



Melting-Pot Modernism

Sarah Wilson

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Between 1891 and 1920 more than 18 million immigrants entered the United States. While many Americans responded to this influx by proposing immigration restriction or large-scale "Americanization" campaigns, a few others, figures such as Jane Addams and John Dewey, adopted the image of the melting pot to oppose such measures. These Progressives imagined assimilation as a multidirectional process, in which both native-born and immigrants contributed their cultural gifts to a communal fund.

Melting-Pot Modernism reveals the richly aesthetic nature of assimilation at the turn of the twentieth century, focusing on questions of the individual's relation to culture, the protection of vulnerable populations, the sharing of cultural heritages, and the far-reaching effects of free-market thinking. By tracing the melting-pot impulse toward merging and cross-fertilization through the writings of Henry James, James Weldon Johnson, Willa Cather, and Gertrude Stein, as well as through the autobiography, sociology, and social commentary of their era, Sarah Wilson makes a new connection between the ideological ferment of the Progressive era and the literary experimentation of modernism.

Wilson puts literary analysis at the service of intellectual history, showing that literary modes of thought and expression both shaped and were shaped by debates over cultural assimilation. Exploring the depth and nuance of an earlier moment's commitment to cultural inclusiveness, *Melting-Pot Modernism* gives new meaning to American struggles to imaginatively encompass difference?and to the central place of literary interpretation in understanding such struggles.

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