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The Invention of the White Race

Volume One:
Racial Oppression and Social Control



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Introduction

In this Introduction I criticize freely both “friend and foe”, even as I have drawn upon their research and insights to a great and obvious extent. I have tried to remain aware that any unfairness could only weaken my own argument. I ask indulgence for only one assumption, namely, that while some people may desire to be masters, all persons are born equally unwilling and unsuited to be slaves.

In the broad division of historians into “psycho-cultural” and “socio-economic” groups as I have defined them, I, of course, belong with the socio-economic category – with them, but not altogether of them. I have tried to show that one cannot rest content with the socio-economic case as it now stands, because of serious compromising ambiguities and inconsistencies in it. This book is intended as a contribution toward freeing the socio-economic thesis of such weaknesses.

The doing of it, however, has led me to cast the argument in a new conceptual mold. I approach racial slavery as a particular form of *racial oppression*, and racial oppression as a sociogenic – rather than a phylogenic phenomenon, homologous with gender and class oppression. Second, in considering the phenomenon of racial slavery I focus primarily not on *why* the bourgeoisie in continental Anglo-America had recourse to that anachronistic form of labor, slavery, but rather on *how* they could establish and maintain for such a long historical period that degree of *social control* without which no motive of profit or prejudice could have had effect.

I believe that the thesis here presented – of the origin and nature of the so called “white race,” the quintessential “Peculiar Institution”¹ – contains the root (from the seed planted by W.E.B. DuBois’s *Black Reconstruction*) of a general theory of United States history, more consistent than others that have been advanced. Only by understanding what was peculiar about the Peculiar Institution can one know what is exceptionable about American Exceptionalism; know how, in normal times, the ruling class has been able to operate without “laborite” disguises; and know how, in critical times, democratic new departures have been frustrated by the “white race”.

The Search for Beginnings

The liberating impulses set loose by World War Two, and the impact of the United States civil rights movement in particular brought official society for the first time in American history to acknowledge racism to be an evil in itself. Addressing itself to the problem of the nation's social policy, the presidential commission appointed in the wake of a number of insurrectionary anti-white-supremacy urban outbreaks of recent years concluded:

Few appreciate how central the problem of the Negro has been to our social policy. Fewer still understand that today's problems can be solved only if white Americans comprehend the rigid social, economic, and educational barriers that have prevented Negroes from participating in the mainstream of American life.²

It was in this context that racial slavery became the central preoccupation not only of African-American historians, but of American historians in general. It had long been a truism of our social sciences that the historical roots of racism were traceable to the slave system. But that was a proposition that quickly deteriorated into a pointless tautology: European-Americans deny equal place to African-Americans today because European-Americans denied equal place to African-Americans in slavery times. This tautology could no longer be reconciled with a national consciousness in what some have ventured to call the Second Reconstruction.³ If racism was an evil, historians were impelled to question the tautology, to examine the basis on which it rested, to understand not only that racism and slavery were connected, but to study the nature of that connection more deeply than before. What were the roots of the tautology, how did the imposition of lifetime hereditary bond-servitude, the quintessential denial of equal place to African-Americans, begin?

Striking parallels were to be seen between patterns of history and its interpretation. Just as consideration of the injustices imposed on African-Americans had for half a century been confined within the constitutional lines of the "equal-but-separate" doctrine, so European-American historians generally dealt with the subject of African-American bond-labor on the basis of an unchallenged assumption of a natural instinct for "racial" domination.⁴ Just as the constitutional principle of racial segregation was challenged by Oliver Brown of Topeka and by Rosa Parks of Montgomery, the African-Caribbean historian Eric Williams challenged his profession with the proposition that "Slavery was not born of racism; rather racism was the consequence of slavery."⁵ Just as Brown and Parks sent shock waves deep into the foundations of United States society, so did the Williams idea evoke a convulsive controversy in the field of American historiography.⁶ Just as the forces of racism rallied on the "white man's country" premisses of the United States constitution to produce the Wallace movement, self-servingly called a "white backlash," so from the ranks of American historians there emerged a cohort of

defenders of the basic validity of the old assumption of "natural" racism. Like the slaveholders who absolved themselves by putting the blame on evil British ancestors, or like those who today excuse their own defense of white-race privileges by noting that their ancestors never owned slaves, this avowedly "anti-liberal" contingent revels in condemning as "racism" every reference to "anti-blackness" that antedates the founding of Jamestown, the first permanent English settlement in America, in 1607, and then concludes on that ground that regrettably there is little, if anything, they or anyone else can do to change it. And just as in time the political scene came to be dominated by those who celebrate the battles won but forget that the war is just begun, so some historians claimed to rediscover a symbiosis of democratic freedoms and racial slavery.

The Origins Debate

In 1950, in an article published in the *William and Mary Quarterly*, Oscar and Mary Handlin planted the Williams banner most appropriately on continental Anglo-American soil, particularly that of seventeenth-century Virginia and Maryland. The Handlins argued that African-American laborers during the first four decades after their arrival, that is, up until 1660, were not lifetime hereditary bondmen and bondwomen; rather, their status was essentially the same as that of European-American bond-laborers, namely limited-term bond-servitude. Furthermore, the Handlins maintained, when a difference in the treatment of African-American and European-American laborers did emerge, it was by deliberately contrived ruling-class policy, rather than as the outcome of some inborn or preconditioned "race consciousness." The Handlins also briefly noted that in England's Caribbean island colonies, in contrast to those on the continent, the pattern of "race" privileges for "white" laborers, free or bond, did not develop. The root of this difference, they said, was the scarcity of land on which a free, or prospectively free, person of even modest means might subsist.⁷

The basic historical fact upon which the Handlins rested their thesis – the non-slave status of African-Americans in early Virginia – had long been established in the opinion of a number of the most eminent scholars in that field.⁸ And at least one, John H. Russell, in 1913, charged that to contend otherwise was to make apology for the slave system.⁹

The Handlins therefore were renewing an old debate, but one whose time had come. Its implications for the rising anti-racism cause were of the utmost significance. If racism was historically prior and the oppression of the African-American was derivative, then the shadow of "natural racism" was cast over the prospect. On the other hand, if racism was derivative of ill-treatment of African-Americans in the form of slavery, then the hope was encouraged that

racism could be eliminated from present-day American society by establishing equality for African-Americans. As Winthrop D. Jordan, who would emerge as one of the two foremost opponents of the Handlin thesis, put it: "If whites and Negroes could share the same status of half freedom for forty years in the seventeenth century, why could they not share full freedom in the twentieth?"¹⁰

The Psycho-cultural Argument

The issue began its evolution into a major controversy with the appearance in 1959 of an article by Carl N. Degler, "Slavery and the Genesis of American Race Prejudice," and a published exchange of letters with the Handlins in the following year.¹¹ In 1971 Degler elaborated his views in a book comparing social attitudes toward race and prejudice in Brazil and in the United States of America.¹² In 1962 Winthrop Jordan took his stand with Degler in "Modern Tensions and the Origins of American Slavery." In a series of subsequent journal articles, Jordan defended and developed the anti-Handlin argument. Then, in 1968, his main work appeared under the title *White over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812*.¹³

Although Degler and Jordan deeply wished it otherwise, they were convinced all along that there was practically no possibility that "whites and Negroes could share full freedom in the twentieth" or any other century. "It is my conviction," said Degler, "that blacks will be . . . discriminated against whenever nonblacks have the power and incentive to do so . . . [because] it is human nature to have prejudice against those who are different."¹⁴ Jordan understood the concept of race in exclusively genetic terms. He argued that "races are incipient species," but that the prevalence of interbreeding makes the full development of different race-species "very unlikely." Even so, he was convinced, and his study of "historical experience" confirmed his belief, that the white man's "blackness within" constitutes an insuperable barrier to finding "a way out of [racist] degradation."¹⁵

From the time of the first Degler article, the argument over the origin of slavery has been enriched by the contributions of scores of scholars representing the two fundamental lines of analysis: the Williams-Handlin socio-economic approach and the Degler-Jordan psycho-cultural approach.

Whether they avowed or merely tacitly accepted the gloomy Degler and Jordan premisses, historians on the psycho-cultural side of the issue quite logically emphasized those aspects of the record that might serve to indicate that prior to 1660 African-Americans in Virginia and Maryland were held in a bondage and contempt worse even than that inflicted on the European-American bond laborers. They also drew support from the works of pre-controversy historians who had tended to the opinion that in continental

Anglo-America the status of African-Americans was not significantly different in 1619 from what it was in 1719 or 1819.

Holding that the Handlins had erred by assuming that the subordination of African-American laborers could not have occurred until it was done by positive legislation, the psycho-cultural school easily found sufficient evidence in the records to demonstrate that the matter was at least more complicated than the Handlins had suggested. On the other hand, there was much evidence that in those early decades "Negro" was not simply another word for "slave."¹⁶ Jordan himself was forced to concede that until at least 1640, "There simply is not enough evidence to indicate with any certainty whether Negroes were treated like white servants or not."¹⁷ Small matter; the strategy of the psycho-cultural school would depend not upon direct frontal assault, but upon encirclement and inferential attack from the rear.

If racial discrimination were the consequence of slavery, said Carl Degler, then how could one account for the differences in the treatment of free African-Americans and of free African-Brazilians? Since both emerged from an initial condition of slavery, why was there a racist rejection in one case, and an assimilationist and positive attitude in the other? Why did Brazil provide an "escape hatch" of social mobility for the free African-Brazilian, while in America the African-American was systematically denied such opportunities? Or, from another perspective, if racism was a function of slavery, he asked, why was the free Negro in the USA obliged to cope with the same cruel racist exclusionism in the non-slave states as in the slave states?¹⁸

This contradiction could be avoided, said Degler, "only if we reverse our assumption as to which came first, slavery or discrimination . . . and work on the assumption that discrimination preceded slavery and thereby conditioned it." Degler accordingly projected three theses: (1) "American race prejudice originated in the discriminatory social atmosphere of the early seventeenth century"; (2) "slavery in the English colonies was the institutionalization of [pre-existent] race prejudice"; and (3) "from the outset, as far as the evidence tells us, the Negro was treated as inferior to the white man, servant or free."¹⁹

Determined though he was to block the Handlins' passage, Degler stood on a slippery sill. His evidence was too little, and that little tendentiously selected. As evidence of the predominance of anti-Negro attitudes in England before the founding of the first Anglo-American colony, Degler cited the depiction of two Moorish characters in Shakespeare plays, Aaron in *Titus Andronicus* and the title character of *Othello*.²⁰ But if one proceeds consistently with this exegesis, it is possible to find implications quite contrary to those inferred by Degler. Shakespeare's Aaron is black and villainous; Othello is black and noble. Since Othello appeared ten years after Aaron, might we not, by Degler's logic, infer that this indicated a growth of respect and a reduction of contempt in the English attitude toward Africans? It seems pertinent, if we develop the subject along this line, to point out the transformation undergone by the character of

the Moor in Shakespeare's hands. In the original Italian play, the Moor is simply a weak-minded cowardly murderer, uncomplicated by any redeeming quality. Othello, on the contrary, was made a tragic hero, said to be modelled on the real-life Earl of Essex, and in literary power and pathos ranking with Lear.²¹ Othello's flaw was not his color but his male ego, made to pass for some part of "honor" and surely calculated to evoke universal sympathy from the English male audience. It may be worth noting that Degler's sense of audience appreciation of Othello is not one the American slaveholders would have shared. An English traveler to Charleston, South Carolina about 1807 found that there "*Othello* and other plays where a black man is the hero of the piece are not allowed to be performed."²²

Or again, were contrary opinions and attitudes with respect to Negroes, as expressed by some of Shakespeare's contemporaries, to be ignored for want of iambic pentameter? Take Sir Francis Drake. At least three times in the 1560s, Drake (under the command of his kinsman John Hawkins) participated in the premature first English interloper venture in the African trade to the Americas, selling captive Africans into bondage in the Caribbean and on the Spanish Main.²³ A few years later, in 1572-73, this time under his own command, Drake returned to the Spanish Main to conduct a campaign of privateering raids. After an initial setback, the English decided on a basic strategy of alliance with the Maroons (or Cimarrons) of Panama, self-liberated former African slaves and their freeborn descendants, some three thousand in all, living in a number of independent settlements, "growne to a nation, under two Kings of their owne."²⁴ The English and the African-Panamanians, in mutual sympathy for the particular aims of each in the common anti-Spanish cause, worked, suffered, rejoiced and fought side by side and, according to Drake, "These Symerons during all the time that wee were with them, did us continually good service . . . and they would shew themselves no lesse valiant then [than] industrious and of good judgement." On parting there were exchanges of gifts, including silks and linens, from the English in token of friendship and appreciation; the English also burned their small ships in order to leave the precious ironwork, nails etcetera, for the Maroons (iron was worth more to the Maroons than the gold and silver so eagerly sought by the English and other Europeans).²⁵ Richard Hakluyt, the English visionary of exploration and colonization, generalized from Drake's Panamanian experience and proposed that the Straits of Magellan at the tip of South America be made an English stronghold against the Spanish, defended by a colony of Cimarrons.²⁶ Edmund S. Morgan, in his *American Slavery, American Freedom*, cited this record in order to argue that the defeat of such antecedent English attitudes was a necessary precondition for the eventual establishment of racial slavery in Virginia.²⁷ Certainly these facts do not conform to Degler's facile thesis that the origin of racial slavery is in part to be found in an English precedent of racial prejudice against non-Europeans.

One more example. When ship captain Richard Jobson in 1620 and 1621 made a trading voyage to Africa, he refused to engage in slave-trading because the English "were a people who did not deal in any such commodities, neither did we buy or sell one another or any that had our own shapes."²⁸ When the local dealer insisted that it was the custom there to sell Africans "to white men," Jobson answered that "They," that is, "white men," "were another kinde of people from us . . ." Jobson's account was alluded to by Basil Davidson in *The African Slave Trade*, in which he argued that "European attitudes toward Africans in those early times displayed a wide range of contrast . . . [but] they supposed no natural inferiority in Africans."²⁹

For those who feel that a generalization about "the English attitude toward the Negro" must be attempted, it might be safer to see in the contrasting "Moors," Othello and Aaron, a reflection of a common ambiguity expressed by another Shakespeare contemporary and poet, Sir John Davies of Hereford:

Southward men are cruel, moody, mad
Hot, black, lean leapers, lustful, used to vaunt [boast]
Yet wise in action, sober, fearful, sad
If good, most good, if bad, exceeding bad.³⁰

Even such a "balanced" view cannot be made to conform with the assumptions on which Degler chose to rest his case.

Finally, if ingrained English prejudices, institutionally evolved, predetermined the reduction of African-Americans to slavery, why should Degler not at least have indicated why equally apparent contemporary English anti-Irish and anti-Jewish biases did not eventuate in the enslavement of Irish and Jews?³¹ The anthropologist Marvin Harris challenged Degler specifically on this question. "Ethnocentrism," Harris said, "is a universal feature of inter-group relations, and obviously both the English and the Iberians were prejudiced against foreigners, white and black." Proceeding from this generalization, Harris directly controverted Degler. In the Anglo-American colonies, said Harris, "the Negroes were not enslaved because the British colonists specifically despised dark-skinned people and regarded them alone as properly suited to slavery." Two historians who have devoted a great deal of study to the attitudes of early English colonialists, Nicholas P. Canny and P. E. H. Hair, have explicitly challenged Jordan on this question. Canny maintains that early colonial records of the fellowship between Anglo-American and African-American laborers in Virginia "greatly modify the opinions on seventeenth-century Englishmen's antipathy for people with black pigmentation advanced in W. D. Jordan, *White over Black*." Professor Hair, writing on the basis of sixteenth-century documents, argues that, "English opinions about Africans . . . were more varied than has been suggested in works which set out to show that Anglo African contacts in Elizabethan times were dominated by 'racialist'

considerations." He too specifically mentions Jordan's *White over Black* as tending to this error.³²

As I have noted, Degler recognized the fundamental significance of the contrast between the racist exclusionism faced by all African-Americans, free or bond, on the one hand, and the assimilationist policy with regard to African-Brazilians. This difference he ascribed to the difference between the cultural backgrounds of Iberia and England.³³ But no such cultural variation could be invoked to explain the difference in the positions of the free Negro in the British West Indies and in continental Anglo-America. Despite the explosive implications of this historic fact, Degler ignored it completely. The omission was especially deplorable since the Handlin article, which originally drew Degler to battle, had directed attention to differences between the Anglo-Caribbean and continental Anglo-America.

Worse still, Degler attempted to support his thesis by citations from the record of the short-lived (1630–41) English colony on Providence Island, located in the western Caribbean about 350 miles northeast of Panama. In the very record he cited, he completely neglected the dispute among the English colonizers of Providence Island over the legal and moral permissibility of attempting to hold Africans in lifetime servitude. In the end the colony had to be abandoned because of mutiny by the Negro laborers and the external pressure of the Spanish.³⁴

Having insisted on the assumption that the origin of slavery depended upon the English colonists having come to the Americas with already indelible prejudices against "black men," Degler proceeded with a most explicit self-contradiction by asserting that slavery-producing prejudice "did not depend" on an imported mind-set but rather was fostered by the sight of Africans "as the cargo of the international slave trade . . . those wretches newly spilled out of the slave ships!"³⁵ If the prejudices "originated long before slavery became legal" (and therefore long before the arrival in the Chesapeake of "slave ships" directly from Africa),³⁶ why intrude "fostering" (without a pretense of documentation) and, incidentally, hold the Africans responsible for it? Instead of racial prejudice causing slavery, here Degler was making slavery the cause of racial prejudice. In seeking to support his argument with both the *a priori* belt and the *post facto* suspenders, Degler instead rendered untenable the "reversal of assumptions" upon which his thesis depended.

Most regrettable of all, Degler was oblivious of the transcendental fact that, *whatever the state of English prejudices at that time*, any attempt to hold African laborers in lifetime hereditary bond-servitude was doomed by the African "prejudice" against it, as expressed by flight and rebellion.

Jordan scornfully distanced himself from "liberals on the race question . . . uninterested in tired questions of historical evidence . . . [who] could not easily assume a natural prejudice in the white man . . . [because it] would violate their basic assumptions concerning the dominance of culture."³⁷ He took up the

gauntlet of his own design: "If prejudice was natural there would be little one could do to wipe it out"; and his book, naturally called *White over Black*, was written to say a defiant "Amen."

With regard to the crucial question of the origin of racial slavery, Jordan believed he had found a way to save the psycho-cultural case from the "which-came-first" dilemma on which Degler had impaled himself.³⁸

Rather than slavery causing "prejudice" or vice versa, they seem rather to have generated each other. Both were . . . twin aspects of a general debasement of the Negro. Slavery and "prejudice" may have been equally cause and effect, continuously reacting upon each other . . . : a mutually interactive growth of slavery and unfavorable assessment, with no cause for either which did not cause the other.³⁹

In thus conflating cause and effect, Jordan disposed of the dilemma by evoking a parthenogenetic unicorn called "the general debasement of the Negro." If, in the process, he abandoned the principle of chronological order by which the historian is bound to live, Jordan found a *cause* outside of time (at least, time as measured by the rhythms of recorded history) in instinct (or, at most, the unconscious). There, in an atavistic domain of aversion to black, of guilt as blackness, of backward projection of guilt; there, in the pits of identity crisis, in the realm of dreams and symbols, Jordan said, was prefigured time out of mind the "unthinking decision" that produced racial slavery in Anglo-America.⁴⁰ So it was that Jordan contributed a book on the history of thought, the crux of which was an *unthought* choice.

As a corollary to the asserted instinctive drive to "debase the Negro," Jordan posited a psychological compulsion: "the need of transplanted Englishmen to know who it was they were." And what they were, he said, was "white": "white men had to know who they were if they were to survive."⁴¹ This notion, Jordan avowed, was the thread that bound his study together. It was the old "germ theory" of American history decked out in up-to-date psychological trappings: before the Mayflower Compact, before the Petition of Right, before the Magna Charta, before the German-Saxon Hundred, there was the Word: *White over Black*, innate, ineradicable – a Calvinism of the genes, a Manifest Destiny of the White Soul.⁴²

Historians are cautioned to avoid the vice of "presentism," that is, the assignment of motivations for behavior to suit current vogues without proof that those motivations actually figured in the needs and feelings of the people of the historic period under consideration. One common example of this error is that of casually classing Negroes in colonial Anglo-America as "slaves" from the first mention in 1619 on, decades before there is any justification in the record for such a generalization. On account of the inevitable deficiencies of the record, the tendency to this kind of error has to be guarded against, even when the subject is the objective, material world of actual places, persons, and events. But when, as in Jordan's book, the subject is the thoughts, reflections,

attitudes of the observers of actual places, people and events, the danger is of a higher order of magnitude, because it involves the interpretation of interpretations.

As a citizen of the twentieth century, Jordan could look forward from his spaceship-in-time and see that the war to abolish slavery would be led by anti-abolitionists; that the war fought to strike the chains of slavery from the African-American would sow the seeds of a "white" imperialism; that even on the bank of the river of martyrs' blood the promise of equality would be repudiated after the Civil War, by a white-supremacist exclusion of Africans,⁴³ Asian-Americans, Mexicans, Indians and African-Americans. But the "transplanted Englishmen" in the new republic where Jordan left them – perched on the Atlantic slope of a continent inhabited in its vastness by a non-European majority, and further opposed by a rival European power's ancient claim to much of that territory – they could not know what the future would hold with regard to "the Negro question," or "the Indian question," or "the Spanish-Mexican question." For all they knew, Spain would maintain its claim to Texas and the West, and the "Indians" would continue (perhaps with outside help) to preside over most of the rest of the continent.⁴⁴ At the same time, they were increasingly convinced that slavery would have to end, and that, whatever some of the literate, record-leaving "whites" might wish, schemes for colonization of African-Americans outside the United States offered no answer to the "race" question.⁴⁵

In this situation, might not the imminent freedom of the African-American lead to a peopling of the United States by a primarily African-European blend?⁴⁶ The Spanish and the Portuguese had blended with "not-whites" in their areas of American settlement without losing their Spanish or Portuguese identity. Among the population of the British West Indies the descendants of Englishmen were overwhelmingly persons of African descent, whose very struggle for equal rights was largely predicated upon their British identity.⁴⁷

Jordan ascribes the West Indies blending to "race" and sex ratios such as were unachievable in the continental colonies.⁴⁸ But the "attitudes of ['white'] Americans", which is his proclaimed concern, did not show much of Jordan's faith in the demographic ratios as the controlling factor. The belief that such a blending with African-Americans was sure to happen was the major argument of the advocates of forced shipping of freed Negroes to the West Indies, Latin America, Africa or the periphery of the United States.⁴⁹

They had known "who they were" in the seventeenth century and during most of the eighteenth century: they were Englishmen. But then something happened to their "need to know" that they were Englishmen, and they found a new identity, as "white" Americans. Might not the same obsolescence swallow up the "need to know" they were "white", just as their previous "need to know" that they were "Englishmen" had been superseded? They had been Englishmen far longer than they had been "white". Might they not have

experienced "a new birth of freedom", and a new identity, American still, but simply human instead of "white"?

But there is more here than a mere lapse of professionalism. Jordan takes as his subject "attitudes . . . thoughts and feelings (as opposed to actions)," regarding them as "discrete entities susceptible of historical analysis." He proclaims his philosophic adherence to the ultimate primacy of "attitudes" in delimiting "the categories of possibilities within which for the time being we are born to live."⁵⁰ Was it possible that because of his personal conviction that nothing much can be done by remedial social action to end the curse of racism, Jordan was far from careful about the extent to which this attitude might lower his guard against his own "white" bias in his presentation of the picture of American society up to 1812?⁵¹ Bad as this was in itself, it caused Jordan's analysis of "attitudes" to parody more than it explained of the "actions", the causal course of events, to which they stand opposed.⁵²

As the root of "white attitudes" toward the African-American, Jordan staked all on what he saw as the ineluctable need of the English psycho-cultural heritage to preserve its identity in the New World. But how could the same heritage produce the "social accommodation of mixed offspring" in the British West Indies and the contrasting refusal to allow for any such special status for "mulattos" in the continental plantation colonies? Faced by this problem (which the Handlins had suggested and Degler had ignored), Jordan was compelled to acknowledge that the variance could not derive from "the English cultural heritage."⁵³ But in so doing Jordan punctured his basic assumption. He was saying that the gene-pool factor, the "need to know they were 'white'", etcetera were not, after all, timeless absolutes in the English psyche; rather, they were only relative, alterable by sudden circumstance.

Jordan began his repair work with a sly reference to "the push and pull of an irreconcilable conflict between desire and aversion for interracial sexual union," with desire proving the stronger in the British West Indies.⁵⁴ "No one thought intermixture [of African and Anglo] was a good thing," Jordan asserted.⁵⁵ But it is just as true to say that no one in England thought that the "intermixture" by seduction and rape of poor women by propertied men was "a good thing", and the law and the pulpit were as productive of the appropriate expressions of disapproval there as they were in the corresponding case in the Anglo-American plantation colonies. Jordan's belief in "aversion" as a special operative factor in "biracial" America is unsupported by contrasting evidence involving dependent-class women in England and Ireland. (J. H. Plumb makes a similar criticism in his review of Jordan's book.) It seems doubtful that Jordan fairly conveys the feelings of English colonists in Jamaica in this regard. They disdained to account for their "interracial liaisons" as a result of a scarcity of European women. Quite the contrary; they proclaimed the moral superiority of their conduct as compared with that of the master class in England, contrasting the "relatively permanent" relationships in Jamaican

society with the "prostitution, infanticide and unnatural neglect of illegitimate children in England."⁵⁶

As for the Caribbean versus continental differences, since the push of desire under continental elms is no less fundamental than it is under insular palms,⁵⁷ Jordan turned a metaphor of his own: "The West Indian planters were lost . . . in a sea of blacks."⁵⁸ That men of the owning leisure classes impose their desires on women of the non-owning laboring classes is as old and as general as the division of society into such classes, although those men are never thought of as being "lost in a sea of laborers."

Still, demographic facts are appropriate to demographic studies. In colonial Anglo-America, the higher the proportion of African-American laboring women among the non-owning classes in an area, the higher we could expect to be the incidence of sexual unions of Anglo men with African-American women. The varying degrees of "acceptance" of the relationship among Anglos in the plantation colonies was basically a function of its practice, with a tendency to vary toward "desire" rather than "aversion." If we can accept the testimony of two of the most cited chroniclers of Jamaican affairs prior to emancipation, we must conclude that the proportion of English men there involved in child-producing unions with non-European women was greater than might be expected from the demographic ratios.⁵⁹ That fact testifies to the racist operation of ruling-class male domination, but not to the "aversion" thesis posited by Jordan. Discounting the differences in opportunity as determined by demographic variations, the sexual exploitation of African-American women by European-American men (the main, though not the only social form of "interracial" sex) does not appear to have been less practiced on the continent than in the British West Indies.⁶⁰

The difference in the status won by the Anglo-African in the West Indies, on the one hand, and in the continental plantation colonies, on the other, was, Jordan said, due to differences of "self-identification" by the fathers in the two different settings.⁶¹ And how the Anglo fathers identified themselves was determined by demographics, the "race" and sex ratios. Whereas the Caribbean Anglos, he argued, were "lost in a sea of blacks," the continental colonist felt "the weight of the Negroes on his community heavy enough to be a burden, yet not so heavy as to make him abandon all hope of maintaining his own identity."⁶² This conclusion is tautological since the maintenance of "white" identity was equivalent to rejection of the "mulatto."

We turn now to what Jordan calls the "single exception" to the pattern of non-acceptance of "mulatto" status in the Anglo-American continental colonies. Georgia colony originated in 1732 as a buffer against Spanish Florida. It was set up especially to stop African-American bond-laborers from fleeing to freedom in Florida, either to the Spanish or to friendly Indians. For this reason, the new colony was founded on the exclusion of "Negroes," in order to seal South Carolina against the outflow of fugitive bond-laborers. But in less than

twenty years the expansive power of the South Carolina plantation bourgeoisie made hash of the no-slavery principle and quickly brought Georgia into the system.

The consequent rise in the proportion of African-American bond-laborers in the total population of the new colony largely negated the territorial buffer function, despite the English takeover of Florida in 1763 at the end of the Seven Years War. Faced with this crisis, the Georgia authorities acted to erect a new *social* buffer to reinforce, restore, replace the territorial one. In 1765, the Georgia Commons House of Assembly enacted that free "mulatto" immigrants be "naturalized" and accorded "all the Rights, Privileges, Powers and Immunities whatsoever which [belong to] any person born of British parents."⁶³

In the shadow world of "attitudes," this Georgia law may seem merely an exception to the general policy of rejection of the "mulatto" as it was practiced in the continental Anglo-American colonies. But, in its own person it appears not as an exception, but as a perfectly consistent element of a general policy of social control, a *sine qua non* of all government, at all times, in all places. The Georgia case was exceptional only in the brevity of its duration. Every plantation colony faced the same social control problem; each required a buffer social control stratum to stand between the mass of slaves and the numerically tiny class of slaveholders. In the Americas there was no such historically developed middle stratum, and therefore it had to be invented.

The records richly attest to the deliberate pursuit of this fundamental principle of colonial policy in the English colonies. Repeatedly, the theory and the practice of promoting the "free colored" to an intermediate social status in the British West Indies was proposed in order that they "would . . . attach themselves to the White race . . . and so become a barrier against the designs of the Black."⁶⁴ This essential social control function was operative in Jamaica in the 1730s. The European militia there was found altogether inadequate to the task of combating the African-Jamaican runaway maroons, who from mountain bases encouraged plantation workers to join them. In 1739, when a military campaign was waged against the maroons, the British forces were composed of two hundred British sailors and two hundred Mosquito Indians, free Negroes and "mulattoes."⁶⁵ In Barbados, in order to control the bond-laborers the plantation bourgeoisie "created" and promoted the "mulatto" group, which then "functioned as 'whites' *vis à vis* the slaves."⁶⁶ In Georgia the 1765 "mulatto" policy was designed, as Jordan himself put it, "to attract men who might be *counted as white* and who would thereby strengthen the colony's defenses against her foreign and domestic enemies," the powerful Indian tribes on its frontiers and the rising proportion of Negro bond-laborers.⁶⁷ Whatever reasons Jordan had for ignoring the obvious parallel of the Georgia case, a fair inference is that he found it incompatible with his approach to the question of the origin and function of racial slavery. The

parallel argues that everywhere in Anglo-America, not just in Georgia, the "white attitude" was, in the final analysis, shaped by the exigencies of the relationship of contending social forces. In the dynamic tension of ideas and experience, ideas were the bowstring, experience was the bow. The "mulatto" distinction was a functional one; being necessarily and above all concerned with maintaining their ascendancy, members of the plantation bourgeoisie sometimes made accommodations in their thinking in the interest of having a "mulatto" buffer between themselves and the plantation bond-laborers.⁶⁸

Sometimes, but not always. Why was this not the practice, except to the possible extent of the Georgia case, in continental Anglo-America, in either its colonial or its regenerate United States form? Jordan, from other premisses, argues that unlike the English in the Caribbean, "lost in a sea of blacks," those on the continent were able to beat back the challenge to their ancestral "white" identity.⁶⁹ But as Jordan himself points out, the continental slaveholders no less than those in the West Indies were constantly concerned with dealing with the various forms of resistance on the part of those whom they held in bondage.⁷⁰ The Georgia case shows that they were prepared, in certain circumstances, to resort to the "mulatto" option. If the "mulatto" on the continent were not generally, however, to be accorded the West Indies style social promotion, nevertheless for the slaveholders – outnumbered sometimes twenty or more times by their African-American bond-laborers – the "mulatto" function was as necessary as it was in the West Indies. If, there, "mulattos" could "function as whites," then on the continent laboring-class, largely propertyless and poor European-Americans could function as "mulattos". In the West Indies the "mulatto" was compensated by emancipation and promotion to some sort of petit bourgeois status.⁷¹ Since the poor European-Americans were or, after a term of servitude, would be free, and since they typically had already lost upward social mobility, they were promoted to the "white race" and endowed with unprecedented civil and social privileges *vis-à-vis* the African-American, privileges that, furthermore, were made to appear to be conditional on keeping "not-whites" down and out. This entailed the exclusion of "free Negroes" from participation in the buffer role in the continental colonies, because their inclusion would have undermined the racial privileges upon which depended the loyalty of the laboring-class "whites" to the plantation bourgeoisie.⁷² Whatever might have been the case with literate members of the ruling class, the record indicates that laboring-class European-Americans in the continental plantation colonies showed little interest in "white identity" before the institution of the system of "race" privileges at the end of the seventeenth century.⁷³

The Socio-economic Argument

Despite the more or less obvious inadequacies and fallacies of the Jordan–Degler psycho-cultural analysis, efforts by the opposition to emphasize the primacy of socio-economic causes have often betrayed a critical ambiguity toward the origin of anti-Negro prejudice. In other cases an "economic" thesis was weakened by oversimplification. In still others, economic facts were tendentiously attenuated to the point where they could not bear the weight of their argument. In one instance, the embryo of a complete and consistent socio-economic interpretation was formulated, but remained undeveloped.

Although the Handlins were aware of the uncongenial inferences they were inviting, they nevertheless explained the rise of anti-Negro discrimination as "simply the reaction of [English and other European] immigrants . . . isolated in an immense wilderness . . . [who] longed in the strangeness for the company of those who were most like themselves."⁷⁴ This was pure intuition on the part of the Handlins, devoid of any reference to the colonial records. They had thus adopted so much of the Degler natural racism principle, that Degler could say, "Actually our two positions are not as far apart as the Handlins would lead one to believe."⁷⁵

Eric Williams, at the very outset of post-1945 discussion of the origin of Anglo-American slavery, provided a corrective for a fundamental historiographical blindspot. Referring specifically to the political crisis in Britain that more than a century earlier had led to the emancipation of bond-laborers in the West Indies, he made a point of fundamental importance not only for the Anglo-Caribbean but for the Americas generally, including the Anglo-American continental plantation colonies:

Contrary to popular and even learned belief, . . . the most dynamic and powerful social force in the colonies was the slave himself. This aspect of the . . . problem has been studiously ignored. . . . The planter looked upon slavery as eternal, ordained by God. . . . There was no reason [however] why the slave should think the same.⁷⁶

The bond-laborer accordingly made the counter-argument of resistance by "indolence, sabotage and revolt."

After Williams made this point, European-American historians showed a greater awareness of the need to include the African-American bond-laborers as self-activating participants in historic events. But generally they continued the old tendency of ignoring an equally crucial matter, namely, the question of social control. Unfortunately Williams, by an oversimplification of the particular reason for the employment of Africans as plantation bond-laborers, may have contributed to a perpetuation of this problem.

In the course of his refutation of the various "racial" explanations for the unique enslavement of the African (climatic adaptability, skin color, race prejudice, etcetera), Williams argued from "a simple economic fact: that the

colonies needed labor and resorted to Negro labor because it was cheapest and best."⁷⁷ There is no evidence, however, to show that the cost of the acquisition and delivery of African laborers to Anglo-America, even the Caribbean, was lower than the corresponding costs for laborers brought from England, Scotland and Ireland.⁷⁸ The significant relationship between cheapness and enslavement was this: the African laborers were cheaper because they were enslaved, before they were enslaved because they were cheaper. To assume the cheapness is to assume the enslavement. That is an error against which, as has been noted above, Williams himself argued most forcefully, in pointing out that the desire of the plantation bourgeoisie for cheap labor was matched by the African laborer's desire not to be enslaved. Clearly, then, their enslavement was not simply the result of the plantation bourgeoisie's perception of an economic advantage to be gained by it. Such a perception meant nothing without its other half, the successful construction of a system of social control whereby the normal process of peaceful day-to-day exploitation of bond-labor could be conducted.⁷⁹

A number of other historians seeking an economic interpretation of the origin of racial slavery in continental Anglo-America have leaned heavily on the "cheaper labor" rationale.⁸⁰ They have then proceeded as if the ability of the plantation bourgeoisie to control the African-American bond-laborer could be taken for granted. That assumption is especially harmful for the study of the continental colonies, because it was there that the operation of social control was obscured by its "white race" form.

Edmund S. Morgan authored several journal articles in 1971 and 1972 bearing on the establishment of racial slavery in colonial Virginia. The publication in 1975 of his full 500-page treatment of the subject, *American Slavery/American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia*, provided the most substantial contribution so far to a socio-economic interpretation of the origin of racial slavery. Morgan was recognized by reviewers as the socio-economic party's counterpoise to Jordan.⁸¹

Making use of the Virginia Colony and County Records (to an extent exceeded only by Philip Alexander Bruce more than seventy-five years earlier) Morgan drew a picture of seventeenth-century Virginia as "the Volatile Society," in which the ruling elite was faced with critical problems of social control. Racism was not a significant factor. African-American bond-laborers were increasing in number, but they still made up only one-fourth or one-fifth of the bond-labor force until the 1690s. The threat to social order, Morgan said, came from propertyless, discontented, poverty-ridden European-Americans, mainly former limited-term bond-laborers.

Social order was achieved, according to Morgan, through two policies. First, motivated by simple profit considerations, the plantation bourgeoisie gained, incidentally and unconsciously, a more docile laboring class by shifting its primary reliance from limited term to lifetime bond labor. "Slaves," Morgan

said, "[were] less dangerous than free or semi-free [limited-term-bond-] laborers," because slaves "had none of the rising expectations that have so often prompted rebellion in human history."⁸² Morgan dismissed the frequently encountered ruling-class fears of servile rebellion as unfounded in reality. In explaining why only Africans were enslaved, Morgan differed sharply with the Jordan-Degler thesis. Morgan showed that the bourgeoisie was quite willing to consider proposals for the enslavement of Englishmen and Scots. But whereas the Africans arrived already enslaved, Morgan argued, "the transformation of free men [from England, for example] into slaves would have been a tricky business."⁸³ Welcome as his rejection of the "innate racism" explanation of racial slavery may be, Morgan's "non-rebellious slave" belongs with the mythical "friendly master" in the analysis of the dynamics of slavery in the Americas.⁸⁴ If the extent of rebellion by African-American bond-laborers in continental Anglo-America did not reach the levels witnessed in such countries as Santo Domingo, Jamaica, Guiana and Brazil, it was not because of any difference in their status upon their arrival in America.

The second policy was deliberately calculated as a social control measure. It was in this connection that Morgan made his most valuable contribution to the socio-economic analysis of the origin of racial slavery. The plantation bourgeoisie did not hold Morgan's low opinion of the bond-laborers as potential rebels; their ultimate fear was that "freemen with disappointed hopes should make common cause with slaves of desperate hope . . ." and jointly re-enact their part in Bacon's Rebellion of 1676, in which African-American and Anglo bond-laborers together had demanded an end to bond-servitude.⁸⁵ Against this danger, "the answer . . . obvious if unspoken and only gradually recognized, was racism, to separate free whites from dangerous slave blacks by a screen of racial contempt."⁸⁶ Morgan then proceeded to catalogue and analyze "a series of acts" passed by the Virginia Assembly over a period of some thirty-five years, culminating with the revisal of the laws in 1705, whereby "the assembly deliberately did what it could to foster the contempt of whites for blacks and Indians."⁸⁷ He argued that European-Americans of the laboring classes, since they were not slaveowners, did not derive any "direct economic benefits" from the establishment of slavery. But, according to Morgan, the "small men," the old rebellious types, "were . . . allowed to prosper" and were accorded "social, psychological, and political advantages." The deliberately calculated result was to turn "the thrust of exploitation" away from the European-American petty bourgeoisie and "[align] them on the side of the exploiters," that is, the slaveholders.⁸⁸ Morgan also noted that, as "Christian whites," even the unpropertied European-Americans (including bond-laborers) were offered a number of benefits previously denied them, in order to alienate them from their African-American fellow bondmen and bondwomen.⁸⁹

Thus Morgan carried the argument against the "unthinking decision"

explanation of racial slavery to its logical conclusion: deliberate ruling-class choice. The resort of the plantation bourgeoisie to slave labor might have been a matter of mere profit-seeking instinct, he said, but racial slavery and racism were a calculated form, designed to cope with problems of social control.⁹⁰

Bold and cogent, and full of promise as it was at the start, Morgan's argument involved false premisses that would vitiate its full development. With the turn to African and African-American lifetime bond-labor as the basis of the economy, coupled with the simultaneous expansion of opportunities for European-American freedmen, the social control problem, according to Morgan, evaporated in a cloud of upward mobility until "the remaining free laborers and tenant farmers were too few in number to be a serious threat."⁹¹

Morgan had documented most convincingly the non-racist character of the volatile society of seventeenth-century Virginia, and the deliberateness of the development of the racist policy of social control. But now (without, however, his customarily scrupulous documentation), he presented a denouement that not only rendered redundant the theme of "racism as the answer" to social discontent, but spared the life of the "innate racism" idea that he had so trenchantly attacked as an explanation of racial slavery.

In proceeding on the assumption that there were now "too few free poor on hand to matter,"⁹² Morgan was wrong on the facts and wrong on the theory. The proportion of landless European-Americans did not shrink to insignificance as a social category in the plantation colonies in the century between Bacon's Rebellion and the American Revolution. In 1676, the overwhelming proportion of the population of Virginia was in the Tidewater region. Of its economically active (tithable) European-American population, half were bond-laborers and another one-eighth were propertyless freemen.⁹³ A century later this proletarian proportion of the European-American population of that same area was still more than 40 per cent. This marked the limit of proletarian promotion to the owning classes. Furthermore, relative to the conditions prevailing in the northern, non-plantation colonies, those of the European-Americans were worse in general in the plantation colonies.⁹⁴

Consider now the theory of it. If the European-American laboring classes "aligned themselves with the exploiters" because they, the "white" poor, benefited indirectly in the slave-labor-based monocultural plantation economy by becoming property-holders during the so-called golden age of the Chesapeake (that is, the colonies of Virginia and Maryland bordering the Chesapeake Bay) in the middle quarters of the eighteenth century, then why did that collaboration not diminish as the contrary tendency set in, as it evidently did, and "racial" competition for employment became one of the well-known features of American society? Or again, if the operation of slave economies was such as to make free people generally into property holders, why were the free African Americans excluded from a fair share of the bounty? Would not their participation have strengthened the front against the threat of slave revolt,

which strengthening, as we well know, was calculated to be the effect elsewhere in the plantation Americas? The exclusion of the free African-American from such participation is *prima facie* proof that the mass of the "whites" was not composed of property-owners but of proletarians and semi-proletarians, whose social status thus depended not upon their property but upon their "race."⁹⁵

In contrast with the British West Indies, the social control problem in the continental plantation colonies was not that there were too few European-American laborers, but that there were too many. It was this circumstance that accounted for the decisive role of "race" which came to characterize the system of social control in the continental colonies. Primary emphasis upon "race" became the pattern only where the bourgeoisie could not form its social control apparatus without the inclusion of propertyless European-Americans. If, in the plantation colonies, there had really been "too few free poor to matter", as Morgan argued, then those few would have been relegated to social irrelevance, as indeed happened in the West Indies, and the "white race" would never have become the essence of the social control policy of the Anglo-American continental plantation bourgeoisie. By conceptually erasing the European-American proletarian, Morgan was inviting back the psycho-cultural theory of the origin of racism, the theory he had done so much to refute by his scholarly study of seventeenth-century Virginia. Propertied classes do not need special motivation to unite around their interests *vis-à-vis* the propertyless and exploited. Racism among the propertied classes alone would be evidence for the psycho-cultural belief in "natural" racism. But Morgan's theory that practically all European-Americans benefited, directly or indirectly, from keeping African-Americans out and down has more specific and dire implications favorable to the psycho-cultural view with respect to "modern tensions." For, whether racism be "natural-born" in European-Americans, or whether it be the function of actual (as against illusory) benefits for all "whites" as a result of racial oppression, the implications for ridding our society of the curse of racism are equally unfavorable.

In seeking to understand this trend of Morgan's argument, it may be helpful to note that he shares with Jordan the "paradox" theory of American history.⁹⁶ "In committing themselves to a slavery whose logic rested, in the final analysis, on racial differences," Jordan wrote, "the colonists may in fact have enhanced the fluidity of the American social structure above the racial line."⁹⁷ A paraphrase of Jordan accurately expresses Morgan: in committing themselves to a political order whose logic rested, in the final analysis, on racial distinctions, Virginians such as Jefferson and Madison had assured equality and justice for all "above the racial line." There is no place in this scenario for a growth of proletarian misery on the "white" side of the line. But even in Jefferson's time, the ugly fact was evident.⁹⁸

Plowing furrows through the records side by side with Morgan, Timothy H.

Breen produced strong reinforcement for the socio-economic explanation of the emergence of racial slavery in colonial Virginia. In his 1973 article "A Changing Labor Force and Race Relations in Virginia 1660-1710,"⁹⁹ Breen drew attention to the extent and significance of actual rebellion involving African-American and European-American bond-laborers, and poor freedmen. Breen, furthermore, regarded the African-American bond-laborers as a constant potential for rebellion against the plantocracy.¹⁰⁰

On the other hand, in this article, and as co-author with Stephen Innes of a book published in 1980,¹⁰¹ Breen ascribes the cancellation of laboring-class solidarity by the counterfeit of "white race" identification to exclusively objective factors. Of these, said Breen, "none was more important than the rise of tobacco prices after 1684 ... [which] raised white laborers out of poverty."¹⁰² But there does not seem to have been any significant rise in tobacco prices and production in the critical period chosen by Breen. Allan Kulikoff in a later study found that, "From 1680 to 1715, except for a short boom between 1697 and 1702, the real [tobacco] price level was almost always low or declining." Although the status of poor whites was elevated relative to African-Americans by the new system of racial privileges, they faced a decline of opportunity for social mobility in the decades after 1680.¹⁰³ According to economic historian Jacob M. Price, "It was precisely in the 1680s and 1690s that slaves were first introduced into the Chesapeake in large numbers, yet we can observe no effect on production before the 1720s."¹⁰⁴

The second of the factors listed by Breen was the increasing proportion of laborers arriving in Virginia direct from Africa, lacking previous Christian "seasoning." "No white servant," said Breen, "... could identify with these frightened Africans."¹⁰⁵ The concomitant "language barrier," he added, further inhibited the development of labor solidarity. On this point, in the absence of documentation Breen resorted to intuition, as first Degler and then others on both sides of the aisle had taken to doing. He made no attempt, however, to learn by a comparison with the at least somewhat parallel situation elsewhere in the Americas, where new laborers were constantly arriving direct from Africa in far larger proportions, and where language differences not only occurred naturally, but were deliberately manipulated by the capitalist employers hoping thereby to frustrate bond-labor solidarity. To reject out of hand, or not even think of, such a possible light on the question seems justifiable only on the assumption of the existence in the European-American bond-laborers of an overriding sense of "white" identity with their owners, contrary to the tenor of the well-documented presentation that Breen had made up to that point.

Finally, among these objective factors Breen included improved wage scales for a relatively diminished number of free laborers, and improved opportunities for freedmen to become landholders (a point whose limited importance has been indicated above in connection with Morgan, and which is further to

be inferred from Breen's comment that "If landless freemen could not afford acreage in Virginia, they could move to Carolina or Pennsylvania ..."¹⁰⁶) Whatever those expanded opportunities, and whatever the increase in the number of African-American bond-laborers might be, such objective factors could not explain the exclusion of the free African-American from their benefits.

Despite the obvious limitations of such mechanical reliance upon objective factors to explain white racism among European-Americans of the laboring classes, Breen gives no scope at all to deliberate ruling-class policy in the displacement of European-American proletarian class consciousness by the incubus of a "white" identity with the employing classes, which has presided over our history for three centuries.

Of all the historians of the "social" side of the question, only the African-American historian Lerone Bennett Jr. succeeds in placing the argument on the three essential bearing points from which it cannot be toppled. First, that racial slavery constituted a ruling-class response to a problem of labor solidarity. Second, that a system of racial privileges for the propertyless "whites" was deliberately instituted in order to align them on the side of the plantation bourgeoisie against the African-American bond-laborers. Third, that the consequence was not only ruinous to the interests of the African-Americans, but was "disastrous" for the propertyless "whites" as well.¹⁰⁷

Bennett's aim was to look at three and a half centuries of African-American history. Understandably, he was limited in the scope he could give in his book to his treatment of the origin of racial slavery, a development of the first century of that history. Whether or not he might otherwise have devoted attention to Bacon's Rebellion and compared the various systems of social control in the colonial period we do not know. In any case, when primary attention is directed to the origin of racial slavery, these matters need to be taken into consideration.

On the Misleading Term "Race"

In an avowed attempt to make clear the meaning of the terms "race" and "racial" as he used them in *White over Black*, Winthrop D. Jordan appended a "Note on the Concept of Race," which he had composed as editor of an earlier book. He also devoted a section of his "Essay on Sources" to works by anthropologists and biologists, particularly geneticists, which he had consulted on the question of "race."

Two geneticists whose works obviously influenced the formulation of that note were Stanley M. Garn and Theodosius Dobzhansky.¹⁰⁸ Garn's book *Human Races* was said by Jordan to be "the best single book on race." Of Dobzhansky's well known writings, Jordan particularly mentioned *Mankind*

Evolving as “an absorbing treatment” of the subject. But a study of these two sources does not help one understand why Jordan thought that their concept of “race” was important to him as a historian.

Garn concludes his discussion of “The Contemporary Approach to Race” by explicitly separating genetics from the social sciences with regard to “race” and “racism.” His book, he says:

has nothing to do with racism, which is simply the attempt to deny some people deserved opportunities simply because of their origin, or to accord other people certain undeserved opportunities, only because of their origins. The history of our species is far too long (and periods of national glory far too short) to direct attention away from race as an evolutionary phenomenon to futile arguments about superiority, inferiority, or moral supremacy, which become two-edged and detrimental to all who wield them. (pp. v–vi)

In *Mankind Evolving*, Dobzhansky insists on the cultural significance of “race differences,” but condemns any and all attempts to find in the human genetic make-up any justification for racism; there is no gene for a “white” attitude. “The mighty vision of human equality,” he says, “belongs to the realm of ethics and politics, not to that of biology” (p. 13).

Jordan’s search among arcana of genetic evolution to better understand “white men’s attitudes,” was, at best, an exercise in irrelevancy. For when an emigrant population from “multiracial” Europe goes to North America or South Africa and there, by constitutional fiat, incorporates itself as the “white race,” that is no part of genetic evolution. It is rather a political act: the invention of “the white race.” It lies within the proper sphere of study of social scientists, and it is an appropriate objective for alteration by social activists. Leave genetics to the geneticists; as Garn and Dobzhansky say, genetics has nothing but disclaimers to contribute to the study of racism as a historical phenomenon.

The Irish Mirror

Just as instruments of observation operating above the earth’s enveloping atmosphere reveal significant meteorological phenomena with a clarity unachievable from the earth’s lowly surface, so does the reflector of Irish history afford insights into American racial oppression and white supremacy – the overriding jetstream that has governed the flow of United States history down to this very day – free of the “White Blindspot” that Dr DuBois warned us about in *Black Reconstruction*.¹⁰⁹ Irish history presents a case of *racial oppression without reference to alleged skin color or, as the jargon goes, “phenotype.”*

That is why *Racial Oppression and Social Control*, Volume One of this

study of the origin of the paramount issue in American history, begins with a long look into an Irish mirror.

From that vantage point I will: (1) substantiate a definition of racial slavery as a sociogenic rather than a phylogenic phenomenon; (2) show racial oppression introduced as a deliberate ruling-class policy where it was not originally intended; (3) present an example of the casting-off of racial oppression to be superseded by “non-racial,” natural human affinity (though in the contexts of a normally class-differentiated society); (4) show how, at a critical moment, when racial oppression might have been displaced, it was renewed by deliberate ruling-class decision; (5) demonstrate historically that racial oppression can be maintained only by a military establishment, except where the oppressor group is in a majority; (6) show how, even after centuries of racial oppression, where the oppressed group is the majority a ruling class can be forced to abandon racial oppression (or face civil war), even though, as in the Irish case, racial oppression may be replaced by national oppression under the same ruling class; (7) supply, incidentally, a definition of the difference between national and racial oppression, in terms of the recruitment of the intermediate buffer social control stratum; (8) show by examples how propertyless classes are recruited into the intermediate stratum, through anomalous “racial” privileges not involving escape from propertylessness; (9) present analogies, relating to the question of racial oppression, between features of continental Anglo-American and United States history and the history of Ireland; and, finally, (10) show the relativity of race by describing how persons, actually the same individuals, or at least persons of the same “gene pool,” were first transformed from Irish haters of racial oppression into white-supremacists in America.

The Invention of the White Race

With the conceptual groundwork laid, free of the “White Blindspot,” *The Invention of the White Race* turns its attention in Volume Two to the plantation colonies of Anglo-America during the period from the founding of Jamestown in 1607 to the cancellation of the original ban on slavery in the colony of Georgia in 1750. The pivotal events are seen to be Bacon’s Rebellion in 1676 and the 1705 revision of the Virginia laws, in particular, the “Act concerning Servants and Slaves.” Topics to be considered in Volume Two include: the English background, the origin and peculiarities of England’s original colonial labor supply and their implications for the evolution of the bond-labor system in Anglo-America; why the Spanish example could not be followed in regard to the labor force; the consequence of the economic addiction to tobacco – the plantation system, foreclosing the emergence of an intermediate buffer social control stratum; the chattelization of labor; the oppression and resistance of the

bond-laborers – African-Americans and Euro-Americans – together; the growing interest on the part of the Anglo-American continental plantation bourgeoisie in reducing African-Americans to lifetime hereditary bond-servitude; the divided mind of the English law on the enslavability of Christians; the sharpening class struggle – in the absence of a system of racial oppression – between the plantation elite on the one hand and on the other the debt-burdened small planters and the majority of the economically productive population, the bond-laborers, three-fourths Anglo-, one-fourth African-American; the dispute over “Indian policy” between “frontier” planters and the ruling elite; the eruption of the social contradictions in Bacon’s Rebellion, in which the main rebel force came to be made up of Anglo- and African-American bond-laborers together demanding an end to bond-servitude; the defeat of the rebels, followed by a period of continued instability of social control; apprehension of a recurrence of rebellion; the social control problem in attempting to exploit the newly gained African source of labor by reducing African-Americans to lifetime hereditary bondage, especially considering the refuge available for escaping bond-laborers in the mountains at the back of the colonies, and in a continent beyond; the problem of social control reconsidered; the invention of the “white race” – the truly Peculiar Institution – as the solution to the problem of social control, its failure in the West Indies, its establishment in the continental plantation colonies, signaled by the enactment of the “Act concerning Servants and Slaves,” which formally instituted the system of privileges for European-Americans, of even the lowest social status, *vis-à-vis* any person of any degree of African ancestry, not only bond-laborers but free Negroes as well, however possessed of property they might be; the remolding of male supremacy as white male supremacy, the peculiar American form of male supremacy, as an essential element of the system of white-skin privileges; the creation of white male privileges with regard to African-American women – white male supremacy. Volume Two will take note of the fact that the revision of the laws in Virginia to codify racial oppression coincided with the codification of racial oppression in Ireland by the enactment of the Penal Laws. It will also contain my observations on how the “Ordeal of Colonial Virginia” gave birth to the Ordeal of America.

VOLUME ONE

Racial Oppression and Social Control
