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Making the White Man's West

Jason E. Pierce

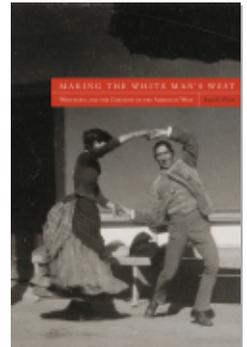
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A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

Throughout this work I employ the terms *Anglo-Saxon*, *Anglo*, and *white*. These terms are somewhat imprecise because they describe arbitrary and contested categories. Anglo-Saxon referred to Germanic tribes that migrated to the British Isles in the first millennia AD and drove out occupying Celtic tribes. Americans, however, used the term to refer to people of English ancestry. This helped differentiate early white-skinned Americans, who migrated from England, from later groups including the Germans and Irish, the first immigrant groups to come in large numbers in the decades after the revolution. The term endured throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century as a way to separate “real” white Americans from the supposedly inferior immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe who were coming to America in great numbers. Claiming Anglo-Saxon ancestry, therefore, provided a shorthand definition for “real” American citizenship. Out West, however, the Saxon often disappeared, and the term *Anglo* came into wide use to separate Hispanics from non-Hispanics. Following this tradition, I try to employ *Anglo-American* to describe white-skinned Americans

of Northern European ancestry, even if the term is imperfect. In general, Anglo-Americans over the course of the nineteenth century came to see a close affinity with other Northern Europeans, Germans, and so on, and often *Anglo* came to mean any non-Hispanic white person.

The most contested and troublesome category is *white*. White is a racial category, an amalgam of European ethnicities into a generic and arbitrary single “race.” White or Caucasian differs from black or African, Asian, and American Indian. It also, as used by the US Census Bureau today, includes Hispanics who claim a European ancestry. The inclusion of Hispanics, many of whom have at least some American Indian ancestry, came about with the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which offered citizenship to former citizens of Mexico. Since citizenship at the time required that one be white, Hispanics came to be considered white by the fact that they allegedly had Spanish ancestors. As in the case of the new Americans created with the 1848 treaty, claiming whiteness also proved advantageous since it conveyed citizenship and thus the full protection of law, but, despite the letter of the law, the bulk of Hispanic peoples were treated as inferior, second-class citizens and were informally segregated, especially in Texas. The nation’s first immigration law in 1792 formally codified whiteness as a condition of citizenship. Not until the ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868 did the definition of citizenship expand beyond the category of white.

Yet, and here is where the issue of racial and ethnic identity becomes confusing but also very interesting, white Americans, especially in the West, could use all of these terms interchangeably. When it suited them, writers like Charles Fletcher Lummis and Frank Bird Linderman could embrace Anglo-Saxonism to attempt to build a wall between old-stock Americans and new immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe whose values and beliefs, they argued, did not fit with those of people already living here. Anglo, meanwhile, endured as a handy way to distinguish between Hispanics and non-Hispanics in the Southwest. The generic category of white, further, effectively locked out American Indians, Asians, and African Americans from inclusion in society. European ethnic groups, however, pushed to be included in this category, as scholars like David Roediger, Matthew Frye Jacobsen, and Noel Ignatiev have argued. In the West (as elsewhere in the country), Greeks, Armenians, and other borderline groups fought, often in court, to be included in the category. While I endeavor to define my terms as precisely

as possible, the terms themselves are ambiguous. It also goes without saying that I employ *white American* or *Anglo-American* to discuss the views of the dominant racial group (even though the formulation can be a bit clunky and repetitive). Using *white* and *American* interchangeably, as Toni Morrison and others have shown, makes everyone else invisible and makes *white* universal and ubiquitous but also invisible.¹ This is not my intention, but there can be little doubt that Anglo-Americans viewed themselves as the standard by which others were to be judged, and therefore describing them in these terms has utility.

Finally, I use *American Indian* to describe all Indian peoples in a generic sense (since they often were lumped together as such by whites) when they are described as such, but I prefer to use tribal or group names as much as possible. Similarly, while I use *Asian*, I endeavor to differentiate between Chinese and Japanese. For Hispanics, when possible, I employ the narrower terms *Californio* for Hispanic Californians and *Tejano* for Hispanic Texans. These terms appear to be commonly used, especially the latter, although the most common term appears to have been *Mexican* or *Mexican American*. The latter I use as a synonym for *Tejano* to vary the writing and also because it does seem to have been used; the former, since it refers to a citizen of the nation of Mexico, I try to employ only in that narrower sense.

All these terms can be a bit confusing, but the confusion again comes from the imprecise and constructed nature of these categories since race and ethnicity really have no biological basis. Yet copious amounts of ink and blood were spilled to make these amorphous notions tangible. In the end, the power inside these definitions enabled Anglo-Americans to claim and possess a continent. Whiteness and the closely related concept of white supremacy (the latter essentially an applied form of whiteness) proved tools more powerful than guns in the conquest of the West and the creation of the white man's West.

NOTE

1. See Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (New York: Vintage, 1992).

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