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Chapter 3

Spectacles of Difference: Notions of Race Pre-Migration

Very quickly new immigrants came to mark their introduction to America in racial terms. Jokes in newspapers such as *New Yorkský denník* of the greenhorn's first encounter with "čierny" operated as racial foundational myths, as the naïf learned for the first time that there were black people on the planet, and, decades later, oral histories of immigrants related the shock newcomers at Ellis Island felt when first meeting black people.¹ Recently, however, scholars have questioned the accuracy of characterizations of migrants as *tabulae rasae* when it came to matters of race. Race was not an entirely unfamiliar concept to many Southeast European immigrants, even though newcomers did have to learn what the Jim Crow hierarchies meant in their new homeland. While African Americans may have been encountered for the first time, even here there is evidence that many groups had ample opportunity to learn of, and even meet, Africans and Asians prior to their migration to the United States. Simply put, Southeast Europeans did not arrive in America "race-neutral."²

As Mathew Frye Jacobson and other scholars have demonstrated, in the eyes of late-nineteenth-century commentators, race was a fluid concept that entailed divisions among European groups regarded as just as salient—or pernicious—as the distinctions between Asians, Africans, and Europeans. When immigration restrictionists warned of the danger America faced from the Slavic race, they were not merely being rhetorical or misusing the term, but imposing moral classificatory schema they were convinced had as much scientific validity as the more enduring "three races of humankind." Progressive Era American race theorists such as Edward Alsworth Ross advanced and popularized the earlier racial classifications of such European thinkers as Johann von Blumenbach and Comte Gobineau in asserting the moral, cultural, and intellectual disparity between Mediterraneans and Slavs and the Nordic stock from which the Sons of the Mayflower had supposedly descended; in any case, most immigrants didn't need to have read scholarly tomes to have heard of the inferiority of some Europeans from Habsburg officials or xenophobic Magyars (Hungarians).³

By now academics are familiar with the valid assertion that race is a social construct, a political fiction. But it is a fiction that was imposed at great political and

psychic cost on other European groups, too. Indeed, the Senate's Dillingham Commission, charged with studying the immigrant "problem," identified 35 races coming to the United States from Europe alone. The categorization of even Europeans into such fine gradations was disseminated via science, popular culture, and political rhetoric, in some ways that were new to Slavic migrants to America but which in others might have seemed all too familiar. As residents of the polyglot Habsburg realm, Slavs knew before they set foot in America of a variety of peoples who were racialized as lacking in full personhood; here the depiction of Jews and Gypsies in Slavic folklore is most salient.

Pre-migration, many Southeast Europeans were familiar with race (as it was defined circa 1890) in four ways. Slavs were themselves the object of scorn as lesser beings, particularly when they performed certain jobs that were regarded as almost Gypsy-like. The tinkers (*drotári*) of Trenčín province were particularly prone to belittlement, but Larry Wolfe ably demonstrates that beginning in the Enlightenment, all of East Europe came to be regarded by Western Europeans such as the English, Germans, and French as the seat of barbarism, a stereotype that continued in German literature during the nineteenth century.⁴

Second, other marginalized people within Central Europe were frequently denigrated as racial outsiders both by Slavs and the German and Habsburg empires' rulers. Slavic folk culture cast certain groups as mythical pariahs. During Slovak and Rusyn Christmastime pageants, for example, characters portraying Jews and Gypsies often wore garish, black masks designed to distance these characters from the viewer's concept of "normal" people.⁵

But it is also likely that by the time of the mass migration to America (beginning in the 1880s) actual Africans had long been known to many Southeast Europeans who later migrated to New York, Chicago, or Philadelphia. African natives were familiar on the streets of many port cities by the sixteenth century, and in Central Europe, too, provincial nobles emulated their Habsburg or Bourbon superiors by importing Africans to serve at their courts as butlers, musicians, and denizens of the aristocrat's "Cabinet of Wonder."⁶ At least some Slavic tillers of a count's soil would have encountered such servants. And by the 1870s a more direct experience of Africans, albeit in an exotic, "primitive" light, was possible for East Central Europeans. A thriving band of impresarios such as Carl Hagenbeck presented exotic "human zoos" featuring African "tribesmen" performing for audiences in places such as Warsaw, Saint Petersburg, Vienna, and Prague, as well as smaller provincial cities.⁷ And when Slovak tinkers got tired of being mocked or starving at home, they wandered, as early as the sixteenth century, to places where they would have encountered black citizens, as well as Asians.⁸

Finally, Slavs and other Christian Southeast Europeans employed stereotypes of blackness against the Turkish Ottoman Empire, which only in the late seventeenth century had been expelled from Hungary, and still ruled over fellow Slavs in other places in the Balkans. These slights at the Asiatic Ottomans occasionally surfaced in Slovak newspapers such as *Jednota* and *New Yorkský denník* as well.

By broadening our conception of race, we can see that such concepts of racialized group difference predated Slavic migration to the United States, and these depictions of race in all its various European inflections appeared in immigrant plays and on the pages of *Amerikanský ruský věstník*, *New Yorkský denník*, and other papers. Not surprisingly, these newspapers gave no credence to Germans' or other peoples' depictions of Slavs as semi-Asiatic nomads. However, the racialization of other European groups (both those familiar and those newly encountered) continued in Slavic immigrant newspaper accounts of Italians, Jews, Irish, and Gypsies. To be sure, such characterizations appeared less frequently than the voluminous coverage of black lynchings, criminality, and the race riots in which African Americans were attacked *en masse* and desperately fought back. These depictions of European others will be addressed in the following chapter.

It is important to stress that for all the discrimination and animus from nativists that Southeast Europeans faced, there never were legal barriers to their immigration and citizenship (as there were for Chinese and other Asians), nor did they face Jim Crow restrictions and mass disenfranchisement or threat of persistent spectacle lynchings (as blacks faced into the 1960s). Still, in these newspapers' denigrating depictions of Jews (with whom Slavs were quite familiar pre-migration) and Italians (with whom their contacts were less frequent if at all) we can see the writers of the Slavic press trying on racial roles to determine which barriers would persist as the most salient in asserting full American citizenship.

The Magyars, ethnic Hungarians who after the 1867 "*Ausgleich*" (Equalization) ruled in Budapest in a power-sharing relationship with Vienna, were frequently racialized in Slovak and Rusyn newspapers as despotic, Asiatic "Mongols." In these depictions Slovaks asserted their right to break free of the empire during World War I, and established a different form of alterity for Magyars—an Asiatic one. Therefore the persistently racialized treatment of Magyars will be considered separately.

Race in the "Half-Asian" East

Before they came to the United States, Slavs had often wandered far and wide in search of work, and encountered a wide variety of ethno-racial groups. As such, they were often familiar with unflattering ethnic hierarchies, but they were often on the receiving end of ethnic slurs. When Slavic workers migrated to Habsburg cities, they were likely to be denigrated as less than intelligent simian oafs, as in an 1886, almost racialized, cartoon that scoffed at "how the Czechs help build the parliament building." In this cartoon the bungling workmen have vacant expressions and apelike features, indicating with what low regard many Germans held Slavic migrants. Early twentieth-century Slovak immigrants likewise constructed identities out of an admixture of "assignment" and self-proclaimed "identity," a process they had known even in Austria-Hungary, where "racial"

differences certainly had been emphasized. These caricatures, disseminated in *fin de siècle* Austria, mocked Czech, Moravian, and Slovak day laborers in Vienna, indicating Slavs were often on the receiving end of racial slights.⁹

Worse depictions of Slavs filtered through Central Europe. The widely read German novelist Karl Emil Franzos published a series of novels beginning in 1876 that portrayed the Slavic provinces under Berlin and Vienna's control as "Half-Asian," stereotypes that would carry across the Atlantic and appear in the immigration-restrictionist diatribes of American authors and academics such as Edward Alsworth Ross, Lothrop Stoddard, Madison Grant, and Henry Cabot Lodge.¹⁰

Larry Wolfe notes that attitudes such as Franzos's had a long and storied pedigree. During the Enlightenment, the seats of civilization and progress were judged to be Western capitals such as Paris and London. Balancing these centers of learning, cartographers, philosophers, and popular writers posited a backward, Asiatic East, a land of superstition and decidedly unenlightened despots such as Russia's tsars. Earlier, Wolfe argues, civilization was centered in the Mediterranean South, with Northern realms held to be backward. But during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with the rise of powerful empires inconveniently centered in the north, this dichotomy was no longer politically expedient, and the line between light and dark was repositioned. This reorienting of a dividing line to West versus East persisted at least until the fall of the Berlin Wall; much earlier Poles, Slovaks, Rusyns, and other Slavs were classified by many writers such as Franzos as at least half-Asian.¹¹

When tinkers or other migrant Slovaks took to the roads, they therefore were the ones often stigmatized as lesser beings. During stays in Prague or Vienna, tinkers who were natives of Kolárovice lived together in spartan and unsanitary boarding houses. An ethnographer of the tinkers, Karel Prochazka, noted in 1905:

The Kolárovice tinkers have meager funds for lodging. Nightly they wander in search of lodging. For their payment they get a mattress in the "quarter" living by the sugar mills. In this wretched, underground place there's a single window in the door, without a table, without a light.

Tinkers scrimped on lodging so as to return home with as much cash as possible. Criticisms of unsanitary and overcrowded "foreign quarters" in 1905 were heard in both American cities and Europe. The photographs accompanying Prochazka's work, as well as 1880 photos of Slovak street urchins peddling tinware in the streets of Vienna, indicate that wandering Slavs were looked upon by respectable burgers as disreputable, dirty, and "un-white" (or at least un-German) even before they sailed for America.¹²

Prochazka notes that jokes and curses often greeted these Slovak wanderers, and they seem to have had something of a roguish reputation akin to traveling

salesmen. Roving *drotári* (tinkers) were said to have had an unusually frank way of drumming up business. "Chiefly he goes about getting work calling in at the house . . . 'How's it going, little mother; tinker?' At this she looks heavenward. 'I'll give you something to tink—I'll give you something to hammer!'" The *drotári* spoke "tinker slang, a glorious East European mishmash, *krpoština*, which contains many elements of Czecho-Slovak prison slang." Perhaps it's not surprising then that Hungarians and South Slavs denigrated the "wandering Slovak" as outcasts, even as they needed his expertise to repair broken pots and agricultural tools. Even in 1930s Philadelphia, new workers at the bench were taught ribald songs about the roving wireworkers, while as late as the 1970s, a Czech man recalls, his parents chastised dirty or disobedient children that they were looking and behaving like filthy *drotári*.¹³

Tinkers in other regions of Europe such as Ireland were viewed suspiciously as vagrants; in East Central Europe, too, the Slovaks of the Trenčín region often competed with Gypsies in metalworking, and both groups were frequently stigmatized as vagabonds and thieves. Other itinerant craftsmen, such as the glassblowers of Carmaux, France, were likewise looked at askance by more settled villagers.¹⁴ Robert Pynsent notes that in 1920 the Prague police issued special instructions designed to rein in young apprentice tinkers with a reputation for begging and thievery. All tinkers were to be kept under official scrutiny, while "Wandering youths who are defective, or indeed already *criminal*, must be transported straight back to Slovakia." Pynsent further notes that this stigmatization of all Slovak *drotári* bears some similarity to the official harassment of Slovak-speaking Gypsies in the post-1993 Czech Republic.¹⁵

Even Slovaks and Rusyns who did not practice the tinker's trade recalled in oral histories that they were treated shabbily by the German and Magyar ruling partners of the Habsburg Empire. A man who immigrated from Trenčín province to Philadelphia said of the Germans, "That people don't look kindly on Slavs, you know. That Germanic feeling that you're sub, sub-people, the Slavs, you know. A lot of people still think that."¹⁶ Another migrant recalled that his father couldn't get a better job on the railroad, such jobs being reserved for Magyars or Germans, while immigrant newspapers frequently denounced the slavery to which they were subjected under "Mongol" Magyar rule.¹⁷ Still, it is unclear if even itinerate *drotári* had the same conception of race as they would come to experience it in the United States, with brutal lynch law, the rigid "one-drop rule" ostracizing any American with even the slightest African ancestry, and Jim Crow reigning in virtually all public accommodations.

Other groups in East Central Europe faced even more pernicious stigmatization. Slavs knew of, and sadly sometimes participated in, pogroms that had raged across Jewish communities in tsarist Russia and elsewhere, most notoriously in 1903 in Kishinev. Interestingly, though, as noted in Chapter 2, the term "pogrom" was not imported by Slavs to describe the lynchings of African Americans, even as some papers such as the socialist *Rovnost ludu* denounced the pogroms against

Jews near Košice, Slovakia, who were blamed for ritual murders, the shameful blood libel.¹⁸ Indeed, Slavic migrants often accorded pariah status to Jews and Gypsies, but even here Slavs were sometimes equated with these outcasts. In Vienna, in 1902, a Slovak dealer of wire goods and calendars was labeled a “peddling book Jew.” Perhaps as they were engaged in commerce, even of a marginal kind, wandering Slovak tinkers also faced some of the same prejudices that Jewish merchants faced.¹⁹

If they knew of these associations, Slovaks may have bristled. In 1905 the Catholic newspaper *Jednota* denounced an anti-immigration article in *Collier's Weekly*, “Our Imported Criminals,” which alleged, among other things, that most of the Poles in Chicago were criminals, murderers, and agitators. The editorialist denied that Slovaks, at least, lived like Gypsies, thundering, “Such an honor it is to be noticed by American journalists. They’ve besmirched an entire class of people. They are right who declare, think before you write. This should apply to the English newspapers. What then can we expect from the publishers of so-called ‘yellow’ newspapers, who think we live like gypsies?”²⁰

Gypsies, however, were stigmatized in the recollection of Slovak informants, who referred to them as black people in the Carpathians. The Gypsies or “*buduc-sani*” they knew were recalled as “sort of like wild people, from Uzhorod,” farther east in present-day Ukraine.²¹ Such references suggest that a cultural equation of blackness with evil or the Evil One himself existed in the Carpathian mind. Sander Gilman similarly argues such ingrained cultural notions, “mythic structures of blackness” as connoting immorality, permeated German understanding even before migrants encountered actual African peoples. While Gilman focuses a bit heavily on German high culture’s depictions of blacks, even folk culture, with which many Slavic immigrants would have been familiar, utilized tropes equating blackness with evil. Slovaks of the eastern provinces who performed Christmas *jasličkari* plays and other entertainments in the Carpathians already knew that a blackened face or dark mask connoted the equally vile figures of the thieving Gypsy, the duplicitous Jewish merchant, and the conniving *Čert* (devil). Even non-European figures made it into some Slavic Christmas pageants, for the costumes of hairy-coated shepherds conjured up images of the “barbarous” East. And in her pioneer research among Slavic peoples, Emily Greene Balch, too, in early twentieth-century Bohemia encountered children “masquerading as the Three Kings, one, of course, as a blackamoor.” Even before setting foot in the New World, such people had a conception of non-European races through their own folklore. Czechs, Slovaks, and other Slavs thus may have already carried these conceptions of what race might come to mean, or learned of blacks from traveling tinkers.²²

Stereotyped ethnic characters from East Central Europe persisted in the New World, too, even as new prejudices were learned. In describing the work of missionaries in Africa, *New Yorkský denník* helpfully explained to its readers that the Christians toiled among “dark people with sharp teeth who, just like our

gypsies, don't really want to work."²³ More will be said about Slavic papers' coverage of colonial empires in Chapter 5, but the reprise of Gypsy stereotypes was frequent among many Slavs. Theater troupes such as "Nada," the Croatian-American Dramatic Society of Chicago, which had both Croatian and Slovenian members, into the 1930s performed plays such as *Črnošolec*, *Cigani*, *Ciganska Kri*, *Rokovnjači*, and *Prisega o Polnoči*, village dramas that featured broad caricatures of Gypsies.²⁴ In 1901 Rusyns in Trenton staged *Šenk Palenčevý* (*The Whiskey Bar*), which featured Gypsy tipplers.²⁵ Digs at thieving, or lazy, Gypsies were not atypical. A letter-writer from Glassport, Pennsylvania, could think of no greater slur against socialists than to label them "stateless gypsies."²⁶ *Amerikansky russky viestnik* as late as 1924 continued to publish a column of Gypsy jokes,²⁷ while *New Yorkský denník* continued running disparaging Gypsy jokes as late as 1953.²⁸

Other Slovene, Czech, Rusyn, and Slovak plays featured stereotypical Jewish innkeepers and merchants, figures with whom Slavic migrants had pre-migration familiarity. The play *Vládání Lilky Gřinn*, a *Jewish Comedy*, for example, was performed in 1934 by the Czech-American Dramatic Society of Chicago at the Sokol of Chicago, Twenty-fourth Street and Kedzie Avenue. The troupe also performed *Potash and Perlmutter's Firm* and *Polsky Žid* (*The Polish Jew*). Croatian and Slovenian socialists in Chicago also performed plays with Jewish village figures, while the Educational and Dramatic Society of Young Slovaks in Fort William, Ontario, between 1924 and 1943 frequently presented plays with Gypsy and Jewish stock characters. On April 11, 1943, for example, the play *Tatar* featured the character "Simon Rozenfeld, *Žid* (Jew)." (The Tatars themselves are Muslim Asians, who, as we'll see, were stigmatized as savage threats to civilization in Russia.)²⁹

Casting a Jewish character as village innkeeper or merchant may not in every instance have been a directly anti-Semitic gesture. *Amerikansky russky viestník*, though, in 1909 advertised a theater evening and ball presented by parishioners of Cleveland's Greek Catholic Church of St. John the Baptist. On the bill was *Štrajk*, a comedy in three acts that featured "Ivan, a Jewish agitator." And in 1921 the paper published a play which left little room for benefit of the doubt. The short script, by Maria Kushnir, a student at Lincoln High School, Cleveland, includes a "boarding house keeper," "a worker," "coal miner"—and "Levi-Silverman, Jew, owner of everything."³⁰

Still, for all the stereotypes, Slavs and Jews continued to live in American cities in sometimes wary proximity, as Ewa Morawska notes. While some of the stereotypes of Jews were decidedly unflattering, Jewish storekeepers continued to be patronized by dedicated Slavic customers in places such as Philadelphia's Marshall Street, even if theater groups at other moments mocked Jews. The psychic distance between Jews and Slavs evidently was not as great as that which would develop between white immigrants and African Americans.³¹

Other plays performed at Slovak parishes, published in the Slovak press, express the desire of immigrants to perform the role of regular Americans. Plays such as *Cesta k americkemu Občianstvo* (*The Road to American Citizenship*) were

published by *Denník Slováč v Amerike* and *Národný kalendár* as early as 1897, and included Gypsy musicians in its cast list. In 1937, Slovaks and Rusyns at Philadelphia's Holy Ghost Greek Catholic Church were still performing a self-mocking *Grinorka* (*The Greenhorn*.) Seven years later Peekskill, New York, Slovaks reprised the play. *Grinorka* contains no black characters, instead satirizing the immigrants' own comical process of acculturation—although with some digs at “Tony the Italian Ice-man” as well as Irish and Jewish peddlars, Gypsies, and “Herško Rozenthal, innkeeper.” Only the Gypsy and Jewish stereotypes likely were familiar to Slavs in the Old Country, while the vaudeville depictions of Italians and Irishmen were readily available to immigrants from American popular culture. Such European group stereotypes, though, often were juxtaposed with black stage types. On the bill in Philadelphia was also a selection of American songs by a parish quartet—including the minstrel standard, “My Old Kentucky Home.”³² Earlier “greenhorn” plays had also been twinned with immigrant “Banjo Jass Orchestras,” which performed in blackface.³³ Greenhorns were set along the road to Americanism, if not exactly citizenship, by a process of blackface, and reading of blackness in black and white. Still, room was made for enduring Old World caricatures as well.

Spreading Civilization to ‘Kindly Devils’: Slavic Views of Asia

Slavs had likewise encountered the Asiatic outsider prior to emigration, and here the supposed threat was of a dual nature. Russian emissaries of the tsar had to contend with another successful cultural model, Islam, but also seek to civilize even more “savage” Siberian and Central Asian “tribes” who might set the Russians down the path of devolution. Russia had been sending merchants, fur trappers, and missionaries eastward since the sixteenth century, but in spite of some initial success proselytizing along the Volga, the counterappeal of Islam, with its sophisticated centers of learning, culture, and economic dynamism proved quite attractive to Kazakhs, Bashkirs, and other Central Asian peoples. Wayne Dowler writes that by 1840 “a wave of apostasy among baptized non-Russians in the Volga” led to great fears that the Tatars (Asian Muslims) were winning the battle for non-Slavic hearts and minds. Russian Orthodox priests had little ability in Central Asian languages, and were “no match for the confessional schools of Islam (*maktabe*), which by the 1860s were spreading rapidly in the region.”

Fears of the attractiveness of Islam to Asians in the tsarist empire continued into the twentieth century. In 1906 education officials issued stridently nationalist demands that instruction in the Russian language and the Orthodox faith must be at the center of pedagogy, although exceptions were made for “especially savage, undeveloped and stupid” peoples of the Caucasus and Siberia. Conversely, developed peoples such as Poles were also allowed to conduct some history and religion classes in their native languages. When a Muslim Duma member nevertheless asked for textbooks in native languages, a delegate shouted,

"Go to Turkey!" Other Russians belittled Asians who sprinkled their Russian with "idiotisms," an indication of the condescension many Slavs held for the idioms and culture of supposedly less enlightened Easterners. Darwinian hierarchies of lesser developed Asians and grudgingly acceptable fellow Slavs (Poles and Ukrainians) permeated debates in Russia on the course of empire.³⁴

Even more worrisome to many tsarist officials was the appeal that pagan, supposedly less civilized Asian cultures had for certain Russians in the East, the backsliding "*starozhily*" ("old settlers"). Willard Sunderland notes that the few early Russian settlers who had established tiny villages across Siberia often were integrated into Asian cultures by the time other Russians revisited these places in the nineteenth century. "By the late imperial period, 'nativized' Russians of one kind or another could be found throughout the imperial east. In the northern Caucasus, for example, whole Russian villages looked and lived like *gortsy*; in the Volga-Ural region, other Russian peasants performed 'pagan' sacrifices like Voguls and Maris; on the Kazakh steppe, still others had converted to Islam. . . ."

Contrary to the Orthodox Church's civilizing mission, "lapsed Russian northerners" proved susceptible to "nativizing" into Siberian and Central Asian cultures and destabilized Slavic certainties of the power of their self-regarded superior religion, culture, and race. The fear of the inexplicable appeal of savage peoples and ways to "nativizing" Russians was palpable. Attempts to counter backsliding were expressed first in cultural terms in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, although by the nineteenth century appeals to "race" and blood were evoked in an effort to preserve the superior Slavic type and improve Siberian and Central Asian peoples such as the Samoeds and Irkuats. In either trope, the alarm at "nativized" Russians was apparent, for as Sunderland notes, if the Russian peasant "went native, what did that say about the invincibility of his national spirit or, for that matter, about the difference between savage and civilized?" In either cultural or "racial"/biological terms, the threat of contamination by a savage East was much on the mind of Slavic commentators by the 1870s. Ironically, Christian Slavs such as Russians, Slovaks, Rusyns, and Ukrainians would themselves be characterized by Nordic nativists as barbaric, Asiatic hordes once they arrived in the United States. Hierarchies of civilization and savagery seemingly cut many unkind ways.³⁵

Such discourses on race influenced non-Russians, too, for the tsar's empire was looked up to by many Slavs ruled by the Habsburgs as a pan-Slavic big brother. Ethnic elites such as the editors of *Jednota* and *Amerikanský ruský věstník* often defended Saint Petersburg and emulated its Russophile condescension of the Asian East. During the Russo-Japanese War, for example, some Slovaks took pains to make the distinction between white, European Slavs and non-white Japanese. *Jednota* congratulated Pavel K. Kadak, a member of the First Catholic Slovak Union, for answering American newspapers' anti-Russian editorials and their approval of "the glorious Mongols" (i.e. Japanese). Kadak's letter to American newspapers was reprinted in *Jednota* in both English and Slovak. "What is it that

induces this pro-Japanese enthusiasm on our part?" Kadak demanded. "Is it . . . because Russians belong to the same Caucasian race as Americans or because the Japanese are of the Mongolian race? Because the Russians are . . . spreading Christian civilization in northern and eastern Asia, and the Japs are pagans and enemies of Christianity? . . . Do they not dream of uniting the whole Mongolian race under their leadership for the purpose of chasing out of Asia the 'white devils'?"³⁶

Later that year, *Jednota* was more to the point. "Yellow Peril" was the English headline to a Slovak editorial conflating the Japanese menace on the world stage and in America under an "open door" policy that actually, the editors argued, left America susceptible to a flood of docile Asian laborers who worked for distressingly low wages. "Asiatics once inundated Europe," the editors warned. "The Huns of Attila were actually wild savages who slaughtered women and children like bloodthirsty animals. . . . Why it is impossible to educate the world, that Japan similarly wants to destroy us, is difficult to say. 'Yellow Peril.'" Such an editorial would likely have found favor with Senator Lodge and other immigration restrictionists, even if they might have tacked on a paragraph or two on "the Slavic peril" not altogether to the liking of *Jednota's* editors.³⁷ Slavic American championing of Russia as a defender of white, Christian civilization against barbarous Asia also continued during World War II.³⁸ Racialized attitudes toward the backward East prominent among educated Russians filtered into immigrant newspapers as well.

In this denigration of Asian and Muslim cultures, Slavic Europeans were not alone, for southern Italians and people of the Balkan region also worked and journeyed in places where Muslim Africans and Middle Easterners were a known quantity, as did English, Dutch, and French mariners by the seventeenth century. A polyglot community developed, for example, in Tunis well before its explicit colonization by the French. But again Islam was seen as a threat. Intriguingly, Peter L. Wilson argues that it was not the barbarism of Islam but its very success at appealing to new converts, not just in North Africa and the Balkans, but also among northwest European sailors, that made the "Moor" such a threat to the European public. He was winning the battle for far too many hearts and minds. To counter this—and also to capitalize on English, French, German, and Dutch fascination with forbidden, supposedly decadent Islam—the "captivity narrative" genre flourished into the early nineteenth century. Memoirs of European sailors who swore they had suffered at the hands of the Turk were salacious bestsellers that didn't let the facts of life under Islam get in the way of good sales. As Linda Colley notes, at a time that Britain and other European powers were expanding their overseas slave trade from Africa, captivity narratives

branded the men responsible, whether they were Moroccan, Algerian, Tunisian or Tripolitanian, as Barbary or Turkish pirates, terrorising the seas, preying on legitimate, peaceful trade, and selling innocent Christians into

Muslim slavery. . . . [T]he assonance between Barbary as a geographical signifier and the insult “barbarian” was a gift of which generations of polemicists made abundant and predictable use.

There were also many popular-culture depictions of evil North African Moors on the English stage, fitting like the narratives into a framework of savage Moors preying on enlightened and innocent Europeans—even if the very act of bringing to light the vulnerability of Englishmen (and Irish, Dutch, and other West European sailors) unsettlingly called into question the era’s belief in the ultimate progress of reason and white rule. Stage Moors often displayed less sensitivity to foreigners’ humanity than Shakespeare achieved with *Othello*. These dramas were avidly consumed by working-class Britons and Irish as early as the sixteenth century.³⁹

By the nineteenth century, Istanbul was on the decline, but many ethnic groups carried recollections of the threat posed by the “Turkish times” into the twentieth century. Although most Slavic immigrants arrived with not much familiarity with high culture, folk plays conveyed similar fears of Tatar invaders or the “Turkish Times” (rule by the Ottomans, 1526 to the 1680s), which equated blackness, non-Europeaness (African, Asiatic) with barbarism and evil. Croatian American actors in Chicago portrayed characters in plays that depicted uprisings against Ottoman rule, with evil “Musselman” characters featured in dramas such as *Zulumčar*, *Hasanaginica*, and *Mlada Breda*. The last play, published in 1922 in Ljubljana, Yugoslavia, was set in 1472.⁴⁰ Newark Slovaks in 1917 similarly presented a play in which stage Turks threatened the pure during “the Serbian uprising against the Turks at Jagodine in 1787.”⁴¹ As late as 1965 a similar play was presented by New York Slovaks, in which “Jozef Šottník played a Turkish type” with outlandishly long nails, odd fez headdress, funny nose, glasses and beard, and pointy shoes. Amateur theater groups practiced their own form of “orientalism” which depicted Muslims as barbaric (even if sometimes comically so) no less than practitioners of high culture.⁴²

Earlier, during World War I, papers such as *New Yorkský denník* characterized the Ottoman Empire as a backward land of despotism, and cheered on imperial Russia in its fight against the Turks and the rule of the burka. “The Russian in Asia battles the Turk, who brings Islam with its veiled ‘burka.’ Kindly devils!” was the caption for a cartoon of a misshapen midget Turk battling a calm, noble-looking Russian (see Figure 3-1.)⁴³ *Slovák v Amerike* in 1912 had already characterized the Turks and Islam in general as barbarian and “Mongol” in support of the war by Serbia, Montenegro, and Greece against Istanbul. “The sick man of Europe should get out of Europe and go back to Asia!” an editorial’s headline declared. Anti-Asian, “Mongol” rhetoric frequently was used elsewhere against the Magyars.⁴⁴ *Jednota* took a more lighthearted look at the “Mahommedan,” publishing a joke in which a dervish demonstrates the existence of God, free will, and suffering by throwing a clump of dirt at a skeptical nonbeliever.⁴⁵

FIGURE 3-1: “The Russian in Asia Battles the Turk, who Brings Islam with its Veiled ‘Burka.’ Kindly Devils!” Stereotypes of Asians and Muslims as not fully human were prevalent among Slavic peoples even before some of them migrated to the United States. *New Yorkský denník*, January 31, 1917, 1.

uje v azyskom Turecku. - Armiou vitaju Rusov do svojich oslobodených. Turci sú priatelia

MORE CULTURE

Koľ už kultúrni Nemci nenali nikoho na svete, kto by im pomáhal, aby dovršili svoju kultúrnu prácu, tak prosili o pomoc Turka. Turci vyhlásili svätú vojnu, oproti všetkým kresťanom. Teda Turci s Nemcami idú oproti kresťanstvu. Nemci sa spríatelili s Turkom. Jedno veľmi dobré staré latinské porekadlo hovorí takto: "Poveda mi, kto ti je priateľom a povieš ti, kto si."

Zo Sluisu v Holandsku oznamujú, že Nemci utiahli sa od Yseru a Belgičania obsadili obe strany, rieky. Stuykenskerke bolo poslednou obcou, ktorú Nemci vyvrátili.

lia opúšťajú Bruges a utekajú do Holandska.

V Belgicku Nemci prehlásili proklamáciu, dľa ktorej je zakázané hlásiť sa k Bruges na veľa. Kto sa

si postavené ťažké nemecké kano-ny. — V susedstve Heystu boli zrobené siance. Na nemeckom fronte posledný týždeň zase dostali posilu.

mecko uvádzá, že sú v Anglii akých Anglič 17 do 66 rokov tých dôstojníkov. Toto na tých, ktorí po kolónii, kde nakladá.

Z Berlína novembra m zajatcov. Z stojníkov a : ska: 3121 d mužov; z Bu kov a 34,90 Britanie: 41 mužov.

Americký dal britský radu, aby s mecko.

FR

Francúzsk vyдало věr ně-úradné ženie počas lo sa zmenil de a 'Lys-ri ten starý rá na nedostan nazad. Seve Arras sám náda, bez t tel bol dosi Nemecké út cúzsku a E vajú. Neme viedli spoz posilujú s ktoré už ho skom do pr úmyslom, ži ofenzívu. — Oiseom, po Meuseom u nejšieho vý dili naše : Andechy, z na kolona : rozbúraná kolí Namp od L'Aigue au-Bacn z Sapignaul, Nemcami.

FIGURE 3-2: "Once the cultured Germans found that no one in the world would help them to achieve their fine cultured work, they asked the Turks for help. The Turks, who declared holy war against all Christians. Thus the Turks turned the Germans against Christianity. The Germans are great friends of the Turks. One very good old Latin proverb says the following: 'I can tell who you are if you show me your friends.'" *Slovák v Amerike*, November 9, 1914, 1.

When Germany announced its alliance with Istanbul, *Slovák v Amerike* was quick to point out what uncivilized company the Kaiser was keeping. "MORE CULTURE," a front-page cartoon was captioned on November 9, 1914, with Wilhelm embracing a devious, grinning sultan under the hated crescent. "Once the cultured Germans found that no one in the world would help them to achieve their fine cultured work," the editors noted, "they asked the Turks for help. The Turks, who declared holy war against all Christians. Thus the Turks turned the Germans against Christianity. The Germans are great friends of the Turks. One very good old Latin proverb says the following: 'I can tell who you are if you show me your friends'" (see Figure 3-2.)⁴⁶

These characterizations were often conflated with critiques of the supposedly "Mongol" Magyars, as when *New Yorkský denník* ran a letter to the editor that said that under the Magyars Slovak women had it worse than among the Turks, where the women are regarded as slaves. This letter-writer also compared Slovaks to the blacks freed by Lincoln, who he argued had it much better than his countrymen ruled by Budapest. There were many arrows in the racial quiver, but at a time when the United States still barred emigration by Asians, the "Mongol" characterization was employed liberally by Slavs against their enemies.⁴⁷

Gilman has argued for the cultural equation of blackness with evil as early as the Middle Ages among German writers. He further argues that by the seventeenth century black retainers were already prized at aristocratic courts as symbols of the exotic world of less civilized beings with which enlightened nobles wished to show their familiarity.⁴⁸ While few people in certain more remote East Central European regions may have come into direct contact with blacks, other peoples by the late nineteenth century were more conversant with non-Europeans. As Robert Orsi and Catherine Eagan have argued, many immigrants such as the Italians and Irish came to America with more than passing familiarity with non-Europeans, including blacks in the Atlantic and Mediterranean worlds. Other Europeans settled in ports such as Tunis prior to 1800, while even London had a sizable non-European population by the eighteenth century. And even Slovak tinkers of the nineteenth century were documented as wandering as far afield as the Ottoman realms, and thus could plausibly have encountered black workers years before Ellis Island.⁴⁹

If Slovak *drotári* were sometimes disparaged as Gypsy vagabonds, they were well-traveled vagrants. Indeed, the tinkers of western Slovakia had had many opportunities to experience non-European peoples prior to arriving in the United States. By 1905, a Slovak tinker community could not be studied in isolation from the wider world to which *drotári* wandered. In that year an ethnographer studying wireworkers of Kolárovice noted,

All over the world can be found the sons of Slovaks. They have wandered throughout the world in search of work and many a wife can tell of an expedition made by the whole family in search of work. . . . We are familiar

with wireworkers not only in our place (Bohemia and Slovakia), but also in Austria, Moravia, Hungary, Slavonia, Serbia, Russia, Germany, Spain and elsewhere.⁵⁰

The ethnographer divided his study into a section on life on the road and at home just as *drotári* themselves divided the year as a matter of course. Tinkers returned to Kolárovice three times a year, especially in the summer to help with farm work.⁵¹

Drotári (wireworkers or tinkers) of Trenčín villages such as Čadca as early as the sixteenth century established a name as itinerant craftsmen, selling wares and metalworking skills across Central Europe. Initially working in nearby Silesia, *drotári* soon spread across the Slovak region and as early as the seventeenth century Slovak tinkers had traveled to Russia. During the eighteenth century they established trade routes and workshops in Albania, Armenia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Russia, Serbia, and Slovenia, repairing all manner of household goods. So famous did the Trenčín *drotári* become that, in 1905, Manó Somogyi devoted considerable attention to them in his study of the Empire's "wandering dealers and workers."⁵²

Writing on the tinkers in the 1950 *Ludový kalendár* (*People's Calendar*), Adam Kosinec noted wireworkers amicably lived and worked among the neighboring Czechs and Poles, but quickly made an appearance in "foreign regions," with Štefan Hunčík and Jozef Zimula noted as establishing a workshop in Moscow, which brought several hundred Slovak workers to that city by the mid-nineteenth century. The author's grandfather, Michal Backor, by 1870 was successfully established in Essen on the Rhine, while other Trenčín natives were working in Stuttgart, Switzerland, "the present-day Yugoslavia," Tbilisi, Irkutsk, and Siberia.⁵³

In relating the tall tales of Magyar and Slovak itinerants, Béla Gunda notes that before World War I the tinkers "traveled all over Europe and occasionally even as far as Asia," again indicating non-Europeans were a known quantity to those who later established workshops in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Newark, St. Louis, and other U.S. cities. Perhaps because of this noted itinerancy, in some Hungarian villages it was said that when Columbus "discovered" America, he also discovered Slovak *drotári* who, although drunk, told the explorer they'd been working the place for years. The disreputable vagabonds' drunkenness and truth-stretching likely fit into stereotypes many villagers held of these outcasts, but whether they really reached America, their worldviews had already expanded beyond their home villages.⁵⁴

As Thomas Čapek noted, hundreds of families in the towns along the Kysuca were dependent on the wire trade. In 150 villages of Trenčín province, it was determined that more than two-thirds of the male population worked as wireworkers in the second half of the nineteenth century. The result of so many people reliant on a single trade was frequent migrations in ever wider circles in search of broken pots and the gold that might come from repairing them. In

1877 it was noted 10,000 Trenčín wireworkers annually journeyed into the world. Trenčín natives established wire works in the eastern province of Spiš, a secondary, distant “branch office” for Westerners. Other *drotári* did business in Germany, Switzerland, France, Belgium, Romania, the Balkans, Poland, and Russia. By the 1870s Spiš Slovaks likewise had been making trips to Bulgaria, Serbia, Turkey, and Russia for decades. Other tinkers established manufactories in Samara on the Volga River; Baku, Azerbaijan; Tbilisi, Georgia; Saint Petersburg and Moscow. Even Argentina, Madagascar, Ceylon, and Harbin, China, knew the Slovak tinkers by then, while Tomáš Fasunek of Kysuca had already established himself in Tunisia, where he owned 45 manufactories.⁵⁵

Certainly in their wanderings to Mediterranean ports, the *drotári* had come into contact with many Africans, and whether Tunisian *drotári* themselves later wandered to the United States or not, far-flung tinkers were still in contact with relatives and fellow townsmen in Trenčín, sending remittances and letters as well as visiting their home base.⁵⁶ Like Irish migrants to London or Italian fishermen sailing to North Africa, these itinerant laborers had to have known of black people prior to emigrating, and did not arrive in America race-neutral. They may not, however, have experienced race as a hard and fast Jim Crow binary, as it developed in the United States.

Still, scholars have recently begun to address the evidence that many European immigrants did not arrive in America as innocent of ideas of race as was once imagined. Orsi notes South Italians and Sicilians had been scorned as “Africans” by northern Italians, and Scott Malcomson notes Sicilian and *Mezzogiorno* fishermen and merchants had come in contact with North Africans for decades, if not centuries, by the time of mass migration. Certainly the tinkers working for Fasunek in Tunisia knew something of race.

Eagan, too, argues that while Irish subjects of the British Empire knew far too well what it meant to be stigmatized as a quasi-racialized other, they nevertheless were learning to distance themselves from African subjects of the crown, those they met as slaves, servants, or sailors in Ireland, England, or the West Indies, and as exhibits in traveling spectacle carnivals that toured the Irish countryside. In the latter instance, a traveling exhibit of “wild African tribesmen” spurred the *Cork Southern Reporter* to comment the blacks “come so near the monkey tribe, as almost to make us question their humanity.” Such cultural productions distancing Irish subjects from black objects cause Eagan to conclude, “[E]ven as early as the eighteenth century, there are indications the Irish had begun to differentiate themselves from blacks in the empire; thus, they had begun to claim the privileges of whiteness long before they emigrated to America.”⁵⁷

In East Central Europe, too, from 1874 on Carl Hagenbeck and his rival impresarios offered “anthropological exhibitions” that emphasized the savagery of supposedly primitive Africans. As William H. Schneider notes, these zoo-like displays “placed West Africans in a setting of spectacle and emphasized their warlike, savage nature.” One such Dahomean village was exhibited in October 1892

in Prague, while other human zoos fabricated cannibalistic displays, or presented scantily clad African women warriors in titillating tours that mixed sexual and racial voyeurism. In the 1880s and 1890s, such supposedly "scientific" displays of backward African natives (often portrayed by non-Africans, including black American actors) entertained huge crowds in Prague, Vienna, Warsaw, Budapest, Saint Petersburg, and Moscow, while the impresario R. A. Cunningham in 1883–84 brought a "tribe" of Australian aborigines to Berlin, Saint Petersburg, Istanbul, as well as "many zoos and music halls throughout provincial Europe." As late as 1922 it was still possible in Prague to purchase a souvenir postcard of an "Abyssinian warrior" in order to commemorate one's visit to the zoo. Tens of thousands of Slovaks by the 1880s had migrated to cities such as Budapest, Vienna, and Prague in search of seasonal work, while Trenčín's tinkers had an even broader familiarity with the cities in which African savagery was offered as entertainment.⁵⁸

Many Slovaks, then, were often not as race-neutral in their thinking pre-migration as had once been assumed. Indeed, East Central European zoo visitors' preoccupation with "Dahomean" cannibalism or savagery prefigures similar coverage of these matters by Slovak American newspapers such as *Slovák v Amerike* and *New Yorkský denník*. These "human zoos" were known/consumed pre-migration by Slavs and Irish, but continued well into the twentieth century as popular attractions at world's fairs, circuses, and other popular-culture venues that immigrants avidly consumed after they came to America. Earlier, in 1889, the U.S. humor magazine *Puck* satirized both the display of exotic Asiatic and African savages and the only slightly less savage Irish who still alarmed WASP nativists. A cartoon from that year shows Mr. Patsy O'Rourke taking a break from his midway carnival job masquerading as the Fiji Chief, while Tooley rehearses his part as the Wild Man of Borneo.⁵⁹

This is not to deny that Slavic viewers of Dahomean villages and other racialized spectacles of supposed African inferiority were not themselves stigmatized once they arrived in America. Still, the prevalence of "human zoos" in Budapest, Prague, Vienna, and even "many zoos and music halls throughout provincial Europe" suggests that many Slavs' race-thinking may have begun gestating years before boarding a Cunard liner for America.

Similarly, while a woman who emigrated to New York in the 1920s recalls she saw images of plantations and seemingly contented slaves on cotton packaging that arrived at the textile factory in Usti nad Orlici, it wasn't until after she arrived in New York that she met actual black people, and learned these idyllic images had little resemblance to slavery or sharecropping on plantations.⁶⁰ Non-Europeans such as African Americans were known to many Slavs from a variety of sources pre-migration. Still, the absolute binaries of Jim Crow segregation, America's "one-drop rule" that disfranchised virtually all citizens with even a remote African American ancestor, and the reign of terror waged against blacks in the South and other parts of the country, were matters with which immigrants

were unfamiliar upon arrival and about which new immigrants such as the Slovaks had to learn if they were to accept their place as “white” citizens.

Such a designation was not as automatic as the descendants of Southeast European migrants might assume. As scholars such as Matthew Frye Jacobson, David Roediger, Alexander Saxton, and others have demonstrated, Southeast Europeans were white and not-quite-white all at the same time; in the eyes of many nativists they were indeed “inbetween peoples.” Legally, European migrants were eligible to settle permanently in the United States and establish citizenship, unlike Chinese, Japanese, and other Asians, even the Filipinos who after 1898 were ruled by the United States. Culturally and politically, however, Southeast European newcomers were greeted with a torrent of diatribes asserting that they were so alien to American traditions of republican self-rule, or so lacking in intellectual capacities, as never to fit into the country.⁶¹

This nativist discourse prevalent in English-language papers found its way into immigrant papers, combining with Slavs’ own Old World prejudices, as writers and readers sifted their way through the hierarchies of peoples. Slavic newspapers reflected this obsession with inter-European notions of the fluidity of race. Papers reported on Jewish, Italian, and Irish residents, often in terms just as unflattering as the alarmist rhetoric employed by the Immigration Restriction League. The coverage in Slavic papers of two ethnic groups in particular—Jews and Italians—indicates the enduring wariness, even hostility, of many Slavs toward other European “outsiders.” One group was quite familiar to Slavs pre-migration, while only those tinkers who had wandered and worked in Mediterranean ports prior to migrating to America likely knew firsthand of the latter. Nevertheless, stereotypes old and new were adapted from American papers and reflected in Slavic journals as newcomers tried out which racial boundaries were most salient in America. In the end, fellow Europeans were regarded, albeit grudgingly, as acceptable neighbors and fellow citizens, but, as with the Slav’s own “promotion” to white fellow citizen, nothing was guaranteed. Many column inches of anti-Italian and anti-Semitic coverage had to be printed first.

It is to these articles that we next turn.