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“Anglo-Saxon”: Nationalism and Race in the Promotion of Edward Hopper

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The current talk of white nationalism; the demonstrators chanting “Jews will not replace us” at a white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, in August 2017; and, most recently, the domestic terrorists’ attack on the United States Capitol in Washington, DC, on January 6, 2021: these events have brought painful memories back from my own past.¹ They have forced me to take stock of how ideologies associated with extremist nationalism affected my life and my work as a curator and historian of art, particularly my scholarship on Edward Hopper (1882–1967).² The cultural shock has made me revisit my work on Hopper, investigating and documenting parallels between what we today call white nationalism and the nationalistic wave in the United States in the 1920s and 1930s, when the first museum devoted to American art was founded in New York. Taking cues from the critique of institutional racism sharpened by the Black Lives Matter movement and from more recent scholarship, I consider here how Hopper’s work was promoted in a time of cultural nationalism, as well as how his art should be reassessed in the light of today’s attention to cultural diversity.

To be clear, I do not advocate that Hopper be removed from his canonical position in the history of American art or that his work cease to be exhibited. Instead, I propose that it is time to investigate and understand that the original promotion of Hopper’s art—by the artist himself, by his champions, and by institutions—had racist underpinnings. By paying attention to this history, we can see that systemic racism has guided our museums and shaped the formative years of many white American artists from Hopper’s generation. Such knowledge can lead to more equitable museums, collections, and exhibitions.

The very idea of devoting a museum to American art contrasted with the international outlook of the new Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) that opened in New York City in 1929. Contemporary American artists composed the nearly seven hundred works collected by the sculptor and socialite Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, who had hosted exhibitions at the Whitney Studio Club since 1918. When the MoMA opened with its emphasis on European modernism, Whitney offered her American collection to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, proposing to house it in a new wing. The Met’s refusal prompted Whitney to create her own institution, which opened in 1931 on West Eighth Street as the Whitney Museum of American Art.

Also in 1929, Whitney, a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), produced one of her most ambitious sculptures, *The Founders of the Daughters of the American Revolution*, commissioned by the DAR for its new headquarters, Constitution

Hall in Washington, DC (located at 1776 D Street NW, near the White House). In 1932, just three years after dedicating the new hall and its honorific sculpture, the DAR would close the space to African American musicians because some members complained about the “mixed seating” that occurred when both Black and white people wanted to attend concerts by Black artists. When the DAR applied the rule in 1939 to deny permission for a concert by the legendary singer Marian Anderson, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, who had been issued a membership card after her husband won the presidency in 1932, resigned from the organization. The DAR did not reverse its official “white performers only” policy until 1952.³

Whitney’s own attitude toward race, however, was complex. With a lack of awareness of her own white privilege, she would have seen herself as cosmopolitan and liberal for her time and high social status. In 1923, she hosted the show *Recent Paintings by Pablo Picasso and Negro Sculpture* at her Studio Club.⁴ In 1932, she purchased *Congolais* (1931; Whitney Museum), a head carved in cherrywood by Nancy Elizabeth Prophet (1890–1960), a Black sculptor from Rhode Island.⁵ In choosing this work out of a group show at the twenty-first annual exhibition of the Art Association of Newport, RI, in 1932, Whitney seems to have been making a “racially inflected aesthetic choice” by purchasing the work of a Black American artist that depicted a clearly African subject.⁶ Mary Ann Calo points out that in early twentieth-century America, “exotic notions of blackness” appealed to white Americans seeking escape from materialistic culture.⁷ One study of the Harlem Renaissance identifies Whitney along with other Americans in the “international high bohemian crowd who traveled to Harlem in their Stutzes and Daimlers” and “fetishized” Black individuals.⁸ Thus, from her privileged background, Whitney would likely have seen her own racial stereotyping and tokenizing embrace of Black culture as benign, to the extent that she was even aware of it.

After the Whitney Museum’s 1931 opening, the press asked what was meant by “American art.” Her Studio Club had shown American folk art in 1924, which was then viewed as authentic American culture. Most of what was being considered, collected, and shown as American folk art at this time was vernacular craft by self-taught white Euro-American artists. Folk culture was such a fad in the United States during the twenties that the era’s leading composer, Aaron Copland, himself the son of Jewish immigrants, could reflect in 1932, “The desire to be ‘American’ was symptomatic of the period.”⁹ With the 1920s’ interest in folk culture came ideas of racial nativism that insisted on the hierarchical distinction between “true Americanness” (based on the conflation between white supremacy, Englishness, and Americanness) and the “inferior races” (which were nevertheless threatening), consisting of Black, Asian, and Southern and Eastern European (especially Catholic and Jewish) peoples.¹⁰ Yet, one of the lenders to the folk art show at the Whitney was the artist Yasuo Kuniyoshi, a Japanese immigrant, who had collected his native American folk pieces in rural Maine, inspired by his patron, Hamilton Easter Field, a collector of Japanese woodblock prints, American folk art, and contemporary art.¹¹ Owning and exhibiting American folk art objects signaled an investment in national identity, in which even recent arrivals—or those viewed as Other by many in the United States—could participate. Kuniyoshi’s own work, while using the techniques of American art, retained some traces of the culture and art of Japan, where he spent his first sixteen years.¹²

Less than five years after the folk art show at the Whitney Studio Club, Hopper, who frequented the club, purchased the American folk painting *Calvin Howe and His Two Sisters* (portraying siblings of Anglo-Saxon heritage) from the 1830s. Hopper treasured the artwork for the rest of his life, arranging with his wife to bequeath it to the Metropolitan

Museum of Art.¹³ Hopper's interest in American folk art coincided with this chapter in racial nativism in the United States, which emerged so strongly that it influenced congressional debates on immigration restrictions in 1920 and 1921. Growing numbers of xenophobes blamed labor unrest and an increase in radical political activity on immigrants.

This period also reinvigorated the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). Its revival had been stoked by the release in 1915 of D. W. Griffith's film *The Birth of a Nation*, which mythologized and glorified the first Klan. The new KKK began to promote white supremacy, inciting racial intolerance and attracting those who considered Black, Roman Catholic, Jewish, and foreign-born minorities to be un-American. The spread of this toxic ideology occurred precisely at the same time that Americans were trying to identify their own "native" culture.¹⁴ The Klan exhorted its members to oppose immigrants and to support racist politics, white supremacy, Anglo-Saxon Protestantism, and segregation.

The nativist fervor of the 1920s puts into sharper relief the founding of a museum for "American art." In an early attempt to respond to the queries and define what the name meant, the Whitney Museum commissioned monographs, its American Artists series, featuring a list of twenty-nine white male artists and one white woman, Mary Cassatt. One of the first monographs, written by Hopper's close friend, the artist and critic Guy Pène du Bois and published in 1931, promoted Hopper, who had shown at the Studio Club, as "the most inherently Anglo-Saxon painter of all times."¹⁵ This publication was the first monograph ever devoted to Hopper's art. The identification of Hopper as "Anglo-Saxon," which won his approval, was meant to convey an assumed superiority. Hopper had himself referred to his Anglo-Saxon identity when writing home from Paris in 1906. In response to a letter from his mother, who descended from Anglicans and French Huguenots, he chided her, "I find in it [your correspondence] a tendency toward sentimentality which is not consistent with your hardy Anglo-Saxon nature."¹⁶ Here Hopper favors the term to reproach his mother for an atypical show of emotion.

Himself of proud French descent, Pène du Bois caters to the renewed wave of cultural nationalism, encouraging pride of country through cultural expression, when he argues in his monograph that "Hopper denies none of the Anglo-Saxon attributes which are so strongly planted in his character. He has built an aesthetic which expresses them directly. He has turned the Puritan in him into a purist, turned moral rigours into stylistic precisions."¹⁷ Pène du Bois continues, "Hopper seems to me to be the first of the Anglo-Saxon painters to have remained in the groove made for them by tradition. He, in any case replies directly, with not a shade of innuendo, to the demands made upon him by his nature."¹⁸ Pène du Bois concludes by contrasting Hopper with French or European artists and describing him as "a male, if you like: certainly an Anglo-Saxon."¹⁹ By "Puritan" and "Anglo-Saxon," Pène du Bois likely conjured ideas of hard work, self-control, and the denial of pleasure. Perhaps he was thinking about Hopper's industry, frugality, and abstinence from alcohol.²⁰ Or Pène du Bois might have meant what Nathan Irwin Huggins calls "the psychic fetters of puritanism"—the prohibitions on letting loose. Huggins refers to Harlem as an escape from the burdensome restraints that bound some white Americans like Hopper, inspiring bohemian whites to flock there.²¹

Hopper wrote to Pène du Bois in a letter of November 20, 1931: "I think that you did a swell job on me as a Puritan in the Whitney Museum book."²² Intentional emphasis on racial identity and ethnicity belied the fact that Hopper's actual ancestry was half Dutch and part French. Years later, the taciturn Hopper admitted to Katharine Kuh in an interview

published in 1960: “Like most Americans I’m an amalgam of many races. Perhaps all of them influenced me—Dutch, French, possibly some Welsh. Hudson River Dutch—not Amsterdam Dutch.”²³ Hopper’s choice to identify himself as “Hudson River Dutch” was a way to claim being part of America’s governing upper social class, defined in the *New York Times* in 1961 as “Anglo-Saxon, Episcopalian . . . though allowance must be made for the Hudson River Dutch and for the other most respectable Protestant sects.”²⁴ In effect, Hopper was asserting his claim to have descended from the early Dutch colonists who settled New York before the arrival of the English Anglo-Saxons.

Pène du Bois’s promotion of Hopper as “the most inherently Anglo-Saxon painter of all times” appears to have offended Alfred H. Barr Jr., who had included Hopper’s work in the 1929 show *Paintings by Nineteen Living Americans*, the second exhibition ever held at the newly opened MoMA. When Barr organized the first retrospective exhibition of Hopper’s paintings for MoMA in the fall of 1933, he contradicted Pène du Bois’s framing of Hopper, writing from what he would call an “internationalist” perspective. In his catalogue essay, Barr refers, for example, to the time just after art school, which Hopper spent painting in Paris: “He is now famous as a painter of emphatically American landscape and architecture but the landscape and architecture which first interested him were French.”²⁵ Remarkably, Barr, too, addresses Hopper’s ethnicity, stating that “Hopper was born fifty-one years ago in Nyack, New York, of North European ancestry, principally English and Dutch, with minor strains of Danish and Welsh.”²⁶ But, in contrast to Pène du Bois, Barr deftly changes the focus from social-class snobbery to an art-historical comparison, suggesting that “Hopper’s interiors of rooms and restaurants reminds one that he had among his ancestors Blauvelts and Brevoorts as well as Smiths and Garrets. The delight in the clean and precise pattern of empty sunlit rooms calls to mind Dutchmen like de Hooch and Janssens.”²⁷ Then, with a swipe against the argument in Pène du Bois’s monograph, Barr argues: “History suggests that a triumphant religion, a successful war, walls needing frescoes, a wealthy tyrant or a cultivated leisure class are more likely to induce art than is a spirit of aggressive nationalism. This spirit has not touched Hopper himself but it has colored some of the thinking and writing about his art.”²⁸

Hopper’s response to Barr can be found in his “Notes on Painting,” written for the MoMA catalogue, in which he admits, “The question of the value of nationality in art is perhaps unsolvable. In general it can be said that a nation’s art is greatest when it most reflects the character of its people. French art seems to prove this.”²⁹ Hopper did not stop, however, with remarks on nationalism but instead forged ahead into the misunderstood territory of race then in vogue:

The Romans were not an aesthetically sensitive people, nor did Greece’s intellectual domination over them destroy their racial character, but who is to say that they might not have produced a more original and vital art without this domination. One might draw a not too far-fetched parallel between France and our land. The domination of France in the plastic arts has been almost complete for the last thirty years or more in this country.³⁰

In Hopper’s mind at this time, questions of nationalism merged with notions about race.

Despite Barr’s best efforts to diffuse a focus on Hopper’s art as nationalistic, the headline for Helen Appleton Read’s review of the MoMA show in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* declared: “Racial Quality of Hopper Pictures at Modern Agrees with Nationalistic Mood: American

Scene Predominating Theme." She writes: "Hopper's rise to fame, and it has been a rapid one, since in the ten years he has been before the public he has come to be one of the most discussed figures in American art, is partially to be explained by the fact that he has come in on the rising tide of nationalism." Hopper satisfied, she goes on to say, "requirements of what was meant by racial quality in American art. Puritan austerity and nothing in excess, an emotional response to his native environment and above all independence of thought and spirit."³¹

It becomes increasingly clear just how accepted racial stereotyping was in the United States in the 1920s and early 1930s. Although race had been earlier subject to debate by the activist and scholar W. E. B. Du Bois and more recently by the philosopher and writer Alain Locke, the theoretical perspective that race is a social construct, invented by humans to classify others, was not yet widely established.³² In 1924, however, Locke had already written, "Race is a fact in the social or ethnic sense, that it has been very erroneously associated with race in the physical sense."³³

The emphatic promotion of Anglo-Saxon identity at the Whitney and in the press provoked the art historian Meyer Schapiro, "an independent Marxist."³⁴ In 1936, just five years after the Whitney opened, he wrote a critique of nationalism titled "Race, Nationality, and Art" for *Art Front*, the Artists Union journal: "It is taught that the great national art can issue only from those who really belong to the nation, more specifically, to the Anglo-Saxon blood; that immigration of foreigners, mixture of peoples, dilutes the national strain and leads to inferior hybrid arts; that the influence of foreign arts is essentially pernicious; and that the weakness of American art today is largely the result of alien influences."³⁵ Schapiro opposed such exclusionist thinking. He himself painted and considered his Jewish identity compatible with his wide scope of interests, which spanned Christian medieval art and modern art. He appreciated and wrote about art by immigrants to the United States, such as Arshile Gorky and Piet Mondrian, and migrants within Europe, from Marc Chagall to Pablo Picasso.³⁶

Hopper was an "eminently native painter," according to Lloyd Goodrich, writing in "The Paintings of Edward Hopper," published in March 1927 in *The Arts*, a journal that Whitney supported. Trained as an artist, Goodrich would later organize Hopper's two retrospective exhibitions (in 1950 and 1964) at the Whitney Museum, where he worked as research curator from 1935, becoming associate director and then director (from 1958 to 1968). In the article, he predicts an even greater future for Hopper and claims, "It is hard to think of another painter who is getting more of the quality of America into his canvases."³⁷ He also writes, "In more than one of Hopper's works one feels less satire than sympathy for a racial expression which, in spite of its obvious shortcomings, has the courage to be itself."³⁸ Goodrich thus seems to embrace the idea of promoting Anglo-Saxon culture, championing the art of Protestant white men, the ethnic group with which he himself identified.

Hopper himself immediately followed Goodrich's article with his own essay in *The Arts* focused on the painter John Sloan. Hopper, too, stresses the need to develop a "native art": "Certain artists of originality and intelligence who are no longer content to be citizens of the world of art, but believe that now or in the near future American art should be weaned from its French mother. These men in their work are giving concrete expression to their belief. The 'tang of the soil' is becoming evident more and more in their painting."³⁹ Hopper emphasizes, "We should not be quite certain of the crystallization of the art of America into something native and distinct, were it not that our drama, our literature and our

architecture show very evident signs of doing just that thing.”⁴⁰ The question is what he meant by “native and distinct.” Neither Hopper nor most men of his generation saw a legitimate role for women as professional artists; thus, he refers to “these men.” Nor did Hopper’s culture prepare him to envision artists of color, especially Black artists, who were then marginalized in an American society that was largely segregated, like the world he painted.

Discovering this historic link between art, ethnic identity, and the Whitney affected my research on Hopper from the moment in 1976 when, still in my twenties, I started work as a curator at the museum, charged with researching and writing the catalogue raisonné for Hopper. My research on the era when Hopper first showed at Whitney’s new museum soon found, for example, a debate between “nationalism” and “internationalism” in a public program held there in February 1932, which posed the question: “Nationalism in Art—Is It an Advantage?” One of the event’s featured speakers, Richard Lahey, an artist and educator whom Hopper had known since the early twenties at the Whitney Studio Club, proclaimed: “In politics the world is crying for internationalism, but in art we must develop prejudices.”⁴¹ The Whitney’s effort to define what was meant by “American,” including the emphasis on the concept of Anglo-Saxon culture by Hopper and his friend Pène du Bois, characterized many of the artists that the museum initially promoted. The museum embraced this conceptual privileging of white Protestant men.

Before World War II, the celebration of diversity in American culture was not a conscious goal. Institutions such as universities and museums (many of which maintained quotas restricting Jews, Blacks, and other minorities from both their staff and collections) were free to exclude those who did not fit their narrow-minded mold.⁴² Progress confronting racism drew in part on seeing the connection between the Civil Rights Movement and the legacy of Hitler and the Nazis, which became evident to American Jewish leaders and others, as documented by scholars such as Hasia Diner.⁴³

Racist considerations linked historically to Hopper’s embrace of Anglo-Saxon superiority persisted at the Whitney long after the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, as I discovered when I embarked on my research. Thomas N. Armstrong III, the museum’s director during the late 1970s and early 1980s, made racist and anti-Semitic comments at curatorial meetings. On one occasion in my first few months at the museum, he made a point of ordering me, the new young Jewish curator, to attend a private meeting on Yom Kippur with him and the president of the board.⁴⁴

When I later wrote that even in 1931, it was racist to call Hopper the most “Anglo-Saxon of artists,” the museum censored my manuscript for the catalogue of the Hopper show of 1980.⁴⁵ Fear of retribution kept me from writing this essay at that time. Only the impact of recent events and the Black Lives Matter movement have given me the courage and determination to speak out now, as institutions across the country have finally begun to acknowledge racial inequity.⁴⁶

Although critics have long been writing about Hopper and “American” identity, the significance of identifying Hopper as “Anglo-Saxon” and “Puritan” has been overlooked. No one has wanted to examine just what these labels implied. Yet in the early twentieth century, individuals labeled Anglo-Saxon were held to be at the top of a racial hierarchy that placed people from Southern and Eastern Europe at the lower ranks of whiteness.⁴⁷ Such ideas affected both legislation restricting immigration and the perception of how to define

American culture. As a result, the view of exactly what American culture was has at different times been simplistic, reductive, restrictive, and used to perpetuate institutional racism, defined as societal patterns and structures that impose oppressive or otherwise negative conditions on identifiable groups on the basis of race or ethnicity. These longstanding inequities relate to the contemporary struggles that we are experiencing today in the United States.

What prompted the Whitney and its spokespersons to emphasize the significance of “race” and then to identify Hopper as “Anglo-Saxon?” Did this identity have any cultural context in his life, or was it merely an invented construct by art critics in the 1920s and 1930s? Hopper’s earliest surviving sketches, dating to his late nineteenth-century boyhood, offer interesting insight into his first attitudes toward race—though the Whitney curators would not have known about these drawings in the 1930s. Saved by his mother, many of these sketches were in the 1968 bequest of his widow, Josephine Nivison Hopper, to the Whitney, which was intended to include the painter’s entire artistic estate.⁴⁸ It is possible that neither the adult Hopper nor his wife had any idea what early works his mother had squirreled away in the attic of his boyhood home, which was inaccessible to them in old age because they were no longer able to enter the attic through its rickety pull-down ladder. These early drawings, which were never exhibited or sold during the artist’s lifetime, show that Hopper shared the racist stereotypes that prevailed at the time in white Protestant culture in the United States. The boyhood sketches further reveal some of the attitudes of his own middle-class family, which attended the local Baptist church, itself divided over the recent influx of immigrants that were perceived by many as threatening Anglo-Saxon dominance in America.⁴⁹



Fig. 1. Edward Hopper, *Anarchism (with Figure Studies)* (detail), 1899. Pen and ink on paper, sheet: 9 7/8 × 7 1/4 in. Whitney Museum of American Art, bequest of Josephine N. Hopper, 70.1605.91



Fig. 2. Edward Hopper, *Three Studies: Man Playing Banjo, Man at Dinner Table, and Men in Armor* (detail), ca. 1895–99. Graphite pencil on paper, sheet: 10 × 7 15/16 in. Whitney Museum of American Art, bequest of Josephine N. Hopper, 70.1562.74

Anti-immigrant ideology appears in Hopper’s 1899 sketch of a grotesquely bearded, long-haired angry man, which he captioned “Anarchism,” a political current that at the time was often linked to immigrants from Italy and Eastern Europe (fig. 1). Hopper made this sketch a few years before Congress enacted the Immigration Act of 1903, targeting anarchists for exclusion. During his teen years, Hopper portrayed many such discriminatory ethnic and racial stereotypes, including sketches of Chinese people, African peoples, and scenes of African-American life that were demeaning caricatures from minstrel shows (fig. 2).⁵⁰ One early sketch of about 1897 was titled *Eight Male Figures of Different Nationalities and Occupations* (Whitney Museum). Here the young Hopper engages in gross stereotypes: the white

Scotsman is musical, the Bobby wields power, Asian and Black individuals do menial jobs, and the urbane Jew offers money to a peddler.

Hopper's early attitude toward race even survives in his verse called "On the Late Chinese War," echoing hymns from church and lessons from Sunday School:

A pagan race may downward trod [sic] the path to hell
While from their multitudinous throats there swell
A hoarse cry raised in boisterous praise
Of images of brass and stone
But can the Christian race with fire and sword
Choke down their throats the Gospel of our Lord
The wrath of God will surely fall on these presumptuous puppets
Who bestow their inconsistent efforts on the heathen horde.⁵¹

The verses, though marginally literate, suggest that Hopper grew up believing that he belonged to the "Christian race" that was superior to pagans and the "heathen horde"; he appears ambivalent, however, toward Christian fanatics.

The survival of these early works is exceptional; yet, to make Hopper the scapegoat for the racism of his generation of white male artists in the United States would be reductive and simplistic. Systemic racism is evident not only in Hopper's work but also in that of other leading twentieth-century American artists.⁵² And not only racism but also sexism was endemic. To bury this information would be to allow it to continue to have insidious effects on our institutions. Instead, we must acknowledge systemic prejudice, condemn it, and work for a more open and inclusive society. It is only by examining details of how bias affected our museums in the past and by raising consciousness that we can help avoid the reoccurrence of such behavior in the future.

While some of Hopper's contemporaries eventually spoke out against racism, he would remain silent on the subject after his writings in the 1920s and early 1930s. In contrast, Thomas Hart Benton denounced racism even as he depicted it in his murals. For example, in one of his 1933 series, *A Social History of Indiana*, produced for the Indiana pavilion at the Chicago World's Fair, Benton foregrounds an interior hospital scene that focuses on a Black child cared for by a white nurse, while in the distant background the Ku Klux Klan is shown burning a cross—an ironic detail that, in the judgment of some observers, should have been omitted.⁵³ Soon afterward, Benton took part in a widely publicized 1935 exhibition, *An Art Commentary on Lynching*, organized by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and staged at the Arthur Newton Gallery in New York. Then, in 1940, Benton explicitly denounced racism, declaring: "We in this country put no stock in racial genius. We do not believe that because a man comes from one strain rather than another, he starts with superior equipment."⁵⁴

In his 1927 article on Sloan, Hopper opines that “generalizations about race are unsatisfying” and asks, “But what of the men of talent and originality who have until now dutifully spent their apprenticeships in Europe and returned with the persistent glamour of the European scene to confuse and retard their reabsorption into the American?” After what sounds like a reflection on the course of his own career, he allows, “The native qualities are elusive and not easily defined except in their superficial manifestations. Perhaps these are all that concern us.” He concludes, “They are in part due to the artist’s visual reaction to his land, directed and shaped by the more fundamental heritage of race.”⁵⁵

Hesitant at first to generalize about race, Hopper shifts to focus on “scene” as generically either “European” or “American,” leaving open his precise meaning of the terms. He then focuses on “native qualities,” which he deems “not easily defined” excepting “superficial manifestations.” Thus, he seems to conclude that superficial show may be all that matters and that it results from the artist’s perceptual apparatus, which he sees as conditioned by ethnicity, here called “race,” about which he at first hesitated to generalize.

Given Hopper’s white male privilege, he was often empowered to serve as an exhibition juror or chair of a jury. He was not inclined to open up opportunities to Black artists or women.⁵⁶ But while such bias was probably deeply institutional, Hopper himself was often accused of gender bias by his wife, Jo, in her diaries (her own canvases were discarded from her bequest by the Whitney).⁵⁷ Such misogyny joined with white male privilege often marks the rhetoric of today’s white nationalism. And such exclusionist ideologies are as mutually reinforcing today as they were in Hopper’s time. Yet even as Jo protested her husband’s sexism over many years, her diaries suggest that she shared his ethnic and racial biases.

My current book project will explore further links between what Hopper referred to in 1927 as the “indigenous” in America (which was definitely not what we today call “Native American”⁵⁸) to what we now think of as white nationalism, complete with its partner, misogyny. Given the responses to the recent presidential election, it is all too apparent that the systemic institutional racism in the United States is still strong. In a sense, interrogating the link between race and Hopper tells us how far we have come and what a long road of reckoning we still have ahead.

Notes

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¹ Gail Levin, “Jewish Children Singing Dixie: The Toll of the Confederate Monuments as Seen by a Jew, a Native Southerner, and an Art Historian,” *Jewish Historical Studies* 49, no. 1 (2018): 1–11, <https://www.scienceopen.com/document/read?vid=3c4d45da-e215-4a4e-acbd-34aa5866ofa8>.

² Gail Levin, *Edward Hopper: A Catalogue Raisonné* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1995); Gail Levin, *Edward Hopper: An Intimate Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995; New York: Rizzoli, 2007).

³ For a brief account of this incident and Eleanor Roosevelt’s resignation letter, see “Eleanor Roosevelt resigns from the Daughters of the American Revolution in 1939 over its refusal to permit Marian

- Anderson to perform at Constitution Hall,” National Archives and Records Administration, last updated March 1996, https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/american_originals/eleanor.html.
- ⁴ The African art at the Whitney Studio Club was borrowed from Paul Guillaume in Paris. For a photograph of the exhibition by Charles Sheeler held by the Metropolitan Museum, see <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/321148>.
- ⁵ Two websites report that Prophet studied in Paris in 1922 through the financial assistance of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney: “Nancy Elizabeth Prophet,” Mapping Arts Project, <http://mappingartsproject.org/providence/artists/nancy-elizabeth-prophet>; and “Nancy Elizabeth Prophet, Sculptor born,” African American Registry, <https://aaregistry.org/story/nancy-elizabeth-prophet-an-unknown-sculptor>. Prophet’s diary, now at Brown University, contradicts this claim. Theresa Leininger-Miller, a leading scholar on Prophet, is also unaware of any documentation for this assertion (email to author, January 25, 2021). See her book: *New Negro Artists in Paris: African American Painters and Sculptors in the City of Light, 1922–1934* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 16–55.
- ⁶ Mary Ann Calo, *Distinction and Denial: Race, Nation, and the Critical Construction of the African American Artist, 1920–40* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 4. Whitney had grown up spending summers at the Vanderbilt’s Newport mansion known as The Breakers.
- ⁷ Calo, *Distinction and Denial*, 1. See also Gail Levin, “‘Primitivism’ in American Art: Some Literary Parallels of the 1910s and 1920s,” *Arts Magazine* 59, no.3 (November 1984): 102, <https://gaillevin.commons.gc.cuny.edu/files/2014/03/Primitivism-in-American-Art.pdf>. In this article, I write: “The white avant-garde saw blacks as symbolic of their own search for personal freedom, able to evade convention and expectation,” referencing David C. Driskell, *Two Centuries of Black American Art* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), 59.
- ⁸ Steven Watson, *The Harlem Renaissance, Hub of African-American Culture, 1920–1930* (New York: Pantheon, 1995), 104.
- ⁹ Aaron Copland, “The Composer and His Music,” *Modern Music* 9, no. 4 (May–June 1932): 143. For the larger context, see also Gail Levin and Judith Tick, *Aaron Copland’s America* (New York: Watson-Guptil, 2000).
- ¹⁰ See Alexander Pavuk, “No Immigrants or Radicals Need Apply: Varieties of Nativism in 1920s America,” in *A Companion to Warren G. Harding, Calvin Coolidge, and Herbert Hoover*, ed. Katherine A. S. Sibley (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 151–69; and Wanda Corn, *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915–1935* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), 325. Corn asserts, “By the late 1930s, as the rise of Nazism and Fascism abroad began to discredit the links between art and nationalism and modern painters turned increasingly to abstraction, folk art began to appear ill placed in museums of modern art.”
- ¹¹ See Gail Levin, “Between Two Worlds: Folk Culture, Identity, and the American Art of Yasuo Kuniyoshi,” *Archives of American Art Journal* 43, nos. 3–4 (2003): 2–17.
- ¹² I do not concur with Shi-Pu Wang’s assessment that descriptions of Kuniyoshi’s work as “individualist” were “a coded label . . . that insisted on attributing Kuniyoshi’s art to his national and racial origin and thus implicitly distinguished him from other Caucasian/white artists and their claim to ‘Americanness’”; *Becoming American? The Art and Identity Crisis of Yasuo Kuniyoshi* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2011), 29. Instead, my research in Okayama, Japan, at Kuniyoshi’s high school, demonstrates that he had absorbed much about Japanese culture and aesthetics before he left for the United States. To me, this recognition underscores the value of Kuniyoshi’s Japanese culture rather than denigrating or erasing it.
- ¹³ The painting is today in a private collection. For a description of the digital image, see <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/digcoll/1786424>. The Hoppers’ folk painting appears in part in the background of Louise Dahl-Wolfe’s 1933 photograph of them: <https://www.mocp.org/detail.php?t=objects&type=all&f=&s=Louise+Dahl-Wolfe&record=7>. See also Gail Levin, “Artists’ Estates: When Trust Is Betrayed,” in *Ethics and the Visual Arts*, ed. Elaine A. King and Gail Levin (New York: Allworth, 2006), 137–39; and Levin, *Edward Hopper: An Intimate Biography*, 221, 243, 245, 522. On

May 4, 1959, the Hoppers had Metropolitan Museum of Art curator Theodore Rousseau come to the studio to see *Calvin Howe and His Two Sisters*, even as they planned its bequest to the museum.

¹⁴ See Pavuk, “No Immigrants or Radicals Need Apply,” 161–67.

¹⁵ Guy Pène du Bois, *Edward Hopper* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art by William Edwin Rudge, 1931), 8.

¹⁶ Edward Hopper to his mother, November 9, 1906, Hopper Archives, Whitney Museum of American Art; quoted in Levin, *Edward Hopper: An Intimate Biography*, 51.

¹⁷ Pène du Bois, *Edward Hopper*, 8. For a concise definition of cultural nationalism in early twentieth-century America, see Patricia Hills, *Modern Art in the USA: Issues and Controversies of the 20th Century* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2001), 53–55.

¹⁸ Pène du Bois, *Edward Hopper*, 10.

¹⁹ Pène du Bois, *Edward Hopper*, 12.

²⁰ For a more in-depth analysis of the relationship of Hopper to Puritanism, see Levin, *Edward Hopper: An Intimate Biography*, especially 61, 81, 97, 238–39, 253, and 275–80. On the development of Puritanism, see Daniel T. Rodgers, *The Work Ethic in Industrial America, 1850–1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 12 and 245n15.

²¹ Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 89.

²² See Levin, *Edward Hopper: An Intimate Biography*, 239.

²³ Edward Hopper, quoted in Katharine Kuh, *The Artist’s Voice* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 135.

²⁴ Allen Potter, “The American Governing Class,” *British Journal of Sociology* 13, no. 4 (December 1962): 314.

²⁵ Alfred H. Barr, Jr., “Edward Hopper,” in *Edward Hopper: Retrospective Exhibition* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1933), 9.

²⁶ Barr, “Edward Hopper,” 9.

²⁷ Barr, “Edward Hopper,” 15.

²⁸ Barr, “Edward Hopper,” 12.

²⁹ Edward Hopper, “Notes on Painting,” in Barr, *Edward Hopper*, 17.

³⁰ Hopper, “Notes on Painting,” 17.

³¹ Helen Appleton Read, “Racial Quality of Hopper Pictures at Modern Agrees with Nationalistic Mood,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, November 5, 1933.

³² W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Conservation of Races” (paper presented at the American Negro Academy, Washington, DC, 1897); see text at: <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/the-conservation-of-races>. See also Megan Gannon, “Race Is a Social Construct, Scientists Argue,” *Scientific American*, February 5, 2016, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/race-is-a-social-construct-scientists-argue>.

³³ Alain Locke, “The Concept of Race as Applied to Social Culture” (1924); quoted in Jacoby Adeshei Carter, “Alain LeRoy Locke,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (summer 2012 ed.), ed. Edward N. Zalta, published March 23, 2012; last modified April 26, 2012, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/alain-locke/#ConEthRac>.

³⁴ Hills reports that Schapiro was “not politically affiliated”; *Modern Art in the USA*, 136.

³⁵ Meyer Schapiro, “Race, Nationality, and Art,” *Art Front* 2, no. 4 (1936): 10.

³⁶ See Meyer Schapiro, *Modern Art: 19th and 20th Centuries; Selected Papers* (New York: George Braziller, 1978).

³⁷ Lloyd Goodrich, “The Paintings of Edward Hopper,” *The Arts* 2 (March 1927): 136.

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- ³⁸ Goodrich, “Paintings of Edward Hopper,” 136.
- ³⁹ Edward Hopper, “John Sloan and the Philadelphians,” *The Arts* 2 (April 1927): 177.
- ⁴⁰ Hopper, “John Sloan,” 178.
- ⁴¹ Richard Lahey, quoted in Edward Alden Jewell, “Should Art Be National?; Debate at Whitney Results,” *New York Times*, February 28, 1932.
- ⁴² See Leslie M. Harris, “The Long Ugly History of Racism at American Universities,” *The New Republic*, March 26, 2015: “It was not until the 1970s that segregation for non-whites and quotas for non-Christian students in universities were completely abolished.”
- ⁴³ Hasia R. Diner, *We Remember with Reverence and Love: American Jews and the Myth of Silence After the Holocaust, 1945–1962* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 9, 11.
- ⁴⁴ Two articles on Armstrong interviewed no one who was acquainted with his anti-Semitic comments: Arthur Lebow, “The Curse of the Whitney,” *New York Times Magazine*, April 1, 1999; and Grace Glueck, “Art-World Figures Defend Director of Whitney,” *New York Times*, February 3, 1990. I grew up in the Deep South during the Civil Rights Movement and taught in the Black community as part of Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty. The Whitney’s early promotion of Hopper as “Anglo-Saxon” seemed inappropriate to me. Unknown to me at the time of this meeting, Howard Lipman, the president of the Whitney’s board, and his wife, Jean, both born Jewish and married by a rabbi, had converted to Episcopalianism years earlier. Dara Horn discusses an anti-Semitism that “asks the Jews to take part in their own destruction” by employing “Jews as agents”—“converted’ Jews {who} openly renounce whatever aspect of their Jewish identity are unacceptable to the relevant regime, proudly declare their loyalty to the ideology of the day, and loudly urge other Jews to follow them. These people are used to demonstrate the good intentions of the regime—which of course isn’t anti-Semitic, but merely requires that its Jews flush thousands of years of Jewish civilization down the toilet in exchange for the price of not being treated like dirt”; “Playing the Fool,” *Jewish Review of Books*, summer 2015, <https://jewishreviewofbooks.com/articles/1672/playing-the-fool>.
- ⁴⁵ For the publication that was censored by the Whitney, see Gail Levin, *Edward Hopper: The Art and the Artist* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1980).
- ⁴⁶ In 2020, protests against major instances of racism, sexism, and anti-Semitism occurred in public spaces including museums, from the Guggenheim in New York to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. For a discussion of the ways in which the art world’s “liberal” racism continues to repeat itself through cycles, see Aruna D’Souza, *Whitewalling: Art, Race & Protest in 3 Acts* (New York: Badlands Unlimited, 2018). She examined three cases, one of which focuses on the controversy over a painting by Dana Schutz, a white artist, shown at the Whitney’s 2017 Biennial, that depicts Emmett Till, the fourteen-year-old Black youth tortured and lynched in Mississippi in 1955 by two white men, in his open casket.
- ⁴⁷ See Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 39–69.
- ⁴⁸ Just before and during probate of Jo Hopper’s will, however, a large number of Hopper’s artworks were removed from the estate by a neighbor, the local Baptist preacher Arthayer R. Sanborn. These works came primarily but not entirely from the attic of the Nyack house that was Hopper’s boyhood home, where his sister died in 1965. Since these works were sold anonymously, without provenance, at auction and through art galleries, it became difficult to account for or to study all of them. See Gail Levin, “Ethics and the Visual Arts,” <https://gaillevin.commons.gc.cuny.edu/ethics-visual-arts>.
- ⁴⁹ Lawrence B. Davis, *Immigrants, Baptists, and the Protestant Mind in America* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1973), 40.
- ⁵⁰ Such stereotypical racist images as these and others are in the Hopper Collection, Whitney Museum of American Art, bequest of Josephine N. Hopper. They include: *Anarchism (with Figure Studies)*, 1899, 70.1605.91 (reproduced in Levin, *Edward Hopper: An Intimate Biography*, 21); *Study of Two Men Captured by a Jungle Tribe*, 1892–95, 70.1557.69, <https://whitney.org/collection/works/9874>; *Three Studies: Man Playing Banjo, Man at Dinner Table, and Men in Armor*, 1895–99, 70.1562.74,

<https://whitney.org/collection/works/22095>; *ME FIXIE YOU*, 1895–99, 70.1558.95, <https://whitney.org/collection/works/21486>; *Eight Male Figures of Different Nationalities and Occupations*, ca. 1897 (known at the Whitney as *Sketches of Caricatures*), 1892–95, 70.1557.14, <https://whitney.org/collection/works/9856> (reproduced in Levin, *Edward Hopper: An Intimate Biography*, 22); *Sketches from Coontown*, 1895–99, 70.1562.87, <https://whitney.org/collection/works/22475>; *Study of a Seated Woman with Hat*, which I read as a Black child, 1899, 70.1556.88, <https://whitney.org/collection/works/31295>; and *Study of a Man Saying Grace before a Turkey Meal*, 1899, 70.1559.101, <https://whitney.org/collection/works/21607>.

- ⁵¹ See Edward Hopper’s handwritten manuscript of this verse, ca. 1896–99, pencil on paper, Whitney Museum of American Art, Bequest of Josephine N. Hopper. 70.1557.41 recto. Hopper crossed out “sword” and “race” before choosing “horde” as his last word.
- ⁵² See, for example, Donna M. Cassidy, *Marsden Hartley: Race, Region, and Nation* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2005).
- ⁵³ Stuart Davis viewed Benton’s depiction of Black people as racist, especially in his earlier series of murals for the Whitney Museum. Davis complained, “Are the gross caricatures of Negroes by Benton to be passed off as ‘direct representation’? The only thing they directly represent is a third-rate vaudeville character cliché with the humor omitted. Had they a little more wit, they would automatically take their place in the body of propaganda which is constantly being utilized to disfranchise the Negro politically, socially and economically.” Stuart Davis, “Reviews: The New York American Scene in Art,” *Art Front* 1, no. 3 (February 1935): 3.
- ⁵⁴ Benton, quoted in Henry Adams, “In Defense of Keeping the Indiana University Mural That Depicts (But Doesn’t Glorify) the KKK,” *Smithsonian*, November 3, 2017, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/misguided-campaign-remove-thomas-hart-benton-mural-180967080>.
- ⁵⁵ Hopper, “John Sloan,” 170.
- ⁵⁶ In 1937, Hopper was one of the six jurors for the Carnegie International. Jo Hopper noted in her diary that Edward was “falling over backwards to be unbiased, overstep his native prejudices for work he didn’t like at all”; quoted in Levin, *Edward Hopper: An Intimate Biography*, 315. The jury’s first prize went to Alexander Brook, the second to Yasuo Kuniyoshi, and the third to Marc Chagall. Hopper was also a juror for the Virginia Museum in Richmond in 1953 (Levin, *Edward Hopper: An Intimate Biography*, 458).
- ⁵⁷ See Levin, *Edward Hopper: An Intimate Biography*; and Gail Levin, “Mapping Edward Hopper: Jo Hopper as Her Husband’s Cartographer,” *Artl@s Bulletin* 7, no. 2 (2018), <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/artlas/vol7/iss2/6>.
- ⁵⁸ Hopper, “John Sloan,” 169. As a boy and a teenager, Hopper produced many surviving stereotypical images of Native Americans, but his use of the term “indigenous” in his 1927 essay had a different meaning.