

**IMAGINING NATION AND IMAGINARY AMERICANS: RACE,
IMMIGRATION, AND AMERICAN IDENTITY IN THE FICTION OF SALMAN
RUSHDIE, RALPH ELLISON, AND WILLIAM FAULKNER**

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation argues that fiction by Salman Rushdie, Ralph Ellison, and William Faulkner registers the destabilizing effect of immigrants on concepts of national identity in their imagined versions of America. Chapter One proposes that these writers organize their representations of American-ness according to competing visions of national identity. Faulkner and Ellison each wrestles with an “internal” hybridity arising from ratios of native black and white. By contrast, Rushdie emphasizes an “external” hybridity premised upon unceasing global immigration. The dissertation first analyzes the implications for American identity defined by an uprooted cosmopolitan’s account of U.S. experience. Chapter Two argues that Salman Rushdie shifts the interests of his early fiction —post-colonial migrants to the Old World — to neo-colonial immigrants to the New World whose possibilities for self-realization are preemptively defined by America’s military, economic and cultural presence in the Third World. The dissertation establishes Rushdie’s imagined America, a 1990’s global metropolis, as the problematic

and humorous fulfillment of Ellison's and Faulkner's worries about the nation's interests and composition if these were exclusively circumscribed by immigrant presences.

Chapter Three argues that Ralph Ellison juxtaposes the "Great Migration" with the "New Immigration" to suggest contemporary consequences of the nation's failure to recognize the a priori American-ness of its black population. Seeking cultural integration between native blacks and whites, Ellison depicts the historical injustices, linguistic confusions and political dangers posed by Eastern European immigrants who gain recognition as Americans before southern blacks in pre-WWII New York. Chapter Four argues that William Faulkner regards the presence of Italian immigrants in the U.S. as undermining his efforts to imagine an America free to resolve persistent tensions between North and South, black and white, rural and urban. Alert to the 1920's nativist movement and to southern debates over "New Immigration," Faulkner imagines racially indeterminate, mobile Italian newcomers upsetting internal balances that were necessary for rectifying America's and the South's historical failings. Chapter Five contends that American identity, whether imagined as black and white or as a series of migratory mixings, occludes a primordial hybridity represented by Native Americans. The dissertation concludes by theorizing about American Literature's globalized status.