

RACIST AMERICA

**Roots, Current Realities,
and Future Reparations**

Joe R. Feagin

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Racist Ideology as a Social Force

Creating a Racist Ideology The expansion of Europe from the 1400s to the early 1900s eventually brought colonial exploitation to more than 80 percent of the globe. The resulting savagery, exploitation, and resource inequalities were global, and they stemmed, as W. E. B. DuBois has noted, from letting a “single tradition of culture suddenly have thrust into its hands the power to bleed the world of its brawn and wealth, and the willingness to do this.”¹ For the colonizing Europeans it was not enough to bleed the world of its labor and resources. The colonizers were not content to exploit indigenous peoples and view that exploitation simply as “might makes right.” Instead, they vigorously justified what they had done for themselves and their descendants. Gradually, a broad racist ideology rationalized the oppression and thereby reduced its apparent moral cost for Europeans.

An ideology is a set of principles and views that embodies the basic interests of a particular social group. Typically, a broad ideology encompasses expressed attitudes and is constantly reflected in the talk and actions of everyday life. One need not know or accept the entire ideology for it to have an impact on thought or action. Thus, each person may participate only in certain fragments of an ideology. Ideologies are usually created by oppressors to cover what they do, and counterideologies are often developed by the oppressed in their struggle against domination.² In this chapter we examine a critical aspect of the social reproduction of

systemic racism from one generation to the next. The perpetuation of systemic racism requires an intertemporal reproducing not only of racist institutions and structures but also of the ideological apparatus that buttresses them.

The early exploitative relationships that whites developed in regard to African Americans and Native Americans were quickly rationalized, and they became enduring racist relations. From the beginning, racism has been webbed into most arenas of American life, including places of work and residence, and activities as diverse as eating, procreating, and child rearing. Racist practices in these life worlds create, and are in turn shaped by, basic racist categories in the language and minds of Americans, especially white Americans. A racist ideology has overarching principles and beliefs that provide an umbrella for more specific racist attitudes, prejudices, and stereotypes. In this chapter we examine in detail the overarching racist ideology of the American past and present, with an emphasis on the role of white elites in framing and perpetuating an antiblack ideology. In chapter 4 we will look at the present day, and focus on an array of specific antiblack attitudes and images in the United States, with an emphasis on the views of ordinary white Americans. As we will see, however, both chapters 3 and 4 and their subject matters are closely connected.

Major ideological frameworks, including racist frameworks, are typically created, codified, and maintained by those at the top of a society, although this construction takes place in ongoing interaction with the views and practices of ordinary citizens. Those with the greater power have the greater ability to impose their own ideas on others. As Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels long ago pointed out, "the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e. the class, which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force."³ Elites have dominated the creation, discussion, and dissemination of system-rationalizing ideas in business, the media, politics, education, churches, and government. While there is indeed much popularly generated racist imagery and discourse, even this is usually codified and embellished by the elites. As with most important ideas, if the elites had been opposed to the development of the racist ideology, they would have actively combated it, and it would likely have declined in importance. Thus, in his detailed analysis of the racist ideas and actions of presidents from George Washington to Bill Clinton, Kenneth O'Reilly has shown that conventional wisdom about presidents *following* a racist populace is wrongheaded. The historical evidence shows that most of the men who control U.S. political institutions have worked hard "to nurture and support the nation's racism."⁴ Racist thought did not come accidentally to the United States. It was, and still is, actively developed and propagated.

The Emerging Antiblack Ideology: Early Views For several centuries white ministers, business people, political leaders, academics, scientists, and media execu-

tives have developed and disseminated to all Americans a complex and variegated racist ideology that defends the theft of land and labor from Americans of color. The antiblack version of this ideology is the most developed; it has included a variety of religious, scientific, and psychosexual rationalizations for oppression. Although the ideology has been elaborated and changed somewhat over time, in all its variations it has operated to rationalize white power and privilege.

Positive Images of Africa: The Early Period Negative images of Africans and African Americans are now so commonplace that one might think that non-Africans have always held such views. This is not the case. Early Judeo-Christian writings, including sections of the Bible, reveal that images of Africans were often positive in the Middle East. In what Christians call the Old Testament, African kingdoms are frequently portrayed as strong societies and as allies of Jewish kings.⁵ Moreover, during the Greek and Roman periods Europeans generally attached far greater significance to Africans' learning, advanced culture, and nationality than to their physical characteristics. Africa and the Africans, from whom Greeks and Romans borrowed substantially for their own development, were seen in mostly positive terms. While individual Greeks or Romans did sometimes express negative views of Africans' physique or skin color, these views were never developed into a broad color consciousness viewing Africans as a greatly inferior species. Before the European slave trade began in the 1400s, the world had not seen a well-developed racist ideology.⁶

However, in the writings of early Christian leaders the idea of spiritual "darkness" was increasingly linked to concepts of sin, evil, and the devil. As Jan Pieterse tells us, "Origen, head of the catechetical school in Alexandria in the third century, introduced the allegorical theme of Egyptian darkness as against spiritual light."⁷ Gradually over the next several centuries Christian leaders and their followers came to associate evil, the devil, and non-Christian religions with notions of spiritual darkness and blackness. This set the stage perhaps for the next step in European thinking, which gradually associated Africans with negative views of darkness and blackness. Even so, there was still significant diversity in European perspectives on Africa in the Middle Ages. African (Ethiopian) Christian groups were well regarded and present at European church councils in the early 1400s, and some African religious figures were viewed in a positive light by many European Christians.⁸

Negative Images of the Colonized European colonialism changed this situation greatly for the worse. By the mid-1400s the Portuguese were sailing regularly to Africa and exporting Africans in chains. Ideas of European superiority were developed and fostered in the first imperialistic nations, Portugal and Spain, as they exploited the labor of, and took the resources of, many indigenous peoples. For a time, a few leading Catholic priests and theologians opposed the ruthless exploitation of indigenous populations, including the savage, often genocidal operations

of Spanish colonizers such as those led by Christopher Columbus against indigenous peoples in the Americas in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. However, in a 1550 debate the important Spanish theologian Gaines de Sepulveda argued that it was lawful to make war on and enslave indigenous populations because of their heathen, sinful, and uncivilized natures, which obligated the latter to serve those (the Spanish) with the superior culture. Sepulveda represented the dominant view and was perhaps the first European intellectual to defend the barbarity of colonialism in such comprehensive cultural terms.⁹

The English soon followed in the imperialistic ways of the Spanish. Prior to the English colonization of North America and much of the globe, some negative ideas about non-English peoples overseas were already current in England, perhaps coming from other European explorers. For example, in 1611, a few years before English colonists brought Africans into the Jamestown colony, William Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*—set perhaps on the island of Bermuda—had featured the sinister figure of Caliban. Caliban is portrayed as the dark other, as a “savage and deformed slave.” His mother is said to be from Africa. Caliban is portrayed as physically threatening to Prospero, a European man of intellect. The English had some negative images of certain cultural others before their overseas conquests were well underway.¹⁰

“Christians” Versus the “Uncivilized Others” From the 1600s to the 1800s English and other European Protestants dominated the religious scene on the Atlantic coast of North America, and their religious views incorporated notions of European superiority and non-European inferiority. The early English Protestants regarded themselves as Christian and civilized, but those they conquered as unchristian and savage. Religious and cultural imperialism accompanied economic imperialism.

Why were Europeans first to engage in large-scale imperialism and colonialism across the globe? One proposed reason points to the relative absence of mineral and agricultural resources in Europe. Another reason often suggested is that Europeans had the shipbuilding and military technologies to expand and colonize overseas. However, one other society, that of China, had developed the technological potential (for example, large sailing ships) for major overseas conquest well before the Europeans, but had not engaged in such large-scale conquest. Perhaps very important to the emergence of European imperialism was the early development of a strong acquisitive ethic, an ethic coupled with a missionary zeal convinced of the superiority of European civilization. This was early revealed in the conflicts of European Christians with Islamic regions that controlled access to spices and gold, land control that spurred European expansion across the oceans. European colonialism involved more than the we/they ethnocentrism common to many societies. In European colonialism, the we/they dichotomy becomes greatly accentuated, and the cultural other becomes much more than a traditional enemy. Europeans view themselves as culturally superior to all others. At the cen-

ter of European imperialism was a powerful drive to dominate the entire world, at whatever human cost, for economic and cultural gain.¹¹

By the late 1400s and early 1500s the emerging bourgeoisie in northern and western European societies adhered increasingly and strongly to values of individual acquisitiveness, market capitalism, and colonial expansion. The ever-spreading acquisitiveness and rapaciousness of the north European bourgeoisie was reinforced by the values of certain Protestant religions to which they adhered. The individualistic Protestant ethic did not create capitalism, but it did foster certain values of capitalism, including a rather greedy individualism that contrasted with the more collectivistic values of the majority of the world's peoples. Thus, throughout the British colonial period, the bloody conquests overseas were regularly consecrated by Christian ministers. The acquisitiveness and plunder of European colonialism and imperialism were not deviations from the dominant value system of the emerging bourgeoisie, but rather were part of a religiously reinforced pattern of behavior that eventually encompassed most of the globe.¹²

Most of the new colonists from Europe saw themselves as Christian people of virtue and civilization. From the first century of American colonization these Europeans frequently portrayed themselves as "virtuous republicans." They did not, or should not, have the instinctual qualities of the "creatures of darkness," the black and red Calibans they saw in their stereotyped images. Europeans were rational, ascetic, self-governing, and sexually controlled, while the African and Native American others were irrational, uncivilized, instinctual, and uncontrolled.¹³ The first non-Europeans with whom many European colonists came into contact were Native Americans. Rationalizing the often brutal destruction of Native American societies, European colonists developed early on some negative images of Native Americans. Native Americans were "uncivilized savages" to be killed off or pushed beyond the boundaries of European American society. Moreover, much white thinking about indigenous peoples in the first centuries alternated between great hostility, such as can be seen in the Declaration of Independence's complaint about "merciless Indian savages," and the paternalism seen in the image of a "noble savage" who was independent of the vices of Europeans. Novelists such as James Fenimore Cooper heralded what they saw as the diversity in character of the "native warrior of North America. In war, he is daring, boastful, cunning, ruthless . . . in peace, just, generous, hospitable, revengeful, superstitious, modest, and commonly chaste."¹⁴

In Europe and the Americas, an early and commonplace European or European American explanation for the exploitation and enslavement of other groups drew on an old religious myth based on the biblical story of Noah and his sons (Genesis 9-10), a myth that as we saw in chapter 1 can still be found among some white Christians today. This old story relates how a drunken Noah was encountered by three sons. Two of them, Shem and Japheth, did not look upon

him but covered his nakedness. Noah's son, Ham, had looked but did not cover him. As a result, Ham's son Canaan was cursed by Noah and told that he would be the servant of his brethren. A later version of this religious myth views Ham as African and as suffering the divine punishment of his descendants being made servants to other peoples, the descendants of Ham's brothers. However, in the Christian Bible there is nothing about Ham's African characteristics. It was later, in the Talmudic and Midrashic (Jewish) religious tradition, that Ham (or Canaan) was said to have "darkened the faces of mankind," and thus was asserted to be father to the African peoples.¹⁵

This Ham myth was picked up in Christian communities by the 1500s, and the story was soon used by European colonists to justify the subjugation and enslavement of Africans and African Americans. A religious theory of black subordination and separation remained strong throughout the slavery and legal segregation periods. For centuries religious myths about people of African descent have been retold as part of the dominant ideological framework by members of white ruling elites, including ministers, business leaders, political officials, and judges, as well as by ordinary whites. For example, one of the most important Supreme Court cases in U.S. history, *Buchanan v. Warley* (1917), dealt with a housing segregation ordinance. Apparently alluding to these religious myths, white lawyers for the City of Louisville, Kentucky, argued, "It is shown by philosophy, experience, and legal decisions, to say nothing of Divine Writ, that . . . the races of the earth shall preserve their racial integrity by living socially by themselves."¹⁶

Early Color Coding: The Link to Slavery In the early seventeenth century English American colonists first used terms like "Christians" for themselves and "negroes" for African Americans. The latter term referred to African descent and was not yet a designation for a distinctive "race." Nonetheless, the conceptualization was gradually moving in the direction of a full-fledged biologized racism, for the colonists were paying increasing attention to skin color and the purity of their ancestry ("blood").¹⁷ As early as 1614, Reverend Samuel Purchas spoke of the "black Negroe" and the "whiter European."¹⁸ Moreover, some were arguing for a God-ordained hierarchy of human beings; God had created, as a Boston slaveholder put it in 1701, "different degrees and orders of men."¹⁹ It was already part of the nature of being defined as "black" to have to suffer discrimination and to develop resistance to that discrimination. One was only "black" in relationship to those self-defined as "white."

In the process of English colonialism and the African slave trade some of the world's lightest-skinned people came into contact with some of the world's darkest-skinned people. Gradually, color and other physical characteristics became central to an ideology rationalizing exploitation and oppression. In the prevailing European view, the *enslaved status* of most black Americans was fundamental: African Americans were inferior because they were enslaved, and they were

enslaved because they were inferior. The expansion of enslavement and color typing developed side by side, with one reinforcing the other. By the late 1600s colonial accounts refer to the unusual "complexion" of the slaves as making an impression on the "white" mind. The term "white" was increasingly used alongside "Christian" and "English" by the colonists to distinguish themselves from "negroes," who had no role in naming themselves. By means of slavery European colonists had created a new group consisting of people from many different African societies, one sharply differentiated from whites in rights and privileges. Enslaved Africans became a major point of reference for the construction of the newly defined whiteness. In 1709 an English official noted in his diary that a Spaniard had petitioned the Massachusetts Council for his freedom and that a certain Captain Teat had alleged that "all of that [dark] Color were Slaves."²⁰ Darker skin color was then taken by whites as the visible badge of enslavement.

The controlling language in the new nation was that of the English colonists. They had power to shape the terminology used in interaction with one another and with those they oppressed. Increasingly, skin color was linked to older color meanings in English. In Old English, the word "black" meant sooted, while the word "white" meant to gleam brightly, as for a candle. In line with earlier Christian usage, the word "black" was used by the English colonists to describe sin, evil, and the devil.²¹ Old Christian images of darkness and blackness as sinister were transferred to the darker-skinned peoples exploited in the system of slavery.

The European colonists, who were usually some shade of tan, brown, or pink in skin color, must have seen that Africans varied greatly in skin color, with the majority being some shade of brown. There was no obvious reason for the English to connect the longstanding religious images of evil and darkness with the skin color of Africans.²² The attributing of whiteness or blackness to those who are mostly some shade of brown suggests there are deep emotional roots to the antiblack thinking and imaging of whites, an issue to which we will return shortly.

In the first century of North American slavery the antiblack ideology was becoming ever more developed and comprehensive. The emerging ideology increasingly focused not only on the blackness of the others but also on the whiteness of Europeans. Africans and African Americans were viewed as physically, aesthetically, morally, and mentally inferior to whites—differences that were regarded as more or less permanent. "Whiteness" was created in opposition to "blackness," in comparison to which it was not only different but quite superior. Indeed, from the seventeenth century forward black women, men, and children were "constructed as lazy, ignorant, lascivious, and criminal; Whites as industrious, knowledgeable, virtuous, and law-abiding."²³

Significantly, the antiblack image was not "out there," but rather in the white mind and emotions. In their thinking and imaging, some whites went so far as to view the dark skin of Africans as a "natural infection" or as "pollution." A leading

medical educator of the late 1700s, Dr. Benjamin Rush, thought the dark skin color of African Americans resulted from a type of leprosy that could be cured with medical treatment.²⁴

The Legal Underpinning At an early stage, the antiblack perspective of white Americans was imbedded by them in new legal and political institutions. By the 1670s slavery was enshrined in colonial laws defining Africans as chattel property. From that time to the Civil War much lawmaking, in the North and South, strongly supported the barbaric institution. Consider the central colony in the first century and a half of North American development—Virginia. In that area could be found 40 percent of all those then enslaved, as well as many of the prominent whites who were speaking out on issues of liberty.²⁵ Thomas Jefferson published the cases of Virginia's General Court for the years 1730 to 1772. More than half involved legal matters of concern to slaveholders, "such as testamentary disposition of slaves, creditors' rights in a debtor's slaves, warranty in the sale of slaves, life estates in and mortgages of slaves, dower in slaves, and entailed slaves."²⁶ From the 1600s to the mid-1800s many state and federal court cases and decisions revealed the centrality of slavery to the new nation.

The U.S. Constitution recognized the slave economy and implicitly incorporated an ideology of white supremacy in such provisions as the one that counted an African American as only "three-fifths" of a person. After the new nation was created, the unifying of growing numbers of immigrants from various European countries was done in part through the legal and political doctrines buttressing white privilege and superiority. In the first naturalization law in 1790, the new U.S. Congress made the earliest political statement on citizenship. Naturalization was restricted to "white persons." Whiteness thereby became an official government category; only European immigrants could qualify to become citizens of the new United States. The legal doctrines established by Congress and the courts helped to shape and unify the white consciousness, including that of the nation's leadership.²⁷

Education and the Antiblack Ideology From the colonial era to the present, educational institutions have been critical to the transmission of the racist ideology across many generations. Elites have long maintained power in part by controlling the processes of learning and knowledge dissemination through public, religious, and other private schooling. At an early point in colonial history, a New England minister, Samuel Hopkins, noted why whites see blacks negatively: "We have been used to look on them in a mean, contemptible light; and *our education* has filled us with *strong prejudices* against them, and led us to consider them, not as our brethren, or in any degree on a level with us; but as quite another species of animals, made only to serve us and our children; and as happy in bondage, as in any other state. . . ."²⁸ Since the first century of colonization, whites have learned racist prejudices and attitudes at school, as well as at home and church.

Over centuries of colonialism Europeans and European Americans have celebrated conquests by various means, including controlling how conquered peoples and their physical environments came to be named. Many areas around the world, including "America," were given lasting names by Europeans from within their own interpretive frames. By such naming, the conquerors made other peoples' spaces into their places and claimed them for their own. The spatial conquests of colonialism have long been celebrated in the form of slanted histories and Eurocentric holidays, collections, museums, and monuments. Today, to use the names given by imperialists or to visit their museums is to participate, however unconsciously, in the lasting consequences of European colonialism and imperialism.²⁹

Emotional Underpinnings From the seventeenth century to the present the ideology justifying antiblack oppression, while overtly cognitive and legally enshrined, has had a strong emotional base. Antiblack attitudes and actions among whites have long been linked to or supported by such emotions as hate, fear, guilt, and repulsion. W. E. B. Du Bois suggested that color barriers are created not only out of overt maliciousness but also by "unconscious acts and irrational reactions unpierced by reason."³⁰

For instance, many whites have been emotionally obsessed with what they term "racial mixing." Strong and irrational emotions are evident in the taboos and laws against interracial sex and marriage, which have long been considered to be extremely "unnatural" and "abominable" by many whites. In 1662 the colony of Virginia established the first law against interracial sex, and in 1691 a law against interracial marriage was enforced by banishment. White Virginians, scholars have noted, were very "disturbed by the racial intermingling, especially white-Negro mixtures, and introduced laws to prevent what they saw as the 'abominable mixture and spurious issue' by penalizing whites who engaged in interracial sex."³¹ Mixed-ancestry Americans were viewed not only as inferior but also as degrading what Benjamin Franklin called a "lovely" whiteness. As Franklin argued, white "amalgamation with the other color produces a degradation to which no lover of his country, no lover of excellence in the human character can innocently consent."³² Like most whites of the eighteenth century, Franklin seems to have developed a deep fear of black Americans. A slaveholder for several decades, then a leading abolitionist later in life, Franklin openly opposed slavery not because of its inhumanity but because of its negative impact on the whiteness of the American population.³³ Ironically and significantly, for most of American history it was white men who were the most likely to cross the color line and force sex on black women.

Strong emotions are evident in the white violence that has long targeted black Americans. While most of the bloodthirsty lynchings of black Americans took place after the Civil War, they were preceded before that war by barbaric beatings, rape, torture, and mutilation of Africans and African Americans on slave ships,

farms, and plantations. The early white notion that African Americans were “dangerous savages” and “degenerate beasts” played a role in rationalizing this violence. To deserve such treatment “the black man presumably had to be as vicious as the racists claimed; otherwise many whites would have had to accept an intolerable burden of guilt for perpetrating or tolerating the most horrendous cruelties and injustices.”³⁴ After slavery, the racist ideology legitimated lynchings, whose sadistic character suggests deep and shared white emotions of guilt, hatred, and fear.

Fear is central to the ideology and attitudes woven through the system of antiblack oppression. Significantly, of the three large-scale systems of social oppression—racism, sexism, and classism—only racism involves the dominant group having a deep and often obsessively emotional fear (some term it “Negrophobia”) of the subordinate group. This is not generally true for men, who dominate women in the system of sexism, nor is it true for the capitalists who exploit workers in the class-stratified capitalist system. The racist system of oppression is often very deeply rooted in the identity and emotions of white men, women, and children.

Why do many whites often react viscerally to the presence or image of the black body, and especially the bodies of black men? Joel Kovel has argued that many whites dislike and reject black bodies because they project onto them their own deep fears, which are often rooted in childhood. As they are socialized, young whites learn, directly and indirectly, consciously and unconsciously, that the dark otherness of black Americans symbolizes degradation, danger, sinfulness, or the unknown—imagery dating back to at least the seventeenth century and still present in white imaginings. Over the course of a lifetime antiblack impulses and actions are strongly shaped by the images in whites’ unconscious minds. From this perspective, a primary reason for the intensely emotional character of the racist ideology is that many whites project onto the black out-group their own deep-lying inclinations and forbidden desires, which cannot be openly acknowledged.³⁵

Developing an Explicit Ideology of “Race” We/they ethnocentrism existed long before Europeans built their colonial empires, but a well-developed exploitative, and soon to be fully racist, ideology emerged only with European domination of peoples overseas. As Oliver Cox has noted, the modern racist ideology did not arise out of some “abstract, natural, immemorial feeling of mutual antipathy between groups,” but rather grew out of the exploitative relationships of colonialism.³⁶ There are significant variations in the stereotyping and treatment of external groups across societies. Some societies, for example, do not develop the high level of xenophobia that others do. Historically, many indigenous societies showed a friendliness (xenophilia) toward Europeans when the latter first came into their areas. As it turned out, this friendly attitude was usually a serious mistake.

The ideology rationalizing exploitation did not develop all at once, but was elaborated as colonialism expanded around the globe. First, as we saw above, the

"others" were viewed as religiously and culturally inferior. This brought an early accent on a hierarchy of inferior and superior groups. Later on, those oppressed were seen as distinctive "races" that were inferior in physical, biological, and intellectual terms to Europeans. A clearly delineated concept of "race" as a distinctive pseudobiological category was developed by northern Europeans and European Americans about the time of the American Revolution.

By the late 1700s these hierarchical relations were increasingly explained in overtly bioracial terms. This biological determinism read existing European prejudices back into human biology; then it read that biology as rationalizing social hierarchy. Those at the bottom were less than human; they were alleged to have smaller, and thus inferior, brains.³⁷ Reflecting on European imperialism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Frantz Fanon stressed the point that this colonialism was about much more than labor or resource exploitation, for it involved broad social domination constructed in racist terms. European colonialism created the modern idea of "race" across the globe. "In the colonies the economic substructure is also a superstructure. The cause is the consequence; you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich."³⁸ This new racist ideology had three important elements: (1) an accent on physically and biologically distinctive categories called "races"; (2) an emphasis on "race" as the primary determinant of a group's essential personality and cultural traits; and (3) a hierarchy of superior and inferior racial groups.

Early White Leaders and Intellectuals Audrey Smedley argues that "race was, from its inception, a folk classification, a product of popular beliefs about human differences that evolved from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries."³⁹ However, much of the effort to create an ideology accenting a hierarchy of races has come from the top. While most people tend to sort others into categories, it is typically the elites who codify and propagate strong versions of social categorization. From the beginning, European and American elites worked hard to defend imperialism and its many forms of oppression. By the mid- to late eighteenth century, white leaders were arguing that "negroes" were a biologically different species or "race" from Europeans. For example, in a lengthy book, *The History of Jamaica* (1774), prominent judge Edward Long, a slaveholder, argued that Africans were a "truly bestial" and different species. Long's influential book was published in the United States in 1788.⁴⁰

America's prominent theorist of liberty, Thomas Jefferson, contended that black Americans were an inferior "race." In *Notes on the State of Virginia*, written in the late eighteenth century, Jefferson articulated what were the first developed arguments by an American intellectual for black inferiority. Blacks are said to be inferior to whites in reasoning, imagination, and beauty. Blacks are alleged to favor white beauty "as uniformly as is the preference of the Oranootan [Orangutan] for the black women over those of his own species."⁴¹ Blacks are alleged to be more

adventuresome than whites because they have a “want of forethought,” to be unreflective, and—perhaps most amazing—to feel life’s pain less than whites. Blacks are alleged to have produced no important thinkers, poets, musicians, or intellectuals. Improvement in black minds comes only when there is a “mixture with whites,” which Jefferson argues “proves that their inferiority is not the effect merely of their condition of life.”⁴² Over his long lifetime Jefferson was an active slaveholder, even as he asserted from time to time that he disliked slavery. Among his famous words on the subject are those inscribed on the Jefferson Memorial in Washington, D. C.: “Nothing is more certainly written in the book of fate than that these people are to be free.” Significantly, the critical words following this sentence are omitted on this monument: “Nor is it less certain that the two races, equally free, cannot live in the same government.”⁴³

Paul Finkelman has summed up Jefferson’s fears, saying, “First, he hated what slavery did to whites. Second, he hated slavery because he feared it would lead to a rebellion that would destroy the society. Third, he hated slavery because it brought Africans to America and kept them there. He cared little for the fate or feelings of these Africans or their African American descendants, but he could not stand their presence in America. None of this hatred motivated him to do anything about the institution.”⁴⁴ Numerous white Americans, then and since Jefferson’s day, have feared that those in the “black race”—or people of color more generally—are growing so fast as to destroy a supposedly homogeneous white society.

The West’s Moral Philosopher During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries white American leaders in business, politics, and the universities were greatly influenced by European intellectuals and writers, many of whom held openly antiblack views. Indeed, the major Western philosopher of the late eighteenth century, Immanuel Kant, produced the first developed theory of race in modern terms. Intellectuals have long viewed Kant as the leading moral philosopher of the West, a pure philosopher uncontaminated by racist thought. However, for decades Kant wrote and taught some of the first courses explicitly dealing with the geography and anthropology of race. At the heart of his influential thinking was an attempt to define humanity: “If there is any science man really needs, it is the one I teach, of how to fulfill properly that position in creation which is assigned to man, and from which he is able to learn what one must be in order to be a man.”⁴⁵ For Kant, one must be *white* to be fully human, for “humanity exists in its greatest perfection in the white race.”⁴⁶ During the 1770s Kant wrote of the hierarchy of “races of mankind,” one of the uses of the idea of races in the sense of biologically distinct, hierarchical categories. In one document Kant delineated a hierarchy, with whites at the top:

STEM GENUS, white brunette
First race, very blond (northern Europe), of damp cold.

Second race, Copper-Red (America), of dry cold.
 Third race, Black (Senegambia), of dry heat.
 Fourth race, Olive-Yellow (Indians), of dry heat.⁴⁷

For Kant the essence of humanity can best be seen in a white man like himself. At this early point, European philosophy and philosophical anthropology were grounded in ideas about the supremacy of the white race and Western civilization.

Scientific Racism From the middle of the eighteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century, the physical and social sciences were regularly used to defend the oppression of Americans of color. Leading scientists developed a scientific view of black Americans and other peoples of color as innately and permanently inferior beings. Ideological racism is not something that comes only out of the margins of Western societies, but rather from their intellectual and cultural centers.

As early as the 1730s the Swedish botanist and taxonomist, Carolus Linneaus, distinguished four categories of human beings—black, white, red, and yellow. Though he did not explicitly use the idea of “race,” he associated skin color with cultural traits—with whites being superior and blacks inferior.⁴⁸ Between the 1770s and the 1790s the prominent German anatomist and anthropologist, Johann Blumenbach, worked out a racial classification that became influential. At the top of his list of “races” were what Blumenbach called the “Caucasians” (Europeans), a term he coined because in his judgment the people of the Caucasus were the most beautiful of the European peoples. Lower on the list were the Mongolians (Asians), the Ethiopians (Africans), the Americans (Native Americans), and the Malays (Polynesians). “White” was viewed as the oldest color of mankind, and white had degenerated into the darker skin colors.⁴⁹

The new scientific racism firmly encompassed the notion of a specific number of races with different physical characteristics, a belief that these characteristics were hereditary, and the notion of a natural hierarchy of inferior and superior races. In their broad sweep these racist ideas were not supported by careful scientific observations of all human societies but rather were buttressed with slanted reports gleaned by European missionaries, travelers, and sea captains from their experiences with selected non-European societies. Most scientists of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, while presenting themselves as objective observers, tried to marshal evidence for human differences that the white imperialists’ perspective had already decided were important to highlight.⁵⁰

The first edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1798) authoritatively asserted in its entry called “Negroes” that this “unhappy race” was a people of “idleness, treachery, revenge, cruelty, impudence, stealing, lying, debauchery, nastiness and intemperance.” They were said to be “strangers to every sentiment of compassion” and were “an awful example of the corruption of man when left to him-

self.”⁵¹ Such hostile, grossly stereotyped, and highly racialized language underscores the emotional and psychosocial roots of Western racist ideology—this time codified in what soon became the most prestigious encyclopedia of the English-speaking world.

Celebrating and Expanding the Racist Ideology: The 1830s to the 1930s

The International Industry of Racist Ideology By the mid-nineteenth century the propagation of racist thinking had become a major industry in Europe and the United States. From that period to the present day, thousands of articles and books have been written, as well as speeches given, as part of an ideological machine that constantly defends white supremacy and racial oppression—principally antiblack oppression.

Some analysts have distinguished a traditional ideology from a conservative ideology. In this typology a traditional ideology has a passive attachment to the social structures inherited from the past, while a conservative ideology goes beyond that to aggressively defend the status quo in response to challenges. A dominant ideology is often challenged, such as when those oppressed fight back (see chapter 8). When their interests have been challenged, white elites have attempted to deflect or destroy the challenges. The ruling elite must constantly combat insights into the real nature of the racist reality that its members have fostered and maintained. For example, during the mid-decades of the nineteenth century the growing antislavery movement in Britain and the United States spurred an elite reaction that was combative. An even more developed and formalized racist ideology was created in a vigorous attempt to defend slavery against abolitionism.⁵²

Many U.S. and European intellectuals argued for white supremacy and African inferiority. For example, in his 1830 lectures the leading German philosopher G. W. F. Hegel spoke about the Negro as “natural man in his wild and untamed nature” and argued that there is “nothing remotely humanized in the Negro’s character.”⁵³ Black people were not human beings with a real history and consciousness. Hegel based his racist judgments on the reports of European colonizers and travelers. Drawing on similar sources, leading authors as diverse as Thomas Carlyle, William Makepeace Thackeray, and Charles Dickens defended racist ideas or the enslavement of Africans.⁵⁴

Count Joseph Arthur de Gobineau, a French diplomat and perhaps the most influential racist thinker of the nineteenth century, argued that whites are “gifted with reflective energy, or rather with an energetic intelligence. . . . They have a remarkable, even extreme love of liberty, and are openly hostile to the formalism under which the Chinese are glad to vegetate, as well as the strict despotism which is the only way of governing the Negro.”⁵⁵ In his extensive writings on the superiority of the “white race,” Gobineau articulated a highly developed racist ideology. Once translated, his writings became influential in the United States and other