



Immigrant Mothers: Narratives of Race and Maternity, 1890-1925

Katrina Irving

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The debate over the "new" immigrants - primarily from southern and eastern Europe - that raged in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century was dominated to a surprising degree by representations of immigrant women. Whether intent on welcoming cultural diversity, Americanizing new arrivals, or stemming the flow of unwanted aliens, participants in the debate drew from the same well of female images - parsimonious, sexually vigorous, racially inferior - to convey their particular version of the immigrant "problem". Katrina Irving's close reading of novels by Willa Cather, Stephen Crane, Harold Frederic, and Frank Norris discloses the portrayal of immigrant women, especially immigrant mothers, as a reflection of larger cultural anxieties. Irving sets these fictional depictions against a complex background that incorporates eugenic and sociological texts, social workers' reports, newspaper editorials, and government and corporate-sponsored reports on immigration and Americanization.

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