“Courageous and daring, this work testifies/documents the reality that political solidarity, forged in struggle, can exist across differences.” — bell books
Part Two

On Being White and Other Lies: A History of Racism in the United States

for Jacqui Alexander
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Four years of full-time anti-Klan organizing and I began to get sick. First it hit my stomach, and I was up all night puking. That was the week after Eddie and Tim, Tuscarora Indians, walked into the local newspaper office in Robeson County with sawed-off shotguns and held twenty people hostage for most of the day. While I and a host of others waited outside, they finally released everyone after the Governor promised to investigate racist violence, drug trafficking and law enforcement complicity in both. I got home and got well, then it hit my throat and came and went for another three months. The first time, I was back in Robeson County, after Lumbee Indian leader Julian Pierce was killed the month before he would have beat the white power structure in a fair election for District Attorney by consolidating Black, Indian and poor white votes. Later it hit me in a motel in Shelby, where we were trying to build up local support for a case against neo-Nazis who murdered three young men in an adult bookstore, “to avenge Yahweh on homosexuals.”

I slowed down then and started tracking another way; my roadmap was not the spidery backroads of North Carolina, but history. I knew I needed to understand the genesis of the violence that was sickening me.

A year or so into the process, I found James Baldwin’s piece “On Being White and Other Lies” on microfiche in the Duke University library. Baldwin’s face watched from the opposite page, light off his features showing as whiteness on the duotone, his intelligent eye emerging from the blackness like a galaxy, Andromeda perhaps. But in his universe it was definitely I who was under observation:

America became white—the people who, as they claim, “settled” the country became white—because of the necessity of denying the Black presence and justifying the Black subjugation. No community can be based on such a principle—in other words, no

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community can be established on so genocidal a lie. White men—from Norway, for example, where they were Norwegians—became white by slaughtering the cattle, poisoning the wells, torching the houses, massacring Native Americans, raping Black women. This moral erosion has made it impossible for those who think of themselves as white to have any moral authority.... It is the Black condition, and only that, which informs the consciousness of white people. It is a terrible paradox, but those who believed that they could control and define Black people divested themselves of the power to control and define themselves.

Baldwin’s words resonated with my own sense of whiteness. I could see the country was going backwards, and I understood instinctively from my childhood in the Jim Crow South what that meant. This knowledge had brought me to anti-Klan organizing, and it also fed my deepening sense of crisis. But I also came to suspect that these changes, the bloody effects of which I had experienced so intimately working for North Carolinians Against Racist and Religious Violence, might involve more than just the roll-backs of the civil rights movement I had lived through in my adolescence. What was the larger historical framework, and what did it mean?

I was convinced that most white progressives hugely underestimate the power of race in U.S. history as well as the degree to which racial struggles have shaped other political struggles in this country. I suspected that both feminism and the gay and lesbian organizing I had done for over a decade had been as profoundly shaped by race as by gender, but with far less acknowledgement. I had spent many of my years in these movements trying to ensure that my new women’s community would not replicate the segregation of my Alabama childhood, but I often felt my head bloody from beating it up against a familiar wall of what felt like willed ignorance, or disoriented from wandering in fogs of personalization and guilt. If racism equals “power plus prejudice,” as the anti-racist formula states, how do we really go about explaining this “power” to people in ways that help them to understand what a huge force it is we are up against, how inevitably we all have been shaped by it, and how much we need to do beyond “fixing” ourselves?

As I worked on these questions, the globe shifted: the Soviet bloc collapsed, the Sandinistas lost the Nicaraguan election, Nelson Mandela walked out of a South African jail, Bush went to war against Iraq, and a hardline coup against Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev brought the end of state-sanctioned Communism in the Soviet Union and that Union’s collapse by the year’s end. How did these volatile and massive international shifts relate to my sense of growing crisis at home as Los Angeles burned in the wake of Rodney King’s judicial beating and the economy unraveled to the extent that Bill Clinton could defeat George Bush in the 1992 race for President?

In an attempt to answer, or at least more fully frame, some of these questions, I set out to write a history of racism as it emerged in what is now the United States. The immediate context for the project was my participation in the editorial collective of The Third Wave: Feminist Essays on Racism, which publisher Barbara Smith of Kitchen Table Women of Color Press had approached me and several other women to edit in 1988. Barbara assembled a multiracial group of women: Jocqui Alexander, an African-Caribbean woman living in Boston (then later in New York); Sharon Day, an Ojibwe from Minnesota; Norma Alarcón, a Chicana at Berkeley; Lisa Albrecht, a Jew relocated from New York to Minnesota; and me, a white southerner. Early in the process, we came up against the question of how anti-Semitism would be incorporated into the anthology. Was anti-Semitism a form of racism within the U.S. context, or not? To answer that question with any integrity, I realized I needed a clearer sense of what racism is in the United States, how it has evolved. I soon learned that I would have to understand more about capitalism as well.

Putting together the anthology became a major learning experience for me. As we met in each of our home communities to discuss manuscripts and the emerging vision of the book, we also shared our lives and cultures. In the context of our continuing discussions I would hear what to me was new information and say, “You should write that up for the book.” The response I often got was, “I already know that. I want to do something that is fresher for me.” It occurred to me that I could take on as my part of the project some of these understandings that seemed so basic to particular cultures yet were so foreign to people outside. The bibliography for this essay emerged from those Third Wave discussions, as my co-editors recommended books and I read them. I began to synthesize what I was learning into very rough drafts, which
I brought back to the collective for comment. Whatever strengths this essay has, they have arisen from this collective process.

I have attempted this overly ambitious project, not with a scholar's time and degree of specialization, but with an organizer's urgency. It is the result of a rich collective process I underwent with women who became my friends. They helped me to struggle with and against a knowledge that was coming to me through the pages of books, their usually remote and objective tone reinforcing the very white emotional denial that created the devastation in the first place. This "book learning" was balanced by the passionate oral histories of communities in struggle that we shared.

My co-editors also urged me to find a way to close the distance between myself as a white person (a lesbian, a woman) and the material. Near the end of my reading, I remembered part of my mother's legacy. Before she died, she passed on to me the genealogical work done by her cousin to establish her father's lineage back to emigration to the British colonies from England in 1613. She thought that someday I or my siblings might want to belong to the United Daughters of the Confederacy, the Daughters of the American Revolution or the Colonial Dames—all women's organizations predicated on proving European pedigree. As my mother explained it, the genealogies were designed to help me "know who I am." I got out those family papers and decided to put them to use, as a way to locate myself within this history and to frame it in more personal and immediate terms.

My goal, then, is to provide an overview of the history of racism in the United States that can be read in one (long) sitting: a place for beginning students and activists to understand the extensive and cruel history of institutional racism, as well as for others more veteran to review this history in light of the present emergency; to understand how capitalism has worked with racism to write various of us into it differently according to gender, class, sexual orientation, religion, nationality, geography and skin color. The essay has had an additional value for me in getting a historic perspective on my own family's emotional dynamics. In that respect, it serves as a long footnote to the first, more personal section in this book, "Memoir of a Race Traitor."

I. Commerce Capitalism:
"So great a supply exhausted in so short a time..."

My great-great-great-great-great-great-great-grandfather Ambrose Cobbs landed at Yorktown, Virginia, on the "Treasure" in 1613 with his brother Joseph. The Cobbs were among the earliest emigrants to America from Devonshire, Lancaster, London and northern England. Ambrose had been born in 1590, two years after the English Navy defeated the Spanish Armada and opened up North America to British conquest. Ambrose arrived six years after the first settlement at Jamestown, only three years after the "starving time" when colonists living in cave-like holes dug up and devoured newly buried corpses, one man killing his wife, salting and eating all parts of her except her head. European settlers in such new worlds probably often found themselves in such desperate situations acting similarly savage and animal-like, responses which intensified their need to project such characteristics onto the peoples they encountered.

Ambrose and Joseph came to what we now call North America as settlers. Joseph's wife and two sons came over to join him in 1624; Ambrose married Anne and settled in York County, Virginia, where they were granted 350 acres of land. These Cobbs were part of the worldwide massive burst of discovery, colonization and conquest that catapulted Europe out of feudalism and into commerce capitalism, the first stage of capitalist expansion that would amass the huge amounts of resources needed to make the industrialization of Europe and the United States possible. Its cost I can only describe as a maniacal declamation of other peoples and resources across the globe.

Western Europe, of course, did not invent empire building, the conquest of other peoples and appropriation of their resources justified by a sense of the conqueror's superiority. But capitalism and modern technology allowed these behaviors much more global and totalizing effects than they had ever had before in what we know of human history. By 1914, Europe would control 80 percent of the globe: 283 million Europeans would rule 900 million non-European peoples. Racism in the United States today cannot be understood outside of this
context, that is, the emergence of capitalism in its commercial, industrial and finance stages, and the global imperial agenda that it required.

In Africa and Asia, Europeans initially conducted their business from fortifications and limited their emphasis to trade, given the geographical, political and climatic considerations in those vast continents. But the Americas, New Zealand, Australia and South Africa became settler colonies, to which people like Ambrose Cobbs brought their families, intending to stay and take advantage of economic and political opportunities. Of all these settler colonies, only in the Americas would European colonials import Africans for slave labor, and it is from this fusion of settler colonization and chattel slavery that the particularly vicious character of U.S. racism emerges. "There is not a country in world history," concludes historian Howard Zinn, "in which racism has been more important, for so long, as in the United States."

Ambrose and Joseph landed in Virginia six years before the first shipment of "negars" to the British colonies would debark in Virginia in 1619, recent starvation having sharpened British appetites for a source of added labor. By the Cobbs' arrival, however, European enslavement of Africans was almost two centuries old and had become "a fixture of the New World" in Latin America and the Caribbean. The English got the idea of enslaving Africans from Spain and Portugal. Explorers had brought Africans to Portugal to serve as slaves in the 15th century. Slavery did exist in the African states to which Europe turned for slaves, but with nothing like the severity or inhumanity that European slavery derived from a relentless pursuit of profits and from racial hatreds.

The Spanish and Portuguese also led the way in exploration and colonization, establishing the first basic and deadly practice of racism in the Americas: the genocide of native peoples necessary to control the new lands, and the enslavement of Africans for the labor needed to tap their wealth. Spanish conquistadores rapidly destroyed the centralized states of the Aztecs and Incas, partly because of the hierarchical nature of those cultures, partly because the Spanish had the advantage of gun powder, horses, iron and bacteria that spread European diseases with fatal results among the indigenous population. By the end of the 16th century, Spain had a colonial empire twenty times its own size. So vast a territory would require massive amounts of human labor to yield its riches. The Spanish first tried indigenous labor, but the Indian population was soon decimated by the brutal nature of that labor and by disease. As one Jesuit remarked casually in 1583, "No one could believe that so great a supply [of labor] could ever be exhausted, much less in so short a time." Practically the entire Indian population of the Caribbean was wiped out by the end of the 17th century. In 1492, Indigenous people in the Americas totalled at least 70 million; by 1650, they had been reduced to 3.5 million.

For anyone trying to understand racism, this terrible history brings us to a crucial question: What could allow for the deaths of 66.5 million people? Or for the deaths of an estimated 50 million Africans in the beginning centuries of the slave trade? The Spanish and Portuguese, like the British after them, seemed driven by a psychosis of domination. It affected kings as well as soldiers, workers as well as priests. When Columbus wrote home about his first encounter with Indians, he described their amiableness and their love toward all others in preference to themselves, and his own confusions as to whether they had any private property. When Cortez' forces slaughtered the Aztecs at the fiesta of Toxcatl, it came (according to an Aztec who was present) "at this moment in the fiesta, when the dance was loveliest and when song was linked to song, [when] the Spaniards were seized with an urge to kill the celebrants." When the exploring party of Cabeza de Vaca lost three of its men in an accident, the survivors were amazed when the Indians who discovered them sat down among them and expressed a loud and earnest grief, feelings that the Spanish had not been able to muster for their own people. It is this failure to feel the communal bonds between humans, I think, and the punishment that undoubtedly came to those Europeans who did, that allowed the "community of the lie" to grow so genocidally in the soil of the "New World." Historian Howard Zinn has pointed to a possible source of this European malady: tribal life, with its more communal spirit and kinder rules and punishments, had been destroyed in Europe by the slave societies of Greece and Rome. What took its place was an individualism that was only sharpened by the drive for private ownership as Europe emerged from feudalism. The massive denial that results from the destruction of communal bonds is the undergirding of the episte-
ology or the "way of knowing" of genocide: We do not feel, and thus we cannot "know."

The silver that indigenous people were forced to mine during this period of genocide fueled Europe's economy while it killed the native people and sapped the natural resources of the colonies. By 1650 silver was 99 percent of the mineral export of Spanish America, exceeding by at least three times the total European reserve. It passed to Dutch, French, Genoese, English and German bankers. This enormous capital in northern Europe fueled the spirit of enterprise and financed manufacturing, which propelled the advent of the Industrial Revolution. The concentration of global wealth in Europe prevented the accumulation of industrial capital in the lands that produced the wealth. Conquest had shattered the foundations of native civilizations, and forced labor in mines or plantations destroyed the collective farming system, further punishing the people and land from which European wealth flowed. These historically created patterns of poverty are the source of what we now call "underdevelopment."17

Having exhausted the native supply of labor, the Spanish needed an alternative. However, the kidnapping and importing of Africans to use as slave labor did not become a profitable alternative until European consumption of chocolate and coffee imported from the colonies made the demand for sugar skyrocket; by the end of the 1500s, sugar was the most valuable agricultural product in international trade. The profits from sugar production offset the costs of the slave trade and opened Africa up as a new supply of labor.18 It seems no accident that two of the cash crops that would make slavery profitable—sugar and tobacco—were highly addictive substances; and the physiological responses to these substances further incorporated racism into the European body, demarcating European and "Other" as consumer and consumed. No wonder that in the late-20th century, people all across the United States flock to a host of "Twelve Step" programs that offer a solution (whatever their political strengths and limits) to a proliferating sense of addiction.

England did not realize the potential in overseas exploration until the reign of Queen Elizabeth. The English did not get to Africa until 1550, and their encounter there with Africans would reverberate in the American colonies. The English, hailing from a small northern island, had more limited cultural experience than the Spanish or the Portuguese, who had both been conquered by a darker-skinned, more advanced Moslem civilization during the Middle Ages. When these Englishmen met Africans for the first time, one of the most fair-skinned peoples on the globe came into contact with one of the darkest, a difference reinforced by the existing dichotomy between dark and light in British culture. It led the English to see the Africans as both "black" and "heathen" and to link them immediately with barbarity, animalistic behavior and the devil (not a healthy combination).19

The English were coming from a culture in which the Protestant Reformation required of its pious aspirants self-scrutiny and internalized control at an expansive time when medieval moral restraints seemed to be disintegrating. British (and other European) explorers projected their disquieting sexual feelings onto the darker, seemingly less inhibited peoples with whom they came in contact. For example, Europeans found both apes and Africans similarly lustful ("sexuality was what one expected of savages").

They concocted stories of cross-species copulation and of apes attacking African women.20 It was with a shock of recognition that I read of these accounts in Winthrop Jordan's White Over Black. I had just co-written Quarantines and Death: The Far Right's Homophobic Agenda, which discussed the contemporary neo-Nazi "explanation" for the origins of AIDS as cross-species copulation between Africans and monkeys.21 That such racist mythology could find resonance across four centuries (I don't think the Nazis had been reading Jordan or the writings of early explorers) is cause for alarm. I hardly believe in "racial memory," but in the absence of such biological theories we have to account for the ways in which such cultural residues are kept alive and passed on from century to century. I think in the 20th century the presence of overtly fascist movements is one medium of transmission, which is one reason why such movements are allowed by capitalists, the state and regular white folks to operate.

This tendency of Christian European men to project sexual desire onto an Other, then to exterminate the "polluted" was already in practice in the witch burnings in Europe in the late Middle Ages and early modern periods. Estimates of the number of women executed range from 30,000 to nine million22—in a time period that coincides
with the beginnings of imperial conquest. Excessive female sexuality, as church documents explained, made women susceptible to witchcraft. "From 1480 to 1700, more women were killed for witchcraft than for other crimes put together," explains historian E. William Monter. The emerging nation-state also needed to assert control over its male subjects' bodies at home and overseas. In 1553 Henry VIII's Parliament made the act of sodomy a crime, the first in a series of statutes that recodified as felonies crimes that were previously under the jurisdiction of church courts.

Sixteenth-century biblical justifications for slavery based on the story of Noah and Ham also show how the European mind linked sexuality with racism. In fact, the Genesis story has no mention of race or color. After the Flood, Noah's son Ham looked on his father's nakedness while he lay drunk in his tent, the violation of a patriarchal injunction. For this, Noah cursed Canaan, son of Ham, saying he would be a "servant of servants" to his brothers. According to Elizabethan commentators, Ham's posterity was cursed also with becoming "so blacke and lothesome, that it might remain a spectacle of disobedience to the whole world. As of this blacke and cursed Chus came all these blacke Moores which are in Africa." At a particular historical moment, emerging racism adopted patriarchy for its own ends.

Jews, the primary Other in Europe for much of the Middle Ages, were also receptacles of European Christian men's projections, and also received punishment. The Christian Crusades of the 11th century intensified religious anti-Semitism in Europe, as did the role that Jews were forced to play in the money economy that emerged in part from the Crusades. Usury, like sexuality, was considered a sin, so Jews were forced as money-lenders into the marginal economy until that cash economy became profitable, then forced out in country after country, until capitalism replaced feudalism in Europe, with Christians in firm control of financial resources and with Jews as a convenient buffer class to obscure the real source of class oppression and to hedge Christians against their own guilt over a burgeoning materialism.

When the British turned to the West in search of profits for the private London Company, the history of European anti-Semitism, racism and sexual repression shaped the laws and attitudes of their first permanent settlement at Jamestown, the entry point of the Cobbs into the history of North America.

Ambrose Cobbs died in 1656. His son Robert Cobbs had been born in 1620, the year the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock. Robert Cobbs lived his sixty-two years in York County, Virginia, eventually holding the authority of justice of the peace and high sherrif. His life spanned the period when the practice of African chattel slavery developed in Virginia, a shift that also brought the emergence of white identity. The British in America followed Spanish and Portuguese patterns of genocide of indigenous people and enslavement of Africans. Some historians feel, however, that British racism was even harsher than the Spanish variety, partly because the British did not have to reckon with the competing interests of the Catholic Church and partly because British capitalism was more ruthless as Britain gained control of the slave trade. The British policy regarding the racial identity of the offspring of interracial unions was also much more rigid than the Spanish. British colonies used what Marvin Harris calls the "rule of hypo-descent," which categorized anyone with any African parentage as belonging to the subordinate race. This practice allowed plantation masters to have sexual access to Black women without jeopardizing the inheritance of white children; it also ensured that "whites" would remain relatively "pure," while "Blacks" became increasingly hybrid.

The British employed slavery first on their sugar plantations in the Caribbean. Like Spanish silver, profits from the slave trade fueled European industrial development. The Royal Africa Company had been chartered in the 1670s, and between 1680 and 1686 it paid 300 percent in dividends, although 35 percent of its (human) African cargo did not survive the Middle Passage. Slave traffic made Bristol, its shipping center, Britain's second largest city and Liverpool the world's largest port. Liverpool slave merchants made more than 1.1 million pounds a year from the Caribbean trade (at a time when an Englishman could live on six pounds a year). Banks grew, and Lloyds made money by insuring each step of the process. These slave profits financed Britain's Great Western Railway and its industries, and subsidized the invention of the steam engine.

The slave trade profited New England as well. In the mid-1700s, northern slave ships left Boston for Africa with rum to trade for slaves,
then sailed to the Caribbean and traded slaves for molasses, bringing that back to Massachusetts to distill into rum, with big profits made from each transaction. This slave trade helped develop the northern naval industry and distilleries and created a market for agricultural and manufacturing exports.50

This history of European-U.S. economic development provides the context we need to understand programs such as affirmative action, which seem a puny enough redress to centuries of rape of resources and labor and women. According to the latest U.S. census figures, African Americans still make only half the wages of whites, but have one tenth the wealth,51 because many whites are still inheriting the cumulative effect of centuries of appropriation.

Sugar made slavery profitable in the Caribbean. Tobacco was the cash crop on the Atlantic seaboard, and in the tobacco colonies of Virginia and Maryland, African slavery developed in three phases. Between 1619, the year before Robert Cobbs was born, and 1640, the year after his family received a land grant, the British imported Africans gradually, with no set policies. But by 1640 evidence mounts that Africans were being subjected to the twin characteristics of slavery—lifetime servitude and inherited slave status. Both of these were very different from the indentured servitude of Europeans and the "tendency toward liberty" of English common law. Along with this emerging practice came the debasement of Africans through discriminatory laws and practices, such as the barring of interracial sexual unions and not allowing Africans to purchase arms.52 British jurisprudence—the American version of which various Cobbs would help to implant—codified an emerging American racism. Little wonder that when I sat in North Carolina courts monitoring trials of racist attackers I despaired of justice from a legal system that itself helped to invent the racist distinctions between "slave" and "free."

The Cobbs probably used their 350 acres to grow tobacco, the main cash crop of Virginia. That acreage hardly made them part of the planter aristocracy; but it was probably a large enough tract to "require" a small number of slaves. The Cobbs were probably also affected in the 1660s when the price of tobacco dropped in Virginia, and with this economic pressure "unmitigated capitalism" (in Stanley Elkins' terms) became "unmitigated slavery," as colonists realized the extra dividend of inherited slave labor.53 As justice of the peace Robert Cobbs doubtless reacted to Bacon's Rebellion in 1676, an uprising of African slaves and white indentured and unemployed workers against the planter aristocracy.

To forestall such revolutionary alliances across race lines, colonial rulers had already begun extending to all European settlers the rights initially given to Englishmen. By 1671, the British began encouraging the naturalization of Scots, Welsh and Irish to enjoy "all such liberties, privileges, immunities whatsoever, as a natural born Englishman."54 In the same decade, the Virginia assembly passed a law that "the conferring of baptism doth not alter the condition of the person as to his bondage or freedome":55 that Africans could be converted to Christianity but still remain slaves. (I wonder whether Robert Cobbs in his role as first vestryman of Bruton Parish Church in Williamsburg agonized at all over the contradiction between "saved" soul and enslaved soul.) Historian Winthrop Jordan comments, "From the initially most common term Christian, at mid-century there was a marked drift toward English and free. After about 1680, taking the colonies as a whole, a new term appeared—white.56

Robert Cobbs' life spanned the period in U.S. history when white people were "invented" to give Europeans a common identity against Africans. His son Robert Cobbs, Jr. was born in 1660 and lived until 1725, serving as constable and vestryman. It was during Robert Jr.'s lifetime that slavery was finally consolidated into a police state in the mid-Atlantic colonies. By 1705 Virginia consolidated a generation of random statutes into a "slave code." With police power and the legal equation between Africans and slavery in place, African slaves were brought to the colonies in unprecedented numbers in a period that Jordan calls the "unthinking acquiescence" with slavery and its presuppositions.57

This creation of white identity in late-17th-century Virginia is what James Baldwin recognized. The implications are profound: If we white folks were constructed by history, we can, over time and as a people, unconstrukt ourselves. The Klan knows this possibility and recognizes those whites who disavow this history as white niggers, race traitors and nigger lovers. How, then, to move masses of white people to become traitors to the concept of race?58
II. Industrial Capitalism:
"Slavery is nothing compared to it..."

My great-great-great-grandfather James Cobb was a captain of the Militia in the American Revolution—he is my claim to membership in the D.A.R. He was born in 1735. After the war, he was granted large tracts of land in Kentucky and South Carolina, which he willed to his sons at his death on or before 1800. During James Cobb's lifetime, Europe entered a new phase of capitalism, its industrial phase, made possible by technology that adopted new energy sources and machines for manufacturing and by the development of the factory system. Profit-making from manufacturing was at the heart of industrial capitalism, as money became concentrated in the hands of the middle class. Both the American Revolution and the Civil War would be fought over who would reap the profits of industrialism on the vast continent. In the British colonies, commerce capitalism had demarcated whiteness against and above both Africans and Indians; in the new nation, industrial capitalism would add Mexicans and Asians to a racially demarcated underclass.

As the market revolution expanded, African, Indian, Mexican and Asian peoples were written into sectors of the economy differently. African Americans were tied to the southern agrarian/slave economy, Mexicans to the "free" and soon-to-be freed territory of the Southwest appropriated after an official war, and Asians to the "free" agricultural and industrial labor system of California and Hawaii. Indians resisted incorporation into any labor system and thus were the objects of open warfare, land appropriation and the reservation system.

The American Revolution was fought on the cusp of the Industrial Revolution in America. It was precipitated by England's victory over France in a struggle for control of increasingly profitable colonies in North America, the West Indies and India. After four global wars fought in the first half of the 1700s, England emerged in 1763 as the leading colonial power in the world, a position the British would hold until the mid-20th century when the United States assumed hegemony. England's victory over France, however, led to the loss of her richest claim, the thirteen colonies in North America, because England began to tighten the bonds of empire that previously had been laxly enforced in America, in order to pass on the costs of the war. British taxation, passed through such acts as the Stamp Act and the Tea Act, led to the colonials' cry of "no taxation without representation" and to the Continental Congresses and the Declaration of Independence.

The "self-evident truths" that Jefferson used to explain the colonials' revolt were not merely the more cold-blooded "right" to profit, but the "inalienable rights" of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness"—hardly consistent with the practices of genocide or chattel slavery that had helped create the profits the colonists were so loath to have taxed. In fact, the new Constitution, passed in 1787, wrote racial inequity into the new nation's founding document in the "3/5 compromise," in which slaves were counted as 3/5 human for the purpose of determining the population base for property rights and representation. Abolition of the slave trade ("the Migration or Importation of such Persons as any of the States now existing shall think proper to admit") was forbidden for twenty years.39

If the white framers of the Constitution did not apply natural rights to Blacks and Indians, the people of Haiti did, as Haiti became the next country in the Americas to follow the revolutionary example, overthrowing French domination in a bloody revolt. The aftershocks of Haiti's uprising persuaded Napoleon to sell off the Louisiana territory to the United States in 1803, ironically opening up more territory for slavery and for relocation of Indians. The Haitian Revolution also terrified the white authors of American liberty, inspired North American slaves and sent tremors through southern households, including, perhaps, the Cobbs'.

One of the first concerns of the new nation was economic independence from Britain. The large-scale agriculture of the plantation system in the South was the southern face of the Industrial Revolution. Textile manufacturing in the North using the new technology ushered in the beginning of the factory system in the United States, which was based in New England but which used southern cotton. Thus when the Industrial Revolution reached American shores, it set up interdependent but competing economic systems, one dependent on "free" white labor, the other on the slave labor of Africans.

James Cobb's son Thomas Cobb40 (born in 1764, the year after the Treaty of Paris) sold off part of the land he inherited from James and
moved to Georgia. He was a lawyer and became a judge. He died in 1816, willing his farm to his son. Perhaps he moved south in the years after the Revolution because of depleted soil and a glutted tobacco market, which brought a severe depression in the tobacco colonies. The price of slaves declined, and there was reason to believe that slavery as a practice might pass. But here the momentum of racism overrode short-term economic motives, and the planters sustained their losses. The invention of the cotton gin in 1792 broke the bottleneck in textile production and ushered in "a period of economic change...that, in degree, compared favorably with any changes in the history of agriculture." Cotton became the new cash crop on which slavery could thrive. The United States produced 6,000 bales of cotton in 1792; by 1810 it was producing 178,000 bales, and by 1860, over five million.42

About the time Thomas Cobb left Virginia and headed with his family to Georgia, the economic center of the slave colonies shifted from the mid-Atlantic to the "Cotton Kingdom" of the Deep South, where soil had not been depleted by tobacco production. The new states of Louisiana (1812), Mississippi (1817) and Alabama (1819) were swelled by slaves and by immigrants like Thomas Cobb. The population of the Cotton Kingdom rose from 40,000 in 1810 to one million, thirty years later.43 The abolition movement won the end of the international slave trade in 1808, but a white supremacist economy adjusted, as the Atlantic states substituted breeding slaves as the "cash crop" to replace tobacco, what historian John Hope Franklin calls "one of the most fantastic manipulations of human development in the history of mankind."44 In 1790 there were less than 700,000 slaves in the United States. By 1830 there were two million. By 1860 there were almost four million slaves.45

Boston Judge Samuel Sewall at the turn of the 18th century had declared, "[Africans can] never embody with us and grow up into orderly Familles, to the Peopling of the land."46 Clearly, the American "family" was being ideologically constructed as white. The bonds of biological and emotional families outside of whiteness had no protection, an inhumanity that, I suspect, has considerably eroded emotional bonds within white families as well.

Southern and westward expansion created the need for a new Indian policy. From the first colonial settlements in the early 1600s, North American Indians (in less hierarchical, more egalitarian tribal arrange-
unconstitutional action was a disregard for the facade of "justice" that Jefferson could not have mustered.

Several thousand Seminoles in Florida refused to relocate, many of them escapees from Georgia and South Carolina. They were joined by several hundred African Americans, escaped slaves or the descendants of slaves who could slip on and off plantations, bringing information gathered by slaves. Under the leadership of Chief Osceola, they waged a guerilla campaign (the Seminole War) against the U.S. troops Jackson sent with instructions to find their villages and to capture or destroy the village women. If strong measures are not taken to restrain our slaves, there is but little doubt that we should soon be assailed with a servile as well as Indian war," reported Major Benjamin Putnam to the Secretary of War. William Cobb of Columbia County, Georgia, was thirty-eight when he served under Jackson against the Seminoles and escaped slaves.

The Seminole War was only one of many acts of resistance by people of color to the racist practices of Europeans. From the beginning of the slave trade, as Vincent Harding chronicles, Africans had seized control of slave ships or jumped overboard, preferring drowning to slavery; once in the Americas, many Africans ran off to join bands of Maroons in the Caribbean or the Seminoles in Florida, or to initiate slave rebellions on plantations. In 1831, several years before the Seminole War, Nat Turner led a slave uprising in Virginia that killed sixty whites in twenty-four hours, explaining to his followers that theirs was not a war "for robbery, nor to satisfy our passions;...but a struggle for freedom." From the beginning, Indian tribes had engaged in protracted warfare against white encroachment.

While William Cobb was soldiering for Jackson, the movement to abolish slavery became the first strong interracial anti-racist movement in the United States. The egalitarian strain in Christianity, combined with a rise in humanitarianism, produced the white abolition movement, which for the first time among whites challenged slavery in an organized way. Of the fifteen known white condemnations of slavery before 1750, all were by Quakers, who themselves had undergone years of persecution for doctrinal heresy. White abolitionism coincided with a growing number of free Blacks in northern states. The doctrine of natural rights that justified the American Revolution, if it did not in fact
protect African Americans or Indians, did give ideological impetus to both white and Black abolitionists. In 1794, delegates from nine anti-slavery societies met in Philadelphia. Northern states abolished slavery in the two decades after the Revolution, and many southern states allowed manumission, or voluntary freeing of slaves. By 1808, the first year after the Constitutional protection of the slave trade expired, abolition sentiment and fear of Black uprisings was enough to abolish the international slave trade—the high water mark of early abolitionist struggle.

The 1830s brought a new upsurge in abolitionist organizing, as sharpening economic differences between the slave states of the Cotton Kingdom and the wage labor of the Northeast caused increasing sectional conflict. White abolitionists led by William Lloyd Garrison took on a more militant stance, abandoning gradualism to argue for immediate abolition. In 1831 the New England Anti-Slavery Society and in 1833 the American Anti-Slavery Society were founded.

It was from this interracial abolition movement that the first feminist or "Woman Rights" organizing emerged. Black women such as Maria Steward, Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth and Sarah Redmond and the white Grimké sisters (who had been run out of South Carolina for their opposition to slavery) joined the question of racial slavery with that of women's rights. They had the cooperation of male supporters of women's rights such as Frederick Douglass. This radical analysis emerged as a contradiction to the moment when growing industrialism encouraged the "cult of true womanhood," confining pious, domestic, submissive and pure—therefore middle-class—"true" women to the home at a time when more and more poor women were entering the factory workforce. Disagreements over the role of women in the abolition movement eventually helped to split the American Anti-Slavery Society. White racism also split the abolition movement.

Martin Delany observed that African Americans within the abolition movement occupied a similar "underlying position" to whites as in the general culture, racist practices that contributed to increasing autonomy in Black organizing. By 1830, there were 319,000 free Blacks in the United States, many of whom were subject to the northern racism of white mob violence and denial of education and jobs and land that would become the model for Jim Crow. A radical Black analysis began to emerge from such people as David Walker and Martin Delany, who began to target not just slavery but the federal government for its anti-Black policies, combining an analysis of racism for the first time with an analysis of economic exploitation. Delany began to advocate for more separatist and nationalist Black strategy, while Frederick Douglass continued to argue for integration into the U.S. political system. Historian Vincent Harding points to a similar emergence in the 1960s of Black nationalist strategies from a disillusionment with interracial activism.

Indian-fighter William Cobb's life spanned the advent of the market economy in the United States. In the early years of the 19th century, the "Market Revolution" marked the take-off of the U.S. economy in a period of entrepreneurial ferment. In 1800, the cost of transporting a ton of goods thirty miles overland was as much as shipping it 3,000 miles to Europe. Advances in transportation and increasing urbanization (the U.S. urban population increased from 5 percent to 20 percent from 1800 to 1860) broke down barriers and created the space in which a sectorized market emerged as a central force in U.S. society, with the East providing manufactured goods and commerce, the West foodstuffs and the South cotton, both for eastern textile mills and for Europe. Because cotton was the commodity that sold on an international market and thus brought in extra capital, the entire economy depended for its growth on the cotton trade, which depended on stolen Indian land and unpaid African labor.

The Jackson administration (1828-1836) had been a period of increased democratization for white U.S. citizens as frontiersmen challenged the patrician rule of the previous forty years. Constitutional changes in a number of states widened suffrage, in some cases giving the vote to all adult white males. These votes brought Jackson to the White House. In the late 1860s, white rights had expanded at a period of intense contraction of rights for Africans (the consolidation of chattel slavery). In the 1820s, expanding white political freedom across class lines came at the same historical moment as Indian removal and Sam Houston's appropriation of Mexican land and a viewing of African Americans as "anti-citizens." White democracy, it seems, gets built on the backs of people of color, a fact that gives white people a very different subjective experience of U.S. democracy than many people of
color have. Congressman Alexander Duncan observed without conscious irony in 1845: "There seems to be something in our laws and institutions peculiarly adapted to the Anglo-Saxon American race, under which they will thrive and prosper but under which all others wilt and die.... There is something mysterious about it."  

The Market Revolution reshaped U.S. citizens not only as consumers, but also as workers subject to the labor discipline required by industrial capitalism. A white working class emerged, defining itself in Republican terms as "free laborers" in contradistinction to the despised and forced labor roles of African slaves. Labor historians George Rawick and David Roediger have suggested that Blacks came to symbolize their pre-industrial way of life for whites: "Increasingly adopting an ethos that attacked holidays, spurned contact with nature, saved time, bridled sexuality, separated work from the rest of life and postponed gratification, profit-minded Englishmen and Americans cast Blacks as their former selves."  

William Cobb's son James was born in 1835, the year before his father went off to fight in the Seminole Wars. James would himself fight in the Civil War to defend the agrarian slave economy against the wage labor system of the North as the culmination of the competition over which form of economy would prevail in the expanding U.S. territories. If Robert was the first "white" Cobbs, James was the first "southern" one, since defense of the increasingly profitable slave system rose to fever pitch and consolidated the identity of the slave states as "southern" in the three decades before the Civil War broke out. James joined the 5th Texas Regiment of the Confederate cavalry. Like Thomas Cobb's migration to Georgia, his grandson James' migration to Texas in 1857, where he went to practice law, was made possible by appropriation of land—this time, the land of Mexico. After the Louisiana Purchase, the next major block of territory to the west belonged to Spain. Jefferson had commented in 1809, "[The Spanish borderlands] are ours the first moment war is forced upon us." It was the kind of "just war" that the U.S. government had become expert in rationalizing against Indians.  

"New Spain" reached from what is now Utah to Central America in 1810, when the native or mestizo inhabitants of Mexico began their revolution against Spanish colonial control. The country of Mexico that they won in 1821 was already sapped of many of its resources because of 300 years of colonial rule. Mexico was bankrupt and needed time to build a unifying infrastructure. The United States, on the other hand, was an expanding white settler state, its southern economy underwritten by slave labor and its profits firmly in the hands of its industrial class. The U.S. population encompassed seventeen million people of European descent, three million slaves and less than a million Indians; Mexico's population was four million Indians and three million mestizo and European. Anglo Americans began to covet Mexican territory more aggressively after Mexican independence. Sam Houston's and Stephen Austin's men took over a million square miles and established the Republic of Texas by defeating the army of Santa Anna in 1836. Then in 1845, the United States annexed Texas and provoked a war with Mexico by claiming territory to the Rio Grande. U.S. victory resulted in Mexico's ceding what is now California, New Mexico, Arizona, and parts of Colorado, Utah, and Nevada for only $15 million. The statement of rights for former Mexican citizens that Mexican negotiators fought to include in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was uniformly violated, and Mexican Americans quickly became an underclass in the rapidly expanding Anglo-American political and economic system.  

With California part of U.S. territory, the country had reached the Pacific Ocean; the invention of steam transportation, both trains and boats, opened up Asia as a source of markets and labor. European imperialism in Asia was likewise creating conditions that propelled its workforce toward the United States. Most of the Chinese immigrants came from Guangdong, driven to the United States by peasant rebellions and the British Opium wars of 1839-42 and 1856-60. Many Chinese immigrants avoided starvation.  

Asians were the only non-European peoples during the 19th century who immigrated to the United States for economic opportunity. (Mexicans were incorporated by land appropriation, as were Indians. Africans were imported for slave labor.) They were treated very differently than European immigrants, however. Immigration policy, repression and racist violence were used to keep Asians as a "reserve labor force." Like Africans in the Caribbean, the pattern of Asian labor was established on island sugar cane plantations in Hawaii. William Hooper, a Boston visitor to a sugar mill on the island of Kauai in 1835, noticed a small group of Chinese workers and wrote home to the New England
businessmen who had sent him there: "They have to work all the time—and no regard is paid to their complaints for food, etc., etc. Slavery is nothing compared to it." 71

At about the same time the Royal Hawaiian Agricultural Society was importing Chinese to Hawaii, Chinese also began immigrating to the West Coast of the United States. The year after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ceded California to the United States, gold was discovered there, bringing a wave of new settlers to the great "Gold Rush" of '49. There were 325 Chinese among the prospectors in 1849. Three years later, 20,000 Chinese had immigrated, and by 1870 there were 63,000 Chinese in the United States, 77 percent in California, where they constituted one-quarter of the entire workforce. In the first year or two, they were welcomed, but the nativism of white miners rapidly contracted the space in which they were allowed to operate. 72

James Cobb lost his law library in a fire in 1860. Penniless, he taught school in Liberty, Texas, until Texas seceded from the union. James joined Company F of the 5th Texas Regiment as a private, and he was soon promoted to second, then first lieutenant. He was captured at the battle of Gettysburg and spent the rest of the war in a series of northern prisons. Soon after the war, he settled in Alabama. According to family records, there he "made a name and fame as a jurist and statesmen of which Alabama may well be proud...succeeding in every thing that he undertook and with energy and foresight made his impress in politics, in the church, and in his daily intercourse with his fellow man." Other records show that he was one of many white men instrumental in reasserting white supremacy, both regionally and nationally, in the decades following the South's defeat in the Civil War.

III. Finance Capitalism
"Nothing we could do but take them all..."

James Cobb returned to Alabama part of an army whose defeat had settled the issue over whether slave or wage labor would prevail and opened up all the mainland territory to the expanding industrial economy. In Europe and the United States the years between 1870 and 1914 brought a new surge of industrial and technological progress. The invention of electricity, wireless telegraphy, refrigeration, the dynamo and the gas engine helped create the "New Industrial Revolution." It was fueled by industrial research that systematized inventions, mass production techniques and the assembly line, and breakthroughs in chemistry that created new synthetic materials, such as early plastics. Business consolidated into huge new structures such as trusts and cartels to control markets and sources of raw material necessary for the new products. Increasingly, the chief source of profits would come from the process of finance itself. The northern United States, Germany and Japan emerged to rival Britain as industrial powers.

Within the United States, burgeoning industry brought suddenly skewed distribution of wealth. In 1889, total manufacturing capital in the United States was $5,697 trillion; in 1900 it was $8,663 trillion. In 1890, the wealthiest 1 percent of families owned 51 percent of real and personal property, while 44 percent of families at the bottom owned only 1.2 percent. The 88 percent of families in the poor and middle classes owned only 14 percent of the wealth. 73 These inequities, periodic depressions and the expanding power of business brought intense labor agitation in the late-19th century, as new waves of immigrants from Eastern Europe entered the industrial workforce. These Eastern European workers were often viewed as different "races" from northern Europeans; 74 however, much like in the 1600s when other northern Europeans were given the privileges of Englishmen, after Reconstruction the category of "whiteness" was expanded to take in all Europeans (even Jews). Eastern Europeans battled their way into the white working class, while non-Europeans were often excluded from the unions and the economic progress that resulted from labor struggles. 75 Like the "cult of true womanhood" that worked to draw the line around who was a "real woman," race ideology created a highly elastic "cult of true whiteness"; both of these seemingly biological categories drawing their power in part from their volatility and their power to exclude.

This expanding economy, whose benefits within the United States flowed differentially according to race, led the United States for the first time to carry out imperial conquests beyond the limits of North America and eventually to overtake Britain as the world's foremost Imperialist power. The imperialism that accompanied finance capitalism linked
people of color in the United States even more closely to their continents and nations of origin. As in industrial capitalism, in finance capitalism the roles of various nationalities and communities of color within the United States depended in part on that group's role in a sectored economy.

When James Cobb returned from Yankee prison camps, emancipated slaves in the South were experiencing a brief period of increased freedom and economic promise during Reconstruction. The Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments helped to rectify the injustice built into the original Constitution, not only for African Americans but for other people of color as well. But after four decades of intense sectional conflict, northern and southern whites closed ranks, to the detriment of all people of color both in the United States and globally.

In 1874, James Cobb was elected Judge in Macon County on the Democratic ticket, and he did his part to restore white rule to his county, sentencing two Black legislators to the chain gang for larceny and adultery and persuading a white Republican to leave town by indicting him for perjury. Judge Cobb opposed the white businessmen in Tuskegee who supported Booker T. Washington's plans to build a school for African Americans. Cobb was elected to Congress in 1884.76 James Cobb's training as a lawyer and his role as a judge was in keeping with his Cobb forebears, who were consistently part of the judiciary and police in the emerging racist disciplinary structures. He was not, nor were they, part of the capitalist class who owned the plantations or, after the war, profited hugely from the development of an industrial economy. During his lifetime, New South industrialists would link up for the first time with northern capitalists. Sharecropping and debt peonage replaced slavery for Black workers who were shut out of most union organizing during this period as white workers joined the mill villages in the textile industry of the newly industrializing South.

As the South shifted back toward white control, marking James Cobb's passage from defeated soldier to Democratic judge, northern opinion also began to shift. Former abolitionists, like "neoconservatives" a century later, moved to the right, speaking for the prosperous, educated classes. In publications such as the Nation and Atlantic Monthly, these men "mouth[ed] the shibboleths of white supremacy regarding the Negro's innate inferiority, shiftlessness, and hopeless unfitness for full participation in the white man's civilization."77 A succession of Supreme Court decisions between 1873 and 1898 closed the political space opened by the post-Civil War amendments, leading to "separate but equal" segregation in Plessy v. Ferguson in 1898.78

As racist propaganda and state-instituted repression surged, racist violence escalated, fueled by a racist mythology. Philip Bruce explained in The Plantation Negro as a Freeman (1889) that Black males, cut off from the civilizing influence of whites, had regressed to African type and were raping white women.79 Whites rioted and murdered all over the South, lynching 2,060 Blacks between 1882 and 1930, some of the victims children and pregnant women. It was not so much the African who had regressed: some of the Black victims were castrated, burned at the stake, decapitated or blinded with hot pokers.80

In the 1880s and 1890s, a severe economic depression fueled an insurgent interracial populism that offered a radical challenge to the southern elite. Tom Watson, foremost leader of southern populism, declared the Populist Party would settle the race question "by presenting a platform immensely beneficial to both races and injurious to neither." Watson explained that race hatred rested on "the keystone arch of financial despotism which enslaves you both...[and] a money system which beggars you both." In Georgia in 1892, 2,000 armed white farmers came to the defense of a Black populist threatened with lynching, and in 1896 Georgia populists denounced the lynch law. Blacks were admitted to the inner circles of the party, serving with whites as party delegates and officials and speaking from the same platform to interracial audiences.81

This class alliance alarmed southern conservatives, who had made their alliances with northeastern financial interests, and they mounted a campaign of repression, using fraud, terror and race-baiting. Conservatives stole Black votes, and Populist Party candidates were defeated by these forged ballots. The resulting frustration and bitterness dissolved the Black-white coalition, leading the way for intensified racial repression and violence. Tom Watson turned racist and campaigned in 1906 on what Woodward calls a platform of "Negrophobia and progressivism."82

In the 1890s, James Cobb seems to have stolen at least one, if not two, elections from Populist candidates. Voter fraud was so obvious in
government's genocidal policy toward Indians, established in the early years of the century, played itself out. After the Civil War western expansion into "treeless" territory once thought unfit for white habitation led to demands for a new wave of military conquest of Indian tribes. There were bloody battles in the 1870s and 1880s, with surviving members of tribes put in reservations, land which government policy then set out to steal. The Dawes Severalty Act of 1887 intended to break up communally owned reservation land and allow for purchase of "surplus" by white settlers, leading to a decline in reservation land from 138 million acres in 1887 to seventy-eight million in 1900. In 1890 at Wounded Knee, the U.S. Army attacked warriors of the Ghost Dance, the last burst of Indian resistance in the 19th century, killing 146 men, women, and children. By 1910, the policies of Jefferson and Jackson had borne their deadly fruit: there were only 222,000 Indians in the United States, a population reduced by two-thirds in only 100 years.87

In the Southwest, the years of rapid Industrialization after the Civil War brought the appropriation of Mexican-American land and the forcing of Mexicans into a dual-wage labor system in mining and agriculture. New Mexico and Arizona remained territories until the 20th century because their populations were not white majorities. In New Mexico, where land was the major resource, the Anglo-American colonizers destroyed communal land holdings through use of private land grants. Anglos also took control of the open range, where cattle raisers established monopolies on grazing and pushed out Mexican subsistence farmers, who began to accumulate in urban barrios, or neighborhoods.88

The completion of the railroad opened the Southwest to an intensified exploitation of its mineral and agricultural resources in which Mexican-American workers became the lowest level of labor in the mines, on the railroads and on communal farms. Often Anglo workers insisted on twice the wages of Mexican workers.89 Throughout the Southwest, Mexican Americans fought back against white violence, and armed rebellion was common. When even the most radical unions excluded Mexican-American workers, they organized in mutualistas. In the Clifton-Morenci strike of 1903, upwards of 1,500 miners—80 percent to 90 percent Mexican or Mexican-American—armed themselves and occupied the mines. Strikes in 1906, 1915 and 1917 con-

1894 that Congress threw out his election and seated his Populist opponent. By the turn of the century, the South was in the throes of a resurgent white supremacy. All over the South, legislatures enacted segregation laws and disenfranchised Black as well as poor white voters, inaugurating the rule of Jim Crow. One of James Cobb's last official acts in 1901, at the age of sixty-six, was to participate in the Alabama Constitutional Convention that brought segregation and disenfranchisement to Alabama before he went to New Mexico for his final years.

African Americans, numbering about eight million, were the largest non-white population in the United States at the turn of the century. But the rising racism fueled by expanding capitalism devastated other communities of color as well. The Chinese had migrated to the West Coast in large numbers in the 1840s, 1850s and 1860s. Capitalists in California looked to the Chinese to do the hard labor that white workers refused to do, in the building of the western section of the transcontinental railroads, service work in mining camps, back-breaking agricultural production and manufacturing in western cities. "The introduction of machinery was rendering Black labor obsolete, it was claimed, for what was required in an industrial mode of production was a 'much higher standard of intelligence.'" Chinese became both servants and factory proletariat.83 In 1882, organized labor turned against "coolie" workers, and Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, barring the entry of Chinese laborers into the country and denying them the vote and citizenship. Chinese were also the targets of white mobs, with eighteen Chinese lynched in Los Angeles in a single incident in 1871, and twenty-eight Chinese murdered in Rock Springs, Wyoming, in 1885.84 Like the African presence during slavery, the Chinese presence on the West Coast helped to consolidate the white working class. Many white workers got a start toward economic self-sufficiency, as one railroad builder explained, "by controlling Chinese labor on our railroad."85 The Chinese functioned as a kind of internal colony of "nonwhites allowed to enter as 'cheap' migratory laborers and members of a racially subordinated group, not future citizens of American society."86

Indians, who were not willing to be assimilated into the U.S. workforce, fought a new set of wars for western territory. The federal
feminist leaders Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton teamed up with millionaire Democrat George Train, who financed The Revolution, their Woman Rights newspaper, and implemented an increasingly racist suffrage strategy. "While the dominant party have with one hand lifted up TWO MILLION BLACK MEN and crowned them with the honor and dignity of citizenship," it read, "with the other they have dethroned FIFTEEN MILLION WHITE WOMEN—their own mothers and sisters, their own wives and daughters—and cast them under the heel of the lowest orders of manhood." Stanton, writing of a lynching in Tennessee, said, "The Republican cry of 'Manhood Suffrage' creates an antagonism between black men and all women that will culminate in fearful outrages on womanhood, especially in the southern states."

The American Equal Rights Association, founded by Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Frederick Douglass, split into two suffrage organizations after its 1869 meeting because of increasing racism within the movement. After 1870, when the Fifteenth Amendment was passed, both Black men and women agitated for the female vote, including Black elected officials in Reconstruction governments. Black Woman Rights activists again came in conflict with white women leaders during the anti-lynching campaign spearheaded by Ida B. Wells-Barnett. "The colored race multiplies like the locusts of Egypt," Frances Willard of the Women's Christian Temperance Union had written, "and the grogshop is its center of power." In white feminist circles, there were no anti-racist leaders in the tradition of the Grimke sisters. The complicity of white women in the mythology of rape doubtless contributed to the escalation of racist violence, as right-wing feminism emerged. By the 1910s, Black women had organized independently in the club movement and were fighting not only for women's votes, but for the votes of Black men lost to post-Reconstruction disenfranchisement in the southern states. In 1918, after the Nineteenth Amendment passed the House, white feminist organizers again capitulated to racism to get the support of southern Senators. "Negro men cannot vote in South Carolina and therefore negro women could not if women were to vote in the nation," Alice Paul of the Women's Party told the New York World. After the eventual passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, Black women continued to press white feminist organizations to work against their disenfranchisement in the
Jim Crow South, with little success. In the South, however, Jesse Daniel Ames and the Society of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching took on the white power structure in the name of “white womanhood,” and an interracial YWCA movement brought women together to work against racism.

Like the suffrage movement, the birth control movement took a decidedly racist and elitist turn, as leaders like Margaret Sanger capitulated to the eugenics movement. “More children from the fit, less from the unfit—that is the chief issue of birth control,” she explained in 1919, and by the 1930s, her rhetoric was virulently racist and she began to advocate sterilization of the “whole dysgenic population.”

One major factor in the national move to the right was a new wave of U.S. imperialism toward peoples of color globally. In 1898 the United States went to war with Spain over Cuba and the Philippines, and U.S. victory brought eight million people of color under U.S. control. To many whites, the new colonial possessions symbolized national greatness, a coming of age on the world stage and expanded access to new markets, especially in Asia. The “English virtue” of empire sparked a new sense of brotherhood among English-speaking peoples and a sense of Anglo-Saxon superiority. In the United States, these concepts echoed the race theories being propagated in Europe in the late-19th century, where “scientific racism” gave ideological justification for European Imperialism. From the beginnings of colonialism, the intellectual machinery of Europe had been busy explaining what “race” meant in a context that justified European dominance, shifting from a religious to a scientific explanation as Europe emerged from the Middle Ages. Early race theories that supplanted the interpretation of the story of Ham in Genesis were concerned with whether humans developed from a single stock in a short period of time or whether many races evolved differently in different places.

Opposition to the slave trade at the end of the 17th century prompted European scientists to consolidate the theory of race, drawing on both anthropology and evolution to justify racist practices. In 1843, the English Ethnological Society grew out of the activities of the Aborigines Protection Society. British scientists felt a need to understand “the whole mental condition of the savage...so different from ours.” These “savages” were subjects of the Empire that represented “almost every known modification of the human species whose varied and often conflicting interests have to be regulated and provided for.” Although Charles Darwin did not himself assign superiority to particular traits or place races in position on the evolutionary scale, his followers did. They used the doctrine of natural selection, or “survival of the fittest,” to explain the superiority of conquering European culture: “As the Indian is killed by the approach of civilization, to which he resists in vain, so the black man perishes by that culture to which he serves as a humble instrument.” Cultural traits such as language and physical traits such as facial features were dangerously confused into a biological determinism designed to show European superiority.

Within this biased framework, various tests were used to classify humanity into racial groupings: the test of language arrived at groupings of three or seven main races. Physical characteristics such as skull size were used to clarify the Frontal (European), Parteal (Mongol) and Occipital (Negro). Facial angle was used to conclude that the “receding forehead and projecting jaws of the Negro” represented “ignorance and brutality” in contrast with the “harmonious” Saxon/Celt/Scandinavian “broad forehead...a special fulness in the intellectual and moral regions.” Often the reason scientists would challenge a particular system would be that it lumped in Europeans with less “evolved” races. While all non-European “races” were inferior, in British thought the Negro came in for special fear and hatred: “His energy is considerable. Aided by the sun, he repels the white invader.”

Darwin himself underlined the subjectivity—thus the irrationality—of racial classifications:

Man has been studied more thoroughly than any other organic being, and yet there is the greatest possible diversity amongst capable judges whether he should be classed as a single species or race, or as two (Vicer), or as three (Jaccquino), as four (Kant), five (Blumenbach), six (Buffon), seven (Hunter), eight (Agassiz), eleven (Pickering), fifteen (Bory St. Vincent), sixteen (Desmoulins), twenty-two (Morton), sixty (Crawfurd), or sixty-three (Burke).

Anti-Semitism evolved within this race-conscious European climate from 1,800 years of Christians persecuting Jews as a religious group (“Christ killers,” or “poisoners of wells”) to the persecution of Jews as
a race. Not unlike his British counterparts, German philosopher Arthur de Gobineau was convinced that "the racial question overshadows all other problems of history, that it holds the key to them all, and that the inequality of the races from whose fusion a people is formed is enough to explain the whole course of its destiny." In Germany, nationalism fed by Germany's defeats fueled a sense of Teutonic destiny. Race was seen to determine the fate of civilizations. German philosophers fused the ideas of the German people, or volk, with the idea of the state as a transcendental essence to which the Jew was the primary outsider. The term "anti-Semitism" itself was coined during this period by a German racist, Wilhelm Marr, to promote hatred of Jews.

Hitler and his party of National Socialists would take these racist anti-Semitic ideas to their genocidal conclusions. In Mein Kampf, he wrote, "The racial question gives the key not only to world history, but to all human culture" for "in the blood alone resides the strength as well as the weakness of man." The Aryan race is the "bearer of human cultural development" and was therefore chosen to rule the world. The state must "set race in the center of all life...not only of assembling and preserving the most valuable stocks of basic racial elements in this people, but slowly and surely of raising them to a dominant position." "The mightiest counterpart of the Aryan is represented by the Jew," Hitler explained. "Jewry is without question a race and not a religious fellowship" because "if worst came to the worst, a splash of baptismal water could always save the business and the Jew at the same time." At the end of the 19th century, Jews were being allowed into the white working class in the United States, at the same time that they were being cast as the most reviled racial Other in Europe (an indication, among other things, of the extreme malleability of the concept of race).

The climate that fostered scientific racism also began to evolve medical distinctions between homosexuals and heterosexuals. Doctors such as England's Havelock Ellis, who were investigating questions of sexuality in the late 1800s, reported an outpouring of stories from the newly labeled homosexual population. Many indigenous cultures in North America had allowed community members such as the bendache cross-gender identification, practices severely discouraged by Christian missionaries. With urbanization, white medical writers came to see homosexuality not as sodomy, a punishable but discrete offense, but as a kind of gender identity, a personality type with specific behaviors that they usually assumed to be pathological. Between the 1880s and World War I, homosexuals emerged as a "sexual minority of sorts." Scientific racism as well as psychiatry contributed to early homophobic discourse. In an atmosphere where the propagation of the white race was the key to a nation's destiny and the fittest were assumed to be white, the newly discovered white homosexual's alleged inability to have children was seen as "degenerate." In the United States by the beginning of the 20th century, Anglo-Saxons, not "Aryans," were the superior racial group. The virtues of these Anglo-Saxons, according to Our Country, an influential report on missions published in 1887 and paraphrased by historian Nell Painter, were "a sense of fair play, the ability to gain wealth honestly, the enjoyment of broad civil liberties in democracies in which every man had an equal vote, the genius for self-government and for governing others fairly and the evolution of the highest civilization the world had ever known." Theodore Roosevelt, imbued with a sense of Anglo-Saxon manhood, declared in 1895 that "this country needs a war." President McKinley explained his decision to keep the Philippines after the Spanish-American War that came three years after Roosevelt's declaration: "We could not leave them to themselves—they were unfit for self-government—and they would soon have anarchy and misrule over there worse than Spain's was...there was nothing left for us to do but to take them all." The white lie refined its concept of democracy as an exclusively Anglo-Saxon preserve at a time when the United States was extending increasingly anti-democratic control over huge numbers of people of color.

My grandfather, Ben Cobb, one of Judge James Cobb's seven children, lied about his age and, perhaps harking to Roosevelt's call to Anglo-Saxon manhood, went off at sixteen to enlist in the Spanish-American War. He didn't get to fight in 1898, but spent his time camped in Florida, where he did get malaria. He later became an engineer and spent a good bit of time in Central America working on the Panama Canal. But his health had been weakened by disease, and he died in the influenza epidemic of 1918, when my mother was three. It is with James and Ben Cobb that I begin to pick up the trail, the emotional scent, of family history. "Men and wars! Men and wars!" Mama would
sometimes exclaim bitterly; but she too was an Anglophile, reading my
brother and me to sleep at night with tales of English adventure, from
Robin Hood and King Arthur to When Knighthood Was in Flower and
Under Drake's Flag. She loved her daddy the way women love men
they never knew except through other people's stories. Mother said
that my grandmother hated Judge Cobb because he beat his children.
Ben was a wanderer, an adventurer, maybe trying to escape his
power-hungry father; and I don't think it was coincidental that many
of the places to which my mother liked to travel—often needing to get
sick to get to do it—were places he had been. In my forties I have
begun to deal with the effects of my sense of abandonment from her
absences, my panic from her sickness: issues usually privatized in
therapy discussions of "dysfunctional families," but in fact with historic
causes and dimensions, racism not the least of them.

The Spanish-American War that eventually killed Ben Cobb marked
the beginning of the United States' rise to global economic supremacy
in a century when intense rivalries among industrial powers would
contribute to two world wars. World War I brought the beginning of
the watershed shift from Britain to the United States as premier imperial
power. The Allies turned to New York to borrow money to finance the
war. The dollar joined the pound as a major reserve currency, or that
national currency (and/or gold) that is used to pay off the balance of
payments of nations that import more than they export. These reserve
dollars act as IOUs that can only be used to purchase U.S. goods at U.S.
prices, making the role of the dollar an instrument of massive economic
control.\textsuperscript{114} The increased trade that resulted helped the United States
to shift to a creditor nation and begin international lending on a large
scale, bringing profits from the interest. In 1913, the Federal Reserve
Act made international branch banks legal, the beginning of a web of
U.S. financial networks that would increasingly span the globe. When
World War II devastated Europe for a second time, the dollar finally
beat out the pound as primary reserve currency, requiring that the
leading trading nations keep their reserves in U.S. banks.

As the United States gained its status as the premier capitalist country,
for the first time in four centuries serious challenges emerged to the
capitalist/imperialist system. The threat of international socialism mani-
fest in the Bolshevik Revolution in 1919 presented an alternative to the
imperialist system.\textsuperscript{115} Within the United States, the Great Depression,
brought on by excesses of capitalism such as stock speculation, high
taxes and skewed distribution of income, brought riots and strikes from
both white workers and people of color: armed white farmers in
Arkansas seized food supplies, 500 unemployed people rioted in
Detroit, Boston children railed a luncheon for Spanish War vets,
300,000 southern textile workers went on strike and Black Alabama
sharecroppers fought off Sheriff's Deputies when they came to confis-
cate their land.\textsuperscript{116}

This uprising occurred near my home county. The fact that Black
sharecroppers fired on white law enforcement officers to defend their
property brought immediate reprisal. Vigilante violence by white
groups followed the incident, and two of the Black farmers died in jail
of untended wounds. Survivors received prison sentences of up to
twelve years.\textsuperscript{117} My paternal grandfather was sent by local law enforce-
ment out to the hospital to question one of the surviving members of
the Sharecropper's Union shootout about possible communist influ-
ence. These and other insurgencies necessitated a "New Deal" between
workers, owners and government—a reorganization of U.S. capitalism
through increased federal regulation, deficit spending and a co-opting
of socialist policies in a range of welfare-state reforms. Both World Wars
also weakened Europe's hold on its colonial empires, which became
too expensive to maintain. After World War II, strong national move-
ments across the globe won political independence from former
European colonizers, a process accelerated by World War II and
extending into the 1960s.

Fascist movements emerged in the 1920s in Germany, Italy and Japan
and were propelled into power by the Great Depression. They offered
a challenge both to communism and to the leading industrial countries,
but not to capitalism itself. As Hitler explained, "Let these 'well-bred'
gentry [capitalist leaders] learn that we do with a clear conscience what
they secretly do with a guilty one."\textsuperscript{118} Bertram Gross explains that the
fascists were "heretics seeking to revive the old [capitalist] faith by
concentrating on the fundamentals of imperial expansion, militarism,
repression, and racism." They mobilized the discontented and alienated
in order to "channel the violence-prone" and they manipulated and
tolerated anti-capitalist currents to ultimately build a firmer base for capitalism. "Above all," Gross explains, "the fascists wanted 'in.'"119

Albert Speer explained Nazism as "the first dictatorship of an industrial state in this age of technology, a dictatorship which employed to perfection the instruments of technology to dominate its own people."120 The Germans employed unprecedented repression on their own people, focusing, as Hitler explained, on "the annihilation of the Jewish race throughout Europe."121 Concentration camps built and supplied by German firms became the focus of wholesale gassing and cremating of twelve million people (six million Jews, as well as communists, gypsies, homosexuals and the sick or insane), slave labor (7.5 million civilian foreigners working for the Reich), medical experiments and "recycling" of human remains. Beyond the concentration camps, fascists in all three countries "destroyed the very liberties which industrialization had brought."122 The needs of the master race justified imperialism and the militarism required for it and for domestic repression. These racist theories were used not only against Jews but also Africans (by Italians), Slavs (by Germans) and Chinese and other Asians (by the Japanese).123

My two uncles, Ben Cobb's sons, fought in World War II, as did my own father, who was in the Air Force. He was shot down over Germany, and he spent two years in a German P.O.W. camp before being liberated by Allied armies in 1945. The defeat of fascism made World War II a "good war," although the internment of Japanese Americans, the decision to drop the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the experience of Black soldiers on their return home showed that there was a need to defend democracy beyond its white preserves at home as well as abroad. Like many men and women of their generation, my parents turned from the defeat of German Nazism to a fervent Cold War confrontation with communism. They also began to anticipate the postwar uprising of African-American southerners that announced itself most publicly with Brown v. Board of Education in 1954.

As bankers and industrialists in the United States had anticipated, the victory of the Allies over the Axis brought the United States to an unprecedented role of global leadership in what Time/Life magazine Henry Luce dubbed "the American century." World War II had brought unprecedented cooperation among political and military leaders, busi-

nessmen and scientists. At the close of the war they worked to consolidate a world capitalist bloc under the leadership of the United States with myriad channels of influence, "a loose network of constitutional democracies, authoritarian regimes, and military dictatorships described as the 'Free World,'" Gross explains. The net result was "a remarkably flexible control system in which competing views on strategy and tactics make themselves felt and are resolved through mutual adjustment," allowing business to operate both through and beyond the state.124 As colony after colony won independence, they were brought into the burgeoning capitalist financial networks as the price of their independence, a process known as neocolonialism.

Within these networks, the poorer, "underdeveloped" countries were at a permanent disadvantage. When they ran up deficits that their reserve currency could not cover and were refused credit by banks, they were forced to undertake severe internal adjustments, austerity measures that raised prices, lowered wages and shifted spending from social services toward the military. The United States, on the other hand, could maintain yearly deficits without having to induce the kind of austerity measures that would have had severe political repercussions, both in terms of encouraging domestic revolutionary movements and increasing governmental repression. The United States used the money from its deficit to finance its military machine, to lend military and economic aid to its allies (including forgiving debts for its client states who behave and for foreign investments that brought countries more tightly into its economic sphere). The United States maintained a deficit because of its flexibility of resources, because it generated much of its income from its financial services and because it could extend itself credit because other countries wanted dollars in a way that they did not want Third World national currencies. "If we had not been world banker...we would have been in the same situation as other countries face," explained Secretary of the Treasury C. Douglas Dillon in 1963; "as soon as we got into deficit we would have had to balance our accounts one way or another."125 Once again, political openness in the United States was built on the backs of people of color.

World War II also brought a shift within the United States away from self-sufficiency in raw materials, one of the "striking economic changes of our time," according to a Commission on Foreign Economic Policy;126
and the intensified need for overseas raw materials coincided with the
growth of the "Second World" of the communist empire. Three-fourths of
the imported materials in a Department of Defense list of necessary stockpiles came from underdeveloped areas; a "Third World" beyond
Europe, North America, Japan and the Soviet Union. Explained W.W.
Rostow, President Johnson's adviser on national security affairs, to a
joint congressional committee: "The location, natural resources, and
populations of the underdeveloped areas are such that, should they
become effectively attached to the Communist bloc, the United States
would become the second power in the world.... In short, our military
security and our way of life as well as the fate of Western Europe and
Japan are at stake in the evolution of the underdeveloping areas."128

These far-reaching shifts in world finances helped to shape racial
policies and practices within the United States. Intensified racism at the
end of the 19th century had brought an upsurge in Black anti-racist
organizing, marked by the beginning of the NAACP and the Urban
League. World War I brought increased economic opportunities to as
many as one million African Americans who left the South looking for
industrial employment formerly denied by industries and by white
unions but now available because of war-induced labor shortages.
Black soldiers came home from fighting a war to make the world "safe
for democracy" to race riots, lynching and a resurgence in the Klan.
With a powerful and growing urban base in the North, the 1920s saw
increasing Black militancy with an international focus: W.E.B. Du Bois
called a Pan-African Congress to meet in Paris during the Versailles
conference, Marcus Garvey promoted Pan-Africanism with his Universal
Negro Improvement Association and the Harlem Renaissance
brought an unprecedented cultural resurgence.

Immigration policy shifted under the new global pressures of the
American century, affecting especially Asian immigration, which had
been severely limited since the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882. World
War II had also brought the internment of 110,000 Japanese Americans
here while German Americans went on with their daily lives. But after
the war, the quotas limiting non-European immigration, in place from
the beginning of the century, finally gave way under pressure from
Cold War competition for Third World resources. In 1952, the Immi-
gration and Nationality Act (also called the McCarran-Walter Act) finally
made legal the naturalization of any person regardless of race, for the
first time making immigrants from Japan, Korea and other parts of Asia
eligible for citizenship.129 In 1956, the Republican Party came out in
favor of easing immigration restrictions—the same year its platform
called for "the establishment of American naval and air bases all around
the world."130 Political refugees from Cuba and Indochina were admitted
in large numbers after the United States failed to dislodge communist
governments. In 1965, the McCarran-Walter Act was amended to abolish
the national-origins system and substitute seven preferential categories,
including refugees "fleeing a Communist or Communist-dominated
country." Asians began to immigrate to the United States in record
numbers—one and a half million people between 1966 and 1983,131
creating a brain-drain and siphoning off wealth from the Asian conti-
nent. Capitalism's economic competition with communism helped to
shift immigration policy and thus the racial demographics of U.S.
society.

The deficit in U.S. mineral resources contributed to a shift in policy
toward American Indians as well, as mineral resources on reservation
lands became more coveted. Indian policy after the Dawes Severalty
Act had followed a colonial pattern, destroying collective structures and
fostering dependence on an emerging welfare apparatus. From 1880 to
1930, 50,000 Indian children were sent, by force or otherwise, to Indian
boarding schools to encourage assimilation. Between 1881 and 1934,
Indian land declined from 155 million acres to seventy million acres.132
In 1924, Congress granted full citizenship, finally, to Indians. In 1928,
the Meriam Survey described unrelieved poverty on reservations as a
result of land policies. Because corporations wanted access to mineral
leasing, the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 gave power for economic
planning to a "tribal council" system, setting up Indian leadership that
would collaborate with corporate pillaging and further usurp traditional
structures.

Roosevelt's "New Deal" and World War II helped to dislodge the
biological approach of "scientific" racism, whose genocidal ends Hitler
made clear. From the 1930s to 1965, the "ethnicity theory" of race
operated as the progressive/liberal consensus. First articulated by
sociologists at the University of Chicago in the 1920s, it theorized a
"race cycle" of contact, conflict, accommodation and assimilation based
largely on the experience of European immigrants, an approach which has been increasingly challenged by class- (mostly marxist) and nation-based (anti-colonial) theories of race. Jim Crow still gripped the South, but the integrationists won the confrontation within the Democratic Party in 1948.

As the United States competed with the Soviet Union for Third World resources, domestic racism became an international issue. "We cannot escape the fact that our civil rights record has been an issue in world politics," Truman admitted in 1946. "Those with competing philosophies have stressed—and are shamelessly distorting—our shortcomings." Third World revolutionary movements were growing in Indochina, the Philippines, Indonesia and Africa. Truman appointed a Committee on Civil Rights in 1946 and in 1948 issued an order barring racial segregation in the armed forces. In 1954, after decades of work by the NAACP to shift court findings, in Brown v. Board of Education the Supreme Court reversed the 1896 Plessy v. Ferguson ruling that had made "separate but equal" school facilities legal at the end of Reconstruction. Challenging the southern apartheid put in place as Jim Crow, the Black freedom movement erupted in the South, targeting school desegregation and voting rights.

In early January 1965, Sammy Younge, one of the young Black men and women across the South who responded to this movement, was shot and killed by a man named Marvin Segrest, a cousin of my father's, when Younge had insisted on using the "white" bathroom in the gas station where Marvin Segrest worked. Segrest claimed he had shot in self-defense and was acquitted by an all-white jury. Activist James Forman called Younge "the first Black college student in the movement to have been killed," a murder that "marked the end of tactical nonviolence." That year, I was sixteen and deeply disturbed by the eruptions of racist violence around me.

School desegregation and voting rights arrived in the South with federal “support” of the civil rights movement turned to opposition, as George Wallace had predicted. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated after he linked Black civil rights struggles in the United States with the issue of domestic poverty and with anti-imperialist struggles in Vietnam. Numerous Black Panthers and other Black leaders were murdered by federal and state law enforcement officers.

This militant Black organizing triggered renewed militancy in other Third World communities within the United States, as well as student rebellions and the anti-imperialist opposition to the war in Vietnam. Vietnam became the first U.S. military defeat in history, and the militant anti-war movement at home helped to put some brakes on U.S. military power. This revolutionary upsurge also triggered a "Second Wave" of feminism, in a way similar to the emergence of early Woman Rights out of the abolition struggles. Gay and lesbian liberation movements also erupted from the homosexual subcultures that had been developing since the late 1800s, inspired by and using political models of both feminism (itself highly influenced by anti-racist struggles) and Black freedom struggles. It was this lesbian-feminist politics into which the great-great-great-great-great-great-granddaughter of Am-brose Cobbs of Jamestown came out in the mid-1970s.

In this essay, I have tracked ten Cobbs, from the sweating pews of Virginia churches; to Florida swamps, dodging gators and searching for human prey; to the Alabama bench, gaveling Reconstruction officials off to the chain gang. I have traced my white history through a particular set of white men because they are the ones who constructed white history and because my mother’s papers did not include the genealogy of daughters and mothers. I suspect from my knowledge of own mother’s and grandmother’s experiences that this matrilineal history is fraught with much more ambivalence and opposition. My father’s side of the family would bring a more working-class worldview. Likewise, if I have tracked ten of these ancestors back to English origins, I find it hopeful that I am left 1,014 more possibilities of something other than “pure” European blood.

"It is the Black condition, and only that, which informs the consciousness of white people," wrote James Baldwin. And on another occasion: "As long as you think you’re white, there’s no hope for you." I have
worked in this essay to both think myself, and unthink myself, white (the related project, in which I engaged in the memoir, to feel myself both white and not-white), in order to regain the power, in Baldwin's terms, to "control and define" myself by excavating the Black (and "red" and "brown" and "yellow") condition within my own white history. For it is only through acquiring a consciousness of racist consciousness (a necessary corollary to anti-racist practice) that we as white people will ever have any other community than the community of the lie.
On Being White and Other Lies

2. Thanks especially to Jacqui Alexander for many careful readings of drafts and for her confidence that I would, indeed, someday, finish the essay in a useable form. Thanks also to Barbara Smith for close editing and encouragement and to Tobi Lippin and Peter Barnes for feedback and support.


8. Zinn, 26-28; "African slavery is hardly to be praised. But it was far different from plantation or mining slavery in the Americas, which was lifelong, morally crippling, destructive of family ties, without hope of any future," 27.


14. Aztec's account of the incident as given later to the priest-historian Bernardino Sahagún, quoted in Vogel, 55-56.


17. Galeano, 33-34.

18. Harris, 12-14.


22. See Mary Daly, Gynecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), n183.

23. E. William Monter, "Pedestal and Stake: Courtly Love and Witchcraft," in Becoming Visible: Women in European History, ed. Renee Bredahl and Claudia Koonz (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), 133. Perhaps in the witch craze, the trajectory of European misogyny (a much longer story than that of the racism traced here) intersects with the trajectory of European racism in a way that we have not fully understood, as Harriet Desmoules suggested to me in response to this section of the essay, for example, in the breaking of the European peasant movement leading toward land enclosure (a technique used also against people of color to break up communal ownership and economic and spiritual connections to the land).


28. Galeano, 91-93.

29. Galeano, 95.


32. Jordan, Black Over White, 93-95.

33. Jordan, 46, 57.

34. See Margo Adair, "The Subjective Side of Politics," unpublished essay; the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond, based in New Orleans (1444 N. Johnson St., New Orleans, LA 70116), shapes much of its work with white people against racism on this historic knowledge of the ideological construction of whiteness.

35. Article II, Section 2 of the U.S. Constitution tied representation and taxes to "the whole Number of free persons, including those bound to Service for a Term of Years, and excluding Indians not taxed, three-fifths of all other persons." The prohibition against abolishing the slave trade was in Article II, Section 9.

36. The "s" was dropped and "Cobbs" became "Cobb."
51. Quoted in Drinnon, 86.
52. Quoted in Drinnon, 89.
53. Gossett, 231.
54. Quoted in Drinnon, 76-77.
55. Quoted in Drinnon, 179.
57. Takaki, Cages, 101-102.
58. Quoted in Harding, 109-111.
59. Quoted in Harding, 95.
62. See Harding, Chapter 9; he quotes Delany: “We are politically not of them, but aliens to the laws and political privileges of the country,” 174. Delany’s emerging Black nationalism was influenced by the nationalism sweeping Europe. Delany prefigures DuBois in his observation: “It would be duplicity longer to disguise the fact that the great issue, sooner or later, upon which must be disputed the world’s destiny, will be the question of black and white, and every individual will be called upon for his identity with one or the other,” 186.
63. Takaki, Cages, 75-79.
65. Quoted in Gossett, 235.
68. Acuña, 1-2, 12.
69. See Acuña’s chapter, “Legacy of Hate: The Conquest of Mexico’s Northeast.”
71. Quoted in Takaki, Strangers, 22.
74. Painter, 21-22.
75. Omi and Winant, 64-65.

78. In the Slaughterhouse Cases of 1873, in U.S. v. Reese and in U.S. v. C rendered the court cut back sharply on privileges and immunities seen as under federal protection, limiting the scope of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. Civil Rights Cases of 1883 nullified portions of the Civil Rights Act, the legislative enactment of the Fourteenth Amendment, saying that Congress could restrain states but not individuals from acts of racial discrimination and segregation. In Halt v. De Cuir (1877) and Louisville, New Orleans and Texas Railroads v. Mississippi (1890), the court ruled that states first could not prohibit, then could require segregation, leading toward the 1896 Plessy v. Ferguson decision that “legislation is powerless to eradicate racial instincts” and “separate but equal” facilities were constitutional. Williams v. Mississippi (1898) “completed the opening of the legal road to proscription, segregation, and disfranchisement by approving the Mississippi plan for depriving Negroes of the franchise,” in Woodward, 71. “Just as the Negro gained his emancipation and new rights through a falling out between white men, he now stood to lose his rights through the reconciliation of white men,” Woodward, 70.
79. Giddings, 27.
82. Woodward, 79-80, 90.
83. Takaki, Cages, 219.
84. Painter, 162.
85. Takaki, Strangers, 28.
86. Takaki, Strangers, 31.
87. Painter, 163.
89. Acuña, 90-91.
90. Acuña, 98, 103.
91. Quoted in Drinnon, 182.
94. Takaki, Strangers, 25.
96. Quoted in Giddings, 66.
97. Commented Frances Ellen Harper, “The white women all go for sex, letting race occupy a minor position. Being black means that every white, including every white working-class woman, can discriminate against you,” Giddings, 68.
98. Quoted in Giddings, 91.

101. Painter, 147.


108. Quoted in Davdowicz, 14.


111. Painter, 149-50.

112. Quoted in Painter, 150.

113. Quoted in Painter, 147.


115. Magdoff, 40.

116. Zinn, 380-81, 386.


120. Quoted in Gross, 25.

121. Quoted in Gross, 24.

122. Gross, 22.

123. Gross, 23.


126. Quoted in Magdoff, 49.