

CONSERVATISM AND RACISM IN AMERICA FROM THE CIVIL WAR UNTIL THE GREAT DEPRESSION



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CONSERVATISM AND RACISM IN AMERICA FROM THE CIVIL WAR UNTIL THE GREAT DEPRESSION

Professor Jack Bloom has been a critical reference in helping us think about conservatism: its genesis, metamorphoses and common core. He does this, of course, from the context of his empirical work: the USA. However, I believe it is of the utmost importance for sociology to develop comparative analyses to understand how, in a given configuration, specific dimensions emerge, while in another, they are hidden; how, in different contexts, constellations of values, immersed in their social contexts, gain or lose strength; how, finally, disparate coalitions of social agents mobilise or, on the contrary, disappear. Comparative analysis is the salt of sociology, and conservatism, in its many guises, emerges worldwide.

Sociology will gain from accumulating knowledge, making ever more complete and daring syntheses, and detecting both invariants and social variants. This is the only way to combat rhizomatic dispersion and the temptation of Sisyphus.

Finally, his reflections, consolidated over a long period, allow us to understand how class inequalities, racism and the collective action of social movements are articulated at every moment in concrete social formations.

In this text, we will find very stimulating analyses of the waves of conservatism in American society over the last two centuries. After all, conservatism, as a heterogeneous block of values, ideologies, discourses and behaviours, is not an essence or an uncreated process: it has a genesis and an evolution that can be periodised. The present always calls on the past, and it is in the past that the future is already inscribed. Let's learn to read this intersection of temporalities because the 'sleep of reason produces a monster'. We already know its claws.

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Conservatism and Racism in America From the Civil War Until the Great Depression^a

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The structural elements of race and class have deeply affected one another, while both of them have been deeply affected by the ideology of conservatism. It is important to understand that *slavery* in the United States was not primarily a *racial* system: it was a *class* system that created vast riches for the slaveowners, and it was the first basis of the country's wealth. In that period, the South was, by far, the most prosperous section of the country, and the most politically powerful section, as well. So, how did race fit in? Race was the legitimation, the justification for enslaving these people, for using torture to force them to labor under arduous conditions, and to render them as things, with no feelings or concerns that their owners had to take into account. The claim was that people of the African race were inferior to whites, that they were not truly human, that they did not have the same intellectual abilities as their owners, that they did not feel pain as whites did, that hard work under a hot sun did not bother them as it did whites, and that a whole string of other supposed characteristics differentiated them from people of European descent. Therefore, they could be forced to do things that would be too difficult for whites to do. After slavery, these stereotypes persisted.

The slave system was the basis of the conservatism that was created on the North American continent. Similarly, race and racism provided an important basis for conservative power in the United States after slavery ended. Conservatives were dominant for much of American history, but never unless they were closely associated with racism and racists and the dogma of white supremacy. I have identified three periods in American history when conservatives dominated:

1. Slavery—which lasted from the colonial period, through the beginnings of the Republic until the Civil War ended it.
2. From the period of Reconstruction, which refers to the period after the Civil War, during which the federal government attempted to impose racial equality upon the South, until the Great Depression of the thirties, though some elements of it persisted to near the end of the twentieth century. That period began as the national government tried to transform race relations in the post-Civil War South. Ultimately, that effort failed, and then the country went way to the right.
3. The third period began with the presidency of Ronald Reagan—who assumed power in 1981—and it continues today. The Trump movement is part of it.

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In this article, I will be talking about that second period, from Reconstruction until the New Deal that was born out of the Great Depression of the thirties. The period lasted for over a half century. The amount of time it lasted mattered: its policies did not just keep being repeated. Rather, conservatism had time to develop and to become increasingly extreme, as ideas and policies built upon one another, and as it was applied to new groups of people, beyond Africans and their descendants. Conservatives began defensively, seeking to keep from having policies of social equality imposed on them, regardless of their feelings about them. Later, they went on the offense and proceeded to attempt, often successfully, to spread their ideas and their practices about white supremacy into the rest of the country. So, we can speak of defensive and offensive conservatism. During this time, more and more groups were defined as not white, and therefore as subject to inferior regard and treatment. As the end of the period approached, the nation suffered the largest and worse set of race riots in American history.

One should also bear in mind that at that time, the Republican Party was America's progressive party. It stood for working people against slavery, for social and political equality. The Republican Party did not only fight to end slavery, and to attempt to integrate the former slaves into the nation on the basis of equality. It also advanced the Homestead program that allowed people to attain public land for their private usage and thereby create their own wealth. It provided the states with thousands of acres of public land that they could sell to provide the basis for establishing public universities which it stipulated were to be tuition-free. The Democratic Party at that time was the party of white supremacy, the party of secession, of states' rights (against the federal government). It was pro-slavery, against Black people. Obviously, there has been a major transformation. I explained how the Democratic Party changed in my first book, *Class, Race and the Civil Rights Movement*¹. The book that I am now researching, and that this article is a part, will, among other things, explain how and why the Republican Party changed its character.

Let's begin by looking at what was happening in the U.S. as the presidential election unfolded. In this way, we can see the relevance of what we will be examining:

- Donald Trump has run the most racist campaigns, and the most racist presidency in over a century, since that of Woodrow Wilson, who was president from 1913-1921. In truth, to find a comparable example, we would have to go back to Andrew Jackson, who sent Native Americans on a forced march from the Southeast to Oklahoma, over a third of whom died on the trip, so he could open the territory for more slavery.
- When Trump began his campaign in 2015, he opened with these words: "When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those prob-

lems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.”²

- In 2017, just months after Trump took office, the right held a rally in Charlottesville, VA, where the University of Virginia is located. They held a nighttime march, bearing torches, that were intentionally reminiscent of Nazi rallies in Germany, and chanting “Jews will not replace us!”
- Note this, for this idea—of replacement--has deep roots in American history—the idea that the people who immigrate to the U.S. will push those already there aside. A little over a century ago, people were worried about Italians and Jews and Hungarians and Slavs, and generally they feared that people from eastern and southern Europe would swamp them. Now, the concern is about Mexicans, Central and South Americans, Muslims, Asians and Africans.
- That march included members of the alt-right, neo-Confederates, neo-fascists, white nationalists, neo-Nazis, Klansmen, and far-right militias. The next day, one of the counterdemonstrators was murdered when a car intentionally drove into her. Trump said that these people from the far-right were “very fine people!”³
- Trump said that he wanted more immigrants from places like Norway rather than from what he called “shithole counties” like Haiti and those in Africa. “Why are we having all these people from shithole countries come here?” he complained.⁴
- In the election of 2024, Donald Trump literally used Hitler’s rhetoric when he said: “They are poisoning our country. They’re coming from all over the world. They’re coming from prisons. They’re coming from mental institutions and insane asylums. They’re terrorists. Absolutely...that’s poisoning the blood of our country.”⁵
- When people pointed out that he was stealing Hitler’s lines, he denied having read Hitler and therefore being aware of where his rhetoric originated. Okay, he wasn’t channeling Hitler; he and Hitler just think alike!

The racism that Trump expresses draws upon a long-existing, deep history of racial animosity that has been central to America for a very long time. It began with the war between the Europeans and the Native population; it continued with plundering and kidnapping people from Africa. It included stealing the land and goods of Mexicans.

Even before Trump came along, the Republican Party had made itself into a party where white supremacists could feel comfortable, beginning in 1964, with the opposition expressed by Senator Barry Goldwater, the Republican nominee for the presidential elec-

tion that year, to the Civil Rights Act that was passed then. As a student of social movements, the dynamism of the conservative movement has been unmistakable to me. So, I began examining the right as a significant social movement even before Trump came along.

I came of age during the civil rights movement in the U.S. It profoundly shaped my outlook and values. I thought we had won a decisive, irreversible victory then. But, we now know that we have been living in a period of reaction to the civil rights movement, and the movements that it engendered, that has been in power for almost 45 years, since Ronald Reagan became president in 1981, and that many of the gains of the civil rights era have been taken back—like the Voting Rights Act, which came out of the efforts of activists in Selma, Alabama in 1965, and which has been virtually nullified by the conservative-dominated Supreme Court.

So, I wondered what conservatism had been like in the previous era when conservatism was dominant to see what that was like, and in particular, what was the relationship of conservatism to racial oppression in America. To do that I had to go back to the end of the Civil War to see what happened there. It was an era I had previously visited when I was writing my first book. At that time, I was trying to understand the struggle for power in the South that had taken place at that time. Now, I was interested in how that same conflict had affected the structure of power in the nation.

What I found in that lengthy period, was that the right-wing in power became increasingly extreme in its racist tendencies as time went on. In this period, southern whites were fighting two battles. One was a race war, in which the federal government with its army occupying the South, sought to impose social equality among Blacks and whites. It was a program which southern whites were simply unwilling to accept—and that they were prepared to resist, pretty much “by any means necessary,” a term that Malcolm X used, but that has characterized many struggles for power.

The other battle was a class war over which class would be dominant in the postwar South, where slavery no longer existed. Both the former slaves and the poor whites challenged the former plantation ruling class after the Civil War. This was a conflict which persisted for most of the rest of the nineteenth century, but that burst into an open electoral struggle in the last decade of the nineteenth century.. When it was over, the landed ruling class that had been in control during the slavery period, was once again the dominant power. It had been somewhat transformed, but it was still the landowning class, and it once again had political control.

The conflict that had brought about the Civil War did not end with the defeat of the southern army. Why not? Because southern whites were still convinced of the justice of

their positions, and because their interests were significantly threatened by the program which the abolitionists attempted to impose on them. So, they refused to acquiesce, despite their being occupied by the Union army. This is an important point that scholars of social movements sometimes overlook: because those who are defeated in conflicts do not give up, do not disappear and do continue to resist in new ways, the outcome may not be what the victors sought. After the victories of the civil rights movement, I and many participants of the civil rights movement thought we had won a permanent victory. We were not prepared for the continuing resistance that the white South exhibited. I now understand that a defeated side can come back, even years later. The political reaction to the Civil War and Reconstruction lasted about a century. The reaction to the civil rights movement of the mid-twentieth century is now in its sixth decade, with no indication that it is slowing down or losing momentum.

So, the opposition to the program that the victorious federal government attempted to impose upon the South took a new form. To end this resistance would have required doing away with the landowning class, by dividing their property up among their slaves, whose labor had given the land its value. That was something that the dominant capitalist class in the country was unwilling to do, so the resistance persisted.

White southerners began their **ideological** war immediately when hostilities ended, as they insisted upon the superiority of the white race and the inferiority of the former slaves. The war where actual shots were fired against racial equality began almost immediately after the Civil War ended. Six weeks after President Lincoln gave his Second Inaugural Address, which was attended by John Wilkes Booth, Lincoln's assassin. There, Booth decided that Lincoln planned for black citizenship—which was his death warrant.⁶ Lincoln's assassination was the first act of the new war. It occurred just one week after the main southern army, led by Robert E Lee, had surrendered to General Grant. It was not just Lincoln whom they tried to kill: that night there were other attempted assassinations of his vice-president, and his secretary of state.

The second act of the new phase of the war was the formation of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) at the end of 1865, by former Confederate officers. The KKK dressed themselves in robes, masks and hoods and used them literally to terrorize by means of a guerilla war against Blacks and their white supporters. So, now the resistance had its own military—which was not used against the Union Army, but against African Americans and their white supporters (of whom there were many).

Now, southern whites responded to the legal end of slavery by passing what came to be called the Black Codes. These were laws that allowed white southerners to arrest the former slaves with newly-created prohibitions – like requiring them to have jobs and to be at those jobs, or be labeled “vagrants,” which would subject them to arrest, which effectively

re-enslaved them. Rather than being locked in cells (which didn't exist), they were hired out, with first option going to their former owners. Moreover, when they had been slaves, they were an investment by their owners who, because of the value of the slave, would not want to work them to death. But when they hired convicts, there was no such prohibition and they felt free to work them to death, and they often did so.⁷

The Congress responded to this defiance of its program by passing the Civil Rights Act of 1866, which stated that Blacks were citizens with equal rights with all other citizens. They also passed the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments to the Constitution, which transformed the Constitution by strengthening the central government over the states. The first ten amendments to the Constitution, known as the Bill of Rights, all limited the powers of the federal government, but did not apply to the states. So, for example, if one wrote a critical article about the governor of one's state, he could be put in prison. While slavery had been a state choice, now it was prohibited by the Thirteenth Amendment. The Fourteenth Amendment applied the Bill of Rights to the states, and made it the job of the federal government to make sure that those rights were guaranteed. Before its passage, one was a citizen of one's state; now if you were born in the U.S., you were a citizen of the United States and a resident of a state.

But, ending slavery also ended the infamous three-fifths clause in the Constitution. That clause specified that slaves were worth three-fifths of a person for purposes of representation. That meant that the slaveowners got additional representation in the House of Representatives and in the electoral college, because of course the slaves were unable to vote. How much extra representation did they get? Thirty-seven representatives, which amounted to about fifteen percent of the House, and a similar increase in votes in the electoral college that actually elected the president. No surprise that ten of the first twelve presidents were slaveholders. (The other two were one-term presidents.) So, the Congress responded by passing the Fifteenth Amendment, which prohibited denying the right to vote for reason of race or previous condition of servitude.

Together, these three amendments to the Constitution are known as the Reconstruction Amendments. They are sometimes seen as representing a new founding of the country. Eric Foner, the leading scholar of Reconstruction in the United States, entitled a book about this matter: *The Second Founding: How the Civil War and Reconstruction Remade the Constitution*. The abolitionists, who pushed these measures through Congress, were now seeking to accomplish what Lincoln had called "a new birth of freedom" that would come out of the terrible mayhem caused by the Civil War.⁸

The federal government used the military to attempt to suppress the efforts to force the former slaves back into a situation that approached slavery. But, by no means were they always successful. White southerners responded to federal efforts to ensure free and

fair elections by stealing and stuffing ballot boxes; they used violence to prevent the former slaves from voting; they emphasized racist propaganda; and they organized racist attacks on the former slaves. They ultimately succeeded in ending the military occupation.

To get some sense of how white southerners saw the situation, see how the *Atlanta News* put it: “We have submitted long enough to indignities, and *it is time to meet brute force with brute force. Every Southern state should swarm with White Leagues [meaning KKK-modeled organizations] and we should stand ready to act the moment [President] Grant signs the civil rights bill [emphasis in original]...* The signing of the bill will be a declaration of war against the southern states.”⁹ There is little doubt that they saw themselves at war.

They were clear that they were unwilling to accept any notion of Black equality, be it social, political, economic or whatever. A whole series of race riots followed over the years. White race riots meant Black deaths, beatings, rapes, burglaries and arsons. These disturbances began almost immediately in Memphis, Tennessee at the start of May, 1866 and in New Orleans at the end of July the same year. They were followed by a whole series of such actions, in Colfax, Louisiana in 1873, where the riot was really a coup, in which a Black-based government was removed; in Danville, Virginia in 1883; in Wilmington, North Carolina in 1898; in Atlanta, Georgia in 1906. These mass attacks stand out for their destructiveness, which was as much political as being simple acts of violence. Their purpose was to encourage African-Americans to abandon the hope either of being able to influence the direction of events or of freedom from such repression.

The riots that I have just named were hardly alone. Many other attacks on Blacks were carried out during this lengthy period, often with large numbers of casualties. Their purpose was clearly to terrorize Blacks and their white supporters, and to drive both either out of the region or underground, where they would remain silent. The Equal Justice Initiative has documented some thousands of killings of Blacks, and there were certainly white victims of the Klan, as well. There were other similar slaughters that took place in at least 24 places during Reconstruction between 1865 and 1874.

At the same time as these attacks on Blacks were taking place, the Supreme Court was invalidating the civil rights laws. According to the Court, these laws were unconstitutional. They also reinterpreted the Fourteenth Amendment to have little to offer to Blacks, and its benefits were instead bestowed on businesses. According to the Court, corporations were endowed with personhood, with all the rights inherent to persons. Then, when governments attempted to regulate the businesses, they were prevented from doing so because of the personal rights that the corporations were said to have. Somehow, the intent of the legislators, who passed the amendment specifically to protect Blacks, disappeared.

When, in the terrible depression of the 1890s, lower-class Blacks and whites joined together in the Populist Party to challenge the planter-controlled Democratic Party, they were quite successful in winning several elections. The ruling class responded to this threat to its power as it had to Reconstruction, with a combination of force and fraud: stealing and stuffing ballot boxes, murdering people who sought to vote, and racist propaganda. As before, this method allowed them to triumph.

Then, having learned a lesson, they turned to ensure that they would never again face such a united class threat to their rule. The state of Mississippi showed how to do it. Its leaders developed a way to deprive Blacks of their constitutional right to vote. By the end of the century, all the southern states had adopted this method. Instead of using *racial* criteria to decide who gets to vote, which the Fifteenth Amendment prohibits, they decided to use *class* criteria, which the Constitution does not prohibit. They used "literacy" tests, in which one had to interpret, to the satisfaction of the registrar, a section of the state constitution. Somehow, African-American aspirants to be voters could never give interpretations that the registrars would accept. They also had to pay what were called poll taxes to be able to vote. For a population who was kept impoverished, that was usually an insurmountable obstacle. Huge percentages of the Black population ended each year in debt, so they had no disposable income. The state governments had already passed laws that prevented convicted felons from voting ever, and those laws were often tailored to crimes that were more characteristic of Blacks than of whites. With all these measures, Black voting dropped by ninety-nine percent.

Many poor whites were also not exempt from some of these measures. This effect was not accidental. The plantation owners who were writing these measures knew how they would affect the poor whites, whom they referred to as "the ignorant and vicious whites." So, significant numbers of them likewise lost the right to vote, in the name of white supremacy. Sometimes, a quarter or even more of the white population, lost the right to vote, thereby securing the class rule of the landowners.¹⁰

The Supreme Court accepted this subterfuge and allowed this effort to undermine the basic rights both of the freedmen and of lower-class whites, all of whom were kept as a cheap labor force. Having lost the right to vote, the former slaves could not prevent the amount of money allocated to schools for their children from being drastically cut. Because they were not on the voter registration rolls, they could not serve on juries. Nor could they prevent the passage of the segregation laws, which were also ratified by the Supreme Court in 1896, in the infamous *Plessy v Ferguson* case. That Court decision effectively removed the Fourteenth Amendment as a source of protection for the former slaves. It was only finally reinstated in 1954, when the Court ruled that segregated schools discriminated against Blacks and undermined the equality that the Fourteenth Amendment required.

That was the **racial** conflict that was waged in this period. The **class** conflict that was fought over was central to understanding the structure of power in the South at that time. I contend that the racial practices and beliefs that were constructed in this period—the denial of political rights to blacks, forced segregation, and the degradation of blacks to second-class citizenship—were embedded within the class, economic, and political systems of the South. Southern racial customs emerged from that class structure and were retained because they were necessary to its functioning. The interest group that, above all others, depended upon black subordination and suppression was the agrarian upper class of the southern Black Belt. This class had both the need to subordinate Blacks and the power to do so, albeit in conjunction with other classes.

There had been immense damage done to the slaveowners because of the war. Most of their capital had been in slaves, which they lost without compensation, a revolutionary act that went way beyond what the United States ever did before or after. Much of the slaveowners' land was seriously damaged, as the war was mostly fought on their territory. Total destruction has been estimated in the billions of dollars. The war bonds that they had bought were repudiated by the victorious Union. Their cost of labor rose significantly, often more than doubling. They were also beset by the lack of capital available in banks to borrow. And they now found themselves heavily taxed by the new Reconstruction governments.

Nonetheless, the plantation survived. No longer slave owners, the plantation owners had to exist under conditions that required careful attention to moneymaking. As merchants and landlords, they had to deal with customers and tenants; and it was from them that they had to accumulate their fortunes. That would mean squeezing them as far as they could.

Meanwhile, how did the freed slaves, who owned nothing, survive? By borrowing from the supply merchants that grew up in the South. But why would the merchants make the loans? What collateral could the freedmen offer? What developed was a lien system, whereby the former slaves promised (by contract) to market their cotton crop to the merchant. Once that was done, the Black farmer had nothing else to offer, so his sole supplier was the merchant to whom he had given his lien. The merchant, then, was in a position to tell him what he could borrow: some food, some farm implements, seeds that they insisted be all cotton because if the farmer grew food, he would become more independent. The interest rates that the former slaves had to pay were very high: Estimates have ranged from 40 percent to 125 percent. And this was not for a whole year's time: the tallying was done at harvest time, and the borrowing was done only until then. The cost of the goods lent was also artificially high.

By 1877, the last of the Reconstruction regimes was driven out of the South, which proclaimed itself “redeemed.” Moreover, during the next couple of decades, the Reconstruction Amendments were rendered powerless in protecting Blacks. By then, the white South had won its **defensive battle** against the attempt on the part of the abolitionists to impose racial equality. Now, they turned to a form of **offensive conservatism**, in which they sought to lead the country to adopt their perspective on white supremacy and Black inferiority. One form that this approach took was an Ideological offensive: histories of the Civil War and of Reconstruction were written by southerners or by people who were sympathetic to the South. They denied that the Civil War had been about slavery, even though each of the states that seceded had made a statement that said that they were doing it to defend and retain slavery.

Rather, their line was that the war had supposedly been about states’ rights—but they didn’t say that the right they were seeking was the right to have slavery. Rather, the war had supposedly been waged by the South for what they now began to call “The Lost Cause,” —a memorialized notion of nobility and of racial harmony, in which African Americans were loyal and faithful to their masters before the war. It certainly romanticized the old South. Historian David Blight said:

“No argument in the Lost Cause formula became more an article of faith than the disclaimer against slavery as the cause of the war.... ‘In 1861,’ declared Judge H. H. Cook, ‘the southern people were the best informed, most energetic, the most religious and the most democratic people on earth.’ They had ‘no classes’ and ‘perfect equality’ among whites. As for the slaves, who had been imposed on them by Northern traders, they had nobly ‘civilized and Christianized 4,000,000 of this unfortunate race’. The Lost Cause imagined millions of willing and contented slaves in its nostalgic remembrance, with slaveholders in the role of providers and mentors for African bondsmen.”¹¹

As one other historian of the Lost Cause put it: “They never abandoned the belief that slavery was a divinely ordained institution, or the idea that Southerners had helped Christianize the Negroes, which they felt showed that they were carrying out God’s plan in bringing Africans to America.”¹²

The leading American historians of that period were sympathizers of the South. William A. Dunning, a history professor at Columbia University, developed a school which came to dominate historical thinking about the war and Reconstruction. Dunning summed up his analysis in a book (*Reconstruction, Political and Economic, 1865-1877*), in which he “denounces Radical Reconstruction and paints the White Southerners as the primary recipients of injustice during the era of Reconstruction.” He argued that:¹³

“The ultimate root of the trouble in the South had been, not the institution of slavery, but the coexistence in one society of two races so distinct in characteristics

as to render coalescence impossible; that slavery had been a *modus vivendi* through which social life was possible; that, after its disappearance, its place must be taken by some set of conditions which, if more humane and beneficent in accidents, must in essence express the same fact of racial inequality. The progress in the acceptance of this idea in the North has measured the progress in the South of the undoing of reconstruction.”

See how this analysis was framed: the problem was not slavery, but the existence of supposedly inferior human beings whose existence made slavery a necessity as they were purportedly incapable of acting in a civilized manner by themselves. It shows how slavery, by putting whites in control of Blacks, brought them to see the Blacks as inferior, as not having the same capacities as whites had.

Dunning’s book received rave reviews in the leading history journals and in 1913, he was elected president of the American Historical Association, all of which indicated that his point of view was generally embraced by most of the profession. That all set the framework that shaped how people learned about their country’s history. By early in the twentieth century, the whole country, North and South, had accepted the doctrine of white supremacy—meaning that people of European descent were the superior and dominant group in the world, and all the other peoples in the world were inferior to them. This was the dominant wisdom of the period.

An indication of this fact was that segregation became almost as characteristic in the North as in the South, though it was done differently. While the Southern states and localities passed segregation laws that required separate existences for Blacks and whites, the north passed no such laws. But, segregation still existed there because real estate agents would not show Blacks houses in white neighborhoods, and because if Blacks managed to avoid this barrier, mob action was used to drive them out. Given that children attended neighborhood schools, segregated housing meant segregated schools. And Blacks were denied many jobs—by employers who would not hire them except as strikebreakers when their white workers went on strike, and by many white unions who refused to allow them to become members. (It is important to note that there were some important unions which did organize Blacks.) Blacks were denied jobs where they would meet the public—as maître de’s, as waiters and waitresses, as automobile salesmen, and many others.

People who were sympathetic to the white South’s cause became the principal interpreters of that period of American history. Whereas it is common to say that the winners of wars usually write the histories, in this case, the losers wrote the histories. So, it should not be surprising that the histories they produced argued that what had actually happened—the Civil War and Reconstruction—was a terrible mistake, a great tragedy that did much harm to the country.

The white South's ideological offensive went beyond textbooks. On May 29, 1890, an enormous statue of Robert E. Lee, the Confederacy's Commander-in-Chief of its armed forces, was unveiled in Richmond, Virginia, which had been the capital of the Confederacy. It was the first of what became the construction of thousands of such memorials—some big, some small—throughout what had been the Confederacy, and this trend even spread into the northern states. These memorials drove home the lesson that the white South's policies had been legitimate.¹⁴ (In the twenty-first century, The Lee memorial in Richmond was taken down, as were several other memorials, despite considerable resistance to such actions in several places. Many of them still remain.)

It was also in the decade of the nineties that the United Confederate Veterans (UCV) was formed (1893), and the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC, 1894). In 1896, it was the United Sons of Confederate Veterans (USCV). These organizations guaranteed that the reverence for the southern rebellion would continue for at least another generation, and in fact there is still a lot of support for the memorials, and well over a third of Americans believe not that the flag was the traitor's flag or that it represents racism, but that it simply represents "heritage." The older Americans are, the more likely they are to reject that it represents "heritage"¹⁵ rather than racism.

The United Daughters of the Confederacy were a major force in the construction of the many monuments that progressives fought to remove in the early twenty-first century. They battled for control of the understanding of the meaning of the Civil War and Reconstruction. They insisted on the inferiority of the former slaves' intellects, their character and of their ability and willingness to conform to accepted standards of conduct. They asserted that these supposed inabilities were the opposite of the superior qualities inherent in the white race. One historian at Columbia University, who was clearly influenced by the Dunning school, wrote: "The rule of the Negro and his unscrupulous...patrons, was an orgy of extravagance, fraud and disgusting incompetence."¹⁶ This was said despite the fact that Blacks were only a small minority of the legislators in almost every state.

It was not just that some historians glorified the slave-owning South and its position in the Civil War. The United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) insisted that this line had to be carried in the schools and that any history books for schools that did not live up to this requirement had to be rejected. Mildred Rutherford, one of the leaders of this movement, produced a pamphlet that laid out the criteria required for such histories, titled: *A Measuring Rod to Test Text-Books, and Reference Books in Schools*. Those choosing books were told to reject a book if it:¹⁷

- Didn't give the principles for which the South fought in 1861
- Said the South fought to hold her slaves
- Spoke of the southern slaveholder as cruel and unjust to his slaves.

The result was that an historian of the Supreme Court, writing in 1965 could refer to: "...the **almost universally held view** that the Reconstruction Congress and its chief architects were evil people motivated solely by hatred for the South and a consuming passion for vengeance, tempered only by a venal desire to milk the South financially by burdening it with an army of political parasites consisting of deserving Republican politicians from the North."¹⁸

By the early twentieth century, white supremacy had become the ideology that permeated most of the country. American history textbooks that most people read in schools were filled with it. So, white supremacy was dominant in the nation and its implication also was widely shared: everyone who was not white was considered inferior. And the list was far more inclusive than people today are likely even to imagine.

The atmosphere and understanding of these ideas spread far and lasted for a long time. For example, while preparing for, and during World War I, nine military bases established in the South were named after Confederate generals—who had been seen as traitors at one point—and who were then generally welcomed, with the hope of winning southern support for the war. These bases continued bearing these names until the third decade of the twenty-first century, so they endured for more than a century. There are still people who are demanding that the bases named for Confederate generals be given back those names.

When Blacks started leaving the South, they did not only go to the big cities in the North, where the overwhelming bulk of Blacks in the North live today. Many of them settled in little towns, especially in the Midwest. Indiana and Illinois were among other states that were filled with such towns. Sociologist James W Loewen exposed in his book *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism* that as he put it: "[B]lacks moved everywhere in America between 1865 and 1890. African Americans reached every county in Montana. More than 400 lived in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. City neighborhoods across the country were fairly integrated, too, even if [B]lack inhabitants were often servants or gardeners for their white neighbors."¹⁹

But, said Loewen, after 1890, towns all across the U.S. began expelling their Black residents and preventing others from moving in: "from California to Minnesota to Long Island to Florida, whites mounted little race riots against African Americans, expelling entire [B]lack communities or intimidating and keeping out would-be newcomers." Loewen called them "sundown towns" because, as he quoted from a former resident of Indiana who recalled the billboard outside his town that said: "'NIGGER, DON'T LET THE SUN SET ON YOU HERE' Such signs were posted on almost every small town in Indiana." Loewen argued that especially in the Midwest, towns with these racial restrictions were everywhere. He told us: "I identified a total of 231 Indiana towns as all-white. Of 95 towns, I confirmed all 95 as sundown towns. It is quite likely that 90 percent to 100 percent were sundown towns."²⁰

So, Black people who were forced out of all these towns and small cities were forced to move to the major urban centers. There, they were not welcomed by the white inhabitants. Rather, they were forced into separate areas within the cities, the so-called “ghettoes.” As more Blacks moved in during the Great Migration, the areas became increasingly crowded and slum-like, so those who had the means sought to break out of the ghetto, where housing was nicer and often more affordable. (For those who were trapped in the ghetto, where choices of housing were inherently limited, people ended up paying more and getting less than did whites in other areas of the city for comparable or even better housing.) Some would even get a supportive white person to purchase a home outside the ghetto, and then to transfer it to them. Whites, on the other hand, countered these Black aspirations with racially restrictive covenants that prohibited the sale of a home to a Black person (and often also to a Jewish person). These provisions were legally enforced until 1948. The other means used to keep Blacks out was mob violence.²¹

By 1900, 90 percent of the Black population still lived in the South. But a decade later, the “Great Migration” began, in which over the next several decades vast numbers moved out of the South, until about half of African Americans came to live elsewhere. It was not long into this process that, during and after World War I, occurred the worst set of race riots in American History. These riots resulted from a variety of conditions: the Great Migration brought Blacks into conflict with whites over jobs and housing; some of these whites were also southerners who had migrated and brought their attitudes with them. In Elaine, Arkansas, it was economic competition, in which the efforts of Black farmers to improve their lives by forming a union to enable them to get better prices for the cotton they grew, enrage the white population and led to armed conflict. Hundreds of Blacks were killed, many by the military, and scores of others were rounded up and charged with murder. Beyond these purported provocations, the sight of Blacks returning from the war, wearing their military uniforms, enraged some people and a number of Blacks were attacked. One had his eyes gouged out by a policeman after having fought for the U.S. in Europe; others were murdered. There was competition and therefore conflicts over jobs. It got very brutal: In East St. Louis, Illinois, across the river from St. Louis, Missouri, one black man had suffered severe head wounds; but, as he was not dead yet, the mob decided to hang him. “To put the rope around the negro’s neck,” noted a reporter, “one of the lynchers stuck his fingers inside the gaping scalp and lifted the negro’s head by it, literally bathing his hand in the man’s blood.” Whites did not allow their victims “to die easily;” when “flies settled on their terrible wounds, the dying blacks [were warned not] to brush them off.”²² In 1919, there were major riots in Chicago, Elaine, Arkansas, Knoxville, Tennessee; Charleston, South Carolina, Washington, DC, Longview, Texas and Omaha, Nebraska and at least 25 smaller ones.

There were other riots—massacres, really—in Rosewood, Florida and in Tulsa, Oklahoma. In both places, the Black community was decimated. In Tulsa, in 1921 the Greenwood section was a vibrant African-American community, with a population of nearly 8000. Its pro-

professional class had become so prosperous that the streets on which it conducted its business were collectively known as the Negro Wall Street. The southern end of Greenwood Ave, including adjacent side streets, housed dozens of African-American-owned and -operated businesses—grocery stores and meat markets, clothing and dry goods stores, billiard halls, beauty parlors and barbershops, as well as a drugstore, a jewelry store, an upholstery shop, and a photography studio. Greenwood's diverse economy comprised businesspersons and professionals as well as skilled and semiskilled workers. They included fifteen doctors, seven attorneys, a jeweler, and a skating rink proprietor. Because of racial segregation, these businesses served primarily African-Americans. There were two black newspapers, the *Tulsa Star* and the *Oklahoma Sun*. Greenwood was also home to a local business league, various fraternal orders, a YMCA branch, and a number of women's clubs.²³

On the evening of May 31, 1921, a white mob, many of whose members were drunk, gathered in front of the Tulsa jail and was apparently preparing to lynch a Black man who had been accused of attempting to assault a white woman. Some African-American men, including World War One veterans, came to the jail to prevent the lynching. During a scuffle between the white and Black men, shots were fired and "all hell broke loose." The mayor of Tulsa called out local units of the National Guard and deputized and armed them. The deputies were instructed to "go get...a nigger."²⁴

Over the next day, there was rampant violence and destruction of property in Greenwood. In the early hours of the morning of June 1, local units of the National Guard drove Black residents from their homes and looted many buildings before burning Greenwood to the ground. It is estimated that at least three hundred people were murdered during the Tulsa Race Massacre, which occurred 60 years after the end of slavery. Many of the riot victims were former slaves, or the children of slaves. Many whites defended the riot, claiming that it was the result of increasingly aggressive attitudes of African-Americans, who sought "social equality" following their service in WWI. But it is evident that immediately after the violence, wealthy whites tried to buy up the land on which the destroyed businesses and homes had been sitting, which they had coveted. Greenwood never reclaimed its place as the Negro Wall Street. Hundreds of blacks lost their lives and property, and many moved to other states, vowing never to return to Tulsa.

When U.S. troop training began for World War I, the idea of black soldiers receiving combat instruction alarmed many white Southerners. A confrontation regarding the rights of black soldiers culminated in the Houston riot of 1927.

This is where conservatism had led us well into the 1920s. In the 30s, unions learned from their mistakes of the past, when they had excluded Blacks from joining, and were regularly defeated. I have not discussed the role of class conflict in this period. It is important to know that it was significant, and that while workers won some victories, they generally lost

these battles. The 30s were a turning point for that, as well as the unions surged, organizing both Black and white workers, and the result is that even now there are conservatives who hope to do away with the gains that were won then.

There were many other forms that this notion of white supremacy took once it was developed against African-Americans, and against Native Americans, whom I have not discussed here, but against whom genocide was carried out for centuries. These ideas were later used against the Chinese, who also suffered vicious physical attacks, beatings burglaries, arsons and murders. They were the first group to suffer exclusion by immigration law, but hardly the last. Later, immigrants from eastern and southern Europe, became the objects of prejudice and discrimination. There was a period when many of these people were not considered "white," and it was decades before they came to be accepted into the privileged white caste. There was a fantasy that existed for the first half of the twentieth century that there was not one but three European races, and that, of course, the original settlers of the United States, who were Protestants from northern and western Europe, constituted the superior white race. Italians, Jews, Poles and others were also not really "white." In this period was also the rise of social Darwinism, and the passage of laws to keep out these supposedly inferior people, especially Catholics, Orthodox Christians and Jews because of the fear that they would "dilute" the "stock" of American society. So, during the holocaust, a ship containing almost 1000 Jews was not allowed to dock to disembark the passengers, who were sent back to Europe, where many of them died in the Nazi ovens. In order to keep the people who were considered inferior from "breeding," the practice of eugenics was instituted, beginning with a law passed in 1907 that allowed forcible sterilization. It went on until 1983, and an estimated 60,000-80,000 people were forced to undergo this invasive procedure.

Moreover, the United States was certainly the largest and wealthiest slave society in the modern world, and after slavery it continued to be the most diverse society in the world. It should not be a surprise that that country created one of the most fully-developed sets of racial concepts and prejudices. One indication of its impact, and of where it was going, was that the Nazis carefully studied American racial laws and mores. They noted the segregation laws, the laws that prohibited interracial marriage, sex and cohabitation; and they applied them to Jews, the Roma and others. Indeed, in that period, as the Nazis showed us that they could go far beyond what the U.S. had accomplished or intended with their cruel program of mass genocide, they may have saved the United States by showing what the consequences of such ideas could be. As a result, by the end of the war, those ideas had been largely discredited in the U.S.

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