

THE
ABOLITION
OF
WHITE
DEMOCRACY

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The Problem of the White Citizen

Two public acts characterized the democratic will of antebellum America: the vote and the riot. The age that heralded the rise of the first mass democracy in the world was also one of the most violent, turbulent times in American history. Riots, lynch mobs, insurrections, and other disturbances swept the urban landscape like a panic. In 1835 alone, seventy-one people died in 147 riots across the country. Between 1830 and 1865 over seventy percent of all cities with a population of 20,000 or more experienced some kind of major civil disorder.¹ Jacksonian mobs rioted for many reasons but the greatest number were in defense of slavery and Black subordination. Mobs attacked Black people, abolitionists, “amalgamators”—anyone whose actions or mere existence raised the specter of social equality. But the riots were not the spontaneous actions of a few drunk mechanics gone mad. Hardly. The majority were organized, disciplined, and under the leadership of the city’s most prominent gentlemen. Mayors, congressmen, attorneys general, physicians, lawyers, and newspaper editors directed the mobs’ activities at night and defended them in the morning, often citing them as expressions of the “will of the majority.” The riots, participants argued, were necessary to preserve American democracy from attempts to undermine it by abolitionists, Negroes, and Tory agents.²

How could such violence be done in the name of democracy and slavery alike? How could men, esteemed and lowly, invoke the heroes of

the Revolutionary War as they burned Black tenements? How could citizens of a democratic republic perpetuate such tyranny and terror? These questions go to the heart of the problem of race in American democracy. Their answer, I argue, lies in an analysis of the relationship between race and democracy that was established in the antebellum era. In particular, it lies in the relationship between what it meant to be a citizen and what it meant to be white.

A common apology for the white mobs is that they represented a sad aberration of democracy. The universal democratic ideals of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution had not yet been fully implemented in the body politic due to significant exclusions based on race, gender, and class. Racist mobs were tragic proof that the United States had a ways to go before it would fully live up to its own ideals. Underlying this explanation is the assumption that the mobs were anti-democratic. But this is certainly not how the rioters understood their actions. They took themselves to be protectors of republican institutions. Mob leaders presented themselves as patriots—several claimed to have ancestors who came over on the *Mayflower*—while mobs christened themselves with names like the Sons of Liberty and the Minutemen. The mobs saw anti-Black riots as absolutely democratic, whether they involved tarring Black people or smashing abolitionist presses. The question, then, is not whether the white rioters were democratic but what kind of democracy they believed in, practiced, and fought for.

Riots and other acts of racial oppression served to protect the color line. But this line was much more than a bar that excluded certain people from membership in the republic or that undermined democratic ideals. It constructed democratic citizenship itself. And in turn, citizenship served to construct and defend the color line. The result was the white citizen. To say that the antebellum American citizen was white is not an empirical observation. Rather, it is an acknowledgment of a successful political struggle in which certain persons won the right to proclaim themselves white and therefore citizens or potential citizens, largely by distinguishing themselves from slaves and free Black persons.

The origins of this struggle lie in seventeenth-century colonial Virginia. Not just racism but the American racial order itself was invented on the plantations of the colonial South, largely by extending social and political rights as well as economic opportunities to one section of the poor while withholding them from another. The story then moves to the Jacksonian period, in which the rise of mass democracy is interdependent with the development of a racialized class consciousness. Using Judith Shklar's conception of citizenship as standing, I argue that white chauvinism did not contradict citizenship but was constitutive of it. As American workers fought to define themselves as producers and citizens, many of them also fought to define themselves as white. I then turn to Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* to show that democracy and white tyranny were not contradictory tendencies in the age of Jackson. The twin "inevitabilities" Tocqueville observes—the "gradual progress of equality" and the intractability of racial prejudice—coexisted because equal citizenship *depended* on a system of formal and informal controls that maintained racial hierarchy. This hierarchy was enforced by white women as well as white men, for although white women were the legal and social dependents of white men in the nineteenth century, they nevertheless enjoyed racial standing. Black women and men, on the other hand, were not citizens at all but the antithesis against whom citizenship was defined. I argue that the distinction between dependent citizenship and anticitizenship helps explain the relationship between gender and race in the United States. Finally, I return to Du Bois's critique of the white working class to show how, in defending their racial prerogatives, white women and men closed off opportunities to imagine freedom and equality in more radical ways. In so doing, they disfigured democratic movement in the United States.

Slavery and the Origins of the White Race

Race as we now know it did not exist when the first colonists landed on the shores of the New World. (Native Americans may have been "uncivilized" in manner and "tawny" in color to the first settlers, but their humanity was not in question.) The first inkling of a new way to organize

human beings accompanied the arrival of the first Africans to Jamestown, Virginia, in 1619. The exact social status of these immigrants from the West Indies and Africa is unclear, but most scholars agree that while some arrived already enslaved, others arrived as or became servants; still others were or became free. Regardless, all of the first African immigrants, slave, servant, or free, possessed most of the same rights and duties as other Virginians. They could buy and sell cattle, sue and be sued, earn money, do penance in the church, and if enslaved sometimes purchase their children's freedom, or even their own. The first African Americans held minor political offices, voted, and owned property—including slaves and servants.³ But by 1660, lines were being drawn to separate Africans from all other settlers. By 1700, they were definitively distinguished socially, economically, and politically from other colonists. Just how the status of Africans, initially tenuous yet generally divided along the same class distinctions that differentiated English colonists, declined to slavery and debasement while the lot of the English poor appreciably improved tells the story of how not just racial discrimination but race itself was invented in North America.⁴

According to Edmund Morgan, there were two ingredients that formed the foundation of the American system of race. The first was hatred of Indians. Initially, the English saw Indians as savages but potentially assimilable into English civilization. This was an ethnocentric vision, certainly, but not a racist one. After an attack on Jamestown in 1622 by a confederation of Indian tribes reacting to English expansion in the region, however, the English gave up any plans to “civilize” the first peoples. Indians became an implacable enemy, and the new wisdom was enslavement or extermination.⁵ The second ingredient was indentured servitude. Servitude was a condition shared by most poor colonists, including many Africans. It was often as harsh and degrading as slavery. Servants could be bought or sold by any master so long as they were still under contract. A master could unilaterally extend a term of service as punishment for trifling or invented offenses. Given the mortality rate in the early part of the seventeenth century (Morgan estimates it was as high as fifty percent until the 1650s), many servants died

before fulfilling their terms. Their chances of freedom and survival slim, servants were in a position similar to slaves and perhaps worse, for the limited terms often encouraged masters to work servants as hard as they could before their term expired.⁶

The degradations of servitude and the constant threat of Indian attack combined with hardening class distinctions to produce a volatile social order in Virginia by the 1660s. In addition, most of the land was already claimed by established tobacco growers, leaving only the dangerous frontier available to freed servants. Further, the colony had an acute shortage of potential spouses. Even by the turn of the century, just one-third of all colonists were women. The result was a class of young, landless, largely single, and increasingly rowdy freemen. Yet even as the colony's restless free English population grew, the tobacco plantations continued to require a cheap, exploitable, and stable labor source. From the planter's perspective, something had to be done.

The Virginia elite's solution to its labor problem was slavery. Mortality rates in the colony began to level off by the 1660s, making slaves a better bargain than indentured servants because slaves could now be expected to live and toil longer than the five or seven years of a servant's contract. And anyway, the number of servants arriving in the colonies was not keeping up with the demand for labor. On the other hand, imported African or West Indian slaves were plentiful, cheap, and politically powerless. They had no "rights of Englishmen" to appeal to or representatives to defend their interests. The planter's option for slavery as the principal form of plantation labor was therefore chosen based on rational economic calculations and the existence of a ready supply of a politically weak labor source.⁷ It was not made based on some notion that Africans were an inferior race biologically predisposed to hard labor. That came later.

African slavery solved the labor problem, but it could not guarantee social peace. If anything, it contributed to a climate of rebellion, for might not slaves make common cause with disgruntled freeman and collectively resist their poverty and degradation? A frightening omen of this was Bacon's Rebellion of 1676, in which an anti-Indian crusade by

poor Europeans and Africans turned mutinous as men led by Nathaniel Bacon trained their arms on the rich as well as the Indians, sending the Virginia leadership scurrying to offshore English ships for protection.⁸ Though short-lived and producing no lasting results, Bacon's rebellion proved the insurgent dispositions of the poor freemen and their willingness to unite with rebellious slaves. (For example, the last group of Bacon's men captured was a band of eighty Africans and twenty Englishmen.) Poor Africans and Europeans were already living, working, fighting, and suffering together. Some slept together.⁹ Obviously, poor Englishmen and -women of the first fifty or so years of Virginia's history did not share in the virulent racial prejudice that would rule the land by the eighteenth century. Whatever prejudice did exist at the time—and undoubtedly there was some—was apparently weaker than nascent class loyalties.

Morgan argues that in order to prevent class unity and another rebellion, Virginia's elite deliberately attempted to divide the dangerous freemen from the dangerous slaves with a "screen of racial contempt." Slavery was affixed exclusively to Africans by law and, through a series of legislative measures, the African and English populations were divided and set against each other. While there had been earlier laws fastening lifetime slave status to already enslaved Africans and their offspring, six years after Bacon's rebellion only non-Africans and non-Indians were excluded from the possibility of enslavement. Through a series of acts from 1670 to 1705, the Virginia assembly made laws distinguishing Africans and Indians from the English. They forbade Africans and Indians to own Christian servants, in which the legal definition of "Christian" now excluded baptized African and Native Americans. They forbade Africans from striking any Christian servant, allowing servants to bully slaves without fear of reprisal, an act that Morgan says placed servants "psychologically on par with masters." The government seized all property slaves had been allowed to accrue and distributed it to "the poor," that is, to English servants. Only Christians could now own property. The law forbade sexual relations between "Christians and negroes." It punished Englishwomen severely for having children by an African

father. It defined a child's social status according to the status of the mother, meaning that all children of English male–African female relationships would be cast into the degraded group. Africans and Indians were denied the right to vote, testify in court, serve on juries, or possess arms. Racial domination—at the time inchoate, novel, and a mere prototype of what it later became—was a deliberate policy of the Virginia ruling elite. “If Negro slavery came to Virginia without anyone having to decide upon it as a matter of public policy, the same is not true of racism,” Morgan writes. “By a series of acts, the [Virginia colonial] assembly deliberately did what it could to foster the contempt of whites for blacks and Indians.”¹⁰

The systematic exclusion of Black people—free or slave—through such legislation is a primary fact of American history. It is tragic enough, but to interpret colonial law as a form of power that excluded, repressed, divided, and dominated would only tell the most obvious part of the story, for it was also a *productive* form of power. It produced new types of social relationships, new forms of knowledge, and a particular form of government. As Michel Foucault admonishes, “We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it ‘excludes,’ it ‘represses,’ it ‘censors,’ it ‘abstracts,’ it ‘masks,’ it ‘conceals.’ In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production.”¹¹ We can see the productive nature of power at work in colonial Virginia, for the early legislators did much more than legalize discrimination against African and Native Americans; in drawing discriminatory lines, they created race itself. Slavery was the most profitable form of labor in colonial Virginia, but *racial* slavery was the solution to the threat of servile insurrection and the problem of how to efficiently and peacefully get the workers—slave and free—to work. Such a system was not the product of inevitable prejudices against Africans on the part of the English but of political decisions made to address immediate, particular problems of social control.¹² Not just racial oppression but race itself was a product of these political choices. Race was not something that was already there, ready

to be picked up by colonial elites and used to divide the masses against themselves.¹³ In Theodore Allen's words, the white race literally had to be invented.

Further, the races were produced and hierarchically ordered through the powers and prerogatives of citizenship. Through various legislative measures and social pressures, Virginia elites simultaneously fastened Africans to a lifetime, hereditary, degraded status and created a new group of relatively privileged people heretofore unknown in human history. Remarkably, these measures amassed rich and poor, planter and servant, esteemed and lowly into a single group unified less by ancestry than by the right to own property (including human property), the right to share in the public business, and a pledge to ensure the degraded position of all those defined as Black. As all those of discernible African descent—servant, slave, free, unfree, propertied, propertyless—were thrown down into a single subordinate group, all those who could prove themselves unenslaveable were raised up to a superior group. As their right to possess property was recognized, as their poll tax was reduced, and as their opportunities for land and citizenship increased inversely with the degradation of African Americans, poor English colonists came to identify themselves as “white.” They shared this new identity with the planters, further elevating their status and self-esteem. As the benefits of this new social arrangement accrued to poor Englishmen-cum-whites, they came to have a stake in slavery and its racial basis. In this way, the construction of race in the colonial era was achieved through the elaboration of the rights and privileges of the citizen.

Race emerged from the needs of the Virginia upper class to craft a docile and productive labor force. But as the benefits of whiteness became apparent to English laborers, they came to embrace the system by which privileges were conferred in exchange for policing slaves. As the slaveholder T. R. R. Cobb described the arrangement,

The mass of laborers [i.e., slaves] not being recognized among citizens, every citizen feels that he belongs to an elevated class. It matters not that

he is no slaveholder; he is not of the inferior race; he is a freeborn citizen; he engages in no menial occupation. The poorest meets the richest as an equal; sits at his table with him; salutes him as a neighbor; meets him in every public assembly; and stands on the same social platform.¹⁴

In allying themselves with the large planters, poor whites traded class solidarity for whiteness and its accompanying privileges. Racial oppression, then, was reproduced from below as well as from above. The consequences would be fateful in the development of the American democratic creed. Starting in colonial Virginia, Americans and immigrants came to connect freedom with race. The civil rights of the colonist not only served as the basis for American citizenship; they were simultaneously privileges reserved for the white race.¹⁵

Citizens and Slaves of the White Republic

Race was produced through colonial law, but it was not yet connected to democracy. This occurred in the first half of the nineteenth century. By 1820 the Founding era had passed, and economic developments had already made anachronistic Jefferson's vision of a country of virtuous yeoman farmers. The North in particular was transforming itself into an urban, industrializing nation. In 1820, sixty-three percent of the labor force in New England worked in agriculture; by 1850, only thirty-nine percent did.¹⁶ Overall, the number of people working in manufacturing jumped 127 percent between 1820 and 1840 and the percentage of people living in towns of eight thousand or more nearly doubled. By 1860 half of all white men worked for wages.¹⁷ The first waves of European immigration began in earnest in the 1830s, with over 600,000 people depositing themselves in American cities in that decade alone, looking for work and freedom. That number climbed to 2.6 million between 1851 and 1860, to the point where by 1860 nearly twenty percent of the population of the northeast was foreign born.¹⁸ The emergence of an industrial working class was accompanied by the rise of mass democracy as property requirements for suffrage were swept away, giving the ordinary man the vote for the first time in Western history. It is this

era of rapid industrialization, immigration, and democratization, generally referred to as the Jacksonian era, in which the relationship between whiteness and republican citizenship was cemented.

As the young republic reconciled itself to an industrial future and as workers clamored for political power, Northern labor republicans of “the Democracy” (as the Democratic Party was known then) adopted a new political identity to replace Jefferson’s yeoman farmer as the bulwark of democratic-republican ideals: the producer.¹⁹ The producer ethic held that society should be run by those who produce for it: small farmers, mechanics, laborers, and Southern planters. Bankers, speculators, and other representatives of America’s quasi-aristocratic class were not producers but parasites who lived off the labor of others. This business class, with its banks and corporations and its control of the press and institutions of education, wanted to do more than simply subject workers to long hours at low pay. It wanted to press workers down into slavery. Lacking conscience or mercy, nonproducers were a hated lot in Jacksonian ideology, for they threatened cherished republican freedom. As an adage of the time went, “Corporations have neither bodies to be kicked, nor souls to be damned.”²⁰ Labor republicans feared that the republic’s existence—and their place in it—was fragile and uncertain. The decline of republican institutions and the corruption of civic virtue are typical fears of classical republicanism, but they were given new life in the era of the “tumultuous republic” in which nothing—the permanence of the Union, employment, social status, masculinity, or race—could be taken for granted. The producer ethic was forged out of wage labor and the fear of economic and political dependency. Dependence was slavery, and workers did not have to look far to see what that looked like in practice.

As Judith Shklar argues, American citizenship was a product of this combination of working-class political power and the fear of falling into slavery. In its standard liberal conception, citizenship is defined as equality in the political sphere, equal opportunity in the economic realm, and the right to participate in public affairs. Shklar acknowledges these elements, but she maintains that in the United States the primary

significance of citizenship is that it provides persons with social status, or standing. The importance of American citizenship does not derive from the political power it imparts; on an individual level such power is practically insignificant. Nor does it derive from equality of rights, for it is the *distinction* between citizen and noncitizen that matters. The value of American citizenship, Shklar argues, is that it confers dignity and standing upon members of the polity over and against noncitizens. The struggle for American citizenship, then, is the struggle for standing, understood as inclusion in the public sphere.²¹

The quintessential noncitizens of the nineteenth-century American polity were white women and slaves. The exclusion of white women from the vote was essential to reconstructing a masculine identity damaged by the degrading demands of industrial labor. Proletarianized men could not depend on their position as wage laborers to provide a foundation for their household authority like a yeoman farmer could. To compensate, the notion of the father as the family "breadwinner," whose wages support the family, became the basis of male authority. In defense of this new male, labor republicans took up the struggle for a "family wage" that would enable the male worker to earn enough to provide for himself and his family.²² This new working-class manhood, while securing the male's place at the head of the household in the private realm, presupposed women's exclusion from the public realm. Thus efforts by women to participate in public affairs were ridiculed by the official public.²³

But it was slavery that particularly distinguished citizens from noncitizens and that has had the greatest impact on American citizenship.²⁴ Shklar argues that American citizenship has been forged as a "virtuous middle" between the lazy lord and the servile slave. The nation had a notable lack of aristocrats but an abundance of slaves. Further, slavery in the States was quite literally the opposite of liberty in a way European republicans could only imagine. "In Europe the slave was a metaphor drawn from the annals of classical antiquity. In America slavery referred to a living presence."²⁵ To white workers facing a life of wage labor or "wage slavery," the possibility that they could become actual

slaves was acutely felt. To distinguish themselves from slaves they had to make themselves citizens. As Shklar writes, “Black chattel slavery stood at the opposite social pole from full citizenship and so defined it. The importance of what I call citizenship as standing emerges out of this basic fact of our political history. The value of citizenship was derived primarily from its denial to slaves, to some white men, and to all women.”²⁶

The hatred of slavery passed easily into hatred of the slaves. As white workers came to fear the slave, they came to fear Black people and to measure white liberty against Black subjugation. “Working Americans,” David Roediger notes, “expressed soaring desires to be rid of the age-old inequalities of Europe and of any hint of slavery. They also expressed the rather more pedestrian goal of simply not being mistaken for slaves, or ‘negers’ or ‘negurs.’ And they saw not nearly so great a separation between these goals as we do.”²⁷

The votes of Jackson Democrats, combined with their fear and hatred of Black people, produced what the sociologist Pierre van den Berghe calls a *Herrenvolk* democracy, a regime that is “democratic for the master race but tyrannical for subordinate groups.”²⁸ Under this regime, which persisted until the civil rights movement, all whites are political equals while all not-white persons are relegated to an inferior status. The result is a curious mix of democratic government and egalitarian values along with state repression, mob violence, and an ideology, justified by religion and science, of the eternal inequality of humanity. This mix is epitomized in Vice President of the Confederacy Alexander H. Stephens’s famous “Cornerstone Speech” of 1861:

Many governments have been founded on the principles of subordination and serfdom of certain classes of the same race; such were, and are in violation of the laws of nature. Our system commits no such violation of nature’s law. With us, all the white race, however high or low, rich or poor, are equal in the eyes of the law. Not so with the Negro. Subordination is his place. He, by nature or by the curse against Canaan, is fitted for that condition which he occupies in our system.²⁹

Shklar shows that citizenship in a *Herrenvolk* democracy has a twofold nature. It is a mark of equality in that all citizens possess the same rights and responsibilities, but it is also a mark of distinction between those who are citizens and those who are not. A standing conception of citizenship provides citizens with a glass floor below which they can see but cannot fall. Success is not guaranteed by the glass floor, but citizenship assures that one cannot be degraded below it and that one can always see those beneath it and feel superior to them. This twofold nature of American citizenship generates conflict, for it simultaneously enshrines political equality (among citizens) and produces inequality by excluding some people from full citizenship. This conflict, Shklar argues, “has marked every stage of the history of American democracy.”³⁰

Shklar’s argument about citizenship as standing goes a long way toward explaining the relationship between slavery, race, and citizenship. She explains the powerful negative relationship between citizenship and slavery: one is a citizen because one is not a slave. She also points out that slavery and Blackness are inextricably connected in the American mind. However, Shklar does not complete the thread. Citizenship was defined against slavery. Blackness and slavery were associated. Black and white were diametrically opposed. All that is left is to complete the square: to be a citizen was also to be white. This is not an empirical observation of who had the vote at the time. Whiteness was not a biological status but a *political* color that distinguished the free from the unfree, the equal from the inferior, the citizen from the slave. Citizenship was not just standing, as Shklar argues, but *racialized* standing.

As the antithesis of the white citizen, then, Black people in the Jacksonian era were not simply noncitizens but *anticitizens*.³¹ They were not merely excluded from the social compact, they were the Other that simultaneously threatened and consolidated it. This was graphically illustrated in who won—and lost—the vote in the 1820s and 1830s. As the Democracy ascended, suffrage was extended to all white males as it was stripped from Black men. New York in 1821 and Pennsylvania in 1838, for example, eliminated their property requirements for voting

and proscribed Black male suffrage in the same stroke. From 1819 to the Civil War, every state admitted to the union limited the franchise to white males in their constitutions. By 1860, only six percent of the Northern Black population lived in states in which they could vote (Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont, Rhode Island, and Maine), and only half of eligible voters in these states did vote due to white terror at the polls. The white republic was also defended in state referendums. In the North between 1840 and 1870, equality with Black people was overwhelmingly rejected by white voters in seventeen of nineteen referendums.³² In addition, Black Northerners were excluded from schools, militias, juries, seats in public transportation, participation in social activities, and the possession of firearms. In some places they were even prohibited from walking on sidewalks.³³

The changes in citizenship rights effected in the Jacksonian era did more than merely include some and exclude others. These laws and social norms produced the white citizen.³⁴ Equality and liberty went from abstract principles to lived experiences for the masses of ordinary men (and women to a lesser degree), but they became concrete not as universally held rights but as privileges reserved for members of the white club. White citizenship represents the democratization of social status, extending it from the upper class to the masses by transforming it from a perk of wealth to a perk of race. What Shklar implies but fails to elaborate, then, is that citizenship as standing links democracy to race. Standing not only reconciles equality and freedom with slavery; it builds white domination into democracy.³⁵ Thus, the democratic problem is not simply the legacy of slavery and racial exclusion or the failure of American democratic practices to live up to American democratic ideals. The democratic problem lies in the white citizen itself.

Because of its political significance, whiteness was not something that could be taken for granted in the antebellum era. It was a badge of status that indicated full membership in the community and rights to all the accompanying perquisites: the right to vote, to earn, to prosper, to educate one's children, to own a firearm, even to riot. Recently arrived immigrants quickly learned that, like citizenship, membership in the

white race could not be assumed but had to be earned. One did not receive the rights of American citizenship because one was white but rather the reverse: one was white because one possessed such rights.³⁶ Thus, the process of immigrant assimilation—as citizens, Democrats, Americans—was also a process of assimilation into whiteness.³⁷

The most striking example of this process was the Irish, not because their immigration experience was unusual but because they were escaping a land from which they had suffered something akin to racial oppression. One of the most discriminated-against ethnic groups in antebellum America, Irish immigrants were not guaranteed admission into the white club.³⁸ As historian Noel Ignatiev argues, the Irish sought to assimilate by allying themselves en masse with the Democratic Party, by forming the bulk of the modern police force, and by fighting to join labor organizations. But the prerequisite of entrance into these institutions was proof of whiteness, which implied a commitment to the degradation of African Americans.³⁹ Thus, the Irish took up anti-Black discrimination with zeal. They were at the forefront of the many anti-Black riots that convulsed the North. They also led efforts to exclude Black labor from work sites, to contain and repress Black neighborhoods through policing, and to keep Black people away from the polls in places where they were allowed to vote. Many Irish workers openly supported slavery despite the antislavery efforts of respected Irish independence activists such as Daniel O'Connell. These actions were the on-the-street supplement to the legal disfranchisement of Black persons; their intent was to show white citizens that the Irish deserved racial standing. The Irish struggle for white citizenship was an eminently political battle, the outcome of which, Ignatiev argues, "was not the inevitable consequence of blind historic forces, still less of biology, but the result of choices made, by the Irish and others, from among available alternatives. To enter the white race was a strategy to secure an advantage in a competitive society."⁴⁰ It was so important to become a citizen in the Jacksonian era in part because it was so important to become white. Once conjoined, the two identities were practically interchangeable.

Like any social system, the white-citizen/Black-slave quadrangle could not fit all persons into its prefabricated containers. So that free Black persons would not form an exception to the rule, they were deliberately degraded by law and custom below all those defined as white and pushed down toward slavery. Though nominally free, Black men and women remained potentially enslaveable, since the fugitive slave law put the burden on them to prove they did not belong to any master who might claim them. The infamous Dred Scott case of 1857, in which the Supreme Court ruled that the Black person has no rights that a white person is bound to respect, settled any question of free African Americans' status, placing all Black people firmly below the status of any white.⁴¹

None of this meant that membership in the white club was without its costs. As Roediger points out, for Northern workers in the early 1800s, "to be white was both an urgent necessity and a lifeless burden." It guaranteed standing but it was a cultural straitjacket that cut white workers off from their preindustrial past, from connections to Black workers and American Indians, and ultimately from their very humanity.⁴² It must also be said that whiteness was no guarantee of prosperity. White standing, as Ignatiev notes, meant that members of an immigrant ethnic group could enter the labor market as free laborers rather than indentured servants, that they could compete for all jobs instead of being confined to certain ones, and that their entrepreneurs could operate outside of a segregated market. It meant they had the right to vote and be elected, to hold positions in the Democratic Party political machine, to be tried by a jury, to live wherever they could afford, and to spend their money as they pleased. These are not signs of prosperity, only its prerequisites. The price the Irish and other immigrant groups had to pay to earn them underlines the exploitation they endured in this country. Nevertheless, they quickly determined that becoming white—not so much by looking white as by proving themselves sufficiently anti-Black—was the best way to escape their miserable conditions and become American citizens.

Black people's participation in the political and social order, then, was not simply a matter of inclusion and exclusion. The white-citizen/Black-slave relation stood at the center of American democracy like a

village square. In order for whites to be “independent citizen-earners” (to use Shklar’s phrase), all Black persons had to be thrown down as a mass below all whites, irrespective of class, gender, or other social distinctions. African Americans held up the glass floor, giving whites (especially poor whites who had little else) something to fear, despise, and look down at. This sense of superiority confirmed their standing as citizens in a democratic republic.⁴³

Tocqueville and the Two Inevitabilities

White citizenship, then, reconciles racially oppressive practices with democratic ideals. This is reflected in Alexis de Tocqueville’s classic account of antebellum democracy, *Democracy in America*. Rogers Smith contends that the book is the quintessential example of a text that brackets racist traditions from democracy.⁴⁴ But in fact it does no such thing. Rather, in Tocqueville’s *Democracy* as in Jackson’s democracy, slavery and racial prejudice are tangents to the greater story of expanding equality not because Tocqueville brackets them but because he recognizes that white domination makes equality possible. Tocqueville saw little contradiction between the spread of egalitarian ideals and the practices of slavery and racial oppression because white citizenship reconciles them. Indeed, there would be no contradiction until slaves and abolitionists made one.

Based on Tocqueville’s travels to the United States and Canada during Jackson’s presidency, *Democracy* is a tale of societies (European no less than American) transforming themselves into democracies. Equality, not distinction, is the watchword of these new republics. Throughout both volumes of the book, Tocqueville grapples with an emerging new world whose template is America. As a young aristocrat, he approaches this world with anticipation and trepidation. At times he has great faith in the future; at other times it seems the world has gone mad.

Where are we, then? Men of religion fight against freedom, and lovers of liberty attack religions; noble and generous spirits praise slavery, while low, servile minds preach independence; honest and enlightened citizens are the enemies of all progress, while men without patriotism or morals make themselves the apostles of civilization and enlightenment! Have

all ages been like ours? And have men always dwelt in a world in which nothing is connected?⁴⁵

Regardless of his mixed feelings about this transformation, he regards it as inevitable. “[T]he gradual progress of equality is something fated. The main features of this progress are the following: it is universal and permanent, it is daily passing beyond human control, and every event and every man help it along.”⁴⁶ Nevertheless, there is one place where “the gradual progress of equality” is completely halted: race relations. He discusses this in the longest chapter of either volume, “Some Considerations Concerning the Present State and Probable Future of the Three Races that Inhabit the Territory of the United States.”

Tocqueville counts three “naturally distinct, one might almost say hostile” races in America: whites (also referred to as Anglo-Americans), Negroes, and Indians.⁴⁷ The majority of the chapter is devoted to the degraded condition of the African and Native races.⁴⁸ Tocqueville generally treats American Indians as part of nature and as distinct from civilization. *Democracy* begins, for example, with a description of North America’s first inhabitants and its geography, essentially regarding Indians as a part of the physical landscape. He doubts whether the advanced elements of Natives’ culture could have come from them alone; a more sophisticated civilization must have preceded them and passed its religion and language along to them. Their destruction by an advanced civilization was fated.

The Indians occupied but did not possess the land. It is by agriculture that man wins the soil, and the first inhabitants of North America lived by hunting. Their unconquerable prejudices, their indomitable passions, their vices, and perhaps still more their savage virtues delivered them to inevitable destruction. The ruin of these people began as soon as the Europeans landed on their shores; it has continued ever since and is coming to completion in our own day. Providence, when it placed them amid the riches of the New World, seems to have granted them a short lease only; they were there, in some sense, only waiting.⁴⁹

Tocqueville, however, is far from seeing Indians as entirely depraved. He certainly sees nothing to justify their wholesale slaughter by white settlers. He criticizes the state's role in their expulsion and extermination, particularly the role of state governments. Furthermore, while he sees Indians as the counterpoint to civilization in certain ways, he does not doubt that they could join and fully participate in Anglo-American culture if they wanted to. Unfortunately, Indians are too free and too proud to accept the kinds of dependence that civilized society requires of its members, and so they choose to suffer rather than assimilate. Indians refuse to adapt to modern society, so they will be destroyed by it.⁵⁰

Tocqueville is less charitable toward African Americans. Unlike Indians, who face doom because of their stubborn independent spirit, Africans' future on the continent is threatened because they are servile and dependent. Tocqueville condemns slavery as a great evil and considers it to be the primary cause of Black people's degradation rather than their "nature." Nevertheless, slavery has so degraded Africans' intelligence and soul that they no longer know how to be free.⁵¹ At the same time, because slavery brings white and Black people into close daily contact (whereas Western expansion drives whites and Indians apart), the fate of Black and white Americans is uniquely intertwined. "The Indians die as they have lived, in isolation; but the fate of the Negroes is in a sense linked with that of the Europeans. The two races are bound one to the other without mingling; it is equally difficult for them to separate completely or to unite."⁵²

Tocqueville resisted the rising trend of scientific racism in the 1830s led by his friend, the Count Joseph-Arthur de Gobineau. While Gobineau believed that a person's character derived from unchangeable racial characteristics and that such characteristics organized people into hierarchically ordered races, Tocqueville continued to insist that the environment was the predominating influence on a person's character and behavior.⁵³ Tocqueville's rejection of scientific racism, however, did not prevent him from judging other cultures inferior to European civilization. It is also clear that he somewhat fears Native and African Americans, particularly slaves. As George Fredrickson has persuasively

argued, Tocqueville's views on Black people were strongly influenced by advocates of colonization, and he absorbed that movement's negro-phobia.⁵⁴ Yet in spite of this, Tocqueville was one of a shrinking number of whites and Europeans of his day who recognized the humanity of Native and African Americans.

Tocqueville's ambiguities on race are well documented in the secondary literature. He is a contested figure because of them—and because he is one of the few theorists of the political theory canon to write extensively on American race relations.⁵⁵ He is both hailed as an early critic of America's racist betrayal of the principles of the Declaration of Independence and criticized for holding to an ideal of a homogeneous republic in which there is no place for Native or African Americans. He is held to be both antiracist and negrophobic, an agitator against slavery and an advocate of forced labor, one who sympathized with the slaves while doubting they could ever become whites' equals.⁵⁶ The debate is anachronistic, however, for Tocqueville held all of these positions. His firm belief in the impossibility of *racial* equality never disrupts his faith in the inevitable spread of equality. These positions appear contradictory to post-*Herrenvolk* eyes but not to Tocqueville or his white contemporaries. Taking white citizenship for granted, they saw no necessary tension between equality and white domination, for as a Jackson Democratic slogan read, "Negro's Elevation Means Your Degradation."⁵⁷

Tocqueville argues that there are two possibilities regarding the fate of whites and African Americans, who "face each other like two foreign peoples on the same soil." Either they "mingle completely" or "they must part." Tocqueville does not believe the first option is a real possibility. Ironically, the only thing that could possibly get Black and white people to "mingle" in democratic America is a despot. As long as America remains a democracy, no one, he insists, would dare attempt to bring about social equality. Indeed, "the freer the whites in America are, the more they will seek to isolate themselves" from Black and Native peoples.⁵⁸ It is not just that race is the one terrain where the march of equality will not tramp, he implies; it is that equality and white supremacy are symbiotic. As the fervor for equality deepens, so does racial

conflict. In essence, Tocqueville makes the startling claim that while equality is an inevitable trend in the United States, *racial* equality is incompatible with its democracy, since only a despotic regime can bring the races together. America will have democracy or racial equality, but it will not have both. The implication of Tocqueville's argument is that the United States is democratic and white supremacist simultaneously, and that there is no necessary contradiction between the two.⁵⁹

Tocqueville's famous critique of the tyranny of the majority further explains how equal citizenship and racial oppression went together in the Jacksonian era. One of *Democracy's* principal themes is the middling tendency of democracy. Democracy eliminates the highs and lows of aristocratic society. There is no nobility but there is no valor; there is no monopoly of control of art but there is no great art; there is free speech but there is no original thought. In the sweep of the equality of conditions it becomes nearly impossible to distinguish oneself from the mass. Hence the danger that mass opinion could overwhelm the public sphere is very real. But as Tocqueville recognizes, one form of majority tyranny was already realized in the Jacksonian era: white tyranny. In the chapter "The Omnipotence of the Majority in the United States and Its Effects," he asks a Pennsylvanian why free Negroes cannot vote in a state founded by Quakers and known for its tolerance. The person retorts that there is no such law preventing Negroes from voting; they have that right. Why don't they show up at the polls, then, Tocqueville asks. The gentleman answers that Negroes do not vote because they are intimidated from doing so by the white majority, which is prejudiced against them. Tocqueville blurts, "What! The majority, privileged to make the law, wishes also to have the privilege of disobeying the law?"⁶⁰ As the anecdote shows, white citizenship is built into majority rule. *Herrenvolk* democracy functions through a combination of democratic decision-making by white majorities and extralegal practices of terror, such as those involved in preventing Black men from voting. The white majority not only makes the law but decides whether, how, and on whom it will be enforced. White tyranny does not contradict the democratic will but is an expression of it.

Tocqueville, then, was not contradicting himself in recognizing two “inevitable” in American democracy. The inevitable progression of equality occurred simultaneously with the inevitable increase of racial prejudice because the elaboration of equality and liberty depended on racial oppression. *Democracy in America* reflects the fact that the white citizen in the age of Jackson contained both inevitabilities within his or her breast. Tocqueville writes, “The southern American has two active passions which will always lead him to isolate himself: he is afraid of resembling the Negro, once his slave, and he is afraid of falling below the level of his white neighbor.”⁶¹ In the North, he observes, “[the] white man no longer clearly sees the barrier that separates him from the degraded race, and he keeps the Negro at a distance all the more carefully because he fears lest one day they be confounded together.”⁶² White citizenship alleviates this fear of hitting bottom. It ensures that whites cannot fall to the level of Black people, free or slave, and that no matter how poor or mean a white person may be, she or he is, in certain respects, equal to any other white. (In his notebooks Tocqueville records an interview with a lawyer who tells him that in New Orleans, “There is not a white beggar but has the right to bully the wretch he finds in his way and throw him in the dirt, crying out: ‘Get off, mulatto!’”)⁶³ Equality and racial privilege became antinomies only with the arguments of abolitionists, the appeals of free Black persons, and the mutinous plans of slaves. “It was the Negro himself who forced the consideration of this incongruity,” Du Bois writes, “who made emancipation inevitable and made the modern world at least consider if not wholly accept the idea of a democracy including men of all races and colors.”⁶⁴ Slavery was always deplored by some as a violation of the Rights of Man, but it took the publication of David Walker’s *Appeal*, the speeches of Frederick Douglass, the underground railroad led by Harriet Tubman, and the revolt of Nat Turner to raise to the level of public consciousness the notion that white domination might violate equality. But by then such domination had come to constitute equality itself.

It is to Tocqueville’s credit that his argument recognizes this, at least implicitly. It is true that in his writing and in his work in the

French government he opposed social equality among white and Black people. (For example, he advocated the enforced labor of ex-slaves in the French colonies to prevent them from leaving the plantations upon emancipation.)⁶⁵ This is a consequence of his inability to recognize the centrality of Black agency in determining Black people's own destiny. But his negrophobia does not undermine his acute analysis of the relationship between democracy and race in the United States. Such an analysis gives many of his famous predictions their staying power. It enables him, for example, to forecast that racial conflict will long outlast slavery, since the problem does not lie merely between master and slave but also between Black and white. Well after slavery is abolished, Tocqueville foresees, Americans will still have to "eradicate three much more intangible and tenacious prejudices: the prejudice of the master, the prejudice of race, and the prejudice of the white."⁶⁶ Tocqueville is also among the first to point out that racial prejudice is buried deep in social mores and practices. "I plainly see that in some parts of the country the legal barrier between the two races is tending to come down, but not that of mores; I see that slavery is in retreat, but the prejudice from which it arose is immovable."⁶⁷ Even when legally free, Tocqueville observes, the Black race is indelibly linked to slavery and a degraded status in the minds of white Americans. "Memories of slavery disgrace the race, and race perpetuates memories of slavery."⁶⁸ Tocqueville's elitism and negrophobia demand criticism, but his insight that in the *Herrenvolk* era, white tyranny sustains democracy rather than contradicts it is profound.

Gender and the White Citizen

The coexistence of racial standing and equality was not the only paradox of citizenship in the *Herrenvolk* era, of course. Women as a class were also denied full citizenship. Indeed, they did not win the vote until 1920, fifty years after the Fifteenth Amendment granted it to Black men. Clearly, gender also has been an organizing principle of American citizenship.⁶⁹ Denial of full citizenship due to gender shares important similarities with its denial due to race, particularly the exclusion of a category of

people based on ascribed characteristics. In many ways, male domination is rooted more deeply in the social structure than white supremacy, pervading the most intimate of human relations. Yet gender and race also function in significantly different ways in regards to citizenship. As the legal and social dependents of men throughout much of the *Herrenvolk*, white women enjoyed only a dependent citizenship, yet a form of citizenship nonetheless. Black people (male and female), on the other hand, were not citizens at all. They were anticitizens against whom civil society was defined. Dependent citizenship in the *Herrenvolk* era produced a tension between women's desire for full citizenship and the felt need to restrict citizenship to those with racial standing. As a result, it tended to yield a call for gender equality that was compromised by the imperative to preserve the racial standing of white women and men alike.

As Carole Pateman argues, male domination functions through a sort of "fraternal contract" among men. Modern patriarchy is not so much the rule of the father as it is the rule of the brothers, in which men expressly or tacitly agree among themselves to guarantee each other's rights, including the right to dominate women. Excluded from the fraternal contract, women are incorporated into civil society indirectly via the marriage contract, which admits them as semipolitical beings whose rights are dependent on the full citizenship of their husbands. The marriage contract incorporates women into civil society, but as dependent citizens relegated to the private sphere.⁷⁰

Two pillars of dependent citizenship in the antebellum era were coverture and antimiscegenation law. Coverture is a legal practice, imported from English common law, that at marriage transfers a woman's civic identity to her husband. A woman is "covered" by her husband's citizenship. Under coverture, women cannot independently hold property, enter contracts, make wills, testify in court, retain earnings, or exercise legal authority over their children. The husband, in effect, becomes a surrogate for the state in the legal life of the woman.⁷¹ Antimiscegenation laws regulate marriage between people of different "races" in order to prevent "race-mixing." They reverse patriarchal tradition by

defining the social-racial status of a child according to the race of the mother rather than the father. Regardless of the father's race, only a white mother can have white children while a Black mother can only have Black children. Antimiscegenation law guaranteed the white father that his "official" children (i.e., those borne by his white wife) were white while any offspring due to sexual liaisons with Black women would belong to the subordinate group, keeping the dominant race "pure."⁷²

Coverture and antimiscegenation laws subordinated female citizenship to male citizenship. As a result, white women were not full citizens in the *Herrenvolk* democracy. Nevertheless, they were still citizens. As Linda Kerber points out, white women were issued passports, could be naturalized, could claim the protection of the courts, and were obliged to pay taxes. Although the dependents of white men, "White women have been citizens of the United States as long as the republic has existed."⁷³ On the other hand, Black persons, whether female or male, free or slave, were anticitizens. Marked by slavery, they were the antithesis of freedom and as such stood outside of citizenship rather than being incorporated into it, even in a dependent or derivative fashion.⁷⁴ White women's status in the *Herrenvolk* was defined by the public/private split, in which society is divided into the political and social sphere on the one hand and the household on the other and in which women are confined to the latter. White women in the nineteenth century endured a form of "civil death" in which they legally disappeared into the private realm while "covered" by the husband or other male surrogate in the public. Slavery, however, was a form of "social death" in which the person disappears as a social being from the community altogether.⁷⁵ As Cheryl Harris argues, "'Slaves' and 'women' were constituted as subordinated categories; however, they were unequal to white men for different, although related, reasons. The disability of race differed from the disability of gender: slaves were not free individuals, but a class completely outside the social compact, while women were within the polity but not the public sphere."⁷⁶ White women stood outside the public sphere, but slaves and free Black persons stood outside civil society altogether.

Harris describes this arrangement as a racial patriarchy, a “social, political, economic, legal, and conceptual system that entrenched the ideology of white supremacy and white male control over women’s reproduction and sexuality.” Such a system functioned “by subordinating all Black people along lines that were articulated within and through gender, and all women along lines that were articulated within and through race.”⁷⁷ White women were “protected” from the “burden” of owning property by coverture laws, giving them only a derivative right to property. Black women, however, could not own property at all because they were property or (for free Black women) potentially property. Antimiscegenation laws granted white women a form of standing by default, too. Citizenship and property rights were passed down through the father’s line but a child’s status as free or slave (and thus white or Black) was determined by the mother’s status. Accordingly, for a father’s children to be indisputably free (and white), their mother by definition had to be, too. The perverse nature of racial patriarchy granted white women racial standing even as it oppressed them as women.

White women could count on dependent citizenship to provide a variety of direct and indirect racial privileges. They enjoyed favored access to certain occupations such as teaching, nursing, and clerical work. They enjoyed access to better housing, schools, and child care as well as easier access to plumbing, heating, electricity, and time-saving household appliances. They might look forward to the right to be treated like a “lady.” White women who had to work (always a smaller proportion than women of color) could look forward to higher wages and occupational segregation. Their children could not be sold. These advantages were among the fruits of favored standing in the *Herrenvolk* era.⁷⁸ They were clearly incomplete compared to the full menu of wages enjoyed by white men, but as Dana Frank points out, “Such women nonetheless enjoyed a sense of superiority and pride in being white.”⁷⁹ By sharing in the proceeds of white citizenship, white women came to have a stake in its perpetuation, even as they were barred from full citizenship themselves.

Racial standing compromised struggles against gender subordination because it often pit the struggle for women's liberation against the concern to preserve one's racial prerogatives. Many white women in the suffrage movement, for example, demanded equal citizenship on the grounds that granting the vote to Black men but not to "civilized" white women was an insult. They further suggested that white female suffrage would double the white vote and thereby help protect the nation against "the rising tide of color" that many whites feared in the early twentieth century.⁸⁰ Indeed, as Aileen Kraditor notes, "This in time became the single most important argument [for women's suffrage] used in the South."⁸¹ The result was that when women's suffrage was finally won, it turned out to be "the biggest non-event in electoral history," as Shklar notes, because "women had adopted the dominant attitudes of their time and place . . . completely."⁸² Similarly, Paula Baker argues that (white) women fragmented politically after they won the vote in 1920 due to the lack of a distinct women's politics or culture. Unable to form a political bloc, they could not appreciably increase their power in the political system.⁸³ The imperative of securing white unity across gender lines blunted the radical potential of women's political participation.

The second wave of the feminist movement continued to trip on the white problem, even among those who explicitly criticized white privilege. Marilyn Frye, for example, recognizes whiteness as "a social or political construct of some sort" and concludes that as a white feminist she must "set [herself] against whiteness" and "give [herself] the injunction to stop being white."⁸⁴ Frye's argument is valuable as an early call for the abolition of white identity, yet she associates racial privilege entirely with white men. "Those who fashion this construct of whiteness, who elaborate on these conceptions, are primarily a certain group of males. It is *their* construct."⁸⁵ White women (particularly feminists and lesbians) play an insignificant role in perpetuating whiteness, according to her, because they have few associations with white men. Frye ignores the ways in which white women perpetuate white citizenship even in a patriarchal society.

The differences between dependent citizenship and anticitizenship make it “dangerous and historically inaccurate,” as Harris writes, “to suggest that the position of Black women and white women, even white women who were not economically privileged, were functionally equivalent.”⁸⁶ Scholars and activists are increasingly calling for analyses that illuminate the intersections of race, class, and gender.⁸⁷ It is indeed vital to understand how these forms of power interact. Yet as Harris indicates, the attempt to demonstrate the interconnections of multiple forms of power sometimes obscures these relations rather than illuminates them. In emphasizing the similarities in how gender, race, and class function, the distinct character of each form is often downplayed. When this occurs, Patricia Hill Collins argues, intersectionality can perpetuate a “new myth of equivalent oppressions” by tending to treat race, gender, and class as identical experiences. In the United States, she points out, race has been more salient than gender or even class in the lives of Black women. Treating gender and race as functional equivalents, therefore, discounts a primary experience of Black women. “Although this approach [intersectionality] is valid as a heuristic device,” she argues, “treating race, class, and gender as if their intersection produces equivalent results for all oppressed groups obscures differences in how race, class, and gender are hierarchically organized, as well as the differential effects of intersecting systems of power on diverse groups of people.”⁸⁸

Given this, a critique of the white citizen is preferable to a critique of the white *male* citizen in the context of this book’s argument because the former distinguishes between dependent citizenship and anticitizenship and therefore better captures the hierarchical manner in which race, gender, class, and citizenship intersect.⁸⁹ As Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham argues, race in the United States is a “metalanguage” that “resounds over and above a plethora of conflicting voices.”⁹⁰ As a consequence, dependent citizenship and anticitizenship intersect, but the former has been refracted through the prism of the latter. “Despite the predominance of patriarchal rule in American society,” bell hooks stresses, “Racism took precedence over sexual alliances in both the white world’s interaction with Native Americans and African Americans, just

as racism overshadowed any bonding between black women and white women on the basis of sex.”⁹¹ Although white women were not full citizens, they were white citizens. White citizenship is gendered, but it is not exclusive to one gender.

This is not to say that white women’s oppression was insignificant. Racial patriarchy in the *Herrenvolk* placed unique burdens on white women. Punishments for miscegenation were much harsher for them than for any other group, since they bore the burden of racial purity. The Naturalization Act of 1907, for example, actually stripped a white woman of her citizenship if she married an “alien ineligible for citizenship,” such as a Chinese immigrant.⁹² The effect of antimiscegenation law was to restrict access to white women’s bodies to the husband alone while it generalized access to Black women’s bodies to include the white owner and possibly other males. The sexual abuse of Black women was essentially decriminalized, while the sexuality of white women was rigorously policed. The result was different types of subjugation—white women were the private property of their husband or father while Black women were the public property of men—but subjugation nonetheless. Just as white men’s complicity in the racial order provided privileges that ultimately undermined their ability to challenge class domination, white women enjoyed racial standing at the cost of weakening their position from which to confront gendered and class forms of power. The tragic price was paid for in political defeats, compromised victories, and a stunted political imagination.

The Limits of the White Imagination

The *Herrenvolk* democracy’s pernicious effect on the white imagination was noted by Tocqueville. Slavery makes white men lazy, wasteful, hedonistic, and aggressive. It “enervates the powers of the mind and numbs human activity.” It makes white men scorn labor, because labor is something slaves do, and it makes masters aristocratic in their temperament.⁹³ As others have noted, the white political imagination compels whites to try to evade exploitation rather than confront it, to scoff at manual labor as being beneath them, and to seek pleasure outside of their labor rather

than through it.⁹⁴ It generates scorn among slaveholding women, who must remain “pure” (and silent) as their mates rape their slaves. The racial order, in other words, shapes the way whites see the world. In particular, it affects what Sheldon Wolin calls political vision. Political vision or imagination serves three functions. First, through exaggeration and extravagance it allows us to see things that might not otherwise be apparent. The state of nature, for example, allows Hobbes to show his readers the basic presuppositions on which a political order rests, even though he acknowledges such a condition never really existed. Second, political vision provides a view of society in its “corrected fullness” that renders complex political phenomena comprehensible. Marx could not know or explain every detail and subtlety of capitalism, but he abstracts important phenomena to draw a picture that generally explains how capitalism works and its effects on humanity. Finally, political vision is the means by which we criticize the values of society and transcend them by imagining a new society and better values.⁹⁵ It is this third function that has been so deformed by white citizenship.

The distortion of white citizens’ political imagination is one of the central lessons of Du Bois’s *Black Reconstruction*. Du Bois contends that slavery and anti-Black discrimination were defended by the white worker because “it fed his vanity because it associated him with the masters.”⁹⁶ By tying their beliefs, actions, and aspirations to the planters, poor whites were able to look down on slaves and later the freedmen. But the cost, Du Bois argues, was the inability to see Black people as fellow workers exploited by the same system and abolition and Reconstruction as labor struggles that had profound implications for whites’ freedom as well. Du Bois calls this tragedy of history the “American Blindspot.” The labor movement, which logically should have been a force for greater democracy, refused to recognize that slavery and racial discrimination compromise the political power of the entire working class. It was determined to see Black labor as an enemy and so refused to include Black workers—free or slave—in its ranks. The consequence was that the American Blindspot drove a wedge between black and white labor such that “there probably are not today in the world [Du Bois is

referring to the 1930s] two groups of workers with practically identical interests who hate and fear each other so deeply and persistently and who are kept so far apart that neither sees anything of common interest.”⁹⁷ This is not to say that class conflict between white workers and capitalists was nonexistent or that white workers did not engage in democratic struggles. Du Bois recognizes that poor whites had ambivalent feelings toward slavery and many even opposed it. Nevertheless, when they engaged in class struggles, it was often to defend or build upon their standing. Poor whites struggled against planters and industrialists, but the hard-won gains they extracted too often took the form of racial privileges.

The “American Assumption” (Du Bois’s term for the American Dream) accompanies the Blindspot. The Assumption that any ordinary person can become wealthy through hard work and thrift, Du Bois asserts, gave birth to a shallow definition of freedom limited to economic opportunity, the absence of government interference in private ventures, and the right to elect public officials.⁹⁸ The Assumption presumes that the community is an obstacle to individual freedom rather than its conduit. So, for example, public assistance that does not appear to be “earned” by the individual becomes a “handout” indicating dependence rather than independence.⁹⁹ By downplaying the structural aspects of economic failure, it resists any form of wealth redistribution, whether it is forty acres and a mule, a welfare check, or the redistribution of opportunities through affirmative action. By embracing the Assumption and its negative conception of freedom, Du Bois argues, the labor movement encouraged poor whites to strive to become capitalists rather than challenge capitalist exploitation. In turn, “capitalists not only accepted universal suffrage but early discovered that high wages in America made even higher profits possible; and that this high standard of living was itself a protection for capital in that it made the more intelligent and best paid of workers allies of capital and left its ultimate dictatorship undisturbed.”¹⁰⁰

The white citizen’s political imagination tends toward a limited notion of equality as well as freedom. In the *Herrenvolk* democracy, rich

and poor whites alike were hostile to the notion of “social equality” because it implied both radical economic transformation and equality with Black people. By definition, the *Herrenvolk* could not consider social equality as racial equality, but it also could not consider social equality as economic democracy because the redistribution of wealth would require breaking up the cross-class alliance between white labor and capital that guaranteed both accumulation and whites’ privileges. Condemnation of one form of equality led to condemnation of the other, as white citizens saw “in every advance of Negroes a threat to their . . . prerogatives.”¹⁰¹ Thus, a fervent desire to prevent social equality, no less weak in the North than in the South, stamped the polity, driving whites into a collective madness. White parents in the antebellum North pulled their children out of school and swore they would rather their children grow up in ignorance than have them sit next to a Black pupil. Devout Christians denied themselves religious instruction rather than share a pew with a Black parishioner. Southern towns in the 1960s drained their community pools rather than integrate them. Postal workers crossed out the “Mr.” and “Mrs.” and other titles of respect on envelopes addressed to African Americans. White women refused to relieve themselves in factories lacking segregated washrooms. Labor radicals demanded “stomach equality,” which would equalize wealth but leave white supremacy intact. In the antebellum era, many such actions and proclamations were rounded out with a public condemnation of the abolitionists for promoting social equality or “amalgamation.” A mob sometimes ensued. It is no wonder civil rights workers were frequently called “communists” by segregationists. As symbols of social equality, both civil rights and communism stood as threats to the *Herrenvolk* democracy; both had to be purged from American citizenship.

The burden of racial standing undermines the very vision of the white citizenry, disfiguring its notions of democracy, freedom, equality, and what to expect from politics. If James Baldwin is correct that a more democratic society requires “the most radical and far-reaching changes in the American political and social structure,” then he is surely correct that the white citizen is an obstacle to such changes, for “white

Americans are not simply unwilling to effect these changes; they are . . . unable even to envision them.”¹⁰² Whiteness, then, does not simply exclude some persons from enjoying democratic rights. It does much more: it produces a particular conception of democracy that not only denies active participation and social equality but cannot even imagine them.¹⁰³

The tragic aspect of the white political imagination is not simply its refusal to consider the possibility of a society where all races can live together in peace and equality. As the dominant group, the white race is by definition aggressive and inegalitarian. (As Marx puts it, slavery made whites “filibusters by profession.”) Further, the white political imagination is not able to recognize that the advancement of “whites” depends on the advancement of those who are not white and that so long as the dark world is degraded whites will be, too. The democratic problem is not the refusal to envision a society free of all exclusions based on race or other social distinctions. The tragic limitation of the white imagination is that a people imagined itself white at all.

2. The Problem of the White Citizen

1_ David Grimsted, *American Mobbing, 1828-1861: Toward Civil War* (New York : Oxford University Press, 1998), 4; Michael Feldberg, *The Turbulent Era:*

Riot and Disorder in Jacksonian America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 5.

2. Leonard L. Richards, “Gentlemen of Property and Standing”: *Anti-Abolitionist Mobs in Jacksonian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970).

3. Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1975), 154–57; Morgan, “Slavery and Freedom: The American Paradox,” *Journal of American History* 59, no. 1 (1972): 16–18; Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550–1812* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968), 44–98.

4. By “African” I refer to those persons brought from Africa (directly or indirectly) and their descendants, or those whose African ancestry was considered preeminent by their community. By “English” I refer to those who immigrated from Britain and their descendants, or those whose British ancestry was considered preeminent. The labels do not describe all settlers. The terms “Black” and “white” are inappropriate until around 1700.

5. Morgan, *American Slavery*, 233–34; George M. Fredrickson, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and South African History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 23–25.

6. Lerone Bennett Jr., *The Shaping of Black America: The Struggles and Triumphs of African-Americans, 1619 to the 1990s* (New York: Penguin, 1993), 53; Theodore Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*, 2 vols. (New York: Verso, 1994–97), vol. 2, chapter 7.

7. Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (New York: Capricorn, 1966), chapter 1; Fredrickson, *White Supremacy*, 62–68.

8. Wilcomb E. Washburn, *The Governor and the Rebel: A History of Bacon’s Rebellion in Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1957).

9. Antimiscegenation laws, first written in the early 1660s, were a response to the significant number of relationships between African men and European women. Martha Hodes, *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 28–31.

10. Morgan, *American Slavery*, 329–37. For similar arguments, see Allen, *Invention*; Allen, “They Would Have Destroyed Me: Slavery and the Origins of Racism,” *Radical America* 9, no. 3 (1975): 41–63; Bennett, *Shaping*, chapter 3; T. H. Breen and Stephen Innes, “Myne Owne Ground”: *Race and Freedom on Virginia’s Eastern Shore, 1640–1676* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980);

George M. Fredrickson, “Toward a Social Interpretation of the Development of American Racism,” in *Key Issues in the Afro-American Experience*, vol. 1, ed. Nathan I. Huggins, Martin Kilson, and Daniel M. Fox (New York: Harcourt, 1971); Fredrickson, *White Supremacy*, chapter 2; Oscar Handlin and Mary F. Handlin, “Origins of the Southern Labor System,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, no. 7 (1950): 199–222; and Gary B. Nash, “Red, White, and Black: The Origins of Racism in Colonial America,” in *The Great Fear: Race in the Mind of America*, ed. Gary B. Nash and Richard Weiss (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1970). Allen and Bennett argue even more forcefully than Morgan that the emergence of racial oppression was a deliberate plan of the colonial ruling class in Virginia and that white people had to be taught to “worship their skin,” as Bennett puts it.

11. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 194.

12. This position is a contested one. Some historians argue that perceptions of difference in color, culture, and religion held by the English toward Africans at least since the 1500s led the English to immediately distinguish themselves from Africans in a way they did not from other foreign peoples. These innate prejudices, they argue, marked Africans as permanently different and inassimilable into English civilization and led to the system of racial slavery and Black degradation. Thus, they contend, racism actually preceded slavery, not vice versa. This argument, however, falters on two grounds. First, it cannot explain what turns ethnocentrism, a common enough phenomena, into a system of racial oppression. Even if the English were prejudiced against Africans from the first contact for reasons of skin color, religion, or culture, it was by no means inevitable that this prejudice would lead to a social system of white domination and the creation of a white race. There is no reason why the English people’s perception of difference from Africans, however strong, would inevitably drive them to group themselves in a single “race” with Spaniards, Germans, Russians, Poles, French, and even the hated Irish. Second, the documents colonial historians rely on to address the relationship between slavery and race were written by colonial elites. Thus, they say little about how poor Englishmen and -women saw Africans. It seems just as likely that the rash of laws between 1660 and 1690 designed to separate the poor into Black and white groups were passed because prejudice was waning among poor English and African colonists as it was due to innate racial prejudice. For statements of the “racism before slavery” perspective,

see Carl N. Degler, “Slavery and the Genesis of American Race Prejudice,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 2, no. 1 (1959): 49–66; Jordan, *White over Black*, chapter 2; Alden T. Vaughan, “The Origins Debate: Slavery and Racism in Seventeenth-Century Virginia,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 97, no. 3 (1989): 311–54. For good overviews of the origins of slavery debate, see Allen, *Invention*, vol. 1; Vaughan, “The Origins Debate”; and Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic* (London: Verso, 1990), chapter 1.

13. Most of the historians I rely upon, excluding Allen and possibly Bennett, share an essentialist conception of race. That is, they assume the biological preexistence of races, though the power or status of each race had yet to be determined in the colonies. My point, with Allen, is that power and status created the races themselves.

14. Quoted in William Sumner Jenkins, *Pro-Slavery Thought in the Old South* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1960), 193.

15. Though Native Americans were considered something like a separate race by 1630 and many of the statutes that degraded Africans included Indians as well, most historiography concludes that anti-Indian attitudes and policies were less significant to the construction of white identity than anti-Black ones because Native Americans, while not considered “civilized” by English Americans, were still considered free, making them a poor counterpoint to white identity. Jill Lepore, for example, argues that an American identity (as distinct from an English identity) was constructed in the Jacksonian era through the image of the “free” Indian and against the image of the “slave” African. This conception of “Indianness” reflected white chauvinism, of course, and actual Indians continued to be killed and racially oppressed, yet Indianness was crucial to the formation of American identity in a way that Blackness was not. “The Indian” helped construct an ethnic *American* identity in the Jacksonian era and alleviated white Americans’ inferiority complex in relation to England. “The African,” on the other hand, helped construct a racial *white* identity. Jill Lepore, *The Name of War: King Philip’s War and the Origins of American Identity* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998). Other historians, however, argue for a more central role for Indian-colonist relations in the history of racial formation, placing the West and the trope of conquest (the drawing of lines and the allocation of power and meaning to those lines) at the center of American history and racial formation rather than the South and slavery. See Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of*

Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West (New York: W. W. Norton, 1987). The relevant implication here is that my account of the development of the white race is shaped by the historiography I rely upon. An analysis starting with Indian-settler relations rather than slave-citizen relations would not refute the association of white supremacy with democracy I make here, I suspect, but it might modify the model of racial formation I present.

16. Robert A. Margo, “The Labor Force in the Nineteenth Century,” in *The Cambridge Economic History of the United States*, vol. 2, ed. Stanley L. Engerman and Robert E. Gallman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 213.

17. Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *The Age of Jackson* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1953), 9.

18. Michael R. Haines, “The Population of the United States 1790–1920,” in *Cambridge Economic History of the United States*, vol. 2, ed. Engerman and Gallman, 193–97.

19. David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1991); Saxton, *White Republic*; Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788–1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

20. Schlesinger, *Age of Jackson*, 306–21, 335.

21. Judith N. Shklar, *American Citizenship: The Quest for Inclusion* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).

22. Martha May, “Bread before Roses: American Workingmen, Labor Unions, and the Family Wage,” in *Women, Work, and Protest: A Century of Women’s Labor History*, ed. Ruth Milkman (Boston: Routledge, 1985); David Roediger, “Gaining a Hearing for Black-White Unity: Covington Hall and the Complexities of Race, Gender, and Class,” chapter 10 in *Toward the Abolition of Whiteness* (London: Verso, 1994), 131–33.

23. The abolitionist movement provides an excellent example of the reaction against—and defense of—women’s efforts to participate in the political sphere. See Aileen S. Kraditor, *Means and Ends in American Abolitionism: Garrison and His Critics on Strategy and Tactics, 1834–1850* (Chicago: Elephant, 1989), especially chapter 3.

24. Shklar writes that the two things that distinguish American political thought from the rest of modern history are “the early establishment of representative democracy and the persistence of slavery”: Judith N. Shklar, *A Life of Learning* (Washington, DC: American Council of Learned Societies, 1989), 16.

25. Judith Shklar, "Rights in the Liberal Tradition," in *The Bill of Rights and the Liberal Tradition*, The Colorado College Studies 28 (Colorado Springs: Colorado College, 1992), 34. In a similar vein, she argues that citizenship is constructed in terms of membership and exile and that those persons excluded from a polity are "internal exiles." Thus slaves were like refugees in refugee camps. Shklar, "Obligation, Loyalty, Exile," *Political Theory* 21, no. 2 (1993): 181–97.

26. Shklar, *American Citizenship*, 16.

27. Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*, 47.

28. Pierre L. van den Berghe, *Race and Racism: A Comparative Perspective* (New York: Wiley and Sons, 1967), 18.

29. Quoted in George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817–1914* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 63–64.

30. Shklar, *American Citizenship*, 28.

31. Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*, 57, 108.

32. Jean H. Baker, *Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), 243–44. In an 1879 referendum on the "Chinese question," California voters favored total exclusion of the Chinese by a vote of 150,000 to 900, or 99.4 percent of the vote: Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 139.

33. Leon F. Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790–1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 74–93; Baker, *Affairs of Party*, 243–49.

34. Ian Haney-López similarly argues that immigration laws and cases that limited naturalization to whites also show how "citizenship easily serves as a proxy for race": *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York: New York University Press, 1996).

35. One possible reason why Shklar does not make this connection between whiteness and citizenship is because she holds a biological conception of race: "And whether or not you choose your nationality is a very tricky question, but you are stuck with your race" ("Obligation, Loyalty, Exile," 185). Both, I assert, are tricky questions.

36. Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 132.

37. This work toward earning one's whiteness began almost immediately upon arrival. As Malcolm X told Alex Haley as they witnessed the arrival of European immigrants at the airport, "By tomorrow night, they'll know how to say their first English word—*nigger*": *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York: Ballantine, 1965), 459.

38. My account of Irish assimilation here relies primarily on Ignatiev, *How the Irish*. Complementary accounts can be found in Allen, *Invention*, vol. 1, chapters 7–8, and Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*, chapter 7.

39. In *Age of Jackson*, 320–21, Schlesinger argues that the Democratic Party fought nativism because Democrats saw their struggle against monopoly as international. However, he does not explain how this internationalist impulse accommodated the official Democratic Party policy of white supremacy and virulent anti-Black prejudice.

40. Ignatiev, *How the Irish*, 2.

41. *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, 60 U.S. 393 (1856); Don Fehrenbacher, *The Dred Scott Case: Its Significance in American Law and Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

42. David Roediger, "The White Question," *Race Traitor*, no. 1 (1993): 104–7.

43. This sense of superiority among white laborers was likely an ambiguous one. As George Rawick suggests, it may have had as much to do with a certain longing for a lost way of life that was unattached to the clock, less sexually repressed, and closer to nature as it did with revulsion toward such a life and those who (supposedly) lived it. He writes, "The Englishman met the West African as a reformed sinner meets a comrade of his previous debaucheries. The reformed sinner very often creates a pornography of his former life. He must suppress even his knowledge that he had acted that way or even that he wanted to act that way": George P. Rawick, *From Sundown to Sunup: The Making of the Black Community* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1972), 132.

44. Rogers M. Smith, "Beyond Tocqueville, Myrdal, and Hartz: The Multiple Traditions in America," *American Political Science Review* 87, no. 3 (1993): 549–66.

45. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. George Lawrence, ed. J. P. Mayer (New York: Anchor, 1969), 17.

46. *Ibid.*, 12.

47. Tocqueville's conception of race was not a biological one. He resisted the growing trend in his day to associate particular physical and mental capabilities

with particular races. Emphasizing an older usage of the term, Tocqueville considered a “race” a group of people distinguished by their kind and level of civilization more than by any commonly shared genotypical or phenotypical traits. In effect, race was national character. James T. Schleifer, *The Making of Tocqueville’s “Democracy in America”* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 62–72. So, for example, in his notebooks he speaks of French and English Canadians as two distinct races and Indians as yet another, and in *Democracy* he compares the Anglo-American race with the Spanish and French races. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Journey to America*, trans. George Lawrence, ed. J. P. Mayer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), 39; *Democracy in America*, 408–13.

48. He says little directly about the white or Anglo-American race, presumably because it is the subject of the rest of the book. The white race in *Democracy* is almost always only invoked in contrast to African and Native Americans. It is rarely explicitly considered and when it is, it is usually in one of two ways: as oppressors or as a more powerful people and thus more intelligent in matters of trade, resource extraction, industry, culture, and governance. See, e.g., Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 334.

49. *Ibid.*, 30.

50. *Ibid.*, 28; Harry Liebersohn, “Discovering Indigenous Nobility: Tocqueville, Chamisso, and Romantic Travel Writing,” *American Historical Review* 99, no. 3 (1994): 746–66.

51. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 318.

52. *Ibid.*, 340.

53. Comte de Arthur Gobineau, *The Inequality of Human Races*, trans. Adrian Collins (New York: H. Fertig, 1967). Tocqueville taunts Gobineau’s views in a letter to him: “I am sure that Julius Caesar, if he had had the time, would have willingly written a book to show that the savages he met in Britain were not of the same human race as the Romans, and that while the latter were destined by nature to dominate the world, the former were fated to vegetate in an obscure corner” (Alexis de Tocqueville, *On Democracy, Revolution, and Society: Selected Writings*, ed. John Stone and Stephen Mennell [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980], 321).

54. Fredrickson, *Black Image*, 6–27. Colonization was a movement for the forced deportation of free Black people to Africa until slavery eventually died out and all ex-slaves were removed from the United States. The abolitionists

succeeded in discrediting colonization by the mid-1830s, though it had a brief revival just before the Civil War among Republicans like Lincoln.

55. Many works on *Democracy in America* or Tocqueville in general, however, pay little attention to his thoughts on race and slavery, including Jack Lively, *The Social and Political Thought of Alexis de Tocqueville* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962); Whitney Pope, *Alexis de Tocqueville: His Social and Political Theory* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1986); and Marvin Zetterbaum, *Tocqueville and the Problem of Democracy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967). Further, Tocqueville's chapter on the "Three Races" of America was omitted from most abridged editions of *Democracy* in the 1950s and 1960s. For a discussion of this kind of abridging, see James L. Colwell, "The Calamities which They Apprehend: Tocqueville on Race in America," *Western Humanities Review* 21 (1967): 93–100.

56. For arguments that Tocqueville was negrophobic or racist, see Fredrickson, *Black Image*; Richard Resh, "Alexis de Tocqueville and the Negro," *Journal of Negro History* 48 (October 1963): 251–59; and Stephen Frederick Schneck, "Habits of the Head: Tocqueville's America and Jazz," *Political Theory* 17, no. 4 (1989): 638–62. For arguments that Tocqueville should be read as essentially antiracist, see Liebersohn, "Discovering Indigenous Nobility," and popular accounts such as Andrew Hacker, *Two Nations: Black and White, Separate, Hostile, Unequal*, expanded and updated ed. (New York: Ballantine, 1995), and Sven Lindqvist, *The Skull Measurer's Mistake and Other Portraits of Men and Women Who Spoke Out Against Racism*, trans. by Joan Tate (New York: New Press, 1997). For a good discussion of race and democracy in the America Tocqueville visited, see Harry W. Fritz, "Racism and Democracy in Tocqueville's America," *Social Science Journal* 13, no. 3 (1976): 65–75.

57. Baker, *Affairs of Party*, 253.

58. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 356.

59. For a similar interpretation of Tocqueville, see Margaret Kohn, "The Other America: Tocqueville and Beaumont on Race and Slavery," *Polity* 35, no. 2 (2000): 169–93.

60. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 252–53 n. 4. As I pointed out in the previous section, the Pennsylvania legislature revoked the right of Black males to vote in 1838, a few years after Tocqueville's visit.

61. *Ibid.*, 357.

62. *Ibid.*, 343.

63. Tocqueville, *Journey to America*, 106.

64. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Gift of Black Folk* (Boston: Stratford, 1924), 139.

65. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Report on the Abolition of Slavery in the French Colonies* (Westport, CT: Negro Universities Press, 1970).

66. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 342.

67. *Ibid.*, 343.

68. *Ibid.*, 341.

69. Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Unequal Freedom: How Race and Gender Shaped American Citizenship and Labor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); Catherine A. Holland, *The Body Politic: Foundings, Citizenship, and Difference in the American Political Imagination* (New York: Routledge, 2001); Dana D. Nelson, *National Manhood: Capitalist Citizenship and the Imagined Fraternity of White Men* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).

70. Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988).

71. Linda K. Kerber, *No Constitutional Right to be Ladies: Women and the Obligations of Citizenship* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998).

72. Hodes, *White Women, Black Men*; Julie Novkov, “Racial Constructions: The Legal Regulation of Miscegenation in Alabama, 1890–1934,” *Law and History Review* 20 (2002), <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/lhr/20.2/novkov.html>.

73. Kerber, *No Constitutional Right*, xx.

74. Patricia Hill Collins, *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 15–16.

75. The terms “civil death” and “social death” derive from Cheryl I. Harris, “Finding Sojourner’s Truth: Race, Gender, and the Institution of Property,” *Cardozo Law Review* 18, no. 2 (1996): 309–409, and Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), respectively.

76. Harris, “Finding Sojourner’s Truth,” 321.

77. *Ibid.*, 312.

78. Dana Frank, “White Working-Class Women and the Race Question,” *International Labor and Working-Class History* 54 (fall 1998): 80–102; Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, “African-American Women’s History and the Meta-language of Race,” *Signs* 17, no. 2 (1992): 251–74.

79. Frank, “White Working-Class Women,” 85.

80. Barbara Hilkert Andolsen, “*Daughters of Jefferson, Daughters of Bootblacks*”: *Racism and American Feminism* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986); Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race & Class* (New York: Vintage, 1983); Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: William Morrow, 1984); Louise Michele Newman, *White Women’s Rights: The Racial Origins of Feminism in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

81. Aileen Kraditor, *The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890–1920* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), 168.

82. Shklar, *American Citizenship*, 60–61; Kraditor, *Ideas of Woman Suffrage*, 252–53; Gretchen Ritter, “Gender and Citizenship after the Nineteenth Amendment,” *Polity* 32, no. 3 (2000): 345–75. The Nineteenth Amendment technically covered Black women but it was an empty victory for most, as they were prevented from exercising their new right by the same tests, taxes, and terrors that had kept Black men from voting since the rise of Jim Crow.

83. Paula Baker, “The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780–1920,” *American Historical Review* 89, no. 3 (1984): 620–47.

84. Marilyn Frye, “On Being White: Toward a Feminist Understanding of Race and Race Supremacy,” in her *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory* (Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1983), 127.

85. *Ibid.*, 114.

86. Harris, “Finding Sojourner’s Truth,” 336.

87. Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, “Beyond Racism and Misogyny: Black Feminism and 2 Live Crew,” in *Words That Wound: Critical Race Theory, Assaultive Speech, and the First Amendment*, ed. Mari J. Matsuda et al. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993); Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 139 (1989): 139–67.

88. Collins, *Fighting Words*, 211.

89. This is not to say that this focus is the most appropriate in all contexts. For an example of a useful critique of white male citizenship specifically, see Nelson, *National Manhood*.

90. Higginbotham, “African-American Women’s History,” 274.

91. bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (Boston: South End, 1981), 122.
92. Frank, "White Working-Class Women."
93. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 35, 347–48, 375–76; *Journey to America*, 269.
94. Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*, 13.
95. Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1961).
96. W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America: 1860–1880* (New York: Atheneum, 1992), 12.
97. *Ibid.*, 700–701.
98. *Ibid.*, 183.
99. Nancy Fraser, *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse, and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), chapters 7 and 8.
100. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 184. As Jennifer Hochschild has shown, the American Dream still dominates the American political imagination and it continues to be intimately connected to and challenged by race because white and Black Americans still see each other as barriers to each other's success: *Facing Up to the American Dream: Race, Class, and the Soul of the Nation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).
101. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 700–701.
102. James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Dell, 1963), 115.
103. In making this argument I do not want to imply that wiping away white privilege makes a utopian kingdom inevitable. The primary weakness of Du Bois's argument is that it assumes that without the wages of whiteness, there would be little else to prevent the crystallization of a politically conscious working class that could fight capital not just for reforms but for basic changes in the system. But class always operates in the context of other relationships that, while inevitably related to class, are not reducible to it. There is certainly a tendency toward class consciousness and labor unity in the processes of capitalist production, as Marx shows, but it is not inevitable. It is but one tendency among many, and it is often not the strongest. Class unity and consciousness, like democracy, are ultimately political products borne of vision, struggle, compromise, and hope. Nevertheless, though there are no sure paths to a more democratic society, Du Bois's gift to theory is his analysis of white wages and the cross-class alliance and how their abolition is one of the most important prerequisites of such a society.