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# A Race Suicide among the Hogs: The Biopolitics of Pork in the United States, 1865–1930

*Gabriel N. Rosenberg*

“Mr. President,” said I, “I have been much interested in your remarks on race suicide. But I wish you would tell me how race suicide is to be prevented when the cholera gets among the hogs.”

The president looked puzzled. “Is not that a swinological rather than a sociological problem?” he asked.

“Perhaps,” I replied, “but any science that deals with men must of necessity concern itself with a great many hogs.”

—Josephus Ananias Shucks, *Farm, Field, and Fireside*, May 9, 1903

In October 1902 President Theodore Roosevelt wrote a letter about an issue “infinitely more important than any other question in this country—that is, the question of race suicide.” Roosevelt defined race suicide as the alarming reluctance of members of America’s white middle class to become parents, a mind-set Roosevelt deemed “criminal against the race” and that “should be an object of contemptuous abhorrence by all healthy people.”<sup>1</sup> The publication of the letter set off a firestorm of debate on the dangers of race suicide, a fire that still smoldered in April 1903 when Roosevelt embarked on a grand western speaking tour. As the historian Gail Bederman notes, on his tour, Roosevelt was met with insistent “cries of ‘No race suicide here!’” that “joyfully reassured men that white American manhood was not growing decadent or overcivilized.”<sup>2</sup>

Given this backdrop, consider this article’s epigraph: an account of Roosevelt’s stop in Kansas City, published in a May 1903 issue of the progressive farming magazine *Farm, Field, and Fireside*. That probably fictional account authored by the magazine’s pseudonymous humorist, “Josephus Ananias Shucks,” had the sly hayseed befuddling the president with quick and quirky confluences of hogs and humanity. Shucks did not dismiss race suicide but, rather, *stretched* it: “Any science that deals with men must of necessity concern itself with a great many hogs.” Here Shucks riffed on the observation that since

people often behaved greedily, many humans qualified as hogs. But Shucks's observation also conveyed how deeply interwoven the economic and biological fates of humans and swine had become. Shucks already grasped the present article's central argument: invocations of livestock race suicide suggest that, by 1900, networks of industrial meat production constituted a trans-species biopolitical apparatus governing the life and death of both human and nonhuman animals. In the age of industrial meat, to understand biopolitics—that is, politics that arraigns life as both the object and the instrument of governance—we must examine anew the differential sorting mechanisms of violence across and through the boundary of species.

In the early twentieth century, progressive farm magazines published other accounts of farm animals both resistant and susceptible to race suicides. A 1907 article in the *Ohio Farmer* warned that inattention to poultry housing resulted in “debility . . . in the flock, followed by egg infertility and ‘race suicide.’” An article in a 1913 issue of the *Prairie Farmer* titled “No Race Suicide at Weisenbaum’s” boasted that Frank Weisenbaum of Assumption, Illinois, had “an average of 10 ½ pigs from 14 litters.” An article in a 1907 issue of the *Farmers’ Review* blamed an encroaching “race suicide of good dairy qualities” on dairy farmers who “disregard[ed]” bovine “family connections” and, thus, made no special effort to get calves off of “unusually good mother[s].” In a 1907 issue of *Farm Home*, a Beloit, Wisconsin, breeder blasted “in-and-in breeding” in swine, saying there was “no source of race suicide so potent as this practice.” And a 1917 article in the *Berkshire World and Corn Belt Stockman* pondered the ideal hog, only to answer that the masculine porcine specimen “must be strictly opposed to race suicide. . . . He must have size and vigor.”<sup>3</sup>

By 1900 the nation's swine population numbered sixty-three million.<sup>4</sup> Those sixty-three million bodies translated into billions of dollars' worth of flesh and fat, and humans ever more elaborately orchestrated hog lives and deaths to keep both meat and money moving. This system created a powerful interdependency between human wealth and hog reproduction. The multiplication of hogs multiplied the breeders' wealth, and the multiplication of the breeders' wealth multiplied the hogs. Fickle porcine desire, however, spelled disaster for farmers. By the late nineteenth century, hog breeders developed a variety of strategies, technologies, and practices to conceptualize, contain, redirect, and exploit hog desire for their own economic and aesthetic purposes. By the turn of the century, compulsory reproduction determined the lives and deaths of millions of swine and was embedded at the very core of the food system. In this system of intensively governed reproduction backed by pervasive sexual violence, a simple rule decided the fates of millions of swine: breed or die.

Under such conditions, hog breeding functioned as a popular laboratory of racial knowledge and biopolitical management. Porcine racial categories were tied to the specific economic and gastronomic possibilities of swine bodies. These categories stretched across the rapidly reconfiguring infrastructures of American meat consumption and discourses of racial decline and contamination that spanned both human and nonhuman animals. Porcine racial categories both reflected and constructed a biopolitical process that sorted similarities and differences between what types of lives were livable, reproducible, and fit to receive violence. Tales of “aristocratic” swine “over-civilized” into race suicide converged with discourses about human whiteness, eugenics, and racial hygiene, but they did not fully overlap, nor did one merely “reflect” the other (or vice versa). Instead, human and swine racial ascents and declines converged and conversed, with the specificities of their distinct breeding regimes informing but never determining the other. The conditions for a race suicide among the hogs sat at the intersection of human and nonhuman racial discourses; the specific technologies governing hog reproduction, gendering, and racialization; the shifting biological capacities of swine bodies; and the challenges of profitable pork production.

This moment of intersection foregrounds important lessons for both histories of the American food system and broader biopolitical theorization. Turn-of-the-century talk of race suicides referenced a biopolitical apparatus that now spanned multiple species and increasingly depended on their interwoven governance and orchestration. The case study of the history of Berkshire swine suggests that to grapple with breeding’s articulation of race and reproduction, we need to move our focus away from slaughter. We must account for formations of sexual violence, racialization, and whiteness that permitted the efficient accumulation of animal capital through managed reproduction. Biopolitical maps across species were and continue to be important heuristics for the production, management, and elimination of human populations. Attention to these heuristics and the forms of violence they legitimate broadens potential biopolitical genealogies from metropolitan, centralized technologies of “slaughter” and locates important biopolitical models in the slow violence practiced in the agricultural peripheries of settler colonialism and chattel slavery.

### **Biopolitical Steaks**

Biopolitical theory of late is obsessed with slaughter. This is an unexpected development given the relative paucity of analysis of death making in the works of Michel Foucault dedicated to biopolitics and its genealogies, especially given

his primary characterization of modernity as a turn to the addition of life and away from the threat of vital subtraction.<sup>5</sup> Foucault defined biopolitics as a strategy of governance in which “the basic biological features of the human species” became the primary means and ends of politics.<sup>6</sup> This was, in Foucault’s famous figuration, a reversal of the sovereign’s power to let live and make die. In its place, there was a power that “consists in making live and letting die.”<sup>7</sup> Governance was increasingly dedicated to both the anatomic-political task of disciplining productive, if docile, bodies and the biopolitical task of managing healthy national populations. In the European metropole, both tasks entailed the aggregated sorting of populations in ways that created differential, structured exposures to violence, what Foucault considered racialization.

Given Foucault’s relative silence about the catastrophic death making of the Holocaust, biopolitical theory in the past two decades has gravitated toward the question of why apparatuses of life making veer into the efficient production of death. For Giorgio Agamben, the problem of speciation can never be disentangled from the mobilizing logics of slaughter. The “inclusive exclusion” of separating human from animal is precisely what enables the possibility that humans may find themselves in a “zone of indeterminacy” in which they are less than fully human and, consequently, subject to wanton slaughter.<sup>8</sup> The thanatopolitical potential of the human–nonhuman distinction Agamben identifies has similarly traversed the scholarship of thinkers as varied as Jacques Derrida, Judith Butler, Dominick LaCapra, and J. M. Coetzee. The comparison between industrial slaughter and the Holocaust explored by Coetzee and sometimes echoed by animal rights activists, for example, suggests that the massive slaughter of swine in early twentieth-century America was guided by the same underlying thanatopolitical impulse later expressed by the Holocaust.<sup>9</sup>

This interest has spurred the burgeoning field of critical animal studies dedicated to understanding the diverging fates of humans and animals as contingent outcomes of biopower rather than as reflections of natural difference. For the literary theorist Cary Wolfe, speciation stabilizes human–nonhuman binaries that “countenance violence against the social other of *whatever* species—or gender, or race, or class, or sexual difference.”<sup>10</sup> Wolfe critiques the aforementioned thinkers for failing to account for the historical and empirical role of speciation in biopolitical formation. Theorists have either excluded animals from consideration entirely, as with Judith Butler’s writings on grieving and loss, or reduced their existence, as with Agamben on “bare life,” to a “highly symbolic and sacrificial ritual in some timeless political theater.”<sup>11</sup> Some scholars in critical animal studies, such as the literary theorist Nicole

Shukin, press for a biopolitical theory attendant to both “the semiotic currency of animal signs *and* the carnal traffic in animal substances” that structure violence in North American settler colonial states. Thus, the bodies of swine can be rendered as both potent signifiers of social difference and as literal sites for biocapital accumulation.<sup>12</sup>

The problem of species has a thorny relationship to the problem of race in biopolitical theory. For example, Alexander Weheliye argues that contemporary biopolitical theory elides models (like the Plantation) that propelled settler colonialism and chattel slavery in the Atlantic world, and to the extent that race has been included, it has been to buttress a facile conflation of blackness, animality, and abjection. Weheliye is responding to an analogy familiar to readers of animal studies: *human:animal :: white:black*. Since animal, or “animality,” can function as a metonym for (or at least as a subset of) bare life in biopolitical theory, acceptance of the analogy suggests that deactivating the State of Exception’s production of racialized bare life will be ineffectual if critics leave the human–animal boundary in place. Thus, the argument goes, criticism of racialized settler colonialism logically demands opposition to the current exploitation of nonhuman animals. By contrast, and following Weheliye’s thinking, the present article contests that foundational analogy through a historical question: under what conditions did human entanglements with animals produce knowledge specifically about whiteness?<sup>13</sup>

To answer this question, several categories of difference that subtended late nineteenth-century livestock breeding require definition: *race*, *species*, and *breed*. As I use it here, *race* is the material sign of the sorting and regulation of bodies according to visions of collective, social, and national health. This sorting both produces and reflects debility—sociopolitically imposed vulnerability and exposure to violence—and is structured by racial fantasies that are historically fluid, contingent, and often incoherent. Race is both irreducibly material and semiotic: it is the ligatures by which social institutions relate material debility to inchoate and contradictory ideas about the vitality, health, and purity of heterogeneous populations. I refer to the social process of this relation making as *racialization*. As Mel Chen argues, racialization impels the regulation of many types of bodies—living and nonliving, human and animal, animate and inanimate—and, thus, it is not exclusively the province of the regulation of either human bodies or even the living. Any body—even a body of toxins—can be racialized, insofar as its regulation is related to social vitality and the viability of life, individual or collective.<sup>14</sup>

By contrast, here I consider *species* as the taxonomic classification, scientific and vernacular, particular to distinguishing different forms-of-life. This taxonomy delimits and inscribes the human at its center as both synecdoche and exception. Humans are synecdoches of evolutionary progress. But the human is exceptional because it is the particular species that devises the taxonomy. *Speciation* is the process of locating a form-of-life within the taxonomy and, thus, elaborating its difference in relationship to other species. Like race, particular bodies with material characteristics and possibilities are located within this discursive taxonomy and subject to debility on its basis. Similarly, the taxonomy itself indexes various material differences—including reproductive commensality, morphological uniformity, and, of late, genetic similarity—as constitutive of the boundaries of species, although particular boundaries, like bodies, evolve and dissolve over time. Within a given species, *breeds* are recognized categories of bodies that are historically constituted by the directed management of reproduction. While the designation of species presupposes a human taxonomist, the designation of *a breed* (within a species) presupposes a human breeder and institutions capable of governing the reproduction of a species.

*Racialization* and *speciation* are distinct processes that, nevertheless, overlap and entangle materially and symbolically at given moments. In contending that the study of hog breeding maps animal racialization, I do not mean that animal bodies should be understood within the particular scaffolding of human racial categories—pigs as “white” or “black,” for example. Quite to the contrary, I am arguing that this terrain must be mapped on its own terms. The differences between human and swine racialization noted here are numerous and profound. In the context of North American settler colonialism, human racialization has been interwoven with capital formation, liberal subjectivity, political institutions, and the ideological constitution of the nation-state, all in ways that have often involved swine only at the margins, if at all. The co-articulation of racial, sexual, and class difference has met capital’s need for “surplus” laboring populations while justifying the heightened biopolitical regulation of those surplus populations by the formal and informal agents of the state.<sup>15</sup> It is true that the same forces of capital multiplied hog life in the form of livestock, but some specificity here is warranted. Surplus human populations were often exposed to a slow violence that preserved labor power even as the exercise of that labor power propelled life’s attrition. Most livestock were, however, reproduced only to be slaughtered—and such “feeders” were fattened and slaughtered as quickly as was profitable without respect to their

potential labor power. Yet this death making required equally prolific reproductive labor from a small subset of animals, “breeders,” that, in turn, became the obsessive focus of the breeder’s art. While nearly all swine were racialized, swine-breeding discourses elaborated “breeders” and “feeders” as particular figures exposed to radically different forms of debility: racial discourses indexed the relationship between the biological characteristics of select “breeder” bodies coherent within “breeds” and the potential of those bodies to reproduce purebred, grade, and scrub “feeders.” The management of racial reproduction espoused by race suicide theorists and, later, eugenicists hinged on the fantasy of managing whiteness in the interests of reproducing more whiteness, halting perceived racial contamination, eliminating nonwhite populations, and eliding the extant biological and intimate relationships between surplus populations and the white, middle class. In stark contrast, breeders fantasized about managing purebred animals to maximize the reproduction of the meat animals that had direct reproductive relationships to the objects of reproductive governance. In short, these systems of racialization entailed entirely different reproductive configurations between their pivotal figures.

My uses of *race*, *species*, and *breed* are self-consciously and necessarily anachronistic, and they reflect lexical differences never considered by swine breeders in the late nineteenth century. My sources—texts written by and for commercial swine breeders—used all three terms, but the meanings and differences among those terms were contested and imprecise. Each term sometimes functioned as metaphor for the others, and sometimes as metonym. By *race*, my sources sometimes meant race in the vulgar contemporary sense—biological differences among humans signaled by differences in skin color—and sometimes my sources meant it as a metonym for what I call species (e.g., “the human race”). At other times, race referred to a subspecies produced through the institutionalized management of reproduction, what I call above *breed*. In the context of livestock race suicide, race is critically and impossibly underdetermined: sources played with the multiple meanings and both their metaphorical and their metonymic possibilities. Indeed, this critical indeterminacy is what made turn-of-the-century animal breeding a particularly fertile site for the production of racial knowledge that could be applied in trans-speciative contexts.

While scholarship on the history of livestock breeding is comparatively sparse, scholarship on the industrialization of animal slaughter and meat production is comparatively robust and has already enriched biopolitical theory.<sup>16</sup> Much of this literature has emerged out of environmental history and in response to one of its most celebrated works, William Cronon’s *Nature’s Me-*



*tropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (1991). In conversation with these works, the present article foregrounds the governance of animal reproduction as central to the story of industrial meat production, the accumulation of animal capital, and the generation of racial knowledge. The industrial meat system in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries operationalized sexual violence, forced life, and compulsory reproduction. These strategies constituted the basic instruments of racialization for my case study of Berkshire hogs: through the intensive governance of their reproduction, breeders sorted animal bodies according to racial and gendered categories of difference. By examining these categories as contingent and entwined historical processes, I describe a different “zone of indeterminacy” that emerges out of the trans-species intimacies required by the governance of animal reproduction and the racialization of animal bodies. The paradox of “livestock race suicide” coheres as a description of death and life for humans and animals bound alike in a single apparatus.

### **Breeding a “Thrifty Race of Hogs”: Berkshire Breeding Culture**

Hog meat—and fat—suffused the nineteenth-century American diet. Although considered a lower-status meat, Americans ate hog more than any other animal—most often cured and sold in barrels.<sup>17</sup> At the turn of the nineteenth century, many farmers used hogs as foragers—an instrument to transform waste into meat. Self-provisioned hogs were primarily butchered for local consumption, and the intensity of their breeding was necessarily limited. Most farmers practiced “range” or “pasture” mating, where choice boars were given free run of sows in heat. Scrub boars—reproductively unfit or undesirable boars—were often castrated, but, otherwise, hog farmers exercised minimal control over particular hog sex acts and infrequently supervised and tracked breeding lines. Those few farmers who did practice intensive swine breeding operated wealthy “improved” estates in New England, New York, and eastern Pennsylvania. By contrast, meat animals dwelled at the literal margins of Southern plantation ecologies, with little land free for pasturing and hay. Large plantations usually purchased marginal meats for slaves, though overseers permitted some slaves to trap, hunt, and fish as well as keep and breed stock. Smallholders free-ranged swine (and some cattle) on commons and in forests. This mode of husbandry was necessarily low intensity, since the livestock were rarely fenced until the late nineteenth century. Despite the ubiquity of swine in and around agriculture spaces, *intensive* animal breeding was almost exclusively a “gentlemanly” pursuit practiced on horses and peripheral to the motive economics of chattel slavery.<sup>18</sup>

Despite the rarity of intensive animal breeding in the South, the logics and language of animal husbandry were often deployed to justify racial violence in nineteenth-century American culture. Throughout the Atlantic world, as well as in global settler colonial settings, breeders used animal bodies to reason through differences between European and non-European populations. For European colonizers, the presence of preferred breeds of domesticated animals signaled, justified, and abetted the ascent of “civilization” and the accompanying eradication of indigenous populations and systems of land management.<sup>19</sup> By the early nineteenth century, nascent racial science and popular wisdom justified chattel slavery by contending that enslaved persons descended from biologically distinct subspecies: slaves were not fully human and were endowed with inferior bodily and cognitive capacities. Critics of slavery frequently cited slavery’s bestializing effects—its tendency to treat humans as mere beasts—as evidence of its evils. This bestializing treatment extended to sexual violence and forced reproduction, examples cited frequently in abolitionist literature.<sup>20</sup>

The historian Thelma Jennings notes that the Southern “white patriarch” derived authority from his power to “force [slaves] to mate with whomever he chose, to reproduce or suffer the consequences.”<sup>21</sup> This “forced coupling,” as the historian Thomas Foster calls it, used the idioms of animal husbandry, with fit male slaves referred to as “stock men” and “bulls” and the unfit characterized as “scrubby.” Slavers forced a small number of “bulls” to reproduce with many different women, which formally obscured particular slave paternity.<sup>22</sup> This uncertainty reinforced the sexual access of white slavers to the bodies of enslaved women. By contrast, intensive animal breeding depended on the transparency, registration, and recording of animal paternity in the form of public herd books and pedigrees. Chattel slavery, as practiced, functioned to erase slave paternity and often obliterated biological kinships. Relationships between slave and animal breeding were mediated through a metaphoric relation, but did not encompass the trans-species migration of technologies and practices dependent on publicly legible paternity.

In the Near West, the emergence of a profitable corn–hog nexus propelled the ecological conversion of prairielands into settled agriculture by settler colonists. Growing populations on the Atlantic seaboard, both hungry for meat and increasingly incapable of producing it, encouraged farmers around the nation to raise livestock for market and drove homesteaders west in search of land for pasture, range, and grain. At midcentury, farmers throughout the Ohio River Valley drove swine on hoof to Cincinnati. In “Porkopolis,” the city’s sobriquet, millions of pigs were slaughtered, butchered, and barreled in the

scores of slaughterhouses spread around the city. Barges loaded with barreled pork floated downriver to the Mississippi, bound for urban markets on the East Coast and in Europe. A provisioning hub for the Union Army during the Civil War, Chicago soon eclipsed Cincinnati as the center of pork processing. Rail networks routed hogs from increasingly far-flung farms west of the Mississippi through Chicago, turning pigs into pork in the single, sprawling slaughter complex on Chicago's Southside, the Union Stock Yards. The development of refrigerated warehouses and railcars permitted the year-round processing and consumption of pork by the 1880s. Chicago's ascent as the major western destination for both meat *and* grain and the invention of grain grading in the 1850s meant that, for many Corn Belt farmers, the value-added transformation of low-grade corn into pork became an important source of farm revenue.<sup>23</sup>

In the two decades after the Civil War, some farmers refined this process even further by economically disaggregating hog finishing from hog breeding. On finishing farms, swine that entered were fed corn until they attained market weight, and then they were uniformly sent to the slaughterhouse. On breeding farms, farmers retained some swine that, because of their reproductive prowess, served as breeding stock. Porcine life-horizons were logistically, materially, spatially, and symbolically interwoven with porcine reproductive prowess and the efficient management of hog desire. These farms were paradigmatically biopolitical: they were spaces where the reign of death making impelled a constant, thoroughgoing recalculation of life giving. This key biopolitical calculation initiated hog racialization; it created discrete categories of swine whose reproductive management, in turn, indexed the future viability of both swine and the reproductive mastery of their white breeders.

The growth of dedicated breeding farms in the late nineteenth century helped institutionalize hog breeds and, thus, permit breeds to take on more differentiated functional and aesthetic ("fancy") characteristics. Beginning with the founding of the American Berkshire Association (ABA) in 1875, professional breeding organizations formed to promote their particular swine breeds, as well as to facilitate the reliable sale of registered animals in that breed. The ABA's most basic task, before even its relentless boosterism of the breed, was simply to keep a reliable herd book. The herd book contained the name of registered animals, dates of farrowing, the names and locations of their owners, and their pedigrees. Farmers paid a fee to register their animals—in 1878 the fee was one dollar to appear in the record and twenty-five cents to record a transfer of ownership—and the ABA required breeders to use a standardized pedigree form and to submit signed "certificates" attesting to the pedigree's

authenticity. The ABA also claimed the authority to exclude from the herd book hogs that it saw as unworthy specimens of the breed. To pursue that aim, the ABA endorsed the National Convention of Swine Breeders' definition and scoring of Berkshire breed characteristics, a fact that helped breeders standardize the bodies of their animals according to how the animals would be judged in competitions. In the subsequent three decades, this standardization drove toward a refinement of the Berkshire hog—a quest, as the *Berkshire World* put it, to breed “a strong, healthy, thrifty race of hogs.”<sup>24</sup> The herd book restructured and consolidated those markets, creating an integrated national market for purebred Berkshires and giving American breeders greater access to international purebreeding networks. Within a decade of its first publication, the ABA herd book already included over eleven thousand registered, pedigreed Berkshires, and, at the turn of the century, that number had grown to sixty thousand. By the time the 1920 US Census recorded that 3.5 percent of all hogs on farms were purebreds—or roughly two million—the Berkshire herd book had accepted 275,000 entrants.<sup>25</sup>

Breeders differentiated two “types” of hogs. “Lard” hogs were characterized by a higher percentage of body fat. Their bodies were heavy, stocky, and short legged, they took on weight rapidly, and the animals fed happily on corn. American consumers regarded lard-hog meat as perfectly succulent and flavorful; the “lard” appellation, derived from the ample, excess adipose fat that could be rendered and sold as lard. “Bacon” hogs, by contrast, had a greater percentage of muscle and produced meat that appealed to consumers in the United Kingdom and Canada. Two major “bacon” breeds persisted in the United States, the Tamworth and Yorkshire breeds. British Berkshires hovered near the boundary between the lard and bacon types, but American breeders aggressively crossbred British Berkshires with various lard hogs, creating a heavier American breed. The American Berkshire had a long, light, and relatively muscular body, a narrow (or short) face, a slightly upturned snout, and a wide, expressive brow with splashes of white fur around its face, shoulders, and hooves against its otherwise black pelt.<sup>26</sup>

An animal could, of course, perfectly express these physical characteristics and still be of limited value as breeding stock. Farmers sent feeders to the butcher when they reached around three hundred pounds, usually between nine and fifteen months of age, when the ratio of hog feed to added weight became disadvantageous. A pristine specimen that produced slow-maturing offspring was less profitable than a physically inferior pig whose piglets fattened quickly. A given boar or sow also needed to be a capable reproductive laborer. Breeders

expected mature boars to “service” between thirty and forty sows in a season, with couplings occurring as often as twice a day. Similarly, breeders prized sows that produced larger litters. But beyond that, breeders prized “prepotent” boars. (*Prepotency* meant the ability of an animal to pass its characteristics on to its offspring.) Breeding stock were valued for their reproductive capacities and their prospective abilities to transfer their physical characteristics to their offspring. In 1910 a celebrated purebred Berkshire boar could command as much as \$10,000 at auction, and, on the whole, the sales of purebred swine at public auction alone amounted to more than \$8 million annually by 1920.<sup>27</sup>

Breeders situated porcine sexual difference in the context of reproductive capability through a gendered syntax. Only the most masculine boars should be bred, and breeders praised the “masculine qualities” of prolific boars such as “ruggedness” and “vitality and vigor.”<sup>28</sup> At other times, a single prized feature, like the “well-dished” forehead of E. J. Barker’s boar Star Value, might index the boar’s “decided masculine appearance.”<sup>29</sup> Breeders unanimously agreed that the most masculine boars were those that both sired the most piglets and proved prepotent. The boar Masterpiece 77000, for example, “possesse[d] the evidences of masculine qualities” because “he [was] the most emphatic example of prepotency and his power for ‘breeding on’ [was] phenomenal.”<sup>30</sup> N. H. Gentry testified that the boar Baron Lee 6th had “the greatest masculine development and vigor” and “sired many great animals, both boars and sows, the latter always feminine and the former always masculine.” For Berkshire breeder culture, the masculine boar was a boar of great reproductive prowess—a boar whose very masculine essence seemed to exceed its body and overflow into subsequent generations.<sup>31</sup>

Identifying a prepotent, masculine boar was much more an art than a science, an art that generated an erotic and esoteric knowledge of boars’ bodies. For W. E. Spicer, the art of breeding required the breeder to think comprehensively about how his animals’ individual strengths and defects might combine with those of his sows to make exceptional offspring. Breeding was not merely the selection of fine animals, after all; it was the ability to pair the right animals with each other. But which boar to choose? Spicer imagined a boar’s masculinity and prepotency as a latent, internal power that expressed itself on the animal’s body as a code or an enigma. Speculative practice offered a cipher through which to read the bodies of individual swine. Spicer scrutinized his boars for gendered traces: “Just as a female should be feminine in character . . . the male should be entirely the opposite.” But to take those traces and make from them a judgment on the whole required “a kind of intuition, a gift of

nature born with the man and developed by nature and experience.” Even then, Spicer suggested, it was the prepotent boar that ultimately announced itself to the breeder: “It is impossible to fully describe a strongly prepotent animal. He needs to be seen, when the master breeder is attracted at once.” The animal’s prepotency manifested itself as an erotic magnetism that called the breeder to the boar.<sup>32</sup>

While breeders conceptualized the boar’s masculinity as tied to the active force of its prepotency, the sow’s femininity derived from her docility and “mothering” abilities. The sow’s idealized passivity was always implicit in the language of “service.” A boar serviced a sow, a depiction of porcine sexual congress that cast the sow as offering nothing to the act of copulation besides her presence. The boar *did* something, while the sow merely *received* the doing. One article in a 1919 issue of the *Berkshire World* explained the different gendered idealizations as “the superlatively matronly qualities of a female of the Berkshire species” and “the wonderfully impressive masculinity of her lord and master.” Just as boars were lauded for their assertive vigor and vitality, breeders praised “sweet, very feminine sows.” The animal scientist C. W. Hickman explained that breeders should select sows with “refined” heads and “feminine (breedy) appearance[s]” that suggested “fecundity; that is, the bearing of large litters.” A. J. Lovejoy, the *Berkshire World*’s advice columnist, agreed with Hickman’s priorities, and he urged breeders to select sows that were “kind gentle mothers.” For Jesse Moore, a Nebraska breeder, the Berkshire’s mothering abilities separated it from other breeds. “I find the Berkshire much more satisfactory,” Moore wrote. “As mothers, they are very kind and gentle. Will farrow from seven to ten good, strong healthy pigs and raise them in good shape.”<sup>33</sup>

Breeders engaged in artful speculations about how gendered swine might be advantageously paired, but the speculative nature of the endeavor carried the possibility of failure—and the sources of failure were numerous. Failures might entail bad judgment in pairing by the breeder, but the problem was often much more basic: what if the hogs refused to breed? Reasons for wanting porcine libido were numerous. Substantial weight disparities between large, old boars and small, young sows proved painful and injurious to sows. Mature sows sometimes intimidated and drove off younger boars. Even when the sow had entered into heat, both boar and sow might simply lack interest in mating. Older, fatter animals were particularly difficult to breed, since “fat seem[ed] to paralyze the generative organs.”<sup>34</sup> Sick animals refused to mate. Boars would not penetrate sows, while sows fled boars or would lie down to make penetration impossible. A breeder might not notice this failure to breed

until farrowing season. “Too often the boar is turned with the sows,” complained Guy Robinson in *Ohio Farmer*, “and the farmer does not know that they are served properly, or whether or not they are at all. This means confusion and often loss at farrowing time.”<sup>35</sup> Other breeders worried that a boar that serviced too many sows lost its potency. Some breeders believed that a boar that had previously serviced a scrub sow would be damaged or “infected” and pass on the scrub’s characteristics if mated to a purebred sow in the future.<sup>36</sup> Regardless, moments such as these punctured the assumed fecundity of animal bodies and the self-sufficiency of animal sexuality and hoggish desire. Breeding, then, was not just the art of matching two ideal specimens; it required an orchestration of will, desire, and bodies in the actual moment of congress. Mating had still to be made.

Breeders tackled those logistical challenges with the gusto of capital-committed practitioners of their art. First, they restricted the mobility of the animals during the actual act of congress. In some cases, this simply called for a “breeding pen” to house the boar and from which the sow could not flee. But beginning in the late nineteenth century, breeding manuals suggested the construction of “breeding crates” or “breeding boxes” to contain the animals during sex. By the early twentieth century, commercial breeding crates were widely available and advertised in most breeding magazines. Breeding crates prevented sows from fleeing and also forced them to stand, making it easier for the boar to penetrate the sow. Experts recommended breeding crates especially for animals with great weight differentials.<sup>37</sup> Breeders sometimes whipped, beat, or “wheel-barrowed” hogs into crates, but most experts counseled that it was best to lure the animals into the crate with seed corn. Even with the animals in the crate, the breeder A. J. Stapleton warned, “You will have to give the boar every assistance you can so that he will make a good and satisfactory service.” In cases where sows did not desire to be bred, the breeding crate prevented resistance and flight. The breeding crate systematized sexual violence as a core strategy of livestock production, a fact that led some dissenting breeders to label breeding crates “against nature. . . . If sows can be bred without a crate, it is better.” Still, most breeders followed Lee Boyce’s approach: “Use a breeding crate, men. They are inexpensive. They save time in breeding. They insure a better service.”<sup>38</sup>

Such a restriction in mobility removed the sow’s volition, but it did nothing to address boars that lacked desire. Breeders created elaborate diet and exercise regimes in the hope that porcine “sexual organs will respond.”<sup>39</sup> At other times, however, the problem seemed to be the boar’s character. A pair of breeders

from Colorado, the Sessions brothers, wrote to Lovejoy for advice about their troubled boar. They owned

a young boar twenty-one months old, and . . . cannot get him to breed at all. I have never seen him have any energy in the least. . . . The old boar did not really fight him, but sometimes would root him out of his way. Sometimes during the day the two boars would nest together. The young boar is timid, the sows have fought him more than the old boar. . . . He will not pay any attention to the sow, not even to mount her.

The boar would not keep to its reproductive script. It had more affection for the old boar than it did for the sows; and a normal boar would do violence to its reproductive competitor rather than nest with him. Lovejoy bluntly advised the brothers to “castrate the young boar and sell him on the market when you get him fat.” Sometimes when met with a disinterested boar, farmers applied a liberal dose of damiana, an herb with aphrodisiac qualities, that “creates a desire and makes a boar get busy. . . . Then, if he refuses, castrate him.”<sup>40</sup> Regardless, the problem of “weak” boars persisted. “Some strains or families of hogs,” opined an editorial in *Berkshire World*, “are phlegmatic, ‘lazy,’ lacking in energy and spirit, indifferent in the sexual relationship and altogether unsatisfactory as mothers.”<sup>41</sup>

Given the lengths to which breeders went to orchestrate porcine reproduction, manufacturing sexual violence, arousing desire, and creating elaborate routines of diet and exercise, perhaps breeders were less artists and more engineers: engineers furiously struggling with the host of intimate and material forces that constantly threatened to capsize their designs. But breeders subordinated those logistical challenges when they spoke of breeding as an art. The product of that art was not merely a commodity—though it was certainly a commodity—but an individual aesthetic object. Breeding, they suggested, was an artful mixing of blood. This art obtained in the identification and larding of “good” and “pure” blood, as well as the purging of “bad” or “impure” blood. Berkshire breeders depicted “this liquid life” as the vital source of “purity” for their breed—the fluid essence of the breed that flowed seamlessly across the dramatic cleavages of porcine gender and generation. “The blood of Longfellow is more thoroughly disseminated than any other boar used in America. . . . his valuable influence on the breed emphasizes the importance of good blood,” explained George Berry. “A pig is the sum of active ancestral blood,” wrote the breeder Charles A. Steward. “Stock breeding will be a more definite business when men are able to enlarge and vitalize the stream of good blood down through the generations.”<sup>42</sup>



Steward's description of the motive power of blood suggests, in part, that emergent pseudo-Darwinian "scientific" racism shaped how breeders conceptualized their art. We might consider Steward's words in light of Mel Chen's argument that speculative difference provided a conceptual framework for turn-of-the-century racial theory's categorization of nonwhite races as unevolved and bestial. Assumptions about animal difference and hierarchy crosscut and constituted the various social, political, and intellectual movements organized around racialized conceptions of heredity, including the social hygiene and eugenics movements. Chen also argues that hierarchies of animation undergirded racial categorizations: whiteness was imagined as action and animation (a suggestion, that, in turn, echoes Hortense Spillers's description of the "slave [as] perceived as the essence of *stillness*").<sup>43</sup> Breeders endowed their hogs with animate force they denied sows. Some of this animation was literal: boars had greater (though often restricted) freedom of motion during sexual intercourse. At other times, through the language of "service," breeders linguistically framed boar sexuality as an active force. Obsessive focus on porcine bloodlines, however, imagined boars as capable of actively shaping future generations of swine through the prepotency of their blood. This vision of boar animacy, then, implied two entwined racial futures: the future viability of the Berkshire breed vouchsafed by reproductive management offered by white breeders.

Given the preponderance of such "good" blood in Berkshires, it is hardly surprising that Berkshire breeders fancied their hogs the aristocrats of swine. "Rival's Last is a born aristocrat and looks the part," the *Berkshire World* gushed in a regular feature titled "History of Famous Boars of the Breed,"<sup>44</sup> in which the owners of prize-winning boars recounted the distinguished pedigrees of their boars and rhapsodized about the aesthetic perfection of their animals. There, as in other parts of the magazine, breeders used a stock set of terms to describe their finest hogs: "nobility," "aristocratic," "high-class," and "blue-blooded."<sup>45</sup> Other articles playfully extended the metaphor even farther. A 1910 issue of the *Berkshire World* reprinted an article from the Kremmling, Colorado, *Daily News* titled "Berkshire Rhetoric" that recounted the arrival of "one of the scions of a very ancient and honorable English family. . . . his Lordship . . . Baron of Sunny Gulch." Describing the boar's exit from the train, the newspaper drolly noted that his owners had arrived "to assist him to alight as it is not customary for a baron of that class to alight from a train without help."<sup>46</sup> The article derived humor by juxtaposing the refined, self-seriousness of human aristocrats with the predilections of a boar. Yet, as the article recounted, both human and animal aristocracies anchored their claims in a system of managed

breeding through pedigrees. Even as the article explicitly distanced itself from royalism, it validated the breeder's claim to elite authority. The rhetoric of porcine aristocracy asserted the well-trod distinction, so central to breeding's technocratic pleasures, between those fit to breed and those fit to decide who should breed. Indeed, the designation of such an aristocracy endowed Berkshire breeders with a broad authority over racial reproduction wherever they might find it, among humans or swine.

Although these sorts of porcine racial discourses must be read contiguously with human racial discourses, they were never reducible to human racial discourses, and, indeed, the particular frame of porcine aristocracy did not parallel human whiteness and could not be reduced to it. In the turn-of-the-century United States, whiteness took shape in relationship to a taxonomy of racial others—the Negro, the Oriental, the Indian, and the Jew, among them. In each case, racial theory compiled biological characteristics that delimited each race and justified the exposure of different populations to violence.<sup>47</sup> By the early twentieth century, some of this violence took the form of intensifying reproductive management. Eugenic laws permitted doctors and state authorities to forcibly sterilize “unfit” persons. Meanwhile, social reformers and state agencies designed “positive eugenic” and pronatalist programs to increase reproduction among the white middle class. Eugenic programs deployed systems of racial knowledge and somatic violence to shape the racial composition (and future) of the national body. By positing that race was a discrete and objectively knowable quality, however, this racialized management of human reproduction also posited the apparent ahistorical truth of the various racial categories and endeavored to conceal the arbitrary and malleable boundaries between them.<sup>48</sup>

Despite its designation as an “aristocratic” breed, Berkshires breeding stock retained obvious reproductive relationships to “feeders” in ways that rendered porcine racialization markedly different from human racialization. Purebreds expressed the characteristics of a set of breeds. By contrast, breeders called hogs with undesirable (or merely unremarkable) breed traits “mongrels,” “scrubs,” “inferior,” or “degenerates”—a vast and undifferentiated swath of pigs uniformly destined for death, but often the offspring of purebred swine. In this, breeders recognized that many “unfit” hogs necessarily descended from aristocratic purebreds. The porcine racial map arranged a ring of coherent reproducing breeds—Berkshires, Tamworths, Chester Whites, Poland-Chinas, and so forth—around an indistinguishable mass of killable scrubs. For “this great race of swine,” as the breeder F. R. Steele called Berkshire hogs, racial improvement still meant improving the average animal *to be killed*. Improve-

ment could never permit the salvation of all pigs, since the economics of pork production meant that only a select few hogs could be breeding stock. Porcine racial discourses shared a family resemblance to human racial discourses, but they were never coincident. Instead, porcine racial discourses articulated relationships between the material (and economic) capacities of hog bodies and the human-orchestrated management of swine reproduction.<sup>49</sup>

### Racial Panic in the Pig Pen

When Steele labeled Berkshires “this great race of hogs” in a 1918 issue of the *Berkshire World*, he did so in a decisively anxious and tragic register. Berkshires, Steele complained, were disappearing from farms across the Corn Belt. Truly, Steele believed, the finest Berkshires still outclassed the finest specimens of any other breed, but the *average* Berkshire seemed to be in decline. Steele offered a list of reasons why Corn Belt farmers turned away from Berkshires. “There are not enough pigs raised per litter,” he complained, “and there is too much difference in size between pigs of the same litter, too much difference in growthiness between different litters in the same herd, too many sows that are hard to get in pig, and too many pigs farrowed dead.” All these symptoms pointed to a single unifying malady. “Reduced vitality, the virile irrepressible swinging power to grow and reproduce, has been spirited away,” Steele wrote. This “lack of vitality” derived from what Steele saw as “the catastrophe of too close inbreeding.” If Berkshire breeders were not careful, Steele warned, they would find themselves with a “suicide of the race” and the extinction of American Berkshires altogether. Steele recommended that breeders practice linebreeding and introduce new blood to their herds.<sup>50</sup>

Numerous commentators remarked on “the decadence of the Berkshire,” as the *Southern Cultivator* labeled it, and “the Suicide of the Berkshires,” as a series of articles in the *Breeder’s Gazette* termed it.<sup>51</sup> Although not all writers agreed that the source of the problem was inbreeding, by the end of the 1910s many observers concurred that Berkshire hogs were entering a period of reproductive crisis. The *Southern Cultivator*, for example, suggested that breeders overemphasized “fancy points” like the distinctive Berkshire head and stout hooves at the expense of functional characteristics such as the speed and efficiency of weight gain. In that narrative, the aesthetic elements of hog bodies had seduced Berkshire breeders and made them lose sight of the basic elements of business. The editors of the *Berkshire World* seemed to concur with that assessment. In 1911, after all, they had warned their readers that

hogs like the human races decrease in constitutional vigor, prolificacy and ruggedness as the conditions surrounding them become more and more artificial. It is obvious that during the past ten years the Berkshire breed as a whole has undergone marked refinement, with the result that some of its most valuable characteristics have degenerated to some extent. . . . A neat, compact, smooth, low-set Berkshire, fine of bone and in its exterior suggesting the quintessence of porcine aristocracy, is a pleasant picture for the artistic eye, but it is an undesirable hog with which to improve a herd. Some of the breeds of swine are being “civilized” out of existence; they are losing the prime qualities on which profitable usefulness depends. Degeneracy has begun in the Berkshire camp.

In another issue, the editors of the *Berkshire World* argued that proper exercise was necessary to “save the breeds of stock as well as our own race from extinction.” A 1914 editorial claimed that Berkshire “vitality” was waning because of “artificial conditions and comparative luxury.” Such decadence resulted in diminished “fecundity” and increased susceptibility to disease. “It is with hogs as it is with the human race; over-civilization defeats its own ends,” the editorial continued.<sup>52</sup>

Such descriptions linked Berkshire degeneracy and the “suicide of the race” to failing *human* reproductive mastery—that is, to the failure of breeders to master both their animals’ bodies and the challenges of accumulating animal capital. The editorials described this crisis of porcine reproduction using the idioms of the human “race suicide” controversy: “degeneracy,” “over-civilization,” and “luxury.” But the three editorials did not simply deploy the same language; they also explicitly announced that the mismanagement of human and nonhuman reproductions had identical causes and effects—that white reproductive mastery, as such, was neither generated nor deployed exclusively in the context of human reproduction. The sustained and intimate management of hog reproduction provided turn-of-the-century commenters with vital information to interpret the arc of human reproduction, the state of American civilization, and whiteness.<sup>53</sup>

Breeders worked in several directions on this terrain. In an article endorsing infanticide, sterilization, and marriage registries, the breeder Freeman Wilson claimed that “if we were as careful and discriminating in respect of our own heredity as we are in regard to that of our pedigreed live stock we should see a marked improvement in the human race within a few generations.” By contrast, “The Useful Member,” a poem published in the *Berkshire World’s* “home” section, used dairy cows to critique maternalist activists: “My cow she never went to school / To learn to be a mother.” Other breeders took their boars and bulls as models. In 1914 the men of Illinois, for example, founded a “Famous Fathers Club.” Men with ten or more children were eligible to join.

“The object of this organization is to encourage the raising of large families of healthy and intelligent children,” explained an article in *Farm Home*, “and to demonstrate the fact that Illinois is not on the map as the race suicide land and to emphasize the fact that its fame as a great live stock breeding state is not confined to one class of animals, but that it is equally famous for its fine herds of cattle and swine; its fine flocks of sheep; its fine studs; and its large families of exceptionally fine children.” The club elected Edward F. Dunne, father of thirteen and then governor of Illinois, as its president.<sup>54</sup>

This kind of agrarian pronatalism was common in early twentieth-century rural American popular culture. The historian Laura Lovett, for example, has documented the variety of human eugenic exhibits—“better baby contests” and “fitter family contests,” for example—that comingled with displays of purebred livestock at agricultural expositions.<sup>55</sup> Similarly, the USDA’s rural youth clubs sponsored “4-H health contests” at county and state fairs for millions of white rural youth and, thus, transposed idealizations of purebred animals to the “fit” bodies of rural youth.<sup>56</sup> These popular cultural artifacts gesture at the agricultural origins of much of the early twentieth-century American eugenic movement. Such movements claimed to derive both knowledge and authority from expertise generated in the context of animal husbandry.<sup>57</sup> Take, for example, the genealogy of the American Genetics Association, the mainline eugenics advocacy and research organization originally formed in 1906 as the “Eugenics Committee” of the American Breeders Association.<sup>58</sup> Charles Davenport, soon to be the nation’s most influential eugenics researcher for his work at the Eugenics Records Office in Cold Harbor, New York, served as the Eugenics Committee’s secretary. When the American Breeder Association launched a publication in 1910, the *American Breeders Magazine* (later renamed the *Journal of Heredity*), Davenport recommended as an intellectual model for his readers the “ideal of the hard-headed, critical, and practical study that characterizes the work of our best plant and animal breeders.” And on that note, Davenport encouraged readers to write him to obtain “blank family records . . . *pedigrees*” that would be filled out and returned.<sup>59</sup>

The pervasiveness of agricultural authority in eugenic discourse and its ubiquitous diffusion throughout rural culture offer insight into the sustained popularity of eugenic logics long after their dismissal by academic biologists and even after the supposed cautionary example of Nazi eugenics. The endurance of eugenic thought in American life may owe no small measure to the success with which the livestock industry has, in subsequent decades, publicly and vocally announced its mastery of animal reproduction. The management

of animal reproduction in livestock agriculture—through artificial insemination, farrowing crates, and hormonal manipulation—only intensified during the twentieth century. That management has directly contributed to human reproductive technology, even as it has bolstered husbandry’s claims of expert authority.<sup>60</sup>

Panicked announcements of the “suicide” of the Berkshires at the turn of the century were not reducible to white masculinity’s contemporaneous crisis of reproduction, the crisis’s agrarian tropes and knowledges, or even the various eugenic programs mobilized in the wake of the crisis that sought to improve the nation’s breeding. Hog breeds could be extinguished: the Byfield, Irish Grazer, Big China, Spanish Red, for example, had all but vanished from American farms by 1900.<sup>61</sup> Berkshire “race suicide” was, in part, the rapid ascent of the Duroc-Jersey and Poland-China swine in the Corn Belt, breeds that grew fatter much more quickly than Berkshires. Compounding this ascent, pork prices cratered in the early 1920s, as the agricultural commodity bubble created by World War I collapsed. Berkshire race suicide emerged at this intersection of crises: a particular crisis of animal capital accumulation and a popular crisis of white masculinity. The terms of Berkshire race suicide soldered strange identifications between breeders and their boars made stranger still by the fact that breeders were, indeed, economically dependent on animal reproduction. Breeders were not merely projecting their own fears of waning potency onto their boars; the slouching popularity of Berkshire swine was objective evidence of a failure of reproductive mastery.

Invocations of livestock race suicide referred to both humans and animals insofar as intensive breeding materially and viscerally invested humans in the reproduction of their breeding stock. Race suicide, then, described the conditions of both a symbolic economy of race and gender and a material economy of flesh and reproduction—economies breeders precariously straddled and struggled to master. As breeders governed the desires and couplings of hogs with an increasing intensity precisely to obtain this mastery, the lessons of that governance migrated back to reshape how they saw their own humanity, its qualifications, and the possibilities for its perfection. Scholars of race and animals both can observe the degree to which human racial categories were ecologically embedded in this moment: human racial difference was not reducible to or coincident with speciative difference, but systems of racialization were, nevertheless, necessarily trans-speciative. Racial knowledge emerged from the visceral entanglements of humans and nonhumans, and the orchestration of nonhuman breeding served as a metaphor and an experimental model for the governance of human reproduction.

Such complex material and symbolic multispecies entanglements persist in all agricultural spaces. Agriculture can be effectively defined as the managed reproduction and destruction of nonhuman life for the expansion of (qualified) human life. Agricultural spaces, from this view, must be reconsidered as paradigmatically biopolitical. Given as well the primacy of settler colonialism and chattel slavery as forms of agricultural organization, agricultural history should be searched anew as a laboratory for multispecies biopolitical orchestration. This biopolitics of agriculture foregrounds those persisting links—those vital technologies of life and death, race, and sex—that still join humans with other animals.

#### Notes

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