shrank by 3.5 hours for manufacturing workers and by even more for white-collar workers and unionized employees. Some workers began getting half of Saturdays off, and vacations — not necessarily paid — became more common.<sup>86</sup> The middle class expanded as small businessmen, farmers, and manufacturers were joined by corporate managers and professionals. In addition, there were more and more “low-level white-collar and service-sector employees” — in the clerical and sales forces especially — who exactly fit neither the traditional middle class nor the traditional working class; they represented a white-collar working class, as they did their jobs more with their heads than with their hands.<sup>87</sup> However they were classified, their numbers were growing fast: the clerical work force went from 160,000 in 1880 to 1.7 million in 1910; clerical and sales workers made up 2.4 percent of the workforce in 1870 and 11 percent by 1920.<sup>88</sup>

Yet the new economy did little for many other people. The demand for

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<sup>85</sup> Trachtenberg *The Incorporation of America*, 53-54.

<sup>86</sup> David Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 3-4.

<sup>87</sup> Steven J. Ross, *Working-Class Hollywood: Silent Film and the Shaping of Class in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 14-15.

<sup>88</sup> Nasaw, *Going Out*, 5.

traditional skilled labor declined as the demand for unskilled labor grew — “operators and machine tenders, with little hope of significant social improvement through their own talents and efforts. In short, the increasingly rigid social stratification that accompanied the dramatic rise in industrial productivity confused, angered, and frustrated masses of Americans.”<sup>89</sup> The new type of skilled labor involved fields such as science, technology, and finance, not crafts.

As hard steel, new lubricants, and new machines parts were developed and as steam power gave way to electricity starting in the 1880s, factories became more efficient and economical, and the nature of factory labor changed as well, becoming more dispersed and decentralized in some cases and allowing for the creation of assembly lines.<sup>90</sup> During downturns — such as the original “Great Depression” (as it was known before the 1930s), which started in 1873 with a Wall Street crash and ushered in twenty-plus years of a “perilously uneven business cycle” — businesses paid even more attention to cost efficiency than they did in other periods, so that by the 1890s, “the corporate office virtually dominated the work place, imposing demands for speed, regularity, and quotas of output.”<sup>91</sup> Management used techniques developed by Frederick Taylor, a foreman at the Midvale Steel Company in Pennsylvania, in his time-study experiments of the 1880s, to try to boost productivity by means of stopwatches

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<sup>89</sup> Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America*, 54.

<sup>90</sup> Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America*, 55-56.

<sup>91</sup> Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America*, 39, 56.



and flowcharts. Workers, meanwhile, became cogs in the industrial process, and business tried to replace as many of them as possible with machines. For workers, automation, which continued into the twentieth century, meant “a steady erosion of their autonomy, their control, and their crafts.”<sup>92</sup>

The increase in industrialization required vast amounts of manpower; here again, numbers tell part of the story: manufacturing employed 1.3 million in 1865 and 4.5 million in 1900, by which point the working class accounted for more than a third of the U.S. population; during the same period, the number of factories and sweatshops went from 140,000 to 512,000. “Wage labor emerged, unequivocally, as the definitive working-class experience, a proletarianization no longer the imagined nightmare of independent artisans and failed entrepreneurs but the typical lot of American workers.”<sup>93</sup>

Just as urbanization in the U.S. was about the commodification of space, industrialization emphasized the commodification of work and the commodification, and depletion, of human beings and human bodies. Long hours, low pay, and appalling living and working conditions were the norm for millions of laborers. Working-class neighborhoods were characterized by substandard housing, schools, lighting, and sewer and water service; work was a regimen of “mechanized violence,” with “the heat and danger from molten steel at open hearths, the threats of cave-ins and toxic gases in coal mines, the danger to fingers and limbs in all kinds of machines with unguarded moving parts.” Railroads, too, were deadly: on the tracks, 72,000 employees killed and almost 2

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<sup>92</sup> Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America*, 56, 69.

million injured between 1890 and 1917, plus 158,000 killed in roundhouses and repair shops. There was no workmen's compensation before the 1930s, and railroads began offering disability insurance only in 1947; and workers got little in return for long hours and high risks: about \$1.50 per day for unskilled labor. In the 1880s, about forty-five percent of workers made \$500 or more a year, considered the poverty line, and forty percent made less than that. It was a highly precarious existence in which one accident at work could doom a whole family to eviction, poverty, and starvation.

The working class thus hardly profited from the vast wealth it generated for business owners and, to a lesser extent, middle management; “progress and poverty were, apparently, inseparable.” The idea of free and dignified labor — “a work ethic which promised personal advancement and security for honest labor, frugal self-management, and disciplined personal character” — had helped motivate antebellum abolitionism and became central to a war that had destroyed slavery, but industrialization seemed to make a mockery of that promise — a few became fantastically rich, and not necessarily, or not only, through honesty and frugality but rather through power, ruthlessness, and luck. Meanwhile, most of those who worked for them, no matter how industrious, frugal, and disciplined, remained mired in poverty. And just as, in previous eras, aristocrats had assured themselves and one another that the existing social order was God's will and thus immutable, so wealthy business owners of the industrial age could salve whatever consciences they had by subscribing to English social

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<sup>93</sup> Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America*, 87-88; Cashman, *America in the Gilded Age*, 143.

philosopher Herbert Spencer's social Darwinism — a perversion and misapplication of Darwinism that imagined human society as being in a state of nature and thus “seemed to sanction precisely that scene of tumult and conflict, of rising and falling fortunes.” But tumult, conflict, and changing fortunes were just what industrialists sought to eliminate or at least mitigate. They wanted order, stability, consolidation, and control so as to ensure, as much as possible, an uninterrupted flow of wealth to the wealthy. Hence the drive to eliminate competition and create monopolies. The extreme concentrations of wealth created by U.S. industrialists after the Civil War made some businesses loci of power that in size and geographical reach could challenge the federal government, which, though strengthened by the war, was at the time still smaller and weaker than it would be in later generations.

In the land of supposed freedom and individualism, then, the fight was rigged from the start, pitting individual workers against corporate might — an enormous imbalance, with the power and the freedom mostly on the side of management; workers were free only to quit — and to starve. Little wonder, then, that in the 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s — especially in the peak years of 1877, 1886, and 1892-93 — hundreds of thousands of workers, most of them not unionized, took part in tens of thousands of strikes. The strike, Alan Trachtenberg argues, “was a rupture, a release, an act of negation by which a sense of positive freedom came to the fore,” as well as “a collective act, embodying a recognition that the freedom which arose from negation belonged to a common group.” Strikes were protests, often spontaneous, of firings or rule changes that workers considered arbitrary or unfair. Some were widespread, long, violent, or all of the above, such

as the Molly Maguires' strike in 1875, the Great Railroad Strike of 1877, the Haymarket riot of 1886, the Homestead strike of 1892, and the Pullman strike of 1894.<sup>94</sup>

Yet for all the anger and all the strikes, the working class in the U.S. remained divided, not just between skilled and unskilled labor but also along lines of gender, ethnicity, race, language, and religion, especially because of the presence of migrants, who between 1870 and the 1920s made up one of every three industrial workers.<sup>95</sup> (In the absence of migration, the U.S. work force would have been thirty percent smaller by 1940 than it actually was.<sup>96</sup>) Under such conditions, unionization efforts often foundered, though the National Labor Union (1866), the Knights of Labor (1869), and the American Federation of Labor (1886) were among the most important exceptions. Unions were also split over issues such as whether it was best to work for long-term, structural reform or more immediate gains, such as higher pay and shorter hours.<sup>97</sup>

### **Cities at play: theater and ethnic theater**

Class was closely bound up not only with the nature of work but also with leisure pursuits. In the first few decades after the Civil War, those who had recently grown rich in banking, steel, and railroads, seeking to “publicly proclaim their patrician taste and culture,” created “exclusive social clubs, from the

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<sup>94</sup> Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America*, 88-89; Cashman, *America in the Gilded Age*, 145.

<sup>95</sup> Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America*, 87-88.

<sup>96</sup> Bodnar, *The Transplanted*, xix.

downtown sanctuaries of Boston and New York where members discussed politics, literature, science and technology over sumptuous meals, to the elite hunting and fishing associations” of Pittsburgh iron manufacturers. Other indulgences of the rich included college football, casinos, and horse racing.<sup>98</sup>

Members of the urban working class, meanwhile, had restaurants, beer gardens, saloons, the “cheap variety theater,” lecture halls, fraternal lodges, billiards, bowling, picnic groves, pleasure gardens, roller rinks, penny arcades, baseball and other field sports, dance halls, shooting galleries, vaudeville, dime museums, burlesque venues, nightclubs, and cabarets. Most such spaces were for men only. Working-class women in their spare time focused mainly on “family, church and neighborhood.”<sup>99</sup>

The “respectable’ middle class” allowed itself fewer entertainment options than the other classes did: theaters, concerts, and libraries were acceptable, as were “travelogues and musicals sponsored by church-affiliated associations such as the YMCA.” Otherwise, “a reverence for quiet seclusion and privacy” — or at least entertainment at home rather than outside of it — prevailed.

There were exceptions to such segregation, but even when members of the different classes were in the same space at the same time, such as at some

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<sup>97</sup> Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America*, 94-95; Cashman, *America in the Gilded Age*, 145.

<sup>98</sup> Hannigan, *Fantasy City*, 15-16.

<sup>99</sup> Lauren Rabinovitz, *Electric Dreamland: Amusement Parks, Movies, and American Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 1-2; Garth S. Jowett, “First Motion Picture Audiences,” in *Movies as Artifacts: Cultural Criticism of Popular Film*, ed. Michael T. Marsden, John G. Nachbar and Sam L. Grogg Jr. (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1982), 16-17; Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies. Revised and Updated* (New York: Random House, 1994), 4; Hannigan, *Fantasy City*, 16.

sporting events, there was little mixing.<sup>100</sup> That went for theater as well. “The theater in the first half of the nineteenth century,” Lawrence W. Levine writes, “played the role that movies played in the first half of the twentieth: it was a kaleidoscopic, democratic institution presenting a widely varying bill of fare to all classes and socioeconomic groups.”<sup>101</sup>

That is not to say, however, that all classes were equal within the playhouse. Because theaters in the early decades of the nineteenth century were “a microcosm of American society,” seating reflected the class structure: the “middling classes” in the pit (orchestra), the upper class in the boxes, and everyone else in the gallery (balcony), including servants, apprentices, members of the working class, prostitutes, and others too poor to buy better seats, as well as African-Americans, who weren’t allowed to sit anywhere else even if they could afford it.<sup>102</sup>

Performances were also more raucous and participatory than they are now — more like modern sports events than like modern theater. Audiences quickly and loudly made known their approval of or displeasure about the play, the acting, and whatever else they wanted to comment on.<sup>103</sup> Such theatergoing practices were, moreover, transatlantic, and *Great Expectations*, published 1860-61 but set in the early 1800s, offers a taste of audience attitudes in Britain at that time. In Chapter XXXI of the novel, the audience at a performance of *Hamlet*

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<sup>100</sup> Hannigan, *Fantasy City*, 16.

<sup>101</sup> Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 21.

<sup>102</sup> Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*, 24, 25.

relentlessly mocks and heckles the actors, offering “peals of laughter” in response to even serious lines and freely discussing and arguing about the play while it is being staged: “On the question whether ’twas nobler in the mind to suffer, some roared yes, and some no, and some inclining to both opinions said ‘Toss up for it.’”<sup>104</sup> Dickens, an avid theatergoer, almost certainly based the passage on personal experience.

Such a response was probably not meant to disrespect Shakespeare. In the U.S., at least, Shakespeare was enormously popular among all classes for much of the nineteenth century. Given the relatively limited range of entertainment options (and none at all that relied on electricity, except watching lightning storms), oratory and theater were prized, and not just in theaters. Shakespeare was performed in places such as mining camps in California and Nevada, church vestries in Maine, a brewery in Kentucky, and a hotel dining room in Alabama.<sup>105</sup> Just as the plays’ long, complex speeches probably did not faze their original audiences, who were used to long church sermons, so the speeches also apparently did not faze nineteenth-century Americans, who were used to long political speeches (and long church sermons). Lengthy political debates were sources of “diversion and pleasure”: a Kentucky senator’s three-hour oration in 1838 was remembered by an audience member as “the greatest speech I ever heard....when he concluded, and the Senate adjourned, the audience lingered in their seats, as if loath to leave the spot of their enchantment.” Americans, Levine

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<sup>103</sup> Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*, 26.

<sup>104</sup> Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations* (Boston: Estes and Lauriat, 1881), 284.

<sup>105</sup> Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*, 19-20.

writes, had “a seemingly inexhaustible appetite for the spoken word.”<sup>106</sup>

Perhaps; but not everyone wanted to satisfy that appetite in the same way. Theater seating was segregated by social class, but at least the classes interacted to some extent, and all were under the same roof. As the century progressed, however, the rowdiness of “audiences caught up in the egalitarian exuberance of the period and freed in the atmosphere of theater from many of the demands of normative behavior” began to blur social boundaries within theaters.<sup>107</sup> Middle-class audiences tried to re-establish those boundaries, and thus make sure they were not mistaken for members of the working class, by keeping their emotions in check during performances.<sup>108</sup> And segregated seating was no longer enough; different venues for different audiences were required. Shakespeare became the province of theaters “catering to a discreet clientele because he was simply too complex for untrained minds.”<sup>109</sup> Shakespeare’s plays thus lost their cross-class appeal and became valued mostly by those who were well-educated, economically secure, or both. (Some of the rich and middle-class probably pretended to enjoy Shakespeare so they would appear to have good taste and thus better fit into their milieu.) The point is (literally) well illustrated by a cartoon, “The Current of the Drama,” in the *Des Moines Tribune* of February 18, 1909, depicting a crowd mobbing a theater staging a “Great immoral show” featuring “Mlle Punkerino,”

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<sup>106</sup> Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*, 36, 46.

<sup>107</sup> Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*, 60.

<sup>108</sup> Roy Rosenzweig, “From Rum Shop to Rialto: Workers and Movies,” in *Moviefgoing in America: A Sourcebook in the History of Film Exhibition*, ed. Gregory A. Waller (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 2002) 32-33.

<sup>109</sup> Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*, 71.



while the sidewalk in front of a theater staging Shakespeare is empty despite reduced admission, a free pearl necklace with every ticket, and Shakespeare himself in the cast.<sup>110</sup>

### Ethnic theater

Migrants, meanwhile, had their own amusements, chief among them ethnic theater. Though migrants “tended to segregate themselves by national origin,” Kathy Peiss argues, “the *forms* of amusement in tenement districts crossed ethnic lines: saloons, lodges, socials, dances, and excursions were common in all working-class neighborhoods.”<sup>111</sup> In some cases, migrants took part in those amusements alongside the native-born but in other cases with other migrants only. Ethnic theater — closed to most of the native-born because of the language barrier — was based on theatrical traditions that migrants had brought with them and continued and developed in their new home.

Migration itself helped make ethnic theater important to migrants, according to Maxine Schwartz Seller, editor of *Ethnic Theatre in the United States*: “the immigrants had left behind many of the institutions, traditions, and companions that had met their intellectual, emotional, and social needs....Shut out of mainstream American life by cultural and (usually) language differences and by poverty, ghettoization, and discrimination, they developed new ways to meet these needs. One of these ways was ethnic theatre, which provided

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<sup>110</sup> Richard Abel, *The Red Rooster Scare: Making Cinema American, 1900-1910* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 102.

<sup>111</sup> Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 31.

education, entertainment, and a focus for social and community life,” thus serving some of the same functions as union halls, churches, saloons, and lodges.<sup>112</sup>

Ethnic theater took a variety of forms. Clubs wrote, read, discussed, and performed plays. Settlement houses sponsored amateur performances, as did labor unions, churches, temperance leagues, universities, schools, youth groups, cultural societies, women’s clubs, athletic clubs, and other organizations. Only the larger migrant communities, however, had the resources to support commercial theaters, whether staffed by amateurs or professionals. The Washington Square Theatre in San Francisco, for example, was an Italian venue that could seat a thousand. Some theater companies traveled, including an Italian company that was based in San Francisco but performed as far away as St. Louis.

The works staged by ethnic theaters aimed both to reflect migrants’ past and present lives — educate them and address their problems — and to provide escapist entertainment — help them forget those problems. Some migrants had had little formal education of any kind and were illiterate in both English and their native languages; ethnic theater “made the history, literature, and folklore of the homelands accessible to literate and illiterate alike and gave the new American-born generations at least some understanding of the cultures of their immigrant parents.” But ethnic theater also staged works, past and present, from other theatrical traditions, using adaptations or translations: “Shakespeare was performed in Yiddish, German, Swedish, and Italian....Yiddish theatre introduced

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<sup>112</sup> Maxine Schwartz Seller, “Introduction,” in *Ethnic Theatre in the United States*, ed. Maxine Schwartz Seller (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1983), 6.

its audiences to Molière, Schiller, Goethe, Tolstoy, Gorki, Sudermann, Hauptmann, Ibsen, Strindberg, Molnár, and Shaw, as well as to Yiddish playwrights such as Jacob Gordin, Leon Korbin, and Sholem Asch.” Occasional performances in English may have helped migrants with the language, but they would probably have learned much more English by conversing with people in real life.

But “despite the importance of educational and ideological plays, most immigrant theatregoers, like most other theatregoers, came to the theatre for diversion, excitement, and glamour. Vaudeville-type entertainment — song, dance, short skis, farce, and satire” — was popular in ethnic theaters, as were “‘formula’ plays about everyday life in the new country or the old”; tragedies also drew audiences, though: “tears, like laughter, provided emotional release.”

Going to the theater was also a social occasion. It was a place for families and individuals to enjoy one another’s company and for migrants of all ages, incomes, political views, levels of education, and lengths of U.S. residency to mix. In some theaters, “the entire evening took on a festive atmosphere; the theatre was a place for dressing in one’s best, courting, gossiping, quarreling, eating, joking, nurturing friendships.”

Apart from educating and entertaining audiences, ethnic theater offered career opportunities to “foreign-born intellectuals, whose lack of fluency in English cut them off from professions they had pursued in the homeland and who had little in common with their working-class countrymen.” Theaters also offered career opportunities to women, “shut out of many activities in the ethnic and mainstream communities by narrow stereotypes of ‘women’s place.’ Energetic,

talented, and independent women found the theatre one of the few places where they could escape traditional domestic roles, earn money, acquire power and prestige, travel, and adopt unconventional life styles with relative impunity.”<sup>113</sup>

Ethnic theater may also have helped to create imagined communities among migrants. A nation, Benedict Anderson argues, is an imagined community “because members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”<sup>114</sup> In *Imagined Communities*, Anderson also discusses the importance of language, especially printed language, in the creation of nationalism and imagined national communities in nineteenth-century Europe.<sup>115</sup> Language in the form of plays may have had a similar role in the creation of imagined communities among migrants in the U.S. Ethnic theater required literacy for performers but could appeal to both literate and illiterate audiences. The emotions aroused by a good performance and the presence of a crowd of people all witnessing the same spectacle and speaking and understanding the same language meant that ethnic theater could lead to strong feelings of nationalism and connect, in a figurative way, groups of migrants across the country who spoke the same language, though they would never meet.

Ethnic theaters faced problems as well, however, including some that were widespread in the theater world. Even in commercial theaters, for example,

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<sup>113</sup> Seller, “Introduction,” 4-9.

<sup>114</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism, Revised Edition* (New York: Verso, 2006), 6.

<sup>115</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 67-82.

money was always tight, and relations among directors, writers, and actors sometimes acrimonious. Ethnic theaters also faced opposition from outside migrant communities. Theaters that held performances on Sundays were targeted for violating blue laws; police who were perhaps influenced by “stereotypes of foreign radicals...closed a Polish play about the assassination of Alexander II of Russia because of a rumor that a ‘live dynamite bomb’ would be exploded”; and anti-German prejudice during World War I dealt a severe blow to German theater in the U.S.<sup>116</sup>

Italian anarchists were also targeted. In November 1900, police prevented the staging of the drama *Senza Patria* (Without a Country) on the Bowery, in Manhattan. Proceeds were intended for the wife and children of Gaetano Bresci, who in July of that year had assassinated Umberto I, king of Italy.<sup>117</sup> A similar situation occurred in February 1901, when an “entertainment” consisting of *Senza Patria* and the farce *Ninguno se Entiende* (No One Understands) were scheduled for the Athenaeum, a meeting hall in Brooklyn. The performances were to benefit the Anarchistic Brotherhood, based in Paterson, New Jersey. “A big force of policemen” greeted the few people who showed up, however, and the entertainment never happened.<sup>118</sup> In August 1901, when anarchists tried to stage *The Assassination of King Humbert* in Paterson, they were again denied. The mayor “has decided that the Anarchists shall no longer be permitted to make Paterson appear in the eyes of the world as a hotbed of anarchy instead of a city

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<sup>116</sup> Seller, “Introduction,” 4.

<sup>117</sup> “Anarchist Play Stopped,” *The New York Times*, November 11, 1900.

<sup>118</sup> “Fifty Policemen Prevent a Meeting,” *The New York Times*, February 10, 1901.

of important industries.”<sup>119</sup>

But even within migrant communities, theater was not to everyone’s liking. In New York in 1882, for example, established German Jews tried to keep more recent Jewish migrants from Eastern Europe from opening a theater for fear of stirring up anti-Semitism. The same type of conflict arose again in 1923 with the staging, initially at the Apollo Theatre in New York, of Sholem Asch’s *Got fun Nekome* (God of Vengeance), set in the Jewish neighborhood of a Polish city, as Harley Erdman explains. To some audiences at the time, both Jews and gentiles, the material seemed incendiary: “Not only does the play concern prostitution, it dramatizes life in a brothel, showing prostitutes playing games, sharing dreams, even commenting about a customer who is being serviced just off stage.” The brothel, on the ground floor of a building, is juxtaposed with a “respectable” household on the second floor, home to a Jewish family in possession of a Torah. The father, Yekel, makes his living from the whorehouse, his wife was once a prostitute, and his seventeen-year-old daughter, Rivkele, has a sexual relationship with one of the women who work for Rivkele’s father. Asch thus seemed to be “almost deliberately hurling a theatrical firebomb at his Jewish audiences,” and authorities took notice: the acting company, the producer, and the owner of the Apollo were indicted on charges of “showing a play ‘which would tend to the corruption of the morals of youth or others.’” All the defendants were convicted, though the judge suspended the sentences of almost everyone. But this was hardly a case of anti-Semites trying to suppress a Jewish play, Erdman

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<sup>119</sup> “Won’t Permit Anarchist Play,” *The New York Times*, August 9, 1901.

argues. Rather, it involved a dispute between “two constellations of Jewish subculture” in New York. One consisted of “uptown” Jews — those who were mainly of Central European and German origin and who had arrived in the U.S. in the middle and late nineteenth century and become incorporated to some extent in mainstream U.S. life. “The uptown Jewish world was associated with middle and upper-middle-class propriety and philanthropy, reformed worship, Broadway theatre, and decidedly assimilationist and Americanized notions of how to perform and present one’s ethnicity.” The other “constellation” consisted of “downtown” Jews — those who were mainly of Eastern European origin and who had arrived more recently and still mostly followed the traditions of their native lands. “The downtown Jewish world...was associated with...Yiddish language, radical politics, the new art theatre, the old labor unrest.” The uptown Jews, Erdman argues, were afraid that *God of Vengeance* would confirm some of the worse stereotypes of Jews that circulated among gentiles: that Jews were sexually “deviant,” that they kidnapped women and forced them into prostitution (“white slavery”), and that there was a “Jewish infection of the American theatre and...attendant moral decay.” The timing, too, was crucial, as the 1920s were a time of heightened suspicion of and hostility toward foreigners, including Jewish migrants, so the last thing that the uptown Jews wanted was to call negative attention to Jews in the U.S. and make Jewish life seem antithetical to mainstream middle-class values.<sup>120</sup>

Despite internal and external obstacles and controversies, however, ethnic

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<sup>120</sup> Hardley Erdman, “Jewish Anxiety in ‘Days of Judgement:’ Community Conflict, Antisemitism, and the *God of Vengeance* Obscenity Case,” *Theatre Survey* 40, no. 1 (May 1999): 51, 55-57, 64, 67.

theater still “provided inexpensive, convenient entertainment in the ethnic languages to hundreds of thousands of new Americans....countless amateur groups played in church basements, barns, social halls, school auditoriums, cafes and living quarters.”<sup>121</sup>

In at least one case, ethnic theater brought many groups together in the same space. For three seasons starting in 1930, Cleveland’s Theater of the Nations, sponsored by the *Plain Dealer* newspaper and held at the 500-seat Little Theater, “showcased dramatic and musical groups from many of Cleveland’s ethnic communities.” The first production of the Theater of the Nations was an Arabic-language version of Schiller’s *The Robbers*, staged by the Syrian-American Club. Then followed the Greek Dramatic Players’ *Maria Doxipatri*, “a patriotic drama set at the close of the Byzantine period in Greek history”; the Lithuanian Culture Gardens League’s *Galunas the Mighty*, a historical drama; the Cleveland Italian Dramatic Club’s *Malacarne*, a tragicomedy; and the United Polish Players’ *Frock and Russet Coats*, “a dramatization of the generation gap,” among other works by other groups.

Thirty nationalities were represented on the Theater of Nations’s advisory board, and, initially, twenty nationalities were represented on the stage, according to the United Neighborhood Houses of New York City’s *Play Bulletin*. The number of migrant groups staging work at the Theater of the Nations later rose to twenty-six, “united in presenting a cycle of their native drama and musical productions... with the native costumes and in the native tongue of each group,”

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<sup>121</sup> Seller, “Introduction,” 5.



so it was no surprise that ninety percent of audience members for each production spoke whatever language the production was in. “Croatian, Czech, Danish, Spanish, Syrian, and Russian vied with each other in picturesqueness,” the *Play Bulletin* reported, and a modern historian writes that “usherettes in native costumes and musical interludes between the acts added to the color and spectacle.”

According to the *Play Bulletin*, the Theater of the Nations had much to recommend it: “First, self-expression for the groups themselves through the drama, which, after all, expresses the soul of the people. Second, an increasing cordial understanding and welding together of the rich culture of the Old World and the rapidly developing culture of the New.” Also, “the American community benefits by this opportunity to understand the background, the culture and the art of the peoples who form an indissoluble part of our nation.”<sup>122</sup>

The Theater of the Nations, however, was an exception. For the most part, each migrant group kept to its own tradition of ethnic theater. Italian migrants to the U.S. inherited and continued three ancient theatrical traditions: “the *fescennia locatio* (improvised and lascivious exchanges sung by clowns); the Greek phylax plays of colonized southern Italy, which were travesties of mythologies and burlesques of daily life; and the *fabula atellana* (farces, parodies, and political satires that introduced stock characters).”<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> UM/SWHA, Box 253, Folder L1:5 — United Neighborhood Houses of NYC Records; John Vacha, *Showtime in Cleveland: The Rise of a Regional Theater Center* (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 2001), 162-163.

<sup>123</sup> Jo Ann Tedesco, “Sacraments: Italian American Theatrical Culture and the Dramatization of Everyday Life,” in *The Italian American Heritage: A Companion to Literature and the Arts*, ed. Pellegrino D’Acierno (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1999), 355-356.

Italian-American theater fare ranged broadly: La Compagnia Comico-Dramatica Italiana A. Maiori e P. Rapone staged European classics, including Shakespeare, but there were also farce, comedy, children's theater, drama, verse drama, and melodrama, plus "accompanying events: music, recitations, grand marches, prize fighting, poetry readings, and the usual assortment of variety acts."<sup>124</sup> *Caffè concerti*, too — musical performances and variety acts at cafés — were part of Italian theater in the U.S. And some performances were staged for the most practical of reasons: raising funds to help Italians in Italy struggling with the political problems of unification along with drought, famine, and cholera.<sup>125</sup> There was aid for migrant communities as well — Italian theater clubs in St. Louis, for example, helped pay for the construction of parochial schools.<sup>126</sup>

In the final decades of the nineteenth century, Italian theater thrived on both coasts of the U.S. In New York, Italian-American theater originated in the coffee houses, social clubs, and churches of Little Italy.<sup>127</sup> The clubs were diverse — "occupational, political, literary, dramatic, military, musical, choral, and nationalistic" — but socializing was important for all them, and members enjoyed a variety of activities, including lectures, dances, and benefits. The many clubs that engaged in theatrical activities were collectively known as the *circolo filodrammatico*, but the first club devoted specifically to theater was the Società

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<sup>124</sup> Tedesco, "Sacraments," 358.

<sup>125</sup> Tedesco, "Sacraments," 357-358.

<sup>126</sup> Seller, "Introduction," 10.

<sup>127</sup> Emelise Aleandri and Maxine Schwartz Seller, "Italian-American Theatre," in *Ethnic Theatre in the United States*, ed. Maxine Schwartz Seller (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1983), 240.

Filodrammatica Italiana di New York, also called Il Circolo Filodrammatico Italo-Americano.<sup>128</sup>

Theater was important to Italians in the North Beach section of San Francisco as well. The key figure was Antonietta Pisanelli Alessandro, whose “informal, friendly, and inexpensive” Circolo Familiare Pisanelli offered a combination club, theater, opera house, and café. Single male migrants could make friends there, and the entertainment was respectable and thus also safe for women and children; illiterate migrants, especially from southern Italy, partook of “entertainment and culture that could be experienced directly through the spoken word, as it had been in the old country.”<sup>129</sup> The Circolo provided a focal point for migrants from all over Italy and helped youths better appreciate their parents’ culture.

Italian-American theater had another side too: the *filodrammatiche rosse*, or radical theatrical groups. Like other theater companies, the radical groups offered migrants a place to socialize, relax, and briefly escape the difficulties of their lives, but they had an important propagandistic purpose as well. The *filodrammatiche rosse* reflected the views of the *souversivi*, or social rebels, initially socialists, syndicalists, and anarchists, joined after World War I by communist and anti-fascist refugees.<sup>130</sup> The radical theater groups took up and dramatized labor issues that were most relevant to the poorest Italian migrants,

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<sup>128</sup> Aleandri and Seller, “Italian-American Theatre,” 240-241; Tedesco, “Sacraments,” 357.

<sup>129</sup> Aleandri and Seller, “Italian-American Theatre,” 261-262.

<sup>130</sup> Marcella Bencivenni, *Italian Immigrant Radical Culture: The Idealism of the Souversivi in the United States, 1890-1940* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 2.

many of them illiterate, and that had been aired in group meetings, the press, and other venues. “Most of the productions,” Marcella Bencivenni writes, “were ‘problem’ plays containing a strong indictment of capitalist society and focusing on social issues and problems peculiar to the Italian American community, such as the *padrone* system, ethnic discrimination, and economic hardship.”<sup>131</sup>

Some Italian women anarchists used theater to “develop their own styles of political activism.” Italians struggling for women’s emancipation, for instance, formed the radical theater group Teatro Sociale in Paterson, New Jersey, in 1899 and used it stage plays expressing their ideas. In East Harlem, meanwhile, Italian anarchist Elvira Catello created and ran a theater group that staged plays written and acted by women. The women characters in the plays produced by such groups “were political and outspoken and exposed audiences to the central issues that women faced in their everyday lives.” *Il Ribelle* (The Rebel) pitted free love against arranged marriage, and *La Figlia della’Anarchico* (The Anarchist’s Daughter) “was celebrated by Italian radicals for its realistic depictions of poverty and suffering.”<sup>132</sup> The ability of art, when done well, to heighten and intensify ideas — while entertaining — could have had a powerful impact on audiences that could not read or could barely read while also helping literate audience members appreciate issues in a way that print could not help them to.

Theater was also space that women controlled, and it afforded them a degree of freedom to move about — even to tour — to appear in public, and to

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<sup>131</sup> Bencivenni, *Italian Immigrant Radical Culture*, 104.

<sup>132</sup> Jennifer Guglielmo, *Living the Revolution: Italian Women’s Resistance and Radicalism in New York City, 1880-1945* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 173.

assert not only themselves but also “their rights to education, to political participation, to employment, to sexual expressiveness, to a voice as cultural critics.” Women also used their dramatic experience during strikes, rallies, parades, and similar events, appreciating the potential impact of the theatrical. In June 1913, Italians and other workers in the silk mills of Paterson staged a pageant to raise money for, and draw public attention to, a seemingly interminable strike.<sup>133</sup>

Like Italian theater, German theater had deep roots. German-speaking migrants could look back on an exceptionally rich and wide-ranging tradition of drama that included world-class, world-renowned figures such as Goethe, Schiller, and Wagner. But German drama had a political purpose as well. In the late eighteenth century, Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803) encouraged the creation of a national German literature, an idea that fit well with the nationalist aspirations that the Napoleonic wars had helped stir up. Frustrated in the early nineteenth century, the drive for the political unity of the German-speaking states was expressed instead through cultural unity, including plays.<sup>134</sup> Even after 1871, however, drama continued to be part of a quest for an “authentically” German culture and a “*völkisch* society rooted in ancient myths, peasant stock, and idealised German virtues.”<sup>135</sup> In the United States, German theater served a cohesive purpose as well, helping create a sense of community among German

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<sup>133</sup> Guglielmo, *Living the Revolution*, 172-174.

<sup>134</sup> Stephen Wilmer, “Nationalism and its effects on the German theatre, 1790-2000,” in *A History of German theatre*, ed. Simon Williams and Maik Hamburger (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 223, 224, 226.

<sup>135</sup> Wilmer, “Nationalism and its effects on the German theatre,” 231-232.

migrants, as well as a degree of cultural continuity between old and new homelands.

Amateur German-American theater dates to the 1830s, its work supported and reviewed by the German-language press. Professional drama groups started in the 1850s, and German-American theater grew with German migration in the late nineteenth century. Many migrants were conversant with the work of major German-speaking playwrights and were thus a natural audience for German-American theater.<sup>136</sup>

As with other types of ethnic performance, the center of German-American theater was New York. The range of offerings in the Lower East Side's Kleindeutschland was wide: "operas, operettas, musical comedies, musical revues, folk plays with music, dramas, comedies, farces, variety acts, and tableaux vivants (living pictures) by German, Austrian and local German American authors, as well as German translations of American, French, and English works."<sup>137</sup>

Second in importance to New York was Milwaukee, where German-American theater "represented not only the best of a German theatre tradition, but also, as no other theatre in the United States, was responsible for introducing the best modern plays by Germany playwrights."<sup>138</sup> Dozens of other American

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<sup>136</sup> Thomas Postlewait, "The Hieroglyphic State: American Theatre and Society, Post-Civil War to 1945," in *The Cambridge History of American Theatre Volume Two: 1870-1945*, ed. Don B. Wilmeth and Christopher Bigsby (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 142.

<sup>137</sup> John Koegel, *Music in German Immigrant Theater: New York City, 1840-1940* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2009), 2, 4.

<sup>138</sup> Christa Carvajal, "German-American Theatre," in *Ethnic Theatre in the United States*, ed. Maxine Schwartz Seller (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1983), 184.

cities with significant German populations, including New Orleans, San Francisco, St. Louis, and St. Paul, were sites of German-American theater as well.<sup>139</sup>

German-American theater was connected to an even more prolific dramatic tradition, the Yiddish theater. In New York, actors from the Yiddish and German-American theaters appeared on each other's stages, and German theaters relied on attendance by German-speaking Jews — whose patronage Yiddish theaters competed for as well. The Yiddish theaters eventually proved more successful and on the Lower East Side took the place of German troupes that departed.<sup>140</sup>

Yet for hundreds of years before the advent of Yiddish theater, Jewish public performance had been restricted. “The first expression of Yiddish theater — indeed, the only one until the nineteenth century — was the *Purimshpil*, or Purim play,” Nahma Sandrow writes.<sup>141</sup> Purim plays date to about the sixteenth century and were similar in some ways to Christian mystery plays, but Purim plays peaked in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, long after mystery plays had been abandoned, and are still performed. For a long time, Purim plays were the only kind of drama that rabbis allowed, partly because in antiquity, drama had been linked to the worship of Roman gods but also because of the rabbis' belief that “one should be studying Torah or thinking serious thoughts

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<sup>139</sup> Koegel, *Music in German Immigrant Theater*, 3.

<sup>140</sup> Koegel, *Music in German Immigrant Theater*, 11.

<sup>141</sup> Nahma Sandrow, *Vagabond Stars: A World History of Yiddish Theater* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 2.

instead of idling time away watching idiotic antics.”<sup>142</sup>

The development of Yiddish theater, then, had to wait. The first professional performance of Yiddish theater anywhere was in Jassi, Romania, in 1876. The first professional performance of Yiddish theater in the U.S. was a staging in 1882 of Abraham Goldfaden’s *The Sorceress* in New York, which soon became the heart of Yiddish American drama.<sup>143</sup> Conditions there were harsh — grueling work, crowded tenements — and the migrants struggled to learn English and adapt to a society “violently different from Eastern Europe.”<sup>144</sup> Theater, cheap enough to be affordable even to migrants making little money, became for many migrants more necessity than luxury, Sandrow writes. According to writer and anarchist Hutchins Hapgood’s *The Spirit of the Ghetto* (1902), Jews in New York who made ten dollars a week, at most, working in sweatshops spent half of it on the theater, “which is practically the only amusement of the Ghetto Jew.”<sup>145</sup>

The Yiddish theaters on the Bowery at the time — the People’s, the Windsor, and the Thalia — accommodated “Jews of all the Ghetto classes,” the “poor and ignorant” majority rubbing elbows with “the learned, the intellectual and the progressive.”<sup>146</sup> From Monday night to Thursday night, the Yiddish

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<sup>142</sup> Sandrow, *Vagabond Stars*, 4, 16.

<sup>143</sup> David S. Lifson, “Yiddish Theatre,” in *Ethnic Theatre in the United States*, ed. Maxine Schwartz Seller (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1983), 555; Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), 461-462.

<sup>144</sup> Sandrow, *Vagabond Stars*, 77.

<sup>145</sup> Hutchins Hapgood, *The Spirit of the Ghetto*, ed. Moses Rischin (1902; repr., Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967), 118.

<sup>146</sup> Hapgood, *The Spirit of the Ghetto*, 113, 129.



theaters rented their space to clubs and guilds, but the performances staged on the other nights of the week were always sold out, though some tickets cost as much as a dollar.

Sandrow notes a wide range of Yiddish plays: There were, for example, “glorious escapist spectaculars set in a sentimentalized old country gave an evening’s relief from homesickness.” Yet “other plays validated the special problems of immigrants by acting them out” or “helped teach spectators how to deal with the problems of adjustment and family dislocation, that reassured them these were standard problems, communal problems.”<sup>147</sup>

According to Hapgood, audiences were divided over the kinds of plays they wanted to see: “the thinking socialists naturally select a less violent play than the comparatively illogical anarchists. Societies of relatively conservative Jews desire a historical play in which the religious Hebrew in relation to the persecuting Christian is put in pathetic and melodramatic situations.” Many plays, Hapgood wrote, portrayed intergenerational tensions, such as the “pathos or tragedy involved in differences of faith and ‘point of view’ between the old rabbi and his more enlightened children.” Shakespeare’s plays were also staged, some versions sticking closely to the original texts but others heavily adapting the texts to Jewish life — Hamlet and his uncle as rabbis, for example.<sup>148</sup>

A carnival atmosphere prevailed before, during, and after the performances. The acting brought forth “great enthusiasm...sincere laughter and tears” from audience members. The stage curtain carried portraits of prominent

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<sup>147</sup> Sandrow, *Vagabond Stars*, 77.

<sup>148</sup> Hapgood, *The Spirit of the Ghetto*, 122, 126.

actors and advertising from local merchants. Between acts, “pedlars of soda-water, candy, of fantastic gee-gaws of many kinds” hawked their wares. Conversation during performances was frowned on, but afterward, there was plenty of discussion about the play, mixed with gossip about the community. Friends and strangers mixed freely. Leaflets distributed to the audience included “sometimes amusing announcements of coming attractions or lyric praise of the ‘stars.’”<sup>149</sup>

For Irving Howe, the importance of early Yiddish theater was as an “outlet for communal emotion” for Jewish migrants on the East Side of New York: “this was a theatre of vivid trash and raw talent, innocent of art, skipping rapidly past the problems of immigrant life, and appealing to rich new appetites for spectacle, declamation, and high gesture. To the gray fatigue of Jewish life it brought the gaudy colors of Yiddish melodrama. It was a theatre superbly alive and full of claptrap, close to the nerve of folk sentiment and outrageous in its pretensions to serious culture. The writers and actors of this early Yiddish theatre understood instinctively that their audiences, seemingly lost forever in the darkness of the sweatshop, wanted most of all the consolations of glamour. They wanted spectacles of Jewish heroism, tableaux of ancient and eloquent kings, prophets, and warriors; music, song, dance, foolery...evoking memories of old-country ways.”<sup>150</sup>

### **Cities at play: new technology, new amusements**

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<sup>149</sup> Hapgood, *The Spirit of the Ghetto*, 116.

<sup>150</sup> Howe, *World of Our Fathers*, 460.

The last decade of the nineteenth century was transformational for urban leisure. There was, first, a new attitude — what Lewis Erenberg goes so far as to call a “profound reorientation in American culture” that started in the 1890s and involved a decline in “Victorian gentility” and the rise of more informal values, with fewer constraints on individual impulses and desires and more emphasis on “self-fulfillment, self-expression, and the development of ‘personality.’”<sup>151</sup> That was especially the case among members of the middle class, who increasingly sought “a public social life outside the cloistered walls of home and business.”<sup>152</sup>

Electricity helped make public urban leisure spaces in general, and nightlife in particular, more attractive and popular. The streetcar system, for example, freed from a reliance on horsepower, expanded, allowing more people to get to leisure spaces faster. A more important use of electricity, however, was illumination. Gas improved on older forms of lighting but could not hold a candle to electricity, which created a “fairyland of illuminated shapes, signs, and brightly colored, sometimes animated, messages and images...a new kind of visual ‘text,’ a new landscape of modernity.”<sup>153</sup>

Electricity also allowed for the creation of amusement parks. Their ancestors were pleasure gardens such as Vauxhall in London and Tivoli Gardens in Copenhagen, offering “recreation for a burgeoning urban middle class...when nature was understood as an antidote to the business of commerce and

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<sup>151</sup> Lewis A. Erenberg, *Steppin’ Out: New York Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture, 1890-1930* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981), xiii.

<sup>152</sup> Erenberg, *Steppin’ Out*, xi.

<sup>153</sup> Nasaw, *Going Out*, 8, 9.

amusement a pleasurable middle-class distraction from the social hierarchy of European societies.”<sup>154</sup>

The more immediate predecessor to American amusement parks, however, was the midway of the 1893 Chicago World’s Columbian Exposition, which became the model that amusement parks, “in their promiscuous juxtaposition of sedate and seditious entertainments,” tried to imitate.<sup>155</sup> By 1909, for example, Coney Island had three parks, including Luna Park, and they were copied nationwide. An idea that was originally European was also re-exported: Luna Parks, many of them designed, built, and equipped by American businessmen, opened in Paris, Cologne, Geneva, Leipzig, Hamburg, and St. Petersburg in the first four decades of the twentieth century.<sup>156</sup>

In the U.S., amusement parks came into vogue in the mid-1890s and remained major draws for some fifteen years. Suburbs of rapidly growing cities were especially popular sites for the parks, some of which were built from scratch, while others began as zoos, picnic grounds, or gardens. Their attractions included theater, pyrotechnics, rides, and cinema.<sup>157</sup> David Nasaw sees amusement parks as examples of the “harmonious relationship that could be established between commerce and amusements in urban settings...[D]istinctions between work and play, day and night, education and amusement, fantasy and reality, beauty and excess, propriety and immodesty

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<sup>154</sup> Rabinovitz, *Electric Dreamland*, 31.

<sup>155</sup> Rabinovitz, *Electric Dreamland*, 2; Nasaw, *Going Out*, 85.

<sup>156</sup> Rabinovitz, *Electric Dreamland*, 3, 63.

<sup>157</sup> Rabinovitz, *Electric Dreamland*, 2-4.

were delightfully blurred.”<sup>158</sup> And Lauren Rabinovitz argues that amusement parks were also a type of “energized relaxation” that calmed “fears about new technologies and living conditions of an industrialized society.” They offered freedom for workers whose hours on the job were strictly regimented. And for some, they “symbolized the democratic ideals of a melting pot society.”<sup>159</sup>

Amusement parks especially, but other new public urban leisure spaces as well, were also microcosms of expanding cities themselves and thus may have helped accustom patrons to urban crowds and helped them navigate urban space filled with unfamiliar faces: “Unlike the landsmen’s lodges and union halls; the saloons and church socials; and the front stoops, parlors, and kitchens, the new entertainment centers held more strangers than friends,” Nasaw writes. The effect, he argues, was to foster a “sense of civil sociability....‘Going out’ meant laughing, dancing, cheering, and weeping with strangers with whom one might — or might not — have anything in common.”<sup>160</sup>

Such anonymity may have comforted some, but it frightened others, and the new leisure spaces held peril as well as promise. Amid the big city’s bright lights lurked a kind of darkness that electricity could not fully banish: that of the unknown and mysterious — in some cases attractive and pleasurable, in others alienating and threatening. Putting a bunch of strangers into close physical proximity did not necessarily lead to the kind of love-in that Nasaw envisions. It

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<sup>158</sup> Nasaw, *Going Out*, 79.

<sup>159</sup> Rabinovitz, *Electric Dreamland*, 2, 44.

<sup>160</sup> Nasaw, *Going Out*, 1-2.

could instead — or also — result in conflict, in crime, in feelings of loneliness in a crowd, and in people sticking close to those they already knew rather than trying to reach out to those they did not.

And though traditional social rules may have been bent or ignored — and despite the attempts of “leisure merchants” to create a “public culture which was attractive, non-threatening and affordable...to lure as wide a cross-section of society as possible” — traditional social structures and strictures still asserted themselves in the new leisure spaces.<sup>161</sup> There was segregation by race — common in public spaces in the U.S. at the time — and by class. At Coney Island, for example, Steeplechase Park was the province of the working class, whereas the urban middle class preferred Dreamland and Luna Park.<sup>162</sup> The “melting pot society” that amusement parks called to mind thus had strict limits.

### Cinema and migrants

Movies came into being at about the same time as amusement parks, and in some ways, the two forms of leisure were similar. Both were “like other modern spaces of public life: places of chaotic intermingling.”<sup>163</sup> Like amusement parks, cinemas relied on electrification (to project light; early film projectors, however, were hand-cranked), and large numbers of amusement parks offered movies as one attraction among many. In many cases, a city’s or town’s first

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<sup>161</sup> Hannigan, *Fantasy City*, 18.

<sup>162</sup> Hannigan, *Fantasy City*, 21.

<sup>163</sup> Mark Jancovich and Lucy Faire, *The Place of the Audience: Cultural Geographies of Film Consumption* (London: BFI Publishing, 2003), 43.

cinema — where patrons were initially exposed to the new medium — was at an amusement park.<sup>164</sup> And some silent movies, such as *Speedy* and *Lonesome* (both 1928), were partially set at amusement parks.

In most ways, however, the two types of urban leisure differed from each other starkly: one was about moving freely outdoors in the day or night, while the other was about sitting still in a small, dark room; one was mainly about bodily experiences, while the other was mainly about sight and sound. If amusement parks offered the concrete, then movies were, and are, a grand illusion or, to be less charitable, a con: motion pictures are pictures, not motion; movies don't move — only the film moves (in digital projection, not even that). In such “panoramic sleights,” light masquerades as substance, energy as matter.<sup>165</sup> Movies do not, as Robert Sklar argues, subject “time and motion to the human will” — they only seem to.<sup>166</sup>

Though clearly a new art form, cinema combined elements of older media such as theater (plot and acting), photography (film is a series of photographs, and *photoplay* is an old term for a movie as well as the name of an early film fan magazine), painting (film is a series of frames; some shots are composed like paintings), flip books (images that seem to move), and magic-lantern shows (projected light). In addition, the absence of audible dialogue in early films led to continuities between the new medium and the older theatrical tradition,

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<sup>164</sup> Rabinovitz, *Electric Dreamland*, 35.

<sup>165</sup> Hart Crane, “Proem: to Brooklyn Bridge,” in *The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry*, 2nd ed., ed. Richard Ellmann and Robert O’Clair (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1988), 613.

<sup>166</sup> Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, 5.

encouraging participation by audience members (as explained below) and melodrama by the actors, who had to use exaggerated gestures, rather than words, to convey ideas, intentions, and emotions. And just as Shakespeare was performed not only at theaters but also at mining camps and in churches, so movies — even after the concept of a space devoted to films was well established — were shown not only at cinemas but also at schools, factories, unions, voluntary associations, and even outdoors on canvas fences. Churches used films to improve attendance.<sup>167</sup>

The differences between theater and film, however, mattered more than the similarities. Just as cinema transcended the media from which it derived, it also ushered in a new type of visual culture, involving mass distribution and high degrees of uniformity and simultaneity — many prints made from the same negative and sent to many cinemas, resulting in many people watching the same movies at, or about, the same time. (Television brought all three characteristics to their apotheosis.) And while screenings of early films were in some ways like audience-participatory theater, the lack of audible dialogue, combined with minimal use of intertitles, emphasized comprehension through visual means — even given live musical accompaniment — to an extent that theater and opera, with their crucial auditory components (music; words spoken or sung), did not. That helped further erode the status of the spoken word and public oratory, to which early film was antithetical. Crowds that once might have thrilled to political speeches or live performances of *Richard III* now packed movie houses

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<sup>167</sup> Ross, *Working-Class Hollywood*, 19.



to witness on-screen spectacles. Cinema thus became the phenomenal new mass medium of the promising new century.

It was also, from the start, a transatlantic medium. The groundwork was laid in the 1870s by figures such as Eadweard Muybridge, an Englishman living in California whose photographs of running horses contributed to the idea of imitating motion through a series of still pictures (though the breakthrough was achieved by John Isaacs, a railroad engineer).<sup>168</sup> Also important was the work of Étienne-Jules Marey, a French scientist, who developed a movie camera in 1882 and a film projector in 1892. While in Europe in 1889, Edison saw Marey's film strips and borrowed or stole the idea, adding perforations to the film to make it run smoothly past the lens. The result was the kinetoscope, "Edison's 'peep show' viewing machine." Though popular for a while, the kinetoscope was superseded in the mid-1890s by projected movies. Projectors were developed by the Lumière brothers in France and also by inventors in the U.S., including Edison's employees.<sup>169</sup>

The earliest movies shown in the U.S. were gimmicks — "chasers," for example, signaling the end of vaudeville programs. Movies were also exhibited in theaters, church halls, and dime museums and at tent shows and amusement parks.<sup>170</sup> The closest thing to a purpose-built space for film exhibition was the penny arcade, many of which were opened by migrant entrepreneurs and which

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<sup>168</sup> William K. Everson, *American Silent Film* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 17.

<sup>169</sup> Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, 9-11, 13.

<sup>170</sup> Abel, *Red Rooster Scare*, 2; Steven L. Piott, *Daily Life in the Progressive Era* (Denver: Greenwood, 2011), 120.

offered games such as slot machines “and perhaps a movie for a nickel in a curtained-off corner of the store in back” — the first nickelodeons (or nicolets or nickeldromes), so called because of the admission price.<sup>171</sup>

New York and New Orleans had such venues perhaps as early as 1896, but the nickelodeon era began in earnest when, on June 19, 1905, in Pittsburgh, Harry Davis, a vaudeville magnate, and John P. Harris, his brother-in-law, opened the 96-seat Nickelodeon, a storefront theater that had been a vaudeville house; *The Great Train Robbery* was shown on the first night.<sup>172</sup> Soon there was a nickelodeon boom in many urban areas. In Manhattan, for example, movies went from being “a relatively marginal amusement” in late 1905 to being screened at more than 300 cinemas by 1908. Nickelodeons “revolutionized urban recreation and altered the commercial landscape of Manhattan,” Ben Singer argues.<sup>173</sup> Nickelodeons peaked in 1910, when there were more than 10,000 in the U.S., drawing perhaps 26 million people a week, or about 20 percent of the population, including 1.2 million to 1.6 million in New York and 900,000 in Chicago — 25 and 43 percent, respectively, of those cities’ populations.<sup>174</sup> It was, however, a volatile business, with high turnover. According to Singer, half the nickelodeons that opened in Manhattan in the second half of 1907 lasted a year or

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<sup>171</sup> Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, 14.

<sup>172</sup> Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, 14; Ross, *Working-Class Hollywood*, 16; Abel, *Red Rooster Scare*, 30; Piott, *Daily Life*, 120.

<sup>173</sup> Ben Singer, “Manhattan Nickelodeons: New Data on Audiences and Exhibitors,” *Cinema Journal* 34, no. 3 (Spring 1995): 5.

<sup>174</sup> Russell Merritt, “Nickelodeon Theaters 1905-1914: Building an Audience for the Movies,” in *The American Film Industry*, ed. Tino Balio (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1976), 62-63.

less.<sup>175</sup>

The typical nickelodeon, according to Russell Merritt, was “a small, uncomfortable makeshift theater, usually a converted dance hall, restaurant, pawn shop, or cigar store, made over to look like a vaudeville emporium.” And despite the name, admission to most nickelodeons was more than five cents.<sup>176</sup> Nickelodeons, “initially clustered in downtown commercial districts and soon after along densely populated streets in immigrant and working-class neighborhoods,” were “designed to attract the eye of the casual passerby,” with flashy, gaudy metalwork, banners, posters, colors, and electric lights.<sup>177</sup> As Peiss puts it, “The early nickelodeons seemed extensions of street life, their megaphones and garish placards competing with the other sights and sounds of urban streets.”<sup>178</sup>

Early cinema appealed strongly to the working class, including migrants, for a number of reasons. Rather than segregating patrons based on ticket prices, movie houses charged one price — which most working-class people could afford — and let all patrons sit anywhere they wished. Members of other classes who didn’t want to mix with the working class stayed away.<sup>179</sup> Given the segregation of leisure, as discussed above, going to cinemas may have been an act of defiance for some in the working class, especially those who resented their exclusion from

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<sup>175</sup> Singer, “Manhattan Nickelodeons,” 28.

<sup>176</sup> Merritt, “Nickelodeon Theaters,” 60-61.

<sup>177</sup> Ross, *Working-Class Hollywood*, 18.

<sup>178</sup> Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, 149.

<sup>179</sup> Ross, *Working-Class Hollywood*, 18.

leisure activities that only the rich and middle class could afford. And because movies were short (fifteen minutes to a half-hour) and shown continuously beginning at or before noon and going late into the night, children could conveniently drop in after school and workers on their lunch hour or on their way home and stay as long as they could or cared to. On evenings and Saturday afternoons, nickelodeons attracted whole families.<sup>180</sup>

Cinemas thus became spaces to socialize and develop a sense of community, not just watch flickering images. Children played and friends gossiped. For single working women, cinemas functioned something like social clubs and dance halls — spaces for meeting men, for courtship, and for affordable entertainment, where the “darkness and vocal familiarity of the audience encouraged opportunities for intimacy.”<sup>181</sup> Cinemas were popular with mothers also, as an article in the May 4, 1907, issue of *Moving Picture World and View Photographer* noted: “the mothers do not have to ‘dress’ to attend them, and they take the children and spend many restful hours in them at very small expense.”<sup>182</sup> Some women even used cinemas as day care, breaking the law by leaving children there unattended.<sup>183</sup> (Some cinema owners took the hint and saw a good way to make more money; later, when cinemas became more upscale to appeal to a middle-class audience, the chain that Sam Katz and Abe Balaban started in the

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<sup>180</sup> Merritt, “Nickelodeon Theaters,” 61; Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, 16; Ross, *Working-Class Hollywood*, 20; Abel, *Red Rooster Scare*, 32.

<sup>181</sup> Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, 149, 151.

<sup>182</sup> “The Nickelodeon,” in *The Movies in Our Midst: Documents in the Cultural History of Film in America*, ed. Gerald Mast (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 45.

<sup>183</sup> Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, 150.

Chicago suburbs offered free child care.)<sup>184</sup>

The fare — “a miscellany of brief adventure, comedy, or fantasy films” — was sometimes accompanied by illustrated lectures, vaudeville acts, and sing-alongs.<sup>185</sup> Depending on the venue and how much the owner could or wanted to spend, there were sound effects (cars, horses, animals, etc.) made by special equipment, phonograph music, or musicians — drummers, piano players, even small orchestras.<sup>186</sup> In some cases, there was live narration, in English or another language, by a person standing at the front of the theater.<sup>187</sup>

And just as French innovation had helped create cinema, French films now supplied much of the entertainment to U.S. audiences. Pathé-Frères, the top producer of films on Earth before World War I, offered movies of a greater variety of subjects and lengths than did American companies such as Biograph, Vitagraph, or Edison, and nickelodeons, which “demanded variety, novelty, and increasingly frequent changes in their programs,” so appreciated Pathé’s products that in summer 1905 it became the top supplier of movies to American cinemas; the U.S., likewise, was Pathé’s biggest market. There were also other signs of Pathé’s influence in the U.S.: it established sales agencies in American cities, helped organize the Moving Picture Protective League of America in late 1905, and by 1906 was selling its own projectors and working with Vitagraph to

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<sup>184</sup> John Margolies and Emily Gwathmey, *Ticket to Paradise: American Movie Theaters and How We Had Fun* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1991), 17.

<sup>185</sup> Merritt, “Nickelodeon Theaters,” 61.

<sup>186</sup> Ross, *Working-Class Hollywood*, 25.

<sup>187</sup> Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, 19.

finance *Views and Films Index*, a trade weekly.<sup>188</sup> Pathé's ability to "produce and deliver a variety of films of high quality, en masse and on a regular, relatively predictable basis," Richard Abel argues, "almost single-handedly assured the viability of a new kind of cheap amusement."<sup>189</sup> Nor did the French origin of films shown in the U.S. go unnoticed. "The French seem to be the masters in this new field," Barton W. Currie wrote in *Harper's Weekly* in 1907. "Thousands of dwellers along the Bowery are learning to roar at French buffoonery."<sup>190</sup>

Audiences were making plenty of other noise as well. The boisterous, rowdy crowd behavior of "earlier popular amusements from melodramas to saloons to July Fourth picnics to working-class parks" was transferred to working-class movie theaters.<sup>191</sup> "Unlike the middle-class theater audiences, the working-class crowd audibly interacted with the screen and each other, commenting on the action, explaining the plot, and vocally accompanying the piano player."<sup>192</sup> When the program of entertainment included "sentimental or patriotic songs with illustrative slides thrown against the screen, during which the audience was encouraged to sing along," that further encouraged participation.<sup>193</sup> According to Desirée J. Garcia, such "'sound interventions' — the

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<sup>188</sup> Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, 29; Abel, *Red Rooster Scare*, xi-xii, 34, 35.

<sup>189</sup> Abel, *Red Rooster Scare*, 36.

<sup>190</sup> Barton W. Currie, "The Nickel Madness," in *The Movies in Our Midst: Documents in the Cultural History of Film in America*, ed. Gerald Mast (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 51.

<sup>191</sup> Roy Rosenzweig, "From Rum Shop to Rialto," 32-33.

<sup>192</sup> Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, 149.

<sup>193</sup> Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, 149.

audible forms of approbation and dislike that audiences considered it their ‘natural right’ to make — transformed individual movie-goers into a community.”<sup>194</sup>

Migrants were not slow to see or take advantage of the many opportunities offered by film — opportunities not just for amusement but for serious business as well. Years before the rise of fascism in Europe brought a wave of migrants to Hollywood, Europeans were working in the U.S. film industry, initially centered in New Jersey and New York rather than California. Migrants worked both behind and in front of the camera. Those who could act could find work even without knowing much English — because the dialogue was inaudible, their accents did not matter. They just had to know English well enough to take direction and read scripts. The most famous migrant in early American cinema was Charlie Chaplin, but there were many others (though some stayed only briefly), such as Swedish director and actor Victor Sjöström; English director, actor, and screenwriter Edward Sloman; director Sidney Goldin (no relation to the author of this dissertation), who was born in Odessa; and Alice Guy Blaché, who was French and the first woman to direct movies. Blaché initially worked for a French company, Gaumont, but later migrated with her husband to the U.S., where they formed their own production company and constructed a \$100,000 studio in Fort Lee, New Jersey.<sup>195</sup>

Blaché was not the only migrant drawn to the financial side of cinema.

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<sup>194</sup> Desirée J. Garcia, “Subversive Sounds: Ethnic Spectatorship and Boston’s Nickelodeon Theatres, 1907-1914,” *Film History* 19 (2007): 215.

<sup>195</sup> Fort Lee Film Commission, *Fort Lee: Birthplace of the Motion Picture Industry* (Charleston, S.C.: Arcadia Publishing, 2006), 27.

Established migrant groups dominated businesses such as manufacturing and hauling, whereas movies let more recent migrants get in on the ground floor of a new industry.<sup>196</sup> “Coming from outside the old forms of power,” Lary May writes, “they exemplified what Max Weber aptly called ‘pariah capitalists.’ That is, they seized chances in marginal trades shunned by members of the host society.”<sup>197</sup> Nickelodeons proved “especially appealing to immigrants with lots of ambition but little cash. Greeks, Hungarians, Italians, Norwegians, Germans, Irishmen, and especially Jews were attracted to a venture with low start-up costs and high customer demand.”<sup>198</sup> Most of the prominent business figures of early American cinema — including Harry Cohn, William Fox, Samuel Goldwyn, Carl Laemmle, Marcus Loew, Lewis Selznick, Harry Warner, and Adolph Zukor — were first- or second-generation Jewish migrants. Some went on to become studio moguls.<sup>199</sup>

Most migrants who participated in cinema, however, did so as audience members. Nickelodeons provided migrants, like other members of the working class, both entertainment and social space, as discussed above. Levine calls migrants “a vital factor in the creation of a ready constituency for the rise of the more visual entertainments such as baseball, boxing, vaudeville, burlesque, and especially the new silent movies, which could be enjoyed by a larger and often

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<sup>196</sup> Eugene Rosow, *Born to Lose: The Gangster Film in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 48.

<sup>197</sup> Lary May, *The Big Tomorrow: Hollywood and the Politics of the American Way* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 58.

<sup>198</sup> Ross, *Working-Class Hollywood*, 16.

<sup>199</sup> May, *The Big Tomorrow*, 58; Rosow, *Born to Lose*, 48; Ross, *Working-Class Hollywood*, 60.



more marginal audience less steeped in the language and the culture.”<sup>200</sup>

“Young women of every ethnic background were moviegoers,” Peiss writes. Even “immigrant parents who traditionally restricted female activity” were more willing to let their daughters go to movies than indulge in other forms of entertainment. Many people considered cinemas a relatively safe environment for young women partly because cinemas were patronized not just by single men but also by families and were “in a neighborhood setting.” The cinema was also “a public and commercial space that married women could incorporate into their own culture of kinship, neighborhood, and church ties.” Movies were the “primary form of recreation for Italian women who lived alone,” Peiss writes. Italian mothers, “often the most home-centered of immigrants...went to the movies after evening church services....The casual and neighborly atmosphere of the movies contrasted to more formal occasions for leisure.”<sup>201</sup>

In her memoir, Hilda Polacheck, who was born in Poland and migrated to Chicago with her family, recalls saving her pennies to afford the admission to a nickelodeon. “Some people, without knowing anything about it, labeled it a sort of ‘den of iniquity,’” Polacheck wrote, so “my best pal and I sort of sneaked into the show.” The “moving-picture show” on Halsted Street that Polacheck describes was typical of early cinemas: a converted store with a sheet hung up at one end, “rickety folding chairs...and an ancient piano.” Polacheck was mesmerized by the spectacle: “Was it possible for a horse and wagon to move across a sheet? But there it was, before our very eyes. and then, wonder of wonders — a fire engine

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<sup>200</sup> Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*, 47.

<sup>201</sup> Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, 150, 152.

raced across.” Polacheck’s mother flatly refused to believe that such things were possible until she, too, went to a nickelodeon.<sup>202</sup>

Migrant audiences had no control over the content of the films but still managed to customize the movie-going experience to some extent through their responses to the movies and through accompanying entertainment. It helped that many theater managers were themselves migrants and were thus “usually cut from the same cloth as their customers,” with “similar backgrounds, values, and perspectives, and even...a similar language disadvantage,” Roy Rosenzweig writes. “Together the immigrant working-class movie manger and the immigrant working-class audience developed a style of movie-going that accorded with, and drew upon, earlier modes of public working-class recreation.”<sup>203</sup>

In New York, for example, exhibitors “targeted vaudeville acts to the ethnic composition of the audience.”<sup>204</sup> And in Chicago cinemas, Lizabeth Cohen writes, “the ethnic character of the community quickly became evident. The language of the yelling and jeering that routinely gave sound to silent movies provided the first clue....Stage events accompanying the films told more.” Those events included drama in the language of the local migrants (Polish, for example) or music from the migrants’ home countries (Italian, for example), and performed by local talent in both cases.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> Hilda Satt Polacheck, *I Came a Stranger: The Story of a Hull-House Girl*, ed. Dena J. Polacheck Epstein (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 48.

<sup>203</sup> Rosenzweig, “From Rum Shop to Rialto,” 32.

<sup>204</sup> Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, 149.

<sup>205</sup> Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 123.

Nickelodeons thus became what Garcia calls “vibrant spaces that momentarily celebrated and empowered marginalized groups. As they determined the content and delivery of the program bill that surrounded the film, including privileging members of their own community as performers, ethnic audiences experienced early moviegoing collectively and from a rare position of cultural authority.”<sup>206</sup>

Far less clear, however, is what effect movies had on migrants. Primary sources are lacking, though it is reasonable to speculate that intertitles, at least, may have been useful: they were read aloud by migrants at a nickelodeon in New York to help them learn English, according to cameraman G.W. “Billy” Bitzer.<sup>207</sup> Beyond that, things get murky. Some historians claim that early movies helped educate migrants about their new country; others are more skeptical. Elizabeth Ewen, for example, argues that “many early movies showed the difficult and ambiguous realities of urban tenement life in an idiom that spoke directly to immigrant women.”<sup>208</sup> Eric Rhode sees movies as a “desperately needed consolation and source of knowledge to the poor, the illiterate and to immigrant communities...unable to speak the native language.”<sup>209</sup> And Eugene Rosow goes even further, calling nickelodeons “oracles of the language of American culture, where a new world was interpreted and its goals, values and mores were

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<sup>206</sup> Garcia, “Subversive Sounds,” 215.

<sup>207</sup> Rosow, *Born to Lose*, 65.

<sup>208</sup> Elizabeth Ewen, “City Lights: Immigrant Women and the Rise of the Movies,” *Signs* 5, no. 3, supplement (Spring 1980): S52.

<sup>209</sup> Eric Rhode, *A History of the Cinema From Its Origins to 1970* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976), 21.

presented with humor, action, or melodrama.” Early film, he writes, was a “pictographic presentation of values, myths, language, and feelings that transcended the different pasts of the audiences to provide them with an orientation to present and future America. Film became a cultural cornerstone of the melting pot.”<sup>210</sup> On the other hand, Russell Merritt argues that movies gave migrants few clues to American life and could hardly have “worked as part of the immigrant’s acculturation to American society...to the values and customs of the new world.”<sup>211</sup>

Merritt is probably right in regard to films made abroad, such as the Pathé imports discussed above — they were unlikely to be “oracles of the language of American culture.” Migrants may, however, have learned something from *actualités*, essentially glorified photographs made in the earliest years of the new medium, before anyone knew what to do with it or had explored its possibilities. (Documentaries, in the modern sense, did not exist at the time.) *Actualités* — the word itself being another clue to the importance of France in the development of cinema — offered glimpses of both daily life and notable events. Again, however, many *actualités* were made abroad — the coronation of a tsar; scenes from French factories and train stations. Even American-made *actualités* — McKinley’s inauguration; footage related to the Spanish-American War that combined “views of actual American battleships and troops...reenactments of naval battles...and patriotic scenes of flag waving, the U.S. cavalry, or Uncle Sam” — offered such brief, fragmented views of American society that it is hard to

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<sup>210</sup> Rosow, *Born to Lose*, 64-65.

<sup>211</sup> Merritt, “Nickelodeon Theaters,” 65.

believe that they had much educational value for migrants.<sup>212</sup>

Later, socially conscious movies — filmed morality plays — may have helped migrants understand native-born middle-class attitudes toward issues such as divorce, birth control, drugs, corruption, prisons, and poverty. Migration itself was, of course, an issue at the time, and some early movies offered clues to how the native-born viewed migrants. It was not always a pretty picture. On the one hand, *The Italian* (1915) offered a sympathetic portrayal of a migrant; on the other, the Black Hand was a popular subject for movies depicting Italians. In general, “early films about Italians portrayed them as hot-blooded and violent,” Kevin Brownlow writes, “but the stereotypes were no more offensive than those for any other nationality,” which must have been reassuring to Italian audiences.<sup>213</sup> Many members of the native-born middle class may have needed movies to alert them to social ills; migrants experienced those problems every day and did not need to have the “difficult and ambiguous realities of urban tenement life” presented to them in any idiom. And many movies that depicted migrants simply confirmed the prejudice and condescension that migrants already knew too well from personal experience.

The larger issue, though, is that all representations of reality are constructs and thus, to one degree or another, unrealistic, and that was especially the case for silent cinema. Hugo Münsterberg (1863-1916), a psychologist and migrant — born in Danzig, he taught at Harvard and died in Cambridge — wrote in 1915 that

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<sup>212</sup> James Card, *Seductive Cinema: The Art of Silent Film* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 18; Rhode, *A History of the Cinema*, 23-24; Rabinovitz, *Electric Dreamland*, 5.

<sup>213</sup> Kevin Brownlow, *Behind the Mask of Innocence* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), 310, 318.

the “wordlessness of the picture drama favors a certain simplification of the social conflicts....characters become stereotyped.” Movies, he argued, emphasized “love and hate, gratitude and envy, hope and fear, pity and jealousy, repentance and sinfulness, and all the similar crude emotions.”<sup>214</sup> Many early films were also formulaic, the formula being based on what had worked in theater. As Brownlow describes it: “Give the audience someone to identify with, bring in ‘heart interest,’ a pretty girl or an appealing child, and wind up with a happy ending.”<sup>215</sup> And the formula was, if anything, more effective on screen than on stage: “Melodrama is served hot and at a pace the Bowery theatres can never follow,” Barton W. Currie wrote in *Harper’s Weekly* in 1907.<sup>216</sup> The “humor, action, or melodrama” that Rosow notes in early films was thus probably much more evident to audiences than any “goals, values, and mores.”

Nor did movies magically become “realistic” when they turned from what Brownlow calls “glutinous sentimentality” and toward “plain stories and straightforward approach,” because “realism,” however defined, is just another style. Brownlow praises movies that addressed “strong themes unimpaired by symbolism or sentimentality” and offers as an example prostitution, which some films depicted with “realistic playing, and equally realistic prostitutes.”<sup>217</sup> But

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<sup>214</sup> Hugo Münsterberg, “The Function of the Photoplay,” in *American Movie Critics: An Anthology From the Silents Until Now, Expanded Edition*, ed. Phillip Lopate (New York: The Library of America, 2008), 10, 12.

<sup>215</sup> Brownlow, *Behind the Mask*, xvi.

<sup>216</sup> Barton W. Currie, “The Nickel Madness,” in *The Movies in Our Midst: Documents in the Cultural History of Film in America*, ed. Gerald Mast (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 50.

<sup>217</sup> Brownlow, *Behind the Mask*, xvi.

*realistic* and *unsentimental* are not synonyms; even real life is occasionally sentimental. And “realistic playing” is virtually an oxymoron, as all acting is, by definition, at a remove from reality. Brownlow thus has no basis for judging the reality of such films — no way to say, in the absence of other evidence, how similar the sex work depicted in the films was to the real-life sex work of the time. Such films may have been more “realistic” than comedies in the very limited sense of drawing their original audiences’ attention to social issues, which comedies — with their death-defying stunts, car chases, and face pies — did not. But beyond that, the social issue films were hardly educational. The actresses were still only portraying sex workers, not taking up sex work (at least not in front of the cameras), so the films could not offer unmediated views of prostitution. For historians, such movies are primary sources for filmic representation of sex work, not primary sources for sex work itself.

Commercial concerns also mitigated against films being too educational. To turn a profit, movies had to entertain — offer not a slice of life but a slice of cake, as Hitchcock put it — and appeal to as wide an audience as possible.<sup>218</sup> Both migrants and the native-born, after all, went to cinemas for the same reasons: to escape, relax, and socialize (not necessarily in that order). They were the same reasons that migrants attended ethnic theater, as discussed above. Created by and for migrants and addressing problems that migrants faced, ethnic theater may have had some educational value, but it, too, had to entertain. The main thing migrants may have learned from movies, on the other hand, was what

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<sup>218</sup> François Truffaut and Helen G. Scott, *Hitchcock. Revised Edition* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983), 103.

movies were like. Anyone who thinks that cinema was some sort of guide or orientation to life a century ago should consider how closely Hollywood's current output tallies with life now. Movies were fun, reality harsh — surely migrants, like most other people, could figure out the difference. And reality probably taught migrants more than movies ever could.

Reformers, however, worried that movies and other leisure activities were having all too great an effect on the working class, including migrants. Reformers disliked amusement parks, for example, believing that “cheap sensations” and the availability of alcohol would lead to sexual immorality, as they defined it. They instead advocated “recreational activities that would be government regulated and uphold the traditions of middle-class culture and values, emphasizing intellect, self-control, and good moral character.”<sup>219</sup>

Cinemas, of course, did no such thing (who would have bothered with them if they had?). The middle class sneered — nickelodeons were “little hurry-up-and-be-amused booths,” according to a *Harper's Weekly* article, “The Nickel Madness,” in 1907 — but worried as well. Cinemas were suspect because they were popular and because as “centers of communication and cultural diffusion,” they offered the working class its own “source of entertainment and information...unsupervised and unapproved by the churches and schools, the critics and professors who served as caretakers and disseminators of the official American culture.”<sup>220</sup> The potential power of film scared the middle class; hence *Moving Picture World and View Photographer's* description of cinema as

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<sup>219</sup> Rabinovitz, *Electric Dreamland*, 44.

<sup>220</sup> Currie, “The Nickel Madness,” 46; Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, 19.



“something that may become one of the greatest forces for good or for evil in the city.”<sup>221</sup>

Then there were the movies themselves. Reformers as well as audiences considered cinema more realistic and powerful than other art forms, and that in itself could pose a danger: “Utilizing close-ups and dark rooms, movies had an immediacy that appealed to the irrational level, a level of impulse and dream,” Lewis Erenberg writes. “According to critics, this appeal to the passions had the power to evoke intense and dangerous emotions.”<sup>222</sup> Hugo Münsterberg would have agreed: he wrote of audience members experiencing “sensory hallucinations and illusions...neurasthenic persons are especially inclined to experience touch or temperature or smell or sound impressions from what they see on the screen.” Such powerful impressions, he argued, would lead people to imitate what they saw on the screen, meaning that the “sight of crime and vice may force itself on the consciousness with disastrous results. The normal resistance breaks down and the moral balance, which would have been kept under the habitual stimuli of the narrow routine life, may be lost under the pressure of the realistic suggestions.”<sup>223</sup>

The social space of nickelodeons presented problems as well. “Children have been influenced for evil by the *conditions surrounding* some of these shows,” the Chicago Vice Commission wrote in 1911. “Vicious men and boys mix with the crowd in front of the theaters and take liberties with very young girls.”

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<sup>221</sup> Currie, “The Nickel Madness,” 45.

<sup>222</sup> Erenberg, *Steppin’ Out*, 70.

<sup>223</sup> Münsterberg, “The Function of the Photoplay,” 12-13.

And the liberties, whatever they may have been, continued inside, “when the place is in total or semi-darkness. Boys and men slyly embrace the girls near them and offer certain indignities.”<sup>224</sup> Add “such moral hazards as the lack of chaperonage, suggestive posters advertising the shows, and bawdy vaudeville interspersed between the films,” and it is easy to see why movie houses became, in the eyes of reformers, “arenas of promiscuity and danger.”<sup>225</sup> The cinema was often called a “training school of mischief, mockery, lawbreaking and crime.”<sup>226</sup> Some members of the middle class even classed movie houses with “brothels, gambling dens and the hangouts of criminal gangs” as examples of “corrupt institutions and practices that had grown up in the poor and immigrant districts of the new industrial city.”<sup>227</sup>

Cinemas also got swept up in the xenophobia aroused by the influx of migrants, and little wonder: “Here was a business in which foreign-born exhibitors, many of them Jews, showed films made in Catholic countries like France to foreign audiences in foreign-dominated American cities.”<sup>228</sup> The native-born middle class may also have feared that by bringing together migrants and the native-born working class in the same space, cinemas would foster a class solidarity between the groups that could challenge middle-class power, much as

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<sup>224</sup> Chicago Vice Commission, “Cheap Theaters,” in *The Movies in Our Midst: Documents in the Cultural History of Film in America*, ed. Gerald Mast (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 62.

<sup>225</sup> Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, 151.

<sup>226</sup> Lee Grieveson, *Policing Cinema: Movies and Censorship in Early-Twentieth-Century America* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), 15.

<sup>227</sup> Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, 18.

<sup>228</sup> Ross, *Working-Class Hollywood*, 29.

middle-class whites in the postbellum South feared former slaves and poor whites making common cause. In the case of migrants, one response was federal legislation: hence the Immigration Acts of 1903 and 1907 (which prevented some groups from migrating in the first place) and the Naturalization Act of 1906. And restricting films from abroad was a logical outgrowth of restricting people from abroad. Hence, Pathé found its U.S. offerings under attack. Not only magazines such as *Variety*, *Show World*, *Film Index*, and the *New York Dramatic Mirror*, which reviewed films and covered the industry, but also general-interest newspapers such as the *Chicago Tribune* decided that there were such things as “American” and “foreign” subjects and story-telling styles, Pathé’s being, by definition, the latter.<sup>229</sup> *Show World*, for example, wrote that “‘Indian and Western’ films were the foundation of an ‘American school of motion picture drama’” and that “American films should tell ‘simple life stories...represented by clean, good looking actors,’” a remark that seems to play on the myth of the supposedly dirty, ugly foreigner.<sup>230</sup> Pathé tried to adjust both its films and its business model in the U.S., but the effort failed, and the company’s fortunes fell. World War I dealt a further blow to Pathé and hobbled Europe’s other film industries as well. By 1915, Münsterberg was writing with relief that “the time when the unsavory French comedies poisoned youth lies behind us.”<sup>231</sup>

Keeping out French films was not enough, however; the next step was to

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<sup>229</sup> Abel, *Red Rooster Scare*, 122-124.

<sup>230</sup> Abel, *Red Rooster Scare*, 138.

<sup>231</sup> Münsterberg, “The Function of the Photoplay,” 13.

cancel all movies being shown in cinemas. The effort began at the municipal level: Chicago started a censorship board in 1907, for example, and New York Mayor George B. McClellan revoked all cinemas' licenses just before Christmas 1908. "His excuse was safety; his true concern, public morals," Brownlow writes.<sup>232</sup> In any case, McClellan showed more initiative in attacking an imaginary foe than his father, the Civil War general, had shown in attacking a real one.

For a number of reasons, filmmakers and cinema owners agreed to censorship: it was easier than battling authorities in New York and elsewhere; it was a chance to make movies safe for the middle class and thus gain new audiences and pull in more profits; and it was easier and cheaper to make cuts to each film once for national distribution than to cut each film repeatedly according to the whims of each state and local censorship board. In 1909, then, the Board of Censorship of Motion Pictures was formed, later changing its name to the National Board of Review of Motion Pictures. The "dour-faced men" and "dignified women in broad-brimmed flowered hats" who screened the movies were especially on the lookout for obscenity, which they never defined — apparently they knew it when they saw it. "Films of women in corsets and leotards, kidnapping, gruesome crimes, and films that might give instructions on how to commit a crime, were taboo."<sup>233</sup> Also subject to censorship were movies that showed successful defiance of authority and thus might encourage audiences to rebel against, or at least question, the country's economic and political

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<sup>232</sup> Brownlow, *Behind the Mask*, 5.

<sup>233</sup> Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, 31-32.

systems. While not targeted at migrants alone, censorship was an attempt to control what all cinema audiences, migrants included, saw so as to limit their exposure to influences that the native-born middle class considered harmful. Thus, “moving pictures became the only medium of communication subject to systematic legal prior restraint in the United States.”<sup>234</sup>

Film censorship was rooted partly in the xenophobia caused by the large waves of migration that occurred as film became a popular new mass medium. Censorship made cinemas sites of confrontation, at least indirectly, between migrants and reformers. At the same time, however, migrants and reformers were confronting each other more directly in a very different set of venues — settlement houses. In both cases, performing arts played a major role.

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<sup>234</sup> Grieveson, *Policing Cinema*, 13.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE GLOBAL SETTLEMENT MOVEMENT

The questions of how, or whether, to aid the poor and who, if anyone, should do so are ancient, but the need for answers was especially pressing amid the social conditions of the U.S. and Britain in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as discussed in Chapter 1. For much of the nineteenth century, governments on both sides of the Atlantic were reluctant to provide a social safety net, as Irish corpses of the 1840s could eloquently, if silently, attest. By the last decades of the nineteenth century, however, governments in many industrialized democracies were recognizing that unemployment and on-the-job injuries were a normal byproduct of functioning industrial economies and thus “began spending their citizens’ money on policies meant to soften the impact of modern factory production” — that is, public benefits such as unemployment insurance, health insurance, pensions, and housing. The general idea was to steer a course between socialism and laissez-faire conservatism. Bismarck’s Germany was the first to take the initial steps toward the formation of a welfare state, but other countries soon outspent Germany on social welfare. The United States, however, was an exception: social spending in the U.S. grew, but less than in other countries. In the early twentieth century, the U.S. devoted about 0.6 percent of its GDP to social spending, less than Austria, Britain, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, New Zealand, Norway, or Sweden. (U.S. cities did, however, greatly increase their spending on health and sanitation in the first

decades of the twentieth century.) In addition, while other countries were creating central banks in an attempt to increase economic stability by freely lending during depressions, the United States — which had a fraught history with central banks anyway — refrained. The Federal Reserve System was not created until the U.S. had been industrialized for decades, and even the Fed was not intended as the kind of central bank that other countries had established. One reason that so little was done may have been suspicion of an activist federal government — a characteristic that has always formed part of the national DNA. But a more immediate cause may have been the reluctance of the native-born whites who controlled the federal government to create programs that, even if they helped the native-born white working class, would also have benefited African-Americans and migrants. (The presence of so many migrants and African-Americans in the working class also eroded its solidarity in comparison with the working classes of other countries, and less solidarity meant less political leverage.) A third possible reason for low levels of social spending was that the Senate and the Electoral College gave rural states greater political influence than their population figures would otherwise have dictated — and until the 1920s, the U.S. was more rural than urban anyway. White, native-born rural populations were not against all government intervention — they supported the regulation of banks and railroads, for example — but were hardly interested in providing a safety net for urban workers, especially those of other races and ethnicities.<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> Eric Rauchway, *Blessed Among Nations: How the World Made America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006), 14, 15, 85, 95, 96, 115.

Thus, in the absence of a strong social safety or other policies to cushion workers against the boom-and-bust cycles of capitalism — and even in Britain, which spent more on social welfare than the U.S. did — there were private efforts to alleviate poverty. One such effort involved charity. In the U.S., charity organizations included the Children’s Aid Society and the Association for Improving the Conditions of the Poor in New York. The Charity Organization Society Movement, started in England in 1869 and in the United States soon after, “brought business efficiency to the administration of charity and eliminated some of the duplication of effort caused by a rapid increase in organizations designed to help the poor.” Careful efforts were made to distinguish the “deserving” from the “undeserving” poor.<sup>236</sup>

A second approach to helping the poor was an attempt to improve housing. George Peabody, an American banker living in London, and Sydney Waterlow, an English politician, funded the construction of apartment buildings, the former working outside the market system, the latter combining “charity and market-oriented capitalism,” as Thomas Adam puts it.<sup>237</sup> Octavia Hill, an English social reformer, took a different approach: better housing through better people. She believed that “tenants needed instruction and guidance on how to live decently in improved apartments before they could be entrusted with upgraded dwellings.” Tenants were monitored by “friendly visitors,” upper-class women

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<sup>236</sup> Allen F. Davis, *Spearheads for Reform: The Social Settlements and the Progressive Movement 1890-1914* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1984), 18.

<sup>237</sup> Thomas Adam, *Intercultural Transfers and the Making of the Modern World, 1800-2000: Sources and Contexts* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 42, 45.



who dropped in once a week or more to advise on cleanliness and collect rent.<sup>238</sup> The idea was taken up in the U.S. as well. In Boston, which starting in the 1840s attracted large numbers of Irish who preferred not to starve to death, Henry Ingersoll Bowditch built housing for the poor in 1871. Following Waterlow, the project offered investors a modest return, but Hill was not forgotten, so there were friendly visitors as well. Historian Mina Carson sees the visitors as trying to “combine personal friendship with the poor and dispassionate observation of their living situations.”<sup>239</sup> (Even some corporations tried friendly visiting. Ford paid its workers relatively well but also tried to control how that money was spent, so members of the Ford’s “Sociological Department” dropped in on workers “to ensure cleanliness, good morals, and the proper environment for raising children.”)<sup>240</sup> But whether they intended it or not, the visitors were, in effect, trying to impose middle-class norms on those they were trying to help. And the middle class, Adam writes, saw the working classes as “uncivilized and in need of moral improvement before they could be integrated into civil society.”<sup>241</sup>

A similar spirit animated the settlement movement, a third approach to helping the poor. Settlement houses offered a sort of friendly visiting in reverse: settlement workers (or residents; the terms are interchangeable) living among the poor (or neighbors; again, the terms are interchangeable), who did the

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<sup>238</sup> Adam, *Intercultural Transfers*, 43, 45, 46.

<sup>239</sup> Mina Carson, *Settlement Folk: Social Thought and the American Settlement Movement, 1885-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 66.

<sup>240</sup> David Traxel, *Crusader Nation: The United States in Peace and the Great War, 1898-1920* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 201.

<sup>241</sup> Adam, *Intercultural Transfers*, 47.

visiting. The basic idea was to bridge the class divide, offer aid, and help migrants adjust to a new land, but all of that entailed a complex set of cultural interactions, compromises, and misunderstandings.

Though the settlement movement eventually became not just a transatlantic but a global phenomenon, its roots, both secular and religious, were in Britain. The religious roots involved Christian Socialism, which was promoted in the 1850s by figures such as Frederick Denison Maurice and involved the idea of the nation bound together under one church and individualism giving way to brotherhood, sacrifice, and economic and social cooperation. The movement's secular foundation, on the other hand, rested on the idea of a common humanity and the goal of changing the character of both rich and poor. Poverty arose partly from the individual's poor character, the thinking went, but also from the failure of the rich (meaning the middle class as well) to transmit to the poor the values that led to wealth. Direct monetary charity was thus not the answer: it made the poor dependent on handouts, eroded their self-respect, and did not change their basic economic circumstances while letting the rich off the hook — giving to charity allowed them to continue their unbridled pursuit of economic self-interest with clear consciences.<sup>242</sup>

The solution, rather, was to change the character of both rich and poor so as to create greater unity between the classes, and one way of doing so was to have rich and poor interact in the same space. The idea itself was not new but had been undertaken only by individuals and not in an organized way. Samuel

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<sup>242</sup> Carson, *Settlement Folk*, 3, 1.

Augustus Barnett, an Anglican clergyman, gave the idea new life. In 1873, he and his wife, Henrietta Rowland, were assigned to work in Saint Jude's parish, in Whitechapel in London's East End. Barnett then spent years visiting Oxford to recruit volunteers for a new project. His enthusiasm won him converts and funding, and in 1884, Barnett founded, and became the warden of, Toynbee Hall, the world's first settlement house.<sup>243</sup> Built on land next to St. Jude's by a joint-stock company formed for the purpose, Toynbee had fourteen residents in its first year.<sup>244</sup> It was modeled after a residential university college, including a library, dining hall, meeting space, and rooms for students.<sup>245</sup>

Barnett's goals were ambitious: to bring middle-class culture and education to the working class through lectures, art exhibits, classes, youth clubs, and literary and dramatic societies, and to bridge the class divide and reduce interclass hostility by helping members of each class get to know each other personally. Barnett hoped "that the settlement would become a rallying point for the neighborhood and that laborers and intellectuals would co-operate in promoting social reform."<sup>246</sup> Oxford House, another settlement, opened soon after Toynbee Hall, and Britain had thirty-six settlements by 1900 and forty-six by 1911. Of the forty-six, twenty-five, including Birmingham Settlement, were for

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<sup>243</sup> Carson, *Settlement Folk*, 5.

<sup>244</sup> Carson, *Settlement Folk*, 6-7.

<sup>245</sup> John Matthews and James Kimmis, "Development of the English settlement movement," in *Settlements, Social Change and Community Action: Good Neighbours*, ed. Ruth Gilchrist and Tony Jeffs (Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2001), 55.

<sup>246</sup> Davis, *Spearheads*, 5-7; Matthews and Kimmis, "Development of the English settlement movement," 56.

women residents, eleven were for men, and the rest were for both sexes.<sup>247</sup>

The idea of the settlement house was soon seized on in the United States. Educated Americans absorbed discussions of poverty, industrialization, and related topics through the work of writers such as Matthew Arnold, Charles Kingsley, Ruskin, Dickens, and Carlyle. And the increasing speed and ease of transatlantic travel, at least for those who could afford it, allowed more Americans to see social conditions in Britain for themselves.<sup>248</sup>

Toynbee Hall became “a magnet for American visitors,” hosting, among others, Cornelia Foster Bradford, George Hodges, and Charles Zueblin, who went on to found, respectively, Whittier House in New Jersey, Kingsley House in Pittsburgh, and Northwestern University Settlement in Chicago. Stanton Coit, founder of the Neighborhood Guild in New York in 1886, stayed at Toynbee for three months in 1885, and Robert Woods, who in 1891 became the first head worker of South End House in Boston, visited Toynbee for six months in 1890. Jane Addams, after graduating from the Rockford Female Seminary in Illinois, went on a “European grand tour” starting in August 1883 and ending in June 1885. “She steeped herself in history and culture,” historian Derek Vaillant writes, “spending large amounts of time in England and Germany touring museums, visiting religious and historic sites, and attending plays, operas, and concerts.” After visiting Toynbee in 1887, 1888, and 1889, she, along with Ellen

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<sup>247</sup> Davis, *Spearheads*, 7; Matthews and Kimmis, “Development of the English settlement movement,” 56, 59.

<sup>248</sup> Carson, *Settlement Folk*, 10.

Gates Starr, founded Hull House in Chicago in 1889.<sup>249</sup>

But American settlement workers did not and could not simply copy what the British did. Barnett and other British settlement leaders believed that reform had to start with the individual; American settlement workers, on the other hand, believed that the environment had to be improved before the individual could be.<sup>250</sup> In any case, whatever the American settlement founders learned, directly or indirectly, from the British, they had to find their own way and make their own mistakes. They certainly did not lack for idealism, enthusiasm, or good intentions. Carson describes them as “‘pioneers’ on a ‘frontier’...embarking on an exciting, even audacious, adventure” that put workers into an environment profoundly different from their comfortable, sheltered, upper-class existence. For women, there were very practical reasons for choosing settlement house life: it gave them a career of sorts and independence from their parents, and it was a respectable “substitute for traditional family life” as well as a convenient excuse not to marry. But settlement work also gave women more freedom and a greater public role than they would probably otherwise have had, along with a measure of influence even if they could not vote. “If it did not overwhelm, exhaust, or dismay the individual,” Carson writes, “the settlement experience was often extraordinary stimulating and liberating.”<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> Davis, *Spearheads*, 8; Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), 64; Derek Vaillant, *Sounds of Reform: Progressivism and Musical Activism in Chicago, 1873-1935* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 96-97.

<sup>250</sup> Davis, *Spearheads*, 16.

<sup>251</sup> Judith Ann Trolander, *Professionalism and Social Change: From the Settlement House Movement to Neighborhood Centers 1886 to the Present* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 12, 13; Carson, *Settlement Folk*, 50, 52.

Residents at U.S. settlements said as much. The most prominent ones, well-educated and articulate, wrote tirelessly about themselves, their work, and much else (one historian counted forty-five books produced by just fourteen settlement leaders), though some statements of their aims tended toward the vague and hyperbolic. Of her experience at the Henry Street Settlement in New York City, in a neighborhood of Romanians and Russian Jews, Lillian Wald wrote, “the mere fact of living in the tenement brought undreamed-of opportunities for widening our knowledge and extending our human relationships.”<sup>252</sup> Addams and Starr started Hull House as “an instrument for social, educational, humanitarian, and civic reform.”<sup>253</sup> Mary Simkhovitch described her time at College Settlement as “an identification of my life with that great caldron of boiling thought and feeling, a kind of social baptism.”<sup>254</sup> She saw Greenwich House, which she helped found, as “a group of friends, who, together with the neighbors, would through a common experience build up common enthusiasms for common projects.”<sup>255</sup> Settlements in general, she believed, existed mainly “to voice their [neighbors’] wrongs, to understand their problems, to stand by their side in their life struggles, to welcome their own leadership.” For her, offering aid was less important than gaining “fruitful knowledge obtained

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<sup>252</sup> Lillian D. Wald, *The House on Henry Street* (1915; reprint, New Brunswick, N.J: Transaction Publishers, 1991), 13.

<sup>253</sup> Davis, *Spearheads*, 12.

<sup>254</sup> Mary K. Simkhovitch, *Neighborhood: My Story of Greenwich House* (New York: Norton, 1938), 80.

<sup>255</sup> Simkhovitch, *Neighborhood*, 93.

through firsthand contact with the people of the neighborhoods.”<sup>256</sup> Residents and neighbors would come to respect and learn from each other, resulting in “a useful give-and-take all around...a new kind of university with lessons hot from the griddle.”<sup>257</sup> There were more specific settlement aims as well. According to the United Neighborhood Houses, “from their inception, settlement houses have been devoted to the principle of raising the standards of life in their immediate neighborhoods...Representing as they do vast numbers of the less privileged citizenry and through daily contact, knowing the needs and ambitions of the people they serve, and the conditions under which they live, settlement workers are able...to be a real power in bringing about legislative and other reforms.”<sup>258</sup> Albert J. Kennedy believed that the settlement was supposed to “see that the neighborhood in which it is located is constantly becoming a finer place to live in and to bring up a family of capable and growing children.”<sup>259</sup> Especially idealistic — not to say unrealistic — was Mary McDowell, head of University Settlement in Chicago from its founding, in 1894. “The Settlement idea of social service is based on case work,” she wrote. “The complete understanding of every individual’s problem, the calling together of all agencies to cooperate for the helping of the human being in distress. The Settlement meets every human being as an individual, not as a member of a church, or a party, or a nation.” The complete understanding of anything, however — whatever McDowell meant by the phrase

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<sup>256</sup> Simkhovitch, *Neighborhood*, 86-87.

<sup>257</sup> Simkhovitch, *Neighborhood*, 70-71.

<sup>258</sup> UM/SWHA, Box 250, Folder 74A — United Neighborhood Houses of NYC Records.

<sup>259</sup> UM/SWHA, Legal Box 2, Folder 11 — Albert Kennedy Papers.

— is not humanly possible, and group identities inescapably help define all individuals and cannot simply be ignored; even stranger is the fact that McDowell wrote the above passage not as a tyro at the start of a career but after decades of settlement work and life experience.<sup>260</sup>

In any case, for all the goals and goodwill, early U.S. settlement houses were still improvised affairs, the founders sometimes bumbling amateurs, naive and inexperienced, learning as they went along. Taylor, for example, wrote of “coming into settlement experience with only a general knowledge of its underlying motive and these incentives that lay back of it; its specific aims and methods generally disclosed themselves as we lived and worked at Chicago Commons.”<sup>261</sup> And Simkhovitch took over College Settlement — the first settlement house she had ever lived in — in January 1898 after just a few months’ residence, having been “prepared for the responsibility in one way only: by my intense interest in and admiration for the East Side.”<sup>262</sup> Residents were finding their way and figuring things out as they went along, testing their theories in the real world and trying to translate ideas and goals into practical realities. Kennedy called settlements “experiment stations in community living,” while Hilda Satt Polacheck, a Polish migrant who moved to Chicago with her family, saw Hull

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<sup>260</sup> Mary E. McDowell, “From Day to Day,” *Neighborhood: A Settlement Quarterly* 2, no. 2 (April 1929): 79.

<sup>261</sup> Graham Taylor, *Pioneering on Social Frontiers* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1930), 279.

<sup>262</sup> Simkhovitch, *Neighborhood*, 62.



House as a “laboratory for experiments in human needs.”<sup>263</sup>

Those experiments needed physical space. In most cases, settlement workers looked for an available structure that was well-placed for their work and bought or rented; after that, settlements tended to grow haphazardly.<sup>264</sup> Among the relatively few houses that created their own space were the Roadside Settlement in Des Moines (which moved into its own building in 1906) and the Abraham Lincoln Center in Chicago, whose building was designed by Frank Lloyd Wright.<sup>265</sup>

The experience of Chicago Commons was representative. For its first six years, starting in 1894, it occupied a decaying rented house, built by a well-to-do family of German-Americans, at Union Street and Milwaukee Avenue. Still, Taylor writes, the settlement felt itself lucky to have found such a building, which was better suited to its purposes than any other in the neighborhood: there was an annex that had been used as company offices, and basement floors where club groups could meet. A former stable became an assembly hall: “There, beneath octopus-like furnace pipes attached to its low ceiling, our lowly and more highly privileged guests met on equal terms. Great gray rats challenged our occupancy of what had been their preserve.” When the settlement workers moved in, a part of the house “wholly unfit for family dwelling” was home to eight poor Italian families. The settlement workers later rented that portion of the house as well

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<sup>263</sup> UM/SWHA, Legal Box 2, Folder 11 — Albert Kennedy Papers; Hilda Satt Polacheck, *I Came a Stranger: The Story of a Hull-House Girl*, ed. Dena J. Polacheck Epstein (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 74.

<sup>264</sup> Davis, *Spearheads*, 32.

and moved the Italians “to better quarters” — perhaps some of the first migrants helped by Chicago Commons.<sup>266</sup>

Other settlement founders’ initial experiences were bumpy as well. In 1889, the College Settlements Association — whose members included Vida Scudder, Jean Fine, and Helen Rand, and whose goal was “to solve the overwhelming problems created by the industrial city” — started College Settlement, on the Lower East Side of New York. They were soon visited by a police officer who assumed that any group of well-dressed women in a slum must be opening a whorehouse. He had no objections as long as he got monthly bribes to look the other way. It was perhaps not the beginning that the women had hoped for, but they were undeterred, and in the first year of College Settlement’s operation, some seven dozen college women applied to live there.<sup>267</sup>

To some extent, settlement and charity work overlapped. Settlement houses, for example, found that part of their work had to be charitable — the undernourished had to be fed before they could care anything about art exhibits or lectures.<sup>268</sup> In the early 1890s, Hull House resident Julia Lathrop served as a visitor for Cook County, and in 1894, she and Addams helped organize the Bureau of Charities.<sup>269</sup> Some charity workers, for their part, found “that a

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<sup>265</sup> Robert A. Woods and Albert J. Kennedy, *Handbook of Settlements* (New York: Charities Publication Committee, 1911), 84. Davis, *Spearheads*, 32.

<sup>266</sup> Taylor, *Social Frontiers*, 279, 280.

<sup>267</sup> Davis, *Spearheads*, 11.

<sup>268</sup> Davis, *Spearheads*, 20.

<sup>269</sup> Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull-House with Autobiographical Notes* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1910), 311-12; UIC/HH, Box 55, Folder 672.

settlement house was a convenient and stimulating place to live.”<sup>270</sup> Philip Ayres, secretary of the Chicago Bureau of Charities, gave a talk on “Friendly Visiting” at Hull House in January 1896, and Sherman Kinglsey of the Chicago Relief and Aid Society lectured there in January 1907.<sup>271</sup> The Societa di Beneficenza delle Donne Italiane, “organized by philanthropic ladies of the Italian colony” in 1908, used Hull House for meetings and for fund-raising entertainment.<sup>272</sup> And Mary Richmond, general secretary of the Baltimore Charity Organization Society, respected the settlements “and believed that all charity workers should listen to the ideas of the important settlement workers.”<sup>273</sup>

In many ways, however, charity and settlement workers did not see eye to eye. Some charity workers considered settlement efforts “sentimental and unscientific and too vague to be useful,” as well as in thrall to anarchist and socialist ideas.<sup>274</sup> Settlement workers, on the other hand, believed that friendly visitors “condescended to their forced hosts; they meddled; they were impolite and disrespectful; they disregarded the religious and cultural customs of those they visited; they popped in perfunctorily or overstayed their welcome.” Settlement workers also thought visitors overemphasized self-reliance, and despite initially agreeing with the visitors on the importance of character building among the poor, they later realized that the “poor were caught in a mesh of

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<sup>270</sup> Davis, *Spearheads*, 21.

<sup>271</sup> UIC/HH, Box 43, Folder 425; UIC/HH, Box 43, Folder 430B.

<sup>272</sup> UIC/HH, Box 44, Folder 435

<sup>273</sup> Davis, *Spearheads*, 20.

<sup>274</sup> Davis, *Spearheads*, 20.

environmental circumstances that ‘character building’ alone could not cut through.” Here there may have been, as charity workers suspected, an element of anarchist thought, which held that a “sick environment developed sick inhabitants”; and Addams, herself no anarchist, allowed Peter Kropotkin to speak at Hull House.<sup>275</sup> In any case, residents believed that the real need was less for charity than for social justice. The greater social interaction that settlement work, as opposed to visiting, allowed gave workers more opportunity to see neighbors as complex human beings rather than just charity cases. And workers’ “claim of reciprocity in their neighborhood friendships, though often stilted and artificial in actuality, predisposed them to see their neighbors’ lives as molded by circumstances beyond their individual control.”<sup>276</sup> Addams, for example, wrote of “pliable human nature . . . relentlessly pressed upon by its physical environment.”<sup>277</sup>

If settlement houses were inevitably intertwined with charity work, they were even more intertwined with religion. One reason, of course, was that, more so than now, religion permeated most Americans’ lives and thus could hardly help finding its way into settlement houses. It is no surprise, then, that in a 1905 survey of 339 settlement workers, 88 percent said they were church members, and “nearly all admitted that religion had been a dominant influence on their

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<sup>275</sup> Eric Rauchway, *Murdering McKinley: The Making of Theodore Roosevelt’s America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2003), xi, 135.

<sup>276</sup> Carson, *Settlement Folk*, 66, 67.

<sup>277</sup> Addams, *Twenty Years*, 186.

lives.”<sup>278</sup>

More significant is the fact that in the South, most settlements began as missions, and almost 70 percent of settlement houses in the South were religious. It is also striking that a good number of the early settlement workers had religious training and that even many who did not sought to “create a meaningful faith for an urban, industrial society.” South End House was founded by Congregational minister William Jewett Tucker. George Hodges, a minister bothered by the huge gap between rich and poor, founded Kingsley House in 1893. Taylor started Chicago Commons in 1894 in the belief that Christians had a responsibility to serve their communities and that the church could push social reform. Vida Scudder was inspired by St. Francis, and Starr, even while involved with the settlement movement, searched for a spiritual home, eventually finding it in a Catholic religious order.<sup>279</sup> Addams, who took inspiration from her father’s Quakerism, said at a settlement conference in New York in 1895 that “I should certainly distrust a settlement without the religious life.” According to an article on the conference, “deep religious feeling [was] expressed often and present always.”<sup>280</sup>

Whatever the settlement founders’ intentions, however, the houses’ relationship with religion varied greatly, as shown by the *Handbook of Settlements* (1911), edited by Woods and Albert J. Kennedy. Some settlements were themselves places of worship. San Francisco’s Green Street Congregational

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<sup>278</sup> Davis, *Spearheads*, 27.

<sup>279</sup> Davis, *Spearheads*, 13-14, 23, 27, 29.

<sup>280</sup> “Settlement Workers in Conference,” *The Congregationalist* LXXX, no. 19 (May 9, 1895): 740.

Church, for example, in a neighborhood of Spanish, French, and Italian migrants, sought to be “a church with resident workers.” St. Marks Hall in New Orleans, on the other hand, was not a church but is identified in the *Handbook* as Methodist and made “Christian social settlement work” its aim. It was near a Sicilian community numbering 10,000 to 15,000. In Philadelphia, La Nunziata House, a Catholic settlement, was founded to deal with “the extraordinary situation created by the sudden and large influx of European Catholics, particularly Italian”; among its activities were a Sunday school and “instruction for the sacraments.”<sup>281</sup>

But some settlements listed as religiously affiliated were apparently not religious. Detroit’s Westminster House, for example, identified as Presbyterian and established by members of a Presbyterian church, describes itself as a “center of friendliness” and lists no obviously religious activities. The neighbors were Germans and Poles, “self-respecting, earnest and efficient.” And in New York, the Welcome House Settlement, in a largely Jewish neighborhood, seems not to have held any religious services or provided religious instruction, though it does list among its offerings “lectures on sanitation and street cleaning in Yiddish.”<sup>282</sup>

There was also a distinct secular strand in the settlement movement. “A mission is sectarian, devoted to propagating the faith of some church,” reads the first annual report (1897-98) of Unity House in Minneapolis, “but a social

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<sup>281</sup> Woods and Kennedy, *Handbook*, 18, 92, 276.

<sup>282</sup> Woods and Kennedy, *Handbook*, 144, 238.

settlement has no creed but the golden rule and works for man.”<sup>283</sup> Wald might have agreed. She believed that religious proselytizing would undermine the settlement’s aims: “All creeds have a common basis for fellowship, and their adherents may work together for humanity with mutual respect and esteem for the conviction of each when these are brought into controversy.” Christians, Jews, Buddhists, and even non-believers, she wrote, lived together contentedly in Henry House without trying to convert one another.<sup>284</sup> Taylor took a similar approach, holding that because residents of different faiths and ethnicities “have lived and worked together with such equal devotion...we have needed no creedal test for admission.” His Chicago Commons did, however, offer an informal and voluntary half-hour evening service of hymns, scripture reading, conversation, and discussion of current events and books, after which “we unite in the Lord’s Prayer.”<sup>285</sup>

Religious neutrality, or at least a light touch when it came to religion, may have been the only practical approach for many settlement houses, because despite a modest presence of Jews and Catholics, most settlement workers were Protestants — Allen F. Davis speculates that it was a Calvinist upbringing that infused many residents with “a sense of personal responsibility, a sense of mission to do something about the world’s problems” — whereas most European migrants to the U.S. in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were

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<sup>283</sup> Howard Jacob Karger, *The Sentinels of Order: A Study of Social Control and the Minneapolis Settlement House Movement, 1915-1950* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1987), 15-16.

<sup>284</sup> Wald, *Henry Street*, 254-55.

<sup>285</sup> Taylor, *Social Frontiers*, 286.

Jewish or Catholic.<sup>286</sup> “To remain effective,” Howard Jacob Karger writes, “settlements were thus forced to separate proselytizing from settlement work while...retaining a broadly based Christian mission.” North East Neighborhood House in Minneapolis, for example, began as a Protestant mission, but its neighborhood was overwhelmingly Catholic (and Slavic).<sup>287</sup> Protestant settlement houses could work, however, in neighborhoods dominated by native-born Protestant Americans. That was the case with Wesley House (Methodist) and Virginia Hall Settlement (Presbyterian) in, respectively, Birmingham and Huntsville, Alabama.<sup>288</sup>

Religion eventually started playing a smaller role in drawing people to settlement work, especially after 1900. And “almost without exception,” Davis writes, “the settlements that became important centers of social reform attempted to avoid anything that might give the impression of proselytizing.”<sup>289</sup>

Whatever their attitudes toward religion, most American settlement house residents had much in common. The vast majority were born in the Midwest or Northeast and into “old-stock American families. They had English or Scotch-Irish names.” Many of their fathers were ministers or taught in high schools or colleges, and many workers’ parents, regardless of occupation, “were actively involved in reform or concerned with aiding the poor.” They were raised in an urban environment, but not in slums. Their families were middle-class or rich —

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<sup>286</sup> Davis, *Spearheads*, 27.

<sup>287</sup> Karger, *Sentinels of Order*, 18.

<sup>288</sup> Woods and Kennedy, *Handbook*, 6, 7.



which meant that residents could afford to live in settlement houses, at least for a while, rather than working for a living. It also meant that before embarking on settlement work, few residents “had any real awareness of the problems faced by the poor in large cities.” Settlement workers also tended to be young: the median age for starting settlement work was twenty-five. Even some of the early founding figures in the movement were young: Addams started Hull House at twenty-nine, and Woods began living at Andover House at twenty-seven. Settlement workers were also well-educated: almost ninety percent had attended college, more than eighty percent had a bachelor’s or equivalent, and more than half had done graduate work. Most were unmarried, as settlement houses had difficulty accommodating married couples, especially those with young children. Instead, the houses became places to meet a mate: Simkhovitch writes that “matchmaking has always been one of the chief works of [Greenwich] House both among the residents and neighbors.”<sup>290</sup> In most cases, however, “marriage meant the end of active participation in the movement.” Even among single residents, turnover was high: the median number of years spent doing settlement work was three, so “each year a new group of young men and women...came to the settlements, and the movement profited from their energy and enthusiasm...though it suffered from their inexperience.”<sup>291</sup>

If residents had much in common, however, their motives for entering settlement work were diverse. Almost half entered the movement fresh out of

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<sup>289</sup> Davis, *Spearheads*, 15.

<sup>290</sup> Simkhovitch, *Neighborhood*, 149.

<sup>291</sup> Davis, *Spearheads*, 33-36.

college or graduate school. Some stayed at settlements for a while because they had no idea what else to do with their lives. But “the best settlements were exciting, intellectually stimulating places to live.”<sup>292</sup> Some residents saw settlement work as a continuation of graduate studies, and some of the houses offered a dorm-like atmosphere — books, magazines, interesting colleagues, and late-night conversations — even if the food left something to be desired.<sup>293</sup> Settlement houses also offered opportunities to put into practice some of the theory that residents had learned during their long years of schooling. And residents who were part of the first generation of college-educated women were also eager to justify the idea of higher education for women by doing good works.<sup>294</sup> Simkhovitch, for example, writes that during her graduate studies at Columbia, “a sort of mental precipitation took place. Sociology and economics and history would surely turn out to have a reality and a validity for one if one could gain a wider personal experience.” Living at College Settlement, where she hoped to plunge “into life where it was densest and most provocative,” would give her that personal experience.<sup>295</sup>

Most residents, however, were “not even engaged in full-time social work but rather employed as teachers, writers, lawyers, even probation officers. They lived at the settlement and devoted their spare time to club and class work, and to

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<sup>292</sup> Davis, *Spearheads*, 30-31.

<sup>293</sup> Davis, *Spearheads*, 38, 31.

<sup>294</sup> Davis, *Spearheads*, 37.

<sup>295</sup> Simkhovitch, *Neighborhood*, 58.

work for social reform.”<sup>296</sup> Writers seeking material for “an article on child labor or crowded tenements or for a novel about strikes or an immigrant family” found settlement houses fine places to do research; the houses were “sociological laboratories” for students of urban life.<sup>297</sup> The neighborhoods, too, could become laboratories of a kind: in 1897, Alice Hamilton, a doctor, moved to Hull House to study the cocaine trade and typhoid epidemic among the neighbors. She later became Harvard’s first woman professor.<sup>298</sup>

In such an environment, residents may have been more interested in furthering their own development and socializing with one another than in helping neighbors. But for Addams, that possibility was outweighed by the benefits of companionship and of the “give and take of colleagues.”<sup>299</sup> Taylor took a similar attitude: “Each one of the twelve of us who came into Chicago Commons’ first household profited not only by the ideals that we shared with each other, but also by the differences which accentuated the individuality of each other....the ideals and capacities of every member of the household were developed far beyond what each one of us could individually attain.”<sup>300</sup> Carson argues that the workers “embraced the idea of reciprocity and claimed to receive

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<sup>296</sup> Davis, *Spearheads*, 32.

<sup>297</sup> Davis, *Spearheads*, 30.

<sup>298</sup> Eleanor J. Stebner, “The Settlement House Movement,” in *Encyclopedia of Women and Religion in North America*, ed. Rosemary Skinner Keller and Rosemary Radford Reuther (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 1065.

<sup>299</sup> Addams, *Twenty Years*, 90.

<sup>300</sup> Taylor, *Social Frontiers*, 279.

as much as they gave in choosing to live among the poor.”<sup>301</sup>

Whatever its flaws, the settlement house model took root and flourished in American soil, though more in some parts of the country than others. Among its 420 entries for 32 states and the District of Columbia, the *Handbook of Settlements* lists 250 settlement houses — that is, facilities with residents, as opposed to just volunteers or workers (the rest of the entries are for churches, schools, community centers, and other places that offered aid of various kinds to people living in their vicinity). The *Handbook* makes clear the heavy concentration of settlements in the Northeast and Midwest: New York, Illinois, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Missouri together accounted for 165 settlements, or 66 percent of the total; New York state alone had 56 settlements, or 22.4 percent of the total. By contrast, the South (meaning the states of the former Confederacy plus the border states) accounts for 70 entries, including 61 settlement houses, or 24.4 percent of the total — and more than half of those settlement houses, 33, were in just four states — Maryland, Missouri, Tennessee, and Texas — all of which had been border states or on the edge of the Confederacy during the Civil War. The deep South had very few settlements, perhaps because racism against African-Americans was especially strong in that part of the country, and helping the poor would have meant helping African-Americans. States west of the Mississippi have a combined 55 entries, including 33 settlement houses, or 13.2 percent of the total — and 18 of those settlements were in California and Missouri.<sup>302</sup>

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<sup>301</sup> Carson, *Settlement Folk*, 51.

<sup>302</sup> Woods and Kennedy, *Handbook*, passim.

Some settlement houses had a few residents; others had up to several dozen. Most residents paid room and board and also had jobs outside the houses. In the settlements, residents did most of the work: they planned the programs, staffed the clubs, and engaged in social research and political lobbying. The head resident, who in many cases was responsible to a (non-resident) board of directors, set the house's tone and recruited workers.<sup>303</sup>

Settlements collectively offered a wide array of services aimed at education and entertainment for both adults and children. Many houses had libraries, kindergartens, playgrounds, and gyms. Neighbors could hear lectures and concerts, play pool, join social clubs or arts and crafts clubs, or take classes in sewing, housekeeping, cooking, carpentry, printing, chair making, and other skills. There were parties, dances, and opportunities to sing and to play or learn to play musical instruments. Some houses offered instruction in drawing, painting, and sculpting, as well as space to put on plays. And there were field trips and camps for children.<sup>304</sup> Judith Ann Trolander sketches out a typical day at the Neighborhood Guild in about 1900: kindergarten started at 9 a.m.; a loan office and Legal Aid Society offered their services throughout the day; at 3 p.m., after school was over, “the club rooms, study rooms, library, and rooftop playground came alive”; evening was the time for teenagers' clubs and games, and perhaps trade union meetings.<sup>305</sup>

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<sup>303</sup> Stebner, “The Settlement House Movement,” 1061-62.

<sup>304</sup> Woods and Kennedy, *Handbook*, passim.

<sup>305</sup> Trolander, *Professionalism and Social Change*, 9.

Some settlement workers' efforts went beyond the boundaries of the houses and into the neighborhoods. Kingsley House in New Orleans, for example, investigated housing conditions and collected data on neighbors' health. The Roxbury Neighborhood House in Boston helped build a playground. The South End House in Boston offers, in the *Handbook*, an extensive account of its neighborhood activities, such as helping enforce the building code, improving sanitation, and working with labor unions. The Pillsbury Settlement House in Minneapolis took part in a "campaign for cleaner moral conditions" and helped defeat "a corrupt alderman at the primaries." In New York City, the Little Italy Neighborhood House organized free lectures in Italian at a library, while the United Neighborhoods Guild waged "an aggressive campaign for better housing and more effective municipal service." Whittier House in Jersey City was "instrumental in organizing the Jersey City Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children," besides being "instrumental" — a favorite word — in a number of other important activities. And according to Whittier House, Whittier House was "the pioneer settlement in New Jersey" and had been "of service as well to the state as to the city."<sup>306</sup> (In the *Handbook*, the line between informing and boasting is sometimes fuzzy.)

### **Transatlantic and transnational**

While the settlement movement originated in Britain and flourished in the U.S., it was by no means confined to those countries — or to societies bordering

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<sup>306</sup> Woods and Kennedy, *Handbook*, 89, 91, 123, 146-47, 162, 179-82.

the Atlantic. U.S. settlements, furthermore, drew the attention not just of settlement workers worldwide but also from people involved in a variety of other social causes and, in some cases, from countries with little or no evidence of settlement activity. U.S. settlement workers, meanwhile, also traveled abroad to visit settlement houses and for other reasons. At the very least, such visits helped “wrench social workers out of their provincialism.”<sup>307</sup>

### Britain

Long after the settlement movement had spread from Britain to the U.S., contacts between the countries continued in a variety of ways. British figures had a virtual presence in some U.S. settlements: Addams read aloud the letters of Henrietta Barnett, Samuel Barnett’s wife, during dinner at Hull House; Mary McDowell kept the autobiography of social reformer Beatrice Webb on her desk at all times; and at Chicago Commons, Graham Taylor prominently displayed a photo of English social researcher and philanthropist Charles Booth (Webb’s cousin) in the library.<sup>308</sup>

There were also more substantive transatlantic links. The death of Samuel Barnett in 1913 led, in 1924, to the establishment of the Barnett Memorial Fellowship in both England, where it was overseen by Toynbee Hall, and in the U.S., where it was overseen by the National Federation of Settlements, which solicited contributions from settlement houses to raise the \$12,500 that was the American portion of the fellowship (the English portion was 1,200 pounds).

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<sup>307</sup> Davis, *Spearheads*, 228.

<sup>308</sup> Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings*, 64-65.

Barnett fellows were “appointed alternately from England and America” for one-year terms, with an option for a second year. One reason for the creation of the fellowship was that though Barnett had been memorialized in England, the U.S. had offered “no formal recognition of its gratitude to the father of settlements. It is, therefore, peculiarly fitting that the resident groups should have the first opportunity thus to honor the memory of their spiritual leader.” A more important goal, however, was to allow settlement workers on either side of the Atlantic to get to know each other and “the finest forms of work which each carries on.” Barnett fellows were also free to travel to Continental Europe and Asia. The NFS expected that the cumulative work done by fellows over the years would “have a definite effect in stimulating and improving settlement techniques everywhere.” The NFS also hoped that that the fellowship would increase the prestige of settlement work and draw better people to the field.<sup>309</sup>

The creation of the Barnett fellowship also, however, shows tensions between the U.S. and British settlement movements, as revealed in a letter from J.J. Mallon, Samuel Barnett’s successor as warden of Toynbee Hall, to Albert J. Kennedy, then secretary of the National Federation of Settlements, in August 1924. The letter, which concerns details of how the fellowship would operate, makes clear that it was originally proposed by Toynbee Hall and that, as Mallon puts it, “I think the desire on this side will be, while welcoming in every way the participation of the American Settlements, to depart as little as possible from the scheme of the Fellowship.” Then Mallon turns conciliatory, conceding that “it

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<sup>309</sup> UM/SWHA, Box 194, Folder 19 — National Federation of Settlements Records.



would certainly weigh with us that the American Settlements would prefer a scheme which involved the interchange of research students.” The letter ends with a desire that the fellowship establish “a link between our two countries and I am sure that the people here will take the view that that consideration should dominate all others.” Whatever pride British settlement workers took in having founded the movement, they also realized (and perhaps somewhat resented the fact) that the U.S. movement was far larger and that in the kind of transatlantic cooperation that the Barnett fellowship entailed, the Britons could all too easily be reduced to the status of a junior partner.<sup>310</sup>

Beside such transatlantic cooperation, a steady stream of Britons, including settlement workers, visited U.S. settlement houses. Percy Alden, warden of Mansfield House in London and a radical member of the Liberal Party, made at least two trips to the U.S. In May 1895, he was in New York for a settlement conference that apparently consisted mostly of U.S. settlement workers, including major figures such as Addams, Starr, McDowell, Taylor, and Woods.<sup>311</sup> Alden returned to the U.S. in summer 1897, staying at the Chicago Commons settlement house and visiting other settlements. On August 6, a reception arranged by the Federation of Chicago Settlements was held for Alden at Hull House.<sup>312</sup>

Alden was a close and appreciative observer of U.S. settlements. He saw, on the one hand, that there was at least as much need for settlement houses in

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<sup>310</sup> UM/SWHA, Box 194, Folder 19 — National Federation of Settlements Records.

<sup>311</sup> “Settlement Workers in Conference,” *The Congregationalist* LXXX, no. 19 (May 9, 1895): 740.

<sup>312</sup> “Percy Alden’s Visit,” *The Commons* II, no. 4 (August 1897): 7.

the United States as in Britain: “The conditions which are attached to the life of the poor in East London are beginning to have their counterpart in the great crowded city centres in America,” he wrote in a chapter on U.S. settlements in the 1898 book *University and Social Settlements*. “The struggle for existence in the principal towns like New York and Chicago is almost as keen as that which confronts us in London.” But settlement work in the U.S. was harder and more complex, he argued, because of “the racial question.” Thus, Alden wrote, a settlement house could become “a nucleus around which men women and children of different nationalities may gather and learn the meaning of citizenship.”<sup>313</sup> He singled out Addams for her “tact and devotion, her organising power and indomitable courage,” by which she “has developed the Settlement work with a rapidity that is almost phenomenal.”<sup>314</sup> Alden was also impressed with University Settlement in New York, which he visited during at least one of his stays in the U.S., praising the settlement for its kindergarten, “athletic and social clubs for lads...a good library of nearly three thousand volumes,” and art exhibits.<sup>315</sup> The admiration was mutual: Alden’s “increasing knowledge of American affairs and life and his intimate acquaintance with American settlements,” an article noted, “made especially valuable his suggestions” of U.S. settlement houses duplicating the kind of work that Mansfield House carried

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<sup>313</sup> Percy Alden, “American Settlements,” in *University and Social Settlements*, ed. Will Reason (London: Methuen and Co., 1898), 139.

<sup>314</sup> Alden, “American Settlements,” 141.

<sup>315</sup> Alden, “American Settlements,” 140.

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British settlement workers continued to visit the U.S. in later decades as well. In 1928, Katherine C. Dewar, former warden of Birmingham Settlement, paid an extended visit to the U.S. Kingsley House in New Orleans hosted her for six weeks, but she went north as well. On a “bright and cool” day in May 1928, Dewar was the “honored guest” at a meeting of the United Neighborhood Houses of New York at the Caroline Country Club in Hartsdale, New York. One speaker, discussing the problem of slums, mentioned “the efforts of Dame Barnett of Toynbee Hall Settlement in establishing working-men’s homes in Hampstead Heath.” Dewar, meanwhile, “described the housing conditions in England and the great problems arising from the long period of unemployment with its system of charity-doles.” She also noted the “great difference in the problem of class struggle as between Americans and Britishers. Over there the class lines are pretty well fixed and one does not aspire to rise into another class.”<sup>317</sup> Dewar found other things to admire about U.S. settlements as well: the “welcoming hall,” which many British settlements lacked; central heating; residents and neighbors eating together — and enough food for everyone; and the “absence of really abject poverty.” After five months in the U.S., Dewar left the country from Houston, bound for Le Havre, on August 9, 1928.<sup>318</sup>

But many of the transatlantic visitors to U.S. settlement houses were not directly involved in settlement work. Ramsay MacDonald, Britain’s first Labour

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<sup>316</sup> “Percy Alden’s Visit,” 7.

<sup>317</sup> UM/SWHA, Box 244, Folder 32 — United Neighborhood Houses of NYC Records.

<sup>318</sup> “Through British Eyes,” *Neighborhood: A Settlement Quarterly* 1, no. 4 (October 1928): 50-51.

Party prime minister, visited Henry House, along with his bride, during their wedding trip in the mid-1890s — the beginning of a “long association” of MacDonald with Henry Street, according to Wald.<sup>319</sup> Accompanied by his daughter, he was at Henry Street again in April 1927, when, between terms in office, he was guest of honor at a Foreign Policy Association dinner in New York.<sup>320</sup>

Keir Hardie, Scottish socialist and labor leader, was at Hull House in September 1895, making a speech in which he defended socialism and offered a critique of U.S. capitalism. He praised those trying to “eradicate the evils of our industrial system by works of charity” and “sacrificing themselves in their endeavors to improve the condition of the poor of the large cities, but whilst all these efforts and agencies are at work the causes which produced these evils are also at work.”<sup>321</sup> Hardie also visited Henry Street, writing in the guest book: “Underlying Socialism is the great basic truth of human equality; not that all are to be alike, but that all are to be equal, which is a very different thing. Under Socialism there would be no exploiting class, no tyranny of one sex or race over another.”<sup>322</sup>

Beatrice Webb, so admired by Mary McDowell, was not so impressed with U.S. settlements. Visiting Hull House in summer 1898 with her husband, Sidney,

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<sup>319</sup> Lillian D. Wald, *Windows on Henry Street* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1934), 60.

<sup>320</sup> “Ramsay MacDonald Here April 26,” *The New York Times*, March 27, 1927; “Lillian Wald Dies,” *The New York Times*, September 2, 1940.

<sup>321</sup> “Keir at Hull House,” *The Chicago Tribune*, September 9, 1895.

<sup>322</sup> Wald, *Windows on Henry Street*, 65.

Beatrice Webb found Addams “remarkable...an interesting combination of the organiser, the enthusiast and the subtle observer of human characteristics.” But in describing Hull House itself, Webb seemed to channel earlier British visitors to the U.S. such as Frances Trollope (*Domestic Manners of the Americans*) and Dickens (*American Notes for General Circulation* and *Martin Chuzzlewit*). The evening the Webbs arrived at Hull House proved a “terrific ordeal. First an uncomfortable dinner, a large party served higgledypiggledy. Then a stream of persons, labour, municipal, philanthropic, university, all those queer, well-intentioned or cranky individuals who habitually centre round all settlements!” Worse, everyone wanted to be individually introduced to the Webbs — “a diabolical custom.” The rest of the Webbs’ stay was characterized by illness, “the dull heat of the slums, the unappetising food of the restaurant, the restless movements of the residents from room to room, the rides over impossible streets littered with unspeakable garbage.” In short, it was “one long bad dream” that led the Webbs to skip the other Midwest cities they had intended to visit and head straight to Denver and the “restful mountains.”<sup>323</sup>

U.S. settlements also hosted Patrick Geddes, Scottish biologist, town planner, and, according to Wald, “a light bringer to those who knew him.”<sup>324</sup> Besides visiting Henry Street, Geddes stopped at Hull House in late March and early April 1899. According to *The Chicago Tribune*, which called Geddes a “social reconstructor,” he was in Chicago to “observe conditions of social work.”

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<sup>323</sup> Beatrice Webb, *Beatrice Webb’s American Diary 1898*, ed. David A. Shannon (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1963), 108-109.

<sup>324</sup> Wald, *Windows on Henry Street*, 148

Speaking at Hull House on the evening of March 31, he professed interest in not just settlement houses but also “all forms of social progress.” He also said Hull House reminded him of a “first-class lunatic asylum,” but in a good way: the “subdued tints” of the wallpaper “afford the relief which men and women absolutely need after their struggle in the world day by day.”<sup>325</sup>

1910 saw a number of visits by Brits. Mary Macarthur, a Scottish trade unionist who also worked for women’s rights, visited Henry Street; while in Chicago “as the guest of the Woman’s [Women’s] Trade Union League,” she also lectured at Hull House on October 10, 1910.<sup>326</sup> Graham Wallas, English socialist, prominent Fabian, and founder of the London School of Economics, taught at Harvard in 1910 and also became the first man to take up residence at Henry Street, once dining there with Theodore Roosevelt and Jacob Riis.<sup>327</sup> And Margaret Bondfield, who served as the first female British Cabinet minister and worked for women’s rights, visited the U.S. repeatedly. In 1910, she spent five months in Chicago and Lawrence, Massachusetts, to examine labor problems, and after World War I, she attended the first conference of International Labour Organization in Washington. By 1924, according to the Illinois League of Women Voters Bulletin, Bondfield was “well-known in America,” having been a delegate to the American Federation of Labor and the International Congress of Working

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<sup>325</sup> “Geddes at Hull House,” *The Chicago Tribune*, April 1, 1899.

<sup>326</sup> Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings*, 64; UIC/HH, Box 43, Folder 435.

<sup>327</sup> Henry F. May, *The End of American Innocence: A Study of the First Years of Our Own Time, 1912-1917* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 232; Wald, *House on Henry Street*, 58-59, 238.

Women, in Washington, and having “spoken in many of the large cities in the United States where her beautiful voice and appealing message of Labor’s hope and faith will not be forgotten.” In 1938, Bondfield was in the U.S. again, this time to lecture.<sup>328</sup> On one of those trips, she addressed an “admiring audience” at Henry Street.<sup>329</sup>

Besides the British visitors, there was transatlantic traffic in the other direction as well. Vida Scudder visited settlement houses in England in the 1890s and reported that “the general tone of their life and work seems less democratic than in our own country. ‘Is it true,’ she was asked in London, ‘that in America you don’t go among these people as your betters?’”<sup>330</sup> And in 1919, Mary McDowell investigated the conditions of women working in industry in England and France, and as Europe recovered from World War I, her suggestions “were of vital importance in dealing with the problems of reconstruction as they affected women wage-earners.”<sup>331</sup>

## France

The French settlement movement, like those in the U.S. and Britain, originated in the growing awareness among “enlightened people” of the wretched

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<sup>328</sup> Norbert C. Soldon, “Margaret Bondfield,” in Frank N. Magill, ed., *Dictionary of World Biography Volume VII: The 20th Century, A-GI* (New York: Routledge: 1999), 354-356; Edith Abbott, “More Political Power to Women in England,” *Illinois League of Women Voters Bulletin* IV, no. 3 (March 1924): 6.

<sup>329</sup> Wald, *Windows on Henry Street*, 62.

<sup>330</sup> “Settlement Workers in Conference,” *The Congregationalist* LXXX, no. 19 (May 9, 1895): 740.

<sup>331</sup> Howard E. Wilson, *Mary McDowell: Neighbor* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1928), 137.

lives of the working class, the belief that neither charity nor government action would adequately address the problem, and the hope that settlement houses would help.<sup>332</sup> According to a 1936 pamphlet by S. Chalvet, the French settlement movement “began to take definite form after 1870, and especially...after 1897.”<sup>333</sup> The movement began in Paris, but opinions vary as to the first French settlement house, or houses. *Settlements and Their Outlook*, an account of the first International Conference of Settlements, in 1922, seems to identify l’Union des Familles, established just after the Franco-Prussian War, as a settlement house, which it may have been in 1922; but it probably did not originate as a settlement house. *Settlements and Their Outlook* also mentions a better candidate for the first French settlement house: L’Ouevre du Moulin Vert, established in 1902 by a priest “on the basis of absolute separation between social and religious purposes.”<sup>334</sup> Chalvet does not clearly identify the first French settlement house but does say that by 1903, three *maisons sociales* had been established by Mercédès le Fer de la Motte.<sup>335</sup> *Settlements and Their Outlook*, quoting from a report by a “Mlle. R. de Montmort,” French delegate to the settlement conference, also discusses le Fer de la Motte’s settlements.<sup>336</sup> But a modern historian, Evelyne Diebolt, argues that the first French settlement house was the Résidence Sociale

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<sup>332</sup> S. Chalvet, *Social Settlements in France* (Paris: Centre d’Informations Documentaires, 1936), 6.

<sup>333</sup> Chalvet, *Social Settlements in France*, 5.

<sup>334</sup> *Settlements and Their Outlook: An Account of the First International Conference of Settlements* (London: P.S. King & Son, Ltd. 1922), 55.

<sup>335</sup> Chalvet, *Social Settlements in France*, 7.

<sup>336</sup> *Settlements and Their Outlook*, 55.



de Levallois-Perret, founded in 1909 by Marie-Jeanne Bassot and Mathilde Giraud.<sup>337</sup> According to *Settlements and Their Outlook*, Bassot “found much inspiration for the later development of her work in a visit to American Settlements, and indeed the influence of the American movement has been deeply felt and cordially welcomed by the French.”<sup>338</sup>

Whatever its exact origins, the French settlement movement grew: There were 58 houses by 1922 and 140 by 1932, Diebolt writes.<sup>339</sup> And like settlement movements elsewhere, it aimed to promote greater unity between classes. Also, like settlement houses in other countries, those in France offered a variety of services and activities, including kindergarten, gyms, playgrounds, gardens, lectures, libraries, employment agencies, health care, and child care.<sup>340</sup> Still, as Chalvet wrote, though the French settlement movement owed “a great deal to the experience accumulated in Great Britain...it has been necessary to adapt the principle to the living conditions of the workers of our country, to the habits and traditions of the French family.”<sup>341</sup> French settlements also adapted to changing social conditions, playing a part in rebuilding France after the devastation of World War I.<sup>342</sup>

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<sup>337</sup> Evelyne Diebolt, “Woman and Philanthropy in France: From the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Centuries,” in Kathleen D. McCarthy, ed., *Women, Philanthropy, and Civil Society* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001), 45, 49.

<sup>338</sup> *Settlements and Their Outlook*, 56.

<sup>339</sup> Diebolt, “Woman and Philanthropy in France: From the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Centuries,” 49.

<sup>340</sup> Chalvet, *Social Settlements in France*, 32.

<sup>341</sup> Chalvet, *Social Settlements in France*, 5.

<sup>342</sup> *Settlements and Their Outlook*, 59-63.

Apart from inspiring Bassot, U.S. settlements had a number of connections with the French settlement movement. In June 1922, the National Federation of Settlements decided to open a Paris office, to be headed by Ellen Coolidge, “for the purpose of studying the achievements of European settlements, of bringing the results of their work to the attention of houses in the United States and of interpreting the work of American settlements to them.”<sup>343</sup>

Coolidge had already been in France: in March 1922, she gathered a number of settlement workers in Paris to discuss topics including the first International Conference of Settlements, in July, and plans for a federation of French settlements. Returning to France in August 1922, she wrote that “the settlement movement is firmly rooted in France” and was convinced that “the French have a great deal to contribute to the settlement movement on the subject of local organization. Every country has something special to offer, just as every individual house has original contributions to make when it is truly representing its neighborhood.”<sup>344</sup>

Soon after, Coolidge recommended Eleanor McMain of Kingsley House in New Orleans to help organize L’Accueil Franco-Américain, a settlement in the nineteenth arrondissement of Paris established by Julia Hunt Catlin Park DePew Taufflieb, American wife of French General Emile Adolphe Taufflieb.<sup>345</sup> McMain agreed and even compiled a four-page list of suggestions for the kinds of activities

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<sup>343</sup> Albert J. Kennedy, “Minutes of Executive Committee,” *Bulletin of the National Federation of Settlements*, no. 3 (June 1922): 9.

<sup>344</sup> Ellen Coolidge, “Settlements in France,” *The Survey* XLVIII, no. 14 (Aug. 15, 1922): 635.

<sup>345</sup> Isabelle Dubroca, *Good Neighbor: Eleanor McMain of Kingsley House* (New Orleans: Pelican Publishing Co., 1955), 123.

that L'Accueil should host.<sup>346</sup> It is no surprise, then, that the Paris settlement had many of the same features and services as typical U.S. settlements, such as a clinic, child care, a club for girls, games, and gymnastics. Neighbors got into the habit of gathering at the settlement on Saturday afternoons for tea and music or other forms of entertainment.<sup>347</sup> According to McMMain's biographer, Isabelle Dubroca, McMMain enjoyed her eight months at L'Accueil and got on well with the other residents, perhaps partly because L'Accueil was not so different from a U.S. settlement: "the people who came to L'Accueil...often reminded her of her own people at home, and their problems were much like those dealt with at Kingsley House."<sup>348</sup>

Yet this transatlantic connection also raises questions. McMMain was, if not unique, then at least unusual among U.S. settlement workers in spending so long a time organizing a settlement house in another country. Why did the French need her help? France had had a settlement movement since at least 1909 and thus had apparently had no trouble organizing its own houses, of which there were dozens by the early twenties. Post-World War I reconstruction, however, may have created special circumstances and thus the need for outside help. But did the French at L'Accueil completely accept or partly resent McMMain's presence and influence? Were her months in Paris characterized by collaboration and compromise, or did her ideas dominate? Were the neighbors really so similar to

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<sup>346</sup> UM/SHWA, Box 209, Folder 148 — National Federation of Settlements Records.

<sup>347</sup> Dubroca, *Good Neighbor*, 128.

<sup>348</sup> Dubroca, *Good Neighbor*, 129-30.

those at Kingsley House, or was McMMain just unwilling or unable to see the differences? We have, it seems, only the words of Americans, not of the French: McMMain’s letters and Lillie Peck’s report on L’Accueil, as interpreted by Dubroca, who wrote that “L’Accueil was doing a noble work in eliminating many of the ills that created dissatisfaction and unrest in this breeding ground of discontent and violence.” The remark is slightly condescending, at least hints at the idea of social control, and gives no indication that there may have been valid reasons for the discontent. Further, the “noble work” was accomplished partly with the help of children: “the gently but firm discipline, the lessons the children received in loyalty to their country” were intended to influence their parents, not just at the settlement house but also at home.<sup>349</sup> The fact that the settlement was founded by one American and organized by another American and that even before leaving the U.S., McMMain had very specific ideas for L’Accueil indicate that in Paris, McMMain did the same kind of settlement work that she had been used to doing in New Orleans — probably the only kind that she knew.

### Northern and central Europe

Scandinavia had a modest settlement movement. *Settlements and Their Outlook* mentions a settlement in Christiania, Norway, begun about 1919 by the Student Christian Movement, which provided financial support. There were sixteen residents, all women (including “a few factory girls”), and some fifty volunteers, most of them female students. “Our first aim is the Christian one,”

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<sup>349</sup> Dubroca, *Good Neighbor*, 129-30.

Dagny Thorvall, perhaps a resident, wrote in a report submitted to the first International Conference of Settlements. “Then we want to bring the classes nearer to each other.”<sup>350</sup>

As of 1922, Denmark had one settlement house, the Christian Student Settlement, founded in Copenhagen in 1911 and operating out of “four flats in a common house in midst of a slum.” In 1919, the settlement also started a summer camp. “The Settlement has won a position in the quarter where it lies,” wrote a resident, “and is now of real importance to the neighborhood, being regarded with more and more confidence and hope by those who surround us.”<sup>351</sup>

Besides starting settlement houses, Scandinavians visited the U.S. In 1910, Hull House hosted a mysterious “Fru Krogh of Norway” as well as the much better-known Alexandra Gripenberg, a women’s rights activist and journalist in Finland who was descended from a prominent Swedish-Finnish family. Gripenberg’s travels in the U.S. and Britain to examine the issues of temperance and women’s suffrage produced a book, *A Half Year in the New World* (1888), and helped her become one of the world’s leading advocate of women’s suffrage. Besides being involved in Finnish women’s organizations, she served as treasurer of the International Council of Women from 1893 to 1899. Her visit to the U.S. in 1910 may have occurred in conjunction with a conference of the International Congress of Women, which met in Toronto in 1909.<sup>352</sup>

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<sup>350</sup> *Settlements and Their Outlook*, 73-75.

<sup>351</sup> *Settlements and Their Outlook*, 75-77.

<sup>352</sup> Alexandra Gripenberg, *A Half Year in the New World: Miscellaneous Sketches of Travel in the United States*, trans. and ed. Ernest J. Moyne (Newark, Del.: University of Delaware Press, 1954), vi; UIC/HH, Box 44, Folder 435.

In the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the migration to cities that industrialization caused created a greater need for social services, which had been the province of the state and of the Catholic Church. Otherwise, there were virtually no social agencies in the empire except for the Freemasons. But at the end of the nineteenth century, Marie Lang, an important figure in the Austrian women's rights movement, learned about the settlement movement while attending a conference in London. Along with Marianne Hainisch and Else Federn, Lang founded the Vienna Settlement in February 1901. Thanks to the women's connections to the "large liberal-bourgeois intellectual and socialist circles," funding for the settlement was ample. Karl Kuffner, a prominent brewer, donated a house and adjacent garden to the settlement. Its activities were typical of settlements the world over, including education, day care, medical care, and meals. There was also a library, and neighbors could take classes in subjects such as cooking and sewing.<sup>353</sup>

Germany, meanwhile, developed its own settlement movement, though it was slower to do so than Britain and the U.S. The *Bibliography of College, Social, University and Church Settlements* (1905) lists no settlements in Germany and only one quasi-settlement, the Volksheim in Hamburg, which had no residents.<sup>354</sup> By the second decade of the twentieth century, however, that situation had changed thanks to Friedrich Siegmund-Schultze and Alix Westerkamp.

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<sup>353</sup> Tilly Kretschmer-Dorninger, "History of the Vienna Settlements," in Herman Nijenhuis, ed., *Hundred Years of Settlements and Neighbourhood Centres in North America and Europe* (Utrecht: Gamma, 1986), 75-78.

<sup>354</sup> Caroline Williamson Montgomery, *Bibliography of College, Social, University and Church Settlements*, fifth edition (Chicago: College Settlements Association, 1905), 131.

Siegmund-Schultze, a Protestant minister, was inspired by a visit to Toynbee Hall in 1908 and Hull House and other U.S. settlements in 1911 to found the Soziale Arbeitsgemeinschaft (SAG) Berlin-Ost in 1913. Westerkamp, the first woman in Germany to be awarded a doctorate in law (University of Marburg, 1906), headed the Deutsche Zentrale für Jugendfürsorge (German Center for Youth Care) starting in 1911, which was also the year that she met Siegmund-Schultze.<sup>355</sup> She initially became involved in settlement work, however, not in Germany but the U.S.: Westerkamp was a resident at the Chicago Commons from November 1913 to May 1914 and reported on her experiences in a series of letters that the *Akademisch-Soziale Monatsschrift (ASM)* – established in 1917 as the journal of the SAG Berlin-Ost – published between 1917 and 1919.

Westerkamp noted many differences between the U.S. and Germany, especially the “problem of nationalities,” which she considered a “defining one for almost all social work in the U.S.” (British settlement worker Percy Alden noted the same thing.) As historian Stefan Köngeter puts it, Westerkamp observed that “settlement workers settle where they can meet their fellow humans, where they can immerse themselves in their everyday life and culture, and where they can offer help to those who seek it.” Westerkamp also observed Italian migrants at a game night (“young Romans around the table, flashing eyes, burning cheeks, and unconsciously, fantastically grand, picturesque gestures”), enjoyed Chicago

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<sup>355</sup> Stefan Köngeter and Wolfgang Schröer, “Variations of Social Pedagogy – Explorations of the Transnational Settlement Movement,” *Education Policy Analysis Archives* 21, no. 42 (April 30, 2013): 6-7; Marion Röwekamp, “Women’s Admission to the Legal Profession in Germany Between 1900 and 1933,” in Eva Schandevy, ed., *Women in Law and Lawmaking in Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century Europe* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate Publishing Co., 2014), 80.

Commons' quasi-religious evening service, and was impressed by how well-informed Graham Taylor was about a miners' strike.<sup>356</sup>

Back in Germany, Westerkamp worked closely with Siegmund-Schultze; together, they edited the *ASM* from 1917 to 1924. The German settlement movement, meanwhile, spread: a publication summarizing the 1922 settlement conference lists ten delegates from nine organizations in six German cities, though not all may have been settlement houses in the sense of having residents.<sup>357</sup> U.S. settlement workers were aware of the German settlement movement from at least the late twenties: Lillie M. Peck wrote a detailed, two-part article on the SAG in the first issues of *Neighborhood: A Settlement Quarterly*, in 1928.<sup>358</sup>

In the 1930s, though, Germany's settlement movement, like much else in Germany, took a turn for the worse: in 1933, the Nazis expelled Siegmund-Schultze, who was not himself Jewish but did help German-Jewish refugees; Westerkamp then took over the SAG Berlin-Ost.<sup>359</sup> Again, the U.S. settlement movement had at least some awareness of what was going on: the October 1933 National Federation of Settlements newsletter discussed the travails of the

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<sup>356</sup> Stefan Köngeter, "Paradoxes of Transnational Knowledge Production in Social Work," in Adrienne S. Chambon, Wolfgang Schröer, and Cornelia Schweppe, eds., *Transnational Social Support* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 197-198, 201.

<sup>357</sup> *Settlements and Their Outlook*, 188-189.

<sup>358</sup> Lillie M. Peck, "The Soziale Arbeitsgemeinschaft," *Neighborhood: A Settlement Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (January 1928): 14-22; *Neighborhood: A Settlement Quarterly* 1, no. 2 (April 1928): 57-65.

<sup>359</sup> Stefan Köngeter, "Paradoxes of Transnational Knowledge Production in Social Work," 194-195; Stefan Köngeter and Wolfgang Schröer, "Variations of Social Pedagogy – Explorations of the Transnational Settlement Movement," *Education Policy Analysis Archives* 21, no. 42 (April 30, 2013): 7, 10-11.



“Berlin Settlement” (as the SAG Berlin-Ost was sometimes called in settlement publications, the actual name perhaps being *zu schwer* for some monoglot Americans), where residents were continuing their work “with no thought of personal difficulty or danger. While none of the workers are Jewish, they are in the same category either as pacifists or as sympathizers with the working people.” U.S. settlement workers were encouraged to donate to the “Berlin Settlement.”<sup>360</sup> Twenty years later, Albert Kennedy recalled what had happened to Siegmund-Schultze, even if he got the name wrong, mentioning in a speech that “we saw Siegmund von Schultze, Headworker of the Berlin Soziale Arbeitsgemeinschaft forced to flee for his life as Hitler came into power.”<sup>361</sup>

Besides Westerkamp and Siegmund-Schultze, U.S. settlement houses were visited by a number of Germans involved in social causes, if not directly in settlement work. In 1910, for example, Hull House held receptions for Marie Stritt and Alice Salomon. Stritt was a German feminist leader who fought for causes such as women’s suffrage, women’s education, birth control, legalized abortion, and legalized prostitution.<sup>362</sup> Salomon was the “outstanding pioneer of social work in Germany. As well as being active in the women’s and peace movements, in 1899 she set up the first German training establishment for social workers and was inspirational in the discipline.” She held a Ph.D. in economics from the University of Berlin — hence the “Dr.” before her name in the *Hull*

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<sup>360</sup> UM/SWHA, Box 210, Folder 156 — National Federation of Settlements Records.

<sup>361</sup> Albert J. Kennedy, “The Settlement Heritage” 1, <http://www.ifsnetwork.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=4U2tDdBjcw1%3D&tabid=481&mid=1303>, consulted August 25, 2015.

*House Year Book*. Elected corresponding secretary of the International Council of Women, in 1909 she attended the group's annual meeting. There, Salomon, the "German Jane Addams," met the American Jane Addams, which led to a number of visits to Hull House, where Salomon studied U.S. settlements and social work and lectured on Germany's new republican government.<sup>363</sup> Though Salomon admired Addams, the two were apparently not very close; their correspondence was sporadic, and Salomon began a letter to Addams in December 1911 — not so long after they had first met and Salomon had visited Hull House — with "I suppose you will not remember my name." Whether Addams remembered her or not, Salomon effusively praised *Twenty Years at Hull House*, which Salomon reviewed for the magazine *Die Frau*. In her letter to Addams, she continued: "I hope and trust that you will feel that you are well understood at this side of the Atlantic as well as on the other. It was all like a dream to me to read of your life and work. It is all so different from what we have to do here — and yet...I feel, that the real conflicts and difficulties are just the same."<sup>364</sup>

Visits by Germans to U.S. settlements continued in the interwar years. In 1933, Dr. Käthe Radke, who worked in the Cologne Department of Public Welfare "as supervisor of neighborhood and community activities, her special contribution being the development of community programs in the new housing areas of the city," spent the summer as a guest of the British Association of

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<sup>362</sup> Helen Rappaport, *Encyclopedia of Women Social Reformers: Volume Two, M-Z* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2001), 689-690; UIC/HH Box 44, Folder 435.

<sup>363</sup> Rappaport, *Encyclopedia of Women Social Reformers*, 611; UIC/HH Box 44, Folder 435.

Residential Settlements and then visited with the National Federation of Settlements from fall 1933 to February 1934.<sup>365</sup>

Travel by U.S. settlement workers also led to contacts with Germans. Addams met Anna Lindemann, a German socialist freethinking educator, at an International Woman Suffrage Association convention in Budapest in 1913. “After her return to Chicago, Addams provided Lindemann with several of her books, as she continued to do when friends and colleagues abroad asked for them.” Lindemann and Addams also corresponded.<sup>366</sup>

Mary McDowell visited Germany, the Netherlands, and other European countries in summer 1911 to study how large cities disposed of garbage, seeing that “waste disposal practices in urban and industrialized cities could be controlled and managed for the benefit of all citizens without deadly public health consequences.”<sup>367</sup> While in Germany, McDowell met Lindemann and was impressed by her “work for the national and international suffrage movements as well as her English skills.”<sup>368</sup>

Europeans appreciated McDowell’s work. She received an effusive eightieth-birthday greeting from Europe that referred to her as, among other

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<sup>364</sup> Kathryn Kish Sklar, Anja Schüler, and Susan Strasser, eds., *Social Justice Feminists in the United States and Germany: A Dialogue in Documents, 1885-1933* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 1998), 169-171.

<sup>365</sup> UM/SWHA, Box 210, Folder 156 — National Federation of Settlements Records; “Distinguished Guests,” *The Survey* LXIX, no. 11 (November 1933): 400.

<sup>366</sup> Sklar, Schüler, and Strasser, *Social Justice Feminists in the United States and Germany*, 175.

<sup>367</sup> Sylvia Hood Washington, *Packing Them In: An Archaeology of Environmental Racism in Chicago, 1865-1954* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2005), 93.

<sup>368</sup> Sklar, Schüler, and Strasser, *Social Justice Feminists in the United States and Germany*, 175.

things, “Chevalier d’Honor, member of the Lithuanian order of the Grand Duke Yediminas, honored by Czechoslovakia, Poland and other of the Central European peoples — all for her services to the immigrant groups she has lived and worked with for four decades ‘back of the yards’ in Chicago.” Two years later, after her death, the National Federation of Settlements said McDowell “had real pleasure in her rewards and decorations given by Czecho-Slovakia and Lithuania for distinction and for aid to the Nationals of those countries. The Order of the White Lion was conferred by her friend and admirer, President Masaryk of Czecho-Slovakia and the Order of the Grand Duke Gediminas was presented by the government of Lithuania.”<sup>369</sup>

Meanwhile, U.S. settlement workers continued visiting central Europe. In 1928, Lillie Peck of the National Federation of Settlements, Helen Morton of the South End settlement in Boston, and a third woman attended an informal gathering of 27 people from seven countries — a “Summer Conference de Luxe,” held, at the invitation of the Germans in attendance, at “one of their most gorgeous castles, the Burg Lauenstein in the Thuringian woods,” according to Morton’s article in *Neighborhood*. Among those present, besides the Americans, were a settlement worker from Vienna; a staff member of the Motherhood Museum in the Netherlands; “two teachers and a district worker from a London County Council Child Care Committee; from India a pioneer in Settlement work in Bombay.” The German contingent included workers from the SAG Berlin-Ost and “three men working with boys under the State Youth System bureau...Other

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<sup>369</sup> UM/SWHA, Box 209, Folder 146 — National Federation of Settlements Records.

vocational interests present were a nurse, a minister, the head of a progressive education boys' school, the head of a state 'Frauenshule' or normal school, a librarian, and a child labor worker." There was also at least one Swiss representative.<sup>370</sup>

Siegmund-Schultze was "our best speaker," Morton wrote, and "as far as ideas go, might be one of our own headworkers." Issues discussed included "Is the settlement an Anglo-Saxon institution which will die on other soil?...Can the working-man be made to desire what others want for him? Do we, in fact, work 'for' or 'with' him?" At the final session, according to Morton, "we made our discussion into a symbolic tree to show the growth and progress of our group efforts, and while many branches petered out into space, we could take comfort in the few solid roots we all shared."<sup>371</sup>

One of the U.S. settlement workers also spent a week at the SAG Berlin-Ost, where, according to Morton, any U.S. settlement worker "will feel very much at home." Siegmund-Schultze lived "at one end of the garden campus," and the settlement "serves as a headquarters for friends from all over the world. One morning at breakfast, German, Swiss, Swedish, Chinese, Indian, American all sat at the table." Morton wished that more U.S. settlement workers would stay at the SAG, as "it is guaranteed that each visitor will come back here again sharing our admiration of their spirit." She also expressed the hope that "we in America with our comparatively secure and prosperous houses could send yearly support to our

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<sup>370</sup> Helen Morton, "A Summer Conference De Luxe," *Neighborhood: A Settlement Quarterly* 2, no. 2 (April 1929): 112-113.

<sup>371</sup> Morton, "A Summer Conference De Luxe," 113-114.

Berlin colleague either in a gift of funds, or in some expression of our goodwill.”<sup>372</sup>

### Southern Europe

Whether Greece or Italy had settlement movements is unclear; neither country sent delegates to the first International Settlement Conference, and at the second conference, in Paris in 1926, there were only two Italian delegates.<sup>373</sup> But Greeks and Italians certainly visited U.S. settlements. In 1907, Hull House was treated to a “series of interesting lectures,” among them one by “Mr. Alex. Economos” and another by “Mr. Papadakis of Athens with stereopticon pictures of the Olympian games.”<sup>374</sup> A more important Greek visitor was Sevasti Callisperi, Greece’s inspector of public schools and the first woman to be awarded a B.A. by the University of Athens; she also held a degree from the Sorbonne. She toured the U.S. from 1906 to 1908 (or thereabouts) to study the American system of education but apparently had other interests as well. She attended a convention of the World’s Women’s Christian Temperance Union in fall 1906, spoke at the National Arbitration and Peace Congress in April 1907, lectured at Hull House in August 1907, and attended the annual meeting of the National Congress of Mothers, in Washington, in March 1908.<sup>375</sup>

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<sup>372</sup> Morton, “A Summer Conference De Luxe,” 115-116.

<sup>373</sup> *Settlements in Many Lands: Being Notes of an International Conference of Settlements, held at Paris in July 1926* (London, The International Association of Settlements, 1926), 8.

<sup>374</sup> UIC/HH, Box 43, Folder 430B.

<sup>375</sup> Mrs. A. Lincoln Bowles, “Unitarian Temperance Society,” *The Christian Register* 85, no. 45 (November 8, 1906): 21; Robert Erskine Ely, ed., *Proceedings of the National Arbitration and*

1910 brought a number of Italian visitors to Hull House, among them the mysterious “Marchesa di Bourbon” and a “Miss Bernardi,” who “had been sent to America by the Italian government” to look into “conditions of Italian colonies in the leading American cities” and was spending a few days investigating Chicago’s Italians. According to the *Hull-House Year Book 1910*, “the reception was attended by the social workers among Italians in the city, by the various Italian mutual benefit societies, and by other people interested in immigration problems.”<sup>376</sup>

Also in 1910, Hull House held a lunch for Italian historian Guglielmo Ferrero, who was accompanied by his wife, Gina Lombroso Ferrero, daughter of criminologist Cesare Lombroso. Guglielmo Ferrero “was received with great enthusiasm...by the many Italians who came to the House to meet them.” Guglielmo Ferrero had lectured in Paris, Brasilia, and Buenos Aires and had been invited to the U.S. by President Theodore Roosevelt. Starting in November 1908, Ferrero spoke at the Lowell Institute in Boston, Columbia University, the University of Chicago, the University of Pennsylvania, Harvard, and Cornell.<sup>377</sup>

## Russia

The central figure in Russia’s settlement movement was architect Alexander Zelenko. He visited the U.S. in 1903 and 1904, stopping at settlements

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*Peace Conference* (New York, 1907), 287; UIC/HH Box 43, Folder 430B; Jane A. Stewart, “The National Congress of Mothers,” *Western Christian Advocate* LXXIV, no. 13 (March 25, 1908): 21.

<sup>376</sup> UIC/HH, Box 44, Folder 435.

in Boston as well as University Settlement and Hull House, all of which made a “deep and striking impression” on him, he later wrote. While recognizing the differences between the two, Zelenko believed Russia to be more similar to the U.S. than to any other country, including in “structure and scale...the conglomeration of peoples and races” and the “absence of traditional forms.” He also judged the moment propitious for “the introduction of new social institutions and the organization of new social elements” in Russia. If settlements could work in the U.S., Zelenko believed, then perhaps they could work in Russia as well, and he tested his idea, joining a group that in 1905 established the First Moscow Settlement, of which Zelenko became headworker. The settlement had a kindergarten, concerts, a library, and courses in subjects such as drawing, sewing, and foreign languages. There were nine residents, about thirty other workers, and some 300 “constant clients” ages five to eighteen. Zelenko looked forward to an “exchange of thoughts, experience and literature” between the Moscow settlement and U.S. settlements.<sup>378</sup> The settlement was short-lived, however: it was closed during the 1905 revolution and the founders, including Zelenko, imprisoned “for attempting to educate the poor classes of Moscow” — or, as Graham Taylor put it, imprisoned “by the czar’s police for...dangerous democracy.”<sup>379</sup> Released, Zelenko, his interest in social causes unabated, resumed

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<sup>377</sup> UIC/HH, Box 44, Folder 435; Guglielmo Ferrero, *Characters and Events of Roman History From Caesar to Nero: The Lowell Lectures of 1908*, trans. Frances Lance Ferrero (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1909), iv.

<sup>378</sup> A. Zelenko, “Russia’s First Settlement,” *Charities and the Commons* 21 (October 3, 1908): 61, 62, 64.

<sup>379</sup> Gertrude M. Keedle, “The Social Settlement Movement,” *The American Schoolmaster* XV, no. 7 (September 15, 1922): 251-259; Graham Taylor, “Neighborhood and Nation,” *The Survey: National Conferences* (June 21, 1919): 465.



his settlement work. He even returned to the U.S., visiting the Children's Museum at the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences in 1910 during a trip to "study educational institutions of all kinds" and attending, along with Japanese settlement worker Daisaku T. Matsuda, the National Federation of Settlements meeting in Philadelphia in 1919 (discussed below).<sup>380</sup>

U.S. settlements hosted other Russians as well. Anarchist and naturalist Peter Kropotkin first visited North America in 1897 as a delegate to the British Association for the Advancement of Science, which was meeting in Toronto; he ended up traveling and speaking in Canada and the United States over the course of almost four months. His second trip to the United States was in 1901, and during at least one of those trips, he visited Henry Street.<sup>381</sup> In April 1901, he arrived at Hull House and stayed for a week. Addams made big deal of it: she and her staff dressed in Russian peasant attire and decorated the rooms with Russian folk art.<sup>382</sup> Hilda Polacheck was enchanted by Kropotkin: "I had the great privilege of speaking to him during his stay at Hull-House. He was a gentle, kind old man, and I loved him," even if he disapproved of Polacheck and other girls at the settlement engaging in so "frivolous" an activity as a dance class.<sup>383</sup> Kropotkin also drew the notice of *The Chicago Tribune*, which gave his visit a fair amount of coverage, including a full schedule of his activities. Speaking at Hull House's gym,

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<sup>380</sup> "Notes," *The Museum News* 5, no. 7 (April 1910): 105; Taylor, "Neighborhood and Nation," 465.

<sup>381</sup> "Lillian Wald Dies," *The New York Times*, September 2, 1940.

<sup>382</sup> Paul Avrich, *Anarchist Portraits* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 79-80, 82-90, 99.

<sup>383</sup> Polacheck, *I Came a Stranger*, 69.

“crowded...to overflowing,” Kropotkin addressed the challenges of making work “attractive, and not repulsive to mankind.”<sup>384</sup> A few days later, in a lecture on the “Philosophy of Anarchism,” Kropotkin offered a “vigorous disclaimer of violence as a distinctive practice, an essential principle, or a commendable method of anarchism.”<sup>385</sup> Addams recounts, however, that that did not stop a newspaper from later holding Hull House in some way responsible for McKinley’s assassination.<sup>386</sup> As historian Paul Avrich puts it, “Rumors were soon afloat of an anarchist plot hatched by Kropotkin and [Emma] Goldman, with Czolgosz as their instrument. Hull House was alleged to have been the scene of their ‘secret, murderous meetings’ during Kropotkin’s visit.”<sup>387</sup>

The upheavals in Russia in the early decades of the twentieth century echoed in U.S. settlements. The *Hull-House Year Book 1906-1907* refers to well-attended lectures “upon the present situation in Russia,” including by a “Mr. Francis, who has been rector of the English church in St. Petersburg for many years.” Revolutionists visited as well. There were conferences that included unnamed Russian refugees who had fled Siberia through China, crossed the Pacific and were temporarily staying in Chicago.<sup>388</sup> In 1907, Hull House held a reception for Nikolai Tchaikovsky and Alexis Aladyin, who were in the U.S. to

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<sup>384</sup> “World Improves, Says Kropotkin,” *The Chicago Tribune*, April 18, 1901.

<sup>385</sup> “Kropotkin on Anarchism,” *The Chicago Tribune*, April 23, 1901.

<sup>386</sup> Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull-House*, 402-403.

<sup>387</sup> Avrich, *Anarchist Portraits*, 103.

<sup>388</sup> UIC/HH, Box 43, Folder 430B.

“explain the cause for which they stand and to enlist American sympathy.”<sup>389</sup> By April 1907, they had apparently “aroused fresh interest in the revolutionary cause among Americans.”<sup>390</sup> And in March 1910, Hull House held a reception for Vladimir Burtsev, “a Russian patriot who succeeded in discovering a number of spies in the service of the Russian government, notably Azeff [Yevno Azef, agent provocateur] in Paris. His coming was a matter of the greatest interest to the Russians in Chicago.”<sup>391</sup>

But the most famous Russian revolutionary visitor to U.S. settlements was socialist Catherine Breshkovsky (Yekaterina Konstantinovna Breshko-Breshkovskaya). Arriving in the U.S. in late 1904, she was enthusiastically greeted and spoke in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and other cities.<sup>392</sup> Finding “an especially sympathetic welcome in the social settlements,” she stayed at the Nurses’ Settlement in New York, Denison House in Boston, and Hull House, and “at each she left behind her a circle of strong...warm and lasting friends” including Addams; Wald; Helena Dudley, head of Denison House; and Alice Stone Blackwell, who was editor of the *Woman’s Journal* and who in 1918 edited *The Little Grandmother of the Russian Revolution*, one of Breshkovsky’s

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<sup>389</sup> UIC/HH, Box 43, Folder 430B; “The Mission of Alexis Aladyin,” *The Christian Work and Evangelist* 82, no. 2,091 (March 16, 1907): 336.

<sup>390</sup> “Notes and News,” *What’s in the Magazines* II, no. 4 (April 1907): 6.

<sup>391</sup> UIC/HH, Box 44, Folder 435.

<sup>392</sup> Catherine Breshkovsky, *The Little Grandmother of the Russian Revolution: Reminiscences and Letters of Catherine Breshkovsky*, ed. Alice Stone Blackwell (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1918), 111.

memoirs.<sup>393</sup> In January 1905, Breshkovsky spoke, in Russian and with an interpreter's aid, to a large audience in Chicago in an effort to attract sympathy and raise money for her "countrymen at home, struggling for freedom." Addams spoke as well and was "cheered almost as enthusiastically" as Breshkovsky had been.<sup>394</sup> Addams wrote warmly of Breshkovsky in *Twenty Years in Hull House*, and Polacheck recalled that Breshkovsky's "spirit was dauntless."<sup>395</sup> Dudley said "no six years of her life had been worth so much to her as the six weeks that Madame Breshkovsky spent under her roof."<sup>396</sup>

On Breshkovsky's second trip to the U.S., in 1919, she entered the country through Seattle and arrived January 24 in Chicago, "where she was met by Jane Addams and deputations from Russian and other organizations and was a guest at Hull House."<sup>397</sup> Continuing east to New York, she stayed for two days at the Henry Street Settlement, where she, as a radical critic of the Bolshevik Revolution, was warmly received. "We set out the samovar and placed chairs in our largest room, and Babushka stood at one end of the room, pouring forth her hatred, her contempt for the Bolsheviki," recalled Wald, who admired Breshkovsky unstintingly: "Babushka was enshrined in the heart of every rebel against despotism. Her courage and strength make a Homeric tale."<sup>398</sup> Nor was

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<sup>393</sup> Breshkovsky, *The Little Grandmother of the Russian Revolution*, 123; Carson, *Settlement Folk*, 152.

<sup>394</sup> "Chicago Russians Show Sympathy," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, January 23, 1905.

<sup>395</sup> Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull House*, 402; Polacheck, *I Came a Stranger*, 69.

<sup>396</sup> Breshkovsky, *The Little Grandmother of the Russian Revolution*, 123.

<sup>397</sup> "Grandmother of Revolution," *The Chicago Eagle*, February 8, 1919.

<sup>398</sup> Wald, *Windows on Henry Street*, 257.

Wald Breshkovsky's only admirer: during her stay at Henry Street, "a constant stream of visitors poured in to see her...reporters in shoals, camera men, old friends, new admirers, millionaires, people from the slums, Americans who had read 'The Little Grandmother,' and representatives of various factions among the Russians."<sup>399</sup> Among the latter were "two or three people who had direct communication" with Russian officials but whom Breshkovsky refused to see.<sup>400</sup> Much more welcomed by her was George Kennan, who had met Breshkovsky in Russia. She was so delighted to see him, according to Wald, that she "kissed him on both cheeks, and danced a little Russian dance before him."<sup>401</sup> After giving speeches in New York, Breshkovsky left the U.S. on June 28, 1919.<sup>402</sup>

U.S. settlement workers visited both Russia and the Soviet Union.

University Settlement residents Ernest Poole and William English Walling were in Russia during the 1905 revolution. Walling, according to a 1906 article, became interested in Russia after Breshkovsky's visit to the U.S. and went to Russia believing, "as he expresses it, 'that the American social movement could draw inspiration and spirit from the depth and breadth and self-sacrifice of the Russian revolutionists.'"<sup>403</sup> After a year living in St. Petersburg and traveling the country, Walling produced an article in which he drew a far-fetched comparison:

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<sup>399</sup> Alice Stone Blackwell, "When Babushka Came," *The Woman Citizen* III, no. 37 (February 8, 1919): 758.

<sup>400</sup> Wald, *Windows on Henry Street*, 258.

<sup>401</sup> Wald, *Windows on Henry Street*, 258.

<sup>402</sup> "Mme. Breshkovsky Praises America," *The New York Times*, July 6, 1919.

<sup>403</sup> "American Social Workers in Russia," *Charities and the Commons* XVII, no. 9 (December 1, 1906): 362.

“In America a handful of young people in the settlements and other organizations are devoting their lives to social work...In Russia practically the whole youth of the universities and the larger part of that of the secondary schools are offering not only their time and money, but their lives and liberties for the people’s cause.”<sup>404</sup> Wald visited Russia in 1910 during a six-month tour, with friends, that also took in Hawaii, Japan, and China and during which Wald “spoke about her ideas and methods and learned more about other cultures.”<sup>405</sup>

In 1917, Raymond Robins, an economist and writer who had been a resident of Chicago Commons and head resident at Northwestern University Settlement House, led the American Red Cross expedition to Russia. He and some other U.S. settlement workers were inspired by the Soviet Union, seeing it as “a fulfillment of their dreams of social justice.” But while its political reality disillusioned most, Robins kept the faith and “became the leading American defender of the Bolsheviks.”<sup>406</sup> Wald, too, found something to like about the Soviet Union: returning there in 1924, she was impressed by its system of public health.<sup>407</sup> On that same trip, Wald discovered “an interesting social settlement in Moscow that held many reminders of New York,” though she was disappointed

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<sup>404</sup> William English Walling, “The Call to Young Russians,” *Charities and the Commons* XVII, no. 9 (December 1, 1906): 373.

<sup>405</sup> Deborah G. Felder and Diana Rosen, *Fifty Jewish Women Who Changed the World* (New York: Citadel Press, 2003), 69.

<sup>406</sup> Davis, *Spearheads*, 228; William Hard, “Raymond Robins,” *The New Republic* 16, no. 197 (Aug. 10, 1918): 39.

<sup>407</sup> Felder and Rosen, *Fifty Jewish Women*, 69.

that it was funded by the state.<sup>408</sup>

## Asia

There was at least one settlement house in Hong Kong, and the *Bibliography of College, Social, University and Church Settlements* (1905) lists one settlement in Manila, the Church Settlement House, and one in Tokyo, Kingsley Hall.<sup>409</sup> By 1922, Japan had one settlement house each in Tokyo, Yokohama, Osaka, and Kobe, according to *Settlements and Their Outlook*.<sup>410</sup>

If the conference summary is correct about the number and distribution of settlements in Japan, then by 1922, Kingsley Hall in Tokyo must have closed or been renamed, as there is good evidence of the existence in Tokyo of a settlement called the Garden of Friendly Neighbors, apparently dating from the late nineteen teens, if not earlier. Its headworker, Daisaku T. Matsuda, spent about a year in the U.S. studying settlements; he also attended the 1919 NFS meeting in Philadelphia mentioned above. According to Graham Taylor, Matsuda “expected settlement methods to be adopted by the progressive governmental administration” of Japan.<sup>411</sup> Taylor apparently assumed that Matsuda admired U.S. settlements. That was only partially true, but Taylor may have known no better, as Matsuda’s views did not appear in print until 1920. *The Survey* asked him to “give his impression of American settlement work and its effectiveness as

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<sup>408</sup> Wald, *Windows on Henry Street*, 270-271.

<sup>409</sup> Köngeter, “Paradoxes of Transnational Knowledge Production in Social Work,” 207; Montgomery, *Bibliography of College, Social, University and Church Settlements*, 103, 135.

<sup>410</sup> *Settlements and Their Outlook*, 50.

it appeared to him, frankly and without excessive politeness,” according to an editor’s note, and in the resulting article, Matsuda did not disappoint, especially in regards to the request’s last five words. He was, on the one hand, glad to have spent “a very delightful year among pleasant ‘settlement folks’ in America”; settlement residents and other workers, he wrote, struck him as “a cheerful, lively and quite normal lot of people.” But he found plenty to criticize as well. The gap between residents and neighbors was too wide, he wrote. At one settlement, he was “dumfounded by the vile language and coarse manners of the members, and the one who used the vilest words, who cursed and spat most violently, had the greatest authority.” Settlements’ physical facilities, according to Matsuda, were, on the whole, unattractive and shabby, in some cases reminiscent of “gambling dens” and testament to “the destructive character of the members and...the lack of funds for upkeep.” And Matsuda was dismayed by the lack of trees and other greenery near settlement houses and in large U.S. cities in general.<sup>412</sup> Matsuda’s largely negative view echoes that of some British visitors to U.S. settlements and offers a considerable contrast to the opinions of the most prominent U.S. settlement workers, who thought very highly of themselves.

The transatlantic aspect of U.S. settlements should not be overstated: the vast majority of settlements never became famous and were never visited by anyone prominent. Yet the fact remains that the movement as a whole, and some houses in particular, had a plethora of transatlantic connections, including

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<sup>411</sup> Graham Taylor, “Neighborhood and Nation,” 465.

<sup>412</sup> Daisaku T. Matsuda, “A Japanese View,” *The Survey* XLIII, no. 16 (February 14, 1920): 574.



visitors from all over Europe and even from Japan. Some of the visits were made on the basis of personal friendship or out of interest in how U.S. settlements operated, but in other cases, U.S. settlement houses served as venues for the promotions of causes, putting settlements within the nexus of some of the major social causes of the time, such as women's rights, labor unionism, socialism, anarchism, and revolution. Residents seem to have been happy to host celebrities, if for no other reason than the publicity that such visits garnered for settlements.

For historians, one advantage of putting the settlement movement into a transnational, including a transatlantic, context is that in the absence of extensive sources revealing what neighbors thought of settlement work and workers, it offers foreign observers' critical appraisals of U.S. settlement workers' narrative of their own efforts and thus partly compensates for the relative lack of migrants' own voices.

Of course, migrants themselves were another set of transatlantic visitors hosted by settlement houses. There were far more migrants than there were visitors from abroad, and while visitors arrived and left, migrants gathered at settlement houses month after month, year after year, fostering lasting, complex relationships — sometimes contentious, sometimes cooperative — with residents.

## CHAPTER 3

### MIGRANTS AND THE U.S. SETTLEMENT MOVEMENT

Working with migrants was an essential part of the task of many settlement houses, especially in the large urban centers of the Northeast and Midwest. Migrants were integral to Hull House, for instance. “The mere foothold of a house,” Addams wrote, “easily accessible, ample in space, hospitable and tolerant in spirit, situated in the midst of the large foreign colonies which could easily isolate themselves in American cities, would be in itself a serviceable thing for Chicago.”<sup>413</sup> Settlement workers considered themselves “mediators between competing social and economic interests, interpreters shuttling between alien cultures of the recent immigrants and the entrenched and defensive ‘natives,’” and they tried to promote “tolerance, reconciliation, and a benign recognition of cultural and ideological multiplicity.”<sup>414</sup>

Some of the “mediators” were themselves migrants. (“Residents” and “settlement workers” in this dissertation will still, however, refer to the native-born residents profiled in Chapter 2, except where specified.) Hull House, for example, had a number of live-in migrants in its early decades. Josefa Humpal Zeman was born in 1870 in what is now the Czech Republic, migrated to the U.S. as a young child and took up residence at Hull House in March 1894. She contributed a chapter, “The Bohemian People in Chicago,” to *Hull-House Maps*

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<sup>413</sup> Addams, *Twenty Years*, 91.

<sup>414</sup> Carson, *Settlement Folk*, 53.

*and Papers* and apparently left Hull House not long after that. Addams invited her back in 1896, but the other residents did not approve a second stay for Zeman, as some believed that she “would not be a desirable resident — and that her best sphere was in the Bohemian neighborhood.” In 1901 she left Chicago for Prague.<sup>415</sup>

Alessandro Mastro-Valerio was another migrant who lived at Hull House. Addams had met him when she and Starr were still planning the settlement. “He took Addams on a tour of Italian neighborhoods and described his own activities including his work as a truant officer for the Chicago public schools.” He and his wife, Amelia Robinson, later lived at Hull House, contributing to the settlement in a variety of ways.<sup>416</sup> The autumn 1900 *Bulletin* notes an “Italian reception” during which “Signor and Madame Valerio receive their friends in the Lecture Hall every Thursday evening.” In addition, “Madame Valerio, who speaks Italian and French,” was in charge of a post office sub-station for, among other things, “the issuing of foreign and domestic money orders,” probably for migrants remitting money to relatives in Europe.<sup>417</sup> Alessandro Mastro-Valerio also wrote a chapter, “Remarks Upon the Italian Colony in Chicago,” for *Hull-House Maps and Papers*.

In the middle of the first decade of the twentieth century, the Mastro-

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<sup>415</sup> Eleanor J. Stebner, *The Women of Hull House: A Study in Spirituality, Vocation, and Friendship* (Albany: State University of New York, 1997), 107, 210.

<sup>416</sup> Rima Lunin Schultz, “Introduction,” in *Hull-House Maps and Papers: A Presentation of Nationalities and Wages in a Congested District of Chicago, Together with Comments and Essays on Problems Growing Out of the Social Conditions*, residents of Hull House, 8. 1895. Reprint, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007.

<sup>417</sup> UIC/HH, Box 43, Folder 429.

Valerios were joined by Victor von Borosini, who was Austrian by birth, and his wife, Edith, who taught English at the settlement. According to the *Hull-House Year Book 1906-1907*, “Herr and Frau von Borosini” directed, respectively, the Stirling, “a debating and literary club of young men,” and the Osceola, a “social club composed of young men and girls.” The von Borosinis stayed at Hull House until at least 1912.<sup>418</sup> Even more influential was Edward Corsi, who was born in Italy in 1896 and migrated to the U.S. with his parents in 1906. He became director of Haarlem House in 1926. In October 1931, on the occasion of his appointment as commissioner of immigration at Ellis Island, a lunch held in his honor was attended by 139 people representing the United Neighborhood Houses of New York and a few dozen other organizations.<sup>419</sup> Corsi’s work in both the settlement movement and at Ellis Island is a reminder that the scrutiny and study that federal authorities subjected migrants to at points of entry such as Ellis Island was mirrored, in a way, by the scrutiny and study that settlement workers subjected migrants to for purposes of control.

Migrants such as Zeman and Corsi were a small minority, however; most migrants who took part in settlement house life did so as neighbors, not residents, and one of settlement houses’ main draws for migrants was the chance to take part in social and educational activities. At Denison House, for example,

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<sup>418</sup> Mary L. Bryan and Allen Freeman Davis, eds., *One Hundred Years at Hull-House* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), 68; UIC/HH, Box 43, Folder 430B; Victor von Borosini, “European Regulation of Emigration,” *The Survey* XXVIII, no. 23 (September 7, 1912): 700-702.

<sup>419</sup> Finding aid for Syracuse University Libraries, [http://library.syr.edu/digital/guides/c/corsi\\_e.htm](http://library.syr.edu/digital/guides/c/corsi_e.htm), consulted August 1, 2015; University of Minnesota, Social Welfare History Archives, Box 202, Folder 233 — United Neighborhood Houses of New York City Records.

Vida Scudder organized an Italian club aimed mainly at “intellectuals and the professional class.” Meetings, debates, and lectures were in Italian; during one debate, anarchists and socialists rioted, showing residents that Italian migrants took politics seriously, whereas the migrants learned “something about the American’s penchant for compromise.” The club turned into “an important force for promoting better understanding between Italians and Americans in the area.”<sup>420</sup>

A greater magnet for migrants, however, was Hull House, whose internal publications attest to the large role that migrants of many ethnicities played in the settlement’s life from the start. Some of Hull House’s spaces and activities were multi-ethnic, such as Bowen Hall, which in 1910 was used by the Hungarian Literary and Singing Club, Greek Peddlers’ Association (formed at Hull House in December 1909), and Russian societies, as well as for a Panhellenic meeting. And in 1916, the Satellites, a group of thirty people including Italians and Irish, met there weekly to socialize.<sup>421</sup>

But in many cases, each ethnicity at Hull House had its own groups and activities. “Twenty or thirty Germans have met at Hull-House one evening a week for four years,” the January 1896 *Bulletin* reported. “All Germans invited to join. German music and reading.”<sup>422</sup> Some years later, Polish girls of the Wanda Club gathered for “reading, singing and parties,” and Polish girls, including those who

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<sup>420</sup> Davis, *Spearheads*, 89.

<sup>421</sup> UIC/HH, Box 44, Folder 435.

<sup>422</sup> UIC/HH, Box 43, Folder 425.

worked in Hull House's kitchen, met "for lessons in English and for folk dancing and Polish songs."<sup>423</sup>

In about 1910, Russian migrants organized the Russian Social Economics Club. Its more than 100 members represented "all degrees of education and literacy, and several classes, from the peasantry to the liberal professions." Along with servings of "Russian-style" tea, members delivered lectures three times a week, mostly in Russian, on topics such as U.S. history, industry, and politics, after which there were usually debates. The newest members were taught English by Hull House residents. "The club receives many Russian papers, periodicals and books, and is intensely interested in the struggle in Russia," the *Hull House Year Book 1910* noted, but the club's main purpose was socializing and "the study of American life and conditions for the purpose of facilitating assimilation and Americanization."<sup>424</sup> The Russian Social Economics Club lasted until at least 1916, by which point there were signs of other Russian activity at Hull House: Russian socialists were meeting there twice a month, and the Relief Society for Russian Exiles met weekly and raised funds for "Siberian exiles."<sup>425</sup>

Greek migrants, meanwhile, were busy with their own activities. In 1906, Hull House hosted "numerous lectures and meetings" in Greek or in both Greek and English, including a "rousing Panhellenic meeting" held in September 1906 to protest "the atrocities at Aghialos," apparently a reference to Bulgarians burning down Anchialos (now Pomorie) and killing more than 300 Greeks there

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<sup>423</sup> UIC/HH, Box 44, Folder 437.

<sup>424</sup> UIC/HH, Box 44, Folder 435.

<sup>425</sup> UIC/HH, Box 44, Folder 437.

in summer 1906. The hall was packed to overflowing, and “the American speakers...will never forget the patriotism burning in the faces of the hundreds of young men in the audience, as they listened to a recital of the glories of ancient Greece.”<sup>426</sup>

Less exciting, perhaps, but more frequent were meetings of a Greek social club that gathered in the kindergarten room on Sunday afternoons during the winter of 1906-07.<sup>427</sup> The Greek Educational Association was formed in 1908 and grew to 625 members, in ten branches, by 1910. There were classes in English and math, as well as a cadet corps. A “well-selected Greek library” in the Hull House Boys’ Club was used nightly by members. A meeting of representatives of the association’s branches in December 1909 included “patriotic Greek and American songs...under the leadership of the leading Greek band in the city, and...a stereopticon lecture on modern Greece.” Addams, the association’s honorary president, got a gold pin with the “Greek and American national colors.” In October 1909, one of the association’s members married at Hull House, and in April 1910, the association marked the anniversary of the declaration of Greek independence in April 1828.<sup>428</sup>

By 1910, Hull House hosted other Greek organizations as well. The Greek Ladies’ Charitable Association consisted of fifty women who met monthly to “discuss cases of need...among their own countrymen.” Addams was the honorary

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<sup>426</sup> UIC/HH, Box 44, Folder 430B.

<sup>427</sup> UIC/HH, Box 44, Folder 430B.

<sup>428</sup> UIC/HH, Box 44, Folder 435.

president. There were also Greek Benefit Societies, all of them meeting monthly: the St. George, with 350 members; Colamonta, 150 members; and Panhellenis, 200 members. In addition, the Greek Woman's Social Club, with attendance averaging twenty-five, met weekly for English lessons, dancing, singing, and socializing.<sup>429</sup> In later years, "about thirty little children accompanied their mothers to the club, for whom a play club was formed."<sup>430</sup> The Greek Social Club was formed in 1915 when the settlement "extended a general invitation to its Greek neighbors" for weekly meetings, some of which drew as many as 800 people. Activities included "Greek national dances, music, motion pictures and occasional lectures," and among the residents in charge of the social club was Vasilike Vaitzes, "the Greek-speaking resident of the House."<sup>431</sup> By 1921, there was a Greek Women's Club, which met weekly for dress-making, citizenship courses, and English lessons, among other activities.<sup>432</sup> In the case of both the Greek Women's Club and the Italian Women's Club (see below), attracting new members could be hard because the women hesitated to leave home "even for two hours in the afternoon. This can only be obviated by securing the permission of the man of the family, which is not always possible."<sup>433</sup>

Like Greeks, Italians had a large presence at Hull House. The Hull House Coffee House, which opened in 1893 "on the basis of a public kitchen," was

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<sup>429</sup> UIC/HH, Box 44, Folder 435.

<sup>430</sup> UIC/HH, Box 44, Folder 437.

<sup>431</sup> UIC/HH, Box 44, Folder 437.

<sup>432</sup> UIC/HH, Box 44, Folder 438.

<sup>433</sup> UIC/HH, Box 43, Folder 438.



spurred partly by an investigation showing how costly it was for Italian migrants in the Hull House neighborhood to import food. The Coffee House later seems to have catered to another group of migrants as well: a menu of unknown date says, “Italian or Russian menus on request.”<sup>434</sup>

The January 1896 *Bulletin* lists “Italian Lectures” every Sunday evening in January, along with a party for Italians on January 2 and an English class for Italians on Thursday evenings. There were classes in cooking and in elementary embroidery designated “For Italian girls only.” During Christmas 1895, there were three Christmas trees: one for the kindergarten, one for the nursery, and “one for the Italian children,” though the *Bulletin* gave no indication as to why the Italian children needed or wanted a separate tree or whose idea it was — the migrants’ or the residents’. And according to the December 1897 *Bulletin*, Hull House offered free medical care to “Italian children with rachitis, or eye or ear trouble.”<sup>435</sup>

Hull House also hosted Italian festivities. In 1902, the Italian Carnevalia, a masquerade that had also been held in previous years, took place on February 3 from 8 to midnight and attracted “a great number of Italian families of the neighborhood and of other parts of the city, of all classes and conditions.” The children wore costumes, while other members of the family attended as spectators.<sup>436</sup> A few years later, the Ballo Mascherato Italiano, which celebrated Martedì Grasso (the Italian Fat Tuesday), was attended by “almost the entire

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<sup>434</sup> UIC/HH, Box 43, Folder 430B; UIC/HH, Box 46A, Folder 479.

<sup>435</sup> UIC/HH, Box 43, Folder 425; Box 43, Folder 427.

<sup>436</sup> UIC/HH, Box 43, Folder 430.

Italian Colony” and “by those who have learned to know and care for them through their connection with the House.” The ballo, according to the *Hull-House Year Book 1906-1907*, was among “those festas which link immigrants with their old homes and life-long customs.” Some costumes were imported, while others were made by the migrants “with true Latin imagination and cleverness.”<sup>437</sup> In 1906 or 1907, Washington’s birthday was celebrated by, among others, the Italians at Hull House, whose “addresses were perhaps the most interesting and certainly the audience was the most demonstrative.” The Italians later celebrated Garibaldi’s and Mazzini’s birthdays and invited “their American friends” to join in.<sup>438</sup>

Italians at Hull House took part in a variety of organizations. The January 1896 *Bulletin* lists an Italo-American Fencing Club, “for fencing and other sports.” Perhaps it consisted of Italian migrants and native-born Americans. In any case, by 1897, it had apparently evolved into the ethnically ambiguous Fencing and Athletic Club.<sup>439</sup> More clearly Italian was the Mazzini Club, founded in 1906. It had a “men’s branch” and a “young ladies’ branch” and met weekly under the direction of Alessandro Mastro-Valerio. The Mazzini Club “reads Italian drama and keeps itself informed as to current events in Italy and America.” Though it was mainly a “literary and dramatic club...many of the members are musical and an occasional meeting is devoted to a rendition of

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<sup>437</sup> UIC/HH, Box 43, Folder 430B.

<sup>438</sup> UIC/HH, Box 43, Folder 430B.

<sup>439</sup> UIC/HH, Box 43, Folder 425; Box 43, Folder 427.

Italian music.” The Italian Circolo, meanwhile, met weekly to socialize and for entertainment, giving two balls a year at Hull House. “Four residents who speak Italian and Signor Mastro-Valerio act as hosts and hostesses. Social visiting by the committee of residents in charge is done in connection with the Circolo,” the *Hull-House Year Book 1910* noted. In November 1909, “Signor Alfonso De Salinco, under the auspices of the Dante Alighieri Society of Rome,” gave a lecture on Dante to the Circolo.<sup>440</sup> By 1916, another social club had appeared, the Young Italians, twenty-five men and women who met weekly. “Appreciation for their old world traditions has been fostered in this club,” the *Hull-House Year Book 1916* says. “Italian has to some extent been spoken. Italian favors and decorations and refreshments have been used.”<sup>441</sup>

Other Italian groups had more serious purposes. The Societa di Beneficenza delle Donne Italiane “was organized by philanthropic ladies of the Italian colony” in 1908 and used Hull House for meetings and for fund-raising entertainment. According to *Hull-House Year Book 1910*, “The members of the association are in constant communication with the West Side Bureau of Charities through Miss Virginia Pope, who speaks Italian with an ease only acquired through years of residence in Italy. This society is also in cordial cooperation with the many mutual benefit societies in the Italian colony.”<sup>442</sup> The Italian Committee and Circolo, whose membership consisted of the director of Circolo Italiano along with “the Italians resident in the House, and other

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<sup>440</sup> UIC/HH, Box 43, Folder 435.

<sup>441</sup> UIC/HH, Box 44, Folder 437.

<sup>442</sup> UIC/HH, Box 43, Folder 435.

residents who speak Italian and have Italian sympathies,” met weekly and was “expected to be interested to render any reasonable service to Italian neighbors.” The Italian Committee and Circolo also put on fund-raising performances: “the proceeds of a play were devoted to the Clothing Workers’ Strike; of a ball to the Italian Red Cross.”<sup>443</sup> And the Italian Women’s Club, meeting weekly, offered citizenship courses and other activities.<sup>444</sup>

All the activities, socializing, and education may have been enjoyable and beneficial for migrants, but they paid a price: their presence in space controlled by settlement workers meant that migrants were subject to residents’ ideas not only about migrants but also about the significance of what migrants did in settlement houses. On the one hand, migrants’ “old-world traditions” amused and enchanted residents, who, even while helping migrants adjust to their new lives, encouraged them to preserve aspects of their native cultures, “assuring immigrants that it was not necessary to reject the past to become an American.”<sup>445</sup> First-generation migrants could not, of course, have completely jettisoned their native cultures even if they had wanted to, but they may also have been humoring the residents. In any case, they went along, and “social evenings came to life with pictures, songs, and dances from the immigrants’ native lands. National and religious festivals added color to a drab neighborhood and brought its residents together.” The “festivals and celebrations,” Carson writes, “appealed

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<sup>443</sup> UIC/HH, Box 44, Folder 437.

<sup>444</sup> UIC/HH, Box 44, Folder 438.

<sup>445</sup> Davis, *Spearheads*, 89.

to the settlement workers' own aesthetic sense."<sup>446</sup>

But settlement workers also encouraged migrants to engage in folk art, pageants, and festivals to emphasize how each group could “enrich American culture” with their cultural traditions.<sup>447</sup> Addams wrote that migrants who visited the settlement “to utilize their European skills in pottery, metal, and wood, demonstrate that immigrant colonies might yield to our American life something very valuable, if their resources were intelligently studied and developed,” which makes migrants sound less like humans than like deposits of mineral wealth waiting to be exploited by the native-born — a common view of migrants at the time (see below and Chapter 4).<sup>448</sup> Taylor believed that “perhaps to a greater degree than in other races the artist temperament of the Italian is more passionate,” and that “such tone and color as they add should be welcomed in America.”<sup>449</sup> And Wald hoped that migrants would build a “finer, more democratic America, when the worthy things they bring to us shall be recognized, and the good in their old-world traditions and culture shall be mingled with the best that lies within our new-world ideals.”<sup>450</sup> The goal was to portray migrants in a positive light as an “argument against the nativists and those who favored restriction of immigration.”<sup>451</sup> But this ignored a few important facts. First, many

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<sup>446</sup> Carson, *Settlement Folk*, 103.

<sup>447</sup> Davis, *Spearheads*, 90; Carson, *Settlement Folk*, 108.

<sup>448</sup> Addams, *Twenty Years*, 246.

<sup>449</sup> Taylor, *Social Frontiers*, 195.

<sup>450</sup> Wald, *Henry Street*, 66.

<sup>451</sup> Davis, *Spearheads*, 90.

migrants who arrived in the U.S. did not stay. According to Mark Wyman, a quarter to a third of European migrants to the United States between 1880 and 1930 — perhaps 4 million people — returned home for good.<sup>452</sup> Second, most migrants who ended up staying in the U.S. permanently were intent on making better lives for themselves and their children, not necessarily improving their receiving society. There was also a sinister implication: migrants who — in the view of middle-class, native-born Americans — had nothing to contribute (however “contribution” was defined) had no business being in the U.S.; their human needs alone could not justify their presence. Yet there was no talk of deporting native-born Americans who had nothing to contribute.

A major problem here was residents’ ignorance. Most spoke only English, so they tended to form stronger social bonds with one another than with migrants.<sup>453</sup> At least initially, settlement workers knew little about migrants in general. Eric Rauchway writes of Hull House as being staffed by women who “knew Italy as one might see it from inside the Uffizi or the Galleria dell’Accademia yet...were determined somehow to bridge the gap between the Sicilian peasants on their doorstep and the privileged Americans in their parlor.”<sup>454</sup>

Some settlement workers were aware of the problem. “Few of us residents had any previous personal acquaintanceship with people born abroad, or any

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<sup>452</sup> Mark Wyman, *Round-Trip to America: The Immigrants Return to Europe, 1880-1930* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), 6.

<sup>453</sup> Davis, *Spearheads*, 87.

<sup>454</sup> Rauchway, *Murdering McKinley*, 133.

opportunity to observe their customs and manner and life,” Taylor wrote, so Commons workers “were challenged to prove our capacity to make friends of these strangers and to understand and work with them.” Notwithstanding neighbors’ and residents’ common humanity, “differences of racial heritage, language, and customs...had to be crossed, and by us first.”<sup>455</sup>

One way of crossing those differences was through studying migrants. Such a process may seem simple and innocent but is, in fact, complex and fraught. Michel Foucault has posited a connection between knowledge and power — that is, between gaining knowledge and exerting control. A transatlantic phenomenon, it emerged, according to Foucault, among European governments in the eighteenth century: “the discovery of population as an object of scientific investigation; people began to inquire into birth rates, death rates, and changes in population and to say for the first time that it is impossible to govern a state without knowing its population.” The reason for gaining such knowledge was to get “productive services from individuals in their concrete lives” — that is, to go beyond extracting loyalty through signs, symbols, and taxes, as had been the case during the European middle ages. Governments wanted to know more about their citizens — about “demography, public health, hygiene, housing conditions, longevity, and fertility” — to exercise a greater degree of control over them.<sup>456</sup> The U.S. Constitution, meanwhile, specifies a census once every ten years so as to apportion congressional representation and thus political power — another

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<sup>455</sup> Taylor, *Social Frontiers*, 188-90.

<sup>456</sup> Michel Foucault, “Truth and Power,” in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Vintage Books, 2010), 65-67.

manifestation of the knowledge/power dynamic.

That dynamic continued throughout the nineteenth century and went well beyond government studies of populations. Jefferson not only wrote *Notes on the State of Virginia*, which is, among other things, a study of Virginia's economy and natural resources, but in 1804 also sent William Clark and Meriwether Lewis to map the Louisiana territory, which the Republic had just purchased, hopefully but sight unseen, from France. To incorporate the territory in a meaningful way — that is, to control it — the U.S. would first have to know something about it and its rightful inhabitants.

Later in the nineteenth century, the knowledge/power dynamic arose in new contexts on both sides of the Atlantic. In the U.S., restrictions on migration led eventually to the federal government's scrutiny of would-be migrants to decide who was and was not "fit" to enter the country. Knowledge, in other words, led to authorities' control over the lives of people from other countries. U.S. settlement houses' study of migrants was thus, in a sense, a continuation of the attention that the government had already given to migrants. U.S. settlements also followed the precedent of British settlement workers, who, in studying their neighbors, set "themselves to analyse the problems of the districts in which they have gone to live. Evidence has frequently been given by Settlement workers before royal or departmental commissions."<sup>457</sup>

The ideas of Edward Said, too, have relevance to U.S. settlement workers' study of migrants. Basing his work partly on that of Foucault, Said argues in

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<sup>457</sup> University of Illinois at Chicago University Library, Richard J. Daley Library Special Collections and University Archives, Hull House collection, Box 55, Folder 665.



*Orientalism* that Britain, France, and the United States studied western Asian societies to try to control them. U.S. settlement houses were not, of course, exercises in reverse colonization (in which the colonized inserted themselves into the space of the colonizers instead of the other way around), but something of the *Orientalist* knowledge/power dynamic was nonetheless present, given that Said defines Orientalism broadly as a “*will or intention* to understand, what is a manifestly different (or alternative and novel) world.”<sup>458</sup> The object of study was assumed to be essentially unchanging, and once it was known, at least to the satisfaction of whoever was studying it, then the object of study became, in a sense, whatever it was understood to be by the person studying it.<sup>459</sup> Said further argues that the *Orientalist* knowledge of the British and French derived not just from direct contact with the people they colonized but also from “a sizable body of literature produced by novelists, poets, translators, and gifted travelers.”<sup>460</sup> In a similar way, settlement workers viewed migrants partially through the ancient Greek and Roman history and literature that they had encountered in school, no matter the enormous differences between, say, the principate of Augustus and Risorgimento Italy. That could explain, for example, Jane Addams’s enthusiasm for having Greek migrants perform ancient Greek drama, though the migrants themselves may have shared her enthusiasm. Orientalism is also relevant to the U.S. settlement movement because of the latter’s British origins and because the U.S. movement began about the time that the U.S. acquired an overseas empire,

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<sup>458</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 12. Emphasis in original.

<sup>459</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 32.

<sup>460</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 40.

after the Spanish-American War, to complement the contiguous-land empire that it had wrested, stolen, bought, and won from Native Americans and European powers. In the U.S., then, the settlement movement appeared when issues of both migration and empire were very much current in the transatlantic world.

U.S. settlement workers thus encountered migrants not just face to face, as human beings, but in a more abstract way — as objects of curiosity and inquiry, which, again, was part of the price that migrants paid for the use of space controlled by settlement workers. The objects of inquiry even included migrants who probably never went anywhere near a settlement house. Before arriving at Hull House, Alessandro Mastro-Valerio, himself an Italian migrant, had worked for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, in which capacity he established farming communities for Italian migrants in the Alabama towns of Daphne and Lamberth, in 1890 and 1893, respectively, “pointing to the successful development of the South by Italian colonization,” as a book of the time put it.<sup>461</sup> Alessandro Mastro-Valerio and his wife had themselves lived in the Daphne colony for several years. Hull House took notice: the fall 1900 *Bulletin* includes an article on an Italian government report praising the Daphne settlement. “All this recognition on the part of the mother country has been very gratifying,” the *Bulletin* says. Alessandro Mastro-Valerio himself may have written the article, as Italy was his “mother country.” He certainly wrote an article in the *Hull-House Bulletin 1902* discussing “the wide distribution of Italians in agricultural colonies, with the almost invariable success of these efforts” and urging “that many more

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<sup>461</sup> Eliot Lord, John J.D. Trenor, and Samuel J. Barrows, *The Italian in America* (New York: B.F. Buck & Co., 1905), 132.

Italians be encouraged to thus locate.” Was that Mastro-Valerio’s sly way of hinting that Italian migrants to the U.S. would be better off living in the countryside than in cities? It is, in any case, a useful reminder that during the great wave of migration, not all migrants settled in large cities in the Northeast and Midwest.<sup>462</sup>

Most investigations of migrants done by residents took place closer to home. In 1929, the United Neighborhood Houses of New York created a study group on southern Italian families. According to the initial outline, the study group was to look at “historic, economic and cultural background,” “position of and attitude towards women and girls in the home,” and “possible interests and contact points with the non-English speaking Italian adults of our community.” The study group was also to try to interest southern Italians in “Health, Cleanliness, Housing, Politics, Citizenship, Education,” and get Italians to help pay for the “health and educational opportunities afforded by the settlement” and “live on friendly terms with other nationalities, people from other towns and sections against whom they have an inherited prejudice.” And the group would attempt to address the problem of gangs and understand the groups — “societies” — in Italian migrant communities.

The group was led by Leonard Covello, a teacher at DeWitt Clinton High School in New York and himself a migrant, having been born Leonardo Coviello in Avigliano in 1887 and arriving in the U.S. in 1896. (He went back to Italy in

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<sup>462</sup> UIC/HH, Box 43, Folder 429; Box 43, Folder 430.

1972 and died in Messina in 1982.)<sup>463</sup> Though Covello was never a settlement worker himself, he did spend his life as an educator and was deeply engaged in the study of migrants. In or about 1929, he started gathering material for what would become his dissertation on the “social background of the Southern Italian immigrant.”<sup>464</sup> In other words, Covello was, for his own reasons, just as interested as settlement workers were in studying migrants.

At the group’s first meeting, on February 1, 1929, Covello explained that “the lower class of Italians have been made to feel very inferior and are really quite ashamed of being Italian. They are in most cases entirely ignorant of the beauties and great cultural background” of Italy. The job of settlement workers, he believed, was to instill in the migrants “pride and respect” for Italy. Covello argued that Italian migrants should be taught the history of their country beginning with ancient Rome and ending with the present day so as to “make them realize that their civilization...has lasted for over 3,000 years.” Covello also said that given the “cleverness of the Italian as a farmer,” Italian migrants to the U.S. should have been made to settle in the countryside and not allowed into cities in such numbers — an echo of the view that Alessandro Mastro-Valerio seemed to take years earlier. Covello returned to that theme at the March 1 meeting: “Our immigration laws...do not make provision for them to go into the country where they can adapt themselves and lead the same type of outdoor life

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<sup>463</sup> A Guide to Manuscript and Microfilm Collections of the Research Library of the Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies, Register of the Papers of Leonard Covello, [http://www2.hsp.org/collections/Balch%20manuscript\\_guide/html/covello.html](http://www2.hsp.org/collections/Balch%20manuscript_guide/html/covello.html), consulted September 14, 2015.

<sup>464</sup> Leonard Covello with Guido D’Agostino, *The Heart is the Teacher* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1958), 171.

to which they have been accustomed.” Covello also lamented the fact that once Italians settled in cities, if husbands could not find work and their wives became the breadwinners, then the man was “no longer the dominating person in this closely connected family unit — thus the strong family relationship breaks down entirely.” The solution, he said, was for residents, by “working through the children,” to “gain the confidence of the parents, so that they will keep ‘hands off and let us manage their boys and girls. Through knowledge of language and customs, we can affect a keener understanding between parent and child,” apparently by making it harder for parents to raise their own children. “Encourage children to come out to social affairs and all other types of recreational activities (of which they know nothing in Italy),” Covello told the settlement workers. “In our schools we provide courses in citizenship and English, so that these people will be equipped to go out and help their own race.” Covello went on to say that “the weaker low grade Italians can only be developed to a certain point. Do not make the mistake of wasting too much effort on those who can never ‘carry on.’”<sup>465</sup>

Covello’s condescension may seem astounding, especially given the fact that he himself was a migrant — perhaps a case of less-recent migrants looking down on more-recent ones. Despite emphasizing “pride and respect” for Italy, he portrayed Italian migrants as a burden and said nothing about making any effort to understand why they migrated in the first place or consulting them to try to figure out what they wanted. On the contrary: Covello seemed to say that

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<sup>465</sup> UM/SWHA, Box 245, Folder 38 — United Neighborhood Houses of NYC Records.

settlement workers should have more control over the children of migrants than their parents did. Nor did Covello explain how the “low grade Italians” and the “certain point” were to be identified. And though Covello was not himself a settlement worker, his views on migrants seem reasonably close to those held by residents and may have been especially credible to residents given Covello’s status as a migrant. There is no indication in the meeting minutes of anyone questioning or objecting to anything that Covello said. If his discussion of migrant was less varnished than what residents were used to hearing or expressing, that may have been on purpose: perhaps he was trying to disabuse settlement workers of any excessive idealism (as he imagined it) that they harbored.

In any case, settlement workers studying migrants usually did not seek outside advice, preferring to do the work themselves. Graham Taylor devoted a chapter of his memoir, *Pioneering on Social Frontiers*, to a miniature ethnographic study of migrants in the Commons’ neighborhood: Irish, Scandinavians, Italians, and so on.<sup>466</sup> South End House’s *The City Wilderness: A Settlement Study* (1899) and *Americans in Process: A Settlement Study* (1903), both edited by Woods, the house’s head, examined, respectively, the populations of Boston’s south end and its north and west ends. In New York, *University Settlement Studies* printed articles on migrants living on the Lower East Side written by University Settlement workers.<sup>467</sup> And Hull House workers identified the lineage of every family living near the settlement, finding eighteen

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<sup>466</sup> Taylor, *Social Frontiers*, 187-202.

<sup>467</sup> Davis, *Spearheads*, 86.

nationalities; the result, *Hull-House Maps and Papers* (1895), is “the first systematic and detailed attempt to describe the immigrant communities of an American city” and a primary source for scholarly work (including this dissertation). A similar effort was undertaken starting in summer 1908, this time focusing on Greeks, given that Hull House’s “neighborhood contained the largest Greek colony in the city and that little was known of this new element in Chicago’s complex population.” The study initially targeted Chicago’s “entire Greek population, the wealthier as well as the poorer.” Then, “Miss Neukom, who speaks modern Greek,” did “systematic visiting” of Greeks in the neighborhood, and in spring 1909, “a special study of the Greek boys who work in the ‘shoe-shine parlors’ and fruit stores in the loop district was made by the House in co-operation with the League for the Protection of Immigrants.” The result, “A Study of the Greeks of Chicago,” written by Grace Abbott, was published in the *American Journal of Sociology* in fall 1909. Because of the study, “it has been possible to make available for the Greeks of Chicago not only the resources of the House but to some extent of the entire city.”<sup>468</sup>

Lectures were another way of studying migrants, as well as the countries they came from. In late 1895, E.R.L. Gould of the University of Chicago, who “has made an exhaustive study in Norway upon the Gothenburg system of liquor sales” as well as “statistical studies of comparative conditions of tenements in Europe and America,” gave five lectures at Hull House. At about the same time and as part of Hull House’s “Sunday afternoon readings,” there was a talk on

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<sup>468</sup> UIC/HH, Box 44, Folder 435.

“The Economic, Social and Political Conditions in Italy from 1815 to 1850.” Resident Elizabeth Thomas, who knew Russian and offered English lessons to Russians, lectured on Russia in 1897.<sup>469</sup> And the *Hull-House Year Book 1906-1907* not only notes Addams’s lecture on Tolstoy and the 1905 revolution but also, in an article about the Chicago Federation of Settlements, which met at Hull House, explains that the “the two most interesting lectures given before the Federation last winter” concerned migrants: one was about Slavs and “the conditions surrounding the various immigrants in America,” and the other lecture was on the need to protect migrant women, particularly those in domestic service.<sup>470</sup>

Even learning a language could be a way of studying migrants. Louise McCrady of Ellis Memorial House in Boston wrote in *Neighborhood* of a language class in which “we have been trying to understand the Italian temperament by learning how Italians say in their way something that corresponds to what we say in our way.”<sup>471</sup>

Reports, lectures, and study groups were all very well, but there was nothing like seeing migrants in “action,” which is what Hull House’s Labor Museum set out to achieve. The museum was created by Addams and Starr; the idea seems to have originated with Starr’s fifteen months, in 1897 and 1899, at Doves Bindery in England, where she was apprenticed to T.J. Cobden-Sanderson,

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<sup>469</sup> UIC/HH, Box 43, Folder 427.

<sup>470</sup> Box 43, Folder 430B.

<sup>471</sup> Louise McCrady, “Notes From the Field: Boston,” *Neighborhood: A Settlement Quarterly* 2, no. 2 (April 1929): 120; article is 117-127.



a bookbinder and artist who named the Arts and Crafts movement. Starr appreciated the technical skills he taught her but “also looked to him for guidance on the social value of art,” historian Mary Ann Stankiewicz writes. Cobden-Sanderson did not oppose machines but held handwork in much higher esteem, seeing it as “a means to lift the worker ‘into harmony with the universal order.’” When Starr told him, in a letter, about a proposed Hull House labor museum, Cobden-Sanderson “expressed ‘sympathy with the proposal to enlarge the horizons of the artisan’s life from the point of departure of the tools & material & processes of his own craft.’”<sup>472</sup>

The more immediate inspiration for the labor museum, according to *The First Report of the Labor Museum*, dated 1901-02, was “the fact that in the Italian colony immediately east of Hull House are many women who in Italy spun and wove the entire stock of clothing for their families, some of the older women still using the primitive form of spindle and distaff.” Such women could help “graphically illustrate the development of textile manufacture, to put into sequence and historic order the skill which the Italian colony contains, but which has become useless under their present conditions of life in America.” The demonstration would be educational but also counter a tendency among the youngest Italians to “look down upon the simpler Italians who possess this skill, partly because they consider them uncouth and an-American.”<sup>473</sup>

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<sup>472</sup> Ruth Hutchinson Crocker, *Social Work and Social Order: The Settlement Movement in Two Industrial Cities, 1889-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 219; Mary Ann Stankiewicz, “Art at Hull House, 1889-1901: Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr,” *Woman’s Art Journal* 10, no. 1 (spring-summer 1989): 37.

<sup>473</sup> UIC/HH, Box 54, Folder 586.

Founded in November 1900, the museum was open every Saturday evening, though “the craft shops were busy throughout the week as young people and adults engaged in metalwork, pottery, woodworking, and weaving for themselves or for items to sell in the Hull House shop.<sup>474</sup> On Saturday evenings, “Hull House’s neighbors were invited to demonstrate and teach their traditional skills,” Stankiewicz writes. “The Labor Museum showed process, product, and producer in an effort to illustrate the value of handwork. A visitor to the museum might see local boys learning woodworking; a German potter throwing a vase on the wheel; a display of the constituents of common foods; and Irish, Russian, Syrian, or Italian women spinning.”<sup>475</sup> The *First Report* was more idealistic: “in the narrow confines of one room, the Syrian, Slav, Latin, and the Celt, show the continuity of industrial development which went on peacefully year by year among the workers of each nation, heedless of differences in language, religion and political experiences...Many of the Italian women who came to the museum had never seen spinning wheels, and looked upon them as a new and wonderful invention.”<sup>476</sup> In connection with the museum, there was also, soon after the museum opened, a lecture on spinning, “illustrated by the spinning of wool on a hand spindle by Signora Molinare.”<sup>477</sup>

The Labor Museum offers an important perspective on how residents viewed and treated the migrants. Whatever its educational purpose, the museum

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<sup>474</sup> UIC/HH, Box 54, Folder 586; Stankiewicz, “Art at Hull House,” 37-38.

<sup>475</sup> Stankiewicz, “Art at Hull House,” 37.

<sup>476</sup> UIC/HH, Box 54, Folder 586.

posited migrants' work and, by extension, migrants' ways of life, as undeveloped or underdeveloped: "primitive" methods of spinning and weaving demonstrated on Saturday evenings were the forerunners of factory spinning, just as "the simple human experience of the immigrants may be made the foundation of a more inclusive American life."<sup>478</sup> That is, "primitive," "simple" methods for primitive, simple people — raw material to be shaped — "ore," according to a newspaper article.<sup>479</sup> The Labor Museum also blurred the line between work and leisure (as did the performing arts at settlement houses — see Chapter 4), and between migrants as people and migrants as objects on display. Stankiewicz notes that it was called a labor museum, rather than a school, not just to avoid giving the impression that it was for children only but also "to emphasize its entertainment value."<sup>480</sup> For visitors, perhaps; for migrants, it was a matter of work, not entertainment.

Settlement workers put an impressive amount of effort into trying to understand the migrants they worked with and even, in some cases, migrants they would never meet. As Allen Davis puts it, "almost every settlement worker at one time or another wrote articles about the immigrant community in his neighborhood, or gave a speech at the women's club or the local church. A few, like Addams and Wald, wrote popular accounts of their experiences with

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<sup>477</sup> UIC/HH, Box 43, Folder 429.

<sup>478</sup> UIC/HH, Box 44, Folder 435.

<sup>479</sup> "The Undeveloped Asset in the Alien," Chicago Evening Post, March 3, 1926.

<sup>480</sup> Stankiewicz, "Art at Hull House," 37.

immigrant neighbors.”<sup>481</sup> Davis, whose study *Spearheads for Reform* is valuable but too uncritical of settlement workers, sees such efforts in a positive light. Residents sought “first to understand the peculiar customs and traditions of each group, and then to seek as much opportunity for them as possible,” he writes. “More important than the statistics they gathered was the sympathy they mustered, which allowed them to picture the immigrants as fellow human beings with joys as well as problems.”<sup>482</sup> Perhaps; but sympathy needs a humanistic more than a statistical basis, and gathering statistics, writing reports, and participating in study groups may have made settlement workers less, not more, likely to see migrants as fully human, as opposed to partially humans and partially objects. At the very least, residents’ view of migrants was conflicted: they were people in need of aid — “no fellow-human was a mere ‘case.’ Everyone was a person, a somebody,” as Taylor put it — but also specimens to be studied or museum pieces to be curated — almost literally so in the case of the Labor Museum — and thus a sort of hobby for residents.<sup>483</sup>

It was only a small step from studying migrants to trying to shape their lives, especially through “Americanization,” which among settlement workers was such a vague and elastic term, seemingly encompassing such a variety of stated and implied meanings, that perhaps even settlement workers themselves never precisely defined it. At many settlement houses, however, one basic aspect of Americanization involved language and citizenship. Learning English was crucial

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<sup>481</sup> Davis, *Spearheads*, 86.

<sup>482</sup> Davis, *Spearheads*, 85-6.

<sup>483</sup> Taylor, *Social Frontiers*, 287.

for most migrants, and public schools were of little help; the few that offered evening classes “treated immigrant adults as American children just learning to read.” Settlements, on the other hand, better grasped migrants’ practical needs: in classes that taught both English and citizenship, residents treated migrants as adults and “tried to relate the problems of language and of government to their experience.”<sup>484</sup> Davis argues that “the settlement became an outpost of the English language in the middle of a foreign neighborhood.”<sup>485</sup> Settlements also offered classes in U.S. history.

Hull House took Americanization seriously. According to a booklet commemorating its twentieth anniversary, for example, Hull House’s “most immediate task” was “to aid in the Americanization of the immigrant colonies among which it is so intimately placed.”<sup>486</sup> The booklet itself does not elaborate, but according to the *Hull-House Year Book 1916*, Americanization meant, at least in part, helping migrants get naturalization papers and holding classes in naturalization and citizenship, “first advertised in the foreign press and through cards and handbills circulated in the neighborhood”; in addition, Hull House distributed pamphlets on both subjects.<sup>487</sup>

Some settlement workers saw Americanization as a process of inculcating native-born middle-class values in migrants. In the late 1920s, Tau Beta House in Detroit built a \$200,000 addition that included “a three room model apartment.

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<sup>484</sup> Davis, *Spearheads*, 50.

<sup>485</sup> Davis, *Spearheads*, 89.

<sup>486</sup> UIC/HH, Box 46A, Folder 473.

Here young Poles contemplating matrimony are taught the elements of household decoration and are mayhap indoctrinated with a desire to own their own homes. It is designed to combat the hazardous practice of setting up married life in the already over-crowded tenements of the bride's parents."<sup>488</sup> The idea here seemed to be that the "hazardous practice" was an ingrained cultural norm for Poles, rather than a matter of economic necessity. Given better material circumstances, newlywed migrants would probably not have needed to be taught to set up their own households. The article also assumes the desirability of owning a house and Poles' incapacity for interior decoration.

Americanization could, apparently, also mean attachment to or love of the United States. Edward Corsi, the future commissioner of immigration, called settlement houses "gateways to America" for migrants, and said that "at Haarlem House they have all been interested in the Americanization of the foreign-born. The immigrant was definitely concerned with the country from which he came. Now the immigrants in Haarlem House district are definitely looking toward America."<sup>489</sup> "Concerned with," "looking toward": vague terms that Corsi perhaps counted on his audience understanding (he made the remarks in a speech) — or perhaps just platitudes that Corsi did not imagine that anyone, least of all historians, would parse. Still, Corsi did seem to speak of a transfer of interest or attachment from the country of birth to the country of residence.

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<sup>487</sup> UIC/HH, Box 44, Folder 437.

<sup>488</sup> Joseph A. Beattie, "Notes from the Field: Detroit," *Neighborhood: A Settlement Quarterly* 2, no. 2 (April 1929): 124.

<sup>489</sup> UM/SWHA, Box 202, Folder 233 — United Neighborhood Houses of New York City Records.

For Mary McDowell, too, Americanization meant attachment but also went beyond that. In 1929, she argued (apparently in reference to her own house, University Settlement in Chicago), that “the good will and good understanding of these thirty years have distinctly proved to be a true method of Americanization and led the Settlement’s neighbors to a real desire for English and other good things which the Settlement offers.” Here, “Americanization” is vague and may have any number of meanings, perhaps including attachment to native-born Americans or just to the settlement house or to native-born settlement workers; love of country; and knowledge of U.S. society. McDowell apparently considered learning English not a part of Americanization but something that Americanization would lead to — that is, once migrants had become attached to their new country in some way (maybe through a bond with settlement workers or a settlement house), they would want to learn English. The language, according to McDowell, was one of the “good things” — maybe meaning useful things — that the settlement offered. But mere attachment to country, settlement house, or settlement workers was not enough: “Good housing, good industrial conditions, sanitary surroundings, recreational facilities — all these are cultural and essential to Americanization. Without these, the teaching of English and Americanization become a danger rather than a safeguard.” McDowell does not elaborate on what the danger would be, but she seems to mean that migrants who were armed with a knowledge of U.S. society and the ability to speak English but who remained in poverty could become radicalized and would be more dangerous than migrants ignorant of American ways. At the very least, such migrants would reject middle-class values, whereas educated migrants living more comfortable

lives — that is, having a stake in the middle class — would help “safeguard” the U.S.’s economic system and, especially, the middle class. In a sense, there is nothing untoward about McDowell’s assertion — a restatement of the idea that middle-class material circumstances can help foster middle-class values. Applied to migrants, however, it takes on a new meaning: that to “Americanize” migrants was, by definition, to give them middle-class, native-born American values.<sup>490</sup>

“Americanization” appears yet again in an undated memo from Benjamin J. Bittenwieser, chairman of a special committee of the board of directors of Stuyvesant Neighborhood House, to the board of directors of the United Neighborhood Houses opposing a Senate bill to raise immigration inspectors’ salaries. In trying to justify that opposition, Bittenwieser offered a critique of the entire migrant-processing apparatus, especially the conditions on Ellis Island:

If, in our settlement and neighborhood houses, we are to do the Americanization work endorsed by the United Neighborhood Houses and other similar agencies, we should at least be permitted to receive the immigrants with their minds open to the merits of the land, which has been so glowingly described to them, and they should come to us, viewing America as the land of promise which it has rightly been portrayed to them and which doubtless has been the incentive for their coming here. How can we expect an immigrant to cherish such worthwhile ideas and ideals if his first contact with the country of his adoption is to be marred by the almost brutal treatment and the ill-advised, prison-like methods adopted at the port of entry?...From the time the immigration officers first board an incoming vessel until the immigrant is finally discharged, or rather accepted, his contact with the only United States authorities whom he thus far recognizes is a veritable nightmare and it is small wonder that so many of them are so hastily disillusioned and so promptly change from persons who would be easily assimilated in our midst to dangerous, anti-governmental undesirables with whom it is very difficult for the various Americanization agencies to work.<sup>491</sup>

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<sup>490</sup> Mary E. McDowell, “From Day to Day,” *Neighborhood: A Settlement Quarterly* 2, no. 2 (April 1929): 80.

<sup>491</sup> Box 244, Folder 35 — United Neighborhood Houses of NYC Records.



It is revealing that settlement workers assumed, but apparently did not know for certain, the reason or reasons for migration. The main point, though, is that here, “Americanization” seems to mean, as elsewhere, an attachment to (or devotion to or love of) the U.S. Settlement workers, it seems, wanted to make sure that they could “Americanize” migrants before Ellis Island gave them an “inaccurate” impression of the U.S. — or perhaps an accurate impression, thus disillusioning migrants (or disillusioning them too soon) and showing them that the U.S., far from being a paradise, had problems of its own. Settlement workers apparently wanted to shape migrants’ first important impressions of the U.S. rather than leaving that task to immigration officials. In other words, immigration officials were making settlement workers’ task harder. In any case, though, it was surely an exaggeration to imagine that mistreatment at the point of entry would turn migrants against the country that was taking them in. Many migrants were treated badly, but most of them did not, as a result, work for the overthrow of the U.S. government.

Thus, despite settlement workers’ efforts to study migrants, despite the face-to-face contact between migrants and residents, and despite the fact that some residents were themselves migrants, a significant gap remained between the two groups. As Taylor put it, “No native-born person can put himself quite in the place of the immigrants from any other land.”<sup>492</sup> Residents’ relationship with migrants was strained by irresolvable tensions and contradictions. Differences in class and country of origin — or “race,” as the word was then understood — kept

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<sup>492</sup> Taylor, *Social Frontiers*, 188-90.

neighbors and residents doubly alien to each other.

Addams, Scudder, Henry House resident Rita Wallach, and others displayed toward migrants what Carson calls a “complex amalgam of condescension and admiration.”<sup>493</sup> There is at least a whiff of the former in Addams’s account of Italians who “come to us with their petty lawsuits, sad relics of the vendetta, with their incorrigible boys, with their hospital cases, with their aspirations for American clothes, and with their needs for an interpreter.”<sup>494</sup> Wald wrote of “little hyphenated Americans,” a view only partially excused by the fact that she was referring to children.<sup>495</sup>

There was also positive stereotyping. Writing about Hull House, Irwin St. John Tucker, a priest and journalist, recalled that Starr “was increasingly bitter about the patronizing attitude of the Upper Classes toward ‘these poor Italian immigrants. Any one who gets to know these Italians,’ she stormed, ‘soon finds out that these poor immigrants are far richer than those empty headed society folk. They have a deeper understanding of life and stronger characters.’”<sup>496</sup> McDowell had something of the same attitude, as she made clear in talking to an Italian neighbor: “‘I not stay here,’ she said one day to me. It was amusing to see her dramatic communication with me, nose held tight between her thumb and her first finger and her head shaking furiously, because the odour from the stock

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<sup>493</sup> Carson, *Settlement Folk*, 108.

<sup>494</sup> Addams, *Twenty Years*, 232.

<sup>495</sup> Wald, *Henry Street*, 66.

<sup>496</sup> UIC/HH, Box 52, Folder 579.

yards was more than Sicilians could bear.”<sup>497</sup>

But positive stereotyping manifested itself mainly in settlement workers’ romanticized notions of migrants’ former lives. Migrants were imagined to have enjoyed a “preindustrial community life, in which children played, studied, and shared the healthful labor of a rural economy under the watchful eyes of their parents.”<sup>498</sup> Some residents saw migrants as “legatees of ancient and rich cultural traditions...poignant survivors of earlier, simpler, and more integrated societies.”<sup>499</sup> In a radio address on WNYC in 1929, Albert J. Kennedy said, “New York City has learned that if one desires something choice in needlework, the foreign born and foreign trained women of these settlements [Haarlem House, Hamilton House, and Lenox Hill House] can produce it,” but “it is mournful that their daughters are not interested to sew.”<sup>500</sup>

Addams apparently thought that way, and few nationalities were spared her adoration. She was, first, a sucker for what she considered traditional labor methods — weaving and sewing, for example, or Jews’ traditional preparation of kosher food. It inspired in her “a yearning to recover for the household arts something of their early sanctity and meaning,” which was great for someone who never had to do such work herself. Addams also writes of the “freedom and beauty” of Italian village life and the supposed difficulty of exchanging it for a

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<sup>497</sup> McDowell, “From Day to Day,” 81.

<sup>498</sup> Carson, *Settlement Folk*, 110.

<sup>499</sup> Carson, *Settlement Folk*, 105.

<sup>500</sup> UM/SWHA, Legal Box 2, Folder 11 — Albert Kennedy Papers.

small tenement.<sup>501</sup> Seeing “an old Italian woman, her distaff against homesick face,” Addams imagined that she could have modeled for Michelangelo. At a Greek event at Hull House, she felt “the possibility of transplanting to new and crude Chicago, some of the traditions of Athens itself, so deeply cherished in the hearts of this group of citizens.”<sup>502</sup> German evenings at Hull House “reflected something of that cozy social intercourse which is found in its perfection in the fatherland,” Addams writes. The Germans sang and “pursued a course in German history and literature, recovering something of that poetry and romance which they had long since resigned with other things.”<sup>503</sup> Was Addams imagining what they had given up, or did she ask them? If the latter, did they tell her they had given up “poetry and romance”? Addams sounds here like an American tourist remembering, or a would-be tourist imagining, a European vacation. In any case, it is a wonder that any migrants voluntarily left the bucolic and poetic joys of their native lands to settle in hellish, urban, industrialized America.

Once they did arrive, however, they changed, and settlement workers were dismayed at migrants’ participation, on a scale both large and small, in their new country’s economy. Thus, Addams complained that Bohemians in Chicago joyfully seized on the chance to buy real estate, which they had been unable to do in Europe. As a result, she writes, “their energies had become so completely absorbed in money-making that all other interests had apparently dropped

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<sup>501</sup> Addams, *Twenty Years*, 242, 244.

<sup>502</sup> Addams, *Twenty Years*, 235-36, 256-57.

<sup>503</sup> Addams, *Twenty Years*, 233.

away.”<sup>504</sup> Migrants’ appetite for American manufactures — “things commercially and industrially thrust upon them,” as Starr put it — also distressed settlement workers. Addams, for example, writes about how unpleasant it must have been for Italian women to “give up a beautiful homespun kerchief for an ugly department store hat.”<sup>505</sup> And Starr refers to a “dear old peasant friend of Hull-House” who bought his wife an American dress, but “by the mercy of Heaven, her courage gave out, and she never wore it. She found it too uncomfortable, and I know that in her inmost heart she found it too ugly.”<sup>506</sup> In Starr’s hyperbolic language, then, wearing a dress required courage, though the “mercy of Heaven” intervened to stop it. Starr also presumed to know all about this woman’s “inmost heart.”

Starr instead admired what the Italian peasant “brings with him in the way of carven bed, wrought kerchief, enamel inlaid picture of saint or angel,” all of which “is graceful, however childish.” She also praised the way an Italian peasant living in the Hull House neighborhood decorated his own house: “The designs were very rude, the colors coarse; but there was nothing of the vulgar in it.”<sup>507</sup> “Vulgar,” of course, meant “of American make,” and the condescension here is clear, especially in the word “childish,” perhaps a clue to what the settlement workers thought of migrants of all ages.

Missing from Addams’s and Starr’s accounts is any sense of what the

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<sup>504</sup> Addams, *Twenty Years*, 234.

<sup>505</sup> Starr, “Art and Labor,” 132; Addams, *Twenty Years*, 244.

<sup>506</sup> Starr, “Art and Labor,” 132.

<sup>507</sup> Starr, “Art and Labor,” 132.

migrants themselves wanted or their economic options in their native countries and in the U.S. Neither woman seemed to grasp the work required to make clothes and furniture or imagined that the migrants may have made such objects out of necessity and now preferred, for ease and convenience, to buy. Anyway, if American goods were good enough for the native-born, why weren't they good enough for migrants? (Where Starr's own bed and dresses were made — by Americans or migrants in factories, perhaps — must remain matters of conjecture.) If worship of money was good enough for the native-born, then why not for migrants? Wasn't that (and isn't that still) the American way? Perhaps Addams and Starr wanted migrants to become idealized Americans — to bring to the U.S. a little of the “Old World charm” that American tourists looked for in Europe. Showing too much interest in making money or in American-manufactured goods would have spoiled that.

Still more quixotic was residents' quest to lessen intergenerational conflict among migrants. The problem itself was certainly real: migrants' children, whether born abroad or in the U.S., were generally less interested in their parents' native cultures than in their new environment. Intergenerational conflict, Wald writes, “is likely to be intensified when the Americanized wage-earning son or daughter reverses the relationship of child and parent by becoming the protector and the link between the outside world and the home. The service of the settlement as interpreter seems in this narrower sphere almost as useful as its attempts to bring about understanding between separated sections

of society.”<sup>508</sup> Whatever Wald meant by interpretation, however, could do only so much to bridge the gap between first- and second-generation migrants. The groups’ experiences differed in fundamental ways. In the case of Eastern European Jews in New York, for example, migration was the defining life event of first-generation migrants, whereas for their children, migration was a matter of nostalgia and idealization. And while the first generation, Deborah Dash Moore argues, tried to recreate its European culture in the U.S., the second generation “appreciated these experiences, at best, as abstract ideals.”<sup>509</sup> In any case, intergenerational conflict is ubiquitous, even in the absence of migration, so it is no surprise that residents made little headway.

Migrants themselves had a range of views regarding settlements and settlement workers. Positive impressions were recorded by Mary Antin and Rose Gollup Cohen, both born in Belarussia; Bella Spewack, born in Transylvania; and Hilda Satt Polacheck, born in Poland.

In her autobiography, *The Promised Land* (1912), Antin, who arrived in the U.S. as a teenager, writes warmly of Hale House in Boston, including her experiences with the natural history club and of how her brother started a debating club there. Antin saw settlement houses as trying to “mould the restless children on the street corners into noble men and women.”<sup>510</sup> Cohen’s autobiography, *Out of the Shadow* (1918), relates a visit that Wald paid to Cohen

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<sup>508</sup> Wald, *Henry Street*, 196-97

<sup>509</sup> Deborah Dash Moore, *At Home in America: Second Generation New York Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 8, 9.

<sup>510</sup> Mary Antin, *The Promised Land* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1912), 323-25.

when the latter was a child and sick: “Miss Wald comes to our house, and a new world opens for us.” Cohen also got treatment from a Henry House doctor.<sup>511</sup> For Spewack, the settlement was a refuge when she was a child. To escape the “sordidness of the life about me,” she writes in *Streets: A Memoir of the Lower East Side*, “I hid behind my books and built up a life of my own in the public school I attended on East Broadway and at the settlement house on Madison Street,” referring to Madison House of the Downtown Ethical Society.<sup>512</sup>

Polacheck, in *I Came a Stranger*, writes of her delight in attending a Christmas party at Hull House at which, despite the many ethnicities represented, “no one seemed to care where they had come from, or what religion they professed, or what clothes they wore, or what they thought...I felt myself being freed from a variety of century-old superstitions and inhibitions.”<sup>513</sup> Then and later, Hull House was for Polacheck an “oasis in a desert of disease and monotony,” a “haven of love and understanding.” And Polacheck practically worshipped Addams, with her warm voice and “kind, understanding eyes.” Addams, according to Polacheck, could make a room “warm with a feeling of peace” just by her presence. Addams was also “never condescending to anyone,” Polacheck writes.<sup>514</sup>

One possible problem with all the memoirs mentioned above is that they

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<sup>511</sup> Rose Cohen, *Out of the Shadow* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1918), 231.

<sup>512</sup> Bella Spewack, *Streets: A Memoir of the Lower East Side* (New York: The Feminist Press at The City University of New York, 1995), 66, 74.

<sup>513</sup> Hilda Satt Polacheck, *I Came a Stranger: The Story of a Hull-House Girl*, ed. Dena J. Polacheck Epstein (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 52.

<sup>514</sup> Polacheck, *I Came a Stranger*, 52, 67, 73, 74, 76.



were written by women who arrived in the U.S., and thus experienced settlement life, as children, before they developed the critical faculties of adults. Their views of settlement houses and settlement workers may thus be so positive because they are tinged with childhood nostalgia. *I Came a Stranger*, for example, is an extensive and, in some ways, valuable account, but so unequivocally positive about Hull House, and its portrait of Addams (to whom the book is so dedicated) so near hagiography, as to arouse suspicion. Polacheck could not possibly have known, for example, that Addams never condescended; at the most, Polacheck (perhaps) never personally saw Addams condescend or, if Polacheck did see condescension, may have misunderstood it. And it beggars belief that Polacheck never had a negative experience of any kind at Hull House and never perceived any problems or shortcomings. Maybe she simply forgot anything that was not positive — or omitted any such aspects because she internalized and, through her memoir, helped reify the view that Addams and other residents took of settlement work.

Other migrants took less kindly to their would-be benefactors than did Antin, Cohen, Spewack, or Polacheck. Some were in the U.S. only temporarily, to work and save money before returning to their native countries, and did not particularly want or need the services of settlement houses. Some of the migrants who had arrived in the U.S. intending to stay used settlement houses for their benefit, but without getting into the settlement house spirit. Jewish boys from Eastern Europe, for example, applied the musical education they got at Hull House not, as was intended, to entertaining at civic meetings, much less church picnics, but to play at dance halls and saloons, which did not rank among

Addams's favorite places.<sup>515</sup> Other migrants simply distrusted residents, even those who seemed relatively free of prejudice, seeing them as outsiders in the community. As one migrant put it, "No one but a member of our own race can really understand us."<sup>516</sup> Rather than getting help at settlement houses, migrants sometimes turned to ward bosses, who felt that "their parties have been doing for years the sort of thing the settlement is doing, only we have done it more democratically."<sup>517</sup> And most migrant men preferred saloons to settlement houses, which tended to draw more women and children. According to one male migrant, settlements were good only for "an occasional shower."<sup>518</sup> None of that sat well with settlement workers, who considered ward bosses corrupt and had little love for saloons. Taylor writes of "the baneful influence of those who politically control the immigrants' livelihood," and in the *Handbook*, the University of Chicago Settlement laments that the saloon is "the political as well as the social center, and the saloon keeper, with the ward politician, is too often the only interpreter of American institutions."<sup>519</sup>

But if settlement workers could never fully bridge the gap between themselves and migrants then it is also the case that settlement workers were willing to deal with migrants in a way and to an extent that few other members of the middle and upper classes were. New migrants needed native-born allies who

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<sup>515</sup> Rauchway, *Murdering McKinley*, 135.

<sup>516</sup> John Daniels, *America via the Neighborhood* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1920), 222.

<sup>517</sup> Daniels, *Neighborhood*, 223.

<sup>518</sup> Davis, *Spearheads*, 88.

<sup>519</sup> Taylor, *Social Frontiers*, 195; Woods and Kennedy, *Handbook*, 70.

could speak for them in a way that migrants could not. By living in their own spaces rather than moving into tenements, residents were open and honest about the fact they were trying to help neighbors, not pretending to be just like them.<sup>520</sup> And residents' hearts were in the right place: they were disturbed — as many of their contemporaries were not, or at least not enough to take action — by urban poverty and wretchedness and by the difficulties that migrants faced.

In trying to understand people very different from themselves, residents constructed migrants based partly on the latter's needs and partly on residents' ideas about what migrants were or should have been. Consciously or not — willingly or not — residents thus imposed their own values (the only ones they knew) on those they sought to aid. In reciprocal fashion, migrants, being in an unfamiliar country, had to construct new identities for themselves based partly on their former identities and partly on what native-born Americans expected of them or what the migrants thought that native-born Americans expected. Yet the comparison is asymmetrical: the residents, much more than the migrants, were the ones with the power and the freedom — the power to give aid, the freedom to do or not do settlement work and to navigate a social world they felt at home in. The migrants had to accommodate themselves to the residents' ideas more than the residents did to the migrants'. Settlement workers gave migrants the space and the means to take part in the arts, for example, but, without necessarily intending it, ended up essentially using migrants in an effort to enhance the profiles and fund-raising capabilities of settlement houses.

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<sup>520</sup> Trolander, *Professionalism and Social Change*, 14, 15.

## CHAPTER 4

### SETTLEMENT HOUSES, MIGRANTS, AND THE ARTS

In both a local and a transatlantic sense, settlement houses were very much a part of the world of the arts in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Settlement houses held exhibits of paintings and handicrafts, put on concerts, and staged plays. Dramatists, entertainers, and others visited U.S. settlement houses from abroad, and American residents crossed the Atlantic to perform or to attend arts-related conferences. Migrants, meanwhile, were heavily involved in settlement arts, especially music and drama, though they were not free to do as they liked — residents, for a variety of reasons, exercised a considerable degree of control.

Settlement workers believed in the idea of “art in the settlement as a vehicle of moral education, promoting the growth of individual character through social interaction” and democratizing culture, not by allowing the members of the “vulgar majority” to decide what they liked but by giving them access to the “best which has been thought and known in the world,” as Lillian Wald, founder of the Henry Street Settlement, put it, echoing Matthew Arnold.<sup>521</sup> The foregone conclusions here were, first, that the middle class would decide what the “best” was and, second, that, once exposed to such cultural wonders, the “vulgar majority” would prefer them to, say, Charlie Chaplin.

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<sup>521</sup> Mina Carson, *Settlement Folk: Social Thought and the American Settlement Movement, 1885-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 117.

The arts, then, were a central activity of the settlement movement and had been from the start. At Toynbee Hall, the Barnetts created “the first permanent art gallery in an industrial quarter”; for Samuel Barnett, “pictures and an art gallery” symbolized “the full life.”<sup>522</sup> And the arts remained important in British settlements after Barnett’s death. The 1922 *Handbook of British Settlements* said the poor not only had few material possessions but also “starve[d] for lack of beautiful things. On the aesthetic side the Settlements have made a big contribution. A Settlement is often the only place in a neighbourhood where good music can be heard, good pictures are on view, good drama is performed. Orchestras and violin classes are common. It is scarcely possible to go to a Settlement without finding that folk dancing and eurythmics are taught. Several Settlements help to organise Arts and Crafts Exhibitions.” Newer art forms were welcome as well: the *Handbook* notes that “Oxford House has chosen to guide, rather than challenge, popular taste by establishing its own Cinematograph Theatre.”<sup>523</sup> At French settlement houses, meanwhile, neighbors could sing in choruses, play in orchestras, and watch films that, “carefully chosen, are gay, beautiful or instructive, never dangerous.” There was theater as well: “everybody helps in the production, becoming scene-painter, stage-hand, costumer, ticket-seller.”<sup>524</sup>

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<sup>522</sup> Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull-House with Autobiographical Notes* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1910), 371; University of Minnesota, Social Welfare History Archives, Box 207, Folder 131 — National Federation of Settlements Records.

<sup>523</sup> University of Illinois at Chicago University Library, Richard J. Daley Library Special Collections and University Archives, Hull House collection, Box 55, Folder 665.

<sup>524</sup> S. Chalvet, *Social Settlements in France* (Paris: Centre d’Informations Documentaires, 1936), 20.

In the U.S., the United Neighborhood Houses of New York devoted an entire committee to visual arts, as other committees dealt with issues such as health and unemployment. The UNH itself owned a collection of paintings and drawings that the Visual Arts Committee loaned to settlement houses. The committee also brought together “artists and craftsmen, administrators and amateurs involved in the art work of settlements, to discuss problems of teaching, the organization and administration of studios and shops, and ways of increasing local interest in the fine and applied arts.” Besides encouraging retrospective exhibits at settlement houses, the committee arranged national showings of children’s drawings and yearly juried exhibits of “drawings, paintings, sculpture, pottery and other hand-work of children and adults attending settlements.”<sup>525</sup>

Individual settlements, too, participated in the arts. South End House in Boston and the Neighborhood Guild in New York sponsored art exhibits, and College Settlement in New York began offering music instruction in 1894. Greenwich House in New York staged pageants and plays from the start, including old Italian Christmas plays, modern Italian drama, and a children’s theater.<sup>526</sup> Noting the paucity of professional theater groups in Greenwich Village, Mary Simkhovitch, a founder of Greenwich House, wrote that it “has remained an almost solitary center for dramatic interest in the neighborhood.”<sup>527</sup> Simkhovitch was concerned in particular about children: “The more we saw of

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<sup>525</sup> UM/SWHA, Box 250, Folder 74A — United Neighborhood Houses of NYC Records.

<sup>526</sup> Carson, *Settlement Folk*, 116; Allen F. Davis, *Spearheads for Reform: The Social Settlements and the Progressive Movement 1890-1914* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1984), 49; Mary K. Simkhovitch, *Neighborhood: My Story of Greenwich House* (New York: Norton, 1938), 258-260.

the children's life at home and in school, the more we felt that drawing and painting and music and drama would be a constructive way of breaking up the daily routine."<sup>528</sup>

At the Henry Street Settlement in New York, meanwhile, young volunteers Alice and Irene Lewisohn bolstered the drama and dance programs and in 1914 created the Neighborhood Playhouse.<sup>529</sup> "In addition to the education incident to performing parts in good plays under cultured instructors, and the music, poetry, and dance of the festival classes," Wald wrote, "the playhouse offers training in the various arts and trades connected with stage production. Practically all the costumes, settings, and properties used in the settlement performances have been made in the classes and workshops."<sup>530</sup> The Neighborhood Playhouse, Mina Carson argues, "became the most impressive and renowned artistic contribution of the American settlement movement."<sup>531</sup>

The arts were important in settlement houses in the Midwest as well. Campbell House in Gary, Indiana, and the American Settlement in Indianapolis showed films. At the latter, screenings drew an audience of 4,484 in 1928-29; among a list of activities that also included sports and cooking, only the

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<sup>527</sup> Simkhovitch, *Neighborhood*, 259-260.

<sup>528</sup> Simkhovitch, *Neighborhood*, 250.

<sup>529</sup> Carson, *Settlement Folk*, 116.

<sup>530</sup> Lillian D. Wald, *The House on Henry Street*. 1915 (Reprint, New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1991), 185-186.

<sup>531</sup> Carson, *Settlement Folk*, 116.

playground was more popular than movies.<sup>532</sup>

In Chicago, nine of eighteen settlement houses surveyed in 1905 were involved in music in some way, whether through classes, concerts, or both.<sup>533</sup> That certainly included Hull House, which devoted a good deal of time and energy to the arts in general, not just music. Addams and Starr, its founders, saw the settlement “as a place of interior beauty and grace...teaching the arts and giving children the opportunity to participate in a variety of artistic activities.” For Addams, the value of art was “the escape it offers from dreary reality into the realm of the imagination.”<sup>534</sup>

The fight against “dreary reality” began right away. The settlement’s first building included the Butler Art Gallery, which starting in June 1891 exhibited works loaned by the Barnetts — another example of the transatlantic connections among settlement houses.<sup>535</sup> In the Butler gallery’s first two years, it hosted five art exhibits — “surprisingly well attended,” according to Addams — that included watercolors, oil paintings, etchings, and engravings. Visitors voted on which works they liked the best.<sup>536</sup>

Concerts were also among Hull House’s earliest programs, and music instruction was offered beginning in 1893. Hull House residents “believed that

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<sup>532</sup> Ruth Hutchinson Crocker, *Social Work and Social Order: The Settlement Movement in Two Industrial Cities, 1889-1930* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 128, 62.

<sup>533</sup> Derek Vaillant, *Sounds of Reform: Progressivism and Musical Activism in Chicago, 1873-1935* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 119.

<sup>534</sup> Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull-House*, 372.

<sup>535</sup> Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull-House*, 371; Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Jane Addams and the Dream of American Democracy* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 127.

<sup>536</sup> Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull-House*, 371.



wider access to high-quality music education for the immigrant, ethnic, and working poor, exposure to uplifting classical concert performances, and efforts to supply visitors with affordable alternatives to commercial musical amusements could dramatically enhance the welfare of the urban population and promote civic engagement.”<sup>537</sup> Though some students went on to careers in music, “there was no attempt to turn every student into a professional musician, but rather to allow those who loved music to find a way to express themselves through it,” Allen F. Davis writes.<sup>538</sup>

Bringing theater to Hull House proved a littler harder. “An organization devoted exclusively to dramatic work was a cherished plan of Miss Addams from the earliest days of Hull House,” wrote Laura Dainty Pelham, head of the Hull House Dramatic Association, and for good reason.<sup>539</sup> Addams recognized young people’s desire for entertainment, especially the kind that reflected their own experiences, but as far as she was concerned, theater and cinema “presented rapid and morally offensive dramas and spectacles,” and “repeated exposure to dance halls and vaudeville theaters incited children to vice, crime, and even mental illness.”<sup>540</sup> The solution, Addams believed, was participation in drama at settlement houses, which would serve not only as “an agent of recreation and education” but also “a vehicle of self-expression for the teeming young life all

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<sup>537</sup> Vaillant, *Sounds of Reform*, 94.

<sup>538</sup> Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull-House*, 376-378; Davis, *Spearheads*, 49.

<sup>539</sup> Laura Dainty Pelham, “The Story of the Hull House Players,” *The Drama: A Quarterly Review of Dramatic Literature* 22 (May 1916): 249.

<sup>540</sup> Carson, *Settlement Folk*, 113-114.

about us.”<sup>541</sup> She also held that “to improve one’s performance in a complex practice such as theater was to better one’s life.”<sup>542</sup> And cooperating on such projects could help build a sense of community.

For all Addams’s idealism and good intentions, however, she encountered resistance. Residents enjoyed attending plays, historian Stuart J. Hecht writes, but parents did not want their children participating, for fear that it would lead to careers in the theater — in the 1890s, “the reputation of actors and actresses suffered from traditional social prejudice.” Addams, however, was convinced of theater’s benefits: “A fine drama, one consistent with the workers’ lives and experience, would serve as a healthy standard for social conduct and moral behavior.”<sup>543</sup> She also saw theater as “connecting the lives of the people with the life of the world not only with that outside of their present environment but with historical events and achievements.”<sup>544</sup> Addams got her way, but only gradually, starting with dramatic readings in the drawing room in April 1890. Ellen Starr offered a class in Shakespeare starting in October 1890, and by 1892, Hull House had classes in Greek tragedy. In November 1893, the “Dramatic Section” of the Hull-House Students’ Association staged its first production. By that point, “acceptance and support for neighborhood participation in theatre was established.” Hull House clubs were soon regularly putting on plays, which were

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<sup>541</sup> Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull-House*, 387.

<sup>542</sup> Elshtain, *Jane Addams and the Dream of American Democracy*, 137.

<sup>543</sup> Stuart J. Hecht, “Social and Artistic Integration: The Emergence of Hull-House Theatre,” *Theatre Journal* 34, no. 2 (May 1982): 173.

<sup>544</sup> Jane Addams, “What the Theater at Hull House Has Done For the Neighborhood People,” *Charities VIII* (March 29, 1902): 284.

reviewed in the *Hull-House Bulletin*. The Hull-House Dramatic Association was formed in 1897 to select the best acting talent that Hull House had to offer.<sup>545</sup>

The Young People's Socialist League rented Hull House's theater for performances of plays in both English and Yiddish, but Hull House also hosted a number of amateur theater companies, the longest-lasting being the Hull-House Players (1897-1941) and the children's theater (1902-46), directed by Edith de Nancrede. In 1928, there were, besides the Hull House Players, six drama groups, with membership based on age, ranging from the Baby Group, for four- to eight-year-olds, to the Marionette Players, for twenty-four- to thirty-year-olds. Hull House's dramatic companies, made up of migrants and migrants' children, produced no professional actors, though some participants developed their skills to an almost professional level.<sup>546</sup>

Hull House was involved with the performing arts in another way as well, taking to film early in the life of the new medium: the *Hull-House Bulletin* of December 1897 mentions exhibitions, scheduled for late 1897 and early 1898, of the "Cinematographe," which the *Bulletin* describes as "a series of pictures showing figures actually moving on the canvass, [sic] such as cavalry charges, etc."<sup>547</sup> Full-fledged cinema, according to an article in the *Hull-House Year Book 1906-1907*, arrived at Hull House on June 1, 1907, with the opening of the "Moving Picture Show" (or "Five-Cent Theatre") but was discontinued "when the

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<sup>545</sup> Hecht, "Social and Artistic Integration," 174-175.

<sup>546</sup> Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull-House*, 390-391, 394; Elshtain, *Jane Addams and the Dream of American Democracy*, 285; Edith de Nancrede, "Dramatic Work at Hull House," *Neighborhood: A Settlement Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (January 1928): 24.

<sup>547</sup> UIC/HH, Box 43, Folder 427.

weather became excessively warm.” The films and the “lantern for moving pictures” — probably meaning the projector — had been donated to Hull House, and movies were shown daily from 3 to 10 p.m.; 3,000 invitations were sent to members of Hull House clubs, and “people attracted from the street” attended as well, so the room was filled every day. Films included “fairy stories” for children and “foreign scenes which filled our Italian and Greek neighbors with homely reminiscences.” The article laments that cinema “has become associated in the public mind with the lurid and unworthy.” But “our experience at Hull-House” indicates that eventually, movies will be used for “all purposes of entertainment and education, and that schools and churches will count the films as among their most valuable equipment.”<sup>548</sup>

Thus, in screening movies, control mattered, as with other aspects of settlement house life. Some settlement workers were alarmed by the fare being shown in cinemas, believing that it eroded “family values by attractively portraying youthful sexuality and rebellion.” Unable to get what they considered sufficient censorship of such movies, settlement workers showed their own, “morally acceptable” movies.<sup>549</sup> In that way, settlement houses’ attempt to control what films neighbors saw paralleled censorship boards’ attempt to control the content of films that the public saw.

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<sup>548</sup> UIC/HH, Box 43, Folder 430B.

<sup>549</sup> Mina Carson, *Settlement Folk: Social Thought and the American Settlement Movement, 1885-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 172.

## Transatlantic connections

Though important in a local sense, the arts also figured in the settlement movement's transatlantic connections. Settlement publications often reported on the transatlantic art scene, even in cases where no settlements were directly involved; such articles implicitly endorsed or advertised the events they described. The December 1930 *Preview and Review*, the "Dramatic Play Bulletin of the United Neighborhood Houses of New York," for example, includes an article on the "Olympiad of National Theatres in Moscow," consisting of "a thousand actors, ten film producing companies, conferences on dramatic technique, performances followed by criticism of the methods and results" and involving "theatres of fifteen nations." And the March 1932 *Preview and Review* announces works to be staged by the Russian Opera Foundation, a "non-profit making civic and artistic enterprise with the primary purpose of making a real contribution to the artistic life of New York and America."<sup>550</sup> Created in 1931, the foundation generated media attention and was described by newspapers in a variety of ways: "to aid the many unemployed Russian musicians in America," according to *The New York Sun*; or to give "America a repertory of Russian music drama in Russian and in the tradition and spirit of that country at popular prices," according to the *Chicago Tribune*.<sup>551</sup> *The Lewiston Daily Sun* reported that among those serving on the foundation's committee were "Her Imperial

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<sup>550</sup> UM/SWHA Box 184, Folder 54 — United Neighborhood Houses of New York City Records.

<sup>551</sup> "Operatic Ventures," *The New York Sun*, February 20, 1932; Joan King, "Russian Opera Stars Present 'Khovantchina': Huge Gotham Audiences Greet Musical Dramas at Popular Prices," *Chicago Tribune*, April 10, 1932.

Highness, the Grand Duchess Marie of Russia” and “Prince Alexis Obolensky.”<sup>552</sup>

The foundation was, then, very much a part of the transatlantic arts scene and was reported on by settlement houses.

Settlement houses were also involved in transatlantic arts in more direct ways. José Iturbi, the Spanish musician and conductor, performed at University Settlement in New York City in the winter of 1930-31, and in November 1932 he gave a concert for about eighty “musically talented children...under the auspices of the music division of the National Federation of Settlements and the New York Association of Music School Settlements.”<sup>553</sup>

Some of Hull House’s many transatlantic ties were discussed in Chapter 2, but Hull House took part in the transatlantic arts scene as well. An art exhibit in April 1896, for example, included paintings loaned by Svend Svendsen and John Vanderpoel. Svendsen, born in Nittedal, Norway, arrived in the U.S. in 1881 and settled in Chicago. He studied art in Norway and, in 1896, in Paris, and from 1895 to 1920 he exhibited often at the Chicago Art Institute, receiving a prize from the institute in 1895. John Vanderpoel was born Johannes van der Poel in the Haarlemmermeer, Netherlands, and moved with his family to Chicago in 1869. In 1886 he returned to Europe, studying in Paris for two years and spending summers in the Netherlands. Besides painting, he spent some three decades teaching at the Chicago Art Institute.<sup>554</sup>

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<sup>552</sup> “Serving on Russia Opera Foundation,” *The Lewiston Daily Sun*, June 16, 1931.

<sup>553</sup> UM/SWHA, Box 209, Folder 152; Box 210, Folder 159 — National Federation of Settlements Records.

<sup>554</sup> UIC/HH, Box 55, Folder 690; Fine Arts Collection web page of Luther College, [https://fac.luther.edu/search/index.php/Detail/Entity/Show/entity\\_id/21](https://fac.luther.edu/search/index.php/Detail/Entity/Show/entity_id/21), consulted August 6,

Hull House continued its relationship with migrant artists in later decades as well. In 1910, the settlement devoted an exhibit to the work of Carl Lindin. Born in Fellingsbro, Sweden, he arrived in Chicago in fall 1888 and eventually studied at the Chicago Art Institute but also made a number of trips to Europe to visit his native country and to study in Paris before again settling in Chicago. His work was shown on both sides of the Atlantic, including in the Paris Exposition of 1900; the 1910 Hull House exhibit was of work that Lindin had done in France and Sweden. It was, according to the *Hull-House Year Book 1910*, “attended by a large number of Chicago people interested in art.” The exact relationship, if any, of Svendsen, Vanderpoel, and Lindin to Hull House is unclear, but through their work, they did establish at least a virtual presence at the settlement and thus contributed to Hull House’s transatlantic connections.<sup>555</sup>

Hull House also hosted a number of visitors from Europe who were involved in the arts. In November 1900, for instance, there was “Entertainment for Italians” by Italian journalists “Sigs. Reiter and Galvani, consisting of songs, recitations and acrobatic feats.” They were Florentines, according to the *Hull-House Bulletin* of autumn 1900, and “talked about their tour of the world on a tandem and gave a musical and athletic entertainment.”<sup>556</sup>

In about 1902, “Mr. Yeats the Irish Poet” spoke at Hull House, as Pelham

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2015; *A Memorial Collection of Works by John H. Vanderpoel: Exhibited From February 1 to February 28, 1912, in the Art Institute of Chicago* (1912; reprint: Cornell University Library, 2009).

<sup>555</sup> Ernst W. Olson, Anders Schön and Martin J. Engberg, eds., *History of the Swedes of Illinois, Part I* (Chicago: The Engberg-Holmberg Publishing Co., 1908), 861-862; UIC/HH, Box 44, Folder 435.

<sup>556</sup> UIC/HH, Box 43, Folder 429

later recalled. “His talk mystified us greatly,” she wrote, without specifying what he said. A few years later, Addams entertained John Galsworthy, the English novelist and playwright, at Hull House. “He was apparently deeply interested in our work and gratified with our success in his play, and we were very proud and pleased with his approval,” Pelham wrote. Even more beneficial to Hull House actors was the four-week stay of the Irish Players — some of whose plays Hull House had already staged — in Chicago in 1912. Augusta Gregory, the Irish dramatist, met the Hull House Players, “said she had heard of us and...promised to come see us in some of her own plays,” which she did. In addition, “a very warm friendship sprang up between the Irish Players and the Hull House Players. We saw them in their entire repertory, and a study of their methods was a liberal education. We entertained them in various ways, and they seemed as interested and as pleased with us as we were with them.”

At the Irish Players’ urging, the Hull House Players took a European vacation, leaving June 28, 1912. It was, according to Pelham, “a wonderful voyage crowded with all the charm that invests a first trip to Europe.” No performances were planned, but at the request of “Her Excellency Lady Aberdeen, who had been with Miss Addams in Paris and there heard of our visit,” the company performed for about two hundred invited guests in Dublin, “and I am sure we never played better.” The Hull House Players also visited the Abbey Theatre, “professional home” of the Irish Players, who were in London at the time.<sup>557</sup> The Hull House Players’ European vacation also included five days in London, “two in

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<sup>557</sup> Pelham, “Hull House Players,” 250, 253, 255-258.



the Shakespeare country,” four in Paris, and four in the Netherlands.<sup>558</sup>

The European trip may have been just a vacation, but it resulted in valuable publicity. “The Players’ return to America met with acclaim and attention,” Hecht writes. “Articles appeared in the various Chicago newspapers, and *Theatre Magazine* published a profile of the group.”<sup>559</sup> In late 1912, the Chicago Theatre Society called the Hull House Players “an important factor in the dramatic life of the City” and, in announcing their performance at the Fine Arts Theatre, put the company in a transatlantic context: “The movement which has permeated Russia, Great Britain, and America during recent years in the direction of sincerity and simplicity in dramatic expression has found embodiment in various bands of local players, such as The Irish Players of Dublin, The Horniman Company of Manchester, England, The Scotch National Theatre Society, and, we are happy to add, The Hull House Players of Chicago.”<sup>560</sup> (“Local” here seems to mean local to Dublin, local to Manchester, and so on, not local to Chicago.)

The Hull House Players do not seem to have gone abroad again as a company, but they did retain a transatlantic outlook. A play program from 1931 announces that Galsworthy’s *The Roof* would be staged next — “the first production of this play in America.” A history of the Hull-House Players, written in 1941, apparently by house staff, notes every first U.S. performance of any play. Even if it was partly a matter of advertising — perhaps a hint to audiences that

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<sup>558</sup> UIC/HH, Box 44, Folder 437.

<sup>559</sup> Hecht, “Social and Artistic Integration,” 178.

<sup>560</sup> UIC/HH, Box 52, Folder 597.

they would see something “unamerican” and “exotic” — the fact that settlement workers were knowledgeable about which plays were being performed where indicates an interest in transatlantic arts.<sup>561</sup>

The Hull House Players’ trip had been more or less a lark, but the second (and, as it turned out, last) Anglo-American Music Education Conference, July 31 to August 7, 1931, in Lausanne — the first such conference had been in 1929 — offered a more serious and substantive reason for crossing the ocean. Despite its name, the conference drew attendees from not just the U.S. and England but also Australia, Canada, Egypt, France, New Zealand, Poland, Scotland, South Africa, Switzerland, Turkey, and Wales.<sup>562</sup>

Settlement house music was not originally part of the conference’s program, but that changed when, in April 1931, Rose Phelps, assistant director of the Music Division of the National Federation of Settlements, wrote Paul J. Weaver, a professor at Cornell and, as she understood, in charge of the conference’s program, asking whether there would be a section on settlement music at the conference and writing that “thousands of adults and children are exposed to music in nearly two hundred settlement houses throughout this country...In English settlements, however, music plays only a small part.” Weaver, in turn, got permission from the American executive committee to include settlement music “as a special section” and asked Frances McFarland, director of the Music Division of the National Federation of Settlements, to lead

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<sup>561</sup> UIC/HH, Box 35, Folder 343.

<sup>562</sup> UM/SWHA, Box 209, Folder 152 — National Federation of Settlements Records.

the section. In a letter of May 18, 1931, McFarland accepted “with great pleasure” and asked that Hedi Katz (on whom more below), too, be invited, given that Katz was a “highly trained and accomplished musician” who “has built up the Music School of the Henry Street Settlement and has done an extraordinarily interesting piece of work there.”<sup>563</sup>

McFarland’s experiences at the conference were decidedly mixed. In theory, at least, the conference seemed receptive to the topic of settlement music, which, according to the program, “has great interest for those engaged in musical work in the large cities. It is at present less developed in the British Empire than in the United States, and many British Members may feel that this group offers them an opportunity of obtaining some valuable information and advice.”

McFarland found the reality somewhat different, however. “There was much dissatisfaction among the Americans because they were ignored in sessions and out by the English,” she later wrote. She also complained of the “utter lack of knowledge or interest on the part of the English in Settlement music.” Nor were ignorance and indifference even the worse of it. When she related the history of settlement music to Frank Eames, secretary of the Incorporated Society of Musicians of England, his response was, “Very interesting, but I’m too old at the game to believe that such things can be permanent. I admire your zeal and think you charming, and so — let’s have a drink and forget the impossible!” Eames’s patronizing and condescending answer shows that at the conference, the U.S. settlement workers were quasi-migrants and were on the receiving end of the

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<sup>563</sup> UM/SWHA, Box 209, Folder 152 — National Federation of Settlements Records.

attitude that they sometimes dished out to migrants back home.<sup>564</sup>

The conference still proved of some value to U.S. settlement workers, however. For one thing, it offered McFarland a chance to at least try to educate attendees about the U.S. settlement movement in general and settlement music in particular. She did so through an “address,” submitted in written form but not delivered as a speech, that reviewed the movement’s ideals and history. More important, however, were the connections that McFarland made at the conference. She and a Swiss representative discussed Zurich’s program of “music for the poor,” and the Swiss was interested to hear about settlement music: “He is sending us the part of his address about the Zurich Municipal school and I gave him all our literature,” McFarland wrote. Of still greater interest to her was a roundtable discussion of England’s Rural Music School movement, founded in 1929 by Mary Ibberson, who directed the Hertfordshire Rural Music School. “I was struck by the similarity to our work and the ideals which were identical,” McFarland wrote. The reason, she realized, was that Ibberson “got the ideas and vision for her work from reading a report of a settlement music school in New York City.” McFarland, in turn, “gave a short history of our work” and discussed the similarities between the “Rural Music School movement in England and the Settlement Music Schools in the crowded districts of the great cities in the United States. The difficulty in both cases of getting first class music education at a price within the means of poor people, the necessity of especial study on the part of the teacher of the specific problems and the willingness on the part of the teacher to

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<sup>564</sup> UM/SWHA, Box 209, Folder 152 — National Federation of Settlements Records.

give of their best for moderate compensation.” Transatlantic settlement influence thus ran in both directions: just as Toynbee Hall helped inspire the U.S. settlement movement, so U.S. settlements’ music programs inspired the Rural Music Schools in England.<sup>565</sup>

On the whole, McFarland deemed the conference “unsatisfactory educationally” but still felt that the American presence was worthwhile as a possible step toward a transnational settlement music organization and because of the personal contacts she made.<sup>566</sup>

### **Migrants and the arts**

Closer to home, meanwhile, settlement arts activities continued, and migrants’ participation was an essential element. To some extent, migrants, within and outside the settlement movement, even helped shape settlement arts programs. Settlement houses fostered connections between migrants and theater, for example. At Henry Street, Wald claimed Yiddish playwright Jacob Gordin for “one of our early friends” and praised the quality of the acting in Yiddish plays — including *The Jewish King Lear* and *God, Man, and the Devil* (based on Goethe’s *Faust*), both by Gordin — staged at the settlement. “The fame of some of the performers has now gone far beyond the neighborhood and the city,” Wald wrote. “The drama is taken seriously in our neighborhood, particularly among the people whose taste has not been affected by familiarity with plays or theaters

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<sup>565</sup> UM/SWHA, Box 209, Folder 152 — National Federation of Settlements Records.

<sup>566</sup> UM/SWHA, Box 209, Folder 152 — National Federation of Settlements Records.

classed as typically ‘American.’”<sup>567</sup>

Meanwhile, Leonard Covello, who was Italian by birth, occasionally took time off from disparaging Italian migrants (see Chapter 3) to work with them. According to the November 1929 *Preview and Review*, Covello had “trained a group of young people to give Italian plays in the Italian language. The members are of Italian parentage but are anxious to perfect themselves in speaking. They give the plays for the purpose of improving both accent and fluency of speech. Mr. Covello is willing to give a bill of plays at any house which desires to have such an evening’s program.”<sup>568</sup>

Other migrants were much more directly involved in settlement arts, including at some of the most prominent settlement houses. Among the most important such figures was John Grolle, who also called himself, and is referred to in various sources as, Johan or Johann. Born in the Netherlands, he studied at the Amsterdam Conservatory, migrated to the U.S. in the 1890s, and played violin for the Philadelphia Orchestra. After Philadelphia’s Settlement Music School (still in existence) was “established in 1908 to bring immigrant children the benefits of music,” Grolle became its first director, remaining in the job until 1949 except for a brief interval in the twenties.<sup>569</sup> In 1922, Grolle, while remaining head of Settlement Music, was also appointed to lead the Music

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<sup>567</sup> Lillian D. Wald, *The House on Henry Street* (1915; reprint, New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1991), 270-271.

<sup>568</sup> UM/SWHA, Box 253, Folder L1:5 — United Neighborhood Houses of NYC Records.

<sup>569</sup> Hans Krabbendam, *The Model Man: A Life of Edward William Bok, 1863-1930* (Amsterdam: Rodopi Bv Editions, 2001), 120; Robert F. Egan, *Music and the Arts in the Community: The Community Music School in America* (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1989), 103, 157-58.

Division of the National Federation of Settlements.<sup>570</sup>

If his musical training qualified him for his professional posts, then his idealism let him fit well into the settlement world. A 1921 article refers to his “work in the Italian and Jewish sections of Philadelphia, among the highly talented children of poor people.”<sup>571</sup> And in a paper that Grolle read at the National Conference of Social Work in Boston in 1930 and that was reprinted in *Neighborhood*, he discusses music’s ability to make productive citizens out of children who seemed headed for lives of crime.<sup>572</sup>

Not everyone liked Grolle. Carl Flesch, a Hungarian-born violinist who knew and was influenced by Grolle, called the Settlement School a “kind of people’s conservatoire” and Grolle himself “an honest idealist and indeed something of a Utopian” as well as “a socialist with rather confused ideals, aiming at humanity’s redemption through art.”<sup>573</sup> But Robert F. Egan, a modern historian, argues that the fact that Grolle was a migrant “made him compassionate and understanding of the children in the area.”<sup>574</sup> Egan also calls Grolle a “highly respected as a musician, teacher, and philanthropist” as well as “a man of great musical talent, strong initiative and determination” and “an outstanding diplomat” who took on “enormous responsibility...throughout his

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<sup>570</sup> Egan, *Music and the Arts in the Community*, 157.

<sup>571</sup> “How Would You Answer These Self-Searching Questions?,” *The Etude* XXXIX, no. 5 (January 1921): 10.

<sup>572</sup> Johan Grolle, “Music in Case Work,” *Neighborhood: A Settlement Quarterly* 5, no. 1 (March 1932): 11-17.

<sup>573</sup> Carl Flesch, *The Memoirs of Carl Flesch*, translated by Hans Keller and edited by Hans Keller and C.F. Flesch (New York: Da Capo Press, 1979), 332, 351.

<sup>574</sup> Egan, *Music and the Arts in the Community*, 101.

life” and “earned the respect of administrators and faculty members of community music schools and music departments, who followed his lead quite willingly.”<sup>575</sup>

Another migrant who wielded influence in settlement arts was Hedi Korngold Katz, who accompanied Frances McFarland to the Anglo-American Music Education Conference. Born in Budapest about 1890, Katz graduated from the Royal Academy of Music in Vienna, studied in London and Berlin and was first violinist with the symphony orchestra at The Hague from 1919 to 1923. In 1927, she founded the music school at the Henry Street Settlement. The violin-making workshop at the Henry Street music school was inspired by the people Katz saw on the streets of Vienna, “taking note of their anæmic bodies and starved minds (for there was little food and no beauty in that vicinity)”; and “it occurred to her that such people needed to learn a handicraft; something which would not only be a means of support, but an activity entailing the pleasure of creating.” The language recalls that used by U.S. settlement workers lamenting both material and aesthetic poverty. The violin workshop had a further transatlantic connection in the person of instructor Fred Markert, “who studied at the famous Mittenwald School in Bavaria.”<sup>576</sup>

## Hull House

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<sup>575</sup> Egan, *Music and the Arts in the Community*, 101, 157.

<sup>576</sup> Catherine Parsons Smith, *William Grant Still: A Study in Contradictions* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 179; UM/SWHA, Box 46, Folder 7 — Henry Street Settlement Records.



At Hull House, too, migrants had a say in the arts, among them Ivan Lazareff and Maria Astrova. Lazareff was born in Saratoff, Russia, in 1877 and first performed in the U.S. with the Moscow Players. In 1926, he and Astrova married and moved to Chicago, where they founded the Chicago Art Theatre. Both also taught at the Chicago School of the Theatre, and in addition, Lazareff was a member of the Moscow Art Theatre for twenty years. Lazareff and Astrova apparently had a relationship of some kind with Hull House, Addams, or both, as Addams spoke at Lazareff's memorial service in late October 1929. Astrova, at Addams's invitation, then created the Lazareff Theater Group at Hull House. There, Astrova directed at least four plays, including the Chicago Art Theatre's staging of the *The Protegee* at Hull House on October 25, 1930, preceded by Addams's appreciation of Lazareff on the one-year anniversary of his death.<sup>577</sup>

Hull House also benefited from the talents of Vincenzo Celli, born in Salerno on May 4, 1900. When he was 1, his family moved to Chicago, where he grew up. At 14, he was inspired to become a performer by watching Nijinsky dance with the Ballet Russes. Learning that Hull House "had a theater for aspiring young actors," Celli "knocked on the door and was soon on the stage," performing in *The Enchanted Swans* and *The Mask of the Seasons*. Moving to New York in 1918, he joined the Washington Square Players, taking on- and off-Broadway parts, but in 1920 returned to Italy and for six years studied under

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<sup>577</sup> UIC/HH, Box 36A, Folder 357; Box 36A, Folder 360; Box 43, Folder 425; Mel Gordon, *Stanislavsky in America: An Actor's Workbook* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 84-85; "Ivan Lazareff of Chicago Art Theater Dies," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 28, 1929; "Ivan Lazareff Dies at 52," *The New York Times*, October 28, 1929; Interview with Madame Lazareff, by Ben Chase, Nov. 19, 1936, WPA (ILL.) PROJ. 30275; II A 3 d (1) IV; Foreign Language Press Survey website, [http://flps.newberry.org/article/5423967\\_2\\_1200/](http://flps.newberry.org/article/5423967_2_1200/), consulted October 6, 2015.

ballet master Enrico Cecchetti, “who had taught Nijinsky and Anna Pavlova. His success in Europe was immediate, and within a year, he was appearing in a production to music by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov.” He debuted at La Scala in 1926 in *Petrouchka* and in 1929 became La Scala’s top dancer and ballet master, holding the latter post for 12 years. Also in 1929, he returned to Hull House to help with classes, perform, and take part in a fund raiser for renovating Hull House’s theater. A Hull House play program that calls Celli “an old member of the Marionette Players” and the “premier danseur of the Scala, Milan,” thanks Celli for his contributions.<sup>578</sup>

Migrants at Hull House also contributed to the creation of plays. Hilda Polacheck, discussed in Chapter 3, had been interested in writing, and, with Addams’s encouragement, in 1911 dramatized *The Walking Delegate*, a novel dealing with corruption in the labor movement and written by Leroy Scott, a resident of Hull House.<sup>579</sup> It was, Polacheck recalled in her memoirs, “a perfect setup”: “A book written by a resident; dramatized by a student of Hull-House; and performed by its own actors,” the Hull-House Players. “It was the first time that such an event had taken place. I do not know whether it was ever repeated.”<sup>580</sup> Polacheck “had no illusions that the play would have any

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<sup>578</sup> Kenan Helse, “Vincenzo Celli, 87, choreographer,” *Chicago Tribune*, March 5, 1988; “Vincenzo Celli, 87, A Dancer, Teacher And Choreographer,” *The New York Times*, March 1, 1988; Peggy Glowacki and Julia Hendry, *Hull-House* (Chicago: Arcadia Publishing, 2004), 73; UIC/HH, Box 36A, Folder 358.

<sup>579</sup> Hilda Satt Polacheck, *I Came a Stranger: The Story of a Hull-House Girl*, ed. Dena J. Polacheck Epstein (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 111, 118.

<sup>580</sup> Polacheck, *Stranger*, 119.

commercial value,” but it was a “labor of love.”<sup>581</sup> After she turned the play in to Addams, Pelham read it repeatedly and said it had “merit” but had Polacheck rewrite some scenes. Polacheck was pleased with herself at not objecting to the rewrites, believing that Pelham “knew all about producing a play and I knew nothing.”<sup>582</sup> Writing some years later, Pelham damned with faint praise and in general was far less charitable to Polacheck (not even naming her) than Polacheck had been to her: “A young Jewish girl of the neighborhood, who was making rather ineffective attempts at play writing, at my request dramatized Leroy Scott’s stirring labor story, *The Walking Delegate*. We presented this, after many alterations and much hard work, with great success. Naturally the play lacked the symmetry and finish an older dramatist might have given it, but it was a ‘thriller’ after all, and we who live in the stir and stress of the labor movement found it, as one critic said, ‘uncanny in its realism.’”<sup>583</sup> The contrast between the two accounts of the episode — the migrant ready to please, the settlement worker all too happy to accept the migrant’s labor but looking down on her — shows clearly the gap between migrants and residents discussed in Chapter 3.

Hull House’s music program involved migrants as well. Before becoming head of Hull House’s music school, Eleanor Smith studied music in Berlin for three years, during which time she discussed “with my musical friends the plan of founding a music-school which should give an all-round training...I had many valuable suggestions from wise and learned friends, and one of these was Miss

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<sup>581</sup> Polacheck, *Stranger*, 119, 121.

<sup>582</sup> Polacheck, *Stranger*, 121.

<sup>583</sup> Laura Dainty Pelham, “The Story of the Hull House Players,” 254.

Amalie Hannig, a teacher of piano at the Klindworth Conservatory.” Back in Chicago in 1892, Smith was immediately “drawn into the work at Hull House.” Hannig arrived in Chicago the same year and taught music at Hull House “until, in the fall of 1898, by the generosity of Miss Mary Rozet Smith, one of the trustees of Hull House, we were able to inaugurate a small school,” which had “grown apace.”<sup>584</sup> Hannig also taught classes in needlework and advanced embroidery at Hull House.<sup>585</sup>

Soon after the music school was established, Addams asked William L. Tomlins to organize choruses. Tomlins, “a prominent figure in Chicago’s cultivated music circles,” had been born in London in 1844, trained professionally, arrived in the U.S. in 1870 and strove for “musical progressive outreach” in the Midwest, trying to bring music to children and the poor. Accepting Addams’s invitation, Tomlins helped put on successful children’s concerts at Hull House in May 1895 and June 1897. Also, “Tomlins’s celebrity attracted philanthropic support to Hull House’s music program and lent credibility to the outreach going on there.”<sup>586</sup> Tomlins attracted transatlantic as well as national attention: in a letter in the May 1896 issue of *The Cosmopolitan*, Annette H. Schepel, assistant superintendent of the Froebel Kindergarten Association in Germany, wrote that a children’s concert organized by Tomlins was “one of my sweetest recollections of my stay in Chicago” in 1893. She hoped

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<sup>584</sup> “An Interview with Eleanor Smith,” *The Journal of School Music* 1, no. 4 (January 1909): 112-114.

<sup>585</sup> UIC/HH, Box 43, Folder 425; Box 55, Folder 690.

<sup>586</sup> Vaillant, *Sounds of Reform*, 110-112.

that Tomlins would visit Europe “and show us his wonderful system of developing the musical feeling in children.”<sup>587</sup>

### **Migrants, residents, and issues of control**

Still, settlement arts, like the U.S. settlement movement in general, was dominated by the native-born middle class, and working-class migrants who took part had little, if any, influence. Historian Derek Vaillant has written about “assistance in exchange for control” in describing the relationship between Hull House residents and music pupils, but the idea applies to the whole U.S. settlement movement and its arts programs in general, not just music.<sup>588</sup> Settlement houses gave migrants the facilities, opportunity, and equipment for creative expression. But because residents provided and thus controlled that space, migrants could not simply do with it whatever they wished, as they could in ethnic theater. Instead, migrants became the objects of residents’ scrutiny and control. This was not, as Howard Jacob Karger argues in *The Sentinels of Order*, a matter of social control — keeping the poor (in this case migrants) in their place so they would not rebel. Rather, it was settlement control: residents exerted control over migrants to further the aims of the settlement houses, including using the migrants’ creative “work” to try to draw audiences, attention, and donations; preserve migrants’ native cultures; emphasize migrants’ contribution to society; and create harmony among different ethnic groups.

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<sup>587</sup> UIC/HH, Box 52, Folder 587.

<sup>588</sup> Vaillant, *Sounds of Reform*, 115.

Controlling migrants meant, first, understanding them, at least to whatever extent residents could. As discussed in Chapter 2, then, migrants became, for residents, objects of inquiry and scrutiny — examples at Hull House alone include *Hull-House Maps and Papers* (1895), the Labor Museum, and the study of Greeks undertaken in 1908 — and the habit of studying migrants carried over to the arts as well. Settlement workers were apparently fascinated by migrants' ethnicity and missed no chance to classify, to categorize, to record migrants' participation in settlement arts, sometimes assuming in the process the kind of condescension that residents showed toward migrants in other contexts, as discussed in Chapter 2. Settlement houses thus helped reify and perpetuate the “racial” categories that the wave of migration of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries helped bring into being.

Apparently as part of its study of all things “foreign,” settlement houses made lists of ethnicities — of people, of plays, of groups. The director's annual report for the music school at the Henry Street Settlement listed, for the 1939-40 season, 26 nationalities, “according to father's country of origin.” The greatest numbers were from Russia and the U.S., with smaller numbers from countries all over Europe and from South America and Palestine.<sup>589</sup> The report is unusual in settlement literature in putting native-born Americans and migrants on the same list.

More typical are the many lists compiled by Hull House. According to the history of the Hull-House Players mentioned above, the 225 men, 90 women and

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<sup>589</sup> UM/SWHA, Box 46, Folder 7 — Henry Street Settlement Records.

five children who had been members of the company since 1898 represented 17 nationalities.<sup>590</sup> Hull House's drama groups believed that "mixed nationalities are best," so while the settlement social organizations tended to be "all Italian or all Jewish or all Mexican...all of the dramatic clubs are mixed, boasting as many as nine different nationalities."<sup>591</sup> The national origins of the plays performed are also carefully specified: 55, for example, by "American" authors (probably meaning native-born), three by Greek authors, two by Swedish authors, and one each by French, Russian, and Bohemian authors. The Hull-House Players themselves, the document says, translated those plays into English, though whether migrants did the translating is impossible to say. But the clearest indication of the document's concern with ethnicity is the breakdown by country of origin of all the Players' members, past and present, who had been born abroad as well as children of migrants. In the case of three nationalities, the list distinguishes between birth and descent: thus, five "Irish born" and 145 of Irish descent — or, as the word is consistently spelled in the list, "decent" (implying that some migrants were indecent?); one "German born" and eighty-five of German descent; three "Swedish born" and two of Swedish descent. Those of Irish and German descent dominate the list — no other group even comes close: twenty Italians, for example, along with fifteen Greeks, five Poles, five Bohemians, and so on. In other words, the vast majority of those listed were not migrants at all but native-born people whose ancestors happened to belong to

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<sup>590</sup> UIC/HH, Box 35, Folder 343.

<sup>591</sup> Edith de Nancrede, "Dramatic Work at Hull House," *Neighborhood: A Settlement Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (January 1928): 26.

certain ethnic groups but who, in this list, are nonetheless lumped in with migrants (as well as three “Negro” members).<sup>592</sup>

Hull House also kept track of “foreign plays” staged at the settlement, listing them by language and with comments in its year books. Thus, there were “half a dozen” Russian plays each winter, most dealing with the Russian revolution but also Russian translations of German plays. Lettish plays were “similar in character to those given in Russian, although the Lettish societies exhibit unusual dramatic ability and freedom of expression. The national costumes which they wear upon the stage afford beautiful examples of peasant embroidery and charm of color.” There were “several Yiddish plays” each winter, always well-attended, and “four Lithuanian, one Hungarian and two Bohemian plays” in the winter of 1909-10.<sup>593</sup>

In similar fashion, the *Hull-House Year Book 1921* lists, in alphabetical order, twenty-one “Foreign Dramatic Groups” that used Hull House’s theater, including the Hebrew Dramatic League, Irish Students’ League, Italian Socialist Branch, Roma Liberty Club, Vappas Theatrical Troupe, and Vittoria Alfieri Club. The article also notes that the offerings included “one act, three act, comedy, tragedy, ancient, modern,” that some of the works were by “well-known dramatists” while others were written by the group members themselves, and that most of the performances were “given in foreign languages, and draw their corresponding nationalistic audiences.” Some of the plays, according to the article, were given as benefits, such as an Italian group’s performance “in the

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<sup>592</sup> UIC/HH, Box 35, Folder 343.

<sup>593</sup> UIC/HH, Box 44, Folder 435.



interest of a wounded soldier. Armenian groups have in this way raised small sums for a church, a hospital, and for the care of children in Cilicia” — further examples of the types of transatlantic connection mentioned in Chapter 2.<sup>594</sup>

The *Hull-House Year Book 1921* also notes that among the music groups that held “occasional rehearsals or concerts” at the settlement were “the International Association of Arts, Burte Singing Society, Bellini Philharmonica Orchestra, Russian Singing Society, Scalzetti’s Orchestra, National Operatic Society. Several of the Russian and Lithuanian societies have made particular effort to give expression to the best of music and to their own best local musicians.”<sup>595</sup>

Hull House was not the only settlement that seemed fascinated by the ethnicities of its actors. The November 1933 *Preview and Review* lists details of a number of houses’ dramatic companies, and nationalities are specified first. Kingsley House in New Orleans offers terse, broad descriptions — “the club consists mostly of Irish Americans” — while Roxbury Neighborhood House in Boston distinguishes between first and subsequent generations: “Irish born, Scotch born, German descent, English born, French Canadian first generation.” The Deaconess Home and Settlement in Philadelphia lists nationalities of the actors for each play (“American and Portuguese,” “colored,” “American and Jewish” and so on). And Cambridge Neighborhood House in Massachusetts goes even further: “Dialect acts: young Italian-American, an evening law student,

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<sup>594</sup> UIC/HH, Box 44, Folder 438.

<sup>595</sup> UIC/HH, Box 44, Folder 438.

knowing excellent English, gave charming and sympathetic Italian dialect sketch. Young Lithuanian (the talented president of the Dramatic Association) gave fragmentary character acts using the dialect of the first generation Lithuanian.”<sup>596</sup> Though second-generation migrants may sometimes make fun of first-generation migrants using dialect jokes and other types of humor, it was, and is, unusual for first-generation migrants to make fun of themselves that way. The Italian and Lithuanian at Cambridge may have been playing to settlement workers’ expectations of ethnic humor — an acknowledgement of the degree of control that residents exerted over migrants in settlement houses. A possible analogy is to African-Americans who participated in minstrel shows, publicly degrading themselves based on what white audiences wanted to see.

Putting migrants’ work on display offered another opportunity to classify and categorize. In the early 1930s, an art exhibit of work by children, apparently arranged by the United Neighborhood Houses of New York City, was held in New York for visiting Soviet children. A typescript of the catalog for the exhibit gives each artist’s name, the title of the work, the name of the settlement house, and, in many cases, the child’s ethnicity and even religion: “Irish Descent,” “Russian Descent,” “Spanish Descent,” “Albanian Descent and Mohammedan Faith,” for example. But such information is not confined to migrants: a 12-year-old girl, for example, is identified as “American-Jewish”; a 12-year-old boy is “American-Polish”; a 12-year-old girl is “American Negro”; the identifying information for a 9-year-old boy reads “Parents: Mohammedan and Jewish” — itself striking, given

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<sup>596</sup> UM/SWHA, Box 207, Folder 128 — National Federation of Settlements Records.

the comparative rarity of interfaith marriages at the time — and for an 11-year-old boy, it reads “Parents are Egyptian-Jewish,” probably meaning that those children were native-born. Children born abroad are lumped in not just with the native-born children of migrants but also with Jews and African-Americans. In some cases, the child’s ethnicity is unspecified, perhaps because it was unknown or because those children were native-born Protestants of British or Scandinavian descent — the “norm” or “default” ethnicity, making ethnic specification superfluous. Why Soviet children who had probably never heard of a settlement house in the first place — an essay accompanying the catalog explains the settlement movement — would care about the national origins of child artists is a mystery; what matters is settlement workers’ need to catalog those origins in the same way that the art itself was cataloged.<sup>597</sup>

In some cases, migrants themselves were, in effect, put on display, which also helped residents to study these exotic creatures from foreign lands. Houses including Henry Street, Greenwich House, and the Elizabeth Peabody House used “pageants and festivals to dramatize the heritage of each immigrant group.”<sup>598</sup> Hull House did so as well. In the “Christmas Entertainment” described by the *Year Book 1906-1907*, “the German children sang an early German carol around a Christmas tree; the French children carried a little creche through the streets carolling under windows; the Russian children, masqueraded as angels and devils, marched to an old Russian Christmas song; the Italian children sang

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<sup>597</sup> UM/SWHA, Box 7, Folder 2 — United Neighborhood Houses of New York City — Supplement 1.

<sup>598</sup> Davis, *Spearheads*, 49.

as choir boys; the Bohemians gave their fine old national carol, 'We Three Kings.' The domestic customs of the English and Swedish children which were acted with much spirit caused great merriment in the audience. The performance ended with a Syrian child telling how the first Christmas happened in his land."<sup>599</sup>

Something similar happened to adults. Dorothea Moist, music director of Kingsley House in Pittsburgh, reported in early 1934 that "we have been experimenting with some community singing since September with audiences of mixed Italians and Negroes...It was very interesting to hear the Negroes harmonizing in their own way the Italian songs which are almost entirely sung in unison by the Italians themselves." Here, as elsewhere in settlement literature, "Negroes" are lumped together with migrants, apparently as members of non-"white" "races," and the word "experiment" strongly suggests the ideas of study and of control, of having migrants take part in certain activities not necessarily because they wanted to but to satisfy residents' curiosity.<sup>600</sup>

Whatever residents hoped to gain by studying migrants, however, they emphasized the benefits to migrants provided by settlement arts programs. Plays had educational value, according to the *Hull-House Year Book 1916*, "not only in making the children more expressive, but in giving them decision and freedom in the use of English, which in the case of many of the children is not their native tongue."<sup>601</sup> But Hull House was also quite comfortable with migrants performing plays in all manner of other languages, as the *Hull-House Year Book 1906-1907*

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<sup>599</sup> UIC/HH, Box 43, Folder 430B.

<sup>600</sup> UM/SWHA, Box 210, Folder 161 — National Federation of Settlements Records.

<sup>601</sup> UIC/HH, Box 44, Folder 437.

notes: “Another use of the theatre lies in the opportunity it presents to the foreigners of the vicinity to present plays in their native tongues and to reveal to some extent life as it has presented itself to their own countrymen.”<sup>602</sup> Also, as Addams put it, migrants who participated in theater tried “to reproduce the past of their own nations through those immortal dramas which have escaped from the restraining bond of one country into the land of the universal” — that is, preserving migrants’ native cultures as part of offering them a creative outlet.<sup>603</sup> Those were functions of ethnic theater also, but in settlement houses, such plays were staged in space provided, and thus controlled, by residents. Hull House seems to have been trying to either complement or supplant ethnic theater.

In any case, migrants took up the offer, and not just at Hull House. Hiram House in Cleveland staged *Othello* in Italian in the winter of 1934-35, and “the audience was composed almost entirely of Italian people.”<sup>604</sup> At Hull House, meanwhile, Russians, Lithuanians, and Poles, among others, staged plays in Hull House in their own languages. Some plays were written by the migrants themselves and addressed their situation: a work by an Italian playwright, for example, “depicted the insolent break between Americanized sons and old country parents.”<sup>605</sup> That may have been a reference to plays by a “Signor Frederico Amato,” who lived in the Hull House neighborhood and whose play *The Son of the Immigrant* “embodied certain experiences which almost every

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<sup>602</sup> UIC/HH, Box 43, Folder 430B.

<sup>603</sup> Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull-House*, 388.

<sup>604</sup> Box 207, Folder 128 — National Federation of Settlements Records.

older immigrant has had in relation to his Americanized children,” according to the *Hull-House Year Book 1906-1907*, which also lists plays and songs put on by Italians.<sup>606</sup>

And not just the plays but also the programs were sometimes in languages other than English. In May 1916, Circolo Italiano staged *Nuvole o Fulmini?* (Clouds or Lightning?) and *Il Bugiardo* (The Liar), the latter by Carlo Goldoni (1707-1793) and the former by Giovanni Cavaleri, perhaps a Hull House neighbor. Accompanying the plays was a program in Italian and filled with ads in Italian and English, testifying to the popularity of foreign-language plays.<sup>607</sup>

Greeks, too, put on plays at Hull House. Both Sophocles’ *Ajax* (1903) and the *Return of Odysseus*, staged a few years before, were directed by Mabel Hay Barrows, and *Odysseus* was also “Arranged from Homer” by Barrows, who, if not a resident of Hull House, was certainly a member of the native-born middle class — her father was a congressman from Massachusetts. A flier for *Ajax* has the words “GREEK PLAY” at the top, even before the name of the play, while a program for *Odysseus* starts with the words “A GREEK PLAY” in the biggest type on the page and features “NATIVES OF GREECE” in the second-biggest type on the page. In both cases, the actors’ ethnicity is made very clear: “the Greeks of Chicago,” “Natives of Greece Living in Chicago.” As was the case with *Halsted Street* (below), migrants did the acting, and the native-born, whether settlement workers or not, were in charge. Based on the flier and the program, the main

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<sup>605</sup> Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull-House*, 389.

<sup>606</sup> UIC/HH, Box 43, Folder 430B.

<sup>607</sup> UIC/HH, Box 46A, Folder 479.

attraction of these plays seem to have been that they were Greek (in the case of *Ajax*) or based on a Greek text and were being staged by Greeks. That may have meant that the plays were being advertised as exotic spectacles or perhaps as being “authentically” Greek, giving audiences a supposed glimpse of actual ancient Greek culture.<sup>608</sup>

Addams gloried in the Greek plays, perhaps even more so than the Greeks themselves. Believing that their “history and classic background are completely ignored by Americans” and wanting to distinguish themselves from “the more ignorant immigrants from other parts of south-eastern Europe,” Addams wrote, Greeks put on plays in ancient Greek, including *Ajax* – a “genuine triumph to the actors who felt that they were ‘showing forth the glory of Greece’ to ‘ignorant Americans.’”<sup>609</sup>

The plays that Barrows directed, however, seem to have been in English, as the migrants’ own language was probably quite literally Greek to her. Addams may have been referring to Barrow’s production of *Return of Odysseus* when, in March 1902, she spoke of one of Hull House’s most successful plays being an

adaptation of a Greek play. The actors were drawn from the street vendors and tenement house population of the neighborhood. Those in charge of the production were greatly surprised to find that some of these seemingly ignorant people already knew the lines which were assigned to them, having studied the classics as a part of their early education in Greece. Three days after the parts were assigned the first rehearsal was held and every one was able to repeat his lines without mistake. The Greeks took great pride in the play which had a long run. After deducting the expenses for mounting the play, which were heavy, a clear profit of \$300 remained. This, it was suggested, should be divided, a part to go to

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<sup>608</sup> UIC/HH, Box 36A, Folder 356.

<sup>609</sup> Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull-House*, 388-389.

the Greek Church in the vicinity, and a part to Hull House. The players, however, would not agree to this, saying that they had been amply repaid by the opportunity, as they said, of “upholding the honor of Greece,” and insisted upon devoting the entire profits to Hull House.<sup>610</sup>

There is no reason to think that Addams was lying about the Greeks wanting all the play proceeds to go to Hull House, but the fact that she mentions the episode at all fits well with her portrayal of migrants showing their gratitude for being allowed to perform at Hull House, not for material gain but for expression of national character — and thus implicitly consenting, in return for the use of the space, to the kind of control exerted by residents (and other members of the native-born middle class) over migrants. The actors may have had other motives as well, however. If we can take Addams at her word regarding the play proceeds, then perhaps it was also the case that the actors really were “upholding the honor of Greece.” In that case, though, who was impugning Greece’s honor? Maybe the migrants themselves, by staging the performance, hoped to impress native-born audiences with their abilities and thus try to allay anti-migrant prejudice. If native-born audiences judged the migrants not just as actors but also as migrants — or, which amounts to the same thing, if the migrants believed that they were being judged that way — then the performance for them may well have been a matter of “honor,” not so much of Greece as of Greek migrants and perhaps migrants in general — something that Addams may not have fully understood. In that case, the gesture that the migrants made regarding the proceeds may have been part of the effort to appear “honorable.”

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<sup>610</sup> Jane Addams, “What the Theater at Hull House Has Done For the Neighborhood People,” *Charities* VIII, no. 11 (March 15, 1902): 285.



The arts also helped settlement workers emphasize migrants' contributions to U.S. society, even in cases where settlement houses were not directly involved. The January 1932 *Preview and Review* devotes space to a "Folk Festival" scheduled for January 31 and February 7, 1932, and to be held under the auspices of a "council representing twenty-four nationalities" at the Foreign Language Information Service. Indulging residents' obsession with ethnicity, the newsletter lists every nationality to be represented at the festival — twelve on the first day, thirteen on the second. "Each group will wear characteristic national costumes," the article says. "In addition to songs by nationality choruses and dances by nationality societies there will be an opportunity to see and hear characteristic musical instruments played by musicians in peasant costumes. This will provide not only the proper accompaniment for the songs and dances, but will add to the authenticity and educational value of the festival by giving one more touch of old-world village life. The wide variety of musical instruments, the kaleidoscopic colors of the costumes, and the constantly changing figures of the dances, from the sedate reel to the wild Krakowiak, all will go to make a most unusual picture." The "authenticity" was, of course, constructed — based on native-born ideas of migrants' native cultures and standing in roughly the same relation to reality as Greek migrants' performances of plays did to what ancient Athenians witnessed in amphitheaters. Also, festival attendees may have wondered why, if "old-world village life" was so fun, anyone had left it to toil in a faraway country. In any case, Disney could hardly have improved on the "unusual picture," yet it was apparently redeemed by serious purposes: "to give the people of New York an opportunity to enjoy the contributions of foreign-born groups to

the folk arts” and to offer migrants “fine and dignified opportunities for artistic expression.” The festival, in other words, was a chance to prove the value (or perhaps just the entertainment value) of migrants to mainstream U.S. society, but there was also the implication that migrants were tempted to indulge in, or already taking advantage of, “opportunities for artistic expression” that were neither fine nor dignified, whatever they might have been, and thus needed to be guided (controlled) in such endeavors by members of the native-born middle class. The festival was apparently not directly connected to the settlement movement, but the fact that it was reported on in a settlement publication and, more important, the way it was characterized indicate that such events were of interest to the movement and offer clues to how settlement workers saw migrants in relation to the arts.<sup>611</sup>

Hull House also wanted to show the value of migrants. A 1902 *Hull-House Bulletin* looks at an Italian orchestra’s first six months, during which time, led by “Maestro Guiseppe Vecchione,” who had played flute at the San Carlo theater in Naples, it gave six Sunday performances in the Hull-House Auditorium. The article identifies all the musicians by first initial and last name. Most members of the orchestra were “young Italian musicians who had never played in an orchestra, but in streets, saloons and at parties,” and their ability “to play very creditably, in full orchestra, classic Italian and German music, can not fail to spur them on to higher aspirations in their profession.” The performances, well attended by both Italians and Americans, “proved artistic successes,” according

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<sup>611</sup> UM/SWHA, Box 247, Folder 54 — United Neighborhood Houses of NYC Records.

to the *Bulletin*, which also gives the full program for the next concert and adds more luster to Vecchione's reputation by noting that he was to lecture on music history and on theoretical music "for the members of the orchestra and for the Italian musicians of Chicago, of whom there are many, and who have very little chance to acquire such knowledge elsewhere." The article also quotes from a *Chicago Evening Post* review of one of the orchestra's concerts that begins, "Chicago does not often hear a more interesting and characteristic concert than that given at Hull-House yesterday afternoon" and goes on to praise the musicians' "admirable spirit and understanding."<sup>612</sup>

The large amount of space that the *Bulletin* gave to the Italian orchestra and the abundance of faint praise — "play very creditably," "interesting and characteristic," "admirable spirit and understanding" — create the suspicion that both Hull House and the newspaper were bending over backward to find some way to praise migrants — to highlight their value — just because they were migrants, almost like adults encouraging children by praising them for effort rather than for achievement or success. The possibility that ethnicity mattered more than musical skill is also bolstered by the review's assertion that the pieces were "played with the fire and passion that only an Italian orchestra could put into them."<sup>613</sup>

Handicraft exhibits also showed what migrants could do and, by displaying their work for the general public, helped emphasize migrants' contributions. In an exhibit mounted in 1926, featuring 375 items from 45 houses

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<sup>612</sup> UIC/HH, Box 43, Folder 430.

<sup>613</sup> UIC/HH, Box 43, Folder 430.

in Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Minneapolis, New York, and Philadelphia, the emphasis was on ethnicity; the nationalities represented included Armenian, Bohemian, Italian, Mexican, Polish, Syrian, and Ukrainian. The “collection of drawings, modelings and handwork” was meant to “represent the work done throughout the country,” according to a *Boston Transcript* article. Most “of the decorative devices...spell the nationality” of the craftsmen, so “we find rubbing elbows Italian, Greek, Syrian and Armenian” motifs. “A beautiful rug of a very distinct style is by an elderly Scandinavian woman, who has clung to her native traditions of folk craft.”<sup>614</sup>

In another article, headlined “Beauty of Folk Art Revealed in Exhibit: Settlement Show Bares Wealth of Old Craft Instinct Among Foreign Born,” Italian needlework from the Eli Bates House is singled out for praise, and “the needle crafts seem to excel in the exhibition as a whole. In this field special effort was made to secure, in addition to the more familiar Italian work, examples of Bohemian, Greek, Syrian and Ukrainian craft.” The *Chicago Evening Post* also praises the Eli Bates needlework, along with “pottery from Hull House, much of it the work of a young Italian boy whose unusual talent has made him assistant director of this department at the settlement.”<sup>615</sup> An invitation to the exhibit notes that “Each day, women and children in colorful Old World National costumes will demonstrate the process in one of the crafts” — essentially an extension of what went on at the Hull House Labor Museum (see Chapter 3) and

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<sup>614</sup> Box 194, Folder 17 — National Federation of Settlements Records.

<sup>615</sup> *Chicago Evening Post*, March 3, 1926.

another instance of migrants being put on display.<sup>616</sup>

But this was much more than just an exhibit, according to the newspapers. “There is a general notion that the beautiful old objects so patiently produced by hand have no place in our modern civilization, except perhaps as curiosities,” one article argues. “But this is not true. The old crafts have much to contribute to life,” and the exhibit “brings into play once again the folk arts of the highly artistic foreign-born Americans before they have been completely crushed out by our factory age. It encourages the older women, and sometimes men as well, who are skilled craftsmen to carry on their crafts.” The *Evening Post* went further. In its review, headlined “The Undeveloped Asset in the Alien,” the newspaper wrote that the exhibit “will open the eyes of those who see it to an undeveloped asset in the alien. In this old world love of the beautiful, this inherited gift for form and color, begotten centuries ago and nurtured from family to family thru [sic] the succeeding years, lies a potential contribution to the enrichment of American life which we do ourselves injustice by neglecting...Here is imported gold. The settlements are seeking to mine it from this alien ore; to win for it the appreciation it deserves. It is well, while we are engaged in the attempt to rid ourselves of the undesirable alien element—the chronically criminal element—that we should be thus reminded of how much of what is good and fine and beautiful resides in the same soil, and give ourselves with no less energy to its cultivation.” Migrants, then, were not just romanticized — they could hardly hope to make a living in the U.S. without some participation in “our factory age” — but

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<sup>616</sup> UM/SWHA, Legal Box 2, Folder 11 — Albert Kennedy Papers.

objectified and dehumanized through language: “asset,” “gold,” “ore,” “soil.” The value of migrants to mainstream U.S. society was put in terms not of people but of what those people represented or could produce.<sup>617</sup> The article also, however, in a way, compliments European societies, portraying them as more mature and more refined — because older — than the U.S. and offering a rebuke to native-born Americans who, to their loss, ignore or fail to appreciate the “old world love of the beautiful.” Still, it is a paradox that the writer, in trying to tout migrants and their cultures, felt the need to both romanticize and dehumanize them.

Another reason that settlement workers used the arts was to promote harmony among different groups of migrants, though that was perhaps undermined by residents’ desire to study and categorize migrants by race, which emphasized divisions among them, at least in residents’ minds. Yet even Grolle, himself a migrant, talked of how music “brings various groups and families together; it makes racial cleavages less visible...It is an especially important element in the integration of a foreign neighborhood.”<sup>618</sup> The same idea was strongly espoused by the National Federation of Settlements, which in a 1931 report asserted that “all races, conditions, [and] ages of life meet in music in the settlements. Children bring songs taught them by foreign-born parents; adults of different nationalities that war with each other in Europe cheerfully sell tickets for each other’s concerts in the settlements, and unite in singing the folk songs of

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<sup>617</sup> *Chicago Evening Post*, March 3, 1926.

<sup>618</sup> David Rosenstein, “The National Federation of Settlements, 1917,” *School and Society* VI, no. 132 (July 7, 1917): 76.

all.”<sup>619</sup>

Frances McFarland, head of the NFS Music Division, shared that sentiment, lamenting that “there are racial groups that have never been assimilated into our American life, and that seem to have no desire to be become assimilated,” but she suggested music as a solution: “When the children are brought together and taught to sing the songs of the different nations — Jewish boys and girls singing the songs of Italy, and Italians singing the songs of Germany — a distinct approach to a mutual understanding has been achieved, a thing that will contribute not only to their happiness but *to the good of the commonwealth of which they are a part.*”<sup>620</sup>

And Martha Cruikshank Ramsey, director of the Cleveland Music School Settlement, believed in using music to help people “live together harmoniously even under the difficulties of an East side tenement...there is no stronger bond of fellowship and good will than singing in groups. Much of the charm of European villages is the result of the spontaneous indulging of group singing in work and play...Music has a special advantage...in helping the children to appreciate the contributions of the fatherland. We encourage them to bring in songs which their parents have taught them, these are bound together in a book and are decorated with designs typical of the country represented.”<sup>621</sup> Here the idealism and condescension clash, as the “spontaneous” singing calls to mind antebellum

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<sup>619</sup> UM/SWHA, Box 209, Folder 154 — National Federation of Settlements Records.

<sup>620</sup> UM/SWHA, Box 209, Folder 152 — National Federation of Settlements Records; emphasis in original.

<sup>621</sup> UM/SWHA, Box 209, Folder 152 — National Federation of Settlements Records.

Southern planters who thought their slaves sang in the fields because they were happy. In another context, Cruikshank argued for the importance of musical education for children by transcribing conversations with migrants “as nearly verbatim as memory will allow,” which meant in Italian- and (perhaps) Yiddish-accented English: “I hev’n’t got sixty-five cent. My husband don’t mekka hardly nothing...I have to esk dat maybe you vill wait a little before Sarah should start her piano lessons...my Sarah hes not looked goot to me since she vas in de hospital” — and so on.<sup>622</sup> Cruikshank apparently thought that a good way to persuade migrants to make sacrifices for their children’s future was mockery.

Condescension aside, settlement workers tried to put their high ideals into practice. In April 1921, the UNH held a Neighborhood House Review, featuring 200 actors representing 20 countries and drawn from 100,000 people enrolled in drama classes at 45 settlement houses. Newspaper articles noted migrants’ participation; “Twenty Nations on One Stage in Settlement Work Pageant,” a headline read. According to another article, “both children and grown-ups from Spain, Russia, Italy, Ireland and China will take part in the folk dances of those countries, which form an important part of the review.” The emphasis was on harmony, as one article noted: “In preparation for the neighborhood review, Russians, Poles, Czecho-Slovaks, Spanish, French, Germans, Scandinavians, Italians, Scotch, Dutch and English meet on an equal footing where Old World hostilities are forgotten.”<sup>623</sup>

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<sup>622</sup> Martha Cruikshank Ramsey, “Fiddles and Food,” *The Survey* LXIX, no. 9 (September 1933): 316.

<sup>623</sup> UM/SWHA, Box 253, Folder L1:1 — United Neighborhood Houses of NYC Records.



Hull House, of course, was not left out of such efforts. *Halsted Street*, a play written in what was apparently supposed to pass for verse and put on in May 1939 for Jane Addams Memorial Week (Addams died in May 1935), features migrants prominently, according to promotional materials: “While the connecting narratives and the outline of the play have been prepared by the Hull-House staff, the lively ‘acts’ and ‘dramatizations’ of the production have been worked out by the actors themselves — the Mexicans, Negroes, Greeks, and Italians of the Hull-House neighborhood.” The migrants, then, were under the direction — the control — of residents, considered competent enough for “‘acts and ‘dramatizations’” but, apparently, incapable of writing the narrative of the play. (Also, as elsewhere, “Negroes” — surely African-Americans born in the U.S., not natives of Africa — have been lumped in with migrants as an ethnic/racial other: not middle class, not of northern or western European ancestry.) The play mentions the “Tarantelle from Italy” and the “stately dances” of the Greeks, “a culture now so old / As to be proudly reckoned first / In all remembered things.” Mexicans, meanwhile, were a “proud people of a race of kings, / Who learned to dance in magnificent palaces, / Learned to paint in proud, bold colors on thick blocks / Of sculptured stone. We have weaved into America / Gay blankets and rich hangings.”<sup>624</sup>

The theme of *Halsted Street*, according to the promotional materials, was “democracy as it grows out of the understanding of one nationality group for another.” The play laments disunity among ethnic groups — “The melting pot has

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<sup>624</sup> UIC/HH, Box 35, Folder 355.

never melted” — and urges making common cause: “We must not bind ourselves to race or creed. / So long as, being Greek, we hate the Mexicans / Or being Mexican we hate Italians, / We cannot hope to win.”<sup>625</sup>

The arts thus served a variety of functions in settlement houses, including fostering and maintaining transatlantic connections. The arts also helped shape how residents and migrants interacted with each other. Migrants derived benefits from their participation in settlement arts: they offered a creative outlet — including space and equipment that migrants would probably have been hard-pressed to find elsewhere — and a respite from the routines of work, school, and home life. Settlement arts were also perhaps a chance for migrants to show their abilities to members of the native-born middle class. If nothing else, acting and making music were fun. There was a cost, however: by taking part in settlement arts, migrants allowed themselves to become subjects of study and control by residents, who seemed to see that control as just recompense for providing migrants with the chance for creative and nationalistic expression. Also, settlement arts programs were poised between the worlds of work and play. Settlement workers perhaps did not see it that way, associating the arts mainly with leisure rather than with work, something like the way that travel was, for the financially well-off, mainly a leisure pursuit, while other people traveled only for practical purposes, being unable to afford vacations. Though staging plays and putting on concerts were, on the one hand, enjoyable leisure-time activities, they also required a good deal of effort, especially to do well — effort that helped bring

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<sup>625</sup> UIC/HH, Box 35, Folder 355.

audiences, attention, and perhaps money to settlement houses, meaning that the migrants' performances benefited residents more than it did migrants. There was, after all, relatively little difference between putting migrants and their work on display in a labor museum (see Chapter 3) and putting migrants and their work on display in the context of the arts. The phrase "entertainment value," which historian Mary Ann Stankiewicz uses to describe the Hull House Labor Museum, can also apply to how settlement workers saw migrants, at least some of the time.

Arts programs lay at settlement houses' private/public boundary — such programs were part of settlement houses' public face, the part of settlement work that the general public saw and that residents wanted the public to see, as opposed to the aspects of settlement work that only residents and neighbors saw. Music and drama thus helped settlement houses sell their image, and by extension the value of all settlement work, to the public. And because arts programs helped shape public opinion about settlement houses, those programs needed to be carefully managed, meaning that the people who took part in them, including migrants, needed to be controlled. That did not make migrants slaves or puppets — they were willing participants. But they were also doing work under the management of the native-born middle class. The gap between migrants and residents discussed in Chapter 3 — a gap that could have kept residents from seeing migrants as fully human — may have eased whatever qualms residents felt about using migrants for what was, in a sense, unpaid labor. Thus, despite being a world away from (even if sometimes physically near) factories, sweatshops, and stockyards, settlement houses were, for migrants, not entirely free of

dehumanizing exploitation. That was probably not residents' conscious intention, but it was the result of their actions.

## CONCLUSION

I. The settlement house movement was one response, among many, to the poverty and class divisions created or exacerbated by mass migration, industrialization, and urbanization in the transatlantic world of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Though originating in Britain, the settlement movement gained global currency and fostered a transatlantic and even worldwide network of cooperation, correspondence, and visits. Some visitors, such as Alix Westerkamp, were residents observing settlement houses in other countries, but many other visitors had no direct connection with any settlement movement anywhere.

The basic idea of the settlement movement was that residents would live in working-class neighborhoods, creating facilities where neighbors — both the native-born and migrants, of which there were large numbers in some U.S. cities — could visit residents and, in theory, benefit from middle-class values. In practice, settlement houses offered, apart from material aid, a range of services such as classes, libraries, social groups, kindergarten, and day care.

But residents and neighbors did not meet at settlement houses as equals, any more than they would have in any other kind of space. Residents had the advantage in wealth and in the power and social standing that wealth confers; and residents owned the houses, meaning that they could determine what kinds of activities would happen there and what kinds of services would be provided. In the case of migrants, that imbalance was not just a matter of wealth but also of language, culture, and everything else that people born into a society, as opposed

to those entering it from the outside, take for granted. For residents, migrants became objects of curiosity, scrutiny, and study, rendering the U.S. settlement movement partly a gigantic sociological experiment in which settlement workers observed migrants as if they were members of some other species. Residents also studied migrants in their own dwellings and compiled facts and statistics about them, which yielded scholarly papers and books, and sometimes public policy. The study of migrants was also bound up with, whether residents realized it or not, with an effort to control migrants.

U.S. settlement houses were also part of the world of urban leisure, along with (ethnic) theater and cinema. Migrants were involved in all three types of venues, both as performers and spectators, and in all three venues, migrants and other members of the working class were at odds in various ways with the native-born middle class. In the case of ethnic theater, authorities tried to shut down performances by anarchists, and even within migrant communities, there were objections to theater; still, of the three types of venues listed above, ethnic theater afforded migrants by far the greatest degree of control and creative expression, and the language barrier meant that few outside the migrant community attended or interfered in it. In the case of cinema, migrants were involved both artistically (acting, directing) and financially (in studios and cinemas), and silent films, which put more emphasis on visuals than on language, were a natural draw for migrants who had little or no command of English. Censors, however — generally native-born members of the middle class — decided what was appropriate for audiences, and because early cinema had to cater not just to migrants but also to the native-born (which in practice meant mostly the working

class), migrants had far less control over cinema than over ethnic theater. Settlement houses, meanwhile, gave migrants space and equipment for creative expression, such as drama and music, but settlement workers exerted a large degree of control over the process. Public performances were part of settlement houses' public image; for migrants, such performances blurred the line between work and play. For residents, the arts were another opportunity to study and categorize migrants: hence the lists of nationalities of people, and of the national origins of plays, carefully compiled in a number of settlement houses.

II. How well did U.S. settlement workers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries do at their self-appointed tasks? In what sense, if any, did they succeed and in what sense did they fail? First, it must be acknowledged that settlement workers deserve great credit for embarking on and sticking to a difficult and sometimes thankless task. They sacrificed many comforts of a middle-class existence to enter neighborhoods alien to them and interact with people they would otherwise probably never have met — working-class people, born in or outside the U.S., who were ignored, taken for granted, or loathed by many Americans.

In the U.S., where settlement houses served migrants to an extent that settlement houses elsewhere did not, residents' task was especially hard, and here again, settlement workers are to be commended for their willingness to work with migrants amid an increasingly anti-immigrant mood in the country, of which the KKK and legislation limiting migration into the U.S. were only the most obvious signs. Historical accounts of American isolationism in the 1920s and 1930s would

do well to at least acknowledge exceptions such as settlement houses.

But good intentions, high ideals, and hard work do not always yield positive results. Settlement houses aimed to bridge the class divide, but what did that mean? Surely it did not mean eliminating the class divide — that is, eliminating the class system, which settlement workers did not set out to do and could not have done even if they had wanted to. Perhaps, then, bridging the class divide was a matter of reducing the differences between classes. Again, there are several possibilities. If it meant no more than providing opportunities for people of different classes to become acquainted, then settlement houses did well. But if it meant creating greater understanding between classes, then settlement houses did less well, not so much because of some flaw inherent to the settlement idea as because it is unclear how much anyone could have promoted better understanding between the working and middle classes, whose members were born into and inhabited very different worlds. And if residents were trying to make the working class more like the middle class by inculcating middle-class values — or what residents took to be middle-class values — in the former, then the effort was misguided in a few ways.

Residents were not the first, and have not been the last, to misunderstand poverty, a complex and multicausal problem. People who have never experienced poverty often make unfounded assumptions about it. Even some who have been poor but are far enough removed from it to feel smug about their progress, and eager to dissociate themselves from those who haven't "made it," forget or misunderstand poverty. One of the biggest misperceptions is that poverty is caused entirely or mostly by stupidity and laziness — that is, not understanding



the importance of education and hard work or realizing it but being unwilling to make the effort — an example of having the “wrong values.” There are such things as laziness and stupidity, of course, but the main cause of poverty is lack of educational and economic opportunity.

Apart from a problematic conceptual basis, the U.S. settlement movement faced a number of practical difficulties. Many residents were young, inexperienced, and naive and did not really understand what they were getting into when they undertook settlement work. Some got involved in settlement houses more to benefit themselves than to help others and even wrote about settlement work’s transformational effects — for residents, not neighbors.

Migrants posed particular problems for residents. Many had never encountered migrants and knew little or nothing about them. The gap between residents and migrants was far greater than between residents and the native-born working class. If residents and native-born neighbors spoke different languages in a metaphorical sense, then residents and migrants did so, in most cases, literally. The statistical knowledge that some residents gained may have hindered rather than helped them in dealing with actual migrants — who were human beings and not numbers — and further encouraged residents to see migrants only as subjects of study or museum exhibits to be curated.

Though sources for what migrants felt about their experiences at settlement houses do not exist in the same profusion as residents’ writings, some conclusions are still possible. The most salient fact is that migrants were not forced to visit settlement houses but went voluntarily, meaning that they benefited from the experience and could live with the drawbacks. Further,

migrants, though controlled to some extent by residents, exercised agency and constructed their own settlement house experiences — albeit out of what residents provided — rather than simply taking the experiences that residents meant them to have.

For migrants, settlement houses meant material aid, opportunities to learn English and much else, and a way to get to know native-born, middle-class Americans who were willing to work with migrants and might serve as entrées to mainstream society. Settlement houses also meant equipment, space, and opportunity for creative expression. Migrants also studied residents, just as residents studied migrants, because to thrive or even just get by, migrants had to try to understand everything and everyone in their new surroundings. For residents, such scrutiny was a hobby, perhaps a passion; for migrants, it was a necessity.

There were also aspects of settlements that may have held less appeal for migrants. They probably resented the condescension of settlement workers and were perhaps puzzled, irritated, or both by residents' emphasis on preserving migrants' native cultures. Residents seem to have decided that that was the sort of thing migrants should do; besides, it fit well with residents' goal of studying migrants — that is, by studying migrants who had preserved their native cultures, residents would learn something about those cultures as well. Residents not only studied how migrants lived in the U.S. but also looked to migrants for knowledge about Europe. To the dismay of some residents, however, migrants, while inevitably keeping to some of their accustomed ways of life, looked less to the past than to the present and the future, as they had to if they wanted to survive

and thrive in a new, unfamiliar environment. They also took advantage of opportunities afforded them by their new country, such as owning property and buying American goods. So while residents could afford to be romantic about migrants' past, migrants themselves had to be highly practical about the present and future. They were trying to make a living, adjust to a new country, and raise their children, not serve as curiosities for settlement workers.

Nor did migrants go to settlement houses to learn values, which they already had — migrants were perfectly well aware, and did not need to be told by settlement workers, that hard work, thrift, self-sacrifice, and similar values were essential for building new lives for themselves and their children in the U.S. But migrants, like so many of the native-born working class, were caught in a system of largely unregulated capitalism, in which human life was as cheap as unskilled labor and millions had scant opportunity to improve their economic lot in any significant way. Only major structural reform could have addressed such a problem, and that was a far cry from what settlement workers aimed to do — and from what they could have done even had they wanted to. Despite some comprehension of how the social environment molded individuals' lives, residents still overestimated the cultural causes of poverty and underestimated the structural ones.

Migrants also had more at stake than residents did. For some residents, settlement work was a serious and idealistic undertaking, but for others it was more or less a lark or, at most, something to fill up a few months or years before they moved on their real careers. Such residents lived in poor neighborhoods out of choice, not necessity, and still had comfortable, middle-class lives to fall back

on. Migrants did not have such options. Settlement work for some residents was an escape from real life; for migrants, settlement houses were very much part of real life.

Whatever its successes and failures, however, the settlement movement formed part of an ongoing debate over some of the most important and persistent issues facing U.S. society. One such issue was the changing conception of what it meant for culture to be “American.” Culture in the U.S. had always been the result of a huge confluence of cultures from all over the world, but the inundation of migrants that this dissertation has focused on brought the issue to new prominence. At settlement houses, migrants were allowed or even encouraged to express aspects of their culture, especially regarding the performing arts, in a context controlled by native-born members of the middle class. Settlement houses thus may have made at least parts of migrants’ culture less “foreign” and more palatable to the native-born public. That public had, in any case, few other ways of experiencing migrants’ culture — ethnic theater, for example, was closed to them because of the language barrier.

Settlement workers, by virtue of their efforts, and settlement houses, by virtue of their existence, also called attention to something that many Americans, in all eras, have been reluctant to discuss: class. The United States has never, of course, had an entrenched, titled aristocracy of the British kind, but it is also obviously nonsensical to claim, as some Americans have, that the U.S. is a classless society. For most of its history, the U.S. has been marked by strong class divisions determined by differences in wealth and sometimes by legally codified differences in race, as during slavery and formal segregation. The differences in

wealth were especially great in the last decades of the 1800s and the first decades of the 1900s. Furthermore, class was, and is, extraordinarily influential in shaping every facet of the whole course of people's lives. Against such powerful and enduring forces and structures, settlement houses could do only so much, but by attempting an interesting solution — by offering another option in the fight against economic inequality, and by trying to connect migrants to mainstream society, albeit in a modest way — they do have an honorable place in an ongoing struggle. In the early twenty-first century, with economic inequality in the U.S. as great as, or greater than, it was a century ago; with vast amounts of wealth concentrated at the top and a working class that has little economic leverage; with debate raging over the alleviation of poverty and the idea that the poor have the “wrong values”; with migration a pressing and highly controversial issue; and with no clear solutions in sight, it may be instructive to examine how, and how well, a group of people in a previous era grappled, or failed to grapple, with those very problems.

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