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American Quarterly, Volume 68, Number 2, June 2016, pp. 287-313 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press



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# Visual Games and the Unseeing of Race in the Late Nineteenth Century

Bret L. Rothstein and Karen M. Inouye

Other problems, including many that had previously been standard, are rejected as metaphysical, as the concern of another discipline, or sometimes as just too problematic to be worth the time. A paradigm can, for that matter, even insulate the community from those socially important problems that are not reducible to the puzzle form, because they cannot be stated in terms of the conceptual and instrumental tools the paradigm supplies. Such problems can be a distraction.

—Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*

This article discusses the material and visual culture of popular ludic racism in the later nineteenth-century United States. It argues that an object that gives visible form to bigotry does not simply appeal to or depict stereotypes but in fact *instantiates* them, activating those stereotypes perceptually, intellectually, and even physically. As both a perceptual and a cultural instrument, such an object performs two functions. First, it knits racist ideologies into other, supposedly neutral cultural practices. These practices, for their part, frequently depend on systems of thought that take as their focus absolutes and thus leave aside things of supposedly excessive subtlety or abstraction. The most relevant of such systems here is the “operational aesthetic,” or a broad preoccupation with the ability to sort and explain enigmatic objects.<sup>1</sup> In the operational aesthetic, a quasi-scientific stance becomes the default position, with those excessively “metaphysical” matters being deemed peripheral.<sup>2</sup> Second, in appealing to such a system of thought, the instrumentality of the object also shapes perception, modeling both the range of acceptable topics for viewing and how one should view them. The result, we suggest, is the validation of racist sentiment (but not race itself) as a supposedly trivial concern.

The importance of enigmatic objects for the operational aesthetic comes through with particular force in *Get off the Earth*, a mechanical puzzle patented in 1896 by one of the most popular and important puzzle designers of all time, Sam Loyd (fig. 1).<sup>3</sup> Loyd’s puzzle depicts a group of stereotypical Chinese men arranged around the perimeter of a globe. Though seemingly a single printed image, *Get off the Earth* comprises two pieces of card stock.<sup>4</sup> One piece is circular and bears that globe; a rivet anchors it to a larger rect-

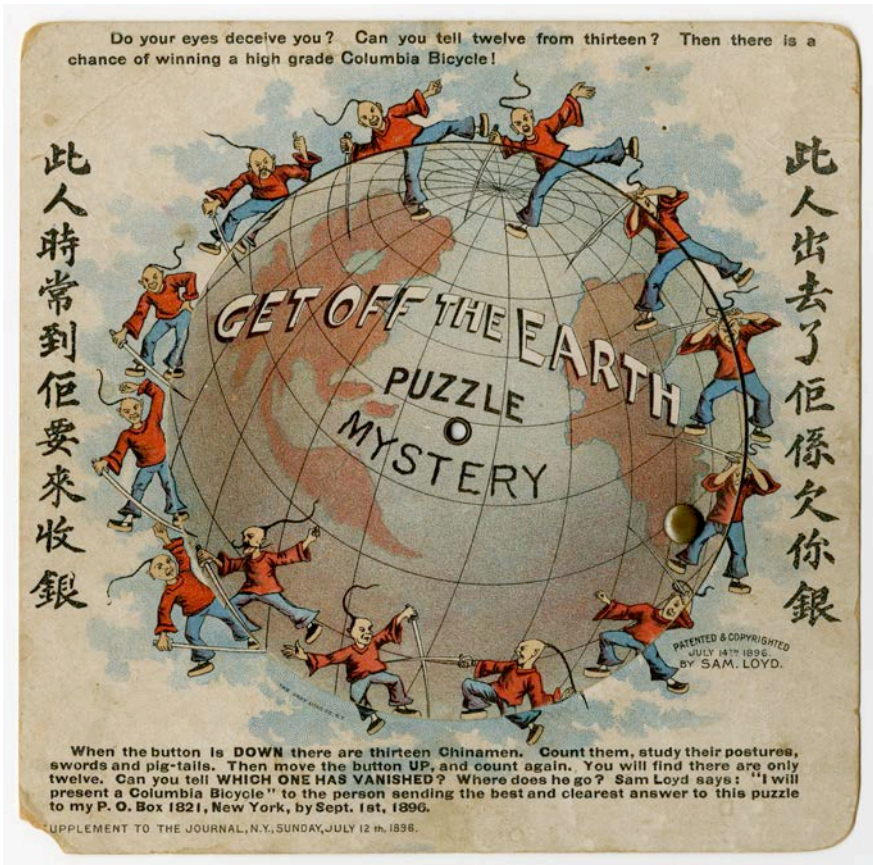


Figure 1. Sam Loyd (designer), *Get off the Earth*, licensed as a Sunday supplement to the *New York Journal* (1896). Lithograph on card stock; 17 × 17 cm. Bloomington: Jerry Slocum Puzzle Collection, Lilly Library, Indiana University.

angle that bears most of the puzzle's supporting text. Loyd arranged the human figures in such a way that part of each appears as if on the globe, and the other part occupies the rectangular stock. This division is necessary to produce what Loyd called a "transformation picture."<sup>5</sup> By distributing its pictorial subject matter across two adjacent surfaces, *Get off the Earth* allows the viewer to reconfigure the resulting image. Rotating the circular piece slightly counterclockwise changes the number of men from thirteen to twelve (fig. 2), and returning it to its original position does the reverse. (A brass fastener, which limits the globe's movement, provides a convenient starting point from which to keep count.) As the inscriptions on the example reproduced here note, the result is a conundrum: how can such a change possibly occur in a printed picture, even a picture that has one—but in essence only one—moving part?



Figure 2.  
Alternative view of figure 1 in its  
twelve-figure position.

## Historical and Visual Context

The racist aspects of *Get off the Earth* likely derive from commercial opportunism rather than special political commitment. Loyd consistently sought to capitalize on popular topics, and in this case race provided an especially easy target. American policy toward people of Chinese descent became increasingly sclerotic in the wake of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, but anti-Asian sentiment had been growing long before that, particularly in the western United States.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the 1880s and 1890s saw significant additional efforts to render national borders less porous.<sup>7</sup> As Erika Lee has demonstrated, Americans were starting to define themselves more through exclusion than inclusion in the years before Loyd published *Get off the Earth*.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, the 1870s–1890s occupy an important place in that definition, seeing

the rise of vigorous but relatively inchoate xenophobia in which exclusionary behaviors as well as laws helped shape nativist and racist sentiment.<sup>9</sup>

Popular imagery bolstered that sentiment. A cartoon published in the 1860s, “The Great Fear of the Period: That Uncle Sam May be Swallowed by Foreigners” (fig. 3), suggests that immigration will gradually destroy the “white republic.”<sup>10</sup> Irish and Chinese immigrants come in for particular criticism. Of these two groups, the latter is evidently the greater threat, handily devouring both his European rival and Uncle Sam—“The Problem Solved,” to quote the caption at the bottom of the picture. Note in particular the Irishman’s hat, which in the third frame becomes an attribute of the now-bloated Chinese figure. As this shift of costume suggests, obliteration of the United States would occur not by effacement but by relentless pollution.

Humor was an important aspect of this visual culture, in part because it soothed the troubled vision of a supposedly white majority.<sup>11</sup> Consider, for instance, another puzzle contemporaneous with *Get off the Earth* (fig. 4). In this dexterity challenge, one is supposed to provide a Chinese figure with stereotypically prominent teeth by rolling five small balls into divots in the figure’s mouth.<sup>12</sup> Rather than present some kind of existential threat to racial integrity, the Asian appears here as little more than a comical physical type of which one might take control. As Sarah Lea Burns has pointed out with regard to images of slave revolt, such humorous racist imagery rendered “laughable what might otherwise be unbearably frightening.”<sup>13</sup>

Loyd’s design performs a similar function, both in its exaggerated treatment of the body and in its use of texts that have no real bearing on the intellectual challenge of the puzzle. The text at left in figures 1 and 2 says, “This person is often here; he is here to collect money”; the one at right tells us, “This person has left; he owes you money.”<sup>14</sup> The relative unimportance of the Chinese language for Loyd’s design is even more obvious in another version of the puzzle from that same year, in which the original inscriptions were replaced with nonsensical faux-Chinese calligraphy based on a model that was likely viewed upside down.<sup>15</sup> We find in such popular imagery a farcical “imaginary orient” akin to that found in popular songs and yellowface productions from the time.<sup>16</sup> A kind of ludic racism, that imaginary orient defines difference as so alien that it becomes comical. Accordingly, we might characterize *Get off the Earth* as a jocular admission of concern, with the supposedly fugitive character of its figures playfully reversing the way that more Asian immigrants had entered the country after exclusion than had done so beforehand.<sup>17</sup>

**Figure 3.** “The Great Fear of the Period” (published by White and Bauer, 1860s). Artwork in the public domain.



## Why Things Matter

Framed thus, *Get off the Earth* might seem like just another variation on a common theme. However, Loyd's design stands out from contemporaneous images because of its physical behavior. Most discussions of racist visual culture, such as our summary of context above, treat the matter as one of depiction, with the image acting largely as a vehicle for iconography. To be sure, interpretations of that sort are instructive and historically valid. After all, stereotypes are opportunistic iconographies, and sharing those iconographies pictorially helps people imagine a community.<sup>18</sup> But such interpretations do not account for the *quiddity* of objects, their tendency to make specific demands of us, depending on medium, materials, and dimensions—prints versus photographs versus sculptures, large objects versus small ones, and so forth. This quiddity is particularly striking in *Get off the Earth*. Though a chromolithographic print, Loyd's design is not a static picture and thus, by definition, not merely a depiction in any conventional sense.<sup>19</sup> In fact, it works in the opposite conceptual direction, casting doubt on one of our most basic assumptions about representation: that a printed picture is, in essence, physically and thus visually immutable. In fact, the mutability of Loyd's picture was a special point of interest for his audience.

The objects we use to sharpen perception also determine the conditions of it, and they do so in ways that are often so familiar as to seem entirely natural. Consequently, they also help determine the conditions of thought.<sup>20</sup> For instance, the challenge of rolling unruly “teeth” into place in a dexterity puzzle invites the viewer to fill in gaps that are as much conceptual and political as they are perceptible and physical (fig. 4).<sup>21</sup> We refashion the stereotype, literally activating it, every time we play with that puzzle. Given the significance of materiality for such operations, and given the striking mutability of *Get off the Earth*, a number of questions arise about the latter puzzle and its milieu. First, how did people respond to the quiddity of Loyd's design, given that it places specific demands on its would-be solver? Second, how did Loyd's audience understand the relationship between visual experience and racial identity? Third, how important was race for contemporaneous interpretations of *Get off the Earth*? And fourth, how did the mechanics of Loyd's design relate to race and to the witty, supposedly informed debate that his design spurred? In addressing these questions, our aim is to shed light on a type of bigotry that is all the more insidious for its playfulness and seeming inconsequentiality.

Our analysis centers on correspondence in the Brooklyn *Daily Eagle*, one of several papers that licensed *Get off the Earth*. We have chosen this venue for several reasons. First, Loyd became one of its regular contributors in April



**Figure 4.** Anonymous, Dexterity Puzzle, ca. 1890–1900. Mixed media; ca. 3.5cm. Bloomington: Jerry Slocum Puzzle Collection, Lilly Library, Indiana University.

1896. Second, he lived in Brooklyn at the time, so his articles were the product of a local boy (of sorts) who had made good, a fact that the *Daily Eagle* played up in an article trumpeting his debut.<sup>22</sup> And third, *Get off the Earth* played an important role in touting Loyd's decision to join the paper, too, figuring prominently in the cultivation of a Brooklyn-based community of amateur enigmatologists.<sup>23</sup> The result was a self-consciously localized dynamic. Attending to how that dynamic played out in the *Daily Eagle* allows us to examine a racist microcosm constituting itself around a popular and engaging object at a specific moment in history.



## The Importance of the Enigma

First things first: since *Get off the Earth* is a pair of overlaid pictures rather than a group of actual people, nothing truly disappears or reappears. As the popular mathematics and science writer Martin Gardner once pointed out, the situation is deceptively simple: “It is meaningless to ask which [figure] has vanished or . . . has newly appeared. *All* [of the figures] vanish when the parts are rearranged—to form a new set.”<sup>24</sup> To rotate the circular piece of card stock is to recompose the entire image and, thus, the entire cohort of figures it depicts. In essence, one creates a different picture on each occasion. Gardner called the phenomenon “concealed distribution,” in which a slight reconfiguration of lines and colors that are otherwise static can produce a surprising change of subject matter. Loyd described the idea similarly, if less helpfully, in an 1897 article from the *Daily Eagle*: “It [the puzzle] is well explained by stretching a rubber band to 13 inches and letting it contract to 12. That 13th inch has vanished.”<sup>25</sup>

In the weeks after Loyd’s initial appearance as a regular writer, the *Daily Eagle* published several short notices encouraging readers to cut out “the thirteen little Chinamen” that accompanied the notices and present them at its business office in return for a copy of the puzzle.<sup>26</sup> As interest in *Get off the Earth* grew from April into May 1896, the paper followed up with articles that attested to the difficulty and popularity of Loyd’s design. One such article told readers about how William Lafayette Strong, the mayor of New York, struggled with the puzzle after he heard a rumor that his counterpart in Brooklyn had solved it. A member of Strong’s staff offered a telling opinion of the challenge:

Job Hedges, his private secretary . . . was flitting about the room.

“Has the mayor solved the Chinaman puzzle?” he repeated as a reply to the reporter’s inquiry.

“No, I don’t think he has,” Job went on wearily: “that thing is impossible. It’s a — fake.”

Job had evidently been trying it himself.<sup>27</sup>

Capitalizing on the biblical origin of the secretary’s name, the article played up how Loyd’s “ingenious problem” might exhaust even the most patient person.<sup>28</sup> Interest continued to grow over the summer, with reader after reader submitting explanations. Eventually, Loyd initiated a competition around *Get off the Earth*, offering a bicycle to whoever provided the best explanation of how the puzzle worked.<sup>29</sup>

Readers of the *Daily Eagle*’s puzzle columns belonged to a culture at play, and the name of the game was to look smart.<sup>30</sup> One played that game literally by possessing and exercising visual wit, or the ability to sort an optical challenge

quickly and intelligently. That playfulness comes through in a May 20, 1896, article about the trouble that would-be solvers had encountered with *Get off the Earth*. The piece's subtitle suggested that the shift from twelve figures to thirteen and back would be "an easy feat for Sam Loyd's Chinaman. But when you try to catch the fugacious little fellow at it he fools you."<sup>31</sup> Acknowledging that appearances can deceive, this statement implied that only a keen eye in the service of a sharp mind could sort the problem at hand. Indeed, that reference to a "fugacious little fellow" was misleading, and not simply because nothing in Loyd's puzzle disappears. It also was misleading because, even as one moves the circular piece of card stock, its pictorial ground, lines, and colors all remain on display; the opposite of being obscure, they have shifted position only slightly, and in full view at that. There are no dark ways or vain tricks in *Get off the Earth*. Everything is in plain sight, awaiting a properly critical observer who understands the principle involved.

And yet, that article from May 20 emphasized failure: "The fact is that most of the writers go chasing after the little fragments and point out minor details, which are of no importance, as showing which of the Chinks stepped off the earth."<sup>32</sup> The paper was taunting its readers with the idea that the majority of their explanations, from the crudest to the most artful, failed to resolve a notably simple visual problem. The very simplicity of that problem was part of what led observers astray. Convinced that the matter must be exceedingly esoteric or intricate, in a manner reminiscent of the supposed decadence of Chinese culture, they allowed themselves to be distracted by extraneous details.<sup>33</sup>

Not that anyone should have felt especially bad about this. Failure was average, the article noted: "A great many people—probably a thousand or more—at the first blush believed that they had mastered the mystery and sent in explanations." Fortunately, there was hope for reflective readers: "Upon second thought, however, the most of them reconsidered their views."<sup>34</sup> That is to say, they dispensed with complication and got down to basics. What matters most about these submissions is not the range of responses (right, wrong, and beyond) but the range of capabilities to which they corresponded. "Reconsidering their views," some people stood a better chance than others. Loyd and the *Daily Eagle* had established a playing field on which the game of visual skill might take place, with readers publicly jockeying for the most advantageous position (i.e., recognition as a great wit). So long as one was sufficiently agile, he or she might move about on that playing field—beginning with relative incomprehension, for instance, but perhaps showing a better sense of the mechanism at work as spring and summer gave way to the fall of 1896. The operational aesthetic was a central factor in this situation, as people rushed to demonstrate their grasp

of concealed distribution. But the various letters in the Brooklyn *Daily Eagle* indicate the desire not simply to perform visual wit but also to perform it as a polymorphous—and distinctly racialized—phenomenon.

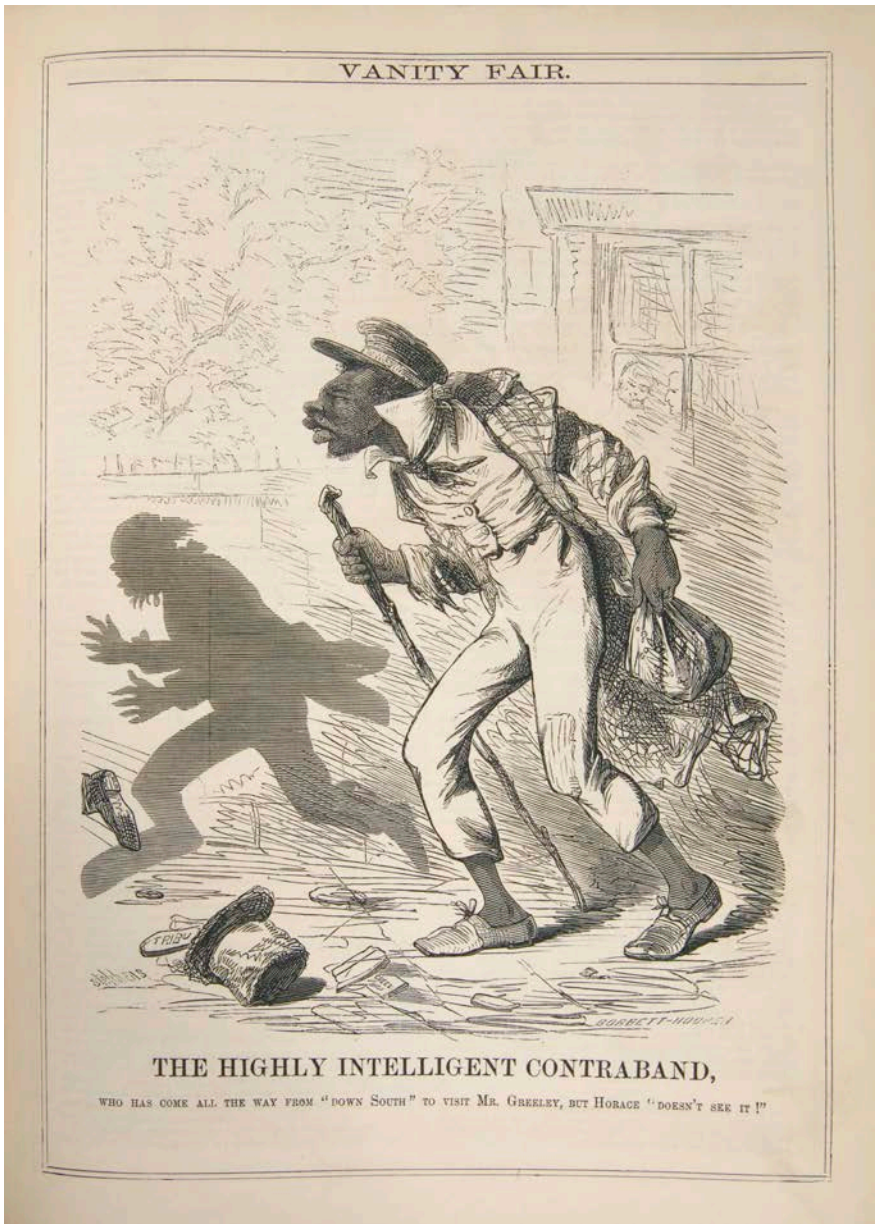
## Looking the Part

Perspicacity was integral to the concept of whiteness. A case in point is “Blaine’s Teas(e),” a cartoon by Thomas Nast that appeared in the March 20, 1880, issue of *Harper’s Weekly*.<sup>35</sup> James G. Blaine, a Republican candidate for the presidency, had argued vociferously against Chinese immigration. Believing Blaine’s xenophobia to be merely a ploy to win support from voters in the West, Nast pilloried the candidate repeatedly, in this case through the suggestion of hypocrisy. (Blaine drinks from an elegant porcelain cup even as he militates against people from the same place of origin.)<sup>36</sup> Nast’s cartoon makes a second suggestion, though. Comprising only vapor, the threat of the Chinese immigrant is illusory, implying that citizens equipped with clear sight—that is, Nast’s white readership—should understand as much.<sup>37</sup> The same argument could be marshaled in support of reactionary forces, as in Henry Louis Stephens’s “Highly Intelligent Contraband,” an 1862 criticism of the abolitionist editor of the *New York Times*, Horace Greeley (fig. 5). Here too we find an implication of hypocrisy, as Greeley flees the man he purports to view as his equal. Note, however, the shadow that falls to the left of the aged black man: arranged in a manner similar to that man’s posture and placed between him and the foot of the fugitive editor, it courts misinterpretation. One must sort Stephens’s image, comparing the vigor of the shadow with the sedate pace of the body that supposedly throws it, observing the proper (attached) shadow at right, and noting Greeley’s foot in the lower left corner of the composition. Only then might one comprehend what the image actually depicts. In this way, Stephens’s print demands that we exercise greater perspicacity than does its abolitionist target, that we see what “Horace” does not.<sup>38</sup> To participate fully and effectively in the white republic, it seems, one needed a sharp eye.

However, correspondence about *Get off the Earth* suggests that a sharp eye alone was not enough. One also had to deploy other sorts of agility, as was the case with respect to one W.L.D. O’G., whose last name was spelled out in other letters to the Brooklyn *Daily Eagle* as O’Grady. This person’s opinions about *Get off the Earth* appeared in that paper on May 16, June 28, July 5, and

**Figure 5.**

Henry Louis Stephens, “The Highly Intelligent Contraband,” *Vanity Fair*, April 26, 1862, p. 203. Photograph courtesy of the Newberry Library.



July 12.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, he was a regular correspondent about Loyd's designs, and on May 10, 1896—a scant few days before his first letter on *Get off the Earth*—Loyd described him as “an expert, who generally masters everything in that line [i.e., enigmatology]” and whose letters “illustrate . . . the spirit of the other competitors.”<sup>40</sup> O'Grady was exemplary with respect both to his puzzling skills and to his “spirit,” which in this case took the form of notably smart playfulness.

Racist jokes were part and parcel of that playfulness, but their value relative to other topics could vary. Consider O'Grady's letter from June 28, 1896, which included a drawing of one figure from *Get off the Earth* as if exploding, accompanied by a poem. The poem itself is of no great significance now, aside from the fact that it is riddled with standard-issue stereotypes and egregiously bad rhymes, but at the time Loyd seems to have considered it admirable. He said, by way of introduction, “The ‘Get off the Earth’ infatuation is breaking out worse than ever, as shown by the following effusion, which is mild compared to many others.”<sup>41</sup> On July 5 O'Grady submitted a second poem, titled “GET OFF THE EARTH—ANOTHER FYTTE,” and once more accompanied by a drawing, this time depicting one of the *Get off the Earth* figures playing with a bicycle. In the latter instance we find clearer evidence of what Loyd appreciated in his admirer. Midway through this second “fytte,” which is also thick with racial epithets and heavy-handed wordplay, O'Grady waxed Horatian, invoking the phrase *dulce et decorum est pro patria mori* (sweet and proper it is to die for one's country) as part of his jokey explanation of the puzzle.<sup>42</sup> Set amid self-conscious poetasting and racist pandering, the reference is noteworthy. More than just the response to a vexing intellectual problem, it advertises an underlying intelligence and education, which is why Loyd singled out O'Grady. This particular reader was also a model contributor to the *Daily Eagle*.

The performance of perspicacity involved a rehearsal of intertwined and overlapping skills—visual, mechanical, logical, literary, and so forth. The unifying principle for those skills and their interactions was a kind of pragmatic and incisive mental agility—wit—broadly conceived. In his letters, O'Grady hypothesized that one particular figure from *Get off the Earth* vanishes, but he also engaged in reflexively crude verse, indulged in various supposedly exotic cultural references, and invoked the Horatian tradition. These actions do not belong strictly to the operational aesthetic, and they only incidentally address the matter of difference, but they were inextricable from both. Horace's praise of patriotism, for instance, neither explains the mechanics of concealed dis-

tribution nor belongs to an explicit discourse of racial identity. And yet, as a rhetorical flourish set amid the relative stylistic poverty of that second “Fytte,” it demonstrates erudition of a distinctly white, bourgeois sort.<sup>43</sup> As he jostled intellectually and verbally with Loyd over the summer of 1896, O’Grady took the opportunity to demonstrate his particular mental agility and, in so doing, his supposedly proper place in society.<sup>44</sup>

The whiteness of this preoccupation with witty performance comes through particularly clearly midway through the exchange between O’Grady and Loyd in the summer of 1896. In the July 5 issue of the *Daily Eagle*, Loyd responded to O’Grady’s second poem by informally challenging his readers to translate the legible Chinese texts that accompanied some early versions of *Get off the Earth*. Declaring that “such a poetical effusion calls for a graceful reply,” Loyd reprinted those texts, claiming that they were the result of a printer’s error.<sup>45</sup> However, he implied, they might still cast a kind of humorous light on *Get off the Earth*, so long as one understood them. Loyd offered his “little sonnet not as a puzzle” but “to ascertain which of our gifted corps of experts will be the first to furnish a clever translation, which, it will be found, clearly sets forth which man always disappears and which uniformly ‘bobs up serenely,’ and give the reasons therefor.”<sup>46</sup> Loyd certainly understood these texts by this time, if he had not earlier, but his aim in this instance was to provoke inventive riffs on the concepts of the elusive debtor and the implacable creditor. He was giving his readers the chance not to win that bicycle but to show off for one another, in the process generating a kind of shared identity through recreation.<sup>47</sup>

Never one to shy away from such a challenge, O’Grady responded in a letter published on July 12. After apologizing for his inability to speak Chinese, he stated that he would have “to cudgel my brains for ‘Still Another Fytte’ in plain United States.” He then recounted how his son had taken the inscriptions to one of the “numerous Chinamen and ‘dagoes’ of various kinds” the boy knew, adding that “the poem was pronounced charming and this is the translation:

‘Pople go way. Him owe him money.  
Him and every time come and get a money.’”

O’Grady then explained that “‘Pople’ is the astute genius I’ve suspected all along who is trying to hide his head up in the N.E.” He then followed this with an elaborate scenario involving various characters along the left side of *Get off the Earth* chasing one another over a bad debt, bringing Loyd’s implicit slight against Chinese financial trustworthiness into the open.<sup>48</sup> Loyd subsequently concluded this part of their exchange by noting that “the Chinese

poem does tell on general principles who vanish and return with regularity,” but he also declared that “it will be claimed that it [the pair of Chinese texts] has no bearing upon the solution to the tantalizing ‘Get off the Earth Mystery.’”<sup>49</sup> Having indulged his readers, Loyd now redirected them away from this strange interlude and back to the twin tasks of explaining *Get off the Earth* and winning that bicycle.

Loyd’s comment, like the letters he received, points up an important difference between the reception of *Get off the Earth* and contemporaneous orientalism more generally. The latter phenomenon was in no small measure a discourse of acquisition, whereas readers of Loyd’s column participated in one of rigorous analysis.<sup>50</sup> Obtaining the puzzle was not an end in itself but a way to be part of an intelligent conversation. More to the point, to play with Loyd’s puzzle was to play with a thing designed and executed in “plain United States,” rather than to fixate on an Asian item that had passively made its way into some middle-class parlor. Consequently, we might characterize the voice in which readers of the *Daily Eagle* addressed their challenge as fundamentally masculine, holding the puzzle at a distance and trying to resist its wily ways. A point of logical rather than aesthetic interest, *Get off the Earth* provoked a self-consciously muscular counterpart to the implicitly feminized appreciation at issue in other contemporaneous examples of orientalism, such as John Luther Long’s 1898 story *Madame Butterfly*. Unlike the titular character’s baby, which her lover’s white wife claims during a visit to Japan, Loyd’s design was not an infantilized plaything destined for the domestic sphere.<sup>51</sup> Yes, it was a leisure object, but it was one that activated a quasi-scientific engagement almost more reminiscent of work. Hence, while O’Grady’s Chinese translator may have considered the puzzle “charming,” O’Grady himself characterized it in an early letter as “scientific” and “ingenious.”<sup>52</sup> For Loyd and his readers, *Get off the Earth* was a challenging locus wherein they might face off in a white, masculine, and thus American contest of meaning.

### The Inconsequentiality of Racial Difference

Throughout the claims, retorts, jokes, bluffs, and challenges associated with *Get off the Earth* runs a consistent desire to move from supposedly minor topics (e.g., race) toward matters of greater substance (i.e., the quiddity of Loyd’s puzzle). Note, for instance, the piling on of dismissive racial and religious allusions in O’Grady’s first letter, which ran in the *Daily Eagle* on May 16, 1896. As did so many of the letters that would follow, the text opens with a barrage of near nonsense that invokes difference through caricature:

I think there are only twelve Chinks and that “there ain’t no such person” as No. 13, who is at best an astral conglomeration of fragments of the others. Apparently, the crowdee is the gentleman in the northeast corner with a dubious physiognomy, who may have disappeared in Buddhistic heaven or been wafted on a cycloidal curve to fiddlers’ green, where all good soldiers find their billets.<sup>53</sup>

The author then issued an altogether more earnest judgment of Loyd’s design: “Seriously [i.e., enough kidding around about Chinese men and their mystifying behavior], the puzzle is as scientific in construction as it is ingenious in conception.” And then, as if to silence all those who failed to comprehend so rigorous and brilliant an enigma, O’Grady closed with the oracular pronouncement that “having an idea of the principle involved and being able to apply it are different things.”<sup>54</sup>

Of course, race mattered a great deal to Loyd and his audience, and not merely in the sense that they participated to varying degrees in an explicit discourse of anti-Asian sentiment. Race also mattered because it could propel that demonstration of white, masculine wit. O’Grady’s translation of the Chinese texts from the legible version of *Get off the Earth* is a case in point. Notably bereft of clarification and grammatical correction, it attested to a source that had struggled to navigate “plain United States.” In this respect, his statements rehearsed precisely the sort of anti-Chinese sentiment that pervaded contemporaneous American society, including its fondness for parodic renditions of immigrant speech.<sup>55</sup> At the same time, it (like the flurry of orientalist references on May 16) also allowed O’Grady to present himself as someone in command of alien tongues and traditions. In short, racial difference and its cultural markers were relevant, even necessary for the constitution of this particular interpretive community, since they articulated a model of identity—so-called plain United States—that was implicitly white, English-speaking, knowledgeable, bourgeois, and (thus) straightforward.<sup>56</sup> But that relevance depended on the posture of irrelevance; difference gained importance precisely through seeming not to matter in the first place.

The various offspring of *Get off the Earth* attest to this contradiction. One can produce a “transformation picture” with any number of subjects, from pencils and eggs to animals and people.<sup>57</sup> Loyd demonstrated as much in the years after the success of *Get off the Earth*, capitalizing in each version on topics of broader public interest. But the fact that he did so is instructive for the study of race. In 1897, for instance, he produced *The Lost Jap*, a simplified version of the challenge posed by *Get off the Earth* (fig. 8). And in 1909 he produced and patented a more complex puzzle, *Teddy and the Lion*, which asks us to figure



out “which black man turns into a yellow lion”—that is, to track and explain how in one position we see seven men and seven lions, while in the other we find six and eight, respectively (figs. 6 and 7). At issue here is the tendency of these puzzles to equate with one another the various stereotypes they invoke: all caricatured figures appear as mere ornamental devices that amuse or delight *in addition to* instructing through an underlying logical problem. We have in a nutshell the phenomenon, familiar from much recent scholarship, of whiteness constructing itself partly through images of largely interchangeable, but decidedly alien, others. (*Teddy and the Lion* is especially interesting in this regard, since it asserts the inconsequentiality and the questionable humanity of a marginalized group by seeming to exchange one of its figures with the king of the beasts.)<sup>58</sup>

To some extent, of course, the subjects that Loyd, his followers, and his competitors employed were necessarily variable, particularly when an advertiser expressed an interest in having a modified or altogether new subject. For instance, in 1912 Loyd revised *Get off the Earth* to tie into a series of moralizing tales titled *What Happened to Mary* and published in *Ladies' World* magazine.<sup>59</sup> To do so, he replaced his stereotypical Chinese men with a cluster of female figures that exhibits the same behavior as its predecessor. Under these circumstances, racial difference and femininity became fungible, interchangeable emblems of difference readily deployed as circumstances demanded. Similarly, one P. D. Cairse issued a puzzle that asked its user to explain the disappearance and reappearance of a sailor named “Jack Tar,” whose postures resemble those of his Asian counterparts.<sup>60</sup> And in 1924 Sam Loyd Jr. licensed another revision of *Get off the Earth*, called the *Disappearing Bicyclist*, to the New Direction Coaster Brake Company. In this last example, a clutch of generic boys in knickerbockers now puts the viewer to the test.<sup>61</sup> Such was the popularity of the “transformation picture” as an intellectual problem that one could, and did, adapt a range of subjects to implement it, depending largely on the prevailing economic or cultural winds.<sup>62</sup>

But for every wayward sailor, headstrong woman, or vanishing cyclist there is a racial stereotype offering the same logic problem. And with only a few exceptions, those fungible figures of difference operate at a conceptual distance from the commercial functions that the “transformation picture” served at the time. In addition to the Brooklyn *Daily Eagle*, Loyd licensed *Get off the Earth* in its original form to several advertisers, including most notably the election campaign of William McKinley, which William Poundstone discusses in some depth.<sup>63</sup> In the United States those advertisers also included William



**Figure 6.** Sam Loyd (designer), *Teddy and the Lion*, licensed to the Bridgeport (CT) *Post* (1909). Lithograph on card stock; 15.5 x 12.9 cm. Bloomington: Jerry Slocum Puzzle Collection, Lilly Library, Indiana University.



**Figure 7.** Alternative view of figure 6 in its six-man/eight-lion position.

Randolph Hearst's *New York Journal*, a Brooklyn cigar store, Brown Brothers' Clothiers and Furnishers in Los Angeles, the Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company, and Dr. Miles Medical Company (producer of "Nervine," a tonic) in Elkhart, Indiana. One might acknowledge a certain political value in Loyd's stereotypes with respect to the McKinley campaign and to Hearst's paper, but doing so with respect to clothing, cigars, tea, or patent medicines is untenable—aside from one basic point: whether Africans, Asians, lions, women, or sailors, all of Loyd's figure types serve equally well precisely because they were deemed ornamental when compared with the task of explaining concealed distribution. The intellectual challenge of *Get off the Earth* was paramount, and race—or, for that matter, cycling, femininity, or saltiness—was to be thought of as merely a topical flourish that leavened that challenge. It was the thing one supposedly left behind when the time finally came to get serious.<sup>64</sup> In this way, the operational aesthetic purported to be color-blind, and that presumption lent particular force to its racism. As the continuous, almost obsessive engagement with racist humor in the letters to the Brooklyn *Daily Eagle* indicates, that color blindness was a hollow claim. In truth, one did not leave race behind but took it for granted, having rehearsed and internalized whiteness by engaging in its aestheticized instantiation, witty recreational perspicacity relieved of significant political or cultural weight.

### Common Sense and the Cost of Enchantment

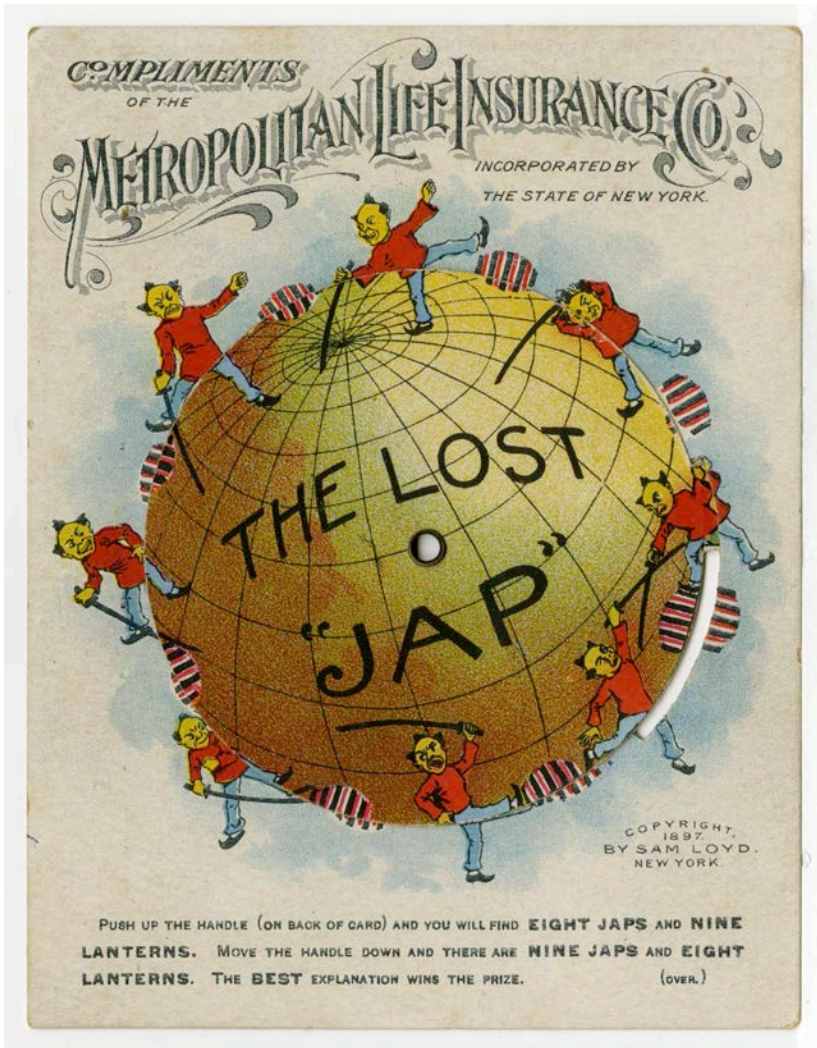
The idea of getting serious underscores the historical interest of Sam Loyd's nonexplanation. Comparing his puzzle with a rubber band, he indicated that the mysteries of *Get off the Earth* are not mysteries at all, so long as one is observant enough to sort what is in plain view. To put it another way, he presented *Get off the Earth* as an exercise in common sense, which Clifford Geertz once described as an expectation that "the really important facts of life lie scattered openly along its surface."<sup>65</sup> In this respect, the various versions of Loyd's design participated in a broader ritualized skepticism that marked later nineteenth-century visual culture.<sup>66</sup> Job Hedges may have considered *Get off the Earth* "a — fake," but Loyd's readers more generally seem to have loved it precisely because it evaded comprehension and, in so doing, provoked ever more vigorous attempts at what it so readily rebuffed. That love seems to have been all the more ardent because Loyd's design appealed to common sense—that white, bourgeois capacity for circumventing the needless complication its subject matter evoked—even as it defied that capacity. Hence O'Grady's declaration that "having an idea of the principle involved and being able to

apply it are different things”: his matter-of-fact tone attested to the straightforward character of Loyd’s puzzle and, by implication, asserted the claim to having mastered it. (He had not.)

Of course, common sense depends on where and when one stands. Less important than any specific truth claim is the suggestion that anybody with even a modicum of intelligence should already possess that particular form of local knowledge, the same way he or she possesses the ability to breathe or to walk around. This was Loyd’s position with respect to *Get off the Earth*, too, expressed for instance in his mention of a vanishing “13th inch.” The performative character of that position depended on its seemingly casual presentation. Hence, the tone of Loyd’s statement, like that of O’Grady’s half-joking letter from May 16, 1896, established the cultural parameters of the puzzle by indicating that concealed distribution was a kind of open secret, the visual equivalent of “plain United States”; *Get off the Earth* was a noteworthy enigma; and race was nothing of intellectual consequence for either Loyd or the sharp-eyed, and implicitly white, viewer.

As John Kuo Wei Tchen, Robert Lee, and others have demonstrated, this stance was common. However, *Get off the Earth* activates that stance in a way that differs fundamentally from other sorts of racist imagery one customarily encountered at the time, even though the figure types and the sentiments it directs toward them are largely consistent with other contemporaneous examples. Loyd’s puzzle differs so profoundly because of concealed distribution. By inviting us to shift two pieces of paper about and, thereby, move a few lines and colors around, it expresses a mechanical challenge. That mechanization does more than merely construct the primacy of whiteness.<sup>67</sup> It also instantiates the supposed inconsequentiality of race by redirecting our attention toward the surprising mutability of the printed image.<sup>68</sup> One turns that circular piece of card stock, notices a seemingly impossible change in the number of depicted figures, and darts through difference on her or his way down a materialist rabbit hole.

In this respect, *Get off the Earth* is a “tamed attraction” not unlike early film, a form of display in which mediation itself becomes an uncanny thing in need of investigation.<sup>69</sup> Loyd’s puzzle provokes enchantment so thoroughly as an intellectual and perceptual challenge that even the sharpest of contemporary viewers can lose sight of the puzzle’s racial politics.<sup>70</sup> The dexterity puzzle in figure 4, by contrast, requires no great intellectual effort to comprehend; it offers primarily, if not exclusively, a test of fine motor skills. Enticing us with its mechanical and logical challenges, though, *Get off the Earth* enacts a clever bit of racecraft.<sup>71</sup> It produces an intellectual and social circumstance in



**Figure 8.** Sam Loyd (designer), *The Lost Jap*, licensed to the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company (1897). Lithograph on card stock; 13.2 × 10.1 cm. Bloomington: Jerry Slocum Puzzle Collection, Lilly Library, Indiana University.

which difference is invoked—and thus validated—specifically by dismissing the matter as inconsequential. And, crucially, it does this neither with words nor with illustrations but with

the mental and physical operations necessary to play with Loyd’s puzzle in the first place. The viewer casts that spell, works that nefarious magic, on herself or himself.

When race did take on a more prominent role with Loyd's "transformation pictures," it usually did so in a strained way. Take, for instance, *The Lost Jap* (fig. 8). The promotional text on the reverse of this design treats the disappearing figure as a kind of object lesson:

This curious puzzle illustrates the uncertainty of life. . . . We see a little family circle of Japs suddenly broken up, and yet cannot tell beforehand which one is to go. We can only hope that the right one was insured when the miniature earthquake occurred. The moral is plain. The only way to make sure that the first member of a family who dies is insured, is for every member of the family to have a policy.<sup>72</sup>

This racialized exegesis of the puzzle runs counter to how *The Lost Jap* was promoted. A contemporaneous notice for it in the Fayetteville, New York, *Weekly Reporter* described it as simply "a curious puzzle."<sup>73</sup> More to the point, perhaps, attending to race in such detail also runs counter to Loyd's own supposedly commonsensical explanation of concealed distribution in *Get off the Earth*. The primary discourse around the puzzle had to do with its remarkable syntax, and not with its almost run-of-the-mill vocabulary. The text on the reverse of *The Lost Jap* is an outlier, and the sole reason it addresses race explicitly is because this particular puzzle served as a promotional tool for the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, which offered \$100 in gold to the policyholder who provided the best explanation of the puzzle's mysteries, \$95 to the next best, and so forth down to last place (\$5). No wonder, then, that that text strains to make cultural (and actuarial) sense of its figures: it had to do so to satisfy the executives who had staked a large sum of cash to promote their business. The company's rather unimaginative stance was due partly to the pervasiveness of anti-Asian sentiment in the United States, but it also was due at least partly to the expectation that the public profile and sophistication of Loyd's "transformation picture" were more recognizably important, or perhaps just more recognizable, to prospective customers than anything else.<sup>74</sup>

## Conclusion

So, what are we to make of how Loyd and his audience envisioned race? In addressing this question, it is hard to dispense with the commonsensical tone both of Loyd's statement about *Get off the Earth* and of those viewers who publicly attempted to solve his challenge. All laid claim to a kind of pragmatism, adopting a dispassionate posture quite different from the smirking aggression of much contemporaneous racial caricature. That posture also differs from the woolly, patronizing affinity that many Americans simultaneously felt toward

Asian immigrants and their cultures of origin at the time.<sup>75</sup> Such differences suggest that an additional operation is at work in *Get off the Earth* and its progeny, an operation that depends on the performance of common sense and its racialized ally, intellectual rigor. Loyd and his correspondents strove to address what they considered basic physical facts (as with the rubber band, so with the paired pieces of card stock, nothing truly disappears). In this respect, they aspired to a kind of shared impartiality in which nothing mattered more than understanding what happens to a composite picture when you move its two components back and forth. Discernment was everything, with issues such as race seeming to take on reduced significance, if not outright insignificance. In this respect, the approach of Loyd and his audience to racism recalls Thomas Kuhn's description of the factors that limit the "puzzle-solving" that constitutes scientific cultures. Race, with its myriad biological, cultural, and geographic complexities—not to mention its emotional, economic, political, and religious implications—was an enigma of excessive complexity.<sup>76</sup> It seemed to fall outside the realm of supposedly rigorous inquiry and, thus, served as little more than a whetstone for wit.

We might therefore think of Loyd's puzzle not only in terms of nineteenth-century caricature and stereotype but also in terms of something much more problematic: the idea of the smart racial joke. To some extent, *Get off the Earth* grasps at the notion that there is a kind of degree-zero existence from which one might recognizably, and reasonably, crack wise about difference—particularly when the sheer impressiveness of the wit behind the wisecrack constitutes a central feature of its presentation. The result is an implicit suggestion that race matters specifically insofar as one can define it as somehow ornamental. That, perhaps, is the most peculiar aspect of Loyd's puzzle: not that it aestheticizes racism, rendering it (and its subjects) trivial, but that it makes race seemingly a nonproblem specifically by employing chromolithography to such peculiar effect. Shifting one's attention from—but also through—difference as a cultural, demographic, and economic issue toward the behavior of a surprisingly tricky object, *Get off the Earth* gave its viewers an opportunity to perform their racism in what was, by contemporaneous standards, a witty and supposedly trivial manner. In the process it helped that racism become all the more subtle and insidious.

## Notes

We are grateful to Mari Yoshihara, the Editorial Board of *American Quarterly*, and the external reviewers for patiently guiding us toward a stronger argument; to Sarah Lea Burns, who read an early draft; to Will Shortz and Jerry Slocum, who resolved several vexing riddles concerning Sam Loyd; and to participants in the session “Picturing, Enacting, Embodying Race: Vision and Cultures of Sensation” at the 2014 meeting of the Association for Asian American Studies.

1. Neil Harris, *Humburg: The Art of P. T. Barnum* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973), esp. 72–89.
2. There is no small irony in this, given how important a role race played in contemporaneous political and social discourses. See, for instance, Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).
3. Loyd was one of the most important puzzle designers of the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with his problems circulating widely in newspapers, books, and syndicated columns, as well as in various advertising campaigns for bicycle parts, magazines, newspapers, teas, and even political careers. The copy illustrated in figures 1 and 2, for instance, was licensed to William Randolph Hearst’s *New York Journal*. For more information, see Martin Gardner, “Sam Loyd: America’s Greatest Puzzlist,” in *Hexaflexagons, Probability Paradoxes, and the Tower of Hanoi: Martin Gardner’s First Book of Mathematical Puzzles and Games*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 94–108.
4. Though some versions are relatively small, the bulk of the surviving examples produced during the height of this puzzle’s popularity (roughly 1896–98) measure about 17 × 17 centimeters.
5. See US Patent 000563,778 (July 14, 1896).
6. See, for instance, Andrew Gyory, *Closing the Gate: Race, Politics, and the Chinese Exclusion Act* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971).
7. Kornel Chang, *Pacific Connections: The Making of the U.S.-Canadian Borderlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Patrick Ettinger, *Imaginary Lines: Border Enforcement and the Origins of Undocumented Immigration, 1882–1930* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009); Gunther Peck, *Reinventing Free Labor: Padrones and Immigrant Workers in the North American West, 1880–1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Yukari Takai, “Circumnavigating Controls: Transborder Migration of Asian-Origin Migrants during the Period of Exclusion,” in *Migrants and Migration in Modern North America: Cross-Border Lives, Labor Markets, and Politics in Canada, the Caribbean, Mexico, and the United States*, ed. Dirk Hoerder and Nora Faires (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 313–32.
8. Erika Lee, *At America’s Gates: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era, 1882–1943* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).
9. *Ibid.*, esp. 19–79 (“Closing the Gates”). See also Kornel Chang, “Enforcing Transnational White Solidarity: Asian Migration and the Formation of the U.S.-Canadian Boundary,” *American Quarterly* 60 (2008): 671–96.
10. Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (London: Verso, 1990).
11. We borrow the term from Nicole R. Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality, and Blackness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011). On the construction of whiteness, see Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*.
12. Though this example was licensed to advertise a Spanish business on its reverse, its visual vocabulary and syntax speak to an American origin. For more on exaggeration and stereotype, see *The Image of America in Caricature and Cartoon*, exhibition catalogue (Forth Worth: Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, 1976); Martha Banta, *Barbaric Intercourse: Caricature and the Culture of Conduct, 1841–1936* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003). Cf. Phoebe Wolfskill, “Caricature and the New Negro in the Work of Archibald Motley Jr. and Palmer Hayden,” *Art Bulletin* 91.3 (2009): 343–65. On the variability of stereotypes, see Lenore Metrick-Chen, *Collecting Objects / Excluding People: Chinese Subjects and American Visual Culture, 1830–1900* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013), esp. 171–73, 199–204.
13. Sarah Burns, *Painting the Dark Side: Art and the Gothic Imagination in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 88. See also Banta, *Barbaric Intercourse*.
14. Haohao Lu of Indiana University, Bloomington, translated these passages.



15. For this particular version (Slocum inv. no. 03720), see [webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/images/item.htm?id=http://purl.dlib.indiana.edu/iudl/lilly/slocum/LL-SLO-003720](http://webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/images/item.htm?id=http://purl.dlib.indiana.edu/iudl/lilly/slocum/LL-SLO-003720) (accessed November 9, 2015). Peter Sturman at the University of California, Santa Barbara, suggested the use of an inverted model.
16. We borrow the term from Linda Nochlin, "The Imaginary Orient," in *The Politics of Vision: Essays on Nineteenth-Century Art and Society* (London: Harper & Row, 1989), 33–59, which is concerned with the academic, or supposedly high art, tradition. On the yellowface tradition in minstrelsy, see John Kuo Wei Tchen, *New York before Chinatown: Orientalism and the Shaping of American Culture, 1776–1882* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 124–28. On the importance of food, language, and especially hair in the popular imagination, see Robert G. Lee, *Orientalism: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), 32–43. Cf. Tchen, *New York before Chinatown*, 191.
17. Over three hundred thousand Chinese entered the country from 1882 to 1943—more than the total that had arrived before exclusion. For another account of the relationship between Loyd's design and contemporaneous anti-Asian sentiment, see William Poundstone, "Get Off the Earth: The Incredible Racist Advertising Puzzles of Sam Loyd," *Believer* 4.7 (2006): 41–45.
18. Cf. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 1991).
19. On the complexity of what Michael Leja calls the "image ecology" of later nineteenth-century America, see his essay "Fortified Images for the Masses," *Art Journal* 70.4 (2011): 60–83.
20. The classic study of this phenomenon is Joel Snyder, "Picturing Vision," *Critical Inquiry* 6.3 (1980): 499–526. See also Snyder, "Res Ipsa Loquitur," in *Things That Talk: Object Lessons from Art and Science*, ed. Lorraine Daston (New York: Zone Books, 2004), 195–221. Cf. Peter Geimer, "A Self-Portrait of Christ or the White Noise of Photography? Paul Vignon and the Earliest Photograph of the Shroud of Turin," *Grey Room* 59 (2015): 6–43.
21. The eyes on this figure move side to side but otherwise remain within their orbits.
22. Though Loyd was born in Philadelphia and lived in various places during his life, in 1884 he moved to Brooklyn, a fact that the *Daily Eagle* noted, along with his street address (153 Halsey Street). See "Loyd's Puzzles," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, March 22, 1896.
23. That introductory article (*ibid.*) notes, for instance, that "the latest puzzle, which has come from a head that has devised about a thousand of them, is a circle of thirteen 'Chinks,' or Chinamen, each having a red jacket, blue trousers, pigtail, sword and wooden soled [*sic*] shoes, and by simply giving the wheel a one-eighth turn, one of the Chinamen, pigtail, sword and all, disappears, and the question is, where does he go?"
24. Gardner, "Sam Loyd," 102–3.
25. *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, January 3, 1897.
26. The 1896 promotion ran in three phases, or "series": April 26–May 3, May 4–10, and May 12–17.
27. *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 12, 1896. The *Eagle* also quotes a Manhattan paper as having run the headline, "Chinamen Charm Strong. Mayor fascinated by the Puzzle of Disappearing Orientals, and Business Is Neglected" (*ibid.*).
28. *Ibid.* On May 21, 1896 the *Daily Eagle* continued this basic theme, referring to the figures on the puzzle as "the notorious thirteen."
29. Fate is nothing if not a sly wit. In September 1896 Loyd announced that the anti-Darwinist Alexander Wilford Hall had produced the most logical explanation and, thus, won the bicycle ("The 'Get off the Earth' Award," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, September 20, 1896). Then again, perhaps fate had help. Hall also served as a witness to Loyd's patent application (see note 5).
30. For a different approach to the subcultures of enigmatology, see Bret L. Rothstein, "Visual Difficulty as a Cultural System," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 65–66 (2014–15): 332–47.
31. *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 20, 1896.
32. *Ibid.*
33. On that decadence and its supposed impact on the white republic, see Tchen, *New York before Chinatown*, 190–95. The presumed esoteric character of Chinese culture seems to have governed much of the discourse surrounding puzzles that likely originated in Asia (e.g., the tangram) as well as those merely thought to be especially difficult. On the tangram, see Jerry Slocum, *The Tangram Book* (New York: Sterling, 2003). For other puzzles that participated in orientalist discourse, see John Kuo Wei Tchen and Dylan Yeats, "Epilogue: Uncle Sam and the Headless Chinaman," in *Yellow Peril! An Archive of Anti-Asian Fear*, ed. John Kuo Wei Tchen and Dylan Yeats (London: Verso, 2014), esp. 341–43.

34. Brooklyn *Daily Eagle*, May 20, 1896.
35. For an illustration of “Blaine’s Teas(e),” see [thomasnastcartoons.com/2014/01/12/blaines-tease-20-march-1880/](http://thomasnastcartoons.com/2014/01/12/blaines-tease-20-march-1880/) (accessed August 24, 2015).
36. See Michele Walfred, “Illustrating Chinese Exclusion,” [thomasnastcartoons.com/2014/01/12/blaines-tease-20-march-1880/](http://thomasnastcartoons.com/2014/01/12/blaines-tease-20-march-1880/) (accessed July 2, 2015). On the contemporaneous relationship between xenophobia and xenophilia, see Tchen, *New York before Chinatown*; Tchen and Yeats, *Yellow Peril*, 343–47; Mari Yoshihara, *Embracing the East: White Women and American Orientalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Metrick-Chen, *Collecting Objects / Excluding People*.
37. On Nast’s approach to the topic of Asian immigrants, see Walfred, “Illustrating Chinese Exclusion.”
38. For another example of this sort of play, see Metrick-Chen, *Collecting Objects / Excluding People*, 214–15.
39. Loyd also referred to other letters from O’Grady on May 23 and June 21, 1896.
40. Brooklyn *Daily Eagle*, May 10, 1896. In addition to two letters from him on this occasion, the *Daily Eagle* also published letters by O’Grady about other puzzles on August 30 and September 13 of that year; it also published a few puzzles of his own devising.
41. Brooklyn *Daily Eagle*, June 28, 1896.
42. Brooklyn *Daily Eagle*, July 5, 1896: “If worsted in war, / He may think it a bore, / Or even feel just a little bit sore. / But: ‘Pro Patria’ ’tis proper, ‘mori,’ you know, / And take things generally as they go, / whether for weal or whether for woe.”
43. For instance, Horace had long been acknowledged as one of the chief apologists for poetic invention in the European academic tradition.
44. Several of Loyd’s letters came from readers of Irish descent, whose own supposedly suspect backgrounds perhaps encouraged them to participate in the ritualized stereotyping that accompanied debates about *Get off the Earth*. On the complex relationship among Irish and Chinese immigrants, see Tchen, *New York before Chinatown*, 216–48, 289–91; Lee, *Orientalism*, 67–76. For another account of the relationship between venerable literary traditions and American identities, see Seth Lehrer, *Error and the Academic Self: The Scholarly Imagination, Medieval to Modern* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 175–220, esp. 202–4.
45. Loyd claimed to have originally drawn up a different Chinese “clew” to the puzzle, one that was genuinely relevant (Brooklyn *Daily Eagle*, July 5, 1896).
46. *Ibid.*
47. For another approach to this sort of operation, see David Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), which discusses public amusements and how they helped construct racial difference.
48. Brooklyn *Daily Eagle*, July 12, 1896.
49. *Ibid.*
50. Although *Get off the Earth* did not, other later nineteenth-century images actively encouraged the collector’s impulse. See, for instance, Metrick-Chen, *Collecting Objects / Excluding People*, 170–71.
51. Yoshihara, *Embracing the East*, 3–6, 77–83. Cf. Metrick-Chen, *Collecting Objects / Excluding People*, 194–99.
52. Brooklyn *Daily Eagle*, May 16, 1896.
53. *Ibid.*
54. *Ibid.*
55. For more on pidgin speech, see Lee, *Orientalism*, 36–42; and Tchen, *New York before Chinatown*, esp. 127, 218–24.
56. For an earlier instance of associating racial difference with tricking the eye, see Barbara Maria Stafford, *Artful Science: Enlightenment Entertainment and the Eclipse of Visual Education* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 73–87, esp. 82–87.
57. Loyd’s design is not the earliest known instance of concealed distribution. That honor goes to the *Magic Egg Puzzle* of 1880, which depicts a chicken accompanied by either eight or nine eggs. For an image of this puzzle (Slocum inv. no. 21265), see [webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/images/item.htm?id=http://purl.dlib.indiana.edu/iudl/lilly/slocum/LL-SLO-021265&scope=](http://webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/images/item.htm?id=http://purl.dlib.indiana.edu/iudl/lilly/slocum/LL-SLO-021265&scope=) (accessed May 2, 2014). On the relationship between the *Magic Egg Puzzle* and *Get off the Earth*, see Poundstone, “Racist Advertising Puzzles,” 44.
58. That is to say, when one shifts one portion of the puzzle, a reduction in the number of human figures will accompany an increase in the number of lions, and vice versa.

59. Written by Horace G. Plympton, the stories (1912–13) tell of a young adoptee who, cursed with a substantial inheritance and no protector, must continually see to her own defense, most notably by departing from hazardous circumstances. The puzzle (Slocum Puzzle Collection inv. no. 30003) bears an interrogative version of the title assigned the stories, which also appeared in concert with a series of films. See, for instance, Rudmer Canjels, *Distributing Silent Film Serials: Local Practices, Changing Forms, Cultural Transformation* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 41–44.
60. Dating from August 1896, this puzzle (Lilly Library inv. no. 05597) adheres closely to Loyd's original design.
61. See, for instance, [webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/images/item.htm?id=http://purl.dlib.indiana.edu/iudl/lilly/slocum/LL-SLO-025705&scope=lilly/slocum](http://webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/images/item.htm?id=http://purl.dlib.indiana.edu/iudl/lilly/slocum/LL-SLO-025705&scope=lilly/slocum) (accessed August 24, 2015).
62. On the sources for and adaptability of images in contemporaneous advertising more generally, see Metrick-Chen, *Collecting Objects / Excluding People*, 175, 184–94.
63. Poundstone, "Racist Advertising Puzzles" (as in note 17). The Lilly Library has a substantially cropped copy of this version of the puzzle (inv. no. 21036).
64. In this respect, *Get off the Earth* raises interesting questions about the relationship between subject and not-subject in nineteenth-century art. On this point, the authors use the term *subject* in a very specific sense. See Creighton Gilbert, "On Subject and Not-Subject in Italian Renaissance Pictures," *Art Bulletin* 34.3 (1952): 202–16.
65. Clifford Geertz, "Common Sense as a Cultural System" (1975), in *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 73–93.
66. See, for instance, Michael Leja, *Looking Askance: Skepticism and American Art from Eakins to Duchamp* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Harris, *Humbug*; and James W. Cook, *The Arts of Deception: Playing with Fraud in the Age of Barnum* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001). American skepticism in the nineteenth century was ambivalent and complex. See, for instance, Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830–1870* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986).
67. Cf. the account of racist objects, including toys and the like, in Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992).
68. For a similar argument about popular song, see Lee, *Orientalism*, 17–23.
69. On the materiality and uncanniness of early film, see the work of Tom Gunning, especially "The Cinema of Attraction[s]: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde," *Wide Angle* 8.3–4 (1986): 63–70; Gunning, "Animated Pictures: Tales of the Cinema's Forgotten Future, after 100 Years of Film," in *Reinventing Film Studies*, ed. Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 316–31; Gunning, "An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)Credulous Spectator," *Art and Text* 34 (1989): 31–45; and, with respect to the idea of interfaces between human and machine, Gunning, "Crazy Machines in the Garden of Forking Paths: Mischief Gags and the Origins of American Film Comedy," in *Classical Hollywood Comedy*, ed. Kristine Brunovska Karnick and Henry Jenkins (London: Routledge, 1995), 87–105. On the "modernity" of racist advertisements, see Metrick-Chen, *Collecting Objects / Excluding People*, 170–71.
70. For instance, Poundstone dedicates much of his article to a discussion of concealed distribution ("Racist Advertising Puzzles," 44–45). He is not alone in this tendency. After a public presentation by one of the authors of this essay (Inouye), subsequent discussion of Loyd's puzzle veered strongly toward questions of enigmatology rather than race. (We must admit to susceptibility on this count, as well; therein lies the origin of our study.) On enchantment, see Alfred Gell, "Vogel's Net: Traps as Artworks and Artworks as Traps," *Journal of Material Culture* 1.1 (1996): 15–38; Gell, "The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology," in *Anthropology, Art, and Aesthetics*, ed. Jeremy Coote and Anthony Shelton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993): 40–67; and Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
71. Our argument here draws heavily on Karen E. Fields and Barbara J. Fields, *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life* (London: Verso, 2014).
72. Not all versions of Loyd's puzzle bear promotional text.
73. *Weekly Reporter*, October 28, 1897: "The Metropolitan Life Insurance Co. has just issued a curious puzzle entitled 'The Lost Jap.' If you would like one enquire of Edward Strong, Agt." On Asian immigrants as themselves curiosities, see Tchen, *New York before Chinatown*, 97–130. On the early modern origins of "curiosity," see R. J. W. Evans and Alexander Marr, eds., *Curiosity and Wonder from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2006).

74. The Metropolitan Life Insurance Company was not alone. The Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company's version of *Get off the Earth* treated the title of Loyd's puzzle as advice for anyone who declined to buy its products. Similarly, the *New York Journal* declared that "it is a perplexing puzzle to a great many people how the Journal achieved its unparalleled success," and then proceeded to articulate the paper's various strengths. Likewise, the Bridgeport (CT) *Post* announced that "Theodore Roosevelt's strenuous public career is the admiration of the whole nation, but the CIRCULATION of *The Bridgeport Post* is equally robust and impressive" on the reverse of its copy of *Teddy and the Lion* (figs. 13 and 14). Cf. Poundstone, "Racist Advertising Puzzles," 42, on the McKinley version of Loyd's puzzle.
75. See Yoshihara, *Embracing the East*; Metrick-Chen, *Collecting Objects / Excluding People*.
76. See note 2 above.