

of the whiteness studies scholarship devolves into white identity politics. This is why Howard Winant (1997) concludes that without these studies incorporating the state, politics, and economic structures, whiteness studies become just a search for identity. As he explains, racial identities are constructed in the context of racial rule. To cite one of the sociological founders of this work, Ruth Frankenberg: "If focusing on white identity and culture displaces attention as a site of racialized privilege, its effectiveness as antiracism becomes limited" (Frankenberg 1997:17).

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White Supremacy as Sociopolitical System: A Philosophical Perspective

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In their introductory pieces surveying, from an interdisciplinary perspective, recent "whiteness" literature, it is noteworthy that neither Margaret Andersen nor Woody Doane cite any philosophy text nor indeed refer to the discipline at all. Philosophy's classic pretensions to be able to illuminate the human condition with the light of reason have, to many critics, collapsed in a retreat to an inbred hermeticism, opaque and irrelevant to the outsider. Particularly in the analytic mainstream of the profession, there is a reluctance to engage with the social and historical. Indeed, in an important recent book, John McCumber goes so far as to anoint analytic philosophy with the dubious honor of being "the most resolutely apolitical paradigm in the humanities today." But McCumber argues that it would be a mistake to attribute this disengagement purely to internal factors. On the contrary, he claims that an examination of the pre- and postwar record shows an externalist account to be far more plausible: the impact of McCarthyism, which differentially targeted philosophers, making philosophy, in fact, "the most heavily attacked of all the academic disciplines" (2001:13, 37). Proportionally more philosophers lost their jobs through political harassment in the 1950s than academics in any other field.

So if academic philosophy today seems to have little to say to the uninitiated, this is by no means a matter of disciplinary necessity, for the fear quite recently was that it would say too much. Philosophy at its best does indeed have the capacity to illuminate, to challenge everyday assumptions of normalcy, undermine the taken-for-granted, upend the conventional wisdom—to be, in short, a highly *subversive* discipline. It needs to be remembered, after all, that Karl Marx's radical revisioning of society was (despite his own disclaimers) ultimately rooted in philosophy.

What I will argue in this chapter is that the best way to approach issues of whiteness is in social-systemic terms and that philosophy can make a

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contribution to such an understanding by its historic (if not always current) willingness to transgress subject boundaries and map global pictures. I am in complete agreement with Andersen and Doane that contextualization within a racialized social system of white privilege is the most illuminating way to understand the workings of race. In my own work (Mills 1997, 1998), I have sought to expose the conceptual whiteness of mainstream philosophy and have argued that *white supremacy* needs to be taken as a theoretical object in its own right, a global social system comparable in current significance, though not historical age, to Marx's *class society* and feminist thinkers' *patriarchy*. If philosophy is about understanding the human condition, then it needs to understand the condition of humans shaped and molded by these systems into capitalists and workers, men and women, whites and nonwhites.

CONCEPTUALIZATION AND SCOPE OF WHITE SUPREMACY

Marx had to redefine "class" and "class society" in terms of ownership relationships to the means of production; feminists had to adapt the term "patriarchy" from a usage originally significantly different. By contrast, retrieving "white supremacy" from the historical lexicon has the advantage that it is the term that was already traditionally used to denote the domination of whites over nonwhites. When the phrase is used in mainstream social theory, of course, it is usually restricted to *formal* juridico-political domination, as paradigmatically exemplified by slavery, Jim Crow, and black disenfranchisement in the United States and by apartheid in South Africa (Fredrickson 1981; Cell 1982). Since official segregation and explicit political exclusion of this sort no longer exist in the United States, the term has now disappeared from mainstream white American discourse. If it is employed at all, it is only to refer to the unhappy past or, in the purely ideological and attitudinal sense, to the beliefs of radical white-separatist groups (i.e., as *white-supremacists*). That in important ways the United States could still be white-supremacist would, of course, be rejected out of hand.

A crucial initial step toward reviving the term, then, would be establishing the simple sociological and political truth—not exactly unknown to the Western sociopolitical tradition—that power relations can survive the formal dismantling of their more overt supports. Even for postapartheid South Africa, where whites are a minority, it should be obvious that their strategic economic and bureaucratic power will continue to give them differential power. For the United States, where racialized and vastly disproportionate concentrations of wealth, cultural hegemony, and bureaucratic control are of course reinforced by white political *majoritarianism*, the case should—were it not for ideological blinders—be much easier to make. So the argument would be that American white supremacy has not vanished but has changed from a *de jure* to *de facto* form. The merely formal rejection of white-supremacist principles will not suffice to transform the United States into a genuinely racially egalitarian society, since the actual social values and enduring politico-economic structures

will continue to reflect the history of white domination (Crenshaw 1988:1336). White supremacy thus needs to be conceptualized in terms broader than the narrowly juridical. Frances Lee Ansley suggests the following definition: "a political, economic, and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily reenacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings" (1989:1024n). Though white-black racial domination has clearly been central to this system, a comprehensive perspective on American white supremacy would really require attention to, and a comparative analysis of, white relations with other peoples of color also: Native Americans, Mexican-Americans, and Asian-Americans (Takaki 1990[1979]; Okihiro 1994; Almaguer 1994; Foley 1997).

In this more latitudinarian suprajuridical sense, white supremacy could be said to characterize not merely the United States but the Americas as a whole. For many decades a sharp contrast was drawn in the sociological literature between Anglo North America, racially exclusionary, and the supposedly more egalitarian Iberian societies of Latin America. But in recent years, an increasing body of work has dismantled the promulgated myths of color-blind racial democracy, pointing out that most Latin-American nations have historically stigmatized and subordinated their Afro-Latin populations (Twine 1998). *Mestizaje* (race mixture) as an ideal has in actuality been predicated on the differential valorization of the European component and the goal of *blanqueamiento*, whitening, and to this socially meliorist end many Latin-American nations have had white immigration policies. A color pyramid with multiple subtle steps and shadings has—when set in contrast to the crudely bipolar and explicitly exclusionary U.S. model—been falsely represented as racially egalitarian rather than hierarchical in a different way (Minority Rights Group 1995).

Finally, insofar as the modern world has been foundationally shaped by European colonialism, there is a sense in which white supremacy could be seen as transnational, global, the historic domination of white Europe over nonwhite non-Europe and of white settlers over nonwhite slaves and indigenous peoples, making Europeans "the lords of human kind" (Kiernan 1981[1969]; Cocker 1998). David Theo Goldberg (2001) argues that the European and Euro-implanted state has been racialized from the modern period onward, and Frank Furedi reminds us that before World War II, most of the planet was in fact formally ruled by white nations who, on colonial questions—whatever their other differences—were united on maintaining the subordination of nonwhites. Indeed, in a (today embarrassing) episode now rarely discussed in the historical literature, a Japanese proposal to include "the equality of races" in the League of Nations' Covenant was formally defeated at the 1919 post-World War I Versailles Conference (Furedi 1998:42–45). To the extent that this European and Euro-American domination persists, albeit through different mechanisms (military,

economic, cultural), into the postcolonial period, we could be said to be still living in an age of global white supremacy.

ORIGINS AND EVOLUTION OF WHITE SUPREMACY

The verdict on the origins of racism is still out because, though most scholars locate its genesis in the modern period, some theorists argue for antecedents, or even full-blown versions, in the medieval and ancient worlds (Gossett 1997[1963]). But whatever the ultimate verdict on this question, white supremacy as a *system*, or set of systems, clearly comes into existence through European expansionism and the imposition of European rule through settlement and colonialism on aboriginal and imported slave populations—the original racial “big bang” that is the source of the present racialized world (Winant 1994).

But this domination need not itself have taken a “racial” form. The causes for the emergence of “race” as the salient marker of exclusion and the corresponding growth and centrality in the West of racist ideologies continue to be contested by scholars. What are sometimes called “idealist” accounts would focus on the role of culture, color symbolism, and religious predispositions, for example the self-conceptions of “civilized” Europeans opposed to a savage and “wild” Other, the positive and negative associations of the colors white and black, and the assumption of a Christian prerogative to evangelize the world and stigmatize other religions as the devil worship of heathens (Jordan 1977[1968]; Jennings 1976[1975]). On the other hand, so-called “materialist” accounts, primarily Marxist in inspiration, would see such factors as either irrelevant or subordinate to the causally more important politico-economic projects of obtaining a supply of cheap labor, expropriating land, and imposing particular superexploitative modes of production, for which “race” then becomes the convenient superstructural rationale (Cox 1948; Fields 1990). Marxist accounts have tended to the class-reductionistic (famously, for example, in Cox), but they need not necessarily be so. The trick is to explain the emergence of race in historical-materialist terms, with appropriate reference to the interests, projects, and differential power of the privileged classes, while recognizing that—*once created*—race acquires a power, autonomy, and “materiality” of its own, so that white group interests then become a factor in their own right. Unfortunately, few theorists have been able to achieve this delicate balancing act.

Other explanations not readily fitted into a materialist/idealist taxonomy regard white racism as a systematized and sophisticated extrapolation of the primordial ethnocentrism of all humans or as linked with particular psychosexual projections on to the dark body (Kovel 1984[1970]).

Debates over origins also have implications for the conception of “race” itself and the evolution of white supremacy. Until recently race has paradigmatically been thought of as natural, biological, the carving of humanity at its actual ontological joints. By contrast, contemporary radical thought on race almost

universally assumes what has come to be called a “constructionist” theory (Omi and Winant 1986; Haney López 1995). From this perspective, “whites” and “nonwhites” do not preexist white supremacy as natural kinds but are categories and realities themselves brought into existence by the institutionalization of the system. The white race is in fact invented (Allen 1994, 1997), though theorists will differ on the relative significance of the role of the state (from above) in making race and whiteness (Marx 1998) as against the role of the Euro working class (from below) in making themselves white (Roediger 1991). Correspondingly, white supremacy evolves over time not merely in its transition from a *de jure* to a *de facto* form but in the changing rules as to who is counted as white in the first place. Matthew Frye Jacobson, for example, has recently argued that U.S. whiteness is not temporally monolithic but should be periodized into “three great epochs”: from the 1790 law limiting naturalization to free white persons to the mass influx of Irish immigrants in the 1840s; from the 1840s to the restrictive immigration legislation of 1924; and from the 1920s to the present. In the process, groups once recognized as distinct races (Mediterraneans, Celts, Slavs, Teutons, Hebrews) have now disappeared into an expanded white race (Jacobson 1998). Similarly, other authors have delineated how over time the Irish and the Jews *became* white in the United States (Ignatiev 1995; Brodskin 1999).

WHITE SUPREMACY AS POLITICAL

In radical oppositional political theory, such as that centered on class or gender, a crucial initial conceptual move is often the redrawing of the boundaries of the political itself. In the Marxist model, capitalism is not seen, as it is in neoclassical economic theory, as a set of market transactions disconnected from societal structure. Rather it is viewed as a system dominated by a bourgeoisie whose differential economic power ramifies throughout society, making them a “ruling class,” so that even with universal suffrage the polity is still no more than a “bourgeois democracy.” Thus the atomistic social ontology of liberalism, most famously manifested in social contract theory, is asserted to be profoundly misleading. Similarly, the radical feminists of the 1970s, who devised the use of “patriarchy,” argued that men as a group dominate women as a group, but that this is mystified by another set of conceptual blinders: the limiting of the boundaries of the political to the so-called public sphere. The ubiquity of patriarchy as a political system is therefore obscured through the seemingly “natural” relegation of women to the apolitical domestic space of child-rearing and care of the household. Male domination becomes conceptually invisible rather than being recognized as itself the oldest form of political rule (Clark and Lange 1979; Jaggar 1983; Pateman and Gross 1987).

In both cases, then, the challenge of class and gender theory to mainstream thought involves a revision of what counts as political in the first place and a focus on power relations and manifestations of domination not recognized

and encompassed by the official definition of the political (political parties, formal contests in the electoral arena, the actions of delegated representatives in parliamentary bodies, etc.). The deliberate employment of the term “white supremacy” (in contrast to the orthodox paradigm of “race relations”) constitutes a parallel challenge. The idea is that it is politically illuminating to see whites in the United States as ruling as a group, thus constituting the “ruling race” of what was originally—and is in some ways still—a “*Herrenvolk* democracy” (van den Berghe 1978), a “white republic” (Saxton 1990), historically founded on a notion of racial, Anglo-Saxonist “manifest destiny” (Horsman 1981).

It will be obvious that such a conceptualization is radically at variance with a mainstream white American political theory that generally ignores or marginalizes race. The hegemonic “race relations” paradigm largely confines discussions of race to sociology—race is not seen as *political* (in the double sense of being created and shaped on an ongoing basis by political forces and as being itself the vehicle of political power). Moreover, apart from this disciplinary confinement, the paradigm itself is fundamentally misguided insofar as it seeks to conflate the experience of assimilating, ambiguously off-white, European *ethnics* (Irish, Jewish, Mediterranean) with the radically different experience of subordinated, unambiguously nonwhite, non-European *races* (black, red, brown, yellow), the former within, the latter beneath, the melting pot. Where race has been dealt with in mainstream political theory, it has either been at the local level of urban politics or, when tackled as a global reality, been standardly framed as an “anomaly” to supposedly central, inclusive, liberal-democratic, political values and conceived of in ideational, attitudinal, and individualist terms: a tragic “American dilemma” (Myrdal 1944). As such, racism is to be redressed through moral suasion and enlightenment, having no substantive conceptual implications for American political theory, which can take over without modification the (facially) raceless categories of European sociopolitical thought in which the ascriptive hierarchy and traditionalism of the Old World are contrasted with the egalitarian and democratic liberalism of the New (R. Smith 1997).

White supremacy as a concept thus registers a commitment to a radically *different* understanding of the political order, pointing us theoretically toward the centrality of racial domination and subordination. Within the discursive universe of white social theory on race, liberal or radical, it disrupts traditional framings, conceptualizations, and disciplinary divisions, effecting what is no less than a fundamental paradigm shift (Blauner 1972; Steinberg 1995).

To begin with, attention is displaced from the moralized realm of the ideational and attitudinal to the realm of structures and power which has been the traditional concern of political theory. Correspondingly, the facile and illusory symmetry of an individualized “prejudice” equally to be condemned wherever it is encountered, which opens the conceptual door to the later notion of “reverse discrimination” and the Supreme Court’s opting for the “color-blind” “perpetrator perspective,” is revealed as a mystificatory obfuscation of

the clearly *asymmetrical* and enduring system of white power itself. “The perpetrator perspective presupposes a world composed of atomistic individuals whose actions are outside of and apart from the social fabric and without historical continuity” (Freeman 1996[1990]:30). Second, this conception blocks mainstream theory’s ghettoizing of work on race through rejecting its conceptual framing of the polity as a raceless liberal democracy. Instead, the polity is conceptualized as a white-supremacist state, a system as real and important historically as any of those other systems formally acknowledged in the Western political canon (aristocracy, absolutism, democracy, fascism, socialism, etc.). Third, the notion of a global racial system with its own partial autonomy constitutes a repudiation of the too often epiphenomenalist treatment of race in the most important Western theory of group oppression, Marxism. Instead of treating race and racial dynamics as simply reducible to a class logic, this approach argues that through constructions of the self, proclaimed ideals of cultural and civic identity, decisions of the state, crystallizations of juridical standing and group interests, permitted violence, and the opening and blocking of economic opportunities, race becomes real and causally effective, institutionalized and materialized by white supremacy in social practices and felt phenomenologies. What is created, in the words of Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, is a “racialized social system” in which “the race placed in the superior position tends to receive greater economic remuneration and access to better occupations and prospects in the labor market, occupies a primary position in the political system, [and] is granted higher social estimation” (2001:37).

Finally, it should be noted that this alternative paradigm—race as central, political, and primarily a system of oppression—is (at least in broad outline) not at all new but has in fact always been present in oppositional African-American thought. Over thirty years ago, for example, Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton argued in their classic *Black Power* that essentially white Americans “own the society,” that the most important kind of racism is “institutional,” and that blacks should be seen as an internal colony facing whites who, on issues of race, “react in a united group to protect interests they perceive to be theirs,” dominating blacks politically, economically, and socially (Carmichael and Hamilton 1967:21–23). From the struggles against slavery to the battles against Jim Crow, from David Walker’s militant 1830 *Appeal* (1993[1830]) to Malcolm X’s matter-of-fact 1963 judgment that “America is a white country and all of the economy, the politics, the civic life of America is controlled by the white man” (X 1971:91), blacks have historically had little difficulty in grasping that the central political reality of the United States is, quite simply, that it is a “white man’s country.” But this “naïve” perception has apparently been too sophisticated for mainstream, white, political theory to apprehend. Current work on white supremacy in critical race theory and critical white studies can thus be seen as a belated catching-up with the insights of black lay thought, simultaneously disadvantaged and advantaged by lacking the formal training of the white

academy, and proper intellectual credit needs to be given to the black pioneers of this conceptual framework.

DIMENSIONS OF WHITE SUPREMACY

White supremacy should therefore be seen as a multidimensional system of domination not merely encompassing the “formally” political that is limited to the juridico-political realm of official governing bodies and laws but, as argued above, extending to white domination in economic, cultural, cognitive-evaluative, somatic, and in a sense even “metaphysical” spheres. There is a pervasive racialization of the social world that means that one’s race, in effect, puts one into a certain relationship with social reality, tendentially determining one’s being and consciousness.

A. THE JURIDICO-POLITICAL SPHERE

For the alternative paradigm, the state and the legal system are not neutral entities standing above interracial relations but for the most part themselves agencies of racial oppression (Kairys 1990[1982]). To Native Americans, the white man’s law has constituted an essential part of “the discourses of conquest” (R. A. Williams 1990). For blacks, the history has been similar. As the late Judge A. Leon Higginbotham, Jr. documented in detail, blacks have consistently been legally differentiated from and subordinated to the white population, not merely with the obvious case of the enslaved but also in the lesser rights of the free black population (1978, 1996). The Philadelphia Convention notoriously enshrined slavery without mentioning it by name through the three-fifths clause, and in 1790 Congress made whiteness a prerequisite for naturalization. The 1857 *Dred Scott* Supreme Court decision codified black subordination through its judgment that blacks were an inferior race with “no rights which the white man was bound to respect.” The promise of Emancipation and Reconstruction was betrayed by the Black Codes, the 1877 Hayes-Tilden Compromise, and the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision which formally sanctioned “separate but equal.” For the next sixty years, Jim Crow was the law of the land, with widespread black disenfranchisement, exploitation, and inferior treatment in all spheres of life (Litwack 1998). Thus for most of U.S. history, white supremacy has been *de jure*, and blacks have either been non- or second-class citizens unable to appeal to the federal government to provide them equal protection (D. King 1995).

While the victories of the 1950s and 1960s over Jim Crow have led to the repeal of overtly racist legislation and thus to real racial progress, substantive racial equality, as earlier noted, has yet to be achieved. The failure to allocate resources to implement antidiscrimination law vigorously, the placing of the burden of proof on the plaintiff, conservatively narrow interpretations of the burden of proof on the plaintiff, civil rights statutes, the backlash against affirmative action and desegregation, and the general shift since the 1960s from the “victim” to the “perpetrator” perspective (Freeman 1996[1990]) in effect mean that further erosion of white

domination is increasingly being resisted. Moreover, since the United States, unlike apartheid South Africa, has a white majority, a democratic vote guided by white group interests will itself continue to reproduce white domination in the absence of opposition from the Supreme Court, which is committed to “veiled majoritarianism” (Spann 1995). Donald Kinder’s and Lynn Sanders’s research shows that, in contradiction to the expectations of classic postwar pluralist theory, racial-group interests are nationally the most important ones, cutting across and overriding all other identities, and that whites see black interests as antagonistic to their own (Kinder and Sanders 1996). Whether through legalized inferiority, electoral disenfranchisement, or majoritarian group-interest-based domination, then, blacks have been systematically subjugated for nearly four hundred years in the white American polity.

Finally, in mapping the juridico-political, the role of official and unofficial white violence in perpetuating white rule also needs to be taken into account: the sanctioned tortures and informally connived-at killings of slave penal codes; the “demonstration effects” of lynchings in terrorizing the local black population; the freedom to operate given the Klan; the differential application of the death penalty; the race riots which, until well into the twentieth century, were basically white riots; and the part played by the repressive apparatus of the state (slave patrollers, federal militia, police, military, the prison system) in first suppressing slave uprisings and then later targeting legitimate black protest and activism to gain the rights enjoyed by white Americans (Berry 1994[1971]; Garrow 1981; H. Shapiro 1988; O’Reilly 1991[1989]; Dray 2002). In effect, for most of U.S. history the state has functioned as a racial state protecting white supremacy.

B. THE ECONOMIC SPHERE

Marx’s theorization of the dynamics of capitalism famously rests on the claim that it is intrinsically an exploitative system, since even when the working classes are being paid a “fair” wage, surplus value is being extracted from them. But with the discrediting of the labor theory of value, this claim is no longer taken seriously in mainstream neoclassical economics. In the case of white supremacy as a system, however, there is a pervasive “exploitation” ongoing throughout society that is, or should be, quite obvious and that is wrong by completely respectable, *non-Marxist*, liberal bourgeois standards (if applied nonracially). As one classic line puts it, white American wealth historically rests on red land and black labor. What could be termed “racial exploitation” covers an extensive historical variety of institutionalized and informal practices operating much more broadly than on the backs of proletarian wage-labor: the expropriation of Native Americans; African slavery; the refusal to blacks of equal opportunity to homestead the West; the debt servitude of sharecropping; the turn-of-the-century exploitation of Asian “coolie” labor; the exclusion of blacks and other nonwhites from certain jobs and trades and the lower wages and diminished promotion chances within those employments that were permitted; the blocking of black entrepreneurs

from access to white markets; the denial of start-up capital by white banks; the higher prices and rents for inferior merchandise and housing in the ghettos; the restricted access of blacks to state and federal services that whites enjoyed; the federally backed segregation and restrictive covenants that diminished the opportunities for most blacks to accumulate wealth through home ownership; the unfair business contracts that took advantage of nonwhite ignorance or that, when recognized as unfair, had to be signed because of lack of an alternative to white monopoly control; and many others (Massey and Denton 1993; Oliver and Shapiro 1995; Lipsitz 1998; Brown 1999).

An adequate theorization of white supremacy would require a detailed taxonomy of these different varieties of racial exploitation that have jointly historically deprived people of color as a group of billions or even (globally) trillions of dollars of wealth and have correspondingly benefited whites, thus in effect constituting the “material base” of white supremacy. (The wealth of the median black American household is less than one eighth the wealth of the median white household.) And globally there is a long-standing black and Third World argument that slavery, colonialism, and the exploitation of the New World were crucial in enabling European development and producing African underdevelopment, so that racial exploitation really has to be seen as planetary in scope (E. Williams 1966[1944]; Rodney 1974[1972]; Blaut 1993). The recently revived struggle for black reparations in the United States and the indictment of the legacy of colonialism at the August 2001 UN Conference in Durban, South Africa, are manifestations of a global movement for compensation for historically unpaid-for land and labor that one hopes will force an official acknowledgment and (partial) reckoning of the terrible human costs of the past few hundred years of white domination.

C. THE CULTURAL SPHERE

Given recent debates about “multiculturalism,” the cultural dimension of white supremacy at least is familiar: a Eurocentrism that denigrates non-European cultures as inferior or even nonexistent and places Europe at the center of global history (Amin 1988). What is not usually articulated is the role such denigration played in teleological theories of history that made Europeans the (divinely and biologically) favored race, destined either to annihilate or to lead to civilization all others, generating a discourse that could be regarded as “fantasies of the master race” (Churchill 1992; Said 1993). Colonial peoples in general, of course, have suffered this denial of the worth of their cultures, but the centrality of African slavery to the project of the West required the most extreme stigmatization of blacks in particular. Thus sub-Saharan Africa was portrayed as the “Dark Continent,” a vast jungle inhabited by savage “tribes” lost in a historyless and cultureless vacuum, to be redeemed only by a European presence (Mudimbe 1988, 1994). The Tarzan novels and movies and the thousands of African “adventure” stories of pulp and ostensibly highbrow fiction of the last

hundred years are all part of this master-narrative of white cultural superiority (Pieterse 1992[1990]). From north to south, from Ancient Egypt to Zimbabwe, the achievements of the continent have generally been attributed to anybody other than the black population themselves. Blacks in the United States and the Americas generally were, of course, tainted by their association with such a barbarous origin (Fredrickson, 1987[1971]). Similarly, after the defeat of Native American resistance, a policy of cultural assimilation to “Kill the Indian but save the man” was implemented.

But apart from this well-known pattern of white cultural hegemony, there is also a phenomenon that deserves more theoretical attention: cultural *appropriation* without acknowledgment, so that civilization in general seems to have an exclusively white genealogy—a form of exploitation that, again, is uneasily fitted within the categories of the best-known mainstream theory of exploitation, Marxism. Cultural white supremacy manifests itself not merely in the differential valorization of Europe and European-derived culture but in the denial of the extent to which this culture—“incontestably mulatto” in the famous phrase of Albert Murray (1970)—has itself been dependent on the contributions of others, hence a “bleaching” of the multicolored roots of human civilization. Ancient Egyptian influences on Ancient Greece, Chinese scientific achievements, Native American mathematics, agriculture, and forms of government, are all denied or minimized, so that Europeans seem to be the only people with the capacity for culture (Bernal 1987; Harding 1993).

D. THE COGNITIVE-EVALUATIVE SPHERE

Systems of domination affect not merely the persons within them but their theorizing about these systems. Integral to both Marxist and feminist thought has been an auxiliary *metatheoretical* aspect, the theorizing about hegemonic theories. In Marx’s analysis of fetishism and naturalization, in feminists’ exposure of overt and hidden androcentrism, oppositional thinkers have mapped the various ways in which ideas, values, concepts, assumptions, and overall cognitive patterns contribute to the reproduction of group privilege and rule. White supremacy likewise will have associated with it distinctive epistemologies, factual claims, and normative outlooks which need to be exposed and demystified.

The clearest manifestation will be the development of racist ideology itself in its numerous and polymorphic historical variants, theological and “scientific”: from the Ham myth through polygenesis, Social Darwinism, and craniometry, to IQ theory and the Bell Curve (S. J. Gould 1981; Hannaford 1996; Gossett 1997[1963]; Jacoby and Glauber 1995; Herrnstein and Murray 1994). But there will be many other kinds of examples also, sometimes not claims of knowledge so much as claims of ignorance—a nonknowing which is not the innocent unawareness of truths to which there is no access but a self- and social shielding from racial realities that is underwritten by the official social epistemology. Being constructed as white means, *inter alia*, learning to see and understand the world

in a certain way. In Ralph Ellison's classic novel *Invisible Man*, the eponymous narrator describes the "peculiar disposition" of white eyes, a blindness arising not out of physiology but socialized cognitive psychology, "the construction of their inner eyes," and in *Black Like Me*, white-turned black John Howard Griffin looks back from the perspective of his newfound consciousness at the "area of unknowing" of Whitetown (Ellison 1972, 1952; Griffin 1996[1961]). Thus there will be characteristic and pervasive patterns of not-seeing and not-knowing—structured white ignorance, motivated inattention, self-deception, and moral rationalization—that people of color, for their own survival, have to learn to become familiar with.

More generally, white normativity in the factual and moral realms will involve taking whites as the normative reference point and illicitly generalizing from their experience, from Eurocentrism in models of history to current "color-blind" denials of the reality of white American racial privilege. The original fusion of personhood—what it is to be human—with membership of a particular race will continue to shape white perception, conceptualization, and affect in unconscious and subtle ways even in apparently nonracist contexts (Lawrence 1995). Since this system will inevitably influence nonwhite cognition also, the racially subordinated will have to learn to challenge white epistemic authority, to think themselves out of conceptual frameworks and value systems that justify or obfuscate their subordination.

E. THE SOMATIC SPHERE

White supremacy also has a central somatic dimension, especially where the black population is concerned. Since this is a political system predicated on racial superiority and inferiority, on the demarcation and differential evaluation of different races, the "body" in the body-politic naturally becomes crucial—and *nonmetaphoric*—in a way it does not in the abstract polity of (official) Western theory. A white "somatic norm" assumes hegemonic standing, serving as an important contributory measure of individual worth, and the literal lack of incorporation of people of color into the extended white macrobody of the *polis* is written directly on their flesh (Hoetink 1962). In his book simply titled *White*, Richard Dyer (1997) documents the pervasive iconography of the white bodily ideal and shows how over decades it has come to be constructed in movies through special photography and lighting techniques. Not merely in the United States but in its broader external cultural sphere, these images influence both how people see others and how they see themselves. The nonwhite body—red, yellow, brown, black—has been clearly demarcated as alien, flesh *not* of our flesh. The black body in particular, being both the sign of slave status and the body physically most divergent from the white one, has historically been derogated and stigmatized as grotesque, ugly, simian, mocked in blackface minstrelsy, newspaper cartoons, advertising, animated films, memorabilia (Turner 1994; Pieterse 1992, 1999).

The young Marx made alienation from one's labor a central concept in his indictment of class society. Here under white supremacy, it could be argued, one has an alienation far more fundamental, since while one can always come home from work, one cannot get out of one's skin. Nonwhites socialized into the acceptance of this somatic norm will then be alienated from their own bodies, in a sense estranged from their own physical being and being-in-the-world (Russell et al. 1992). Recent philosophical work on the body has generally focused on gender rather than race (Welton 1998), but some philosophers of color, for example Lewis Gordon and Linda Martin Alcoff, are beginning to explore racial embodiment and alienation from a phenomenological point of view (Gordon 1994; Alcoff 1999). Particularly for women, for whom the (patriarchally driven) imperative to be beautiful is most important, this alienation will manifest itself in attempts to transform the body to more closely approximate the white somatic ideal, whether through makeup and cosmetic aids or, in the extreme case, plastic surgery: eye jobs, nose jobs, dermabrasion (Gilman 1998). Moreover, there will be an inevitable racialization of sexual relations in terms of the differential social attractiveness of certain bodies (Fanon 1967[1952]). Toni Morrison's powerful and moving first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, depicts the tragic fate of a young black girl whose dearest wish is to get the blue eyes whose lack, she concludes, is what makes her unloved (2000[1970]). Necessarily, then, the resistance to oppressive corporeal whiteness has taken the form of a guerrilla insurgency on the terrain of the flesh itself (White and White 1998).

F. THE METAPHYSICAL SPHERE

Finally, in a bow to the distinctive insights of my own profession, let me conclude by saying something about what could be termed the "metaphysics" of white supremacy. Whereas mainstream Anglo-American analytic philosophy tends to separate metaphysical issues of being and consciousness, identity and the self, from the social (one thinks of the classic images of the isolated, solipsistic, Cartesian ego, of the atomic and presocial individuals of contract theory), there is far greater appreciation in the Continental tradition in its numerous variants (Hegelian, Marxist, poststructuralist) of the notion of the socially constituted, or at least socially shaped, self. Hence the idea of a *social ontology*.

Now, the mainstream narrative of modernity is nominally egalitarian, in that normative human equality is taken to have been achieved by the Enlightenment. So the metaphysic implicit in the description of the "free and equal" individuals of social contract theory is classically that of an undifferentiated equality. But a case can obviously be made that whiteness was a prerequisite for full personhood—normative, sociopolitical, and "metaphysical" equality. An ontology of society and the self that accurately maps rather than obfuscating these realities thus needs to recognize the centrality of racial *inegalitarianism*. From this "metaphysical" perspective, white supremacy could be seen as a bipolar system whose ontological underpinnings lift a white *Herrenvolk* above nonwhite,

particularly black, *Untermenschen*. People of color have always recognized that racial subordination is predicated on regarding them as less than fully human, as subpersons rather than persons. A social theory whose implicit ontology fails to register this reality is getting things wrong at the foundational level, since the nonwhite struggle for equal, socially recognized personhood has in fact been one of the central battles of the past few hundred years.

CONCLUSION

The virtue of using white supremacy as an overarching theoretical concept is that it enables us to pull together different phenomena and integrate these different levels: sociopolitical, economic, cultural, epistemological, somatic, metaphysical. For the elements I have separated analytically are of course interacting with one another in reality, jointly contributing to the reproductive dynamic that helps to perpetuate the system. If race was previously thought of as in the body, it is now too often thought of as merely in the head: claims of nonreality have replaced claims of physical reality. But race is best conceived of not primarily as ideational but as embedded in material structures, sociopolitical institutions, and everyday social practices that so shape the world with which we interact as to constitute an “objective” (deriving from intersubjectivity) though socially constructed “reality.” Philosophy’s promise to illuminate the world can be realized only by recognizing the whiteness of that world and how it affects its residents. Theorizing white supremacy as objective, systemic, multidimensional, constitutive of a certain reality that evolves over time can contribute both to understanding the world and, ultimately, to changing it.

4

Rethinking Whiteness Historiography: The Case of Italians in Chicago, 1890–1945*

THOMAS A. GUGLIELMO

Over the last decade, historians of the United States such as David Roediger (1991, 1994, 2002), Noel Ignatiev (1995), Matthew Jacobson (1998), and many others have played a crucial role in the growth and popularity of whiteness studies—and with numerous positive results. If much of whiteness studies, as Margaret Andersen convincingly demonstrates in Chapter 2 in this volume, has shifted the focus away from people of color and from issues of power and privilege, whiteness historiography may be an exception. Indeed, scholars such as Roediger have stressed the centrality of people of color in histories and theories of whiteness; and he along with numerous other historians has focused squarely on issues of power and resources, inequality and racism.

Still, this close connection between U.S. historians and whiteness studies has not been an unmitigated blessing. Most important, a faulty assumption—that European immigrants arrived in the United States as “in-between peoples” and became fully white only over time and after a great deal of struggle—stands at the heart of a great deal of U.S. whiteness historiography (Barrett and Roediger 1997; Brodtkin 1999; Gerstle 1997; Nelson 2001; Peck 2000; Roediger 1991, 1994; Sgrue 1996) and has been accepted uncritically by scholars in various disciplines (Bonnett 1998; Feagin 2000; Prashad 2000; Warren and Twine 1997; Waters 1999). Focusing on a case study of Italians in Chicago from the turn of the century through World War II, I dispute this core assumption. I argue that many Italians faced extensive *racial* prejudice and discrimination in the United States as Italians, South Italians, Latins, and so forth, but were still largely accepted as white by the widest variety of people and institutions—naturalization laws and courts, the U.S. census, race science, newspapers, unions, employers, neighbors, politicians, and realtors. This widespread acceptance was reflected most

*Much of this chapter comes from my book *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003a). For those readers who wish to see a more extensive treatment (and documentation) of most of the subjects in this chapter, please consult the book.