introduction

NATAL NATIONALISM: THE PLACE OF THE CHILD IN AMERICAN CULTURAL STUDIES

This book begins with a simple assumption that has potentially far-reaching implications for identity-based discourses like feminist and race studies, as well as for liberalist, social-contract, and psychoanalytic theories: While the idea of the child's difference from adults is a fact on which social and civic institutions largely depend and on which a variety of challenges to those same institutions have been premised, the notion of the child's difference from adults has in fact curtailed more far-reaching efforts to rethink the full range of individuals' ethical engagements in a social world. Childhood is now widely regarded as a distinct developmental phase of an individual's life, but as Ian Shapiro points out, "Democratic justice invites us to view such a development with suspicion."[1] At the very least, careful consideration, if not suspicion, of the cultural meanings inhering in child identity is warranted when we consider that the child automatically complicates the very idea of identity that it seems at first to embody. An identity to which all adults can retroactively but no longer actively lay claim, the child refutes the constancy of individual identity even as it represents its most essential premise that each self is stable. In other words, despite—or, more likely, because of—this obvious fact that the child represents the ephemeral and contingent nature of identity, the child, as Adam Phillips has famously observed, remains "our most convincing essentialism."[2]

The trend over the last century to structure ever more social programs

and civic processes around the notion of an essential child identity has codified a conflation of the child with the state that has its origins in the late eighteenth century. Contending that the child was the index and "threshold of democracy" in the United States,[3] the mental-hygiene movement that originated at Johns Hopkins University and largely set the terms for twentieth-century U.S. social-policy debate made explicit the child's primary place within the liberal-democratic state. Believing that the child's welfare directly contributed to the nation's overall "education . . . social security, and standards of health" as well as to its international struggles for "peace and human welfare," the National Committee for Mental Hygiene and the Commonwealth Fund scientifically documented that the only way to strengthen the body politic was by emphasizing childhood.[4] Yet if initiatives from the 1909 White House Conference on the Care of Dependent Children to the 1940 White House Conference on Children in Democracy consistently argued that society could be perfected through the socialization of the child, surveys by the National Committee for Mental Hygiene differentiated between kinds of children, noting that "there is more need for special classes amongst the colored than amongst the white" children if "the development of citizenship" is to progress.[5] These early-twentieth-century configurations of the child as a benchmark of the democratic process and its racial contours reflect the child's longstanding political significance in the United States. Thus, even as the child became a key structural element in national conversations about democratic progress, it continued to index the inadvertent limits and inconsistencies at the heart of U.S. liberal-democratic processes.

To the extent that the child has been recognized as having larger historical importance for discussions of U.S. democratic justice, it tends to be understood as reinforcing women's relegation to a private sphere that facilitates, even as it remains distinct from, public culture. Linda Kerber, for example, has contended that "in the years of the early Republic a consensus developed around the ideas that a mother, committed to the service of her family and to the state, might serve a political purpose. Those who opposed women in politics had to meet the proposal that women could—and should—play a political role through the raising of a patriotic child."[6] More recently, Elizabeth Dillon has argued that women's privacy is central, rather than incidental, to the development of liberalist politics in the United States and thus

that the mother–child relationship pivotal to nineteenth-century American writing works to facilitate the gendered logic sustaining U.S. liberalism.[7] In such models, the child is understood to reinforce and extend women's association with privacy, shoring up an American political culture in which women are dependent and men are autonomous. Such a model, however, ignores how the child challenges as much as stabilizes the distinctions between dependence and autonomy on which the evolution of a liberalist political structure depends. If liberalism proposes that equal political rights inhere in the condition of being human and are thus universal despite differences among individuals, the child functions as a point of origin for the human and thus has occupied a pivotal position in the writing of political philosophers from Locke to Rousseau. Beginning analysis of a U.S. liberal endeavor with the child rather than with the adult subject, therefore, provides a unique opportunity to chart liberalism's inner workings—to see how the child, by simultaneously representing the promise of autonomy and the reality of dependence, both shapes and constantly threatens to disrupt liberalism's two relational antipodes.

Approaching questions of civic representation by way of the child rather than the adult makes explicit the primary, and often unrecognized, importance of racial formations to narratives of U.S. national belonging. Even as political scientists from Ernest Gellner to David Theo Goldberg have long recognized the ethnic and racial origins of nation-states, U.S. political philosophy has consistently failed to acknowledge the role of race in constituting U.S. civic structures, as Cedric Robinson's *Black Marxism* and Charles Mills's *From Class to Race* have made abundantly clear.[8] This oversight has been compounded by the tendency of U.S. cultural scholars to rely on Benedict Anderson's model of nation formation, which tends to obscure the constitutive place of race in a U.S. national imaginary, as Latin American and African American scholars have repeatedly pointed out.[9] When critical commentaries attend to race, they tend to focus on conflicts between different races within the nation rather than on how the nation is imaginatively created and sustained through racial principles. Assuming adult subjects, such studies, in short, have tended to document explicit episodes of racial conflict and thus have overlooked how the child works to establish race as a central shaping element of ostensibly raceless Western ideals. Excavating the child's importance to the development of white supremacy as

a social ontology governing liberal democracy is urgently needed, because the ethical understanding of identity for which political philosophers such as K. Anthony Appiah and Martha Nussbaum advocate requires not only reducing overt episodes of racism but also structurally dismantling the racial logic that historically has shaped social encounters in liberal-democratic systems. The following pages uncover this unrecorded history of the child in the hope of opening new possibilities for civic representation by shedding new light on how Enlightenment, liberalist ideals of freedom, equality, and liberty have worked and continue to work in the United States in tandem with their seeming opposites — dependence, exploitation, and subjugation.

The child carries cultural significance in many nations, but the United States offers a particularly rich venue for analyzing the child's importance to the racial premises underpinning liberal democracy because the nation emerges out of a series of racial encounters between Mexican, Native American, Anglo, and African peoples.[10] Yet analysis of the child in an American context illustrates not only how the U.S. nation materializes out of a series of racial conflicts but, more fundamentally, how the nation is imaginatively created and sustained through the logic of racial hierarchy that the child helps to naturalize. In other words, recognizing how the child facilitates a social ontology of white supremacy is certainly an important step in the ongoing scholarly endeavor of charting the centrality of nonwhite peoples to the nation's history — of recognizing, for example, how Hispanic soldiers played crucial roles in eradicating slavery in the South during the Civil War and in charging up San Juan Hill during 1898. But more fundamentally, such analysis suggests that the concepts of marginality and social dependence that are often used to identify those involved in such lost histories are as important a part of a U.S. liberal endeavor as are the concepts of autonomy and independence with which such an endeavor is more commonly associated.

Scholars are increasingly recognizing the child's centrality to American literary culture. While it is indeed the case that the figure of the child often stands opposed to that of the adult in American writing, this book explores the proposition that this opposition is itself crucial to American political thought and the literary cultures that surround and help to produce it. As such, the following pages argue that American literary and political texts do not so much include child subjects as depend on them to represent, naturalize, and, at times, attempt to reconfigure the ground rules of U.S. national

belonging. Charting this untold story reconstitutes critical understandings of nineteenth-century American literary as well political cultures, revealing how the rise of the child does not merely coincide with but helps to constitute American writing and the public cultures it produces. Thus, I ask, most broadly, how approaching American writing with a child rather than an adult subject in mind reframes what we think we know about political and literary forms; how the unique convergence of social forces that the child represents for readers and writers affects our understanding of civic representation and identity; and, finally, how excavating a long history of the child's centrality to U.S. writing alters familiar and well-worn ways of conceptualizing the interlocking ideas of self and culture.

We can begin to delineate the child's importance to U.S. culture by turning to the political, literary, and social discourses that set and recalibrated the terms of national belonging. In his 1853 fictional account of Thomas Jefferson's mixed-blood daughter, *Clotel*, William Wells Brown, for example, declares that the founding fathers who "boast that America is 'the cradle of liberty' " have effectively "rocked the child to death" with their commitment to slavery.[11] Fifteen years later, the Southern author and slavery apologist Augusta J. Evans predicted to General Beauregard that slavery's abolition would produce "a mighty convulsion, which will swing this 'cradle of liberty' . . . as it was never rocked before."[12] Brown's and Evans's invocations of a child in danger of being destroyed by the nation's dramatically shifting racial politics draws on a longstanding association of the new nation with a child. Whether it be John Adams's declaration that Great Britain's "child colonies are of the same ancestry" as the "old English folks" and so "won't be their Negroes" or Thomas Paine's argument that "the infant state of the colonies" justifies their "separation from a corrupt parent" country committed to denying their inherited "rights and liberties,"[13] the child is consistently featured in early national political rhetoric to constitute the very national entity it represents. And if the child acts as a founding myth through which the new nation comes into being, writers such as Brown, Paine, and Adams—whether critiquing or upholding the racial logic centering the new nation—consistently recognize the founding importance of race to the national myth the child represents. The modern nation-state emerging in the late eighteenth century with the American Declaration of Independence

and the French Revolution, as early national political commentators consistently recognized, conceptually depended not only on "color and race even more than birth"[14] but, more particularly, on the child's capacity to represent the racial contours of the emerging nation to establish its claims to legitimacy.

At the same historical moment that the child operates as an organizing figure around which national memory is retroactively created and retained, the child simultaneously comes to denote an innocent, natural self seemingly unmarked by social categories like race—a self that writers from Ralph Waldo Emerson through W. E. B. Du Bois would seek to reconstitute beyond the nation's convulsive reach. If every society is organized differently, each "with a distinctive orientation to the self," as Diane Margolis points out, the child works to remind each self of an original "infancy" that "conforms to nobody."[15] Thus, either through a return "to the woods," where "a man" can remember that he is "always a child," or through careful contemplation of the child who exists fleetingly beyond the "veil of race," individuals are consistently encouraged to find in the child the seemingly authentic, pre-social self with which the child had become exclusively equated by the late eighteenth century.[16]

Cradle of Liberty assesses the interdependencies of these two coincidentally emerging concepts of self and state that the child represents. Charting the ways in which the child personalizes the nation and, conversely, makes a tacitly racialized nation a constitutive part of the self, the project explores how state and self intermingle through the child—how the child's capacity to align self with state through the racial narrative the child represents creates and maintains the civic selfhood at the center of a U.S. liberal-democratic tradition. The emergence of the modern nation-state and of the modern child in the late eighteenth century and nineteenth century have been subjects of intensive critical inquiry in the last two decades, yet missing from these two rich bodies of work has been an assessment of how these two ideas work in tandem—how the child who is increasingly understood to be separate and in need of protection from civic life has historically helped to constitute and buttress the nation. The project of *Cradle of Liberty* is therefore to explore how the coincident emergence of the distinct category of childhood with the rise of the modern nation-state affects the creation, expansion, contestation, and duration of modern nations like the United States.

Since the nineteenth century, cultural and political commentators have observed the diverse ways in which race marks and orders the modern nation-state, as Ernest Renan notably remarked, but the child's centrality to this process has gone largely unrecognized.[17] Similarly, critical interest in the child that has emerged in the disciplines of anthropology, cultural studies, history, sociology, psychology, and literature in the wake of Philip Ariès's landmark *Centuries of Childhood* has produced rich analyses of children's social place within and conceptual centrality to different nations,[18] but it has yet to analyze how the emergence of the child as a distinct category of identity helps to found and uphold national culture in the first place. Meaning "to be born," the root of nation, "natio," derives from the idea of the child, and the concept of nation continues to be understood within the founding context that the child provides. Alexis de Tocqueville, for example, observed in *Democracy in America* that "the growth of nations" remains most readily observable "in the cradle of the child."[19] More recently Jacques Rancière has reminded us that birth is a founding "principle of sovereignty" in liberal democracy, where nativity is aligned with nationality so powerfully that natural life appears as the source and bearer of rights.[20] Yet the child is central not only to the state that was invented to govern strangers, but also to the idea of the citizen that was invented to people the state. A mother country, fatherland, and "patria" as much as a child, the United States, "like a family," confers a sense of identity and belonging among its members by recreating accustomed family relations and extending the nation's founding image of the child to transform those diverse individuals within its physical boundaries into a collective entity committed to creating and upholding a shared civic environment. Thus, just as the idea of the United States as an independent nation is naturalized through a racially inscribed child, so, too, does the nation create a shared environment among isolated individuals by extending this founding racial image to create a distinctive idea of civic selfhood among its members. If the emergence of the nation-state depends on the hardening of the modern dichotomy between adult and child, as Sharon Stephens has suggested,[21] the child therefore naturalizes the very nation that it summons into being through its capacity to constitute individual as well as national identity through the racial narrative it tells. Operating as a reference point for the state and for individuals in various stages of affiliation with it, the child, in other words, works to integrate individuals into the state by racially configuring both. Not simply representing the

mythical racial purity of the nation-state or the often marginal civic status of racial others living within such a nation, the child, in short, more fundamentally constitutes self as well as state through representing racial identity as a constitutive element of each.[22] The political integration of citizens into a large-scale society is one of the undisputed historical achievements of the nation-state, as Jürgen Habermas has recently pointed out,[23] and as the following pages illustrate, the child brings subjects potentially at odds with an evolving liberal democratic order into alignment with the state by representing race as constituting each at key junctures in the development of both.

While the significance of race to national formations has been long recognized among political theorists, its importance to constituting a modern concept of the self that the child represents has received less critical attention.[24] "Self" in Anglo-Saxon means "same" and thus has long carried with it a notion of identity and likeness, but Saint Augustine was the first to recognize the importance of the child in shaping identity.[25] Of course, the concept of the self has evolved and changed over historical time, as Charles Taylor has persuasively illustrated, and by the Romantic period, depictions of the child were shot through with a racial content, as William Blake's poem "The Little Black Boy" reminds us.[26] Declaring that his "soul is white" though he is "black as if bereaved of light," Blake's child narrator seeks the recognition of the "English child" who is "white as an angel"—recognition that is achievable only once individuals acknowledge the inevitable centrality of race to the social interactions in which they are engaged. Blake's black boy experiences what the speaker of Lunsford Lane's "The Slave Mother's Address to Her Infant Child" recognizes as unavoidable for her child. While her child is able to "fancy in thy dreams but thou are as free as a bird," the mother—just as W. E. B. Du Bois would fifty years later when he contemplated the passing of his first-born child—distinguishes between fancy and fact, foretelling the inevitable drawing around the infant of "the curtain of despair" wrought by race.[27] Refuting the very possibility of freedom from the social order that its "beauty of innocence" and "shining angel infancy" represent for self-declared "child-lovers" like Nathaniel Hawthorne, the child, as Blake's and Lane's lines make clear, does not so much represent a self untouched by social influences "that might embitter or pollute its waters" as function as a vehicle through which these influences are main-

tained and upheld.[28] As a result of its complex social significance, the child therefore acquires an "underestimated sensibility" that transforms it for many nineteenth-century Americans like Hawthorne from "a holy thing" into its seeming opposite — "a spirit strangely mingled with good and evil" that is "frightening" because of its indeterminate combination of the "elfish" and "angelic."[29] Laced with cultural significance that disrupts the innocence and authenticity with which nineteenth-century Americans desire to imbue it, the child thus reveals the series of maneuvers through which the idea of the "authentically human" becomes part of the machinery of constructing a civic self.

Writers like Walt Whitman recognized how the child increasingly equated with the self emerges out of and remains of necessity embedded within a complex web of social structures. Even as he acknowledges the child's unique role as representative of a pre-social, pure, and innocent self, Whitman pushes against such popular Romantic understandings of the child. It initially might seem counterintuitive to think of Whitman as contemplating the constructed nature of the child's authenticity, given that he is, after all, the U.S. writer arguably most deeply committed to finding and relishing the genuine. And yet precisely because Whitman's writing purportedly searches for the unmediated and celebrates the authentic, he offers a rich commentary on the child who is assuming a privileged position as bearer of authenticity and "true consciousness" in the nineteenth century. We can begin to see how Whitman comments on the child's increasingly overdetermined place in American culture in "There Was a Child Went Forth," which documents the child's irrevocable imbrication in the social processes that are fundamental to American civic life. Never sequestered from public encounter, the child ventures forth every day, and, as Whitman asserts,

> The first object he look'd upon, that object he became,
> And that object became part of him for the day or a certain part of the day,
> Or for many years or stretching cycles of years.[30]

Not distinguishable from those objects that make up public life, the child absorbs into itself as a foundational part of its identity, the objects that it encounters in an essentially social world. Whitman invokes the private, do-

mestic sphere with which the child tends to be exclusively equated when he depicts

> The mother at home quietly placing the dishes on the supper-table,
> The mother with mild words, clean her cap and gown,
> a wholesome odor falling off her person and clothes as she walks by,
> The father, strong, self-sufficient, manly, mean, anger'd, unjust,
> The blow, the quick loud word, the tight bargain, the crafty lure,
> The family usages, the language, the company, the furniture, the yearning and swelling heart.[31]

But such affections are constructed as much as genuine, in that they simultaneously create both "the sense of what is real" and "the thought if after all it should prove unreal."[32]

To consider Whitman's interest in the child is, in some ways, to be reminded of the child's longstanding importance to sexuality studies. From Havelock Ellis, Sigmund Freud, and Erik Erikson to recent efforts of queer theorists such as Michael Warner, James Kincaid, Chris Nealon, and Lee Edelman, among many others, the child has been the point of origin from which to rethink narratives of sexual identity and development.[33] Acknowledging the importance of this work, *Cradle of Liberty* nonetheless largely brackets questions of sexuality, not so much because sexuality can be detached from the child's cultural importance, but, instead, because such work has already been capably undertaken, while the racial contours of the child's impact on civic life remain uncharted. Similarly, I am interested in the child not so much because it upholds as transgresses gender difference, and so I attend less to distinctions between boy and girl children (though I would certainly agree that such distinctions exist) and more to the overarching category of the child. The enduring impulse to equate the child with gender divisions of labor, as I suggested at the outset, has delimited the terms of liberalist critique. Therefore, while I am indebted to the work of many who have capably shown the child's importance to maintaining and developing middle-class culture in the nineteenth-century United States,[34] I resist understanding the child as an outgrowth of bourgeois culture precisely because such an alliance is only a portion of—and thus tends to obscure—the longer history of the child's political importance to national development.

Figure 1 Walt Whitman with Jeannette and Nigel Cholmelly-Jones, courtesy Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division (LC-USZ62–92196).

My methodological approach to considering the interdependencies that the child forges between the U.S. nation-state and the self builds on current research in literary and cultural studies that moves beyond a nationalist approach to American studies. Even as scholars have pointed out that the "America" around which the field is organized both conflates the Americas with the United States and obscures the significance of local and regional subcultures within the nation, we have continued to assume adult subjects as the starting point for a critical reconsideration of the shape and texture of a postnationalist American studies. The child offers a unique vantage point from which to contribute to this important task of rethinking the place, dimensions, and duration of the national not only because the child has historically been firmly aligned with the nation, but because the child has become a densely overdetermined imaginary location, often associated with a self understood to precede or be partially free from the more firmly fixed political identities of individuals residing within the nation's borders. *Cradle of Liberty* argues that it is not the child's dissociation from but, rather, its

centrality to the key political debates crystallizing national identity that enables the child to act as a persuasive vehicle through which individuals come to affiliate with the nation at pivotal moments in its development, such as the annexation of the Republic of Texas and the "liberation" of Cuba. With its attention to the child as a primary vehicle through which individual representation within a shifting U.S. liberal-democratic society can be both frustrated and made possible, *Cradle of Liberty* charts the child's conceptual centrality to current critical reconsiderations of both the history and enduring political vitality of liberal-democratic citizenship, even as it argues for the child's centrality to current efforts to think beyond what Jonathan Arac has termed "the impoverished choice between liberalism and identity politics."[35]

Although the child has long been understood as a touchstone for an autonomous, independent self, the child has recently emerged, for scholars of liberalism, as the connective tissue through which the state and the self mutually constitute and shape each other in an increasingly postnational, global era.[36] Declaring that "the self whose choices liberalism celebrates is not a pre-social thing—not some authentic inner essence independent of the human world into which we have grown—but rather the product of our interaction from our earliest years with others,"[37] Appiah, for example, invokes the child to argue that liberalism cultivates rather than frustrates an individual identity that is not so much at odds with the state, as many liberalist scholars have tended to assume, as in need of help from the state to achieve its highest potential.[38] Asking readers, "Shouldn't society step in, in the name of individuality and identity, to insist that children be prepared for life as free adults?"[39] Appiah features the child over which the state exerts a unique amount of power, as John Stuart Mill recognized long ago, to advocate for a liberalism that acknowledges the inevitable dependence of the self on a social world.[40] Yet the child as importantly indicates the state's reliance on the idea of a self in whose behalf society must advocate. Masquerading as essential if historically evolving, the state, in other words, requires the self that the child represents in order to maintain the perception of its power. If "the citizen is the foundation of every social world," as John Tomasi has argued, societal success "requires that ordinary people *behave*" and understand their self in particular ways.[41] This dependence of the state on the idea of self extends back to the nation's origin, as John Adams

acknowledged when he pointed out that "the Revolution was effected before the war commenced . . . in the minds and hearts of the people" who had undergone a sea change in their conception "of their duties and obligations" to the state. Experiencing what religious leaders termed a "New Birth," early Americans suddenly recognized themselves as "free agents," according to one Philadelphia minister, and this new attitude toward the self produced new understandings of the state.[42]

Attending to the child highlights this founding affiliation between self and state, illustrating that just as there is no self before the state, there is no state before the creation of the self. Such analysis of the child clarifies an enduring if mistaken idea that "still lingers in the minds" of some liberalist thinkers, according to John Dewey, that "there are two different spheres . . . that of political society and that of the individual."[43] Because of the biological facts of a child's physical size and dependence, there is a current tendency in popular political debates to feature the child to advocate for diverse political agendas by invoking ethical and political categories such as abuse and exploitation. When deployed in such ways, the child not only sustains these dual, separable ideas of self and state even as these discussions attempt to alter the relative relation between the two, but, more particularly, the child also works to facilitate a shift of social responsibility from the state onto the self. The idea that liberal democracy is in crisis has long been a staple of American political life and, as Charles Willard illustrates, such "calamity-howling diverts attention from other [urgent social] problems, consequently feeding state power."[44] In other words, the child at the center of "crisis" debates, ranging most recently from the Pledge of Allegiance to obesity, aids the state in relocating essentially social obligations onto the very individuals who are in need of help from the state to sustain its civic principles. Thus, in such contexts the child facilitates what Mill, predicting Dewey, identified as the persistent and mistaken idea plaguing liberalism that there is an endemic "conflict between government and the liberty of individuals" rather than "an entire social order" that might be committed to the "nurture and direct[ion of] the inner as well as the outer life of individuals."[45] Analysis of how the idea of the child mutually constitutes and differentiates self and state is therefore urgently needed if we are to achieve the social justice with which liberalism is primarily concerned.

As we have seen, such debates tend to feature the child as the test case for

a diverse range of liberal agendas. However, because they fail to recognize how the child has long maintained the racial hierarchy endemic to the nation and the liberalist thought governing it, such political deployments of the child inevitably retain a social ontology that forecloses liberalism's radical social potential. Race, as William Chafe points out, is "the Achilles heel of the liberal tradition, challenging its capacity to grow and evolve organically in service to democratic values," and it will remain so until "leaders and citizens" recognize "the original sin of American democracy."[46] This "sin" is, of course, slavery and the white-supremacist logic naturalizing it. As Simon Gikandi reminds us, "The moment that has given us immutable liberal values such as freedom and democracy also contains the seeds of the greatest evil of our time." Thus, the question with which liberalists should concern themselves is "how race came to be embedded in what should have been larger forms of identity such as humanism, modernity, and culture" and how "the very institutions that were supposed to will into being universal and cosmopolitan identities were not simply corrupted by racialism but were immanently racialist and racist."[47] It is only by interrogating the deep logic governing liberalist ideals rather than the social programs growing out of such ideals—a logic in which, as Charles Mills reminds us, "race is in no way an afterthought, a deviation from ostensibly raceless Western ideals but rather a central shaping constituent of those ideals"—that liberalism can become more radical.[48]

To the extent that the child represents the liberal-democratic state, it takes on and perpetuates the racial meanings inhering in that social entity. Analysis of the child therefore does not simply index who suffers from racism (and is therefore equated with a child) but, more fundamentally, reveals racial domination to be a system—like patriarchy—that underpins and enables liberal-democratic societies. The following pages are therefore concerned primarily not with tracking episodes of overt racial prejudice but, rather, with charting how racial hierarchy infuses and determines the ground rules governing social encounters between individuals, regardless of their racial identity. Such a focus, I believe, will not only show the extent to which white supremacy has historically governed liberal democracy. It will also suggest avenues to move beyond the conceptual limitations currently encumbering liberalist pursuits. Such an endeavor requires a reframing of our understanding of the child to reshape existing relations between the individual

and the state. "What liberalism requires of us," as Martha Nussbaum insists, "is something more chancy and fearful" than what we currently have, "some combination of adulthood and childhood" that redraws the boundaries separating adult from child, self from state, and that forces us to confront the most "alarming thing about equality," which is that "we are . . . children, and the question is, where is father? We know where we are if one of us is the father."[49] This acknowledgement that we are all partial, dependent citizens as much as the autonomous beings that liberalism assumes is the starting point for any sustained effort to move toward a more comprehensive and capacious model of equitable social interaction and acknowledgment.

Cradle of Liberty's story of the mutually enforcing alliance the child forges between self and nation-state begins in the late eighteenth century and extends through the nineteenth century, with a series of defining events—the U.S. Revolutionary War, the U.S.-Mexican War, the U.S. Civil War, the example of German imperialism, and the U.S. expulsion of Spain from the Caribbean and Cuba—that consolidate the nation's boundaries and generate a heightened sense of unity within the nation. My analysis focuses on literary as well as political narratives because both play a formative role in shaping, as well as reflecting, public perceptions of the nation's territorial expansion and alliances. Extended attention to these narratives reveals the nation to be a contingent, hotly contested political entity that features the child in a wide range of dialogues to expand its transnational influence even while competing for dominance with localized communities and other, often overlooked North American nations like the Confederacy, the Republic of Texas, and Mexico. Specifically, I reconsider some of the most significant literary genres and movements (abolitionist fiction, the sentimental novel, regional writing, and anti-imperialist commentary) and political events (the end of slavery, post-Reconstruction national reunification, and the emergence of an American psychological school) from the precise vantage point of the nation's enduring conceptual dependence on the idea of the child. Doing so reveals that the child has been a sustaining force for the nation from its origins to the present time and thus that the child is of crucial, if so far largely unrecognized, significance to American cultural studies.

Developing largely out of women's studies' attention to motherhood, domesticity, and women's socially marginal status, children's studies has recently made important contributions to our knowledge about the lived experiences, material cultures, and social networks of real children.[50] Acknowledging the significance of this new information about childhood, *Cradle of Liberty* nonetheless does not take the lives of real children or children's literature as its subject. Rather, it focuses on the idea of the child as a rich site of cultural meaning and social inscription.[51] I am interested in the child as a series of representative possibilities rather than as a biological category, so I attend less to who can or cannot be a child or where childhood ends than to the child's signifying responsibilities. Approaching the child as not only born but made — as not only a biological fact but a cultural construct that encodes the complex, ever shifting logic of the social worlds that produce it — offers important insight, I suggest, into thus far neglected, hidden processes of cultural signification. From such a vantage point, the child emerges as not just another distinct category of identity along with class, race, gender, and sexuality but, instead, becomes a vehicle through which these elements of individual identity are stabilized and made legible as distinct aspects of the self. By approaching the child as integral rather than ancillary to the conceptual emergence of the idea of the nation-state, we can begin to understand how the child not only reflects the various class, gender, racial, and sexual ideologies prevailing *within* the United States, as many scholars have richly documented,[52] but more fundamentally how the child functions as a primary building block out of which the interlocking concepts of self and state on which ideology depends emerge. As the blank slate on which the self is shaped and scripted, in other words, the child has maintained the conceptual premise of self from Rousseau to Freud to John Rawls, even as that self's relation to social forces has undergone dramatic reconceptualization.

While I remain interested in the child's representational possibilities rather than in its lived reality, I do want to acknowledge that real children can be deployed to strategically challenge, as well as uphold, the racial principles governing U.S. liberal ideals. The actual child's importance to refuting as well as consolidating U.S. democratic principles is nowhere more evident than in important court cases regarding racial desegregation, from *Sarah Roberts v. City of Boston* (1849) and *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) to *Brown v. Board*

of Education (1954).[53] Charles Sumner begins his 1849 argument for Boston school desegregation by emphasizing that questions of social justice inevitably hinge on the child—that it is "a little child, of a degraded color, . . . still within the period of natural infancy . . . [who] asks at your hands her *personal rights*." The personal rights of this child require the city of Boston to decide nothing less, according to Sumner, than "the fundamental principles of human rights."[54] After collapsing distinctions between the "real" child who has suffered racial prejudice and the ideological child who has historically naturalized such prejudice, Sumner proceeds to extend the founding image of the child to shape the court's role, which he insists is to act as a "parent to all the unfortunate children of the Commonwealth." The court will only "show itself most truly parental, when it reaches down and with the strong arm of the law, elevates, encourages, and protects its colored fellow-citizens.[55] Despite Sumner's masterly deployment of both the biological and ideological child, Massachusetts Supreme Court Chief Justice Lemuel Shaw found that prejudice was fostered rather than ameliorated by compelling colored and white children to associate together in the same schools. He thus found against Sumner's argument to overturn what Sumner coined "separate but equal" education. Not only did state courts from Nevada (in *Stoutmeyer v. Duffy* [1872]) to West Virginia (in *Martin v. Board of Education* [1896]) use Shaw's finding in *Roberts* as a precedent for upholding racial segregation in schools, but the Louisiana Supreme Court turned to Shaw's decision to uphold its findings in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) that an "unreasonable insistence upon thrusting the company of one race upon the other, with no adequate motive, is calculated, as suggested by Chief Justice Shaw, to foster and intensify repulsion between them rather than extinguish it."[56] Yet the child who challenges segregation in *Roberts* not only upholds segregation in *Plessy* but offers a loophole, as well, for *Plessy* specifies that desegregation can and must occur around any white child who has need of black adults.[57] The child proves integral not only to legal reaffirmations of racial prejudice, but also to the final demise of the "separate but equal" policy that Sumner first used the child to challenge. Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren based his 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision on the testimony of the child psychologist Kenneth Clark, whose famous doll experiment on sixteen school-age children served as evidence that black children, "who are subjected to an obviously inferior status in the society in which they live,

have been definitely harmed in the development of their personalities."[58] Convinced by Clark's testimony, Warren finally upheld Sumner's 1849 argument that children "nursed in the sentiment of Caste, receiving it with the earliest food of knowledge, . . . are unable to eradicate it from their natures. . . . [T]heir characters are debased, and they become less fit for the magnanimous duties of a good citizen."[59] Basing his findings on the real children on whom Sumner had earlier relied to make his argument, Warren found—in words reminiscent of Sumner's—that separating black children from white "generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone."[60]

As this brief overview of over one hundred years of legal findings on school desegregation suggests, "real" children often took on the complex ideological representations in which the child had long been engaged and, in so doing, provided individuals with rich opportunities to re-script, as well as uphold, the ground rules of civic governance. Therefore, even though this study is not primarily concerned with actual children, I include visual images of children as well as discursive representations of the child to punctuate the full range of the child's complex social meanings. Images such as *Little Ethiopians* (see figure 2), for example, captures the child's multivalent representations in such social and juridical debates as those just outlined. These "little Ethiopian" children, like Sarah Roberts, have a racial identity that precludes their equal civic affiliation. The popular image thus seems to endorse the idea of "separate, but equal" for little Ethiopians, as well as for little Americans. However, precisely because they must remain little Ethiopians rather than becoming little Americans, the image suggests that the black children represent a constituency of potentially autonomous black selves capable of demanding social and political representation and thus able to reconstitute social space along the lines laid out by social contract theorists such as Locke.

One aim of *Cradle of Liberty* is to rethink the enduring tension that exists between social-contract and psychoanalytic theorists' accounts of the self and the social, even among those who attempt to bridge the conceptual gaps between the two lines of inquiry. John Rawls, for example, recently considered the importance of psychological accounts of the self and the desire with which they are primarily concerned to realizing a politically liberalist

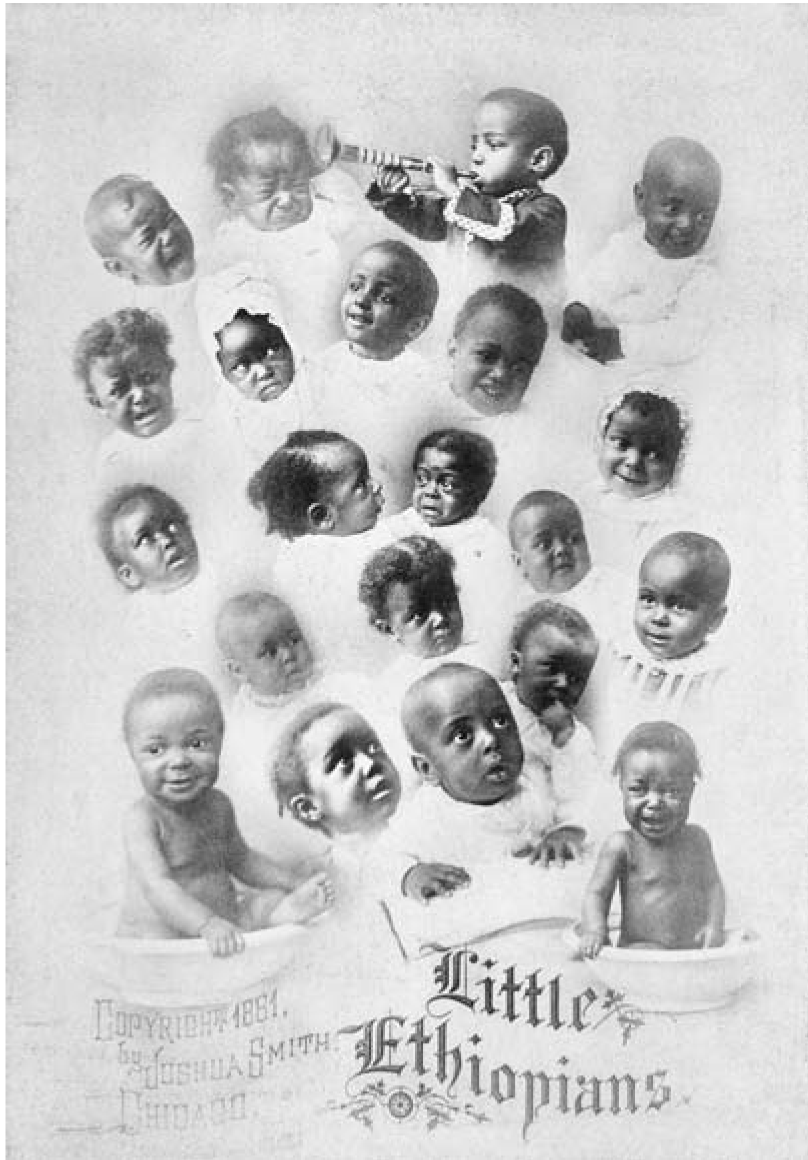

Figure 2 "Little Ethiopians." Courtesy New-York Historical Society (7731d).

model of social justice. Illustrating how individuals' desire inevitably works in the interest of a political ideal of citizenship, Rawls concludes that citizens are not only "normal and fully cooperating members of society, but further [that] they want to be," and want "to realize in their person, and have it recognized that they realize, that ideal of citizens."[61] Pointing out psychoanalysis's often overlooked political utility, Christopher Lane takes issue with such reductions "of desire to basic assumptions about volition and need."[62] Arguing that individuals are not simply an imprint of their national structures, he contends that it is a grave mistake to assume that desire operates according to "conscious and rational precepts," particularly in light of the enduring, acute social injustices that exist within liberal-democratic societies.[63] Even as they seek to bridge the divide separating their respective practices, Rawls's and Lane's accounts actually work to reinforce, rather than refute, the differences that have long existed between the two. Yet even as social-contract theorists' attempts at synthesis continue to subordinate the idea of self to the state and psychoanalytic accounts of identity subordinate the state's historical evolution to a transhistorical self, attention to the child that grounds both lines of inquiry reveals their shared origins, assumptions, and conceptual limitations. Charting the historical unfolding of the child who, for Locke, represented irrationality and thus the limits of consensual governance and who, for Freud, represented the point of origin for theories of individual desire therefore reveals the shared origins and history of these seemingly divergent practices—origins and history that have been subsequently obscured in the twentieth century as a direct result of the child's success in constituting self and state as discrete, at times diametrically opposed, concepts.[64] Further, analysis of the child that has historically constituted an essentially expansionist United States offers important correctives to the oft-cited inattention of both lines of inquiry to the international dimensions of justice, selfhood, desire, and the human.[65]

Throughout the book at large, I approach the idea of nation as historically evolving, yet conceptually fluid, and as integrally engaged in expansionism from its earliest genesis.[66] This project remains attentive throughout to the fact that even though imperialism only began to acquire an invidious meaning at the end of the nineteenth century during the Spanish-American War of 1898 and the Boer War of 1899–1902 (a fact that many critical commentaries of imperial cultures reproduce), the emergence of imperialism

coincided with and irrevocably shaped the creation of nation-states like the United States, a fact that Adam Smith's magisterial *Wealth of Nations* (1776) makes abundantly clear by arguing, at the very same moment that the American colonies are creating a separate nation, that the idea of nation is outmoded, parochial, and in the process of being replaced by an international free-market capitalism more profitable to all developed nations than colonialism and nationalism.[67] Choosing such geographic sites of engagement to map the racial contours of the U.S. nation-state as the nation-founding conflict between the colonies and Britain, the U.S.-Mexican border disputes of the antebellum era, and the transnational alliance between the United States and Germany from 1776 on but peaking in the post-Bismarck period beginning in 1891, the six chapters that make up *Cradle of Liberty* offer a representative rather than a comprehensive view of the operations of U.S. racialized nationalism over the course of more than a century. However, such encounters collectively suggest the range, shape, and texture of the nation's reliance on the idea of the child. Realizing that I just as easily might have chosen other productive sites to explore the dynamics of U.S. nation building—Hawaii and the Philippines being just two of many examples—I have selected those particular episodes which highlight the flexibility and capaciousness of the nation and the child that represents it. Even so, because the project attends to U.S. engagements with other nations, it opens itself to the charge of exceptionalism. Yet I suggest that the following chapters do not so much engage in as delineate the contours of the United States' exceptionalist history. By stabilizing the individual within a firmly fixed national imaginary, the child keeps the United States at the narcissistic center of political debate. We can see the workings of the national absorption that the child stimulates in an immensely popular image that circulated widely after September 11, 2001 (figure 3). Translating a complex, violent expression of geopolitical tension into a centralizing narrative of U.S. victimhood, the image circulated nationally to unify the racially diverse U.S. populace it depicts behind the Bush administration's aggressive policy of dominating demonized racial others. If 1989 signaled the triumph of the Western ideal of liberal democracy, as Francis Fukuyama has observed, then such images reveal the child's role in authenticating that triumph even as the United States engages in a global war on terror. Yet as Frederick Douglass reminds us in "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?" the child with which

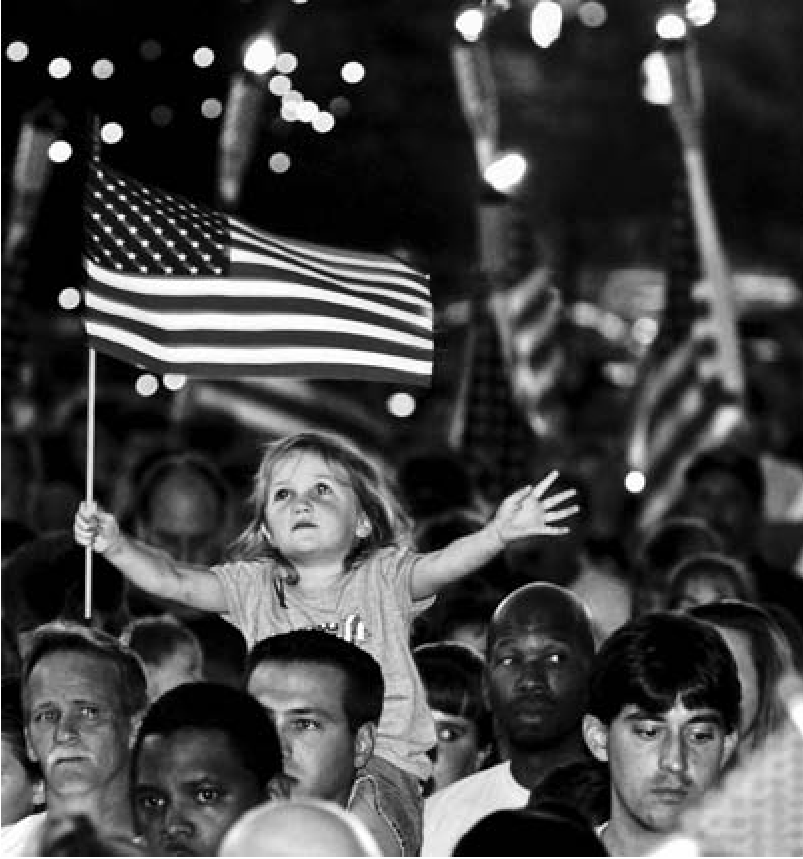

Figure 3 "Girl with Flag." Courtesy Ethan Miller/Reuters.

the nation has long been equated has the potential to impede as well as to perpetuate the deep logic of race structuring U.S. culture: Douglass suggests that "fellow-citizens" are capable of "tearing away . . . the hideous monster" that is "nursing at the tender breast of [our] youthful republic," even after the Civil War.[68] This book charts a history of the child's role in liberal-democratic processes in the hope of contributing to those processes' present and future vitality. Thus, the following chapters ask, most generally, how acknowledging the racial meanings inhering in child identity might reconstitute critical understandings of American political as well as literary culture. But they collectively encourage a rethinking of the child as a cultural ideal to which we are committed.

Like my approach to nation, I conceive of the idea of self not as a static structure but as a process, as did major late-nineteenth-century psychologists like William James, Pierre Janet, and James Mark Baldwin—prominent psychologists who pioneered what Russell Meares has identified as the "school of self" that was eclipsed during the last half century of positivism and behaviorism but that has recently begun to be rediscovered and reintegrated into psychological and psychoanalytic discourse.[69] Psychoanalytic, anthropological, philosophical, sociological, and cultural-history accounts of the self have tended to assume a certain equivalency between the child and the self. Yet this impulse to identify the child as the point of origin for the self has its own history—a history as recent and contested as that of the nation-state, for all we tend to think of both as permanent, rather than transitory, features of the human landscape. The project, in other words, excavates the historical evolution of what the philosopher Joseph Margolis has described as certain cultures' impulse to invoke "its own offspring" as a way of "forming encultured selves," and it does so by mapping the child's circulation through dominant discourses of self, such as American psychology and the novel.[70] Encouraging individuals to foster a civic self—to give themselves over to a collective that requires isolated individuals to consent to creating a shared environment—the discourses of self that the novel and American psychology promoted feature the child not so much to foster and privilege a private or pre-social self as to inculcate the specifically civic self that, as Hobbes noted, predominates in modern democracies and is characterized by a love of order, country, and social betterment.[71] Such a self Charles Taylor has recently identified as essential to "civic humanism," or the belief that humans, when properly motivated, can maintain a new structure of social relations in which, with a sense of oneness with others, individuals engage in the modern experiment of creating a liberal-democratic world defined by order, security, and peace.

The book's six chapters chart the child's representations of self and state from the early national period to the child's crystallization of the self through the rise of American psychology and the state through the rise of imperialism. Beginning with the acknowledgment that literary production, social theory, and political culture were integrally blended in the pre-twentieth-century United States, each chapter considers the dual questions

of American literature's political impact and American political culture's literary effects. To bring literary and political texts into the most richly productive play, the chapters span a diverse range of archival as well as literary sources to explore the child's obscured links to the racial politics governing U.S. national culture and to show how political representation in the United States emerges and continues to be shaped by the "fact" of racial identity. Thus, the first chapter illustrates how the child featured in a wide range of literary, political, and social texts organizes the new nation through a logic of white supremacy so powerfully that subsequent abolitionist writing depends on the enduring association the child creates between race and nation to argue for slavery's abolition. By featuring child protagonists as the linchpin of their abolitionist argument, popular periodicals and stories like *The Slave's Friend* (1836) and *Tales of Peter Parley about Africa* (1830) argue for slavery's abolition by reinforcing the idea that such unbridgeable differences distinguish black from white individuals that slavery can be abolished without jeopardizing the racial logic on which the nation was founded. I am interested in this chapter in showing that the child featured in a wide range of early national texts represents a foundational, and increasingly urgent, national question of where freedom ends and slavery begins as a drama of racialized bodies that might have various desired outcomes but nonetheless is unimaginable in terms other than those of essential racial difference.

The second chapter illustrates how pro-slavery as well as antislavery political rhetoric depends on the child's alignment of race with nation. Recognizing the South as a product of and response to a diverse range of regional, and national, constituencies fighting for dominance along the Mexican border in the antebellum era, this chapter illustrates how the child that is featured in political rhetoric to justify the creation of the Republic of Texas in 1836 and the U.S.-Mexican War in 1848 in turn operates as a cornerstone for Southern writers like Augusta J. Evans to argue for the creation of yet another nation—a separate Southern nation that would uphold the white supremacy the United States was forgetting in its increasing commitment to freeing its slaves. By situating North–South relations within a broader set of geographic struggles that reveal the U.S. imperial contest to be ongoing inside as well as outside of the nation's expanding boundaries, chapter 2 illustrates not only how the child organizes the United States around white supremacy so powerfully that slavery can be abolished without undermining

the nation's racial principles, but conversely how the child constitutes race as an organizing principle of oppositional, if ephemeral, Anglo nations that temporarily challenge the United States by retaining slavery as a logical corollary to white superiority.

The third chapter illustrates how popular nineteenth-century novels that do not interest themselves with slavery or race relations nonetheless feature child protagonists to encourage readers to align themselves with these competing, often contested national interests. In an effort to argue for the importance of popular novels, feminist scholars have approached the protagonists of sentimental novels as "little women" rather than the children they in fact are. Once we recognize these characters as children, we can begin to recognize how such protagonists—precisely because they are children—operate as part of a more extended textual machinery devoted to resolving the particular social and contractual problem that children represented for the nation since its inception. Sentimental novels, chapter 3 suggests, not only utilize the child's unique capacity to represent the nation but also help to resolve the particular problem that children as a class of people inherently incapable of consent pose to the Lockean consensual model of liberal-democratic community around which the nation was constructed. By featuring children as stand-ins for complicated sets of anxieties about national unity, popular novels, in short, present children as agents of national interpellation—as powerful vehicles for soliciting readerly consent to national affiliation and governance precisely because of children's uniquely contested relation to the national body.

Taking U.S.-German transnational relations as its focus, chapter 4 explores the child's role in creating and critiquing late-century U.S. expansionism. The conviction that the United States was a white nation certainly facilitated its expansionist era, but white supremacy continued to function as an imperfect crusading ideology, shot through with more contradiction than is often recognized. Taking the transnational dimensions of the child's ideological significance as its focus, chapter 4 explores how the child protagonists that Mark Twain features in his early 1890s transatlantic writing represent race as complicating rather than sustaining national progress. After charting how the "universal history" perspective propounded by contemporary nineteenth-century social scientists like John Fiske, James Nourse, Theodore Poesche, and Robert Knox aligns the United States and Ger-

many because of the two countries' shared Aryan ancestry, this chapter illustrates how the child protagonists in Twain's little-known 1891 translation of the popular German children's story *Der Struwwelpeter* and in his 1894 *Pudd'nhead Wilson* and *Those Extraordinary Twins* challenge this idea that racial purity explains national supremacy. Illustrating that the purity of "the Anglo-Saxon race" is "an illusion," the child protagonists in Twain's German translation in turn offer an important, and thus far overlooked, context for understanding Twain's critique of U.S. race relations in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* and *Those Extraordinary Twins*. From the perspective the preceding German stories provide, in other words, we can see how Twain's insistence on the conjoined twins' prior history as an attraction in "a cheap museum in Berlin" operates as a pivotal context for analyzing his 1894 commentary on U.S. racial politics. We can see, in short, how instrumental the racial purity the child represents is to an evolving U.S. international, as well as national, project.

Chapter 5 explores how late-nineteenth-century American psychological models of the self that take the child as their interrogatory subject in turn depend on the child's longer history as a representative of the nation's racial contours. In his 1919 "A Child Is Being Beaten," Freud acknowledges how foundational the history of U.S. racial logic is to the psychological self the child comes to represent when he writes that it is "almost always the same books"—books "such as . . . *Uncle Tom's Cabin* . . . whose contents give a new stimulus to the beating phantasies" of his patients. Chapter 5 illustrates, first, how pivotal American psychological models that posit the child as a special site for understanding the self in fact emerge out of a longer conceptual dependence on the child as a representative of an explicitly racialized nation, and second, how writers like Henry James and Pauline Hopkins refute the racialist psychological self the child comes to represent. The distinctly American school of psychology being developed at institutions like Harvard and Clark University in the 1890s and represented by such texts as William James's *Principles of Psychology* (1890), James Mark Baldwin's *Social and Ethical Interpretations in Mental Development* (1897), and G. Stanley Hall's *Adolescence* (1904) therefore not only ensure that the child continues to represent race as an essential, increasingly fixed element of the self well into the twentieth century, but also enable the critique of such a concept of self by writers ranging from James to Hopkins.

The concluding chapter of *Cradle of Liberty* brings the child's longstanding alliance with both self and state together through analysis of Cuba's enduring conceptual importance to the innovative models of nation developed by advocates of an alternative nationalism like W. E. B. Du Bois. Exploring the child's enduring legacy as an image through which the foundational place of race within the state continues to be contested and consolidated over the course of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, this chapter analyzes how early-twentieth-century black intellectuals like Du Bois developed the earlier thinking of writers like Twain, James, and Hopkins to explore the full range of possibilities for individual representation within the racial state. Fascinated with Cubans' struggle for independence, as well as with the psychological theories of self in which he was trained under William James, Du Bois features the child through which insurgent Cubans justified their pursuit of an antiracist independent republic to explore the possibility of renegotiating the increasingly fixed place of race in U.S. political culture. Placing Cuban political rhetoric that featured the child and the children's stories of the Cuban political commentator José Martí in *Le Edad de Oro* in conversation with Du Bois's depictions of the child in such texts as *Dark Princess*, *The Souls of Black Folk*, and *Darkwater* and with the wealth of commentary on Cuba in popular African American periodicals, this concluding chapter suggests that with their "Immortal Child" and "children of our America," Du Bois and Martí, respectively, complicate the liberal-democratic nationalism the child long represented. In so doing, they offer provocative opportunities for rethinking American literary and political history from the vantage point that analysis of the child makes available.

Covering wide-ranging texts, movements, and national formations from the late eighteenth century through the twentieth century, *Cradle of Liberty* illustrates that the child operates as a rich vehicle for constituting U.S. national identity through the idea of racial purity; for scripting competing, alternative nations into being in relation and opposition to the United States; for rethinking the relation between race and nation; and for representing racial identity as a prerequisite for incorporation into the national body. By exploring how diverse imaginings of the nation result from the child's capacity to represent race, this book excavates a long, vital history of cultural and political interaction between these two concepts of nation-

hood and childhood. It argues for the political necessity of taking seriously the child that these diverse literary and political cultures produce, because this child tells an important story not only about how the United States emerged as a global force, but also about how it continues to endure in an increasingly postnational, global era.