



Tim Engles

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in Contemporary North
American Literature



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CHAPTER 2

Ethnicized White Male Nostalgia: Sloan Wilson's *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*

To the extent that *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* endures in American consciousness, it does so mostly in the figuration of its protagonist as a rather bland, angst-ridden “everyman,” especially as played in a 1956 Hollywood version by Gregory Peck. At the time, Sloan Wilson’s eponymous and recently published novel was nearly as well known, a middle-brow literary success that seemed to capture and articulate simmering middle-class white male anxieties about the demands of a new social order, including domestic and workplace expectations that many found constraining, conformist, and inauthentic. Wilson’s narrative depicts the postwar civilian resituating of a World War II veteran, Tom Rath, who has returned to his wife Betsy and to life in a house that strikes them both as too small, particularly when an opportunity for enrichening corporate success arises for Tom. Another option arrives when Tom’s grandmother dies, leaving him her house and its extensive landholdings. Owing to Tom’s uneasiness with the enforced cheerfulness, kowtowing, and other demands of corporate work, he and Betsy eventually decide to move into the inherited house and sell off its land as plots for suburban development. Tensions flare when, among other familial and property-related problems, Tom’s hidden wartime liaison with an Italian woman resurfaces. Tom struggles to maintain a morally appeasing sense of himself both at home and in the workplace, and he longs to come clean, which he thinks he could do by quitting his soul-destroying job and by telling Betsy about his affair.

In retrospect, it seems strange that few observers of the time perceived either Wilson or his protagonist as far from the all-American everyman that Tom Rath came so quickly to represent. Although both were white, and World War II veterans as well, each also had roots in established northeastern, “old money” families, a highly privileged demographic that Wilson later labeled in the title of another novel, *All the Best People* (1970). That Wilson and his gray-flannelled protagonist Tom Rath were far from ordinary white American men, and instead fit a group sometimes labeled (though rarely by its members themselves) as “WASPs,” seems to have escaped most observers, including even recent scholars of the film and novel. The regional and familial roots that Wilson evinces in his novel were actually and more specifically “Anglo-Saxon,” a once commonly overt affiliation that by the 1950s had largely faded from national consciousness, and apparently even from that of Wilson himself. Nevertheless, both Wilson and his protagonist demonstrate the remnants of white American Anglo-Saxonism, including certain nostalgic leanings that betray not only their ethnoracial lineage and attendant dispositions but also those inspired by their class background and gender. Indeed, the backward-leaning proclivities of both Tom and Betsy Rath evince the largely unconscious machinations of white American male hegemony, especially the ostensibly liberal usage of more overtly ethnic characters. Explaining how the novel manifests the submerged dispositions of what I will label a dominant hidden ethnicity calls for some preliminary review of a history largely lost to popular consciousness, that of white Anglo-Saxon racial formation.

WHITE ANGLO-SAXONISM

Although popular notions of the founding of the United States in indignant claims of abuse at the hands of English rule have long existed, standard accounts of subsequent national identity formation have failed to account adequately for the countervailing nostalgia felt by many Americans for the England that once supposedly was. The Anglophilia currently expressed in the common, largely white American enthusiasm for English-heritage novels, films, and television shows has a lengthy and continuous lineage of precedents, even among those with no actual ancestral ties to England. In the past, those with such an interest often chose an oddly ancient affiliation: “Anglo-Saxon.” By the nineteenth century, as Reginald Horsman writes in his groundbreaking study of the

origins of this largely fantasized ethnic grouping, the belief of most white Americans in their inherent racial superiority had become overt, and their seemingly legitimate sources for such a belief multiple:

[From] the English they had learned that the Anglo-Saxons had always been particularly gifted in the arts of government; from the scientists and ethnologists they were learning they were of a distinct Caucasian race, innately endowed with abilities that placed them above other races; from the philologists, often through literary sources, they were learning that they were the descendants of those Aryans who followed the sun to carry civilization to the whole world.¹

As numerous historians of race and ethnicity have subsequently explained, a dominant sector within the relatively new white American race found a variety of reasons to look back to England more existentially. By the mid-1800s, these Americans, who “had long believed that they were a chosen people... also believed that they were a chosen people with an impeccable ancestry”; this was a lineage they widely proclaimed *both* white and Anglo-Saxon.² One impetus for declarations of racial superiority was a felt need to address in some way the moral and existential contradiction posed by a budding empire’s claims to exceptionalist roots in anticolonialism; such morality-challenging extortions as the theft of land and labor were justified as natural results of membership in an inherently superior subset of the dominant white race. As for the more specific Anglophilia marked by the term Anglo-Saxon, it became less a sign of adoration for all things English and more one of distaste for things and people *not* English. Self-declared white Anglo-Saxons held fast to their imagined notions of superiority to all peoples they deemed “darker,” including not only those of indigenous and African descent but also immigrants from other parts of Europe.

By the late 1800s, as industrialization brought further waves of disparate immigrants from Europe (while owing in part to the “free white” portion of the 1790 Naturalization Act, non-European immigration to the United States waned), many filled the increasingly crowded cities, a general urban growth that countered a lingering feudal ideal. One result was that the nation’s multinational and multiracial origins came to strike many instead as a purely English beginning. Nostalgic white Anglo-Saxon identity gained salience, taking on as well a more overtly elitist tinge. As David Lowenthal writes, “The 1880s and 1890s saw the birth of scores

of Sons, Daughters, Dames and other commemorative genealogical societies, with Anglo-Saxon origins a sine qua non of membership.”³ In the early twentieth century, the concept of “ethnicity” gained currency as a way to differentiate provisionally white immigrants from putatively full-fledged white Anglo-Saxon Americans.⁴ Those perceived as Anglo-Saxons were not labeled “ethnic Americans,” yet many continued to anoint themselves members both of the dominant race and of an ethnic group within it. In this way, white Anglo-Saxons viewed themselves as both being distinct from the “melting pot” of the United States and singularly embodying the signature ideals of American progress and achievement.

As intermarriage and the passage of time and geographical distance from England gradually rendered claims to Anglo-Saxon purity (let alone superiority) ever more specious, a further irony arose when Anglo-Saxon adherents found more evidence for non-English inferiority in the supposedly pathological nostalgic tendencies of new immigrants. As Susan J. Matt points out in her historical account of American manifestations of homesickness, “Nativists believed Anglo-Saxons to be the best race and worked assiduously to limit the in-migrations of southern and eastern Europeans, Asians, and Africans. Immigrants’ perceived mental instability and vulnerability to the ravages of nostalgia provided them with ammunition, for they could point to the newcomers filling America’s asylums as a threat to national strength and racial purity.”⁵ Because this sort of homesickness still carried nostalgia’s original stigma of mental illness, pointing hypocritically to inevitable immigrant pinings for lost homelands served to bolster white Anglo-Saxon claims to racial superiority and, by morality-assuaging implication, to their own greater material access and accumulation. Nevertheless, when push came to shove in legal terms, as when people from various countries applied for citizenship, both Anglo-Saxon Americans and others from Europe fell under the racial heading of “white.” Finally, by the 1950s, those who fit the characteristics of white Anglo-Saxons had come to eschew both the term and the increasingly disparaged acronym that had come to describe them, “WASP” (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant). Yet, as Wilson in effect demonstrates in *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, with both his protagonist and his own authorial methods, some still felt what amounts to a lingering Anglo-Saxon nostalgia, a nagging sense of lost eminence that perhaps was felt more keenly by many men, who perceived threats from a more openly egalitarian social order to the formerly stable status, material assets, and prerogatives of people like themselves.⁶

As both Wilson and his protagonist Tom Rath demonstrate, the new social forces that seemed vaguely threatening to many Anglo-Saxon descendants included the heightened ethnoracial integration that had arisen during the Second World War, the defeat of more blatantly racist enemies, further waves of eastern and southern European immigration, and domestic demands from the still ethnoracially and religiously subjugated for greater sociopolitical inclusion. Again, and almost as if in response, self-identification in explicitly ethnoracial terms among the descendants of the Anglo-Saxon elite had largely faded. The era's new liberal pluralism positioned a more general and less explicitly marked form of whiteness at the center of U.S. institutions, politics, and culture, and along with other groups, descendants of those who had once proudly and often defensively declared themselves Anglo-Saxons were assimilating into it. Within the white race, greater opportunities for religious and ethnic others arose, while awareness declined of the genuine relations and connections between the extant ethnoracially dominant—that is, those whose ancestors had most overtly and tenaciously clung to Anglo-Saxon heritage—and more recent immigrants, the “inbetween peoples” and their descendants. These were the technically white people, as represented in Wilson's novel by Italian and Jewish American characters, who still experienced their American-ness as provisional and whose work toward inclusion and equal treatment had nevertheless become impossible to ignore.⁷

Of course, such mid-century changes in white racial formation also took place in response to heightened demands from Americans who were neither firmly nor provisionally white, an increasingly restive racial force that produced further tensions for the white men who navigated suddenly less familiar social and workplace landscapes. Although Wilson never labels the racial status of Tom Rath, he does mark him early in the novel in such terms, as an ordinary (white) man of his time, in large part by repeatedly depicting Tom's encounters with overtly ethnic and racial others. A more subtle (and likely unintentional) marking of Tom as an ultimately nostalgic Anglo-Saxon scion arises only gradually. Tom's status as a more ordinary white man first becomes implicitly apparent during a crucial early scene. As the protagonist whom many (at the time) read as the embodiment of an archetypal new everyman, Tom pensively rides a commuter train back home from another day of trying to embody the era's newly minted corporate masculine ideal. When he looks out the window as the train passes through Harlem, Tom enacts both the era's new racial

liberalism and its particularly white oblivion. Scanning the “littered streets and squalid brick tenements,” Tom gazes on what amounts to a figuratively invisible woman, a female cohort of sorts to the titular character in Ralph Ellison’s epochal novel *Invisible Man*, published three years earlier.⁸ This “aged colored woman with sunken cheeks,” leaning out of a window to water some flowers, starkly contrasts with a more manufactured figure positioned just a few feet above the older woman, on “a huge billboard showing a beautiful girl thirty feet long lying under a palm tree. ‘Fly to Miami,’ the sign said” (*M*, 45). Of course, the literally and ideologically enlarged woman can only be a white woman; however, like Tom’s whiteness and that of the author and of his presumed readers, her racial status is the hegemonic norm that, as such, goes without saying.⁹

Nevertheless, given as well the fundamentally relational nature of racial demarcations in all modes of American culture, the marking of this woman’s blackness here functions to imply something about whiteness as well. *Gray Flannel* has been chiefly read as an individualistic and ultimately reactionary *cri de coeur* against its era’s hypocritical, emasculating conformity, as figured in representative corporate and suburban settings.¹⁰ As Jonathan Vincent writes in a standard interpretation of that which Wilson depicts as thwarting Tom’s efforts to become his own man, “the novel’s politics, indicative of the political mood of its time, are concerned solely with personal redemption through the pursuit of a clean conscience, the acceptance of the responsibilities of fatherhood, and the longing for contentment in the security of the middle-class suburban ideal.”¹¹ That the ideal threatened by creeping corporate conformity is specifically white is signaled by Wilson’s use in this scene of a romanticized Africanist presence. This briefly glimpsed woman registers in no particularly significant way for Tom, and thus in a way that also signals his lack of overt racial prejudice. In addition, her impoverished blackness imbues the moment for white middle-class readers with a nostalgic earthiness, and thus with a contrasting sense of seemingly non-corporate authenticity. This paradoxically stereotypical dash of seemingly genuine humanity contrasts with, and thus highlights, the sanitized corporate sterility that threatens Tom and his family, as represented by the billboard and the white woman garishly splayed across it. In sum, that the ideal threatened by a looming conformity is a specifically white one is registered by Wilson’s authorial use, here and elsewhere, of a romanticized Africanist presence.¹² While Wilson might seem unconcerned

with situating his protagonist amidst his era's ethnoracial structures in any terms other than those of individualized liberal tolerance, he repeatedly figures both racial and ethnic otherness in ways that evince a particularly situated white-male nostalgia. This markedly "WASP" male sense of lingering, wistful inclinations undergirds and helps to justify the eminence enjoyed by members of what had become a paradoxically hidden dominant ethnicity.

As in the interactions between white characters and Ralph Ellison's "invisible" protagonist, the brief appearance of this anonymous black woman registers in no self-aware or contextually insightful manner for Wilson's white character. Although Tom does briefly perceive her difference from himself, he fails to see his own relation to her, that is, *both* of their relative positions in a classed, gendered, and raced geospatial network. In his analysis of the commuting motif in suburban fiction, Christian Long writes regarding this scene, "Tom is not interested in his environment qua environment; it says nothing to him about other people. ... Tom sees not the condition particular to the urban tenements ... but still another reflection of himself."¹³ Wilson depicts in this scene, no doubt inadvertently, a trained white ignorance to such matters that belies not only the era's illogically collective vaunting of "American" individualism but also the broader white culture's heightened racial tolerance. Both Wilson and Tom demonstrate what Charles Mills describes as "racial erasure: the retrospective whitening, the whitewashing, of the racial past in order to construct an alternative narrative that severs the past from any legacy of racial domination."¹⁴ And, given this novel's particular socio-geographic setting and choice of characters, what Tom also enacts in this cross-racial moment is the erasure in the dominant sector of not only the era's liberal white consciousness of communal relations that remained obstinately fixed in terms of race and ethnicity, and thus of social class, but also the manifestations at the individual level of a selectively whitened historical memory.

In terms then of ethnicity, neither Tom nor his restive wife Betsy, nor apparently Sloan Wilson, explicitly identifies as a descendant of a social set that once widely declared itself Anglo-Saxon. Yet all three exhibit what amounts to the psycho-emotional symptoms and inherited cultural capital of what had become, in Ashley W. Doane's terms, a "hidden ethnicity."¹⁵ Because this dominant group identity had lost salience by the time of *Gray Flannel's* setting and because the group nevertheless continued to favor its de-ethnicized members and disfavor those

marked more explicitly as “outsiders,” I will label the group which Tom and Betsy evince most acutely in their nostalgic longings hidden Anglo-Saxons. Although the Rathes exhibit financial and existential problems widely read as typical for middle-class white suburbanites of their era, they also bear the traces of a dominant-yet-ethnic lineage, inherited dispositions that provide anxiety-relieving solutions that they falsely believe they arrive at solely through their own skill, hard work, and good-heartedness.

RESURGENT WHITE ANGLO-SAXONISM

Wilson opens *Gray Flannel* with a portrait of familial suburban angst, as felt by Tom and Betsy. Aside from uncertainty about whether Tom’s efforts to advance in corporate life will result in a satisfying salary, a primary source of discontent is their house. Their suburban location marks them as people who seemed (especially to white readers) naturally suited to domestic conditions far preferable to those endured by people like the relatively impoverished African American woman whom Tom briefly considers from the train. Yet, while the Rathes’ suburban house is much easier to live in than a Harlem tenement, it strikes them as “too small, ugly, and almost precisely like the houses on all sides of it” (*M*, 3). Murkier troubles fester as well, as suggested by an unrepaired plaster crack in the shape of a symbolic question mark, the result of Tom’s having hurled a vase during a heated argument about their strained finances. The house’s unkempt state is also suggestive; Tom would be the appointed one to do household repairs and maintenance, but as with the rest of his current life, he has no enthusiasm for such masculine duties and, given the privileged upbringing that we learn about later, little practice as well. A certain nagging vagueness in this couple’s general discontent is summed up at one point by Betsy: “I don’t know what’s the matter with us. . . . Your job is plenty good enough. We’ve got three nice kids, and lots of people would be glad to have a house like this. We shouldn’t be so *discontented* all the time.” Although Tom emphatically agrees, the true source of their agitation remains elusive: “Their words sounded hollow” (*M*, 3). The couple’s emotions, both surface-level and submerged, are the novel’s immediate, primary focus, and the particulars of their house have become the site onto which they project their muddled feelings. Such a projection is symptomatic of how they generally see leaving this residential area as the solution, making them, as Catherine Jurca puts it in

her study of this novel, “sanctimonious suburbanites,” individualists who resemble their neighbors most fully and ironically in their conviction that they don’t belong among them because they somehow fundamentally differ from them.¹⁶

While the Rathes seek individuation, they also clearly long to embody their era’s newly minted notion of a better domestic future, a familial happiness manifested by a bigger, better house and the higher income it would take to sustain such a domestically centered life. Yet consideration of their particular socio-geographic positioning demonstrates that a certain remembered and felt past remains resonant for them as well, albeit in more unconscious ways. Greentree Avenue seems an ironically named location for their suburban house, nestled as it is amidst little more than similar houses and thus removed entirely from “nature.” Indeed, part of Tom’s discontent with new suburban areas, such as those encroaching on his hometown of South Bay, Connecticut, is their falsely touted connection to an older, supposedly pure landscape: “Brightly painted one-story houses filled the fields where Tom had hunted rabbits as a boy, and even the old nine-hole golf course had miraculously become something called ‘Shoreline Estates,’ in spite of the fact that it was a good two miles inland” (*M*, 16). South Bay itself, however, is depicted as resistant to change and thus eventually as a more suitable residential locale for the Rathes; it has not only larger houses and wider unhoused spaces but also a social hierarchy in which members of established wealthy families like themselves reside at the top. Resettling in South Bay soon arises as a possibility for the Rathes when Tom’s grandmother dies, leaving him as the sole descendant and apparent heir to her country estate.

While specific causes of Tom and Betsy’s gnawing restlessness are not particularly evident to either one of them, they persist with a general belief that more money would solve all of their problems. The Rathes’ neighbors also imagine more money as the main solution to their discontent, but Tom’s thoughts exhibit an additional temporal orientation:

[He] thought wryly of the days when he and Betsy had assured each other that money didn’t matter. They had told each other that when they were married, before the war, and during the war they had repeated it in long letters. “The important thing is to find a kind of work you really like, and something that is useful,” Betsy had written him. “The money doesn’t matter.” (*M*, 7)

Any adult could have such a memory, of a stage in life when a coherent sense of personal finances had yet to develop, but what Tom actually misses, here and elsewhere, is a time when money didn't matter because his family had plenty of it. More to my point in this chapter, Tom's ancestors had plenty because they occupied the upper reaches of a localized ethnoracial hierarchy, which included not only others who were more clearly subjugated in classed, raced, and ethnicized terms but also their own consciously named dominant group.

In the 1920s and 1930s northeastern United States locale of Tom's youth, self-proclaimed Anglo-Saxons were in an earlier stage of their gradual fade into the "ever-expanding boundaries of whiteness," which gradually incorporated not only European immigrants marked as other in terms of "ethnicity" but also an "Anglo-Saxon" or, more rarely, "Nordic" or "Caucasian" elite.¹⁷ Regarding the occasional usage of such terms in the early twentieth century to describe those who were considered the whitest white Americans, historian Kevin M. Schultz writes of the more common use of "Anglo-Saxon" for assertions of racial superiority, and thus for seemingly justified dominance, by an ethnic (yet putatively non-ethnic) minority: "[At] the beginning of the 20th century, there was a need in America for a term that would differentiate the social elite from all others. Anglo-Saxon served that need. ... Anglo-Saxonism became a badge of social acceptance; in many ways, it was the most important social demarcation one could possess in the late 19th and early 20th centuries."¹⁸ Reading *Gray Flannel* in these terms suggests that Tom's longing for a less troubled past is actually a certain hidden Anglo-Saxon male nostalgia—male because his backward orientation is in part a response to new configurations of the masculine burden of bread-winner expectations, and hidden Anglo-Saxon because, in this novel's setting, to have lived while feeling unconcerned with financial security generally meant having come from family wealth accumulated over generations. For the most part, those families that had long occupied such positions were descendants (or claimed descendants) of those who more explicitly and proudly traced their lineage to England and who also saw the increasing presence of "ethnic" European immigrants in their social, institutional, and work-related settings as something like an invasion.

As noted earlier, by the 1950s, a person like Tom would have been unlikely to bear his ethnoracial identity consciously and, if he did so at all, to think of it instead as simply "white." Indeed, that Tom never self-identifies with that word (let alone as Anglo-Saxon) indicates that he

assumes and enacts an unremarkable, “simply American” identity, one in which whiteness has a hidden quality similar to that of his ancestral ethnic heritage. As Tom briefly misses his wealthy past while displaying no awareness of its undergirding ethnoracial privilege, he rejects such nostalgia immediately, reasoning that “a man with three children has no damn right to say that money doesn’t matter” (*M*, 7). Tom and Betsy fall into a money-grubbing rut throughout most of the novel, forgetting their earlier disdain for the act of monitoring personal finances, and failing to recognize how the wealthy background that they each once enjoyed had allowed the cavalier financial disregard they now miss in their adult lives. By novel’s end, readers are encouraged to believe, as the Raths do, that Tom has managed merely to stay honest to himself, rejecting the money-focused, family-sacrificing life of the man he was in danger of replicating, his robotically work-obsessed boss at the United Broadcasting Company (UBC), Ralph Hopkins. A happy resolution eventually arrives for the Raths, not only because they believe that Tom has regained his integrity but also because they have found a path back to relationally marked, socially elevating wealth. As the novel closes, the Raths have moved into an inherited estate and begun the process of selling portions of their landholdings, on which houses suggestively similar to their old home will be built, thereby providing an array of smaller, feudally arranged homes located in sight of and below their quasi-baronial manor. The Raths’ ancestral comfort and status will more or less return, and ethnic, racial, and class-specific others will also clearly continue to be available, as hired hands and minds, and as subordinated human markers of the Raths’ social elevation.

EMPATHETIC BLACK MALE EMBODIMENT AND WHITE MALE EMOTIONAL CONSTIPATION

While the social order in the United States has long equated money with happiness, Tom and Betsy’s fiscal hunger is thus more pointedly markable in terms of a hidden ethnicity. Part of what indicates an Anglo-Saxon influence on their nostalgia for a wealthier past is the gradual emergence of their sense that they are, or should be, rightful occupants of a heightened stature relative to others. In earlier times, this status had been contraindicated by more explicit recognition of subordinated ethnic and racial others. In the earlier generations of their families, this

recognition occurred in part because those who had declared themselves Anglo-Saxon highlighted the differences of others in response to such exclusionary social currents as scientific racism, which helped to suggest the others' supposed "eugenic" inferiority and thus their dubious potential for fully contributory citizenship. These intraracial dynamics also had spatial and temporal dimensions; Irish, Italian, Polish, Jewish, Catholic, and so on were variably salient markers of "ethnic" difference in different times and places in the United States. Those deemed inferior to white Anglo-Saxons included both racial and ethnic groups; the latter were accorded fully white status only in certain regional, cultural, or social contexts. As Matthew Frye Jacobson points out in regard to ethnoracial formations in the early twentieth century, when Tom and Betsy's parents would have been coming of age, both the extant clause of the 1790 Naturalization Act that limited citizenship to "free white persons" (a clause that lasted until 1952) and the influx of European immigrants created a "political crisis" of exacerbated nativism, which arose in response to a perceived "over-inclusivity of the category 'white persons.'"¹⁹ "Anglo-Saxon" favoritism was both fading and changing, sometimes into broader forms of supposedly pure whiteness, as racial preference moved toward simply "white" favoritism. By the 1950s, Sloan Wilson, himself the scion of a by-then subdued Anglo-Saxon heritage, gave his novel an ostensibly liberal tinge of inclusion by peppering both racially and ethnically othered characters throughout *Gray Flannel*, several of whom have extensive speaking roles. Ultimately, a closer look at both Wilson's and Tom Rath's perception of, and *use of*, these explicitly raced and ethnicized characters also identifies both men as reactionary inheritors of a fading Anglo-Saxon legacy.

Although neither Tom nor any other character identifies him as a member of what was once more directly labeled the white Anglo-Saxon elite, Wilson's protagonist clearly is one, to the extent that this by-then amorphous group can be discerned. By 1953, the time of this novel's setting, one evident marker of this dominant group was its very lack of self-definition as a group. As George Lipsitz has pointed out in an oft-quoted clarification of how this phenomenon worked more generally in terms of late-twentieth-century racial domination, "As the unmarked category against which difference is constructed, whiteness never has to speak its name, never has to acknowledge its role as an organizing principle in social and cultural relations."²⁰ By the 1950s, Anglo-Saxon dominance had lost its overtly declarative status while the concept of

“ethnicity” lingered as a marker for those who were not quite white, that is, not quite full-fledged members of the dominant group that “Anglo-Saxon” contained but less and less directly described. As noted earlier, when this dominant northeastern grouping was labeled in this era, “Anglo-Saxon” (often including the word “white”) had moved toward “white Anglo-Saxon Protestant” (or “WASP”) and its occasional usage remained an oddly illogical concept, a marker not only of racial and class-based dominance but also of that which racial dominance ostensibly excluded—ethnicity.²¹ In a later novel, *All the Best People* (1970), Wilson revisited the postwar era by depicting the travails of Dana and Caroline Campbell, a couple who strongly resemble the Rathes, and indeed Wilson himself, and he handled the concept of the protagonists’ hidden ethnicity less subtly than he had in his depiction of the Rathes.

Like both Wilson and Tom Rath, Dana Campbell has graduated from Harvard and served in the war, and he too bears discernible traces of a white Anglo-Saxon heritage. During a conversation about the future between Dana and Caroline while both are in their mid-twenties, such roots become more explicit than they ever do in *Gray Flannel*. As this couple discusses what sort of life each would like to pursue, various prerequisites emerge that were generally limited to those not only of their race but also of their elevated, geographically situated class. These include the expectation of a “veterans’ loan” (which were largely limited to white male veterans), family connections to a beginning position on Wall Street, and a steady confidence that nothing is holding them back.²² As Dana announces his intention to “make a lot of money,” he adds, “Have briefcase, will travel. ... Mobility is one of my assets.”²³ He means a willingness to physically relocate for a lucrative job, but the phrase also references his fealty to the era’s expectations of educated young white men—that they be ambitious, especially in financial terms, and thus upwardly aspirant in terms of social status. However, the more specifically white Anglo-Saxon underpinnings that both buttress and propel Dana become more apparent when he recalls both of their upbringings and an exclusive inn that people they knew had frequented: “Do you remember how they kept saying ‘all the best people’ went up there? ... people who had all the power and wealth they wanted.”²⁴ Like Tom, Dana has a family that pushes him in a particularly status-conscious way, hoping that he will be the one to “Restore the family glory!”²⁵ Significantly, given the postwar setting and the fading of explicit white Anglo-Saxon affiliation, their background becomes labeled as such not

through Dana's own self-declaration but rather through his recognition that the label indicates how *others* see them: "They call people like us WASPS, Caroline, white Anglo-Saxon Protestants." When Caroline says she'd rather not claw their way to the wealthy status that WASP glory has largely been boiled down to for Dana, and instead "Just [be] Caroline and Dana," Dana jokes about how poor they would be, left with little more than "a few good books from the library and a visit to an art museum now and then."²⁶ Although Dana recognizes such cultural capital and the propelling relevance to his future of his privileged ethnic background much more fully than does Tom, he too fails to fully acknowledge its direct ties to his most fervent desire, that of making a great deal of money. While doing so was a common postwar desire among middle-class white aspirants, the relative ease with which Dana could do so and his expectation that he will are especially attributable to his status as a vaguely self-aware WASP.²⁷ More generally then, while actual people thusly situated may not have embraced their WASP status, others did see them in such terms, marking what amounted to a dominant (yet often hidden, especially to themselves) ethnicity, as well as an inherited habitus that shaped their conceptions of others and, as Wilson's authorial methods exemplify, their usages of them.

Among *Gray Flannel's* markedly black and ethnic characters, the former mostly function in a manner similar to Toni Morrison's delineation of an instrumentalized Africanist presence, "traditionally used constructs of blackness" that register in white-authored literature mainly in order to highlight features of the central white characters.²⁸ As with the woman who briefly catches Tom's eye as he passes through Harlem, a minor black character typically works this way by evoking stereotypical elements or connotations of blackness that reside in the collective white imagination. Although some of Tom's current malaise seems attributable to what we now label post-traumatic stress disorder, he also rather fondly remembers a soldierly version of himself, a more confident participant within restorative memories that compensate for the bland, seemingly emasculating roles of corporate drone and responsible family man that he is trying to embody. Aside from Tom's brief encounter with the woman in Harlem, he consciously registers the racial status of black soldiers during one of his wartime flashbacks. When Tom is thrown into shock by his own killing of a fellow white soldier and friend, Hank Mahoney, with a poorly thrown hand grenade, he picks up the corpse and searches for medical help. A group of implicitly white medics tell him that Hank is already dead,

so he obstinately wanders off in search of different medics, only to encounter a segregated group of “Negro” soldiers disembarking from a landing barge. In the scene that follows, Wilson’s inclusion of a black sergeant reflects a 1950s-era white liberal ideal of heightened individualized racial cooperation, rather than recognition of the ongoing systemic racist realities of wartime and postwar segregation.²⁹ Tom’s interaction with this unnamed black sergeant also works in a contradictory way, with the individualizing effect of having this character speak countered by Wilson’s stereotypical depiction of him as more emotional and bodily than Tom and the white medics, that is, as remarkably empathetic and conspicuously large.

Recognizing quickly that Tom is in a state of crazed denial about Hank’s death, the “gigantic” sergeant rests a “big hand” on Tom’s shoulder and “one great arm around Hank’s body.” When the sergeant quickly perceives Tom’s state of shocked denial, he suggests that Tom sit down and rest and then places the body with “gentle and respectful hands ... a hundred yards” from the other collected dead (*M*, 94). While Wilson depicts this man interacting purposefully with Tom and speaking with apparent agency and even goes so far as having this black sergeant issue orders to Tom, a white captain, the overall effect is that of a presence rendered racially typical, in ways likely to register as such for Wilson’s white readers. As Morrison points out, the Africanist presence has been widely used by white American authors in certain codifiable ways; two deployed here include the repeated metonymic emphasis on black hands that function for white purposes and his open display of emotion. Dialectically constituted racial formation has long encouraged white people to repress emotional display in their own demeanor and to project a conception of excessive and often uncontrolled display onto racial others. In literary terms, this tendency has, of course, been exacerbated when the central character is performing ordinary white masculinity as well; secondary female characters have been commonly depicted, as Nirmal Purwar writes, as “lacking rationality and all that the abstract male type exemplified ...” and instead represent “emotion, bodies, nature, particularity and affectivity.”³⁰ Wilson’s black soldier becomes a superficially positive character in terms of marked racial inclusion because he speaks and acts with apparent agency and because he is more helpful than the white medics whom Tom has previously encountered. However, this unnamed character exists solely in order to labor willingly for the sake of the white male protagonist’s well-being, and he does so

in the emotional and physical (rather than intellectual) modes deemed appropriate for members of his race in most of the era's white-authored, white-centered cultural production. Liberal-minded white readers could thereby feel good both about the inclusion of a black (albeit very minor) character and about the positive effect that his heightened emotionality and physicality has in resuscitating Tom's soldierly capacities. Overlooked in this process was the countervailing reinforcement of common white stereotypes about black people.

Thus, Tom's memory of the sergeant as black, and also as someone not only toward whom he felt no racial animus but also from whom he accepted help in an especially vulnerable state, conveys raced and gendered significance in a novel that would seem largely unconcerned with such matters. Tom's recollection ultimately signals nothing significant about this sergeant or about black soldiers or people more generally, but rather something in particular about Tom—that he is a good (that is, tolerant) white man, one able and willing to look beyond the mask unfairly imposed on black people by centuries of racism. In addition, the scene's emotional resonance—which, as racially gendered norms dictate, cannot be depicted as pouring forth from the scene's white male and thus emotionally restrained protagonist—is registered by the highly empathetic, caring black character. By portraying Tom's memory this way, Wilson responded, perhaps intentionally, to his era's newly configured demographic relations. The war's highlighting of xenophobic fascist regimes had exposed racism, ethnocentrism, and religious intolerance as hypocritically pernicious elements of the United States' vaunted "democracy" and thus as national characteristics that its leadership recognized as a deterrent to the country's global reputation and ambitions.³¹ Wilson's liberal-hearted narrative reflects the era's resultant, ostensibly tolerant white middle-class acceptance of racial and ethnic difference. The doubled irony is that a racist mask remains on this character's face; a black foil appears in this highly white-centered narrative as a bit more than a metonymic set of working muscles and hands, but only as a way of suggesting that racism against blackness is rightfully in decline, because white individuals were becoming less racist toward black individuals, as exemplified by tolerant Tom being ahead of the times in the then rigidly segregated military. Although the moment evokes feel-good white liberal tolerance, no recognition, let alone concern, is conveyed for the fact that most African Americans continued to live in highly segregated, subordinated conditions.³²

THE ETHNICIST PRESENCE

While the scene in which an anonymous black soldier helps Tom deal with a friend's accidental death lends a racially liberal tinge to Tom's compensatory reveries about a more vividly alive version of himself, a more extensive suggestion of ethnoracial tolerance arises from his wartime affair with an Italian woman, Maria Lapa. This episode becomes another plot-driving existential dilemma when Tom agonizes over whether to reveal the affair to Betsy. Maria and three other markedly ethnic characters constitute what amounts to (paralleling Morrison's Africanist presence) an ethnicist presence in the novel, and Wilson uses these characters for more complex and submerged purposes than he does the black sergeant and the briefly glimpsed Harlem resident. In *Gray Flannel's* narrative present, Tom's numerous encounters with explicitly ethnic characters begin when he visits the United Broadcasting Company for a job interview. As he enters an elevator, he notices not only something familiar about the elevator operator, who turns out to be his wartime comrade Caesar Gardella, but also his ethnic difference. Like those of other ethnically marked characters, Caesar's differences from Tom are signaled in both linguistic and bodily terms. Not only does the elevator operator have a "slight Italian accent," he is also described as "a stout, dark-complexioned man ... with thick black hair," a "deep voice," a "fat, almost round" face, "black and unblinking eyes," and a "thick neck" which bears "a long, thin white scar" (*M*, 25). Feeling "oddly flustered" by this brief first encounter, Tom finds a men's room to wash his face and comb his hair before proceeding to his job interview. As the novel progresses, this act of ablution clearly signals Tom's unconscious rejection of discomfiting memories conjured up by Caesar, and particularly of his wartime version of himself, one blemished by his hidden affair with Maria. The memory he has of a wartime self who indulged in bodily pleasure is a "dirtier" one that counters the dry-cleaned, gray-flannelled man he is trying to embody. Caesar's corporeal, closely described masculine excess functions *as* excess because it contrasts with, and thus helps to define, the relatively disembodied white masculinity that Tom is rather paradoxically trying to embody. Suppressing reminders of the wartime version of himself becomes in part an effort to achieve that more whitened manhood by washing away, as it were, the Italian-stained identity that Tom had slid into during the war, especially by engaging in a prolonged affair with Maria.

When Tom realizes that the elevator man is Caesar Gardella, whom he remembers as a fellow soldier and “a thin boy of Italian ancestry,” stirrings of guilt and shame arise, coupled with thoughts that indicate how his current struggles trigger nostalgic visions of a former, more conventionally masculine self:

How curious it was that apparently nothing was ever really forgotten, that the past was never really gone, that it was always lurking, ready to destroy the present, or at least to make the present seem absurd, or if not that, to make Tom himself seem absurd, the perpetuator of an endless and rather hideous masquerade. I am a good man, he thought, and I have never done anything of which I am truly ashamed. Curiously, he seemed to be mimicking himself. “I am a good man,” he seemed to be saying in a high, effeminate, prissy voice, “and I have never done anything of which I am truly ashamed.” A gust of ghostly and derisive laughter seemed to ring out in reply. (*M*, 77)

As Tom struggles to contain himself here, a complex array of other feelings also arise, including frustration, humor, alienation, and the anger suggested by Tom’s last name.³³ At a more unconscious level, what also appear are haunting echoes from Tom’s own ancestral past of a denigrated form of elite masculinity. Wilson’s depiction of Tom’s angst here might seem squarely in line with his era’s general anxieties about the supposed decline of (white) masculine virtues. In an analysis of elite American masculinity during the mid-twentieth century, during which numerous renowned cultural critics “bewailed the ‘softness’ of men setting their compass by the collective whims and demands of bureaucratic life...”, historian Robert Dean notes that while such critiques struck a chord with many (white) Americans of the day, concerns about masculine flaccidity resonated in further, long-standing ways for men in the northeastern leadership class.³⁴ Quoting John Adams, the revolutionary leader and second U.S. president, Dean writes that “the Revolutionary forefathers had lamented the ‘elegance, luxury, and effeminacy’ that threatened the ‘great, manly, and warlike virtues’ of the new republican society,” a society created and run, of course, by elite white men.³⁵

By establishing his protagonist as an aspirant to the mainstream post-war idealization of self-reliant masculinity, Wilson appealed to middle-class readers who were concerned about such a supposed decline in the state of American manhood; he also implicitly called for sympathetic

understanding of men who struggled to resist the era's threats to masculinity, including traumatized war veterans. Less evident is just where the "ghostly and derisive laughter" that Tom hears in that moment comes from and why he oddly feels that he is "mimicking" himself. Given the elite WASP background of both Wilson and his protagonist and the lack of awareness both display of their lingering adherence to the dictates of WASP masculinity, I would argue that part of what Tom feels is an ethnically informed derision for his own impulse to declare to himself, "I am a good man ... and I have never done anything for which I am truly ashamed" (*M*, 77). This derision comes from the part of Tom, and likely of Wilson himself, that has tried to reject the patrician heritage that helps to prompt such a declaration, including the doing so in such stiffly formal terms, which helps to explain why Tom hears himself saying it in "a high, effeminate, prissy voice." Tom's hearing of his own self-declaration of goodness in this tone evokes not only the era's broader anxieties about the new (white) everyman as a feminized, obedient rule follower but also a long-standing tradition of casting aristocratic masculinity in terms of effeminacy. In response to such stereotypes, as Dean explains, many mid-twentieth-century northeastern elite men felt a need to prove their virility, and many tried to do so by performing heroically in war (or, in the case of John F. Kennedy, by managing to seem as if they had done so). Such men felt obligated as society's future leaders to prove their martial mettle, but they also did so in response to common conceptions of the elite class's aloof "anglophilia" and "enervating privilege," and especially of elite masculinity as soft and effeminate.³⁶ Although Tom's struggles to adapt to the constraints of corporate life echo his era's common anxieties about its threats to self-reliant masculinity, a submerged part of him also perceives within himself, and tries to reject, the remnants of an aristocratic effeminacy associated with his own elite WASP past.³⁷

Faced with an array of pressures on both the home and work fronts, Tom's wartime reveries center on a supposedly more alive, assertive, and capable version of himself. The current demands that he perform a highly whitened, less embodied masculinity evoke not only a more marked embodiedness via Caesar's ethnicity but also the version of himself that he became by effectively stepping out of his puritanically and, ironically enough, ethnically confined masculinity via an affair with another markedly ethnic character, Maria. Once Caesar identifies himself and asks Tom to help Maria and the son she has had by Tom, both she and Caesar evoke a heightened emotionality that white middle-class

readers would have stereotypically associated with Italian people. The novel's wartime flashbacks thus function as a contrasting backdrop in which Tom remembers an assertive masculinity that he now has trouble enacting. Also, in a pattern that has by now become familiar in white male-authored U.S. literature, darker others, both male and female, help to draw out this otherwise tightly contained protagonist, whom Wilson depicts as gradually developing a masculine courage to resist demands that he fulfill a role unsuited not to the Anglo-Saxon inflected person he has been raised to be but rather to the individualized person he "really" is. Yet, in part because he is a white Anglo-Saxon inflected person, there is no individualized "real" Tom that he eventually becomes.³⁸

Despite the confusion and horrors of a war in which Tom killed not only his best friend but also sixteen other people, he also remembers it as a setting imbued with honesty and sincerity. Caesar's presence continues to inspire Tom's guilt, right in the soul-threatening heart of the UBC building, because Caesar embodies the honesty and integrity that Tom misses in his own current self, as an unfaithful husband and a man unsuited to corporate obsequiousness—Caesar married his wartime paramour, Gina, instead of abandoning her as Tom did Maria. Also, Caesar eventually reveals that he struggles to get by on the wages earned by his manual labor; Tom is clearly headed toward more financial success, but—given the particular demands of the corporate world—at the potential expense of his integrity and his current family. When Tom first has lunch with Caesar, his class-based consciousness of the gaze of his gray-flannelled colleagues leads him to think that he shouldn't be seen fraternizing with an elevator operator, so he steers Caesar to a Mexican restaurant. However, the choice of an ethnic restaurant also helps to suggest that Tom's sense of shame for doing so, and for cheating on his wife, is heightened by Caesar's seemingly more authentic ethnic status.³⁹ While Wilson writes from an even more fundamentally conservative perspective than did such ethnorracial fetishists of his era as Jack Kerouac and Norman Mailer, he too deploys figurations of more vibrant, genuine ethnic otherness to contrast with, and thereby expose as relatively flaccid, the newly minted middle-class white masculinity that Tom is struggling to embody.⁴⁰

Again, the masculine nostalgia triggered in Tom by Caesar is for the better self he supposedly was during the war, a more vigorous and "alive" version of himself triggered in part by his interactions with ethnorracial, and thus supposedly more honest in bodily terms, others.

In racial terms, the wartime setting enabled a psychic evacuation of his white self, whereby Tom imagined that raced and ethnicized people were more genuinely alive and that he could become someone other than his constrained, seemingly flaccid self while interacting with them. Tom remembers, for instance, that Maria's body "was as beautiful as the body of any woman, and much more beautiful than most" and thus his first words to her were, "My name's Bill Brown..." (*M*, 79). Even then, he felt compelled to pretend to be a different person—the Tom Rath that he had been raised to be could not leap spontaneously into doing what he was about to do with Maria, and the current version of himself feels less authentically alive than the person whom he briefly enacted during the war, especially during his idyll with Maria. In this sense, one reason that Tom felt less guilt during his affair with Maria than he likely would about one conducted in the United States (an action that never even tempts him while living with Betsy) was her ethnicity, which made it easier for Tom to slip out of his own straight-laced, contained—and thus inauthentic to what he was really feeling—masculine self and into what seemed like a more authentic mode of being. In terms of race, whiteness thus functions for Wilson as a novelist as it did more generally, as a whitening out, as it were, of that with which people like oneself had been affiliated before. Thus, while Tom may currently be traumatized by wartime atrocities, including those he himself committed, gender, race, and ethnicity functioned together in ways that felt freeing, springing him temporarily from an engaged prior self. And just as Wilson figures more directly the prewhitened authenticity of his era's marked ethnicities, so too does he ultimately figure Tom and Betsy's rejection of the 1950s suburban white ideal as a revival of their former, implicitly white Anglo-Saxon heritage.

Wilson again deploys Italian ethnicity as a contrasting marker of whitened inauthenticity when Tom joins his new boss, Ralph Hopkins, for an elegant lunch. Tom thinks the current version of the speech on mental health that he's been helping others write for Hopkins is horrible, and he considers whether to say so honestly or to temper his opinion in more falsely obsequious terms. Before Tom speaks, another ethnicist presence appears, a nameless waiter who asks for their order "in a thick Italian accent" (*M*, 201). The accent clearly evokes Caesar and Maria, and thus Tom's looming wartime lies, but also an ethnic contrast to the seemingly immaculate racial whiteness of Tom's current setting—the scrubbed corporate executive world—in which men like Tom Rath and

Ralph Hopkins are especially welcome and enabled because they *are* men like them, that is, educated, connected, and “proper”-speaking white men, as well as men who have sacrificed or left behind something in order to be regarded that way. In other words, the waiter’s accent again evokes Italian ethnicity as a coalescence in the white imagination of countervailing yet ultimately whiteness-serving authenticity.

Having been subliminally prompted by the waiter’s accent to value the honesty and integrity he feels are at risk in his guise as junior executive, Tom decides on frankly criticizing the speech. The lie here is not only the smiling, phony corporate life to which Tom feels he has refused to sacrifice his integrity but also, along with it, the form of white masculinity staged in this scene’s setting and embodied most fully by Hopkins. This is a raced and gendered status supposedly stripped of categorical specificity that is inadvertently exposed as such by Wilson’s use yet again of romanticized ethnicity. Tom’s directness with Hopkins about the speech pays off, and he decides to play it straight from then on in corporate life, a trait that leads to Hopkins’s invitation to follow in his wealthy footsteps by becoming his protégé. Tom’s countervailing desire to be a good husband and father by spending more time at home quickly intervenes, leading him to reject the sort of all-consuming career that is destroying Hopkins’ family, but the point remains—white male nostalgia figures ethnic otherness as sincere and genuine, in part because of guilt inspired by awareness of that to which hegemonic white masculinity has subjected ethnic and racial others.⁴¹ When entitled white men like Sloan Wilson felt pushed to acknowledge subjugated ethnoracial others, they often responded with narcissistic nostalgia, by figuring ethnicity as a trace or echo of something seemingly genuine that they themselves have lost.

Although white authors in the United States have often used racial presences for such purposes, the particular impulse of Wilson (whose own life paralleled that of Tom Rath in many ways) in doing so could well have arisen from his own subliminal white Anglo-Saxon guilt about the mistreatment and erasure of those long excluded from the more original, “purely” white club, that is, members of supposedly lesser races and ethnicities. In Tom’s case, these and other internal machinations eventually lead to a compromised rejection of the era’s newly manufactured white male ideal in favor of, and in retreat to, the reconstruction of another nostalgic fantasy, that of life as a noble, patrician member of the de facto white Anglo-Saxon landed gentry.

PSEUDO-FEUDAL NOSTALGIA

Tom's unsettled psyche is not this novel's only site of resurgent white Anglo-Saxon proclivities; a major reviver of such feelings in Tom is his wife Betsy, whose consciousness the narrative briefly occupies. Unlike significant female characters that I will consider in later chapters, Betsy Rath reads primarily as a contented suburban housewife who feels entirely satisfied with her circumscribed role as wife and mother. Betsy does have restless nighttime thoughts about a better life, but they reveal her longing for improvement in terms of domestic and material betterment for her immediate family, rather than for increased independence as a woman in the wider world. Where Betsy differs, like Tom, from suburban typicality is that her current malaise is based less on anything wrong with where they currently live than on memories of previous domestic settings. In the second half of the novel, Betsy springs into action, pushing Tom to win back his grandmother's estate from the threat of loss in a lawsuit and to convert the land into wealth-generating housing plots. For the most part, Betsy's narrative function is entirely secondary—to prod Tom into vigorous, unspoken WASP masculine activity in the hopes of regaining the wealthy splendor that her family also once enjoyed.

Restless with insomnia, Betsy recalls her childhood in Boston, where her family occupied a “big brick house on Beacon Street ... a cavernous building with a long dark staircase” (*M*, 110). The ongoing salience of Betsy's affluent upbringing in her current disposition is more subtly demonstrated by her weariness regarding parties on Greentree Avenue. Seemingly to the contrary, what bothers her more than the monotonous conversation topics and the heavy drinking is the incessant talk of money. The particular invitation that prompts Betsy's thoughts is for a party being thrown to celebrate a husband's rise in salary; at other gatherings, “Budgets were frankly discussed, and the public celebration of increases in salary was common” (*M*, 109). That last word takes on a suggestive second meaning when paired with a complaint made by Tom's “imperial” grandmother upon being placed in a hospital: “The nurses are so *common!*” (*M*, 49, emphasis in original). Betsy does not explicitly think of her neighbors as common people in this sense, but her memories of early married life with Tom do reflect their decidedly un-“common” beginnings, raised as they were by adults who rarely spoke of money

because they had plenty of it. As newlyweds, the Rathes had little money of their own, but unlike most people in the United States, they did have savings, “an absurd proportion” of which Tom spent on “her engagement ring and a diamond-sprinkled wedding ring to match” (*M*, 111). A particularly inherited sense of money is reflected in Betsy’s current realization that “because diamonds had increased in value a great deal since the war,” the rings “had turned out to be the only shrewd investment they had ever made” (*M*, 111). Again, few people had enough extra money when Betsy was a child to think of funneling it into “investments.” Like Tom, Betsy does not consciously frame her own discontent with their situation in terms of a wealthy white Anglo-Saxon past, and yet, the “common” desire for movement up the social ladder that they too feel is ultimately distinct. For the Rathes, this feeling is driven more by wistful remembrances enabled by ancestral wealth than by excited pursuit of the era’s new forms of white masculine fiscal opportunity, as represented by Tom’s budding career at the UBC.

Tom’s framing of the hopes of moving upwards in terms that amount to moving backward is less overt, as Betsy is the one who, again in the middle of the night, conceives of a way in which they can do so. When it becomes evident after the death of Tom’s grandmother that he is the sole heir to her large house upon a hill and its twenty-three attendant acres, but also to high tax and maintenance costs they cannot currently afford, Betsy excitedly awakens him with a new scheme—not only to move into the much bigger house but also to grow wealthy (again) by developing the acreage into small housing plots. When Tom advocates instead staying in their current house and scaling down their ambitions, Betsy accuses him of having lost his manly confidence. Tom counters that he’s being “sensible” but then adds, “It’s time we forget the Rath family’s dreams of glory, and *your* family’s dreams of glory too.... Dreams of glory.... I’ve spent my whole life getting over them” (*M*, 61, 63). Wilson devotes little space to Tom’s conflicted feelings about his ancestral past beyond this simple rejection, but by the novel’s end, his family’s “glory” and the entitled dispositions that go with it have been revived. Tom eventually rejects the self- and family-sacrificing corporate ladder-climbing embodied by Ralph Hopkins. Nevertheless, having adopted Betsy’s scheme, Tom uses his inherited cultural capital to pull various strings in South Bay toward making it happen, setting his new family on a path toward growing comfortably rich, in a pseudo-feudal, small-town setting where his resurgent white Anglo-Saxon self will

reside, literally and symbolically, above others who are more overtly marked in terms of social class, race, and ethnicity.

One privilege that Wilson depicts for people like the Rath family is a local judicial system tilted in favor of their social class. Despite his marked status as Jewish, and thus as the sort of person normally ostracized by the local, whiter elites, Judge Bernstein acts as a legal servant of sorts by bending the law to help out Tom once he moves back to South Bay. In a chapter that switches to the perspective of this ethnicist presence in order to provide his backstory, his double-barreled full name—Saul Bernstein—appears repeatedly, underlining his ethnic status, which again serves to highlight by reflexive implication the submerged dominant ethnicity of the Raths. Indeed, what Judge Bernstein ultimately helps the Raths with is Tom’s masculine pursuit of what amounts to his white Anglo-Saxon heritage, the material marker of which is the inherited ancestral manse. At one point, Betsy comes close to recognizing more explicitly the extent to which Tom’s own ancestral legacy remains an integral part of him: “You’re spoiled. You’ve spent most of your life feeling sorry for yourself because you knew Grandmother wasn’t going to leave you a lot of money” (*M*, 64). Although Tom’s grandmother and his own father have largely spent the remains of the family fortune, she does leave her land and house to him, which also come with Edward, a servant who suddenly refuses to stay in his subordinated place.

Whereas Edward Schultz refers to Tom as Mr. Rath, Tom has to struggle at one point to remember Edward’s last name. When a plot-thickener enters in the form of Edward’s dubious claim to the Rath estate, Tom and his family lawyer solicit the advice of Judge Bernstein. Despite the “hidebound” customs of a “Connecticut town notorious for its prejudice against Jews” (*M*, 133), a place where the judge and his wife still cannot gain entrance to the country club, Judge Bernstein enjoys dispensing justice here precisely because this is a small-town setting; he believes he can do so more fairly when he is more likely to know the disputants who end up before him.⁴² Wilson thus acknowledges in a white liberal fashion the bigotry that lingered in such places—where, after all, the judge is a “respected” man who has been allowed to grow “reasonably rich”—and as a novelist, he seems to have consciously gone one step further, by fleshing out this character with a full chapter and backstory of his own (the book also ends with the image of Judge Bernstein, smiling down benevolently from his office window at Tom and Betsy). Nevertheless, this character ultimately serves as another

ethnacist presence who helps to trigger hidden Anglo-Saxon nostalgia, in part by being physically “fleshed out” in explicitly corporeal ways that Tom, Betsy, and other less provisionally white characters are not. That is, as with Caesar, the judge is continually described in corporeal terms. As a motif that also renders comic relief, this “small stout man with a large mole on his left cheek” finds that dispensing justice often gives him a stomachache unless proceedings go smoothly enough that no one but the guilty suffers (*M*, 131). He is also, like the honorably married Caesar, one-dimensionally virtuous.⁴³ Again, my point is not merely that Wilson limits his explicitly ethnoracial characters to little more than caricature; he also does so in the service of a narrative stance and a pair of central characters that together evince white Anglo-Saxon inclinations, partly in response to the fading into a more general, expanded whiteness of a more explicitly privileged ethnic heritage and partly in response to the era’s status-threatening imposition of socially striving, provisionally white men.

It is important to recall here that ideology, including constructions of normality, functions to justify hidden authority, as well as its iniquitous position at the top, where those who embody it reside at the material and social expense of those below them. One reason that it seems natural for Tom to move back to his ancestral grounds is not because life in South Bay would restore him as a white Anglo-Saxon scion but rather because it would grant him much more autonomy—pursuit of the era’s vaunted, newly heightened individualism becomes even more attractive, and more available, to a man with a family background and attendant resources like those that Tom has. That his easier achievement of an individualized sense of freedom is actually a white Anglo-Saxon inheritance renders Tom a certain discernible social type, a member of a group, even though it’s an unspoken and only indirectly acknowledged group that grants Tom the achievement of his countervailing and illusory sense of individuality. Crucially, the presence of others, who are discernible *as* subordinate others by way of certain defining and denigrated attributes, helped to establish the seemingly natural suitability of white Anglo-Saxon men to their position of dominance. Tom is depicted as a vacillating, ineffectual man throughout much of the novel, and although various troubles and lingering wartime issues help to explain his flaccidity, his eventual rejuvenation is especially enabled by his ancestral setting of South Bay, where he effectively seizes the reins of his heritage despite his earlier rejection of old familial “glory.” Tom’s seemingly natural

membership in the setting's long-dominant group becomes more apparent when he meets with a local contractor about the possibility of regaining his family's wealth by developing his inherited land, in part because the contractor is another ethnicist presence who, accordingly it seems, interacts deferentially with Tom.

Like Judge Bernstein, Antonio Bugala is another character whose overt ethnicity is more than just doubly nominative, and he too is accorded his own chapter. Wilson introduces "Tony" as a person who, as Betsy says, "looks like a man who can get things done," suggesting an emasculating contrast with Tom (*M*, 144). For Betsy, the kinds of "things" that such a man can apparently get done are physical tasks, and as with Caesar and Judge Bernstein as well as the black sergeant, descriptions of Tony are more bodily than are those of Tom: "He was stocky, dark-haired, and had once been told by a girl that he looked like pictures of Napoleon as a young man" (*M*, 144). Also directly countering laconic Tom, Tony is a "man of quick enthusiasms and fast decisions"; he's a smaller man literally, but also figuratively, in terms of the local ethnoracial hierarchy (*M*, 147). Nevertheless, as with Judge Bernstein, South Bay has come to allow ethnic strivers to attain some measure of financial success, and "for the past five years [Tony] had been astonishing everyone by becoming almost as successful as he had always predicted. Already, at the age of twenty-eight, Bugala was a contractor with thirty-four men, including his father, on his payroll" (*M*, 144). As another ethnicist presence who verges on caricature in the service of comic relief, Tony stalks about the Raths' new estate, a big-talking, pushy go-getter who grows so physically agitated by the possibility of becoming rich by building houses for the Raths (and by grossly calculating just how much money he could earn) that he seems about to burst.

While Wilson's novel displays a mild authorial interest in promoting ethnoracial tolerance and respect for circumscribed womanly ambition, his instrumentalizing characterization reflects not only his unexamined masculinity and whiteness but also his more specific white Anglo-Saxon bias. Indeed, although Tony Bugala is not Jewish, his immoderately expressed ambition echoes common conceptions of Jewish students at Wilson's alma mater, Harvard. As anthropologist Karen Brodtkin explains, "The Protestant elite complained that Jews were unwashed, uncouth, unrefined, loud, and pushy. Harvard University President A. Lawrence Lowell, who was also a vice president of the Immigration Restriction League, was open about his opposition to Jews

at Harvard.”⁴⁴ Wilson’s narrator also refers to Tony engaging in dubious “trade secrets” that undercut his competition, evoking stereotypes of underhanded ethnic cohesion and, given Tony’s Italian ethnicity, practices not unrelated to those of the mafia. Nevertheless, Wilson also describes Tony’s decision to “play it straight” in his proposal to Tom rather than subjecting him to “small-time cleverness” (*M*, 147), apparently in recognition of the supposedly evenhanded dealings engaged in and expected by his wealthier, whiter potential clients. That an Italian American businessman of his time would have been more likely to engage in aboveboard forms of cooperation with other Italian American business concerns seems to have escaped Wilson, as does the surreptitious, string-pulling nature of Tom’s budding entrepreneurial practices when he later uses his cultural capital and expectations of respect, if not exactly deference, while dealing with local citizens and officials about zoning laws. Although Tony is a fictional character, we can also consider another factor that Wilson apparently ignored (or perhaps did not realize): the likelihood that a person such as Tony, who like Tom has served in the Second World War, would have drawn on benefits made available by the GI Bill. The ready access both men would have had to these benefits, which included various forms of low-interest loans that could have helped a person like Tony start his business, makes them more similar to each other than Wilson allows; their whiteness unites them in this respect since returning black veterans were routinely denied such benefits.⁴⁵

As Tony talks to the Rathes and as we listen to his often countervailing thoughts, he demonstrates having learned more carefully grammatical and “polite” ways of speaking to his locale’s de facto landed gentry. Tony is also more excitable than the Rathes, another trait that becomes highly physical; as he looks around at their land and realizes its development possibilities, Tony’s “imagination, which was always at a slow simmer, suddenly began to boil over. Why not put up a whole housing project on quarter-acre lots? All right, you’d have to jump over the Zoning Board somehow, but if it could be done—the prospect was fantastic!” (*M*, 145). Tony Bugala is a particularly ethnicized striver and thus readily rendered, from a subsumed elite Anglo-Saxon perspective that draws on common ethnic stereotypes, as comically and almost frantically reaching above his current (and perhaps, in Wilson’s estimation, appropriate) station in life. While fantasizing about the future housing project, he begins to “sweat,” imagining himself as Tom Rath’s full-fledged partner, “complete with all financial details and photographs in

national magazines showing what Antonio Bugala, *Mr. Antonio Bugala, Esquire*, had done" (*M*, 146, emphasis in original). Wilson also works to provide narrative exposition here about how this housing development could happen, but since he relates the possibilities through Tony's perspective, we gather much about him as well, and thus about how different this Italian American is from the Rathes (and also, by contrast, in what ways the Rathes are different from him). Comedy is further provided to more securely white middle-class readers by depicting Tony's fervent dream that attaining a level of wealth commensurate with that of people like the Rathes could gain for him as well as the feudalistic respect evoked by the term "Esquire."

While he excitedly jumps ahead in his thoughts by foreseeing various specific financial details and opportunities, Tony comes "striding up to Tom, perspiring with excitement. 'Mr. Rath,' he said bluntly, 'I've got a proposition to make'" (*M*, 148). Wilson carefully renders grammar, diction, and exclamation points here that mark Tony as both an overtly ethnic member of the working class and one striving all too mightily to make a good impression on a wealthier, whiter man: "I got a good name! ... Hell, everything's a gamble! It's the guys who take the chances who make the dough!" (*M*, 149). Tony Bugala is rash and emphatically impassioned and since these attributes were stereotypically associated with Italians, his ethnicity helps to suggest as well the opposite in Tom—caution and circumspection (accordingly, he replies in measured tones to Tony's feverish overtures: "There are a lot of wrinkles to be ironed out of your ideas yet" [*M*, 149]). Tom and Tony do briefly bond in a leveling way over the war, with Tom remembering an airstrip that Tony says he built, but they quickly snap back into their relative masculine positions within a hierarchy marked in terms not only of class but also of ethnicity, and the hidden white Anglo-Saxon's supposed lack thereof, when resuming discussion of the housing project.

Wilson's characterization of Tony and other ethnicist characters thus relies heavily on rather cartoonish forms of exaggeration, an effect that Sianne Ngai usefully terms "animatedness." As Ngai writes of this common narrative method as deployed by many white American authors, "Whether marked as Irish, Jewish, Italian, Mexican, or (most prominently in American literature and visual culture) African American, the kind of emotional expressiveness that I call animatedness seems to function as a marker of racial or ethnic otherness in general."⁴⁶ This conglomeration of hyperactive, ethnoracially informed "affective qualities"

typically includes “liveliness, effusiveness, spontaneity, and zeal...” and tends to operate in ways that suggest both a lack of self-control in the animated character and thus, relationally, self-mastery in those who do not register as overtly ethnoracial.⁴⁷ In *Gray Flannel*, this set of familiar associations registers not only for comic effect but also, like Morrison’s Africanist presence, as a contrasting ethnic marker for the supposedly calm, reasonable, and self-possessed white (and, at a subdued level, Anglo-Saxon) characters.⁴⁸

In effect, this mode of characterization renders another meaning to Betsy’s comment as she listens to the men, a meaning that applies to Wilson as well: “Tom always looks at the dark side of everything!” (*M*, 149). In his revelatory study of Alfred Hitchcock’s cinematic handlings of the Americanized English masculinity of Cary Grant, Joshua David Gonsalves reminds us that in the 1950s, “the ethnic and racial category of whiteness” was felt to be “under siege,” an anxiety especially felt by men.⁴⁹ In *Gray Flannel*, Sloan Wilson betrays a latent nostalgia for times when black and ethnic Americans were more firmly at bay, less intrusively insistent on larger portions of his current decade’s sweetened American pie. Thanks to heightened degrees of World War II-era and postwar demands for integration and equal opportunity, these other Americans undeniably demanded more space in the American scene that Wilson more broadly seeks to depict and critique—it seems that they had to be dealt with, yet Wilson does so in ways that are both belittling and vaguely anxious. As Gonsalves pauses to note of Wilson’s novel, “If whiteness is threatened by race mobility, or by others passing as *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, fifties-era America also insists on imagining a space free from race anxiety... where the other can be safely contained as a service person.”⁵⁰ Wilson’s narrative registers a specifically positioned white male longing for such a space that was induced not only by the perception of encroaching others but also by a newly felt need to at least seem fair-minded in response. This duality leads to superficially sympathetic narrative inclusion of Africanist and ethnicist presences, which often veer into caricature, a mode of exaggeration that in turn applies as well to the consequent relational depiction of Tom as an ideal, moral, and supposedly individualized man. Gonsalves also notes the era’s common mainstream cinematic deployment of “invisible workers,” barely glimpsed characters who “are decisively marked as non-white by being denied any semblance of a menacing racial mobility.”⁵¹ Although Bernstein and Bugala do enact visible, talkative, and to some degree

interiorized autonomy, Wilson renders them less menacing by limiting their economic and social mobility in comparison with those of the Rathes. Accordingly, the narrative encourages little more than mild disapproval of South Bay's social rejection of Judge Bernstein and his wife, and by the novel's end, Tony has more or less disappeared, despite the heavy amount of planning that he and Tom have so far done together.⁵² Tom's return to his ancestral home, his revivifying within himself of attendant inclinations, and his easy assumption of a well-paying and nearby suburban sinecure all ensure the kind of well-situated future for Tom, Betsy, and their children that resembles the lives of their ancestors in terms of more than just wealth.

The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit is classifiable as yet another white male "liberationist narrative," Sally Robinson's useful label for the slew of late-twentieth-century novels in which white male authors bemoaned what felt like the impending diminution of their raced and gendered privileges.⁵³ However, this novel also functions more specifically as a reaction by a member of an increasingly unmarked dominant ethnicity to certain postwar changes in ethnoracial relations, especially the perceived need for heightened inclusion of subordinated others. By this time, the dominant white Anglo-Saxon ethnicity had lost the legitimacy and visibility it had conferred upon itself, perhaps most explicitly in the late nineteenth century. Yet, generationally transferred privileges and consequent dispositions persisted, as did subsumed expectations of dominance and masculine enactment of it, resulting in assumptions that a social order that maintained this dominance was right and natural—instead of the understanding that the social order was initially and purposefully constructed to position them as the dominant. Indeed, it would take a willed effort for many descendants of such an Anglo-Saxon heritage not to reproduce such inherited, backward-oriented dispositions. As Doane writes regarding the hierarchical nature of racial and ethnic formations, "The key element here is that dominant group ethnic assertion tends to focus upon the defense of existing social structures and cultural norms ... and the negation of subordinate group claims. Consequently, there is less effort devoted to elevating group identity and cultural practices—as opposed to the cultural or psychological decolonization practiced by subordinate groups—and lower group self-awareness."⁵⁴ Tom and Betsy's reassertion of themselves at the top of a feudally reminiscent hierarchy, with ethnically marked servants and residentially positioned subordinates in the form of a future village of sorts literally spread out before

and below them, is not the result of their consciously perceiving themselves as white Anglo-Saxon descendants. Nevertheless, *Gray Flannel* is less what it has primarily been read as—an individualistic rejection of the new and stifling corporate conformity inflicted on the era's middle-class men—and more an ironic and nostalgic longing for the reconstitution of a patriarchal ethnic identity.

In a sense that again evinces the white Anglo-Saxon male nostalgia of Sloan Wilson and thus of his protagonist, *Gray Flannel's* Africanist and ethnicist presences reflect actual people, those who are perceived, in Nirmal Puwar's useful terms, as "space invaders." In the United States, these are the resurgent minorities who seek entry in social spaces and "'privileged' positions which have not been 'reserved' for them, [and] for which they are not, in short, the somatic norm."⁵⁵ Nevertheless, they are also a constitutive part of the norm, helping to define it as such by apparently being that which it is not. As Valerie Babb describes this process in racial terms, "The very existence of whiteness embodies an odd duality of distinguishing itself from something nonwhite while appropriating the nonwhite to justify its being..."⁵⁶ As the novel closes, Tom and Betsy have extracted advice and assistance from marked and subordinated ethnic presences—indeed, the marked, stereotyped ethnicities of such characters specifically help to position them *as* subordinated—toward the imminent development of inherited land that will soon place them in the vaunted social position once occupied by their respective families of origin. Writing in the pre-civil rights era, Wilson acknowledges in a good-hearted white liberal mode the presence of darker or darkened bodies or both, but he keeps them outside the borders of an empowered social center in which both entrenched ethnoraacial privilege and mainstream hegemonic whiteness enable much greater upward social mobility, according them little characterization beyond the familiar racial and ethnic codings commonly used in white-authored, white-centered cultural production. In terms of ethnicity, Wilson does convey the ostensibly inclusive message that in his postwar northeastern setting, non-Anglo-Saxon ethnic male strivers have earned more opportunity than ever before. On the other hand, when such men seek positions of authority (as a judge) and financial power (as a businessman), positions traditionally occupied by members of the Anglo-Saxon elite, their presence, merely because of who they are and what they are thought to be like, and merely because they are not among the "best people," feels to the male inheritors of white Anglo-Saxonism like an

invasion. Although the equally intra-racial, group-bound, and thus “ethnic” origins of such feelings are hidden from Tom, and apparently from Wilson as well, and because the privileged spaces that seem subject to invasion are those in which men have almost always occupied positions of power, the response is ultimately nostalgic, a reactionary desire to restore hierarchies of old in which white Anglo-Saxon masculine superiority defined itself as such in relation to ethnoracially marked inferiority. Although *Gray Flannel* is often read as a critique of the threats to masculinity imposed by the era’s corporatized, commodified conformity, the novel also evinces Sloan Wilson’s longing for his own hidden White Anglo-Saxon Protestant masculinity.

NOTES

1. Horsman, 5.
2. Ibid.
3. Lowenthal, 121–22.
4. “Provisionally white” is David R. Roediger’s term for the non-Anglo-Saxon European immigrants who eventually worked their way into whiteness. *Working Toward Whiteness*, 243. For overviews of the dialectic that was “Anglo-Saxon” self-assertion and discrimination against ethnic others, see Frye Jacobson, 39–90 and Brodtkin, 27–52.
5. Matt, 166.
6. For more on to the waxing and waning of what amount to Anglo-Saxon identity and group cohesion, see Baum, *The Rise and Fall of the Caucasian Race*; Kaufman, “The Decline of the WASP in the United States and Canada”; and Kaufman, *The Rise and Fall of Anglo-America*.
7. James Barrett and David R. Roediger describe “inbetween peoples” as the “millions of Eastern and Southern European immigrants who arrived in the United States between the end of the nineteenth century and the early 1920s.” Their relations with settled white Americans and their efforts to assimilate into the dominant racial order were fraught:

A whole range of evidence—laws; court cases; formal racial ideology; social conventions; popular culture in the form of slang, songs, films, cartoons, ethnic jokes, and popular theater—suggests that the native born and older immigrants often placed these newer immigrants not only above African and Asian Americans ... but also below “white” people. Indeed, many of the older immigrants and particularly the Irish had themselves been perceived as “nonwhite” just a generation earlier. (4)

These inbetween people were the “Polish, Italian, and other European artisans and peasants” whose descendants, and sometimes themselves, eventually became fully white.

8. Sloan Wilson, *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, 45. Hereafter cited as *M*. In his study of (presumably white) middle-class reading tastes, Gordon Hutner also connects *Gray Flannel* and *Invisible Man*, suggesting that they be taught together: “their juxtaposition might be especially productive: surely it would cast a stronger light on the Invisible Man’s experience of alienation, given the ‘invisible’ black characters in Wilson’s novel” (333). Hutner does not elaborate, as I do in this chapter, on how this sort of invisibility works in terms not only of race but also of ethnicity. Andrew Hoberek also briefly connects the two novels, seeing in both a reflection of “the typical postwar nostalgia for nineteenth-century American individualism” while crediting Ellison with a nuanced recognition of this ideology’s unspoken whiteness (56). My analysis sharpens Hoberek’s point by reading *Gray Flannel’s* nostalgic paean to individualism as a more specifically Anglo-Saxon-inflected longing for fading status and property ownership.
9. That which Toni Morrison points out regarding racial assumptions about general readership long applied as well to authors and their characters unless they were labeled (that is, labeled otherwise): “until very recently, and regardless of the race of the author, the readers of virtually all of American fiction have been positioned as white” (xii).
10. As Wilson himself wrote decades later, although the novel includes many themes, conformity stood out to many readers as its sole concern: “To my surprise, my novel, which I had regarded as largely autobiographical, was taken by some serious thinkers as a protest against conformity and the rigors of suburban life,” and soon, “Intellectuals, hippies and flower children began to consider [Tom Rath] not a protester against conformity, but an arch example of it, the squarest guy in the world” (“Afterword,” n.p.). Jürgen Martschukat provides a representative continuation of this focus in later scholarly treatment of the novel: “In 1955, the archetype of the other-directed, domesticated, conformist man was invented. Tom Rath ... perfectly incorporated the 1950s’ male dilemma of opposite demands. On the one hand, he lived his life according to the familial imperatives of the postwar world, and yet, on the other hand, he was grayish, conformist, not in control of his own existence, subordinated, and consequently considered ‘no man at all’” (16). Among the growing number of studies of the novel, almost none—with the brief exceptions of Catherine Jurca (*White Diaspora*) and Hutner (*What America Read*)—considers its intertwined articulations of race and ethnicity.

11. Vincent, 20.
12. As I will explain in more detail later in this chapter, I refer here to Toni Morrison's central and highly influential concept in *Playing in the Dark*.
13. Long, 205.
14. Mills, 220.
15. Doane explains, "Without the existence of a society where all people belong to the same ethnic group, there is no such thing as 'non-ethnicity,' even though it has been popular to view the dominant group in the United States as lacking any ethnic affiliation. Instead, what exists is a phenomenon best described as *hidden ethnicity*—the lack of awareness of an ethnic identity that is not normally asserted in intergroup interaction" (378, emphasis in original). As I will explain, although Doane refers to whiteness itself as a hidden ethnicity, I find this concept useful for explicating as well the hidden nature in *Gray Flannel* of the Anglo-Saxon habitus in which Wilson and his characters were raised and which still affects them.
16. Jurca, 133–59. As Jurca writes, the Rathes distinguish themselves from their neighbors by thinking what people like their neighbors also presumably thought: "Other people belong in a development, not us; everyone else is happy as a corporate drone, except for me. And their fundamental dissatisfaction with the suburb and the corporation proves an engine of mobility that frees them from the constraints of each" (139). Jurca also briefly sees the Rathes, as I do, as missing, in particular, the heightened status of their childhoods: "The question that the question mark in the living room raises is how can they reclaim (maintain) their social privilege?" (138). My analysis pushes this question further, positioning the Rathes' vague emotional dis-ease within a relationally constructed ethnoracial hierarchy.
17. In their description of the "ever-expanding boundaries of whiteness," Jonathan W. Warren and France Winddance Twine write that "a not-so-new racial group has been transformed. Just as the White category was redefined in the 19th century to include the Celt, it has in the past century expanded to include ancestry from *anywhere* on the European continent" (206, emphasis in original).
18. Schultz, 8–9.
19. Frye Jacobson, 68.
20. Lipsitz, 1.
21. Doane defines a "dominant group" in ways that clarify the nature of the relatively unspoken dominant group into which Tom and Betsy were born:

I define a dominant ethnic group as the ethnic group in a society that exercises power to create and maintain a pattern of economic,

political, and institutional advantage, which in turn results in the unequal (disproportionately beneficial to the dominant group) distribution of resources. With respect to intergroup relations, a key element of dominance is the disproportionate ability to shape the sociocultural understandings of society, especially those involving group identity and intergroup interactions. Historically, the origins of dominance lie in processes such as conquest, colonialism, and labor migration—situations where intergroup contact, resource competition, and power differentials combine to produce a system of ethnic stratification.... Thus, dominance is grounded in the existence of unequal power employed to derive material benefit. (376)

22. As Ira Katznelson notes, although the 1944 Servicemen's Readjustment Act, popularly known as the GI Bill, did not contain overtly discriminatory stipulations, its enactment largely excluded black participation. One major problem was the decision to leave particular methods for implementation to state and local authorities:

Shortly after he was hired by the Veterans Administration as a Special Assistant for Negro Affairs, Joseph Albright quietly noted to General Bradley that equal treatment under the act was likely to be a myth. Though the law contained no racial distinctions, the assignment of power to the states ensured discriminatory treatment for blacks. "The difficulties of the Negro veteran," he insisted, "are *not* the same as those of any other minority group of ex-servicemen, for the simple reason that all other minorities are considered as being white, and but with few isolated instances are treated as such." (128, emphasis in original)

23. Wilson, *All the Best People*, 365–66.
 24. *Ibid.*, 370.
 25. *Ibid.*, 372.
 26. *Ibid.*, 373.
 27. In Wilson's memoir *What Shall We Wear to This Party?*, in which he primarily describes participating rather uneventfully in the Second World War, writing several novels, and meeting several women, he also refers at times to his wealthy, deep-rooted family history, including its situated position among northeastern elites. Wilson does so in ways that demonstrate much about the emotional and psychic remnants of an Anglo-Saxon heritage. He never refers to himself as a WASP in this memoir, let alone an Anglo-Saxon, and repeatedly mentions instead the burden of a "puritan" heritage, which he sometimes labels Protestant and

which he states drove him to work hard and to feel inhibited sexually. At one point, Wilson reveals his ambivalent membership in this tribe, by conflating the perception of a religious lineage with that of an English one, when he recalls introducing his mother to a fiancée, Betty, who happened to have an Irish father. Apparently mindful of his mother's Anglo-Saxon pride, Wilson remembers adding "hastily" that "Her people are all Protestants." Much to his surprise, Wilson's mother claims that they too have Irish ancestors: "Never had I heard her speak of Irish ancestors. English, German, Danish and French, yes, but the Irish ancestors she seemed to be inventing on the spot." When he later asks for clarification, his mother says, with a "twinkle" in her "sternly puritanical" eye, "Well, they stayed in Ireland for a few generations on their way from England to America" (380). Wilson's mother, of course, had meant to welcome Betty into the family, but she did so by creating an ancestral connection that was both inclusive and, in a relational, status-conscious way, exclusionary. In this memory from his own life, Wilson condenses several culturally induced habits among those who still embraced this loosely, often fantasized hidden ethnicity, a fading affiliation that was embraced less and less affirmatively by those who came to be known, and increasingly so by others instead of themselves, as WASPs. In particular, this moment reveals both a reflexively nostalgic conflation of puritanism with English-ness and the status assertion that typically came with it. Finally, it's worth noting that by this point in United States history, another fabricated lineage that had once been proudly and openly claimed among such people, that of whiteness, goes entirely unspoken.

28. Morrison, x.

29. As Gary Gerstle writes in his study of twentieth-century "racial and civic nationalism," World War II as participated in by the United States could in several ways be fairly labeled a "race war," not only for the hyper-racialization of the Japanese and the ways in which their wartime conduct was described in ways that harkened back to Native American savagery but also "in the degree to which race remained the organizing principle of the U.S. military":

Throughout the war, all branches of the military remained largely segregated. Black and white GIs trained, served, and socialized separately from each other. Proportionately far fewer black servicemen than whites ... were allowed to engage in combat. When they did, they almost always fought in all-black units commanded by white officers. The military segregated its blood supply to make sure that a white servicemen would never receive an infusion of black blood. (203)

30. Puwar, 141–42. In terms of race, as Morrison writes in her description of “metonymic displacement,” this version of the Africanist presence includes descriptions of “physical traits [that] become metonyms that displace rather than signify the Africanist character” (68). Regarding stereotypical conceptions of black emotionality, as Derek Hook writes in his discussion of theoretical work by South African social psychologist Chabani Manganyi,

one of the most persistent and categorical of the available symbolic equations in Western culture ... is that which equates whiteness with mind, and blackness with the bodily... These polarized sets of value not only replay the rudimentary dynamics of racism (its logics, that is, of superiority and inferiority), they also represent routes of identification: the upper pole (whiteness) provides a means of narcissistic self-valorization, affording its subjects the position of symbolic idealization; the lower pole (blackness) represents that which is devalued, deserving of denial and repression. (143–44).

31. As Gerstle notes, “the threat of communism prompted American leaders to depict the American nation as strong, unified, and steadfast in its devotion to timeless ideals ... This realization was an important factor impelling the U.S. Justice Department, first under Truman and then Eisenhower, to file amicus curiae briefs in support of the NAACP lawsuits challenging the legality of school segregation. In these briefs, the government repeatedly stressed the embarrassment that race discrimination was causing America abroad and the damage it was doing to national security” (241, 250).
32. Although Tom continually refers to Japanese soldiers as “Japs,” a similar feel-good depiction of his wartime racial tolerance arises when Tom remembers empathetically imagining himself in the shoes of his enemy: “Suddenly the Japs had not seemed so much like caricatures of little yellow men grinning and holding bayonets anymore ...” (*M*, 90). An irony here, of course, is the nevertheless caricatured quality of Wilson’s racial and ethnic characters.
33. As Wilson himself writes in an introduction to a 1983 edition of the novel (published also in a later edition as an afterword), “Underneath the bland exterior which the business world demanded of him, Tom Rath was of course a very angry man. When I named him ‘Rath’ I thought I might be criticized for making this too obvious in a rather corny way, but Tom’s manners in the book were so good that very few readers picked that up. Men in gray flannel suits hide their emotions all too well, but younger readers are seeing through the disguise” (“Afterword,” n.p.).

34. Dean, 171.
35. *Ibid.*, 172.
36. *Ibid.*, 90.
37. On Kennedy's trumped-up wartime heroism, see Dean, 37–62. Also at potential play here is the era's anxieties about the supposed threat to a stabilizing postwar social order of homosexuality, particularly the casting of effeminacy in terms of sexuality, as evoked by Tom's disparaging conception of his internal voice as "high, effeminate, [and] prissy." Although consideration of this factor is beyond the scope of this chapter, such anxieties about masculinity—in terms of both aristocratic and homosexual effeminacy—likely also informed Wilson's portrayal of the head of the Universal Broadcasting Company, Ralph Hopkins, who remembers being diagnosed by a psychoanalyst as suffering from "a guilt complex [that] was probably based on a fear of homosexuality..." and whom Wilson occasionally portrays in terms that echo such common mainstream stereotypes (*M*, 156). For a relevant explanation of the movement of associations of effeminacy from aristocracy to homosexuality, see Hennen, 32–58. For discussion of historical examples of aristocrat English men attempting to bolster their besieged classed and gendered identities through ostentatious pursuit of reckless adventure in the western American territories, see Rico.
38. My reading here thus counters those of other interpreters of this major theme of the novel, that of authenticity, which Tom is often said to regain by the novel's end, especially by leaving the corporate world. As Abigail Cheever writes in one such interpretation, "In *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, the decision not to be buried in one's professional life is a choice in favor of balance, domestic harmony, and most important, 'honesty' or authenticity, rather than cynicism or phoniness" (192).
39. In an argument that Wilson uses various forms of clothing to symbolize different levels of economic stratification that the novel ultimately fails to register as iniquitous, Birte Christ writes that in this moment, "Tom is ashamed and knows that he is morally wrong in desiring to disassociate himself from a poorer member of society who even used to be a friend during the war..." While acknowledging that "Tom's uneasiness about their difference in wealth that is so clearly marked by their different 'uniforms' mingles here with his uneasiness about his affair during the war and Caesar's knowledge of it," Christ overlooks the further aura of authenticity evoked in the collective white imagination by the repeated highlighting of Caesar's ethnicity (36).
40. There is a crucial difference between Wilson and those Beat writers who romanticized racial and ethnic otherness: while they sought escape from what amounted to white middle-class conformity by "project[ing]

themselves imaginatively into the kind of primitiveness that was marginalized in respectable white society and repressed within white men themselves” (Forth, 210), Wilson’s romanticizing springs from an unacknowledged well of nostalgically missed Anglo-Saxonism, a hidden ethnicity revealed as a missed site of social dominance by narrative usage of Africanist and ethnicist presences. On the self-reflexive usage during the 1950s of romanticized ethnoracial others by Kerouac, Mailer, and others, see Brayton, Holton, Nicholls, and Traber, 85–87.

41. As numerous scholars have noted, white Anglo-Saxon romanticizing of subjugated others has a long history. See, for instance, Todd Vogel on nineteenth-century sentimental treatments of Native Americans (4–62).
42. As Judge Bernstein ponders small-town life and its suitability for more informed judicial dispensation, he evokes the past in a way that further constructs the novel’s depiction of a feudally hierarchical setting in nostalgic terms: “It was, of course, difficult to resurrect the past, but not impossible. In a small town, the past clung to the present more permanently than in a big city. People’s footprints lasted longer before they were stamped out” (*M*, 189).
43. That Wilson was more interested in using the character of Judge Bernstein in the service of a plot centered on the ostensibly open-minded Rath than in depicting a Jewish American in anything approaching equally complex terms is also suggested by a description of the judge’s life as implausibly comfortable: “Saul Bernstein had prospered in South Bay... He had grown reasonably rich, and respected, and might have been happy except for one thing: he detested justice almost as much as he detested violence or cruelty of any other kind” (*M*, 133). Bernstein is depicted elsewhere as fully aware of his exclusion not only from the country club but also from elite South Bay social circles generally; such a person was, of course, unlikely to feel socially content and “respected” in the face of such degrading subordination and isolation.
44. Brodtkin, 30.
45. Regarding the limitations of access to returning veterans’ benefits for black service personnel, see Katznelson, 209, Note 19.
46. Ngai, 94.
47. *Ibid.*, 95.
48. Yet another minor character who functions in these ways is the Rath’s housekeeper, Mrs. Manter, whose animatedness primarily takes the form of continuous, unself-conscious shouting. Wilson gains further comic effect with this character by rendering her dialogue accordingly. When Tom expresses his interest in hiring her because Betsy is sick, Wilson next writes, “‘DON’T TELL ME!’ she thundered. ‘I HAD EIGHT KIDS MYSELF, AND ONCE WHEN THEY WAS ALL DOWN WITH

MEASLES, I BROKE MY LEG!’” (*M*, 34). As with other minor characters of this sort, Wilson next goes on to emphasize, apparently in the service of humor, Mrs. Manter’s corporeal being, by having her describe tying her broken leg to a chair and dragging it around as she continued her motherly duties. Wilson never mentions Mrs. Manter’s ethnicity, limiting description of her background to the fact that she’s a “farm woman.” Nevertheless, the animatedness that Ngai describes has narrative utility for expressing stereotypical associations in terms of other social hierarchies, and in the case of Mrs. Manter, the stereotypes seem to coalesce into the categories of “working class” and “rural.”

49. Gonsalves, 9.

50. *Ibid.*

51. *Ibid.*, 10.

52. The last glimpse of Tony happens in Judge Bernstein’s court, where the Raths plead their case for a zoning variance before a skeptical crowd of fellow South Bay residents, who fear that an influx of less wealthy people into a new housing development will result in a “slum.” Once again, Wilson delineates Tom’s quiet, seemingly sensible reserve by juxtaposing it with Tony’s excessive, lively animatedness:

Immediately a dozen people were on their feet asking Bernstein for permission to be heard. [Tony] began an impassioned plea for increased business opportunities. For more than an hour the argument raged back and forth, the voices becoming louder and more strident... [Tom’s] head started to ache, and he longed for the cool air outside. (*M*, 245)

53. Robinson, 29.

54. Doane, 380.

55. Puwar, 1.

56. Babb, 43.

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