

One faction claims that the superior classes like ourselves, in fact the great British stock, had ought to produce as many kids as possible, to keep in control of this great nation and maintain the ideals for which we and our ancestors have always stood, while these lower masses hadn't ought to spawn their less intellectual masses. But then again, there's them that hold and maintain that now we've cut down immigration, we need a supply of cheap labor, and where get it better than by encouraging these Wops and Hunks and Spigs and so on to raise as many brats as they can?¹⁰

The Nordic's crass statement of the conflict between the ideal "control of this great nation" on the one hand and the ever-pressing need for "cheap labor" on the other fairly sums up a tension between the imperatives of democracy and the imperatives of capitalism that is integral to American political culture. Historically this tension has heavily inflected American race thinking. Categories of race have fluctuated, not only in response to the imperatives of a segmented labor market, or to the "spontaneous allegiance" of white workers based on their own perceived whiteness, but also to perceptions of "fitness for self-government." The very "inferiority" that suits a given group to a particular niche in the economy, for instance, may raise serious questions about its participation in a self-governing democracy; the very "psychological wage" of whiteness that might win workers' allegiance to capitalism confers a degree of political entitlement altogether threatening to the republic. In short, the idea of a wage economy established "on the white basis" may be useful, whereas a *government* "on the white basis" may be quite dangerous. Hence a major element of the contest over whiteness: the Celt may be white, but he is nonetheless a savage. (A second element, of course, is the white immigrants' own view of their relative consanguinity with native whites. Many came ashore bearing historical baggage of racial thought and racial perception themselves; Celtic or Hebrew identity was not merely pressed upon them from without by native republicans convinced of Anglo-Saxon virtue, but was a *self*-ascription as well—a politically useful idiom in the service, say, of Irish nationalism or Zionism.)

This is not to minimize the significance of economics and class in racial formation. Race and class are intertwined in ways that even Roediger and Allen have yet to explore fully. First, republican notions of "independence" had both racial and economic valences; the white men's movement for "Free Labor, Free Soil, and Free Men" was but the flipside of certain

racial notions such as a belief in the Indian's innate "dependency." Second, racial stereotypes like inborn "laziness," as applied to Mexicans or Indians, were economic assessments that had economic consequences (in the form, typically, of dispossession). Third, race has been central to American conceptions of property (who can own property and who can *be* property, for example), and property in its turn is central to republican notions of self-possession and the "stake in society" necessary for democratic participation. Fourth, political standing, doled out on racial terms (such as the naturalization code limiting citizenship to "free white persons"), translates immediately into economic realities such as property rights or labor-market segmentation. And fifth, in cases in American political culture ranging from the Mexican population of Old California to the immigrant Jews of New York's Lower East Side, class markers have often been read as inborn racial characteristics: members of the working class in these groups have been viewed in more sharply racial terms than have their upper-class compatriots.¹¹

It is not my interest, then, to minimize the significance of class and economics; rather, since class has received most of the attention afforded questions of whiteness in the scholarship thus far, I will go into other areas more fully—especially the areas of national subjectivity and national belonging—as they both inflect and are inflected by racial conceptions of peoplehood, self-possession, fitness for self-government, and collective destiny.

Reviewing the Dillingham Commission Report on Immigration, which significantly constricted whiteness as it bore on eligibility for naturalized citizenship, the eugenicist Harry Laughlin of the Carnegie Foundation remarked, "We in this country have been so imbued with the idea of democracy, or the equality of all men, that we have left out of consideration the matter of blood or natural inborn hereditary mental and moral differences. No man who breeds pedigreed plants and animals can afford to neglect this thing."¹² On the contrary, the "idea of democracy" had never neglected "this thing" about the matter of blood or natural inborn differences, and contested notions of "inborn difference" are themselves as traceable to the imperatives of democracy as they are to the imperatives of capitalism. Chinese Exclusion and the precarious political status of free blacks in the North are two of the more obvious evidences of this. The topography of American politics from the Revolution through the twentieth century has been a contest over the "inborn differences" among various groups—not least, among the "free white persons" who entered the

polity under the terms of the naturalization law of 1790. The eighteenth century's free white persons became the nineteenth century's Celts, Slavs, Hebrews, Iberics, Latins, and Anglo-Saxons, who in turn became the twentieth century's Caucasians, as popular recognition of consanguinity or racial difference fluctuated in response to national, regional, and local circumstances.

Whiteness and Citizenship

In 1790 Congress enacted "that all free white persons who, have, or shall migrate into the United States, and shall give satisfactory proof, before a magistrate, by oath, that they intend to reside therein, and shall take an oath of allegiance, and shall have resided in the United States for one whole year, shall be entitled to the rights of citizenship."¹³ So natural was the relationship of whiteness to citizenship that, in the debate which followed, the racial dimension of the act remained unquestioned. Members of the first Congress argued over the one-year requirements (should it have been two or three?); they wondered whether Jews and Catholics should be eligible; they entertained a proposal for a period of political "probation" for newcomers and pondered limitations on the right to hold political office; they argued over foreigners' rights of land-holding and inheritance; they worried about the potential threat posed by "monarchists," former "nobles," and criminals from other lands. They debated the naturalization process and wondered whether they had made citizenship "much too easy" to attain—should claimants be required, for example, to provide witnesses to their good character? In general the nation's first legislators saw the law as too inclusive rather than too exclusive, and nowhere did they pause to question the limitation of naturalized citizenship to "white persons."¹⁴

Modern commentators ranging from Gunnar Myrdal to Judith Shklar have offered some version of the argument that a democracy built upon systematic disenfranchisements is politically hypocritical. The political history of inequality represents a "dilemma," an uncomfortable betrayal of the "American Creed," according to Myrdal; American society has been "actively and purposefully false to its own vaunted principles," argues Shklar. But "hypocrisy"—even Pierre van der Berghe's condemnatory *Herrenvolk democracy*—is too simple a frame to do justice to the historical conjunction of racialism and American democracy.¹⁵ Exclusions based upon race and gender did not represent mere lacunae in an other-

wise liberal philosophy of political standing; nor were the nation's exclusions simply contradictions of the democratic creed. Rather, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries these inclusions and exclusions formed an inseparable, interdependent figure and ground in the same ideological tapestry of republicanism.

That whiteness would be so entwined with ideas of citizenship as to be invisible during the congressional debate was overdetermined. The practical and ideological meaning of color in the early republic is worth examining. Most important was the practical issue of what was required of a citizen. Political identity was rendered racial identity at least implicitly in the earliest documents establishing a European political order in the New World, the colonial charters, inasmuch as the limits of the polity, the duties of its members, and its mission as a community were articulated in the context of encounter. References to the New World's "barbarous" or "savage" inhabitants were standard in the charters' articulations of political necessity. The Third Charter of Virginia (1611-1612), for instance, dedicated the colony to "the propagation of the Christian Religion, and Reclaiming of People barbarous, to Civility and Humanity." The Declaration of Proposals of the Lord Proprietor of Carolina (1663) similarly declared "a pious and good intention for the propagation of the Christian faith amongst the barbarous and ignorant Indians," while the Charter of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations (also 1663) committed the members of that colony to "pursuing, with peacable and loyall mindes [the] sober, serious, and religious intentions . . . [of] the gaineing over and conversione of the poore ignorant Indian natives."¹⁶

Whereas in these documents the presence of "savages" or "barbarous nations" defines the boundaries of a polity of *unsavage*, *unbarbarous* Englishmen, in the Charter of New England (1620) the very absence of such peoples defined the new political community in this "wilderness," although to much the same effect. We have been given "certainly to knowe," ran the text, that

there hath by God's Visitation raigned a wonderfull Plague, together with many horrible Slaughters and Murthers, committed amongst the Savages and brutish people there, heertofore inhabiting, in a manner to the utter Destruction, Devastacion, and Depopulacion of the whole Territorye . . . whereby We in our Judgment are persuaded and satisfied that the appointed Time is come in which Almighty God in his great Goodness and Bountie towards Us and our People, hath

thought fitt and determined, that these large and goodly Territoryes, deserted as it were by their natural Inhabitants, should be possessed and enjoyed by such of our Subjects and our People as heertofore have and hereafter shall by His Mercie and Favour, and by His Powerfull Arme, be directed and conducted thither.¹⁷

Where "savage" peoples were not evoked in the charters as a field of opportunity for the work of propagating Christianity, they were evoked as probable foes on an imagined field of battle. The Charter of Maryland (1632) granted power to the baron of Baltimore to raise an army "because, in so remote a region, placed among so many barbarous Nations, the Incursions as well of the Barbarians themselves, as of other Enemies, Pirates and Ravagers, probably will be feared." This army was "to wage War, and to pursue even beyond the Limits of their Province, the Enemies and Ravagers aforesaid, infesting those parts by Land and by Sea, and (if God shall grant it) to vanquish and captivate them, and the Captives to put to Death, or, according to their Discretion, to save [them]." The power to muster an army was likewise included in the Grant of the Province of Maine (1639), "because in a Country soe farr distant and seated amongst soe many barbarous nations the Intrusions or Invasions aswell of the barbarous people as of Pirates and other enemies maye be justly feared." The Preamble to the Georgia Charter (1732), perhaps more vividly than any other, demonstrates the meaning of "polity" and the responsibilities of citizenship in the New World:

Our provinces in North America, have been frequently ravaged by Indian enemies; more especially that of South Carolina, which in the late war, by the neighboring savages, was laid waste with fire and sword, and great numbers of English inhabitants, miserably massacred; and our loving subjects who now inhabit them, by reason of the smallness of their numbers, will in case of a new war, be exposed to the late calamities; inasmuch as their whole southern frontier continueth unsettled, and lieth open to said savages.¹⁸

This colonial line of thinking culminated in July 1776, in the Declaration of Independence: among the "injuries and usurpations" attributed to the king, he has "endeavored to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers the merciless Indian savages, whose known rule of warfare is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes, and conditions."

These colonial documents do not use the word "white," but between

the charters of the early seventeenth century and the naturalization law of the late eighteenth, the word "white" did attain wide usage in New World political discourse, and it was written into an immense body of statutory law. In the colonies the designation "white" appeared in laws governing who could marry whom; who could participate in the militia; who could vote or hold office; and in laws governing contracts, indenture, and enslavement. Although there were some exceptions, most laws of this kind delineated the populace along lines of color, and the word "white" was commonly used in conferring rights, never in abridging them (with the single exception of proscribing whom "whites" could marry).¹⁹ The designation "white" appeared in the Articles of Confederation as well, though not in the Constitution.²⁰ As scholars like Leon Higginbotham, Jr., have suggested, in practice the idea of citizenship had become thoroughly entwined with the idea of "whiteness" (and maleness) because what a citizen really was, at bottom, was someone who could help put down a slave rebellion or participate in Indian wars. This meaning of citizenship emerged, for instance, in congressional debate over the relationship of Americans' land-holdings to their former nations of residence: "A person owing no allegiance to a sovereign, ought not to hold lands under its protection, because he cannot be called upon and obliged to give that support which invasion or insurrection may render necessary."²¹ In other words, the potential for "invasion or insurrection" and its attendant "necessities" came to define citizenship for the New World polity.²²

Nor is it surprising that when Congress first penned "An Act more effectually to provide for the National Defence by establishing an Uniform Militia throughout the United States" (1792), the new militia's participants were defined as "each and every free able-bodied white male citizen of the respective states." It was unlikely that a Negro or an Indian should be required to "provide himself with a good musket or firelock, a sufficient bayonet and belt, two spare flints, and a knapsack, a pouch with a box therein to contain not less than twenty-four cartridges."²³ The very notion of "providing for the common defence" was inherently racial in the context of slaveholding on the one hand and frontier settlement on the other. Thus when the legislators of 1790 limited naturalization to "free white persons," they were employing language that had become familiar—for instance, in Georgia's limitation of the franchise to "all male white inhabitants" (1777), or in South Carolina's requirement that every voter and officeholder be a "free white male."²⁴

In addition to the racially inflected question of "common defense," as

scholars like Benjamin Ringer and Ronald Takaki have shown, whiteness was tacitly but irretrievably written into republican ideology as well.²⁵ The American Revolution radically altered the lines of authority from the Crown to "the people," these scholars argue, but it left entirely untouched various Enlightenment assumptions about who "the people" properly ought to be. The experiment in democratic government seemed to call for a polity that was disciplined, virtuous, self-sacrificing, productive, far-seeing, and wise—traits that were all racially inscribed in eighteenth-century Euro-American thought. With its abolition of monarchic power and its disruption of strict, top-down lines of political authority, the new democratic order would require of its participants a remarkable degree of *self-possession*—a condition already denied literally to Africans in slavery and figuratively to all "nonwhite" or "heathen" peoples in prevailing conceptions of human capacity. In his study of the Roman precedents for American republican ideology, M. N. S. Sellers enumerates the elements of classical republicanism this way:

(1) pursuit of justice and the common good, through (2) the rule of law, under (3) a mixed and balanced government, comprising (4) a sovereign people (5) a deliberative senate, and (6) an elected magistracy. Americans in every faction endorsed this basic conception of republican government and the patrician vision of (7) ordered liberty and (8) public virtue it sought to protect.

This was to be an empire "of law and reason, not arbitrary will or passion"; and indeed in this configuration *passion* itself is among the chief villains or potential tyrants. And unbridled passion, if difficult enough to keep under control among Europeans, was the veritable hallmark of "the savage."²⁶ As John R. Commons summed it up in 1907, "It is not enough that equal opportunity to participate in making and enforcing the laws should be vouchsafed to all—it is equally important that all should be capable of such participation."²⁷ Thus does the republican ideal of "the consent of the governed" become inextricably linked to its unfortunate shadow, the gendered, almost always racial question of "fitness for self-government."²⁸

Gordon Wood, perhaps the foremost student of the Revolutionary generation's republicanism, illumines the extent to which inclusions and exclusions based on whiteness did not contradict, but rather *constituted*, republican principles, though he himself is little concerned with race. Wood's gloss of popular republicanism contains several features that

dovetail with broader Euro-American racial assumptions of the period. Among them are, first, an inclination to see "Anglo-Saxon" England as the seat of political genius in the world, thus removing the English to a special political plane; second, a conception of humanity as suspended precariously between vice and virtue, between reason and passion—a struggle whose outcome was scarcely in question for "savages" and "barbarous nations," however perfectible these may have been in theory; and third, a conception of the "public good" that depended upon the polity's constituting "a homogenous body whose interests when candidly considered are one," and upon individual members' capacity for reflection, restraint, and self-sacrifice. In the political thinking of the period, according to Wood, "a republic was such a delicate polity precisely because it demanded an extraordinary moral character in the people."²⁹ With its emphasis upon community and self-sacrifice, Wood elsewhere elaborates, with its reasoned suppression of "private desires" for the sake of "the public interest," republican government placed "an enormous burden" on individual members and "demanded far more of . . . citizens than monarchies did of their subjects."³⁰ (This at a time when the definition of the word "Negro" in a Philadelphia encyclopedia could include "idleness, treachery, revenge, debauchery, nastiness and intemperance.")³¹

It should be emphasized here that this was merely the dominant, not the monolithic, view of the relationship between republican government and race in the period. The Revolution laid the groundwork for abolitionism, as Wood notes, in that "the republican attack on dependency [of all kinds] compelled Americans to see the deviant character of slavery and to confront the institution as they never had to before."³² The attorney general of Maryland, for one, insisted in 1788 that slavery was "inconsistent with the *genius of republicanism* and has a tendency to *destroy those principles* on which it is *supported* as it *lessens the sense of the equal rights of mankind*, and habituates us to *tyranny and oppression*."³³ Generations later an abolitionist like Theodore Parker could assert, "If slavery continues, democracy goes down; every form of republicanism, or of constitutional monarchy, will perish; and absolute military despotism take their place at last."³⁴

But however potent republican logic could prove for egalitarian argumentation, the anti-egalitarian dimension of republicanism was ratified again and again in the political conduct of the new nation. The formulae that maintained this dual civic terrain of the "fit" and the "unfit" for self-government included the white-supremacist naturalization law of 1790;

later, the anomalous construction of American Indians neither as "nations" nor as "citizens," but as "domestic dependent nations"; later still, the enforced alienation of Asian immigrants as "immigrants ineligible for citizenship"; and even in the wake of Emancipation, the Black Codes passed at the local level in various places to keep African-Americans in a political region somewhere well short of true freedom.

Most telling in this respect is not the conquest of American Indians and the policy of removal, nor even the seeming contradiction of slaveholding in a democratic republic, but rather the political status of *free* blacks in the antebellum period.³⁵ Within this republican framework of racially recognized "fitness for self-government," *free* blacks, not enslaved blacks, represented the greater political anomaly; indeed, according to one legal scholar, *free black* was a "schizophrenic description" in the American setting.³⁶ During the late-eighteenth-century debates over slavery and abolition, bondage itself represented only one half of the equation; the political fate of freed slaves was another, in some ways thornier issue. Even setting aside the questions of abstract moral principle, states' rights, and slaveholders' rights in property that framed discussions of abolition, the question remained, what was to become of the ex-chattel? And in most discussants' minds Emancipation decidedly would not imply blacks' equality as citizens. Thus it was that even the most radical blueprints for the abolition of slavery involved, in one way or another, the *disappearance* of the freed slaves—either a colonization scheme would remove them to some distant land, or, by the magic of eighteenth-century ethnological principles, "in the process of time the very color would be extinct and there would be none but whites."³⁷

"It will probably be asked, Why not retain and incorporate the blacks into the state?" wrote Thomas Jefferson in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*. "Deep rooted prejudices entertained by the whites; ten thousand recollections, by the blacks, of the injuries they have sustained; new provocations; the real distinctions which nature has made; and many other circumstances, will divide us into parties, and produce convolutions which will probably never end but in the extermination of the one or the other race." The republican emphasis upon a homogeneous polity did figure in Jefferson's thinking. But he went on to detail "the real distinctions which nature has made" between the two races. He rhapsodized over the greater beauty of whiteness; he noted with unelaborated portent "the preference of the Oranootan for the black woman over those of his

own species"; and he asserted that "in reason [blacks] are much inferior" and "in imagination they are dull, tasteless, and anomalous."³⁸

Jefferson's comments in *Notes on the State of Virginia*—"proving that negroes were by nature an inferior race of beings," as one legislator had it—were quoted in support of a pro-slavery position during the first Congress's consideration of an abolitionist memorial presented by the Quakers. As William Smith (S.C.) characterized Jefferson's thinking, according to the transcript, "that respectable author, who was desirous of countenancing emancipation, was on a consideration of the subject induced candidly to avow that the difficulties appeared insurmountable." Blacks would of necessity "continue as a distinct people," a prospect intolerable in a self-governing republic.³⁹

Indeed, African-American political standing in the "free" states of the North underscores the extent to which citizenship and whiteness were conjoined. Whether or not *slavery* was just became a point of much contention, summoning good republicanist arguments on both sides. But human bondage aside, white republicans came to a much easier consensus on the question of whether free blacks should or could participate in the republic as full citizens—whether, that is, they were "fit for self-government." Alexis de Tocqueville noted in 1831 that "the prejudice of race appears to be stronger in the states that have abolished slavery than in those where it still exists; and nowhere is it so intolerant as in those states where servitude has never been known." As Leon Litwack has documented, well after abolition in the Northern states whites continued jealously to guard the distinction between legal protections on the one hand—the right to life, liberty, and property—and full political equality on the other. At a Constitutional Convention in Pennsylvania in 1837, for instance, during a rousing speech on the benefits of extending the right of suffrage—"that right, sacred and dear to every American citizen"—one delegate could unproblematically add the limiting clause: "I use the word citizen as not embracing the coloured population."⁴⁰ Or again, an 1842 Senate committee in the "free" state of Michigan could comfortably assert that "our government is formed by, for the benefit of, and to be controlled by the descendants of European nations." Negro suffrage would thus be "inexpedient and impolitic."⁴¹ Like the usage of the word "white" in the 1790 naturalization law, moreover, restrictions on the rights of free blacks in the North were characteristically adopted without much debate, as a matter of common assumption. By the time Justice Roger Taney handed

down the *Dred Scott* decision in 1857, in which he asserted that blacks possessed no rights "which the white man was bound to respect"—a decree often singled out for its shockingly glib violation of democratic ideals—a long history of social and political practice, North and South, was on his side.⁴²

Although merely implicit in much of the writing of the Revolutionary period, this critical link between race and republicanism would become increasingly explicit as the nineteenth century wore on, and especially as the slavery question gained prominence in public discussion. As J. H. Van Evrie, a vociferous pro-slavery propagandist, argued, the presence of the "inferior" Negro and American Indian in North America actually *led to* America's grand experiment in democracy: their presence "led directly to the establishment of a new system and a new civilization based on foundations of everlasting truth—the legal and political equality of the race, or of all those whom the Almighty Creator has Himself made equal."⁴³ Stephen Douglas made the same point at several junctures in his debates with Abraham Lincoln, asserting not only that "this government of ours is founded on the white basis," but also that "a negro, an Indian, or any other man of inferior race" should be permitted only those "rights, privileges and immunities which he is capable of exercising consistent with the safety of society." The framers, he argued, had "no reference either to the negro, the savage Indians, the Fejee, the Malay, or any other inferior and degraded race, when they spoke of the equality of men."⁴⁴

Deeply embedded racial assumptions of republican ideology, then, in combination with the practical "necessities" of a slaveholding, settler democracy on a "savage" continent, led to an unquestioned acceptance of whiteness as a prerequisite for naturalized citizenship. In the wake of the 1790 naturalization law, the word and idea "white" appeared in a variety of state laws governing voting, officeholding, and apportionment. Laws governing the marriage or sexual relations of "whites" with "blacks" or "Indians," too, were extended in some of the newly formed states, and created anew in certain others.⁴⁵ Legal and statutory references to "whites" after 1790 ranged from boiler-plate references to "white inhabitants" or "free white male inhabitants," as in the state constitutions of Alabama and Arkansas (1819, 1836), to the rather extraordinary language of the Illinois constitution (1848), which not only provided that the militia "shall consist of all free male able-bodied persons (negroes, mulattoes, and Indians excepted)," but also mandated that the General

Assembly shall "pass such laws as will effectually prohibit free persons of color from immigrating to and settling in this State."⁴⁶

In the first half of the nineteenth century, politically restrictive uses of the word "white" likewise appeared in the constitutions of Missouri (1812), Mississippi (1817), Connecticut (1818), California (1849, 1879), and Minnesota Territory (1849). Conversely, eighteen state constitutions specifically classed blacks as "dependents," thus assigning them the same political status as white women and children of all colors.⁴⁷ Although popular prejudices certainly did exist against *certain* groups of "white persons"—Jews and Catholics in many areas, for instance—still the alchemy of slaveholding and the frontier was powerful enough that in general Europeans, like Brackenridge's "bog-trotter" Teague O'Regan, became simply "white persons" in matters of race and the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

Whiteness and Science

The racist practices that normalized the connection between whiteness and citizenship by 1790 had been carried out, as it were, without the assistance of modern racism. From the early 1600s to the early 1800s Euro-American policies of conquest, Indian removal, slave-trading, and disenfranchisement relied on a logic of "civilization" versus "barbarism" or "savagery," or of "Christianity" versus "heathendom." Peoples might be displaced because of their benighted beliefs or their barbarous customs—their nomadic indifference to the benefits of enclosing and "improving" land, for instance; or their legitimate enslavement might be understood as owing to the mark they bore of God's curse on Ham.⁴⁸ Religion itself carried physical markers, as far as seventeenth-century Euro-Americans were concerned, as when James Otis, a dissenter on the slavery question, wondered in 1764 whether "'tis right to enslave a man because he is black? Will short curled hair like wool *instead of Christian hair* . . . help the argument? Can any logical inference in favor of slavery be drawn from a flat nose?"⁴⁹ God's judgments and biological facts were operating terribly closely here, but this was not racial, exactly. Although Blumenbach had lighted upon his most lovely Georgian skull and so had spoken the group "Caucasians" into existence in the late eighteenth century, it was not until the nineteenth that the language of racism proper—the language of "genus," "species," "types," "poly-" and "monogenesis,"

“craniometrics,” “phenotypes,” and “genotypes”—would frame discussion of human groups, their capacities, and their proper relationship to one another.

If the political meaning of whiteness seems barely to have changed with the advent of scientific inquiry into human types, the epistemological basis of whiteness and its “others” did change drastically. The historian Audrey Smedley has nicely delineated the rise of scientific racialism in five elements that distinguished it from earlier understandings of human diversity, regardless of how similar the consequences for social and political relationships between, say, slaves and masters were. It entailed (1) the classification of human groups as “discrete and biotic entities” measured by physical and behavioral variations; (2) an inegalitarian ethos that required hierarchical ordering of human types; (3) the belief that outer physical characteristics were but markers of inner intellectual, moral, or temperamental qualities; (4) the notion that these qualities were heritable; and (5) the belief that “the imputed differences, believed fixed and unalterable, could never be bridged or transcended,” so distinctly had these populations been created.⁵⁰

Although the scientific outlook represents a new way of viewing “difference,” the development of such an outlook on human types was not a complete break from the conquests and enslavements of the past. On the contrary, the new sciences that arose to theorize the relationship among the world’s peoples—ethnology, anthropology, craniometry, anthropometry, and phrenology among them—owed a great deal to precisely those social questions generated by Euro-American expansionism and the intensifying slavery debate. In his instructions to the explorer Meriwether Lewis, for instance, Thomas Jefferson had asserted that “the commerce which may be carried on with the people inhabiting the line you will pursue, renders a knolege of those people important.” He went on rather frankly to instruct that, “considering the interest which every nation has in extending & strengthening the authority of reason and justice among the people around them, it will be useful to acquire what knolege you can of the state of morality, religion, & information among them; as it may better enable those who may endeavor to civilize and instruct them.” Decades later, in his paean to westward expansion, “A Passage to India,” Walt Whitman would appropriately number the ethnologist among the “noble inventors,” “scientists,” “chemists,” and “geologists” who were at the helm of the new, expansive epoch.⁵¹

The development of various scientific schemes for the understanding

and classification of humanity, wrote Franz Boas, one of the most creative and prolific participants in the project of modern anthropology, owed much to "the passions that were aroused by the practical and ethical aspects of the slavery question."⁵² The imperialism question weighed in heavily, too. The rising nineteenth-century regime of ethnological knowledge, produced by Euro-American expansionism and slave-trading from its beginnings, in its turn created new epistemologies of human difference and thus buttressed a political order based upon physicality and its "recognition." As David Spurr has observed, once "'knowledge' of racial difference is made a condition for political power . . . such knowledge loses its status as an independent, a priori basis for practice, and becomes instead a mere aspect of practice, a construct produced by the same practice it would claim logically to precede."⁵³ Thus the racial sciences were in fact *racializing* sciences, ever responding to the political imperatives of the slavery question, questions of territorial expansion, and, later, the vexing immigration question, and at the same time creating in their wake new kinds of "certainty" that "explained" slavery, expansion, and the trouble with immigrants.

Within the context of European and American exploration, trade, expansionism, enslavement, and conquest, then, a rising genre of scientific explication emerged to enumerate, describe, and ultimately to rank the world's peoples. In the long view, science provided an alternative vocabulary to the polarities of "heathendom" and "Christianity" of religious discourse—a vocabulary keyed to physicality and "nature" rather than to belief, yet marking peoples nonetheless as possessing an inherent degree of righteousness, now refigured as innate *capacity*. Scientific debate between the late eighteenth century and the late nineteenth shifted from natural sciences that merely classified types, toward biological models that apprehended, explained, and thus ranked these types; it also shifted away from static conceptions of various types, toward more dynamic, evolutionary models of diversification through constant change. The scientific controversies and arguments couched within these general intellectual shifts included a bitter debate between adherents of "monogenesis" (who believed in a single origin for all human types) and adherents of "polygenesis" (who argued that human types themselves were so divergent as to indicate separate origins); between hereditarians and environmentalists; and between Darwinians and Lamarckians. These controversies have been ably documented elsewhere.⁵⁴

Most important for the present purposes is the extent to which these

scientific models altered the epistemology of race, lent a new authority to popular notions of "difference," and thus altered the understanding of whiteness. The relationship between the politics of expansionism and slavery on the one hand, and scientific "knowledge" on the other, is nowhere as clear as in the writings of Josiah Nott. Among the chief propagandists for polygenesis in the United States, Nott frankly rooted his scientific observations in the context of the social relations that had produced them. In a letter to J. D. B. DeBow, printed as a preface to his *Two Lectures on the Relationship between the Biblical and Physical History of Man* (1849), Nott articulated the close connection between his scientific understanding of diverse peoples and the daily rhythms of antebellum Mobile, Alabama: "Born in a slave state, and having passed our childhood and manhood in daily intercourse with the white and black races, it is but natural that you and I should have become deeply impressed not only by the physical but also by the moral and intellectual differences which exist between them: nor is it less natural that a doubt as to their common origin should suggest itself to our minds." Nott's polygenetic view thus both justifies and derives from the fact that the slave-holding South was his laboratory writ large. "The Almighty in his wisdom," he continued to DeBow, "has peopled our vast planet from many distant centers, instead of one, and with races or species originally and radically distinct."⁵⁵

Nor are Nott's scientific assessments of white supremacy limited to the "proofs" and "justifications" of black slavery. He also assigned science itself a key role in the imperialist enterprise—here, again, relying upon the "data" of domination for his justification of further domination: "The numberless attempts by the Caucasian race, during several thousand years, to bring the Mongol, Malay, Indian, and Negro, under the same religion, laws, manners, customs, etc., have failed, and must continue to fail, unless the science of Ethnography can strike out some new and more practical plan of operation."⁵⁶ Or again, demonstrating the tortuous circularity of empire, slave-trading, travel, scientific knowledge, and political necessity, Nott in *Types of Mankind* (1855) described the peoples of the eastern coast of Africa,

each [tribe] presenting physical characters more or less hideous; and, almost without exception, not merely in a barbarous, but superlatively savage state. All attempts toward humanizing them have failed. Hopes of eventual improvement in the condition of these brutish

families are entertained by none but missionaries of sanguine temperament and little instruction. Even the slaver rejects them.⁵⁷

Given the circumstances in which such research was undertaken—the power relations which supported it, the social and political necessities which defined it—it is no surprise that scholars who vigorously disagreed with one another on many theoretical and conceptual issues were virtually unanimous in the white supremacism of their scientific findings. Thus scholars on both sides of the Atlantic like Samuel Morton, Arthur Comte de Gobineau, and James Cowles Prichard, who took quite different positions on the question of single or diverse human origins, nonetheless made strikingly similar pronouncements regarding that "uppermost" division of humanity, the "white" or "Caucasian" race. The polygenist Morton declared in his *Crania Americana* (1839) that the "Caucasian" race was "distinguished for the facility with which it attains the highest intellectual endowments." Gobineau, for his part, would take the position of the agnostic on origins, even if he was convinced of "the inequality of human races" (as the title of his best-known work put the matter). Although "there are both scientific and religious reasons for *not* believing in a plurality of origins of our species," he wrote, "the various branches of the human family are distinguished by permanent and irradicable differences, both mentally and physically. They are unequal in intellectual capacity, in personal beauty, and in physical strength." His assessments of the world's peoples, moreover, were forged in a political ambience: he found that "white" peoples, for instance, "are gifted with relative energy, or rather with an energetic intelligence . . . greater physical power . . . extraordinary instinct for order . . . remarkable, even extreme, love of liberty, and are openly hostile to the formalism under which the Chinese are glad to vegetate, as well as to the strict despotism which is the only way of governing the Negro."⁵⁸

Prichard, for his part, was a strict monogenist, finding in the biological facts of interracial fertility undeniable proof that "all tribes of men are of one family." But his argument, too, was frankly bounded by the politics of the day. Although he noted that abolitionism was an object of scorn among most polygenists, for whom "the ultimate lot of the ruder tribes is a state of perpetual servitude," Prichard himself merely marshaled his *monogenesis*—his view of the similarity of human types—toward imperialism of a more benevolent stripe:

We contemplate among all the diversified tribes who are endowed

with reason and speech, the same internal feelings, appetites, aversions . . . We find everywhere the same susceptibility . . . of admitting the cultivation of these universal endowments, of opening the eyes of the mind to the more clear and luminous views which Christianity unfolds, of becoming moulded to the institutions of religion and of civilization.⁵⁹

The question, then, is simply whether white stewardship is to be benign or not—the *tenor* of European supremacy, not the fact of it, is the ultimate stake in the poly- versus monogenesis debate, so far as Prichard is concerned.

Political questions of slavery, expansion, and conquest continued to be highly visible in scientific writings about race as static conceptions of human difference gave way to a more dynamic view based on principles of evolution. Euro-American expansionism was clearly a significant part of Charles Darwin's laboratory as he theorized "the competition of tribe with tribe, race with race." "When civilized nations come into contact with barbarians the struggle is short," he averred, for instance, "except where a deadly climate gives its aid to the native race . . . We can see that the cultivation of the land will be fatal in many ways to the savages, for they cannot, or will not, change their habits." Nor was a stubborn clinging to old "habits" the chief crime of such "savages." Darwin gave voice to a supreme imperialist vision, when, in the closing lines of *The Descent of Man* (1871), he asserted, "I would as soon be descended from that heroic little monkey, who braved his dreaded enemy in order to save the life of his keeper; or from that old baboon, who, descending from the mountains, carried away in triumph his young comrade from a crowd of astonished dogs—as from a savage who delights to torture his enemies, offers up bloody sacrifices, practices infanticide without remorse, treats his wives like slaves, knows no decency, and is haunted by the grossest superstitions."⁶⁰

Because scientific inquiry was so rooted in the politics and practices of white supremacism, these writings tended to ratify the profound separation of whiteness from nonwhiteness that characterized pre-scientific (and hence merely protoracist) colonial policies and statutes. Among those who now seized upon scientific views to buttress political arguments were publicists like Van Evrie. His singular contribution to the scientific discourse of race involved not substance but simply volume. In tracts like his *Negroes and Negro Slavery* and in the pages of his pro-slavery *Weekly*

Caucasian, Van Evrie tirelessly popularized the scientific basis of white supremacy, though always peppering his science with a good dose of Biblical authority as well. Whereas Blumenbach had merely praised the physical beauty of "Caucasians" and held them out as an ideal type, Van Evrie now scanned the physiognomical surfaces for signs of a deeper, more abiding racial superiority. Thoroughly blending the aesthetic with the moral (and the patriarchal), Van Evrie waxed rhapsodic on the inner virtues betokened by the subtle beauties of the "Caucasian" face. "What is there at the same time so charming and so indicative of inner purity and innocence," he asked,

as the blush of maiden modesty? For an instant the face is scarlet, then . . . paler than ever in its delicate transparency; and these physical changes, beautiful as they may be to the eye, are rendered a thousand times more so by our consciousness that they reflect moral emotions infinitely more beautiful. Can anyone suppose such a thing possible to a black face? that these sudden and startling alterations of color, which reflect the moral perceptions and elevated nature of white woman, are possible to the negress?

Van Evrie later added that, although whiteness itself was "essential" in reflecting noble passions, "without the deeply cut and distinctly marked features of the Caucasian, color would be comparatively useless in reflecting the grander emotions of the soul."⁶¹

The crux for Van Evrie was that "the Almighty has obviously designed all His creatures—animal as well as human—for wise, beneficent, and useful purposes." Blacks were slaves not only by religious right and by longstanding American tradition, but by *nature*—slavery represented their "normal condition" and the "natural relation" between the races. As for the "Caucasian," meanwhile, "the flowing beard . . . projecting forehead, oval features, erect posture and lordly presence, stamp him the master man wherever found."⁶²

Thus, of course, the distinction between whiteness and nonwhiteness never fully lost its salience in American political culture. Mexican annexation, black Emancipation, Reconstruction, Jim Crow practices, Indian Wars, Asian immigration and Exclusion, Hawaiian and Puerto Rican annexation, and Philippine conquest—all would keep whiteness very much alive in both the visual and the political economies. But upon the arrival of the massive waves of Irish immigrants in the 1840s, whiteness itself would become newly problematic and, in some quarters, would begin to

lose its monolithic character—notwithstanding the rights and privileges that continued to inhere in whiteness, and the assertions of various John Van Evries that “in modern times there are no white barbarians. In all modern history, wherever found, white men are much the same.”⁶³

The Famine Migration announced a new era in the meaning of whiteness in the United States, an era greeted by many as a full-blown political crisis. In response, some would begin to question the monolithic quality of whiteness, and, again, science would provide the language and the models for understanding this natural fragmentation within the “white race.” As Samuel Morton had written of the “Celts” in 1839, “In some locales their physical traits, their moral character and their peculiar customs, have undergone little change since the time of Caesar. It is probable that the most unsophisticated Celts are those of the Southwest of Ireland, whose wild look and manner, mud cabins and funereal howlings, recall the memory of a barbarous age.”⁶⁴

By the 1860s the Irish would seem to some to be so many “thousands of barbarians in our midst, every whit as ferocious in their instincts as the Minnesota savages.”⁶⁵ (It is worth recalling, in this connection, that the “wild Irish” and the violent colonization of Ireland had provided the template for English understanding of North American savages and the course of North American colonization in the first place. “The wild *Irish* and the *Indian* doe not much differ,” one English observer who was familiar with both had written in 1646, “and therefore [they] should be handled alike.”)⁶⁶ The white-over-dark dynamic of racial theorizing would retain its purchase in Euro-American thought, to be sure, but the fracturing of whiteness (the splitting off of “unsophisticated Celts,” for instance), would become an ever more salient feature of racial discourse as the massive immigrations of the nineteenth century progressed. The untroubled republican equation of whiteness with fitness for self-government, which had informed colonial thinking and had reigned in the new nation since 1790, then, became increasingly untenable as “free white persons” of undreamt-of diversity and number dragged ashore in the 1840s and after.

It is for the Republican institutions of America that we hope and fear most.

—"Immigration into the United States," *DeBow's Review*, 1848

There may be those who can contemplate the addition to our population of vast numbers of persons having no inherited instincts of self-government and respect for law; knowing no restraint upon their own passions but the club of the policeman or the bayonet of the soldier; forming communities, by the tens of thousands, in which only foreign tongues are spoken, and into which can steal no influence from our free institutions and from popular discussion. But I confess to being far less optimistic.

—"Restriction of Immigration," *Atlantic Monthly*, 1896



Anglo-Saxons and Others, 1840-1924

With two centuries of hindsight, the first thing one is likely to notice about the 1790 naturalization law is its fierce exclusivity. Indeed, this is no small matter. The limitation of naturalized citizenship to "free white persons" profoundly shaped Asian-American history, for instance. It was this law, still in effect in the 1870s and 1880s, that denied Chinese immigrants the political might with which to challenge the rising tides of exclusionism or to protect themselves against the violent white mobs of a Rock Springs or a Tacoma. It was this law, still in effect in 1942, that left Japanese immigrants so vulnerable to the wartime hysteria that would become a federal policy of internment. John Okada brilliantly rendered the enduring salience of the inclusions and exclusions of 1790 in his novel *No-No Boy* (1957), when Ichiro Yamada ruminates upon the fateful apostrophe separating the Irish O'Hara from the Japanese Ohara in American political culture.¹ Clearly, the exclusivity of the 1790 law was of profound consequence.

What is too easily missed from our vantage point, however, is the stag-