THE INVENTION OF THE WHITE RACE

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Summary of Volume Two: The Origin of Racial Oppression in Anglo–America

XI
One Mother Country; two systems of social control

Whatever the members of the Board of Trade in England may have thought about the unresponsive, illogical, and seemingly disingenuous reply eventually sent to them by Virginia Governor Gooch, they decided, as they said, to let the matter "lye by." We do not know whether any member of the Board commented on the difference between Gooch's policy of "fixing a perpetual brand" on African-Americans, and his especially bitter rejection of those born of an English father or mother, on one hand, and the policy of the West Indian planters of formally recognizing the middle-class status of "colored" descendant (and Afro-Caribbeans who earned special merit by their service to the regime). Nor did Governor William Gooch allude to that matter in his reply. But it is question that goes to the heart of the matter of the invention of the white race.

In the British West Indies generally the free colored included "shopkeepers, and…owners of land and slaves." In the trade in non-sugar commodities with the North American colonies, many free colored merchants traded directly with captains of cargo vessels. In Barbados, the energy and initiative of freedmen hucksters in meeting bond-laborers on the way to market and ships just arriving in the harbor, were able to control the supply of produce and livestock to the general public. They were likewise involved in supplying the sugar estates with essentials that could not be got from England. Indeed, this proved a route to sugar estate ownership by occasional foreclosure on a bankrupt creditors. Within three years after the repeal of the prohibition of freedmen acting as pilots, they had nearly monopolized Jamaica's coastal shipping.

In 1721 the Jamaica Assembly took a positive view of such trends, as it turned its attention to the problem of unsettled lands becoming "a receptacle for runaway and rebellious negroes." It occurred to them to establish a buffer zone between coastal sugar plantation regions and the mountainous (and Maroon-infested) interior, by offering free homesteads to laboring-class settlers and their families. Among the beneficiaries were to be "every free mulatto, Indian or negro" who would take up the offer, and remain on the land for seven years. Each was to have twenty acres of land for himself, and five acres more for each slave he brought with him. Perhaps some of those homesteaders served in the "companies of free Negroes and mulattoes" who were employed effectively in the First Maroon War, ended with the 1739 Treaty of Trelawney Town binding the Maroons to capture and return runaway bond-laborers. By the early 1830s, "free blacks and coloreds" owned 70,000 of the total of around 310,000 bond-laborers in Jamaica.

When the militia system based on the European ex-bond-laborers proved a failure, the sugar bourgeoisie relied on the British Army and Navy to guarantee their control, while at the same time recruiting free persons, black and white, into the militias as an auxiliary. In Barbados, as in Jamaica, by the 1720s, freedmen were required to serve in the militia, even though they were denied important civil rights. The British Army and Navy, however, weres subject to many demands because of the almost constant world-wide round of wars with France that would last for 127 years, from 1688 to 1815. In the decisive moment—the coming of the French Revolution and the Haitian Revolution—when all hung in the balance, more extreme measures were required, for then the British in the West Indies were confronted with "blacks inspired by the revolutionary doctrine of French republicanism," and were "forced to conduct operations against large numbers of rebellious slaves in the rugged and largely unknown interiors of their own islands" of Grenada, St. Vincent and Jamaica.

The internal and external dangers were so critical that the British supreme commander on the Caribbean was forced to conclude that, "the army of Great Britain is inadequate to…defend these colonies," without an army of Black soldiers. Eight West India Regiments were formed, composed in small part by freedmen, and partly of slaves purchased by the army from plantation owners; but more were acquired directly from Africa. However, "[i]t was clear that the continued existence of the West India Regiments depended upon establishing the black soldier as a freedman," and, indeed, in 1807

on rapid material gain. Throughout our history we believed that were were a chosen people, a belief essentially sustained by our growing affluence. Now we shall see who we are without it.

But, unlike the country as it was in Turner's time, present-day America, bears the indelible stamp of the African-American civil rights struggle of the 1960's and after, a seal that the "white backlash" has by no means been able to erode from the nation's consciousness. Also, although it is not possible to predict how it may eventuate politically, the increasing non-European proportion of the nation's population enhances the possibility of the development of a "not-white" popular movement, which laboring-class European-Americans may join unreservedly, finally casting off the incubus of white-skin privilege that for three centuries has paralyzed their will. Then, and only then, the ghosts of those "four hundred English and Negroes in Armes," who fought together in Bacon's Rebellion to be "freed from their Slavery," may finally rest in peace.

The Civil Rights Legacy and the Impending Crisis

Properly interpreted, Turner's reference to the "safety valve" potential in anti-capitalist "reform" movements of his day had its innings in the Keynesian New Deal, which at least some of its supporters hoped might be a road to "socialism," and some of its reactionary enemies regarded as the real thing. The limitations of that line of reform, which had become evident by 1938, were masked by the prosperity of the United States role as the "arsenal of democracy" in World War II, that ended with the United States as the only industrial power left standing and the possessor of three-fourths of the world's gold reserves. But, by 1953, other major powers had recovered to pre-war levels; by 1957 began a chronic unfavorable United States balance of trade. In 1971 the United States formally abandoned the gold-standard for settlement of international balances of payments and the "gold cover" for the domestic money supply, adopting, finally, a policy of calculated monetary inflation, safeguarded by the deliberate maintenance of chronic unemployment at levels adequate to prevent increases in real wages. Finally, even the party of the New Deal has cast all Keynesian pretence to the winds, proclaiming that "the era of big government is over," and boasting of "ending welfare" in any previously recognizable form.

Now at the end of the twentieth century, the social gap between the Titans and the common people is at perhaps its historic maximum; real wages have trended downward for nearly two decades. "Entitlements" and "welfare," as they relate to students, the poor, and the elderly, have become obscenities in the lexicon of official society. There is less of a "socialist" movement today in the United States than there was in Turner's day, and anti-capitalist class consciousness is hesitant even to call its name. The bourgeoisie in one of its parts mockingly dons "revolution" like a Halloween mask. "Class struggle" is an epithet cast accusingly at the mildest defenders of social welfare, and the country is loud with the sound of one class struggling.

Yet, the pre-conditions of social conflict such as those noted by Turner a century ago, are simmering today if we are to credit the following grim assessment of one well-known political economist:

> [O]ur slower economic growth is no longer simply cyclical or temporary but structural and permanent....[so that] We can no longer count

it was so declared by Act of the British Parliament: the bond-laborers who entered the British Army by that act became freedmen. But the logic of the policy represented a major violation of the principle of denial of social mobility of the oppressed group. Many of these soldiers when discharged settled on plantations as free persons.

In the meantime, thoughtful observers had begun to advocate the advantages to be had from a positive attitude toward freedmen in general. Consider the advice put forward by four authoritative English writers: Edmund Burke, in 1758; Edward Long, in 1774; the Reverend James Ramsay, in 1784, and George Pinckard in 1803.

> What if in our colonies we should go so far as to find some medium between liberty and absolute slavery, in which we might place all mulattoes...and such blacks, who...their masters...should think proper in some degree to enfranchise. These might have land allotted to them, or where that could not be spared, some sort of fixed employment....[T]he colony will be strengthened by the addition of so many men, who will have an interest of their own to fight for.

Edward Long argued similarly:

> Mulattoes ought to be held in some distinction [over the blacks]. They would then form the centre of connexion between the two extremes, producing a regular establishment of three ranks of men. [He stressed training of mulatto apprentices:] [T]o serve a regular apprenticeship to artificers and tradesmen would make them orderly subjects and defenders of the country.... [and he perceived a possible added benefit to the employer class:] But even if they were to set up for themselves, no disadvantage would probably accrue to the publick, but the contrary: they would oblidge the white artificers to work at more moderate rates....

Reverend Ramsay, too, also limited his proposal to mulattoes. The girls should be declared free from their birth, or from the time the mother became free. Male mulattoes should be placed out as apprentices "to such trade or business as may best agree with their inclination and the demands of the colony," and should be freed at the age of thirty. He was persuaded that, "By

these means...a new rank of citizens, placed between the Black and White races, would be established." They would be an intermediate buffer social control stratum since, "they would naturally attach themselves to the White race..., and so become a barrier against the designs of the Black."

George Pinckard, had served several years as a surgeon in the British expeditionary forces in the Caribbean, and he looked favorably on the prospect of gradual reform leading to abolition of slavery in the West Indies. What Pinckard suggested anticipated Charles James Fox's prescription for social control adaptation in Ireland from racial oppression to national oppression, namely, "Make the besiegers part of the garrison." Pinckard argued for the social promotion of a "considerable proportion of the *people of colour*, between the whites and negroes." The installation of such a middle class, would save Britain a great expenditure of life and treasure. This middle class would soon become possessed of stores and estates; and the garrison might be safely entrusted to them as the best defenders of their own property."

In 1803, John Alleyne Beckles, Anglo-Barbadian member of the Barbados Council, denounced the limitations on property rights of freedmen and warned of the danger to social control in the continuation of such restrictions. Bestowing full property rights on the free "colored," he argued,

> will keep them at a greater distance from he slaves, and will keep up that jealousy which seems naturally to exist between them and the slaves; it will tend to our security, for should the slaves at any time attempt a revolt, the free-coloured persons for their own safety and the security of their property, must join the whites and resist them. But if we reduce the free coloured people to a level with the slaves, they must unite with them, and will take every occasion of promoting and encouraging a revolt.

Such ruling-class insights recognized the link between concessions to the freedmen and the maintenance of control over the bond-laborers who, in the late 1770s outnumbered the total free population of Barbados by nearly three-and-a-half times, and by nine times that of Jamaica. As members of the militia that quelled the 1816 bond-laborer revolt in Barbados, "the free coloureds were reckoned to have conducted themselves 'slightly better' than the whites." In Jamaica in the First and the Second Maroon Wars, the mulatto militia justified the expectation that they would be a "powerful counter-

in 1932. Toward the end of his life, Turner felt "baffled by his contemporary world and [he] had no satisfying answer to the closed-frontier formula in which he found himself involved."

The Real Social Safety-Valve of American history

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 how, in critical times, democratic new departures have been frustrated by re-inventions of the "white race." There is a historic "safety valve" of social discontent mounted over the American body politic; Turner just couldn't see it for the White Blindspot in his eye. If Turner had taken note of the Southern Homestead Act and its repeal, and of the heroic Negro Exodus of 1879, might he not have given his "safety valve" theory an added dimension, one wherein the real safety valve is found? The prospect held out to European-Americans, of "free land for him who would take" it from the Indians, however unrealizable it was in actuality, did doubtless, tend to retard the development of anti-capitalist class-consciousness. "Free land" was merely one aspect of the Real Safety Valve; two other broad general forms of lateral mobility—immigration into the United States and farm-to-factory migration, like "free land," were also cast in the mold of "racial" preference for Europeans and European-Americans, as "whites." From such main strands an all-pervasive system of racial privileges was conferred on laboring-class European-Americans, rural and urban, *exploited and insecure though they themselves were*. Its threads, woven into the fabric of every aspect of daily life, of family, church, and state, have constituted the main historical guarantee of the rule of the "Titans," damping down anti-capitalist pressures, by making "race, and not class, the distinction in social life." That, more than any other factor, has shaped the contours of American history—from the Constitutional Convention of 1787 to the Civil War, to the overthrow of Reconstruction, to the Populist Revolt of the 1890s, to the Great Depression, to the civil rights struggle and "white backlash" of our own day.

In 1893, Frederick Jackson Turner (1861–1932), one of the giants of American historiography, presented a theory, "a hypothesis," of American historical development. Rooted exclusively in American experience, without dependence upon English tradition, Turner's "frontier thesis" won wide acceptance. Drawing a parallel with the career of the ancient Greeks in the Mediterranean world, Turner said:

> Up to our own day American history has been in a large degree the history of the colonization of the Great West. The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward explain Americans development.

Turner ended that essay with a portentous epitaph: "[T]he frontier is gone, and with its going has closed the first period of American history." In 1910, he continued his theme: "The solitary backwoodsman wielding his ax at the edge of a measureless forest is replaced by companies capitalized at millions, operating railroads, sawmills, and all the enginery of modern machinery to harvest the remaining trees." He then formulated what came to be called the "safety-valve corollary" of the frontier thesis. "A new national development is before us," he said, "without the former safety valve of abundant resources open to him who would take." He delineated the consequent sharpening of class struggle between capital and anti-capital, between those who demand that there be no governmental interference with "the exploitation and the development of the country's wealth," on the one hand; and the reformers, from the Grangers, to the Populists, to Bryan to Debs and Theodore Roosevelt, who, Turner said, emphasized "the need of governmental regulation... in the interest of the common man; [and] the checking of the power of those business Titans...." "It is not surprising," he added later that year, "that socialism shows noteworthy gains as elections continue, that parties are forming on new lines...They are efforts to find substitutes for the former safeguard of democracy, the disappearing lands. They are the sequence of the disappearing frontier."

Turner's expectation of the emergence of a popular socialist movement of sufficient proportions to "substitute" for the end of the "free-land safety valve" was disappointed. Turner died in the midst of the Great Depression

poise...of men dissimilar from [the Maroons] in complexion and manners, but equal in hardiness and vigour," capable of "scour[ing] the woods on all occasions; a service in which the [British Army] regulars are by no means equal to them." As the struggle to end slavery entered its critical stage, there were freedmen who supported the cause of the bond-laborers, but they were the exceptional few.

By the late 1770s, in Jamaica 36 percent of the free population was composed of persons of some degree of African ancestry; on the eve of Emancipation, in 1833, they were a 72 per cent majority. In Barbados in 1786, only 5 per cent of free persons were persons of African ancestry; in 1833 they were 34% per cent. Although this increase in the freedmen population brought added forces to the intermediate social control stratum against the bond-laborers, it conversely became a major factor in the final crisis of the system of chattel bond-servitude, coming as it did in the larger context of the Haitian Revolution, in which the role of the free colored had been decisive, and the rise of the abolitionist movement in England. The "increasing wealth and numbers of the coloreds as well as their importance in the militia made it more difficult for the Assembly to deny them their rights."

XII

In the Chesapeake: The Maroon threat, plus

The contrast between the denial of the legitimacy of class distinctions among African-Americans in continental Anglo-America and their deliberate inclusion in the intermediate social control stratum in the Anglo-Caribbean, did not arise from differences in the characteristics of the respective ruling plantation bourgeois elites. Both were tiny minorities of the population of monocultural colonies, the largest owners of lifetime bond-laborers and of the best land, as well as controllers of the export trade, and credit, and they held a corresponding dominance in political and legislative affairs.

In the eighteenth-century Chesapeake colonies the social power structure was dominated by the gentry, a leisure class comprising 5 per cent of the Anglo-American men, persons whose wealth, however gained, was such as to relieve them of any economic need to engage in productive work. These "great planters," writes Aubrey C. Land, "...never formed more than a fraction of the total community of planters, something like 2.5 per cent in the decade 1690-1699 and about 6.5 per cent half a century later." From their

ranks came those who actually occupied the posts of political authority. Over the period 1720 to 1776, 630 men held seats in the Virginia House of Burgesses. Of this number, 110 dominated the proceedings of the House by virtue of their committee positions in that body. Of that 110, three out of four each owned more than 10,000 acres of land. With regard to the extent of their holdings of lifetime bond-laborers, it has been found that eleven held more than 300 each; 25 held from 50 to 300; 25 held from 50 to 300 each; and 22 others held more than ten.

In such circumstances, it is not surprising to find Colony authorities expressing apprehension over the problem of social control. In 1719, Governor Spotswood, in the wake of a recently frustrated rebellion of African-American bond-laborers, warned against relying on language differences among bond-laborers to insure rebellion by such workers; "freedom," he said, "wears a cap which can, without a tongue call together all those who long to shake of[f] the fetters of slavery" Although the attempt of African bond-laborers to establish a free settlement at the head of James River in 1729 was defeated, Governor William Gooch feared that "a very small number of negroes once settled in those parts, would very soon be encreased by the accession of other runaways," as had happened with "the negroes in the mountains of Jamaica...." In 1736, William Byrd II, member of the Colony Council, and former Deputy-Governor, expressed fear for the future of the existing Virginia social order, in view of the rapidly increasing proportion of African-American bond-laborers. He, too, had Jamaica on his mind, worrying "lest they [the lifetime bond-laborers in Virginia] prove as troublesome and dangerous... as they have been lately in Jamaica....We have mountains, in Virginia too, to which they may retire safely, and do as much mischief as they do in Jamaica." Open revolt might occur; there were already 10,000 African-American men capable of bearing arms in Virginia, he noted, and warned that "in case there should arise a Man amongst us, exasperated by a desperate fortune he might with more advantage than Cataline kindle a Servile War." In 1749, Virginia Council members Thomas Lee and William Fairfax, favored discouraging the importation of English convicts as bond-laborers. They cited former Governor Spotswood's allusion to freedom's cap, and warned that increasing the number of convict bond-laborers in Virginia, "who are wicked enough to join our Slaves in any Mischief...[which] in all Probability will bring sure and sudden Destruction on all His Majesty's good subjects of this colony."

Obviously, the small cohort of the ruling elite must have a substan-

ged garments bespeak poverty," poverty which he ascribed to the engrossment of the land by the plantation bourgeoisie. Forty years later, a well-off Virginia planter spoke in similarly stark terms of his landless European-Americans neighbors who stayed in Eastern Virginia with but "little to console them but their complexion...."

The number of such very poor was never large, according to Wertenbaker, because anyone with a little drive and ambition "could move to the frontier and start life on more equal terms." However, other historians, who have traced the course of that ambition, find that among those who moved and moved frequently, were those who opted for being tenants, some on leases, but, more typically as tenants-at-will, working on shares with tools, buildings and marketing facilities furnished by the landlord. Share tenants moved on after a short tenure. Squatters left land where they could not afford the surveying and patent fees; two-thirds of the original settlers of Amelia County, formed in 1735,—mostly squatters—left the county between 1736 and 1749. In Lunenberg County, formed in 1746, only one-fifth of the laborers were able to establish households, while two out of five of the householders left the county between 1750 and 1764. Others moved directly to "new" territories taking out patents as fee-simple owners. It is the measure of the cost of becoming "white" that this best hope of the ambition of the eighteenth-century laboring-class Virginians, was precisely what their predecissors had complained against, "being Tenants to the first Ingrossers which no man cares to be, but thinks it hard to be a Tennant on a Continent."

The result was an increasing number of would-be planters moving to "the frontier," wherever that meant at a given time—the Piedmont, the south side of the James, North Carolina, the Shenandoah Valley, or beyond the Cumberland Gap—as tenants, as patentees of "new" land, or as unpatented squatters. Though the squeezing out of such a poor planter to the "frontier" negated the logic of a common interest with the gentry, he was still "made to fold to his bosom the adder that stings him," the bondage of African-Americans. Denied social mobility, they were to have the white-skin privilege of lateral mobility—to the "frontier." By the same token they went typically as "whites"; resenting Negroes, not their slavery, indeed hating the free Negro most of all; ready now to take the land from the Indians in the name of "a white man's country."

flaw? If racism was a flaw, then "the rise of liberty" would have been better off without it—a line of reasoning that negates the paradox. On the other hand, if racism made "the rise of liberty possible," as the paradox would have it, then racism was not a flaw of American bourgeois democracy, but its very special essence. Morgan's "paradox" therefore contains in itself the very challenge that he wanted to refute. In sad fact, the "Ordeal of Colonial Virginia" was extended as the Ordeal of America, wherein the racial oppression and white supremacism have indeed been the dominant feature, the parametric constant, of United States history.

There is a true paradox at the core of American history, the paradox embodied in the "white" identity of the European-American laborer, wherein the social class identity is immured. Perhaps so many of our historians have failed to see the paradox because they conceive of the "white race" as a phenomenon of nature, a realm that knows no paradoxes.

The "white" frontier

The tendency toward concentration of capital ownership is a prevailing attribute of capitalism. The social impact of that tendency is illustrated in Wertenbaker's comment on the Virginia colonial economy of the eighteenth century. But this was not the typical case of increased concentration of capital based on the introduction of new instruments of labor requiring increasing relative investments in fixed capital. It was caused by land engrossment in general, and by the diminished supply of good lands in the Tidewater, but even more by the lower labor costs per unit of output of those planters who had means to invest in the high-priced lifetime bond-laborers.

Being made to compete with unpaid bond-labor, "practically destroyed the Virginia yeomanry," writes Wertenbaker, "…Some it drove into exile, either to the remote frontiers or to other colonies; some it reduced to extreme poverty;…some it caused to purchase slaves and so at one step to enter the exclusive class of those who had others to work for them…. The small freeholder was not destroyed, as was his prototype of ancient Rome, but he was subjected to a change which was by no means fortunate or wholesome."

Those who were "reduced to extreme poverty" included those whom the touring Marquis de Chastellux encountered in 1792, when for the first time in his three year sojourn in America, he saw "in the midst of those rich plantations miserable huts…inhabited by whites, whose wan looks and rag-

tial intermediate buffer social control stratum to stand between it and "great disturbances," or even another rebellion. Like the capitalist enclosers of the peasant's land in sixteenth-century England, the men for whom the plantation world was made needed an effective intermediate yeoman-type social control stratum.

In the eighteenth century, nearly half of the European-American adult male population were landowners. Forty percent of these were employers of bond-labor. This nearly twenty per cent of European-American adult male population was equal in number to around thirty percent of the number of African-Americans in Virginia. Such a proportion of bond-labor holders to lifetime bond-laborers would supply a middle class of small property owners sufficient to constitute an adequate social control stratum under normal condition.

At the same time, however, half of European-American men were not landowners, and sixty per cent of the those who were landowners did not own bond-laborers; rather they were, willy-nilly, put into competition with bond-labor. It was socially and economically almost impossible for persons in these categories to become owners of bond-labor. Aside from the prevailing poverty among such planters, there was the operation of the general tendency of centralization of capital to reduce the number of competitors, not to increase it. Aubrey C. Land's analysis of Maryland estate inventories found that three-fourths of the planters (tenants as well as owners) fell into the £0-to-£100 category in the 1690-1699 period. Although the proportion of planters in the £0-£100 group had declined by 1740, it still made up more than half the total. The poverty of most of the non-owners of bond-laborers was such that, "Between investment and consumption [they] had no choice… they could not invest from savings because [they] had none." Far from becoming owners of even limited-term bond-laborers, they were likely to leave their heirs penniless. Land concludes with a historically significant finding: the majority of the planters were "not the beneficiar[ies] of the planting society."

Here, then, is the key to the understanding the difference between Virginia ruling-class policy of "fixing a perpetual brand" on African-Americans, and the especially bitter rejection of those born of an English father or mother, on one hand, and, on the other, the policy of the West Indian planters of formally recognizing the middle-class status "colored" descendant (and other Afro-Caribbeans who earned special merit by their service to the regime).

The difference was rooted in the objective fact that in the West Indies there were *too few* laboring-class Europeans to embody an adequate petit bourgeoisie, while in the continental colonies there were *too many* to be accommodated in the ranks of that class.

And, therein lay the heart of the social control problem of the ruling plantation bourgeoisie in continental Anglo-America. The overwhelming majority of its population, bond and free, were barred, some by law and some by economic circumstances from participation in the formation of a middle class normal to a capitalist society. What could be done to prevent the poor dispossessed majority of European-Americans from joining with African-Americans to "Emmire themselves as deep in Rebellion as ever they did in Bacon's time"?

XIII

The codification of white supremacy

Sir Francis Bacon in 1625 distilled truisms of statecraft in his essay "Of Seditions and Troubles," two of which would prove to be particularly adaptable to the social control purposes of the Anglo-American continental plantation bourgeoisie, a century later and an ocean away. First, there was the importance of "hopes": "[I]t is a certain sign of a wise government and proceeding, when it can hold men's hearts with hopes when it cannot by satisfaction." Secondly, with acknowledgment to Machiavelli, Bacon advocated "dividing and breaking of all factions and combinations that are adverse to the state, and setting them at distance, or at least distrust among themselves."

It had not been surprising when, in 1676, rich landowners deserted Bacon's Rebellion, "setting them[selves] at a distance" from the laboring classes, bond and free, who had become the self-assertive main element in the rebellion. It was the "speedy seperation of the sound parts from the rabble" for which Virginia's representatives in England were hoping. But maintaining social control thereafter was a different sort of problem. Half the population was still made up of bond-laborers, the great majority of whom were denied even the hope of freedom, and half of the other half was made up of poor freemen, without practical hope of upward social mobility, and who were "not the beneficiar[ies] of the planting society." How to "hold [poor freemen's] hearts with hope" when they have no hope, precisely because the bond-laborers have no hope? How to "set at a distance" these laboring-class

poor to matter," why did the social order not revert to the normal class differentiation, Burke's "beautiful gradation" of "free men" from rich to the less rich, and so on through the scale, in which the free African-Americans could take their individual places according to their social class? Could they not have been expected, as James Madison once argued, to function properly in that social station. Given that, the "white race" as a social control formation, would have been a vicious redundancy. Instead, there was a general proscription of the free Negro, laws against emancipation, even by last will and testament, and banishment of those so freed. That, I submit, is unchallengeable evidence of the continued presence of poor whites who had "little but their complexion to console them for being born into a higher caste," yet served as the indispensable element of the "white race," the Peculiar Institution.

In seeking to understand his adoption of the "paradox" thesis, it seems helpful to consider the following passage from Morgan's 1972 presidential address to the Organization of American Historians:

> The temptation is already apparent to argue that slavery and oppression were the dominant features of American history and that efforts to advance liberty and equality were the exception, indeed no more than a device to divert the masses while their chains were being fastened. To dismiss the rise of liberty and equality in American history as a mere sham is not only to ignore hard facts, it is also to evade the problem presented by those facts. The rise of liberty and equality in this country was accompanied by the rise of slavery. That two such contradictory developments were taking place simultaneously over a long period of our history, from the seventeenth century to the nineteenth, is the central paradox of American history.

Morgan set out to meet the "challenge" of those who, in his opinion, overemphasize slavery and oppression in American history. Yet, the effect of his "paradox" thesis seems no less an apology for white supremacy than the "natural racism" argument. At the end of it all, he writes, "Racism made it possible for white Virginians to develop a devotion to...equality.... Racism became an essential... ingredient of the republican ideology that enabled Virginians to lead the nation." Then, as if shying at his own conclusion, Morgan suggests the speculation that perhaps "the vision of a nation of equals [was] flawed at the source by contempt for both the poor and the black." But, what

Carl N. Degler and Winthrop D. Jordan. Yet, in answer to the truly critical, though euphemistically put, question, "How could patricians win in popular politics?", Morgan offers an elaborate affirmation of the paradox theory.

The essence of Morgan's paradox, to the extent it is a true paradox, is a renewal of the same euphemism of the system of white supremacist and lifetime hereditary bond-servitude that characterized the opinions of Burke and Dew. Unconsciously paraphrasing Edmund Burke, Morgan says, "Virginians may have had a special appreciation of the freedom dear to republicans, because they saw every day what life without it could be." T. R. Dew and others, are recognized in Morgan's approvingly quoted observation of Sir Augustus John Foster, an English diplomat who traveled in Virginia at the beginning of the nineteenth century: "Owners of slaves among themselves are all for keeping down every kind of superiority." It is pure Dew again when Morgan shares Foster's view that "whites" in Virginia, "can profess an unbounded love of liberty and democracy…[because] the mass of the people who in other countries might become mobs [in Virginia are] nearly altogether composed of their" African-American lifetime bond-laborers.

Morgan rests his argument on the assumption that early in the eighteenth century, "the mass of white Virginians were becoming landowners," and the small planters began to prosper, thus giving the large and small planters "a sense of common identity based on common interests." This feeling, says Morgan, was sufficient basis for the small planters to put their trust in the ruling plantation bourgeoisie and thus cease to be a danger to social order.

Sources cited here such as Jackson Turner Main, Gloria Main, T. J. Wertenbaker, Aubrey C. Land, Willard F. Bliss, Russell R. Menard, and Allan Kulikoff show that the economic assumption made by Morgan is open to serious question. In a passing reference to the growth of tenancy, Morgan supplies a bibliographical mention to Bliss and Jackson Main, but that is the limit of his concern with such studies, although they cast great doubt on his facile conclusion that of European-Americans "[t]here were too few free poor to matter," a conclusion without which his "paradox" unravels.

Morgan, in passages that I have previously cited with approval, declared that the answer to the problem of social control was a series of deliberate measures taken by the ruling class to "separate dangerous free whites fromdangerous slave blacks." But if, as the country moved "Toward the Republic," and after it got there, among "whites" there were "too few free

"factions" whose interests were "adverse to the state?"

Since it was impossible to maintain the hopes of the freemen for upward social mobility in plantation society, the very resentment felt by the poor freemen on this account was to be manipulated in such a way as to "set them at distance" from the bond-laborers who had no hope of freedom.

A new social status was to be contrived that would be a birthright of not only Anglos, but of every Euro-American, a "white" identity designed not only to set them "at a distance" from the African-American bond-laborers, but at the same time to enlist European-Americans of every class as active, or at least passive, supporters of capitalist agriculture based on chattel bond-labor. The introduction of this counterfeit of social mobility was an act of "social engineering," the essence of which was to reissue long-*established* common law rights, "incident to every free man," but in the form of *"white" privileges*: the presumption of liberty, the right to get married, the right to carry a gun, the right to read and write, the right to testify in legal proceedings, the right of self-directed physical mobility, and the enjoyment of male prerogatives over women. The successful societal function of this status required that not only African-American bond-laborers, but most emphatically, free African-Americans be excluded from it. It is that status and realigning of the laboring-class European-Americans that transformed class oppression into racial oppression.

The distinction was emphasized even for European-American chattel bond-laborers, whose presumption of liberty was temporarily in suspension. Any owner of an African-American, practically without hindrance, could legally use or abuse his African-American bond-laborers, or dispose of them by gift, bequest, sale, or rental as a matter of course, but by a law enacted in 1691, he was forbidden to set them free. On the other hand, "to be white gave the distinction of color even to the agricultural [European-American bond-] servants, whose condition, in some respects, was not much removed from that of actual slavery." The revised Virginia code of 1705 took pains to specify unprecedented guarantees for the European "christian white" limited-term bond-laborers. Before, masters had merely been required not to "exceed the bounds of moderation" in beating or whipping or otherwise "correcting," the bond-laborer, it being provided that the victim if one could get to the Justice of the Peace and then to the next County Court, "shall have remedy for his grievances." The new code provided that, upon a second offense by a master in treatment of "servants (not being slaves)," the courts could order that the

servant be taken from that master and sold at outcry.

Freedom dues for limited-term bond-laborers had never been specified in Virginia law, but were merely referred to in court orders by the loose term "corn and clothes." The 1705 code, however, noting that "nothing in that nature ever [had been] made certain," enumerated them with specificity: "to every male servant, ten bushels of corn, thirty shillings in money (or the equivalent in goods), a gun worth at least twenty shillings; and to every woman servant, fifteen bushels of corn, forty shillings in money (or the equivalent in goods)." The new code forbade the master to "whip a christian white servant naked, without an order from the justice of the peace," the offending master to be fined forty shillings payable to the servant. Lifetime bond-laborers were not to have freedom dues, of course, but they had been allowed to raise livestock on their own account, and to have them marked as their own. But in 1692, and again in 1705 with greater emphasis, livestock raised by African-American bond-laborers on their own account were ordered to be confiscated.

The act of 1723 that was the subject of the correspondence between Governor Gooch and the Board of Trade was by no means the first evidence in the law of ruling-class desire not only to impose lifetime hereditary bond-servitude on African-Americans, but to implement it by a system of *racial oppression*, expressed in laws against free African-Americans. Such were the laws, several of which have been previously noted, making free Negro women tithable; forbidding non-Europeans, though baptized christians, to be owners of "christian," that is, European, bond-laborers; denying free African-Americans the right to hold any office of public trust; barring any Negro from being a witness in any case against a "white" person; making any free Negro subject to thirty lashes at the public whipping post for "lift[ing] his or her hand" against any European-American (thus to a major extent denying Negroes the elementary right of self defense); excluding free African-Americans from the armed militia; and, forbidding free African-Americans from possessing "any gun, powder, shot, or any club, or any other weapon whatsoever, offensive or defensive."

The denial of the right of self-defense would become a factor in the development of the peculiar American form of male supremacy, white-male supremacy, informed by the principle that any European-American male could assume familiarity with any African-American woman. That principle came to have the sanction of law. I have earlier cited the Maryland Provin-

"attaching themselves" to the struggle against the master class.

These Virginia debates thus gave testimony to the degradation that a century and a half of white supremacy had brought to the poor whites who had forgotten those blood-vows sworn by the triumphant light of the Jamestown fire, and in the gloaming waiting for Grantham.

XV
The white race and theories of American History

Among the several theories that historians have produced as guides to the general course of—the contours of—American history, there are two—"the paradox theory" and "the frontier theory"—to which the argument of this essay is particularly relevant.

The "Paradox" and Edmund S. Morgan

The paradox theory projects an assessment of white supremacism in relation to the foundation of the United States as a republic in a positive light. The essence of the thesis is that democracy and equality as represented in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of 1789, were, by the logic of history, made possible by racial oppression. The lineage of this idea goes back to at least 1758, when Edmund Burke argued that "whites" in the southern colonies were more "attached to liberty" than were the colonists in the North because in the South freedom was a racial privilege. Early nineteenth-century Virginia scholar Thomas Roderick Dew contended that slavery made possible and actual "one common level" of equality "in regard to whites." "The menial and low offices being all performed by the blacks," he continued, "there is at once taken away the greatest cause for distinction and separation of the ranks of society."

It especially disappointing to find Edmund S. Morgan espousing this doctrine. Professor Morgan's *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia*, appeared in the afterglow of the civil rights struggles, sacrifices, and victories of the 1960s. It was a trenchant contribution to the socio-economic and "deliberate choice" explanation of the origin of racial slavery in Anglo-America, and it supplied the most substantial refutation that had yet appeared of the "natural racism" interpretation of the origin of racial oppression in Anglo-America, most notably represented in works by

Yet, the position of the poor laboring-class European-Americans, vis-a-vis the rich and powerful owners of bond-laborers, was not improved, by the white-skin privilege system. That system, after all, was conceived and instituted as an alternative method to the of Grantham and Berkeley, but with precisely the same aims and effect. On that there is unimpeachable testimony.

In 1831, less than a hundred miles from the spot where, in 1676, the "four hundred English and Negroes in Armes" had wanted to shoot Berkeley's mendacious Captain, or cut him in pieces, there occurred that brief uprising of lifetime bondlaborers known as Nat Turner's Rebellion. That event sent a premonitory shudder through the frame of the United States ruling plantation bourgeoisie. It brought to the surface thoughts and dreads not ordinarily spoken. All that winter and spring of 1831–32 the Virginia Legislature and the press debated the meaning and possible consequences of this battle-cry of labor enslaved. They were looking to their defenses and they talked much of the poor whites.

T.J. Randolph, nephew and namesake of the author of the Declaration of Independence, put the rhetorical question to his fellow legislators, "...upon whom is to fall the burden of this defense [against revolt by African-American bond-laborers]: not upon the lordly masters of their hundred slaves, who will never turn out except to retire with their families when danger threatens. No sir, it is to fall...chiefly upon the non-slaveholders...patrolling under a compulsory process, for a pittance of seventy-five cents per twelve hours...."

George W. Summers of Kanawha County (now a West Virginia county) surely made many in the House of Delegates wince. "In the character of Patroles," he said, the poor white "is thus made to fold to his bosom, the adder that stings him." "Civis," an Eastern Virginia owner of lifetime hereditary bond-laborers, pointed out that in his part of the state more than half the white minority had "little but their complexion to console them for being born into a higher caste." In a reply to a letter written by Thomas Roderick Dew (under the pseudonym, "Appomattox"), the editor of the *Richmond Enquirer*, though defending the notion of forced removal of African-Americans to Africa, spoke a truth that bore profounder implications than he intended regarding the plight of the European-American workers in Virginia: "... forced to wander vagabonds around the confines of society, finding no class which they can enter, because for the one they should have entered, there is substituted an *artificial system* of labor to which they cannot attach themselves." Indeed! The artificial, system of labor that prevented them from

cial Court decision of 1767 that "a slave had no recourse against the violator of his bed." "The law simply did not criminalize the rape of slave women," writes Philip Schwarz, "No Virginia judge heard [such] a case...." Free African-American women had practically no legal protection in this respect, in view of the general exclusion of African-Americans, free or bond, from giving testimony in court against "whites."

The Virginia Assembly gave due attention to reinforcement of the "screen of racial contempt" that was intended in these laws. Explicit measures were put in place to guarantee that the people were systematically propagandized in the moral and legal ethos of white supremacism. Provisions were included for that purpose in the 1705 "Act concerning Servants and Slaves" and in the Act of 1723, "directing the trial of Slaves...and for the better government of Negros, Mulattos, and Indians, bond *or free*." To prevent any "pretense of ignorance," the laws mandated that parish clerks or churchwardens, once each Spring and Fall at the close of Sunday service read ("publish") these laws in full to the congregants. Sheriffs were ordered to have the same done at the courthouse door at the June or July term of court. If we presume, in absence of any contrary record, that this mandate was followed, the general public was regularly and systematically subjected to official white supremacist agitation. It was to be drummed into the minds of the people that, for the first time, no free African-American was to dare to lift his or her hand against a "Christian, not being a negro, mulatto or Indian"; that African-American freeholders were no longer to be allowed to vote; that the provision of a previous enactment was being reinforced against the mating of English and Negroes as producing "abominable mixture" and "spurious issue."; that, as provided in the 1723 law for preventing freedom plots by African-American bond-laborers, "any white person...found in company with any [illegally congregated] slaves," was to be fined (along with free African-Americans or Indians so offending) with a fine of fifteen shillings, or to "receive, on his, her, or their bare backs, for every such offense, twenty lashes well laid on."

Thus was the "white race" invented as the social control formation whose distinguishing characteristic was not the participation of the owners of bond-laborers; that alone would have yielded merely a normal form of class differentiation. What distinguished this system of social control, what made it "the white race," was the participation of the European-American laboring classes, non-slaveholders, self-employed smallholders, tenants, and

laborers. Indeed, Governor Notley's 1677 prophecy—with a reversal of subject and object—became reality: The "men in power" had found a way to have the "common [European-American] people" agree with them in keeping down African-Americans, free and bond. In time this white race social control system begun in Virginia and Maryland, would serve as the model of social order to each succeeding plantation region of settlement.

XIV
White–skin privileges—the bait and the hook

This system of white-skin privileges had not been initiated by the European-American laboring classes, but by the plantation bourgeoisie, the owners of bond-laborers. At the same time, European-Americans found themselves increasingly superseded in their trades by lower-cost lifetime bond-laborers. After a brief period of "seasoning" in ruling-class white supremacist regulation and indoctrination, these tradesmen reacted to their plight—not by demanding an end to bond-servitude—but by pleading for preference in employment. Having settled for this ruinous bargain, the tradesmen invariably couched their complaints in terms that could not be considered a threat to the "rights" of the owners to train and directly employ bond-laborers in skilled trades. In 1742, white tradesmen in South Carolina pleaded for the exclusion of Negroes from the skilled trades. The following year the colony's Commons House of Assembly responded by agreeing "that no slaves that shall hereafter be brought up to any mechanic trades shall be suffered to work for any other than their own masters." In 1750, the same legislature excepted owners of bond-laborers from the provisions of a law, "That no Handicrafts Man shall hereafter teach a Negro his Trade."

Georgia colony, founded by its Trustees in 1732 on the no-slavery principle, was territory irresistible to the South Carolina plantation bourgeoisie anxious to "grow the economy," as it might be put today. They soon began to campaign for an end of this government interference with free enterprise. In the course of the controversy, a Savannah man objected that abandonment of the founding principle "would take work from white men's hands and impoverish them, as in the case of Charleston [South Carolina], where the tradesmen are all beggars by that means." The promoters of the slavery cause countered by saying that "the negroes should not be allowed to work at anything but producing rice...and in felling timber." By way of response, the

1750 Act repealing the ban on slavery in Georgia barred the employment of Negroes except in cultivation and coopering. These provisions were, in terms of "white" labor privileges, considered superior to South Carolina's regulation, which related only to free or "hired-out" African-American craftsmen.

Deficiency laws, in a mode often akin to latter-day "featherbedding," provided jobs for European-American workers simply for being "white." In 1712, the South Carolina Assembly, for example, passed a law stipulating that at any plantation six miles or more remote from the owner's usual abode, for every "Six Negroes or other Slaves" employed, a quota of "One or more White Person" must be kept there. Ten years later, the quota was one to ten, but that applied to the home plantation as well as those far removed. The repeal of the no-slavery principle in Georgia in 1750 included a similar privileged opportunity for propertyless European-Americans, by requiring the employment of "one white man Servant" on each plantation for every four African-American lifetime bond-laborers employed.

In 1831, the year of Nat Turner's Rebellion, "white" mechanics in Culpeper and Petersburg, Virginia, demanded that Negroes be barred from apprenticeship, and from any trade without a "white" overseer. In 1851, a similar petition from Norfolk betrayed a high degree of political sophistication. Barring Negroes from competing for employment, they said, would guarantee against "jealousy between slave holders and non-slaveholders." Slaveholding would end, but the "white race" solidarity would remain the country's most general form of class collaborationism, by virtue of the persistence of the system of racial privileges for "white" workers.

The effort bore fruit as far as danger from the European-American bond-laborers was concerned. As Winthrop D. Jordan notes, "[T]he fear of white servants and Negroes uniting in servile rebellion, a prospect which made some sense in the 1660s and 70s...vanished completely during the following half-century." He continues with a corollary: "Significantly, the only rebellions of white servants in the continental colonies came before the entrenchment of slavery. Worse, still, the poor and propertyless European-Americans became the principal element in the day-to-day enforcement of racial oppression..." "The immediate control of the Negroes," writes Thomas J. Wertenbaker, "fell almost entirely into the hands of white men of humble means." It was they who mainly made up the "slave patrols" and, as historian Philip Schwartz says, "Patrollers were the ultimate means of preventing insurrection."