

GEOGRAPHICS: WRITING THE SHTETL INTO THE GHETTO

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ABSTRACT

I am interested, first of all, in the logic of the transition from “tenement” to “ghetto” in the work of the sociologists from the Chicago School, arguably the earliest theorists of the city in the U.S., and, secondly, in how and why the Jewish ghetto became the archetypal ghetto in their work. In the sociological imagination, Jewish immigrants were seen as a group that wanted to Americanize but that also wished to remain apart; the ghetto emblemized, as it gave spatial expression to, that position and thereby exemplified Americanization as the sociologists defined and facilitated it. This essay explores both how the Jewish ghetto evolved as the expression of the sociologists’ understanding of Americanization and how the metaphor of contagion became central to that process. It is part of a larger project on contagion and Americanism in the twentieth century.

When the social reformer and journalist Jacob Riis heard the reports of the investigators for the Tenement House Commission in the mid-1880s, he listened with a mixture of satisfaction and rage. It was, after all, his own angry accounts of the conditions of New York tenements that had helped bring the Commission into existence, and their investigations confirmed his worst charges. “I wanted to jump in my seat at that time and shout Amen,” Riis recalled many years later. “But I remembered that I was a reporter and kept still. It was that same winter, however, that I wrote the title of my book, *How the Other Half Lives*, and copyrighted it.”¹ What he felt he could not say as a reporter, he would proclaim as the author of his crusading book. Moral outrage and condemnation permeate his analysis and his tone. “If it shall appear that the sufferings and the sins of the ‘other half,’ and the evil they breed, are but as a just

punishment upon the community that gave it no other choice,” he writes, “it will be because that is the truth... In the tenements all the influences make for evil; because they are the hot-beds of the epidemics that carry death to rich and poor alike; the nurseries of pauperism and crime that fill our jails and police courts; ...that maintain a standing army of ten thousand tramps with all that that implies; because, above all, they touch the family life with deadly moral contagion. This is their worst crime, inseparable from the system. That we have to own it the child of our own wrong does not excuse it, even though it gives it claim upon our utmost patience and tenderest charity.” (Riis 2)

The tenement was both repository and mirror; there, he believed, the cultural detritus collected, and there the burgeoning metropolis could see reflected the dark side of its glories. Riis was hardly alone in his fear of it. A standing army of ten thousand tramps had already erupted into apocalyptic conflagration in Joaquin Miller’s 1886 novel, *The Destruction of Gotham*. Moreover, the typhus and cholera quarantines of 1892 would shortly thereafter attest to the fear of contagious disease epidemics for which the conditions of tenements were seen—not altogether incorrectly—as breeding grounds. But I want to call attention especially here to Riis’s use of the term “moral contagion.” As his figures of speech suggest, the armies and germs are but materializations of the more pernicious threat, the erosion of values represented and perpetuated by the tenements that he marks with that term. Riis turns to the age-old metaphor of contagion to conjure up the potentially dangerous impact of the tenements on the larger community.

In so doing, he capitalizes on the “fear of contamination from the foreign-born” that historian Alan Kraut labels “medicalized nativism.”² A fear that finds expression, literally and metaphorically, in anxiety about disease is more easily marked and can be more easily addressed legally and spatially than the more general fear of social or ideological contamination. That the conditions that Riis documented in the tenements offered a fertile culture for the spread of epidemics is indisputable, but, as the 1892 quarantines showed, medicalized nativism exaggerated any legitimate concerns beyond recognition.³ Moreover, the influx of immigrants about whom Riis writes coincided with the bacteriological discoveries that put the causes and means of transmission of contagious diseases at the center of public debate.

Even as Riis penned the words “moral contagion,” those discoveries were breathing new life into the term *contagion*. Reanimated, it circulated among reformers and fiction writers, journalists and sociologists, who capitalized on the currency of the term by applying it to a range of cultural phenomena. Most commonly, it marked the spread of ideas, registering a conceptual shift in the understanding of how communities were formed. Not surprisingly, the interest in community-formation was largely motivated by the rapid urbanization and the influx of immigrants who filled the cities at the turn of the twentieth century. The conceptual change in the term *contagion* registers the ways that the work in bacteriology and in urbanization and immigration shaped each other.

It left a powerful legacy. The proliferation of accounts and prophecies of unchecked contagion in contemporary popular literature—fiction and nonfiction—attests to the ongoing power of the idea. With the bacteriological discoveries at the turn of the century, the term became, and remains, a governing trope for the popular understanding of

the mechanisms through which “culture” is transmitted. An understanding of the evolution of the idea of contagion can make its contemporary power more available for analysis.

The change in the term is evident in the work of the earliest urban theorists, the group of sociologists at the University of Chicago in the early twentieth century who made the study of the city the focus of their work on modern society. Known as the Chicago School of Sociology, this group was central to the establishment of sociology as a discipline in the United States. Their project differs from that of social reformers like Riis or even the famous settlement worker Jane Addams, who was also affiliated with the University of Chicago. As academics—and self-proclaimed social scientists—they set out more specifically to study than to reform society. They certainly did not entirely reject the project of reform, but their activism was less explicit than that of a journalist like Riis. Real change came, for them, through structural transformations rather than social reforms. And those transformations, which depended upon an understanding of social process, in their view constituted an activism more profound, because more lasting, than the kind of reform called for by their journalist counterparts. On the other hand, they differed from many traditional academics in their insistence on the practical nature of their work. Albion Small, the founder of the University of Chicago’s sociology department, had trained as a Baptist minister, and many other members of the department had also trained either as religious leaders or, like Robert E. Park, reform-minded journalists. Understanding social processes would lead, they contended, to better control over them; understanding the problems would help them to solve them.

Writing in the introduction to the first issue of the *American Journal of Sociology* (founded at the University of Chicago in the summer of 1895), founding editor Small, notes that “*in our age the fact of human association is more obtrusive and relatively more influential than in any previous epoch... Men are more definitely and variously aware of each other than ever before. They are also more promiscuously perplexed by each other’s presence... Whatever modern men’s theory of the social bond, no men have ever had more conclusive evidence that the bond exists.*”⁴ And no evidence was more conclusive than the contagious diseases that materialized social contact and, ironically, both the social bond and the breakdown of social control.

“Sanitation and Sociology,” as the title of one early essay proclaimed, would mutually determine “the health of the race”: healthy individual bodies lead to a healthy body politic.⁵ More interestingly, health signals successful social engineering and social control, a well-managed society, and is thus the province of social scientists as well as the public health officials and medical personnel they were increasingly beginning to train. Where social reformers like Riis went into the spaces of poverty (notably tenements) looking for social breakdown, sociologists went searching for principles of association, and their metaphors register the conceptual importance of bacteriological discoveries to their formulations. Social influence, for Small’s former classmate, Edward Alsworth Ross, “is the contagion of emotions, ambitions, desires” that “results from the contact and intercourse of men as individuals.”⁶

The language of contagion did more than usher in new strategies for regulating contact and training experts who could identify and contain the invisible threat, which was certainly a central role the early sociologists in the United States defined for themselves. It also helped them formulate the very terms of their inquiries and thus

determine the strategies and methodologies through which they would conduct them. In the pages of the journal, researchers and theorists used contagious disease first literally, then metaphorically, in the studies of urban space and national affiliation, of assimilation and ghettos, to explore the phenomenon of cultural contact. Associates “caught” culture from one another; generations, from their predecessors. Or they “shared immunities.” Social policies addressed “contagions,” and one medical pundit (writing in a more popular periodical) caustically labeled the feared “American woman” an “epidemic of unexampled fury.”⁷ Unlike their colleagues in anthropology, many of the early sociologists believed their discipline should train experts not just to study society, but effectively to govern it. Providing a rationale for the strategies of social engineering, the language of contagion contributed to the social changes associated with Progressivism.

For Ross, as for his cohort, “contagion” marks the contact of individuals—often strangers—for better or worse, as it is (implicitly) registered on their bodies. The assumptions evoked by the term (also implicitly) mandate the supervision and regulation of cultural contact for the health of the body politic. For the sociologist, then, procedures for social engineering and social control emerge logically from the study of association. Not surprisingly, metaphors of contagion and infection permeate the studies of assimilation and urbanization that proliferated during the journal’s early years and that constituted a mainstay of the discipline in the United States. In particular, work on the ghetto, which brings those issues together, registers the importance of the term to the conceptualization of the discipline. And it makes clear how their use of contagion differs from that of their predecessors, such as Riis, writing before the new medical concepts had fully integrated, reinvigorated and transformed the concept.

One of the most interesting, and exemplary, uses of *contagion* appears in Chicago sociologist Robert Park’s field-defining, “The City: Suggestions for the Investigation of Human Behavior in the Urban Environment,” which was first published in the *American Journal of Sociology* in 1915 and is widely regarded by theorists of the city as an inaugural essay of urban studies in the United States.⁸ Writing more than two and a half decades after Riis, Park finds the “special importance” of “the segregation of the poor, the vicious, the criminal, and exceptional persons generally, which is so characteristic a feature of city life” in “the fact that social contagion tends to stimulate in divergent types the common temperamental differences, and to suppress characters which unite them with the normal types about them.”⁹ Where Riis laments the negative examples that lead to a rejection of mores and a disintegration of family values, a corrupting influence, Park uses *social* (as opposed to *moral*) contagion to describe the very principle of community formation and, in particular, the formation of a community that he marks as deviant and pathological. Where moral contagion refers to the corruption of individuals, social contagion names the process of a group’s cohesion.

Strikingly, Park dubs the same process, when it consolidates what he calls the “normal” population, *communication*. “The mechanism of communication is very subtle,” he writes, “so subtle, in fact, that it is often difficult to conceive how suggestions are conveyed from one mind to another... Individuals... inevitably communicate their sentiments, attitudes, and organic excitements, and in doing so they necessarily

react, not merely to what each individual actually does, but to what he intends, desires, or hopes to do.” (Riis, “City” 598-99) The subtlety of the influence that he describes explains the danger presumably posed by the denizens of the tenement: the wrong kind of communication creates the wrong kind of community. Here is the threat that the metropolis will not be able to contain the forces that it has unleashed, which, in significant ways, motivated the discussions, studies and depictions of the tenement —and of the ghetto— that proliferated in this period. “Contagion” pathologizes the threat, but the distinction between the terms *contagion* and *communication* is tenuous. Although he tries to tease them apart, it is the similarity between these terms, and their mutual inflection, that emerges from his work.

The methodology of Park’s essay was characteristic of, even formative for, the work of the Chicago School. His earlier career as a journalist had taught him to attend to the ways in which “the city acquires an organization which is neither designed nor controlled.” (Park, “City” 579) Crucial to his understanding of the evolution and expression of that organization was his work on a diphtheria epidemic and his coverage of crime waves; from epidemiologists and criminologists he learned literally to map outbreaks of disease or crime and thus to track the patterns that register even as they create the social structure of the city. In a letter submitted in response to a request for an autobiographical sketch from sociologist Luther L. Bernard, Park especially noted the importance to the development of his approach of the diphtheria epidemic for which he “plotted the cases on a map of the city and in this way called attention to what seemed the source of the infection, an open sewer” and which thereby led him to the conception that with what [he] called ‘scientific reporting’ the newspaper might do systemically what it was then doing casually.”¹⁰ From that experience, Park fashioned his methodology for the study of “the city... the place and the people, with all the machinery, sentiments, customs, and administrative devices that go with it, public opinion and street railways, the individual man and the tools that he uses.” (Park, “City” 577-78) The relationship between urban spaces and contagion evident in his depiction of this “mechanism —a psychophysical mechanism— in and through which private and political interests find corporate expression” emerged from this early journalistic work. (Riis, “City” 578)

The sociologists of the Chicago School, unlike some of their famous colleagues elsewhere, including Ross and Henry Pratt Fairchild, did not widely advocate the restriction of immigration; rather they typically concentrated on the importance of assimilation and were interested in the insights that strangers could yield into social processes as they clashed with and learned to conform to invisible social dictates. In their influential coauthored 1921 volume *Introduction to the Science of Society*, Park and his colleague Ernest W. Burgess describe assimilation as “a process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons or groups, and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them in a common cultural life.”¹¹ Nine years later, Park would write an entry on “social assimilation” for the *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* that would stress both that assimilation was necessary to “a cultural solidarity sufficient at least to sustain a national existence” and “that an immigrant is assimilated as soon as he has shown that he can ‘get on in the country.’”¹² For Park, the processes of cultural transmission and the contours of Americanism were nowhere more visible

than in that metamorphosis. And from them the processes of group formation could be logically inferred. Yet the processes of those transformations needed to be controlled, and the task of controlling by understanding them fell logically to the sociologists. With that task in mind, Park and his associates sought to mark and formalize a distinction between social contagion, with its implicit sense of danger, and a more beneficent, a healthier, communication. In turn that distinction became central to understanding and managing the processes of Americanization.

While Park does not represent the immigrants as literally diseased in his formulation of social contagion, his terminology taints the association of the tenement's inhabitants. Park saw the city as an invaluable site from which to study what he called "collective behavior," which he carefully distinguished from the interactions of "more highly organized groups," and the tenements that were home to so many migrants and immigrants as well as indigents, criminals and deviants offered an opportunity to explore its pathologies. (Riis, "City" 592) To the extent that urban sociologists viewed themselves as activists, the tenements provided the arena in which they could test their ability to turn literally and figuratively diseased outsiders into productive bearers of American culture, and thereby to transform social contagion into communicable Americanism. Central to that transformation was "the ghetto," a concept that was at least partly shaped by the exigencies of Americanization, as the Chicago sociologists understood them. Their work on the ghetto both reflects and helps to define an emerging concept of "culture," and the tenuousness of that idea finds expression in the uneasy relationship between, in Park's words, *contagion* and *communication*.

The Chicago School inherited from their German predecessors and, in many cases, teachers—notably Georg Simmel and Oswald Spengler—an apocalyptic narrative of the city. The erosion of family values that Riis lamented found expression, for German theorists of urbanism, in demographics: people marrying later and having fewer, if any, children. City dwellers' alleged loss of interest in the continuity of blood would soon be dubbed "race suicide" and would travel from the sociological work of the influential Ross to the pulpit of the mighty Theodore Roosevelt. Spengler chronicles the inevitable decline of civilization thus: "growing from primitive barter-center to Culture-city and at last to world-city, it sacrifices first the blood and soul of its creators to the needs of its majestic evolution, and then the last flower of that growth to the spirit of Civilization—and so, doomed, moves on to final self-destruction."¹³

But where his teachers augured disintegration, Park and his Chicago colleagues noted the possibility for innovation and human freedom. Like their German predecessors, they saw the rise of cities as a transition from the homogeneities of folk culture to the heterogeneities of a more disjointed existence. For the Americans, however, that transition enabled the sociologists to explore the processes through which heterogeneous groups cohered in the interest of facilitating those processes. Tenements posed the greatest challenge to what Ross catalogued in his work on "social control," the intrinsic and explicit rules of behavior that forestalled chaos, and it was that challenge that Park marked by the term *social contagion*. Spengler's worst portentions about the consequences of urbanism were realized in the tenements.

If the tenements seemed harbingers of the social disintegration that their German mentors characteristically saw as the inevitable outcome of urbanism, the urban sociologists of the Chicago School believed they had found its antidote in the

ethnic enclaves known as “ghettos.” These terms are not typically synonymous in their work; rather, they imagined the ghetto as a transitional geographical space and developmental stage between the tenement and the metropolis. In so doing, they drew on a depiction of the ghetto that had become one among several—often conflicting—conventions at the turn of the century: a picturesque community where, for example, journalist Hutchins Hapgood, writing in 1902, found “charm” and “spirit,” the best of the Old World coexisting with the New. Hapgood originally published *The Spirit of the Ghetto* as a series of journalistic essays that he wrote with the help of Jewish immigrant journalist and fiction writer Abraham Cahan between 1898 and 1902. In his study of the rich cultural life of the Lower East Side, Hapgood at once celebrates folk tradition and bears witness to the processes of Americanization underway in the Jewish ghetto. A nostalgic affection for folk culture characterizes much of the work of the Chicago School as well.

Park’s student and, later, colleague Louis Wirth would build on Hapgood’s as much as Jacob Riis’s work when, nearly three decades later, he fashioned a standard for future studies in his landmark book entitled *The Ghetto* (1928), for which Park wrote a foreword.¹⁴ Where the *tenement* housed the city’s refuse, the more romanticized *ghetto* was home to an idealized community of allegedly like-minded—often related—folk. Even for writers as ideologically diverse and chronologically distinct as Hapgood and Wirth, it offered a nostalgic antidote to the alienation of urbanism. The city represented a shift to urban culture from what anthropologist Robert Redfield, Park’s son-in-law, would follow the German tradition in calling “folk society,” in which “kinship, its relationships and institutions, are the type categories of experience and the familial group is the unit of action.”¹⁵ In contrast to the city, the ghetto remained the dwelling place of the folk. Yet for Wirth it also represented progress, a transition not only between the tenement and the metropolis, but between folk culture and urban culture as well. As such, it offered “a rare opportunity... of converting history into natural history,” of furnishing universal principles for an understanding of community.¹⁶ His description of the ghetto registers his hopeful effort to manage process, to reclaim the regenerate, to convert the immigrants, and, of course, to transform social contagion into communication.

Significantly, the sociologists find the roots of the ghetto not in the tenements but in the shtetls, the Jewish communities in Eastern Europe that they summoned to evoke an idyllic sense of village. Although the shtetl actually marked the enforced mobility of a people unwelcome in their natal land (whole villages having to be prepared to move at the behest of the authorities), and although it housed important economic and social divisions among its Jewish inhabitants, in the sociological imagination it epitomized Redfield’s “folk society.” The discrepancy may, to some extent, reflect a Jewish nostalgia for their homeland, but it also underscores some of the expectations and preconceptions that the sociologists brought to their study of the Jewish ghetto.¹⁷

For Wirth, the ghetto yielded insight into community formation, broadly speaking. “To tell the full story of the ghetto in all its uniqueness,” he explains, “is the legitimate function of the artist and the historian. But the sociologist sees in the ghetto more than the experiences of a given people in a specific historical setting... [M]ore than a chapter in the cultural history of man[, t]he ghetto represents a study in human nature.” (Wirth 8) The sociologist converts history into natural history by finding the

set of general (and universal) principles that underlay events and govern human nature and the evidently natural communities they form —by, in other words, replacing events with narratives.

Wirth begins to construct his particular tale of the ghetto by positing the origin of both the concept and the term in Italy. “The Italian Jews,” he explains, “derived the word which they spelled *gueto* from the Hebrew word *get*, meaning bill of divorce.” (Wirth 1) Drawing on several studies of Jews, particularly David Philipson’s 1894 *Old European Jewries*, he offers and discards most other possibilities —all, to my mind, at least as plausible (some more so), including the German *gitter* (cage), the Italian *borghetto* (little quarter), the evolution of the Italian *Giudeica* from *Judaicam* (Jewish state) and its subsequent corruption into “ghetto,” before he arrives at his preferred explanation in the derivation “from the Italian *gietto*, the cannon foundry at Venice near which the first Jewish settlement was located.” (Wirth 2) Inexplicably, that is, Wirth discards *borghetto* and *Giudeica* for *get* and *gietto*. The argument for *get* seems to be the hard-g pronunciation of *ghetto* and for *gietto*, the argument stems from the specific geography of the allegedly first “ghetto.”¹⁸

Beginning with the choices he makes in his discussion of the derivation of the term *ghetto*, Wirth’s study of the ghetto conforms remarkably to the program of Americanization that the sociologists favored. The idea, for example, that a group of people can “divorce” themselves from those among whom they are living suggests a weakening of the ties of nationality that would enable them more readily to shift their allegiance to a new nation; that idea, moreover, would have more relevance in the twentieth-century context in which Wirth is writing than in the fifteenth-century context about which he writes. With that emphasis, he stresses a metaphorical consensual relationship, which, as Werner Sollors has noted, served the Americanization program of this period: people could divorce their past and (re)marry into their present.¹⁹

But the very manner through which the Jews allegedly choose to marry in fits the contours of Americanization. Strikingly, Wirth all but dismisses the derivations from spatial descriptions (*borghetto*, for example) that would seem more compatible with his goal of natural history (general principles) in favor of the very particular geographical/historical derivation (*ghetto*). He goes out of his way, in other words, to establish that the term “applies to the Jewish quarter of a city” and “is, strictly speaking, a Jewish institution,” although he does acknowledge “forms of ghettos that concern not merely Jews. There are Little Sicilies, Little Polands, Chinatowns, and Black belts in our large cities,” he admits, “and there are segregated areas, such as vice areas, that bear a close resemblance to the Jewish ghetto.” (Wirth 6) Indeed, he explains that he intends to extend the term from its “limited... application to the Jewish people” to “a term which applies to any segregated racial or cultural group.” (Wirth vii, viii) But maintaining the Jewish roots —and specifically the idea of the Eastern European shtetl— is crucial to his project, and to that of the urban sociologists more broadly. They recognized the particular challenge posed by the massive influx of immigrants, who dangerously swelled the ranks of the tenements, and they largely agreed with the warning issued in 1902 by the prominent theorist of education John Dewey, an important Chicago colleague of Small and influence (from his student days at the University of Michigan) on Park, that “unless we Americanize them they will foreignize us.”²⁰

In the history of the Jews, Wirth, himself a German Jewish immigrant, and his colleagues read—and partly wrote—the history of a group that they believed wished to live apart.²¹ What he calls the “voluntary ghetto” of the Jews “was an administrative device,” he explains, that historically facilitated “social control on the part of the community over its members” and made “the supervision that medieval authorities exercised over all strangers and non-citizens [that is, quarantine] possible.” (Wirth 20-21) The ghetto as Wirth depicts it offers a mutually beneficial way of incorporating strangers into a body politic. We still live with the idea that Eastern European Jews, as well as other ethnic groups, emigrated en masse and lived in the United States among their landsmen from the Old World. While it is certainly true that people brought their kin and even their neighbors over to live with them, and that associations were formed in the New World to facilitate such Old World contacts, the fiction of Jewish immigrants—such as Abraham Cahan’s *Yekl*, Theresa Malkiel’s *Diary of a Shirtwaist Striker* and Anzia Yezierska’s *Bread Givers*—tells a somewhat different story.

In fact, Cahan, labor movement pioneer, editor and spokesperson for Yiddish America, was, as Hapgood had recognized, one of the most sophisticated observers (and narrators) of the ghetto. He had used his editorial position at the socialist Yiddish *Arbeiter Zeitung* to denounce the injustices and biases that led to the 1892 quarantines, and when he wrote his crossover novella, *Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto*, he continued to address them. Preceding the sociological work of Park and his associates by nearly two decades, Cahan’s 1896 novella captures the contradictions, ambiguities and ambivalences of Americanization in a marvelous description of the Jewish ghetto, when the title character, Yekl, walks through the suffocating surroundings of his home:

He had to pick and nudge his way through dense swarms of bedraggled half-naked humanity; past garbage barrels rearing their overflowing contents in sickening piles, and lining the streets in malicious suggestion of rows of trees; underneath tiers and tiers of fire escapes, barricaded and festooned with mattresses, pillows, and featherbeds not yet gathered in for the night. The pent-in sultry atmosphere was laden with nausea and pierced with a discordant and, as it were, plaintive buzz. Supper had been despatched in a hurry, and the teeming populations of the cyclopic tenement houses were out in full force ‘for fresh air,’ as even these people will say in mental quotation marks.²²

The garbage and nausea of this passage speak pointedly to the dehumanizing conditions he often denounced, but they also play tantalizingly with the cultural stereotypes of the ghetto. It is of course not surprising that the spaces where immigrants lived, already tainted by the metaphors and dogged by the experience of disease, came under increased scrutiny by Progressive sociologists and journalists as well as public health officials at the turn of the century. Riis had dubbed the Jewish East Side of New York “the typhus ward,” where filth diseases “sprout naturally among the hordes that bring the germs with them from across the sea.” (Riis 88) Jews were certainly not the only victims of scapegoating; every immigrant group of the period shared that experience. But Jews had an especially long history of association with

contagious disease dating at least as far back as the Black Death (bubonic plague epidemic) of the fourteenth century, when they were accused of poisoning their neighbors' wells.²³

Such associations were subsequently both enabled and reinforced by the isolation of Jews in ghettos, which in some cases did make them more susceptible to contagious disease. While ghettoization had initially been the result of Jews' choice to segregate themselves, it was institutionalized by the sixteenth century. Histories of the Jews, which appeared in significant numbers in the United States and England at the turn of the century, document the language of contagion through which the compulsory ghettoization of the Jews was justified. Ironically, these studies themselves adopt that language to describe ghettoization: "As we today remove the victims of a pestilence far away from the inhabited portions of our cities," writes Philipson, "so the Jews were cut off by the walls of the ghetto as though stricken with some loathsome disease that might carry misery and death unto others if they lived in close contact with them."²⁴ Penning these words in 1893-94, he surely had in mind the 1892 quarantines directed specifically at Eastern European Jews. History was repeating itself for those former denizens of the shtetls. While not explicitly about contagion, Cahan's words summon the familiar stereotype.

Yet, as quickly as he evokes the familiar scene, he complicates it, following this description with the most lyrical passage in the book, a description of Suffolk Street, which, he writes, has:

become the Ghetto of the American metropolis, and, indeed, the metropolis of the Ghettos of the world. It is one of the most densely populated spots on the face of the earth—a seething human sea fed by streams, streamlets, and rills of immigration flowing from all the Yiddish-speaking centers of Europe. Hardly a block but shelters Jews from every nook and corner of Russia, Poland, Galicia, Hungary, Roumania; Lithuanian Jews, Volhynian Jews, south Russian Jews, Bessarabian Jews; Jews crowded out of the 'pale of Jewish settlement'; Russified Jews expelled from Moscow, St. Petersburg, Kieff, or Saratoff; Jewish runaways from justice; Jewish refugees from crying political and economical injustice... artisans, merchants, teachers, rabbis, artists, beggars—all come in search of fortune. Nor is there a tenement house but harbors in its bosom specimens of all the whimsical metamorphoses wrought upon the children of Israel of the great modern exodus by the vicissitudes of life in this their Promised Land of today. You find there Jews born to plenty, whom the new conditions have delivered up to the clutches of penury; Jews reared in the straits of need, who have here risen to prosperity; good people morally degraded in the struggle for success amid an unwonted environment; moral outcasts lifted from the mire, purified, and imbued with self-respect; educated men and women with their intellectual polish tarnished in the inclement weather of adversity; ignorant sons of toil grown enlightened—in fine, people with all sorts of antecedents, tastes, habits, inclinations, and speaking all sorts of subdialects of the same jargon, thrown pellmell into one social caldron—a human hodgepodge with its component parts changed but not yet fused into one homogeneous whole. (Cahan 14)

In this thorough and strikingly perceptive depiction of the complexity of Americanization in the Jewish ghetto, Cahan offers his own analysis of the relationship between that space and the mainstream American community. Words like “malicious,” “nausea,” “discordant” and “plaintive” peel away as the “dense swarms of bedraggled half-naked humanity” metamorphose into “a seething human sea fed by streams, streamlets, and rills of immigration flowing from all the Yiddish-speaking centers of Europe.” With this depiction, Cahan counters the many narratives of insularity and inbreeding leveled at the denizens of the Jewish ghetto, stressing instead its cosmopolitanism in the United States.

The choice is strategic. Not all diseases that affected communities were contagious, and the carriers of contagious disease were not the only carriers restrictionists sought to exclude. As Cahan wrote, exclusionists were beginning to impute not only contagious disease but inherent degeneracy both generally to marginalized groups and specifically to communities that had significantly intermarried. The argument that Cahan had picked up on would blossom in the decades following his novel. Wirth would address it directly in *The Ghetto*, invoking an essay from the *Jewish Review* that attempts to counteract eugenic anti-Semitism and exclusion of Jews by attributing “the frequency of insanity among Jews” to “social considerations... An ordinary population is spared the degenerating effects of many generations of town life, because any incipient decadence is neutralized and compensated for by the infusion of fresh country blood, as the stream of life is constantly flowing toward the large cities. A Jewish population, on the other hand, has not this reserve of vitality, and thus the evils generated by city life are so liable to remain impressed upon future generations.”²⁵ While the writer’s point was clearly that the high incidence of insanity among Jews was environmental (a result of inbreeding) rather than intrinsic and inevitably biological, such reasoning still fueled nativism, since it was what the immigrants carried in their blood or genes and not how they came to carry it that concerned their antagonists. Wirth inadvertently plays into the exclusionist stereotypes in his depiction of the shtetl-turned-ghetto.

Cahan, on the other hand, underscores the diversity of the Jewish ghetto in the United States with his emphasis on its cosmopolitanism. In fact, even the spread of disease that the public health officials used to justify quarantine could actually be summoned to mark the lack of immunity to each other’s germs, hence their lack of prior contact, as well as the unwholesome conditions in which they are forced to live (reversing the sanitationists’ tendency to blame the ghetto’s inhabitants). Cahan’s ghetto is not, as Wirth asserts, a microcosm of community, or an antidote to the city, but a microcosm of the city itself, its problems a result of overcrowding and economic and social inequity rather than the innate unhealthiness or filth of its denizens.

With the cosmopolitanism of his ghetto, Cahan also exposes the deeper ambivalence about assimilation and Americanization expressed by the discourse of contagion. He distinguishes between the nauseas streets where the immigrants live, which pose a health threat, and the ghetto, which contains it. When it becomes the identifiable space of a “ghetto,” the malicious, nauseas, discordant, diseased, plaintive street scene (contrary to expectation) turns, as Cahan later notes, weirdly “picturesque.” This term connotes the landscape’s resemblance to a picture: Suffolk street is picturesque because it conforms to conventions that have been sketched out in pictures or

words; perception of the scene, he suggests, is influenced by its precedents in art. Life conforms to geographic fictions. As “the ghetto,” in other words, the street scene is already scripted and consequently less threatening: contained, assimilable and even paradigmatic. With the juxtaposition of paragraphs, Cahan conspicuously turns decaying streets into Suffolk Street, a metamorphosis that (almost parodically) anticipates the logic of Wirth’s study. But in Cahan’s passage, which also anticipates the analyses of subsequent theorists of race and ethnicity, Americanization does not just take place in, but actually creates, the ghetto. Garbage-strewn streets become Suffolk Street precisely *because* Jewish immigrants are becoming Americans there. Cahan highlights the conventionality of the assimilation narrative, and points to the picturesque ghetto as one of its chief features.

By contrast, he offers a counternarrative of assimilation, in which he complicates the most conventional understanding of assimilation as the process by which immigrants relinquish the specificity of their heritages to blend into an “American” population. His list of the denizens of the ghetto rhetorically follows a trajectory that expresses the presumed logic of assimilation, the *gradual divestiture* of the past: geographical points of origin (Russia, Poland, Galicia) give way to geographical adjectives (Lithuanian Jews, Volhynian Jews) and gradually to individuals’ motives for immigrating; in other words, geographical noun becomes geographical adjective, itself replaced by the adjective “Jewish,” which is in turn dropped for other kinds of identification (students, artisans, merchants), signalling people’s *professions* or self-claimed (and more individuated) identities. Ostensibly, that is, individuals shed their affiliations with their birthplaces to enter into American life. Here he identifies a grammar of assimilation, illustrating both its formulaic structure and its prescribedness. But the assimilation process gets stalled in Cahan’s description of Suffolk St.; the “component parts” of the “human hodgepodge” are “changed but not yet fused into one homogeneous whole” which, in conformity with an increasingly conventional metaphor and in striking anticipation of the melting-pot that Israel Zangwill would subsequently popularize, he calls a “social caldron.”

It is the “whimsical metamorphoses” that Cahan stresses—the unpredictable changes in fortune and status, the discontinuities and instabilities, in which their immigration results. Those metamorphoses were the most common experiences of immigration, as the fiction not only of Cahan but of other writers, notably his contemporary Sholem Aleichem, attests. As Arthur Hertzberg notes, the earliest Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe were more often the poor Jews from the shtetls, and the reversals of fortunes were of course experienced very differently by those who found themselves worse off than by those who found their state improved.²⁶ For the poorer Jews, who carried with them resentment not only of their Christian oppressors but also of the wealthier Jews, America provided an opportunity to reorganize a Jewish class structure and, in effect, the practice of the religion itself. The “whimsical metamorphoses,” as Cahan depicts them, can be confused with—or perhaps even constitute—a kind of Americanization, but the experience of the ghetto is most precisely the experience of a kind of perpetual liminality, an endless becoming that has as its *presumed* end assimilation into mainstream United States culture. Nothing about the rhetoric or logic of the passage leads to the conclusion that the “homogeneous whole” into which the metamorphosed have not yet fused marks their assimilation

into that culture. Instead, the logic of Cahan's description leads to a social caldron that is making *Jews* out of Russian Jews, Bessarabian Jews, refugees, runaways, rabbis, artists and beggars: Cahan's alternative understanding of assimilation and the logic of the ghetto. The members of this disparate group become *Americans* by becoming *Americanized Jews*. Immigrants neither fully shed their pasts to become Americans (as in the assimilation narrative), nor quite preserve their pasts (as in cultural pluralism). Following the logic of the rhetoric of Cahan's description, the ghetto implicitly works to link them as Jews—their common experience being their life in the ghetto and the whimsical metamorphoses that mark their shedding of the past—and to "Americanize" them as *Jews*. Cahan's Suffolk St. thereby replaces the specificities of heritage with a generically "Jewish" past.

Cahan's characters never effectively move beyond Suffolk Street, although Yekl is the prototype of the avid assimilator. Preceding his wife and son to the New World, he renames himself Jake and convinces himself that his reluctance to send for his family signals only his resolution to be able to provide a comfortable home before their arrival. But he sends for them only when the death of his father makes it impossible for them to remain in Russia. His first response to his wife on her disembarkation is disgust. He is deeply troubled by her "uncouth and un-American appearance" when she steps off the boat after a nine or ten day journey in steerage, and Cahan's description reads thus: "She was naturally dark of complexion, and the nine or ten days spent at sea had covered her face with a deep bronze, which combined with her prominent cheek bones, inky little eyes, and, above all, the smooth black wig, to lend her resemblance to a squaw."²⁷ Here Indian and immigrant are interchangeable, marking how Yekl/Jake has internalized an understanding of *American* to which Gitl's darkness, her physical features and her customary attire, fail to conform. He is troubled, in fact, because she reminds him of his own immigrant past. Jake persuades his wife to shed the wig with which orthodox Jewish women cover their hair for a kerchief, which in turn makes her look to him "like an Italian woman of Mulberry Street on Sunday." (Cahan 34) Gitl is evidently a one-woman melting-pot of the identities that Jake has learned to associate with "un-Americanness." Jake eventually divorces his wife, and the novella ends with him on his way to marry not an "American," but another Jewish immigrant who has been in New York longer than he and who speaks better English; he marries, that is, a more Americanized Jew. Jake espouses the conventional language of assimilation, but he enacts Cahan's revisionary understanding of it: one assimilates by divorcing the past and then emulating, but not marrying into, America. Even the words of the staunchest advocates of assimilation, such as Mary Antin or Israel Zangwill's David Quixano, who did intermarry, register discomfort, the pull of a past they have not been able—or allowed—to forget.

In a sense Jake, who has divorced his Old World marriage (alliances) for the New World, personifies the ghetto as Wirth would later depict it. As Wirth's ghetto is "divorced" from society, Jake divorces and (re)marries within the group; there is no suggestion of intermarriage with the dominant culture. It is precisely because of Jews' stereotypical chauvinism that they become representative of the processes of assimilation for sociologists like Wirth and, as expressed in a popular phrase, "apostles of Americanism," trained not to intermarry, but to return home, as Sara Smolinsky does in *The Bread Givers*, to marry landmen and Americanize their own communities.

Sara, in fact, finds herself painfully ostracized when she pursues an education outside the ghetto, but she returns as a “teacherin,” a proud and happy apostle of Americanism in thought, speech and deed; her job is to carry and communicate Americanism to her students, and she does so in a clean and blissfully empty room of her own.

The Jewish ghetto in fiction and sociology is both a breeding ground and a place of containment. It marks Jewish America and Americans as it addresses the uncertainties and instabilities of assimilation. If Americanism is passed on through the environment, then unassimilated Jews living in clusters pose a threat to the coherence of the national culture. If, on the other hand, Americanism is somehow in the blood (biological model), then assimilated Jews —the ones who leave the ghetto and mingle— are an analogous threat. The fictional *ghettos* of such writers as Cahan and Yezierska resolve the contradiction: the inhabitants of the ghetto are Americanized but not fully digested; the ghetto, as Wirth claims, is never quite outlived. (Wirth 256) The spatial construction of the ghetto materializes the symbolic relation of Americanized Jews to Americanism, resolving the ambiguity that surfaces when the environmental encounters the biological. Where for Cahan’s Yekl it results in confusion and personal breakdown, for the sociologists it provided the resolution they sought.

Depicting the Jews as a group that at once divested itself of its national past and allegedly wished to remain segregated, the urban sociologists imagined a solution to the problem of assimilation. Park borrowed the vocabulary of medical science to describe “the relation of the ghetto Jew to the larger community in which he lived” as “symbiotic rather than social.”²⁸ Sander Gilman has also noted the likeness of Jew to bacterium or parasite, but it is important to understand the *equilibrium* expressed by “symbiosis” in early twentieth-century medical science: the bacterium or parasite can live in a neutral or even mutually beneficial relationship to its host; certain conditions are a prerequisite for that relationship to turn destructive, resulting in the disease or death of the host.²⁹ Jews in the ghetto posed no immediate threat and could actually be beneficial. Even “the emancipated Jew” as an individual was self-contained as, again in Park’s words, “historically and typically the marginal man, the first cosmopolite and citizen of the world. He is, par excellence, the ‘stranger’... who ranges widely, and lives preferably in a hotel—in short, the cosmopolite.”³⁰ Here Park evokes the cosmopolitanism that Cahan describes as a mark of rootlessness. What is for Cahan the prelude to a new community, for Park is a condition of existence, the unintegrated Jew. Crucial to this postulate is the idea of the geographic boundedness of the ghetto and its psychological analogue, in effect an internalized ghetto. Wirth’s “ghetto,” for example, “is a closed community,” spatially markable and “perpetuating itself and renewing itself with a minimum of infusion of influences from without, biologically as well as culturally.”³¹ The ghetto becomes a spatial paradigm for assimilation.

If the tenements bred carriers of dangerous culture (along with contagious disease), the sociologists’ ghetto offered a contained environment in which a process of conversion could take place that turned the dangerous contagion into a benevolently contagious Americanism. If vice and degeneracy were contagious in the tenements, in other words, the positive attributes of Americanism were equally *communicable* in the ghettos. As a mediating space, the ghetto preserved both *contagion* and *communication* in an uneasy balance: the communication within the ghetto could readily re-surface as contagion with any threatened blurring or illicit crossing of its boundaries.

Contagion denotes, in these formulations, any kind of scurrilous outbreak, and the experiences of the ghetto threatened endlessly to break out into the attributes of a tenement. The contagion implicit in communication suggested the embodiedness of the abject and thereby restored the sense of bodies in contact to the abstracted notion of communication—hence its danger, its power, its instability. Yet in that very instability the sociologists found their motivation for ongoing study and their rationale for the policies and strategies of their Progressivism. The ghetto, and the volatile culture it emblemized, demonstrated the need for careful regulation and justified renewed efforts to understand and promote social control. In that fashion, they subtly and unwittingly helped to redefine the idea of culture itself, offering contagion as the basis for conceptualizing its transmission and in the process, imagining and institutionalizing communicable Americanism.

In the contemporary fascination with accounts of rampant epidemics, the legacy of this concept is evident. Jeffrey A. Weinstock has labeled contemporary U.S. society a “‘Virus Culture’—a landscape obsessed with the fear of contagion, infected with ‘infection paranoia.’”³² Contemporary anxieties about cultural contact readily and obviously continue to find powerful expression in the threat of disease. Richard Preston writes titillatingly in his popular science bestseller, *The Hot Zone*, that “a hot virus from the rain forest lives within a twenty-four-hour plane flight from every city on earth. All of the earth’s cities are connected by a web of airline routes. The web is a network. Once a virus hits the net, it can shoot anywhere in a day—Paris, Tokyo, New York, Los Angeles, wherever planes fly.”³³ The sentiment is echoed from science fiction to science thrillers, each warning ominously of *The Coming Plague*, *Emerging Viruses* or *Virus X*. And with each telling, the obligatory map in which epidemiologists plot the circuitous routes of traveling germs and, by implication, human connections: communicability made visible as illness.

The particular power of medical nativism—its efficacy as an expression of cultural anxiety—derives from the centrality of “contagion” to the idea of cultural transmission, the most basic experience of humanity. For the protagonist of Robin Cook’s medical thriller *Invasion*, human susceptibility to a rampant virus is like the mark of kinship: “knowing it is happening and that all humans are at risk,” she remarks, “I feel connected in a way I’ve never felt before. I mean, we’re all related. I’ve never felt like all humans are a big family until now.”³⁴ And the aptly named Hiro Protagonist of Neal Stephenson’s *Snow Crash* makes the remarkable discovery “that civilization started out as an infection” for the spread of which “the twentieth century’s mass media, high literacy rates, and high-speed transportation all served as superb vectors.”³⁵ As people worldwide become infected with a devastating virus, Hiro learns that it spreads through language (literally, a computer virus) as well as contact with bodily fluids. In *Invasion* and *Snow Crash*, the governing concept—the paradigm—that scholars like Park set in motion finds literal expression. Medical nativism is, in effect, one of its attributes, with contagion marking both the danger of contact with “foreigners” and the potency of cultural transmission.

Michael Stephens’s “Immigrant Waves” begins with illness: “Shortly after arriving in Hawaii to teach for a semester,” remarks the journalist narrator, “I came down with a strange fever. I never found out what it was, but a rare tropical disease doctor thought it might have been dengue, which had been wiped out in the Hawaiian Is-

lands after the Second World War, though it was still epidemic in the South Seas and Southeast Asia.”³⁶ The disease at once marks him as a stranger to the culture — a white man, an “American,” not immune to a “local” dormant disease— and in contact with it. It also codes Hawaii as “foreign,” exotic and dangerous, more a part of the South Seas or Asia than the mainland U.S. The disease structures both the story and the narrator’s experience of Hawaii; as he puts it, it “oversensitized” him “to everything, not the least of it being how racially charged beautiful Hawaii was.” (Stephens 318) It simultaneously elicits and expresses a “xenophobia” to which, he writes, “no one is immune.” (Stephens 320) The story turns on his students’ insistence on his difference from them —that English is more his language than theirs, that he is white and American in ways that they are not— and on his response “that we were all immigrants once.” (Stephens 321) It ends with his journey with a photographer, and in his capacity as journalist, to New York’s Lower East Side, which reminds him of his childhood in an immigrant ghetto, “how everything that went into making [him] a writer came out of [the] vagrant experiences [he] had on those stinky, dirty, poor streets” and how “the English of [his] childhood in East New York” was the “beautiful” speech of the melting-pot: “immigrant yes, but not just Irish; it consisted of words from Eastern Europe, the Mediterranean, and the Caribbean. Plus Brooklyn itself.” (Stephens 323, 325) “My English,” he concludes, “comes in immigrant waves; I found this out after getting over my dengue fever...” (Stephens 57) Although he never explains (or, perhaps, understands) the logic of the connection, contagion and communication are inextricably linked in his story. His illness reminds him of his Americanness, which serves as a kind of tonic in the story: he recovers from his strange disease as he recovers a memory of an Americanism communicated to him through the language of the ghetto.

By contrast, the narrator’s students, like Cahan, manifest a dis-ease that expresses their wariness of a communicable Americanism. The narrator believes that his illness heightens his sensitivity to his surroundings, but he does not understand what his students try to tell him: that he does not see the full logic of his connection to them. Concentrating on what has been communicated to him, he fails to consider what he has come to communicate to them. The students, like Cahan, do not oppose Americanness *per se*, just as Hiro Protagonist does not want to eradicate language. Their discomfort, rather, stems from an Americanism conceived as *communicable*, for inherent in that conception, as the work of Park and his associates makes clear, is the potential to pathologize certain forms of communication and to privilege others. Using his illness to structure his experience of Hawaii, the narrator remains unaware of how fully the idea of contagion governs his understanding of culture and communication. Or of how he produces his students’ dis-ease.

Notes

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- ¹ Quoted in Charles A. Madison, "Preface" to the Dover Edition, of Jacob A. Riis, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1971) vii. The book first appeared in 1890.
- ² Alan M. Kraut, *Silent Travelers: Germs, Genes, and the "Immigrant Menace"* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1994) 3.
- ³ On the quarantines, see especially Kraut and Howard Markel, *Quarantine!: East European Jewish Immigrants and the New York City Epidemics of 1892* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1997).
- ⁴ Albion Small, "The Era of Sociology," *American Journal of Sociology* 1.1 (July 1895): 1.
- ⁵ Marion Talbot, "Sanitation and Sociology," *American Journal of Sociology* 2.1 (July 1896): 81.
- ⁶ Edward Alsworth Ross, "Social Control," *American Journal of Sociology* 1.5 (March 1896): 518.
- ⁷ The writer here was not a sociologist but a Canadian medical doctor and military historian, Andrew Macphail. I invoke his words here to illustrate the potency (and popularity) of the metaphor. Andrew Macphail, "The American Woman," *Essays in Fallacy* (London: Longmans, Green, 1910) 5. This essay was originally published in two installments as a letter to the editor of *The Spectator* in 1908 and reprinted in *The Living Age* that same year.
- ⁸ See, for example, Richard Sennett, "An Introduction," *Classic Essays on the Culture of Cities*, ed. Richard Sennett (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1969) 3-19, and Rolf Lindner, *The Reportage of Urban Culture: Robert Park and the Chicago School*, trans. Adrian Morris (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996).
- ⁹ Robert Park, "The City: Suggestions for the Investigation of Human Behavior in the Urban Environment," *American Journal of Sociology* 20.5 (March 1915): 611-12.
- ¹⁰ Luther Bernard never published the accounts that he received from more than two hundred eminent sociologists, but that of Park and his colleague William I. Thomas subsequently appeared in the *American Journal of Sociology*. See Paul J. Baker, *American Journal of Sociology* 79.2 (1974): 243-260.
- ¹¹ Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess, *Introduction to the Science of Sociology* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1921) 735.
- ¹² Robert E. Park, "Assimilation, Social," *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, ed. Edwin R.A. Seligman and Alvin Johnson (New York: Macmillan Co., 1930) 2: 281. On the importance of Park's definition of assimilation, see especially Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins* (New York: Oxford UP, 1964).
- ¹³ Otto Spengler, "The Soul of the City," Richard Sennett, ed., 85.
- ¹⁴ Here I disagree with Moses Rischin who, in his introduction to *The Spirit of the Ghetto*, contrasts Hapgood's and Wirth's projects, calling Wirth's ghetto a "gilded academic successor to Riis's 'Jewtown' of the 1890s." ("Introduction," Louis Wirth *The Spirit of the Ghetto* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1967): xxix.)
- ¹⁵ Robert Redfield, "The Folk Society," Richard Sennett, ed., 180.
- ¹⁶ Louis Wirth, *The Ghetto* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1928) 5.
- ¹⁷ Missing from their accounts, for example, was the history of class conflict reflected in and fueled by the conscription of the sons of poor Jews in place of their rich neighbors in the shtetls to fill the quotas established by the tsar for military service between 1827 and 1856. Although that practice had ended by the time of the mass immigration of Russian

- Jews, the memory of it was still vivid. See Arthur Hertzberg, *The Jews in America: Four Centuries of an Uneasy Encounter: A History* (New York: Columbia UP, 1997).
- ¹⁸ While Philipson also privileges the geographical explanation (although the term he produces is *gheta*), Wirth departs from him in several particulars. *Borghetto*, for instance, is an equally plausible explanation for Philipson. See David Philipson, *Old European Jewries* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1894) 23-25.
- ¹⁹ See Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* (New York: Oxford UP, 1986).
- ²⁰ John Dewey, speech delivered to National Education Association, 1902, cited in Robert A. Carlson, *The Quest for Conformity: Americanization Through Education* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1975) 112.
- ²¹ It is in this link between story and space that I mean to invoke in my title, *Geographics*.
- ²² Abraham Cahan, *Yekl and the Imported Bridegroom and Other Stories of Yiddish New York* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1970) 13-14.
- ²³ See, for example, David Herlihy, *The Black Death and the Transformation of the West*, ed. Samuel K. Cohn, Jr. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1977).
- ²⁴ Philipson, 21-22. Philipson is aware of the irony, noting the appearance of this metaphor in the work of other scholars: "The Ghetto has been well stigmatized as a 'pest-like isolation,'" he notes, and he cites the observation of a sixteenth-century writer that "sone walls arose in all places wherein Jews dwelt, shutting off their quarters like pesthouses; the Ghetto had become epidemic" (22).
- ²⁵ J. Snowman, "Jewish Eugenics," *Jewish Review* IV: 173, cited in Wirth, 68-9.
- ²⁶ See especially Hertzberg, chapter 10, "The Russian Jews Arrive," 140-164.
- ²⁷ Cahan, 34. On Gitl as "squaw," see also Sollors.
- ²⁸ Park, "Human Migration and Marginal Man," Richard Sennett, ed., 131-42, 141. The original version of this essay appeared in the *American Journal of Sociology* in 1928.
- ²⁹ On Jews and disease generally, see especially Sander L. Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1985), *Disease and Representation: Images of Illness from Madness to AIDS* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1988) and *The Jew's Boyd* (New York: Routledge, 1991).
- ³⁰ Park, "Human Migration and Marginal Man," 141. Park's "marginal man" is born of the social change and human migrations that characterize modernity. Striving to live in two cultures, the "marginal man" ("who may or may not be a mixed blood") is "an unstable character" (131). Park oscillates in this essay between describing a liberated and a pitiable figure. In any case, "it is in the mind of the marginal man — where the changes and fusions of culture are going on — that we can best study the processes of civilization and progress" (142).
- ³¹ Wirth 226. "The modern invisible ghetto wall," writes Wirth, "is no less real than the old, because it is based on the sentiments and prejudices of human beings who are products of distinct cultures, and upon the most fundamental traits of human nature that govern our approach to the familiar and our withdrawal from the strange" (280). Assimilation of individuals was not impossible, according to Wirth, but as a group Jews remained identifiable, and individuals more often than not returned in some manner to the fold.
- ³² Jeffrey A. Weinstock, "Virus Culture," *Studies in Popular Culture* 20.1 (1997): 83.
- ³³ Richard Preston, *The Hot Zone* (New York: Anchor Books Doubleday, 1994) 16.
- ³⁴ Robin Cook, *Invasion* (New York: Berkley Books, 1997) 238.

³⁵ Neal Stephenson, *Snow Crash* (New York: Bantam Books, 1992) 397, 403.

³⁶ Michael Stephens, "Immigrant Waves," *Visions of America: Personal Narratives from the Promised Land*, ed. Wesley Brown and Amy Ling (New York: Persea Books, 1993) 316-25, 316.