# THE PURSUIT OF WHITENESS: PROPERTY, TERROR, AND EXPANSION, 1790-1860

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Paul Gilroy, holding forth acerbically in the collection *Black British Cultural Studies*, warns that attempts to write in an interdisciplinary way about identity "can send the aspirant practitioners of cultural studies scuttling back toward the quieter sanctuaries of their old disciplinary affiliations, where the problems and potential pleasures of thinking through identity are less formidable and engaging." Behavior after the scuttling, he adds, follows disciplinary lines: "Anthropologists utter sighs of relief, psychologists rub their hands together in glee, philosophers relax [and] literary critics look blank and perplexed. Historians remain silent."[1]

   In the particular case of the study of white identity and privilege in the United States, historians have been less silent than Gilroy's model implies. The major review essays on what has lamentably been named "whiteness studies" consistently place social history at the center of a burgeoning multidisciplinary literature, citing the work of Alexander Saxton, Theodore Allen, and Noel Ignatiev, among others.[2] Most ambitious accounts of white

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identity by non-historians (in terms of formal departmental affiliations), including those of Karen Brodkin, Susan Gubar, Eric Lott, and Michael Rogin, frame their material historically. Moreover, I will argue, a historical literature on American Indians and white identity, too often "lost," anticipated many of the insights of more recent work and deserves rereading in the light of cultural studies.[1]

Nonetheless tensions surround the place of history in investigations of white identity. Much cultural studies work in the area lacks historical grounding and ignores or misconceives the emphasis on class relations common among historians of whiteness. Conversely, not a few historians disdain cultural studies approaches, and even inquiries into race and cultural representation more generally, as ethereal and frivolous. One goal of this essay, therefore, is to expose an audience of historians to critical insights from those not formally or entirely in the history business. Implicit throughout, this goal is forwarded explicitly in a prelude bringing together the writings of the legal analyst and critical race theorist Cheryl Harris and the American Studies scholar Saidiya Hartman around the themes of

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American Working Class (London, UK, 1991). See also Michael Goldfield, *The Color of Politics: Race and the Mainsprings of American Politics* (New York, 1997), 74-112. Among the review essays, see esp., David Stowe, "Uncolored People: The Rise of Whiteness Studies," *Lingua Franca*, 4 (Sept.-Oct. 1996), 68-77; George Lipsitz, "Swing Low Sweet Cadillac: White Supremacy, Antiblack Racism and the New Historicism," *American Literary History*, 7 (Winter 1995), 700-25; and Judith Levine, "The Heart of Whiteness," *Voice of Literary Supplement* (Sept. 1994), 11-16. The term "whiteness studies" is a misguided one as it wrenches the critical study of white identity from its necessary embeddedness in the consideration of cultural and social relations among races. Would anyone say that James Baldwin and Toni Morrison, the two leading students of whiteness in my lifetime, engage in "whiteness studies"?

[1] Karen Brodkin, "How Did Jews Become White Folks?" in *Race*, ed. Roger Sanjek and Steven Gregory (New Brunswick, NJ, 1996), 78-102; Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York, 1993); Michael Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Berkeley, 1996); Susan Gubar, *Racechanges: White Skin, Black Face in American Culture* (New York, 1997); Richard Drinnon, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire-Building* (New York, 1980); Michael Paul Rogin, *Fathers and Children: Andrew Jackson and the Subjection of the American Indian* (New York, 1975); Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, MA, 1981); Richard Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890* (New York, 1985); Ronald Takaki, *Iron Cages: Race and Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York, 1990). See also Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York, 1979); and Roy Harvey Pearce, *The Savages of America: A Study of the Indian and the Idea of Civilization* (Baltimore, 1953).

property, happiness, and terror in the formation of white identity.[4] The main section of the essay then will use a dramatic moment in the Lincoln-Douglas debates as a window through which we may survey the strengths, weaknesses, and gaps of recent writings on whiteness, expansion, and terror in the early national and antebellum periods. By arguing that relatively neglected older studies offer promising approaches to deepen understanding of that moment in the Lincoln-Douglas confrontation, I will emphasize the necessity of considering white racial formation in the context of a settler colonial—and slaveholding—nation.

## WHITE PURSUITS: A PRELUDE

When the founders used the wonderful phrase, "the pursuit of happiness," political theorists tell us that they must have had in mind largely the pursuit of property. The fascinating connections between property and happiness hinge not only on the vocabulary of Lockean political philosophy but also on the ways in which both property and happiness found meaning in their relationship to whiteness and white privilege.[5] In some ways these relationships are familiar. From Edmund Morgan to the recent work of the political philosopher Charles Mills, it has been clear that ideas of freedom for the mass of white males developed hard by and against notions and practices ensuring that those not white could not pursue happiness effectively in political, social, and economic

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[4] Matt Wray and Annalee Newitz, eds., *White Trash: Race and Class in America* (New York, 1997). For a burlesque treatment of "whiteness studies" that rests on a caricature of the influence of cultural studies, see Margaret Talbot, "Getting Credit for Being White," *New York Times Magazine* (Nov. 30, 1997), 116-19; Pat Jennings and Meredith Redlin, "Constituting White Identities: *disClosure* Interviews David Roediger," *disClosure*, 7 (1998), 133-35, on history, cultural studies, and race; Cheryl Harris, "Whiteness as Property," *Harvard Law Review*, 106 (June 1993), 1709-91; and Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America* (New York, 1997).

[5] For a discussion of the older, scholarly contention that the Declaration of Independence was Lockean at its core, with Jefferson more or less inexplicably or magically substituting "pursuit of happiness" for Locke's emphasis on the right to property, see Garry Wills, *Inventing America: Jefferson's Declaration of Independence* (Garden City, NY, 1978), 229-55. Wills sharply and successfully challenges this view insofar as Jefferson's political philosophy is concerned. Property and happiness, however, were certainly paired in significant ways, in and beyond Locke. See also Herbert L. Ganter, "Jefferson's 'Pursuit of Happiness' and Some Forgotten Men," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 16 (July 1936), 422-34.

realms.[6] What Mills calls a "racial contract" served as a fundamental part of the bourgeois social contract. "European humanism," Mills wryly observes, all too consistently "meant that only Europeans were human" and rewrote history as a struggle to extend both the property- and happiness-producing rights of Europeans and the hegemony of white "civil" spaces over nonwhite "wild" spaces.[7] The sophisticated and celebrated bringing together of property and enjoyment as benefits of whiteness stems from W. E. B. Du Bois's discussion in *Black Reconstruction* of the financial as well as "public and psychological" wages accruing to whites, a formulation that undergirds much recent scholarship on whiteness.[8]

Given that they draw on so rich a tradition, Cheryl Harris and Saidiya Hartman sharpen our understanding of whiteness, property, and happiness in startling ways. In her massive *Harvard Law Review* article, "Whiteness as Property," Harris's deeply historical work pushes far beyond the commonplace that whiteness has carried (and still carries) greater access to property in the United States. She argues that whiteness has been so tied to the right to own property as to itself come to constitute itself a legally recognizable, usable, and cherished form of property, *possessed by all whites.* The attempted reduction of blacks, but not whites, to "objects of property" in slavery, and the expropriation of Indian land via legal processes which "established whiteness as prerequisite to the exercise of enforceable property rights," created, in Harris's view, an enduring set of expectations that whiteness had a value as property.[9]

In addition to its ability to ground whiteness both within and beyond binary black-white dynamics, Harris's approach offers great insight into the complexity of the label "white." Far from denying the existence and import of poverty among whites, Harris establishes the grounds on which poor whites became chained to both their poverty and their anticipations of property benefits as whites—frequently a bad check but often the only one they had.[10] Harris specifically notes that whiteness fits legal definitions of

[6] Edmund Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York, 1975); Orlando Patterson, *Freedom.* Volume One: *Freedom in the Making of Western Culture* (New York, 1991); Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca, 1997).

[7] Mills, *The Racial Contract*, 27 (quotation), 41-53.

[8] W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in the United States, 1860-1880* (1935; rep., New York, 1977), 700-01, 727; Stowe, "Uncolored People," 71.

[9] Harris, "Whiteness as Property," 1721, 1724.

[10] *Ibid.*," 1734-36, 1759-61, esp. 1760n. The discussion of whiteness, property, and "reputation" in Harris opens onto critical connections among race, masculinity, and honor in the South. Cf. Ariela J. Gross, "'Like Master, Like Man': Constructing Whiteness in the

property in that those categorized as white enjoyed the "right to use and enjoy" their racial position. She adds tellingly that "as whiteness is simultaneously an aspect of identity and a property interest, it is something that can both be experienced and deployed as a resource"—that is, it has utility in both the pursuit of happiness and the pursuit of property and forms part of the connective tissue between the two.[11]

Hartman's cultural study originates at a point very near to Harris's legal/historical observations regarding whiteness, property, and enjoyment. Indeed Hartman begins *Scenes of Subjection* with a long section of linked chapters titled "Formations of Terror and Enjoyment." In her specific discussion of "the property of enjoyment," she subtly connects the twinned white pursuits of property and of happiness. Her excerpting of *Black's Law Dictionary* on what it means to "enjoy" drives home her (and Harris's) points dramatically: "to have, possess, and use with satisfaction; to occupy or have the benefit of . . . the exercise of a right, privilege or incorporeal hereditament. Comfort, consolation, ease, happiness, pleasure and satisfaction."[12]

Holding that white "hereditament" created expectations that relations with black people would create "delight" as well as wealth, Hartman "replaces" popular culture within economic structures, state policies, and practices of terror. Of blackface minstrelsy and melodrama, she writes, "The punitive pleasures yielded through figurative possession of blackness cannot be disentangled from the bodily politics of chattel slavery." She continues, "The terror of pleasure—that violence that undergirded the comic moment in minstrelsy—and the pleasure of terror—the force of evil that propelled the plot of melodrama and fascinated the spectator—filiated the coffle, the auction block, the popular stage, and plantation amusements in a scandalous equality."[13]

Hartman's study builds on a substantial African-American tradition which regards terror and complicity in terror as the glue binding together those who think that they are white.[14] Hartman's contribution, among much

Commercial Law of Slavery, 1800-61." *Cardozo Law Review*, 18 (Nov. 1996), 265-66, 298.

[11] Harris, "Whiteness as Property," 1734.

[12] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 23.

[13] *Ibid*, 17-112, esp. 32. Elsewhere (26) Hartman probes more deeply into property's links to minstrel happiness: "The fungibility of the commodity, specifically its abstractness and immateriality, enabled the black body or blackface mask to serve as the vehicle of white self-exploration, renunciation, and enjoyment."

[14] Regarding African-American thought on terror and whiteness, see David R. Roediger, ed., *Black on White: Black Writers on What It Means to Be White* (New York, 1998), 14-17, 317-49.

else, is to capture the terror in what she calls "liberal" moments, such as
Abraham Lincoln's chilling racialized reflections on what be called the
"effect of condition on human happiness." Witnessing twelve slaves on a
steamboat, "strung together like so many fish on a trot-line" and being
separated from home and kin, Lincoln's attention fell on fiddle-playing,
singing, dancing, and joking among the twelve. His conclusion bespeaks
the ways in which, as Hartman puts it, "white self-reflection" used the
supposed "elasticity of blackness ... as a vehicle for exploring the human
condition," expecting at once to know happiness and to come to terms with
misery by looking upon blacks. After his description of the utterly inhuman
conditions of the slaves, Lincoln ended by evoking the slaves' mirth and
musing that God "renders the worst of the human condition tolerable, while
He permits the best to be nothing but tolerable."[15]

   If Harris's location of whiteness *within* prevailing conceptions of
property productively complicates attempts to arrive at a materialist
account of race and class in the antebellum United States, Hartman's study
puts paid to the surprisingly insistent recent attempts to rehabilitate
minstrelsy and other racist entertainments. Going far beyond Eric Lott's
useful insistence that both "love and theft" were involved in minstrel
appropriations of African-American music, David Grimsted and William
Lhamon have argued that present-minded scholars have been so eager to
brand such entertainments as racist that they have missed the real core of
the stagecraft. For Grimsted that core was humor; for Lhamon, it was a
subversive lumpenproletarian cultural exchange across the color line, "a
racial project more radical even than abolitionism."[16] Hartman elaborates
the firm and wise position staked out by Alexander Saxton on this issue a
quarter century ago: "The ideological impact of minstrelsy was pro-
grammed by its conventional blackface form. There is no possibility of
escaping this relationship because the greater the interest, talent, complex-
ity, and humanity embodied in its content, the most irresistible was the
racist message of its form." *Scenes of Subjection* gives flesh to the reasons
for the irony Saxton identifies. At once about pleasure, humor, and property

   [15] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 34-35. Cf. Robyn C. Wiegman, *American
Anatomies: Theorizing Race and Gender* (Durham, NC, 1995), 193-201.
   [16] Lott, *Love and Theft*; W. T. Lhamon, Jr., *Raising Cain: Blackface Performance from
Jim Crow to Hip Hop* (Cambridge, MA, 1998); Grimsted, "Review of Bluford Adams' *E
Pluribus Barnum*," *American Historical Review*, 103 (June 1998), 974-75. The overwrought
comparison of blackface and abolitionism is found, incredibly enough, in the Spring-
Summer 1998 catalogue of Harvard University Press, advertising *Raising Cain*. See also
William J. Mahar's *Behind the Burnt Cork Mask: Early Blackface Minstrelsy and Antebellum
American Popular Culture* (Urbana, 1999).

(Minstrel question: "Why is we niggas like a slave ship on de Coast of Africa?" Answer: "Because we both make money by taking off the negroes."), minstrelsy "reiterated racial subjection." The "love" on which blackface bodysnatching traded was, for Hartman, as terrifying as the "theft" its performance implemented. Furthermore, love was utterly inseparable from that theft. Both joined to constitute "the illusory integrity of whiteness." For reasons Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks develops in her recent and rich psychoanalytic account of the dynamics of racial jokes, minstrel scenes of subjection and their punch lines required endless repetition. They could never quite exorcise the threat, subversive to white pleasure and rule, of being laughed at in ways which threatened to expose the lie of whiteness.[17]

## CHANTING WHITE MEN

If historical reenactors want to get it just right, reprises of the 1858 Lincoln-Douglas debates will need not only the eloquent starring principals but also a large cast of extras to swell the audience. One of the lines for the extras, chanted over and over by Douglas backers, would echo: "White men, white men." This eerie chant gave voice to the popularity of white identity in the late antebellum United States.[18] In many ways the recent and much celebrated historiography on whiteness between the Revolution and the Civil War effectively positions us to understand that chanting crowd and the ways both Douglas and Lincoln played to it, especially if we add the insights of Harris and Hartman to those of Allen, Saxton, Ignatiev, and others. Democratic Party demographics, in Illinois and in the national arena where Douglas's larger ambitions lay, depended on the incorporation of Irish and other immigrants as white voters. Ignatiev's *How the Irish Became White* shows why Douglas's insistence on moving beyond an Anglo-Saxon whiteness to posit a pan-white "American race" could resonate dramatically. The homosocial habit of affirming white maleness in public provides the subject matter for recent analyses of minstrelsy

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[17] Alexander Saxton, "Blackface Minstrelsy and Jacksonian Ideology," *American Quarterly*, 27 (Mar. 1975), 27; Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*, 119; Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 32; Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks, "The Comedy of Domination: Psychoanalysis and the Conceit of Whiteness," *Discourse*, 19 (Winter 1997), 152-56; see also Saxton's insightful revisiting of these questions in his "Blackface Minstrelsy, Vernacular Comics, and the Politics of Slavery in the North," in David Roediger and Martin H. Blatt, eds., *The Meaning of Slavery in the North* (New York, 1998), 157-75.

[18] Paul M. Angle, ed., *Created Equal?: The Complete Lincoln-Douglas Debates of 1858* (Chicago, 1958), 156.

which go to the heart of how Douglas's auditors rehearsed their chants and knew their lines. The utility of white identity in forging cross-class alliances, providing real and psychological payoffs to the more immiserated Douglas Democrats, is central to the agenda of studies showing what it meant to be "not a slave" in an increasingly class-divided and proletarianized labor force.[19]

However, the reverberating chants and the debates which they punctuated also signal ways in which "whiteness studies" risks prematurely cutting off historical exchanges, leaving critical dimensions of the working of race, property, and terror unexamined, encouraging classic older studies (and exciting new ones) to go unread when whiteness is investigated. The chants ought to alert us immediately to large gaps in even the best of the "whiteness studies" by historians of the nineteenth century. If cross-class alliances cemented by white consciousness are at issue, our knowledge of working class motivations for joining such alliances runs far ahead of what is known, even after James Brewer Stewart's intelligent approach to the issue, of middle-class white identity. Whiteness among midwesterners, and among rural populations generally, is so understudied as to give pause regarding generalizations about Douglas's backers. If the process by which the Irish "became white" is understood—and even here some amendments will likely be required in light of Catherine Eagan's forthcoming revisionist analysis of awareness of race in nineteenth-century Ireland and fascinating recent work on Irish immigrant men and women who in some ways resisted becoming white—studies of other immigrant groups remain lacking.[20]

[19] Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White*; Lott, *Love and Theft*; Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*; Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*; and Saxton, *White Republic*. See also Barry Goldberg, "Wage Slaves and White 'Niggers'," *New Politics*, Second Series, 3 (Summer 1991), 64-83.

[20] James Brewer Stewart, "The Emergence of Racial Modernity and the Rise of the White North, 1790-1840," *Journal of the Early Republic*, 18 (Spring 1998), 181-217. Mary Cathryn Cain's forthcoming Emory University dissertation, tentatively titled "The Whiteness of White Women: Gender and the Use of Race Privilege in the Urban Northeast, 1820-1870," promises to make a most substantial contribution to the history of middle-class whiteness. On the Irish and whiteness, see Catherine Eagan, "When Did the Irish Become White?" Unpublished paper, presented at the annual meeting of the American Studies Association, Washington, DC, 1997. On resistant Irish Americans, see Leslie M. Harris, "'Rulers of the Five Points': Irish and Black Workers in New York City," in her *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans, Class, Community and Political Activism in New York City, 1626-1863*, forthcoming; Graham Russell Hodges, *Slavery, Freedom, and Culture Among Early American Workers* (Annonk, NY, 1998), 122-44; John Kuo Wei Tchen, *New York Before Chinatown: Orientalism and the Shaping of American Culture, 1776-1882* (Baltimore, 1999).

German Americans are the largest and most interesting such group. Bruce Levine's able investigations of radical immigrant Germans and the growth of "black Dutch" participation in the antislavery cause heads a slim body of scholarship. German immigrants also surely found their ways into the ranks of Douglas's militantly white Democrats.[21] That religious fissures conditioned differing stances among Germans only reminds us of another large gap, the absence of discussion by historians of whiteness of religious faith, particularly among antebellum Protestants.[22]

As Dana Frank has eloquently shown, the new literature on white identity, especially among workers, overwhelmingly focuses on white male identity. Superficially apt, as we try to understand chanting white men, this emphasis leaves so much out as to imperil understanding even of the gender on which it concentrates. My own recent research on affinities and differences between the antebellum feminist metaphor of "sex slavery" and the (white) labor movement's metaphor of "wage slavery" throws relations between masculinity and property into new relief. Dana Nelson's *National Manhood: Capitalist Citizenship and the Imagined Fraternity of White Men*, discussed at the conclusion of this essay, squarely focuses on the study of white masculinity, but its subtle analysis crosses and recrosses gender lines, making it also the best account yet of white womanhood in antebellum United States.[23]

[21] Bruce Levine, "'Against All Slavery, White or Black': German Americans and the Irrepressible Conflict," in David McBride, Leroy Hopkins, and C. Aisha Blackshire-Belay, eds., *Crosscurrents: African Americans, Africans and Germany in the Modern World* (Columbia, SC, 1998), 53-64; Levine, *The Spirit of 1848: German Immigrants, Labor Conflict, and the Coming of the Civil War* (Urbana, 1992). See also Darlene Wilson, "'Black Dutch'—A Polite Euphemism?" at http://www.clinch.edu/appalachia/melungeon/dw_dutch. htm. Gjerde, "'Here in America There Is Neither King Nor Tyrant': European Encounters with Race, 'Freedom' and Their European Pasts," in this volume; Maria Diedrich, *Love Across Color Lines: Ottilie Assing and Frederick Douglass* (New York, 1999); Matthew Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color* (Cambridge, MA, 1998), 46-48.

[22] Richard Dyer's important overarching discussion of whiteness and Christianity in *White* (London, UK, 1997), esp. 14-18, makes specific studies for the United States still more urgent; see also Mason Stokes, "Someone's in the Garden with Eve: Race, Religion and the American Fall," *American Quarterly*, 50 (Dec. 1998), 719-25.

[23] Dana Frank, "White Working Class Women and the Race Question," *International Labor and Working Class History*, 54 (Fall 1998), 80-102; David Roediger, "Race, Labor and Gender in the Languages of Antebellum Social Protest," in Stanley L. Engerman, ed., *Terms of Labor: Slavery, Serfdom and Free Labor* (Stanford, 1999), 168-87; Dana D. Nelson, *National Manhood: Capitalist Citizenship and the Imagined Fraternity of White Men* (Durham, 1998), 395-415; Maggie Montesinos Sale, *The Slumbering Volcano: American Slave Revolts and the Production of Rebellious Masculinity* (Durham, 1997).

Nonetheless, the need for gendered accounts which make white womanhood their central subject remains acute, especially since women's history of the early national and antebellum periods brilliantly links gender, property, and citizenship in ways which cry out for both comparison with and connection to the property of whiteness. Indeed Nancy Isenberg grounds her *Sex and Citizenship in Antebellum America* in the idea of a "disinvestment" of women's rights to property and liberty. Jeanne Boydston's remarkable *Home and Work* reminds us that whiteness became a much more common male public performance precisely in the context of a widening and deeply gendered ideological split between the private and the public. Moreover, this split denied the fact that white women's labor was critically (and increasingly) tied to the market economy. Even as white masculine identity could be used to paper over contradictions between free labor ideals of economic independence and increasing proletarianization, white true womanhood could shore up perceptions of isolation from the world of power and money. I have long enjoined every student who reads *Wages of Whiteness* to also read *Home and Work*, but the crying need is for studies that discuss race, gender, and the market together, accounting for the ways in which exceptional women performed and challenged whiteness in public and for the ways in which white female identity was (re)made in private spaces.[24]

Superb recent studies of slavery and white womanhood in the South by Martha Hodes, Ariela Gross, Nell Painter, and others suggest that we are poised for exactly such a sweeping new interpretation, which also will draw usefully on Karen Sanchez-Eppler's important *Touching Liberty*. The latter study includes telling observations on terror, arguing that antebellum women's rights advocates used narratives regarding slave women's bodies both to broach and evade the ways in which sexual violence touched their own bodies. Appropriately enough, Cheryl Harris has initiated the synthetic investigations so badly needed by considering whiteness and gender within

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[24] Nancy Isenberg, *Sex and Citizenship in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill, 1998), esp. 27-29, 33-36, 122-27; Jeanne Boydston, *Home and Work: Housework, Wages and Ideology in the Early Republic* (New York, 1990). For promising new work combining insights regarding gender and regarding whiteness, see Cain, "The Whiteness of White Women," forthcoming; and Lori Askeland, "Remodeling the Model Home in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Beloved*," in Michael Moon and Cathy N. Davidson, eds., *Subjects and Citizens: Nation, Race and Gender From Oroonoko to Anita Hill* (Durham, 1995), 395-415. Particularly impressive for its insistence on whiteness as performance, and on the gendered nature of such performance, is Ariela J. Gross, "Litigating Whiteness: Trials of Racial Determination in the Nineteenth Century South," *The Yale Law Journal*, 198 (Oct. 1998), 109-88.

both systems of production and reproduction in her recent and provocative "Finding Sojourner's Truth."[25]

## WHITE RACE, POWER, AND REPRESENTATION

A fascinating dimension of Douglas's own performance suggested especially critical issues much in need of debate by historians of whiteness who wish to emphasize questions of property and terror. Summing up the political/racial geography of overwhelmingly white Illinois, Douglas characterized the state as: "pretty black in the north end of the state, about the center it is pretty good mulatto and it is almost white when you get down to Egypt [Southern Illinois]."[26] By suggesting black domination even in areas almost all white, Douglas takes us to a particularly vexed issue, that of the extent to which white identity grew in face-to-face contact with people of color (crudely, in the realm of social history) or in the context of representation and symbolism (crudely, in the realm of cultural theory and history). Reviewers of *Wages of Whiteness* rightly criticized its tilt toward the latter emphasis. Since property and terror so closely imply power relationships, it is tempting to think that sites where such power was exercised, or resisted, most immediately ought to be the focus of the research. The richness of accounts which attend more closely to the labor process and to race relations in neighborhoods underline the force of calls for finely grained social history of whiteness. Studies, such as those by James Brewer Stewart, Lois E. Horton, and Joanne Pope Melish in this collection, which are well-grounded in the histories of free blacks in the

[25] Martha Hodes, *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth Century South* (New Haven, 1997), Nell Irvin Painter, "Soul Murder and Slavery: Towards a Fully Loaded Cost Accounting," in Linda Kerber, Alice Kessler-Harris, and Kathryn Kish Sklar, eds., *U.S. History as Women's History* (Chapel Hill, 1995), 125-46; Victoria E. Bynum, *Unruly Women: The Politics of Social and Sexual Control in the Old South* (Chapel Hill, 1992), esp. 35-38; Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women in the Old South* (Chapel Hill, 1988); Karen Sanchez-Eppler, *Touching Liberty: Abolition, Feminism and the Politics of the Body* (Berkeley, 1993); Russ Castronovo, "Incidents in the Life of a White Woman: Economics of Race and Gender in the Antebellum Nation," *American Literary History*, 10 (Summer 1998), 239-65; Gillian Brown, *Domestic Individualism: Imagining Self in Nineteenth Century America* (Berkeley, 1990), 3-38; Cheryl Harris, "Finding Sojourner's Truth: Race, Gender and the Institution of Slavery," *Cardozo Law Review*, 18 (Nov. 1998), 309-410.

[26] Douglas as quoted in Robert W. Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas* (New York, 1973), 726. On the efforts, successful in Illinois in 1853, of Midwestern states to exclude African-American migrants, see Eugene Berwanger, *The Frontier Against Slavery: Western Anti-Negro Prejudice and the Slavery Extension Controversy* (Urbana, 1967), 44-59.

North, likewise demonstrate that value of textured scholarship that crosses
the color line. So too do fine recent inquiries, including Lacy K. Ford's
essay in this volume, regarding race and whiteness in the South, an oddly
underemphasized site of white racial formation where opportunities for
face-to-face transracial contacts were most extensive.[27]

Given the excellence of such scholarship and the common sense
association of property and of terror with direct social experience, the flat
assumption that white identity is always best studied as the local product
of immediate social relations across racial lines has its appeals. However,
such an assumption can generate quite naive positions which neglect
Saidiya Hartman's reminders regarding the "filiation" of slavery, discrimi-
nation, and cultural representations of race. As Douglas and his chorus of
supporters demonstrate, white racial identity could function, largely in the
absence of people of color, to position white voters in national, partly race-
based political coalitions promising to shore up exclusionary efforts in the
face of real and perceived threats of in-migration of those not categorized
as white. It would produce pleasure as well as unity. As Stuart Hall has
forcefully shown, posing representations of race as outside of and opposed
to concrete lived experience clarifies little. If they starkly and consistently
contradicted day-to-day direct experiences, racist representations could not
long survive intact. But in the short run there was ample space for patterns
of representation to structure how such interactions would unfold and
would be understood.[28]

[27] See, for example, Joe Trotter's review of *Wages of Whiteness*, in *Journal of Social History*, 25 (Spring 1992), 674-76. For rich studies of specific social histories of race, see Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White*, Hodges, *Slavery, Freedom and Culture Among Early American Workers*; John Kuo Wei Tchen, "Quimbo Appo's Fear of Fenians: Chinese-Irish-Anglo Relations in New York City," in Ronald H. Bayor and Timothy J. Meagher, eds., *The New York Irish* (Baltimore, 1996), 123-52; on free blacks in the North, see James Brewer Stewart, "The Political Meaning of Color in the Free States," Lois E. Horton "From Class to Race in Early America: Northern Post-Emancipation Social Reconstruction," and Joanne Pope Melish, "The 'Condition' Debate and Racial Discourse in the Antebellum North," all in this volume; on the South, see Hodes, *White Women, Black Men*; and Lacy K. Ford, Jr., "Making the 'White Man's' Country White: Race, Slavery, and State-Building in the Jacksonian South," in this volume.

[28] For a vigorous, if naive, endorsement of the clear superiority of local approaches, see Eric Arnesen's "Up from Exclusion: Black and White Workers, Race, and the State of Labor History," *Reviews in American History*, 26 (Mar. 1998), 162-67; Stuart Hall, "What Is This 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?" *Social Justice*, 20 (Spring-Summer 1993), 111, and John Kuo Wei Tchen, "Believing Is Seeing: Transforming Orientalism and the Occidental Gaze," in Margo Machida, ed., *Asia/America: Identities in Contemporary Asian American Art* (New York, 1994), 12-25.

Two very recent works make especially noteworthy and materially grounded assaults on questions involving race, representation, and day-to-day interactions. Joanne Pope Melish's *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "Race" in New England, 1780-1860* argues against locating white Yankees' identity mainly in the context of their contemplation of the slave South. The New England experience of slaveholding, and of a gradual, oppressive emancipation designed to serve interests of order and property among whites, mattered greatly in racial formation. In restoring this authentic social experience to the important position it deserves in white racial formation in the Northeast, Melish evokes great complexity. She shows that it was not just the end of New England slavery which influenced white identity but also the process by which slavery was forgotten ("disowned"), and a vision of a "free white republic" without significant African-American presence was propagated in various cultural forms and political forums. Melish's apt discussion of the fascination with the terror accompanying the supposed enslavement of whites in the Barbary States in the 1780s and 1790s details an important chapter in the prehistory of ideas about "white slavery," one based on direct social experience of a relatively small number of victims.[29]

John Kuo Wei Tchen's monumental *New York Before Chinatown: Orientalism and the Shaping of American Culture, 1776-1882*, also serves as a model of a healthy refusal to imagine a choice between experience and representation in accounting for white racial formation. In his early chapters Tchen fleshes out an orientalism honed in the presence of very few Asian people but out of highly property-inflected relationships to Asian commodities such as porcelain and tea. However, later sections place Chinese migrants squarely in the wildly diverse and freewheeling "port culture" of New York City, where they worked with, worked for, sold to, cohabited with, and (representation never being absent) performed before, white New Yorkers.[30]

## EXPANDING PURSUITS OF WHITENESS

Another of Douglas's arresting appeals went out to white-thinking Mexican War veterans. They could, Douglas argued, corroborate his views

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[29] Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "Race" in New England, 1780-1860* (Ithaca, 1998), 5, 151-62 (Barbary slavery), 210 ("free white republic") and *passim*. See also Paul Baepler, ed., *White Slaves, African Masters: An Anthology of American Captivity Narratives* (Chicago, 1999).

[30] Tchen, *New York Before Chinatown*.

on the need to defend "white blood" against threats of racial "amalgam-ation." In the war, they had seen the results of mixing "white men, Indians, and negroes" in the faces and the degradation of the Mexican population. Douglas explicitly defined white manhood as superior to both African-American and Indian others. At another juncture, Douglas took the debate further abroad. When Lincoln held that the Declaration of Independence applied to African Americans, Douglas fretted that if such arguments were countenanced, white men would be reduced to a parity with Fiji Islanders.[11]

Douglas's expansion of the racial terrain far beyond a black-white binary landscape identifies an area of weakness in recent histories of white racial formation. Almost all the most-cited historians of whiteness are writers whose earlier works are in labor history, or whose analyses are much influenced by Marxism, and usually both. This materialist bent remains a rather well-kept secret, and the study of whiteness is sometimes criticized as if it emanated entirely from the most airy expanses of cultural studies. But materialist influences characterize the work of Alexander Saxton, George Lipsitz, Noel Ignatiev, Theodore Allen, Dana Frank, and myself.[12] The focus, not too surprisingly, has often fallen on labor systems and property, with slavery looming large as a race-making response to class conflict, as a barrier to working class unity, and as a counterpoint against which notions of free labor and white identity took form. Whatever its successes, this line of thought has clearly contributed to the tendency to see racial formation in black and white.

In the case of *Wages of Whiteness*, an emphasis on the history of the white worker made it especially tempting to oversimplify matters. Important as they were, so the argument went, Indian-white relations were about land and not labor and, in any case, Indians were seen as disappear-ing, not as an ongoing other against which whiteness could be defined and mobilized. (Minstrel pun: "The Indian's race is almost run.") The result was that *Wages of Whiteness* relegated settler colonialism and the terror attending it to the "prehistory" of white racial formation among workers, repeating an error made in even some of the best accounts of race in the colonial period. Even on their own terms, these particular arguments in *Wages of Whiteness* collapse utterly. Early and mid-nineteenth century labor politics often hinged precisely on land. Waged Indian labor, as excellent recent studies show, was significant and widespread. In parts of the antebellum North there thrived a wishful pretense that African

[11] Angle, ed., *Created Equal?*, 201.

[12] In addition to the works cited in notes 2 and 22 above, see George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness* (Philadelphia, 1998).

Americans, and not just Indians, were disappearing. Moreover, as Lora Romero's and Jean O'Brien's superb investigations show, the very act of "disappearing" still-existing Indian populations mattered greatly in the formation of local, national, and racial consciousness in antebellum New England, even as the region also "disowned" its slaveholding past.[33]

Very recent work, and neglected older studies, move us decisively beyond a black-white binary framework and towards consideration of settler colonialism in structuring Douglas's expansive commentary on Indians, Mexicans, and Fiji Islanders. Philip Deloria's impressive new *Playing Indian*, for example, uses the history of Indian impersonation to enter broad questions of race and nation. Deloria writes, "Blackness, in a range of cultural guises, has been an essential precondition for American whiteness . . . the figure of 'the Indian' holds an equally critical position in American culture." Susan Scheckel, in her *The Insistence of the Indian*, makes similar arguments where connections between race and nation are drawn. Darlene Wilson and Patricia Beaver cause the ignored history of ethnically mixed "Melungeon" people in Appalachia to speak to large questions of Native-American identity, coercion, gender, whiteness, and property in that region and the nation.[34] Paul Foos's ambitious 1997 Yale dissertation, "Mexican Wars: Soldiers and Society in an Age of Expansion," provides a sophisticated study of the social history of "the phenomenon of [white] working class manifest destiny" in war and politics. Despite a certain overeagerness to transcend race, Foos illuminates the position of Douglas and that of the chanters, and even the possible tension between

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[33] Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*, 21-23; Frank Dumont, *Burnt Cork; or, The Amateur Minstrel* (New York, 1881), 45; Martha Knack and Alice Littlefield, eds., *Native Americans and Wage Labor: Ethnohistorical Perspectives* (Norman, OK, 1996); Jean M. O'Brien, "'Vanishing' Indians in Nineteenth-Century New England: Local Historians' Erasure of Still-Present Indian Peoples" (unpublished paper in possession of author, 1998); Lora Romero, "Vanishing Americans: Gender, Empire and the New Historicism," in Moon and Davidson, eds., *Subjects and Citizens*, 87-105. For colonial studies, see Morgan, *American Slavery*; and Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill, 1998).

[34] Philip Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven, 1998), 5; Susan Scheckel, *The Insistence of the Indian: Race and Nation in Nineteenth Century American Culture*, (Princeton, 1998); Darlene Wilson and Patricia Beaver, "Embracing the Male Off-Shore Other: The Ubiquitous Native Grandmother in America's Cultural Memory," in Barbara Smith, ed., *Links of Iron, Links of Gold: The Social Relations of Southern Women* (forthcoming). Cf. Neal Salisbury, "The Best Poor Man's Country as Middle Ground: Mainstreaming Indians in Early American Studies," *Reviews in American History*, 26 (Sept. 1998), 497-503.

their positions." Recent books on race in California and the Southwest
before and during the nineteenth century, especially those by Tomás
Almaguer, Ramon Gutiérrez, and Lisbeth Haas, bear strongly on questions
regarding who became categorized as white and what it meant to assume
white identities. Strongly attentive to questions of property as well as to
religion, gender, and racial ideas within subordinated groups, these studies
signal rising sophistication and provide models for future work. More
broadly, the "new western history" has encouraged that study of white
settlers in relationship to a varied and continuing presence of people of
color; and it has insisted, at its best, on historicizing white racial ideologies.
Similarly important for studies of whiteness and of race generally are the
friendly challenges by leading Asian Americanists to the tendency of some
Marxists to assume that categories like "labor" or "reserve army of the
unemployed" are abstract and raceless except in particular instances when
race obtrudes.[36]

As impressive as this emerging scholarship is proving to be, it is
perhaps the rereading of older classic studies of race, nation, and United
States expansion which holds the greatest promise in moving the study of
whiteness beyond a black-white axis and ensuring that the experience of
settler colonialism will not be seen as unrelated to the history of white
identity. The most exciting such contributions include Richard Drinnon's
*Facing West*, Michael Rogin's *Fathers and Children*, Reginald Horsman's
*Race and Manifest Destiny*, Richard Slotkin's *The Fatal Environment*, and,
more broadly pitched, Ronald Takaki's *Iron Cages.*[37] These books, most of

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35. On the Mexican War, see Paul W. Foos, "Mexican War: Soldiers and Society in an
Age of Expansion, 1835-1855" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1997), 6.

36. Tomás Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy
in California* (Berkeley, 1994); Lisbeth Haas, *Conquests and Historical Identities in
California, 1769-1936* (Berkeley, 1995); Ramón A. Gutiérrez, *When Jesus Came, the Corn
Mothers Went Away: Marriage, Sexuality and Power in New Mexico, 1500-1846* (Stanford,
1991), 193-206, 338-39. See also David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of
Texas, 1836-1986* (Austin, 1987); and Arnoldo De León, *They Called Them Greasers:
Anglo American Attitudes Toward Mexicans in Texas* (Austin, 1983). On Marxism and race
categories, see Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham,
1996), 24-28; and Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian
Americans* (New York, 1989), 30-31. See also Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of
Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York, 1987), esp. 179-292;
Richard White, "*It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own*": *A History of the American
West* (Norman, OK, 1991); and Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African
Americans in the American West, 1528-1900* (New York, 1998), esp. 27-102.

37. Drinnon, *Facing West*; Rogin, *Fathers and Children*; Horsman, *Race and Manifest
Destiny*; Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment*; Takaki, *Iron Cages*; Berkhofer, Jr., *The White
Man's Indian*; Pearce, *The Savages of America*.

them written as investigations of racism and nationalism in the context or the wake of antiwar and anti-imperialist movements of the Vietnam period, offer especially apt points of departure for historical reflections. They question when and why white identity came to be embraced within the context of anti-Indian violence, capitalist expansion, and nationalism. With some exceptions, these American Studies-influenced works do suffer from a focus, however critical, on conquest, on the conquerors, and on sources generated by victors. The agency of Indian people, well-invoked in James P. Ronda's and Daniel K. Richter's contributions to this volume, is underplayed, and so too are Indians' critical reflections on race and whiteness, topics beginning to be charted in the fine works of Nancy Shoemaker and R. Keith Basso. In probing what Herman Melville called "the metaphysics of Indian-hating," Drinnon, Slotkin, and others often greatly emphasize cultural over social history, and they develop class differences in racial ideology hesitantly.[18] All that said, however, the freshness and force of this older literature remains nothing short of remarkable on several counts when it is read as part of the history of whiteness.

The work of Rogin, Takaki, and others illuminates reasons why direct social experience with "others" cannot be the only focus of research on the generation of white identity. When Douglas debated Lincoln, some of the crowd likely had not encountered Indians; but they knew something of Lincoln's record of soldiering, the folklore of conquest, and arguments regarding the relationship of free labor and "free" land. Some may have been Mexican War veterans; many more heard the stories of those veterans. (Hard-by its discussion of "the metaphysics of Indian-hating," Melville's *The Confidence-Man* adds another ambiguity, drawing a masterful portrait of a "soldier of fortune" who begs as a disabled Mexican War veteran but whose misfortunes likely grew out of class and political conflicts in New York City.)[19]

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[18] James P. Ronda, "'We Have a Country': Race, Geography, and the Invention of Indian Territory," and Daniel K. Richter, "'Believing That Many of the Red People Suffer Much for the Want of Food': Hunting, Agriculture, and the Quaker Constructions of Indianness in the Early Republic," both in this issue; Nancy Shoemaker, "How Indians Got to Be Red," *American Historical Review*, 102 (June 1997), 625-44; R. Keith Basso, *Portraits of "The Whiteman": Linguistic Play and Cultural Symbols Among the Western Apache* (Cambridge, MA, 1979); Herman Melville, *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade*, ed. Bruce Franklin (1857, rep., Indianapolis, 1967), 203.

[19] Drinnon, *Facing West*, 198-99; Melville, *Confidence-Man*, 129-39; Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (New York, 1970).

The older literature, centered largely on the ways that the "civilized" white American took the "savage" Indian as his or her counterpoint, deserves attention for several additional reasons. The first involves the considerable extent to which these studies concentrate on matters of importance in shaping property relations far beyond the confines of the (shifting) frontier. In Chapter 31 of *Capital*, Marx's account of the "dawn" of capitalism in processes of "so-called primitive" accumulation of capital emphasized "the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population" of the Americas as one key to such accumulation. He made this point, however, in a chapter titled "Genesis of the Industrial Capitalist," refusing to imagine separate histories for metropoles and peripheries.[40]

In doing justice to Marx's insight, Slotkin, Rogin, and Takaki have probed white identity not just in zones of contact and conquest but also far more generally. Slotkin subtitles *The Fatal Environment* with *The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization*. He lays the ground for his postbellum discussions of convergences between anti-Indian and anti-(white) labor radical stereotypes with a close treatment of how antebellum thinkers as different as Theodore Parker and George Fitzhugh developed "a racialist reading of social class" among whites by drawing on American Indian as well as African-American counterpoints. Most astoundingly, in terms of Douglas and the chants of "White men," Slotkin offers a surprising reminder that the Kansas-Nebraska conflict—the linchpin of Douglas's career and a set of events almost always discussed in terms of freedom and slavery—also included insistent charges that Douglas's Democratic Party had attempted to create and manipulate an "Indian vote" in Kansas. They brought "savages" to the polls there, so the charges went, even as they rallied racially and religiously suspect Irish voters in urban areas.[41] In a key early chapter of *Iron Cages*, Takaki gracefully moves "Beyond Primitive Accumulation," making the treatment and imagination of Indians by whites central in shaping individualism, asceticism, enterprise, and acceptance of alienation nationally.[42] Rogin, who begins *Fathers and Children* with long sections explicitly titled "Whites" and "Whites and Indians," patiently develops dialectical relationships among

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[40] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ben Fowkes (1967, rep., 3 vols., London, UK, 1976). I, 914-26 (quotation at 915), on this point I am indebted to Peter Linebaugh, "Review of Robin Blackburn's The Making of New World Slavery," *Historical Materialism*, I (Autumn 1997), 185-96, esp. 190.

[41] Slotkin, *Fatal Environment*, 235 (quotation). 226-41, 266-68; see also 117 for the link to Marx's point.

[42] Takaki, *Iron Cages*, viii-x, 69-79, 125-28.

primitive accumulation, liberal capitalism, and the "market revolution." He
further elaborates and historicizes an argument on the role of projection of
desires onto Indians and into "wild" spaces by whites uneasily internalizing
new disciplines. His views strikingly parallel George Rawick's seminal
insights regarding the ways in which white bourgeois anxieties were
projected onto Africans and African Americans. Rogin writes:

> Disastrously for the liberal self-conception, however, its distance from
> primitive man was not secure. At the heart of ambitious expansionism
> lay the regressive impulse itself. Indians were in harmony with nature;
> lonely, independent liberal men were separated from it. Liberalism
> generated a forbidden nostalgia for childhood—for the nurturing,
> blissful, primitively violent connection to nature that white Americans
> had to leave behind [43]

Noteworthy too is the great extent to which the older literature
foregrounds questions of gender and terror. This is true not only within
Rogin's explicitly family-centered and psychoanalytic framework but also,
for example, in Takaki's brilliant commentary on just why Melville took
care to have a "western" character describe his model Indian-hater, Colonel
John Moredock, as "no cold husband or cold father" but a warm, patriar-
chal protector whose anti-Indian rage allegedly never moved to other
realms. (*The Confidence-Man*, published just as the Lincoln-Douglas
debates were taking shape, remembers Moredock as being so popularly
beloved that be "was pressed to become Candidate for governor" of [note
well!] Illinois, an honor he declined as possibly "incompatible" with his
Indian-hating).[44] In conjunction with more recent work regarding the social
history of race and gender in the early West, the older literature challenges
assumptions that contemplation of African Americans was *the* process
shaping ideas concerning white gender roles.[45]
      It is the very expansiveness of the consideration of race, class, and
conquest in the works written in the 1970s and early 1980s that offers the
greatest food for thought. These writers were, for example, far more likely

[43] Rogin, *Fathers and Children*, 19-279, 8 (quotation); George Rawick, *From
Sundown to Sunup: The Making of the Black Community* (Westport, 1972), 125-49, esp.
132-33.
[44] Takaki, *Iron Cages*, 83, 90, 139-42; Melville, *Confidence-Man*, 219.
[45] Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier*; Bruce M. White, "The Power of
Whiteness, or the Life and Times of Joseph Rolette, Jr.," *Minnesota History*, 56 (Winter
1998), 178-201; Sylvia Van Kirk, *"Many Tender Ties": Women in Fur-Trade Society, 1670-
1870* (Norman, OK, 1983); Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indian Empires and
Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge, UK, 1991).

to move beyond black/white binary approaches to white racial formation than have been recent practitioners of "whiteness studies." Drinnon's *Facing West* follows expansion from colonial Indian removals to Indochina, riding the "Occident Express" and tracing its contributions to racism and bureaucracy. His chapter on the South Carolina writer William G. Simms joins anti-Indian and anti-black racism in especially destructive counterpoint.[46] Takaki's *Iron Cages* is as expansive and alternates chapters on Indians and blacks. It demonstrates, for example, how Richard Henry Dana's whiteness, so central to his celebrated indictment of the "slavelike" treatment of white sailors, was inflected by experiences with Mexican and Kanaka (Hawaiian) others and how Hinton Rowan Helper's whites-only attack on slavery partook of his earlier distress at living alongside Chinese workers in California.[47] Horsman's *Race and Manifest Destiny* ranges widely in time and place. He develops the history of the drawing of a vital distinction between an invigorated "mixed" white "American" race (Douglas told his listeners "Our ancestors were not all of English origin . . . we inherit from every branch of the Caucasian race.") and nonwhite "mongrel" offspring, especially in the wake of the Mexican War. It is not an accident, given his spanning of older and newer studies, that Alexander Saxton's *Rise and Fall of the White Republic* thoroughly surpasses other recently published accounts in its encompassing narrative and its ability to address questions of whiteness, property, and national political power.[48]

Perhaps the greatest and most instructive tribute that can be paid to this older body of scholarship is to observe that the very best of the newest work on racial identity stands on its shoulders in ways revealing the potential for wider appreciation of its insights. Just published, Dana Nelson's stunning *National Manhood: Capitalist Citizenship and the Imagined Fraternity of White Men* sets a new standard for the synthetic treatment of white racial formation in the early national and antebellum periods. Nelson describes and dramatizes a series of failed attempts to create fellowship among white men who were set in fierce competition by capitalist expansion, who feared women's work and sexuality, and who worried over the possibilities of democracy. She shows, in analyses of subjects ranging from gynecology to Egyptology, how African Americans, women, Indians, and "primitives" functioned as the "others" necessary to

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[46] Drinnon, *Facing West*, 131-46 (quotation at 355).

[47] Takaki, *Iron Cages*, 156-61, 215-16.

[48] Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 208-71 (Douglas quotation at 251). Saxton, *White Republic*. For an expansive and important new study that extends questions broached by Horsman, see Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*.

forge white masculinities which were as powerful as they were "melancholy," which promised fraternity but delivered atomized racial identities.[49] No book better positions us to understand the chants from Douglas's supporters.

For all of its insights from postcolonial theory, from critical race theory, from recent interventions in feminist psychology and from Jeanne Boydston's history of gender and work, *National Manhood* resonates equally with the work of Rogin, Takaki, and others of their cohort. It frames events within capitalist transformation, alienation, and needs unfilled within liberal obsessions with individual gain. It moves deftly from "Inindianation" as a key to white national symbolism to antiblack racist science, from the explorations of Lewis and Clark, to the abolitionism of Lydia Maria Child. Herman Melville moves through Nelson's pages, as he does through Rogin's and Drinnon's. Above all, the emphasis on the production of white manhood in private as well as in public is sure. Indeed what is perhaps Nelson's most vigorous exposition of her position comes precisely in her effort to supplement Rogin's use of "a psychoanalytic model of 'regression'—a forbidden nostalgia for childhood—to explain the energy at the heart of the United States's westward expansion and its murderous consequences." Nelson writes of the need to locate white masculinity within "that ideological fiction of the 'peaceful competitiveness' of early U.S. capitalism (the providentially soothing logic of the 'invisible hand') versus its experientially anxious, potentially vicious cultural and material results." She continues, in ways that complement as much as contest Rogin, by arguing that newer formations of manhood, tied complexly to national ideals and emerging capitalist practices, effectively and ideologically isolated men, setting them at a long remove from the "thick network of obligation and duty within family and community" that had characterized older masculine ideals. White identity, she shows, perpetually promised to build a bridge (back) to the eighteenth-century ideals of mutuality and fraternity but succeeded only in supplementing the fictions of the liberal marketplace with its own lies.[50]

The existing literature does not contain final answers to the riddles of white racial formation. But it does demonstrate that in addressing Gesa Mackenthun's call to "add empire" to the study of history, we build on substantial foundations where racial identity is concerned.[51] Moreover,

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[49] Nelson, *National Manhood*, passim.

[50] *Ibid.*, 62.

[51] Gesa Mackenthun, "Adding Empire to the Study of American Culture," *Journal of American Studies*, 30 (Aug. 1996), 263.

looking back to fine older works ought to alert us to the fact that many themes addressed in recent scholarship are not exotic concerns driven by cultural studies, but longstanding problems of interest to historians. Nelson's insights, and those of the scholars on whom she draws, position us to see, with Melville, the extent to which white racial identity partook of interactions with African Americans, South Sea Islanders, American Indians, Mexicans, Cape Verdeans, and others. Such work will connect us to critical literatures on race, property, empire, and nation beyond the United States and to studies on the role of the astonishingly diverse international maritime proletariat in spreading and challenging ideas about race. These connections will help us immeasurably in identifying what is exceptional about white identity in the United States and what is shared with a larger white world.[32] Those of us who believe, with Theodore Allen, that whiteness in the United States is a "peculiar institution," formed in a unique conjuncture of anti-colonial/bourgeois revolution, industrial takeoff, and continuing slavery, can only make the case for such peculiarity if these dramas are discussed along with the scenes of subjection, racializations of property, and pursuits of white happiness which accompanied United States expansion.[33]

[32] See, for example, Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's "History of Sexuality" and the Colonial Order* (Durham, 1995); George Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality* (Madison, 1985); Homi Bhabha, "The Other Question: The Stereotype and Colonial Discourse," *Screen*, 24 (Nov.-Dec. 1983), 18-36; Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York, 1963); W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge, MA, 1997); Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, "The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, and the Atlantic Working Class in the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 3 (Sept. 1990), 225-52. On Melville, see Leonard Cassuto, *The Inhuman Race: The Racial Grotesque in American Literature and Culture* (New York, 1997), 170-79, 203-15; Carolyn Karcher, *Shadow Over the Promised Land: Slavery, Race and Violence in Melville's America* (Baton Rouge, 1980); Sterling Stuckey, "The Death of Benito Cereno: A Reading of Herman Melville on Slavery," in Stuckey, *Going Through the Storm: The Influence of African American Art in History* (New York, 1994), 158-69; and Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (New York, 1995), 118-41.

[33] Allen, *Invention of the White Race*, I, 1.