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Making the White Man's West

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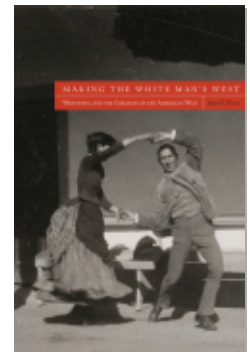
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INTRODUCTION

Whiteness and the Making of the American West

In Los Angeles, the pugnacious editor Charles Fletcher Lummis declared, “Our ‘foreign element’ is . . . a few thousand industrious Chinamen and perhaps 500 native Californians who do not speak English. The ignorant, hopelessly un-American type of foreigners, which infests and largely controls Eastern cities, is almost unknown here. Poverty and illiteracy do not exist as classes.”¹ California and the West, Lummis argued, offered Americans a last chance to create a perfect society. Lummis’s utopian vision of the West imagined small, orderly cities, productive mines and farms, and a population dominated by Anglo-Americans with enough Hispanic, American Indian, and Asian elements to be exotic. At the same time, eastern residents—old-stock Americans like Lummis himself—feared losing control of eastern cities to Southern and Eastern European immigrants who, unlike Asians and most Indian peoples, could vote and therefore wield power. Lummis intentionally used the term *infestation* to link these immigrants to vermin. Thankfully, he believed, the threat of un-American immigrants existed back East and far from his bucolic land of sunshine (the title, incidentally, of the magazine he edited).



FIGURE 0.1. Settler's Day Parade, San Angelo, Texas. Parades like this celebrated the Anglo conquest of Texas. Former Texas Ranger and Confederate soldier John W. Long observed the 1910 version of this parade. Sharing his thoughts with the *San Angelo Standard Times* correspondent, he reflected, "I glory in the knowledge that West Texas will always be what we fought for and what the Lord intended it to be—a white man's country." *Courtesy*, Tom Green County Historical Society Collection, West Texas Collection, Angelo State University, San Angelo, TX.

In 1910, a decade and a half after Lummis's pronouncement, residents of San Angelo, Texas, gathered to celebrate and lament the receding of Texas's heroic age. The parade of aged settlers marching down crowd-lined streets moved a correspondent for the *San Angelo Standard Times* to a paroxysm of nostalgia: "The old boys, a surviving remnant of the Old Guard, lined up today and with stride as nimble as that of youth and with step as elastic as that of boyhood's halcyon days, fell in line and proudly marched in grand parade." The paper continued, "The parade was in every way characteristic of the 'Wild and Woolly West.' To make the event all the more typical of early day[s,] pistol shots and cowboy yells rang out as the procession marched down Chadbourne Street." Behind the geriatric pioneers came the police, a military band, assorted ranchers and stockmen, and members of the Ku Klux Klan.² It was in every way the epitome of a small-town celebration.

Too infirm to participate, another pioneer, John W. Long, stood off to the side watching the procession. The reporter observed, "Few of the great

multitudes who witnessed Monday's parade of Old Timers were cognizant of the fact that there stood in their midst one . . . of the fathers of Texas."³ Long claimed to have served as a Texas Ranger under Sul Ross at the 1860 "battle" of Pease River, the attack in which Cynthia Ann Parker, the white woman who was the mother of the Comanche leader Quanah Parker, was "redeemed" from a life among the Comanches—an event whose importance to Texas was surpassed in magnitude only by the Alamo and the Civil War.⁴ Scarcely a year later Long, like many young Texans, found himself fighting for the Confederacy. Reflecting on his career, Long told the journalist, "I fought for years with the rangers and pioneers to make this a white man's country and fought four years to keep the nigger from being as good as a white man. In the first I won out; in the second I lost, but I glory in the knowledge that West Texas will always be what we fought for and what the Lord intended it to be—a white man's country."⁵

Charles Fletcher Lummis, a relatively egalitarian defender of Indian and Hispanic rights, and John Long, the aged Texas Ranger, had little in common. Both, however, articulated a vision of the West as a white man's country. Long, in his self-mythologizing view of his past, cleared out hostile Indians, thereby bringing civilization to a savage land, and fought against efforts to end slavery and make blacks the equal of whites. He and his fellow Texans had indeed been successful in the elimination of Indian peoples from the state through a campaign of conquest and violence historian Gary Clayton Anderson has described as "ethnic cleansing."⁶ His melancholy over the status of African Americans at first seems unwarranted; after all, in 1910 African Americans occupied subservient roles in the Jim Crow South, as any of the dozens of segregated buildings in San Angelo illustrated. Perhaps his lamentation came from the fact that without slavery, the boundary between the races could no longer be drawn with so fine a hand. Texas, however, had certainly become a white man's country. Lummis meanwhile sought a more racially diverse and colorful West, but even in his vision Anglo-Saxon whites (rather than native peoples or non-Anglo immigrants) would control the region.

This book examines how people like Lummis and Long projected a vision onto the trans-Mississippi West in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a white racial utopia and how to varying degrees that vision became a reality. This process entailed several steps. In part one, "From Dumping

Ground to Refuge: Imagining the White Man's West," I argue that early visitors struggled to understand the region, much of which seemed so different from anything in the American experience. Some visitors feared that Anglo-Americans would degenerate into savages in the region or, alternatively, that the temperate climate of the Southwest would lead them into torpidity and sloth, similar to the supposed state of American Indian peoples and Hispanics. Yet as expansion continued, visitors and settlers concluded that, in fact, the climate of the Southwest in particular would free Anglo-Americans from the centuries-old struggle with nature, enabling them to turn their efforts toward more productive enterprises. This intellectual transformation of the West from savage and inhospitable to a seeming paradise marked an important, if somewhat intangible, aspect of the creation of the white man's West.

Yet the West remained the most racially diverse section of the country as large populations of American Indians, Hispanics, and Asian peoples made their home in the region. This diversity seemed in marked contradiction to the idea of a region reserved for Anglo-Americans, but whiteness advocates in the last third of the nineteenth century came to a much different conclusion. These groups wielded little political power. Asians could not claim citizenship and thus could not challenge Anglo-American control, and Hispanics and Indian peoples mostly saw their influence marginalized, the latter segregated on reservations and the former, though citizens, unable to assert political influence in most areas. Posing little threat to Anglo control, they could be celebrated as part of what made the West unique. As the historian Elliott West has observed, these groups went from being people of color to being "people of local color."⁷ Romanticized versions of their cultures helped forge a unique regional identity and came to be held up as models by those who feared the encroachment of an alienating industrial society. In particular, writers like Lummis and Frank Bird Linderman and artists like Linderman's friend Charles M. Russell and Frederic Remington celebrated American Indian culture and lamented the conquest of the West and the loss of the authentic "first" Americans who inhabited it.⁸ Even Hispanics and Asians could sometimes be held up as adding variety to the western cultural landscape—San Francisco's Chinatown, for example, became a popular tourist destination. This fetishistic fascination with non-Anglos but simultaneous denial of their political and often economic power enabled these writers and intellectuals to hold the West up as superior to the East, a place

supposedly in the grips of an immigrant invasion of largely inferior peoples. Thus Linderman, for example, championed the preservation of American Indian culture while denigrating recent immigrants to the United States, and together Lummis and Linderman could argue that Anglo-Americans retained far greater control in the West than in the immigrant-infested East.

From the acquisition of Louisiana in 1803 to the Progressive Era of the early twentieth century, visitors, boosters, and intellectuals had successfully reinvented the West, transforming it from an alien and dangerous world of possible racial degeneration into a homeland for powerful but increasingly alarmed Anglo-Americans. The land itself did not change markedly, its mountains, plains, and deserts still remained, but it underwent an intellectual reinvention that remade inhospitable into idyllic.

Part 2, “Creating and Defending the White Man’s West,” looks at efforts to apply the emerging belief in the West as having a special destiny for Anglo-Americans into reality. Developers and promoters consciously worked to organize and fashion a society composed of and dominated by Anglo-Americans and desirable immigrants from Northern Europe, who, though not Anglo, were nevertheless “white” and compatible. In the turbulent 1850s, this meant restricting the extension of slavery but also limiting the number of free blacks in new states like Oregon and California. Both of these far western states successfully prevented slavery, but they also attempted, ultimately with less success, to forbid the settlement of free African Americans. These campaigns, however, demonstrate early attempts to create an almost entirely white society and to avoid the nettlesome racial issue of the 1840s and 1850s that slowly pushed the nation toward war. Forbidding slavery would preclude threats to free labor, and preventing the settlement of African Americans would ensure the continued domination of the allegedly superior race.

Promoting whiteness also came about in less overt but more successful ways. Railroads, eager to find settlers for the lands along their lines, advertised heavily to Northern Europeans, ignoring newly freed African Americans in the 1870s and after who seemed interested in relocating to land on the Great Plains. Railroad companies desired these European settlers (most notably the Mennonites) because they considered them to be honest, hard-working, experienced with agriculture, and, perhaps most important, white. Their success in places like Minnesota and the Dakotas transformed these regions, leaving behind orderly farms and an almost completely white population.

Similarly, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or the Mormon church, recruited heavily among Northern Europeans. Missionaries spread out across Europe but soon found Catholic-dominated Southern Europe, an area without the tradition of Protestantism, unsuited to their efforts. This meant that Northern Europeans comprised the vast majority of converts making their way to the shores of the Great Salt Lake. At the same time, Pacific Islanders began to convert to Mormonism in large numbers, but these converts would remain in the Pacific rather than make the long, expensive journey to Utah. Northern European whites, therefore, composed the population of the Mormon's new Zion. However, because of their fringe religious beliefs, mainstream white Americans often attacked the Mormons and in some cases attempted to strip them of their whiteness, arguing that any person who submitted to Mormon authority, regardless of national ancestry, could not be truly white. Nevertheless, Mormons would continue to defend both their whiteness and their status as patriotic citizens of the United States, and in time both would no longer be contested.

The trans-Mississippi West, therefore, in many ways did come to reflect the idea of a white man's West, in practice if not in law. Following the period of conquest and settlement, thousands of square miles from Utah to Minnesota fell under the control of Anglo-Americans and Northern Europeans as the former haunts of Lakotas, Cheyennes, and Utes became farms and ranches. Even in the more racially diverse Southwest, white Americans came to dominate virtually all aspects of society.

Yet tens of thousands of non-whites also made their homes in the West. Promoters like Lummis and Linderman could celebrate their continued presence, but presence did not connote power, and controlling these groups and keeping them in a subordinate status became paramount. Should Hispanics, African Americans, American Indians, or Asians push back (and they did) against their consignment to secondary status, Anglo-Americans had one final tool they could use to keep them in their place: violence.

Across the West, Indians made new lives for themselves on often dismal reservations or existed, as in California, in a kind of peripheral twilight, deprived of rights, land, and dignity. Violence had been loosed upon them to wrest control of their territory and would continue to be used as necessary, especially in California, to control them. Hispanic Californios and Tejanos, meanwhile, saw their landholdings stripped from them and their range of

opportunities compressed until they dwelled in a subservient and semi-segregated status. Hispanics and African Americans—particularly in Texas—also sometimes became the targets of vigilante violence. Even in New Mexico, where Hispanics remained the majority, their status and influence declined with the arrival of Anglo-Americans. The Chinese faced some of the harshest treatment, becoming targets of mob violence and the subjects of blatantly discriminatory legislation. Violence, therefore, helped ensure that the West remained simultaneously the most diverse section in the nation and yet almost totally controlled by one particular ethnic group: Anglo-Americans and other acceptable whites.

This book examines how the trans-Mississippi West, in ways both tangible and intangible, came to be seen as the white man's West, a region dedicated to a narrowly defined Anglo-American and Northern European dominance and supposedly free of the allegedly unpleasant characteristics of an emerging, less ethnically homogeneous nation. Why, though, did this particular region of the nation become so closely identified with one racial group, especially given its actual diversity? Several factors influenced this development. First, in the last half of the nineteenth century, Northeast cities like New York and Boston emerged as the primary points of entry for immigrants, and the crowded neighborhoods these newcomers occupied became symbols of the negative consequences of industrialization. Eugenicists and race scientists warned of the dangers these immigrants posed, especially their amazing fecundity. Some old-stock Americans even compared these immigrants to invasive flora and fauna—all bent on aggressively squeezing out "natives" and transforming the nation.⁹ Meanwhile, racial issues could not be overlooked in the South; indeed, they were as obvious as black and white. The numbers of African Americans in the South, quite simply, meant that no one could mistake the region as overwhelming white. That, of course, did not prevent whites from enacting Jim Crow legislation in an effort to protect white privilege and supremacy. These characteristics, therefore, precluded the East and the South from consideration as refuges for whites.

The West, however, offered an ideal place. Lacking the obvious racial binary of black and white, the more diverse region, somewhat ironically, made overlooking racial concerns easier.¹⁰ Indeed, the most obvious non-white peoples in the West, American Indians, had been forced onto reservations (literally pushed to the margins of society) at the same time Reconstruction

in the South became contested and an ever-growing number of immigrants entered America from Southern and Eastern Europe. With Indian peoples supposedly rapidly disappearing, as artists and race scientists alleged, the West beckoned as an open and largely uninhabited country. As Elliott West has shown, the 1870s became a seminal decade in the formation of American racial ideas, and in many ways the decade marked the limits of citizenship with the imposition of segregation in the South, the defeat of Indian peoples in the West, and the denial of citizenship to the Chinese.¹¹

While these efforts effectively circumscribed the position of African Americans, Asians, and Indian peoples in society, they nevertheless left open the question of the compatibility of new stock immigrants. Indeed, by the early 1900s it appeared to some Anglo-Americans that the East might be ethnically and racially irredeemable, leaving only the West as a possible place of refuge. Promoters grasped the significance of these issues, often portraying areas with high populations of Anglo and Northern European whites as “wonderlands of whiteness,” places like North Dakota and Wyoming with overwhelming white populations. Meanwhile, according to the historian David Wrobel, boosters in more racially diverse areas, like California, promoted their landscapes as “wonderlands for whiteness . . . where cultural diversity was nothing more than an attractive background to the main stage where a narrative of white economic and social opportunity and dominance played out.”¹² Space and time, therefore, conspired to make the West appear perfectly suited to white settlement; “wonderlands of whiteness” tempted with their seeming abundance and “wonderlands for whiteness” promised destiny brought to fruition. A few decades earlier, the West had appeared as anything but ideal for whites, but interpretations had clearly changed as events themselves had changed.

Finally, mythology also played a role. From the moment the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock, the frontier, always just out there to the west, seemed redolent with possibility. To be sure, it could be a scary and dangerous place, but if one possessed strength, intellect, fearlessness, and individualism (all soon considered “American” traits), then one could be successful in this New World.¹³ The frontier, historian Frederick Jackson Turner famously argued, brought out the best in the American character. The frontier created American exceptionalism, Turner declared in “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” an essay that was both paean and

dirge, both a celebration of the American character and a warning about its future.¹⁴ By 1890 the frontier had vanished into memory, but the West remained, persisting as the place where American desires could find room enough to roam. It should not be a surprise, therefore, that the West came to be identified with such a grandiose vision as the white man's West, for the region had always been as much an idea, a belief, as a physical place; if it fostered the characteristics that forged Englishmen into Americans, then it stood to reason that it offered the best locale for preserving those values in the face of a changing world.

Efforts to somehow cultivate and nurture whiteness, however, were not new. The belief that America had a special destiny as a white nation, in fact, predated the founding of the United States and remained salient in the years after the Revolution. Benjamin Franklin, in 1751, celebrated the ties between England and the colonies but warned of threats to America, both economic and, more important, racial. The British colonies offered an opportunity, he argued, to create a white sister nation to Great Britain, a sister that would in time grow to be larger and more powerful. This would only come to pass, however, if the crown put measures in place to assure the preservation of the Anglo majority. Franklin worried about the proliferation of white Englishmen. He noted, "The Number of purely white People in the World is proportionally very small. All Africa is black or tawny. Asia chiefly tawny. America (exclusive of the new Comers [*sic*]) wholly so." Though clearly superior to other peoples, whites felt threatened by the much greater numbers of dark peoples. Yet the leaders of Britain and the colonies took no action to address the danger posed by massive immigration of non-white peoples into the colonies. Slavery posed a particularly troubling problem, as it threatened to unleash African peoples upon the allegedly temperate and fertile North American continent, a situation that would invariably lead to a dramatic population increase. "Why," Franklin asked, "increase the Sons of Africa, by Planting them in America, where we have so fair an Opportunity, by excluding all Blacks and Tawneys [*sic*], of increasing the lovely White and Red?" Slavery, he argued, was artificially importing thousands of inferior blacks into America. This would inevitably "darken its people."¹⁵ Franklin, like Thomas Jefferson, felt ambivalent about the presence of American Indians. While clearly "tawney" and thus inferior, Native Americans could perhaps be redeemed through civilizing efforts. Franklin harbored no such optimism

for Africans. The British colonies in North America could be a biracial nation, composed of the “lovely white and red.”

Franklin defined the white race, however, in much narrower terms than society does today. He did not even consider most Europeans, with but a few exceptions, white. “In Europe, the Spaniards, Italians, French, Russians and Swedes, are generally of what we call a swarthy Complexion; as are the Germans also, the Saxons only excepted, who with the English, make the principal Body of White People on the Face of the Earth. I could wish their Numbers were increased,” he sighed. Thus even Swedish and German immigrants, particularly in Franklin’s Pennsylvania, presented a dilemma. Foreshadowing centuries of anti-immigrationist rhetoric, Franklin wrote, “Why should Pennsylvania, founded by the English, become a Colony of *Aliens*?” These immigrants would “shortly be so numerous as to Germanize us instead of our Anglifying them.” They would further remain separate and “never adopt our Language or Customs, any more than they can acquire our Complexion.”¹⁶ Such alien people, with different customs, language, and features, would undermine the harmony of the colonies.

Franklin’s views point to a fundamental and slippery problem when defining racial differences. Put simply, looking white did not always make one white. Franklin’s beliefs on race expose some of the fundamental problems with studying the unstable and ever-changing landscape of race. Race is not a biological reality; it is a social construction, and, as such, it can change and be refashioned to suit the needs of an individual or a group.¹⁷

Franklin, like generations of Americans after him, made distinctions not just in race but also in what we today call “whiteness.” For Franklin, the Germans seemed irredeemably foreign and non-white, but later generations considered these newcomers among the most desirable of the immigrant groups. Membership in the white race, therefore, often rested on one’s perspective, location, and time. Whiteness scholars have argued that there have been at least three enlargements of whiteness, when previously non-white groups came to be considered white and therefore full members of society, beginning with the Germans early in the republic’s history, Irish in the mid-nineteenth century, and Eastern and Southern Europeans and Hispanics by the twentieth century.¹⁸ Scholars like David Roediger, Noel Ignatiev, and Matthew Frye Jacobson, writing in the 1990s, were the first to argue that ethnic groups like the Irish had to work to prove their whiteness, and to gain that

preferred status, they rejected alliances with free African Americans despite their similar social class.¹⁹ Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Americans, Jacobsen argues, employed terms like *Anglo-Saxon*, *Celtic*, *Hebrew*, *Slav*, *Alpine*, *Mediterranean*, or *Nordic* to describe the various races of white people and not ethnic differences. They created “a system of ‘difference’ by which one might be both white *and* racially distinct from other whites.”²⁰ While certainly not as rigid a distinction as that between black and white, the perception of these “white races” influenced the status and treatment of these peoples in the United States. Anglo-Americans embraced Germanic and Scandinavian peoples because they worked hard, tended to have fair complexions, and often belonged to various Protestant religious denominations. The Irish Celtic race, however, supposedly lacked the self-control and intelligence to be white—at least until the late nineteenth century. Southern Europeans and Jews (the Hebrews, Slavs, and Mediterranean peoples) tended to have darker complexions and large families, and they belonged to the Catholic Church or, in the case of Jews, practiced Judaism. Their cultures, religions, skin tones, and physiognomies made them suspect.

In the trans-Mississippi West, settled at the end of the nineteenth century, many of these issues of acceptance also played out. Elliott Robert Barkan, in his 2007 synthesis of immigration in the American West, writes, “For a number of peoples in the American West the quest for whiteness was largely irrelevant—that is, it was scarcely a hurdle to be surmounted (notably for Canadians and Scandinavians).” For other groups, especially ethnic groups like the Greeks and Armenians, whiteness proved elusive for a long time. Barkan traces how many of these ethnic groups “gradually met sufficient criteria to be regarded as whites, however fluid and inconsistent those standards were. In the West many ethnic groups went from non-whiteness to ‘probationary whiteness’ to full incorporation.”²¹ Similarly, uncertainty attached to the status of Hispanics in the West, despite their being officially considered citizens and therefore white.²² Westerners, though, typically considered Hispanics a non-white group—despite their legal status as white citizens. Linda Gordon recounts an obscure incident in Arizona that illustrates the conditional and contested meanings of race in the West. Gordon follows the story of the adoption of several Irish orphans by Hispanic Catholic families in Arizona. Eager to find the orphans homes, church leaders in New York happily sent them to fellow Catholics in the far-off Arizona Territory. Arizona

white women, appalled that Irish children (considered white in Arizona) could be placed in non-white homes, demanded that the children be relocated to Anglo homes. At the behest of these white women, a male vigilante group forcibly removed the Irish children and found them new homes with Anglo families. Being white could, in effect, depend on where one lived.²³

Attaining whiteness proved critical to success in America because it conferred both citizenship and the right to own property. The nation's first naturalization act, passed by Congress in 1790, limited citizenship to "white persons"—a requirement that continued until 1952 (with the exception of African Americans after ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868 and some Indian peoples under the 1889 Dawes Act).²⁴ Such a limitation made sense to American leaders, who held reservations about granting rights to groups they considered incapable of making the difficult decisions needed to maintain the new republic. Whiteness also brought privileges beyond freedom and citizenship, as in ownership of property. Being free meant being an independent property owner. Slaves, conversely, could never rise above being property, and American Indian peoples typically did not own and use property in the same way as white Americans and subsequently lost their lands to whites.²⁵ Neither group, therefore, could be expected to become citizens.

Americans, to be sure, arrived at these views with a great deal of influence from racial scientists in Europe and the United States. Early racial theorists, like Carolus Linnaeus and his disciple, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, harbored relatively egalitarian views of the differences between the races of humans and argued that racial differences were really only skin deep and resulted from environmental differences, but by the early nineteenth century their views were increasingly challenged.²⁶ Linnaeus, who created the system to order and name various species of plants and animals that remains influential today, struggled with the classification of humanity, but by the 1758 edition of *System of Nature* he had identified four major types of humanity (and two fictitious ones: *homo ferus*, a species of wild humans incapable of speech, and *homo monstruosus*, which included "freaks" such as giants, dwarfs, and eunuchs). He named the four races of humanity *Americanus*, *Europaeus*, *Asiaticus*, and *Afer*, corresponding to the Americas, Europe, Asia, and Africa, respectively. In doing so, he merely classified humanity by geography.²⁷ Blumenbach modified his hero's classification and inadvertently created the science of white supremacy.²⁸ The German scientist offered five categories

of mankind instead of four: Caucasian, American Indian, Oriental, Malay, and African. He rejected racial differences as merely adaptations to climate, reasoning that all humans had roughly the same intellectual capabilities.

Jettisoning race as a marker of difference, however, forced him to develop another way of classifying humanity. He chose the rather subjective criterion of beauty. Not surprisingly, he decided that Europeans stood at the pinnacle of beauty, and the most perfect specimens, he felt, came from the Caucasus Mountains in Russia. These most beautiful of all people he named Caucasian, a name that became a synonym for white.²⁹ Together, his five races of man formed a pyramid. As the most beautiful—though equal in all other mental and physical aspects—Caucasians occupied the apex. American Indians and the Malays occupied the level below Caucasians, and Orientals and Africans formed the base of the pyramid. Blumenbach deduced that the most attractive people would be found at the place of mankind's emergence, and other groups, over time, moved away and eventually changed physically to adapt to new climates. Thus, Blumenbach provided a strong argument for *monogenesis*, the scientific theory that mankind had a single place of origin. He intended this pyramid to show the distance from the origin of humanity, with the most beautiful Caucasians signifying the ideal of human beauty and the Malay and American Indians next in his hierarchy of beauty. Orientals and Africans, he concluded, represented the least attractive peoples. Blumenbach was thinking only of "beauty," but it did not take much imagination to see the European view of man's racial hierarchy laid out in his orderly pyramid.³⁰ Likely unaware of the ramifications of his system, Blumenbach had provided an intellectual justification for European conquest and imperialism.

Blumenbach's monogenesis found a home in the United States, as did his argument that environmental change accounted for racial differences. The Reverend Dr. Samuel Stanhope Smith became the leading proponent of the theory in the United States, reaching his views largely independent from Blumenbach.³¹ Smith wore his religious and scholarly titles comfortably, but as the divergence between science and religion widened in the early nineteenth century, the Presbyterian minister, professor of moral philosophy, and president of the forerunner of Princeton University found himself increasingly at odds with both religious scholars (who disliked the questions science asked) and scientists who mocked literal interpretations of the Bible. Smith believed both camps were mistaken and asserted that rational, scientific

inquiry could elucidate the unity of man, a unity that was explicit in the Bible. His *Essay on the Causes of Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species*, published in 1787 and reprinted in an expanded form in 1810, became an early and respected American ethnological treatise. He argued that mankind had been created by God in one place, most likely the Middle East where the earliest civilizations could be found. Over time, groups of people expanded and colonized other environments. This colonization of markedly different environments in turn led to the creation of distinct races. A change in climate, therefore, could rapidly alter an individual, and these acquired traits would be inherited by the individual's children. As proof Smith offered the then widely known case of Henry Moss, a black man who had slowly turned white (quite likely from the skin disease vitiligo). The beneficent climate of North America—so different from the sun-baked world of Africa—appeared to be curing Moss of his blackness. Benjamin Rush, America's preeminent medical mind of the day and a signer of the Declaration of Independence, also saw Moss's case as a possible cure for the problem of blacks in America and therefore a solution to one of the nation's most troublesome issues.³²

Smith endorsed monogenesis in part because it fit with the origin story in Genesis. Yet it also spoke to especially nettlesome questions for the young republic, offering hope that lesser peoples could be improved and one day be integrated into the nation.³³ Given enough time, perhaps African American slaves and American Indians could be improved through changes in environment and assimilation into American culture. Missionaries, especially those to the Indians of the West, predicated their efforts on the idea that Christianization and education could transform the savage into a civilized person.³⁴

However, if inferior races could be improved through changes in environment and exposure to civilization, then the opposite could also be true. Monogenesis held out the unpleasant possibility that whites could degenerate when placed in inappropriate environments or in close contact with inferior peoples—both of which would invariably happen in the trans-Mississippi West. Western expansion could therefore lead the individual into a state of savagery and the race into degeneracy. Smith noted, for example, that poor whites in the South already approached the dark hue of the native Cherokee Indians: "Compare these [poor white] men with their British ancestors, and the change which has already passed upon them, will afford the strongest

ground to conclude that, if they were thrown, like our native indians [*sic*], into a state of absolute savagism, they would, in no great length of time, be perfectly marked with the same complexion."³⁵ Environment, he argued, explained this. The sun and bilious gases from stagnant water changed people's complexions and even body types. Over time, whites could atrophy and decline. There existed hope, however. In a footnote Smith addressed the issue of white degeneration and concluded, "The arts of civilization may be expected, in a considerable degree, to correct the effects of the climate."³⁶ Indians, with no knowledge of civilization, faced the fury of the elements and had inevitably become savages, but whites, with their technology and intelligence, would fare better. Or so he hoped.

The negative possibilities of monogenesis forced Americans to remain vigilant if they hoped to keep racial degeneration from destroying the nation. As the first explorers made their way back from the Louisiana Territory in the years after 1803, their reports spoke of a brutal and harsh environment, a place of savage mountains and vast deserts, a place, in short, that would surely change settlers, and probably not for the better.

Fortunately, for a young nation with imperial designs on the territory west of the Mississippi River, a new racial theory emerged in the 1840s (just as Americans began the manifesting of their destiny), a theory that promised to soothe concerns about degeneration. The monogenetic views of Blumenbach and Samuel Stanhope Smith faded before the rising view of *polygenesis*, which promised to cement the wall between the races and provide a modicum of comfort for people worried about the effects of westward expansion on whites. Polygeneticists believed God had created the races of man separately and had endowed them with innate and immutable characteristics that could not be changed by climate.³⁷

This new theory found favor with an array of American intellectuals, including scientists like the world-famous naturalist Louis Agassiz, Samuel George Morton (America's preeminent ethnologist), the renowned Egyptologist George Gliddon, archaeologist Ephraim G. Squier, and Josiah Nott, a southern physician and racial theorist. Together they formed the "American school" of anthropology and dedicated themselves to the idea that the races of humanity had evolved separately. This idea found an eager lay audience among slaveholders and those eager to see the young republic expand to the Pacific. Polygenesis, by asserting that inferior races had developed separately and could

not therefore improve, justified slavery as the best possible situation for blacks and the removal or eradication of Indians. It also promised that whites could settle in any climate or environment without fear of racial degeneration.

Agassiz, a Swiss émigré whose arrival in the United States instantly gave American science credibility, quickly became the nation's most prominent proponent of polygenesis, a belief he adopted after coming into contact with American slaves.³⁸ In an 1850 article in the *Christian Examiner*, he outlined his support for the polygenic theory. He argued that the creation story in the book of Genesis referred only to whites; other peoples had been created separately. Further, he rejected the idea that climate accounted for racial differences, noting, "These races [of man,] with all their diversity, may be traced through parts of the world which, in a physical point of view, are most similar, and similar branches occur over tracts of land the physical constitution of which differs to the utmost."³⁹ American Indians provided an example of both climatic diversity and racial consistency: "Over the whole continent of America . . . all the numerous tribes of Indians have the same physical character."⁴⁰ From Canada to South America, through a variety of different climates, American Indians appeared to be the same. Thus, Agassiz concluded, climate could not account for racial differences.

Since God created the races of mankind separately and endowed them with inherent and immutable characteristics, it would be cruel, the Harvard professor warned, to encourage the lesser races to think of themselves as capable of improving to the level of the superior white race. Far better to "foster those dispositions that are eminently marked in them, rather than . . . treating them on terms of equality," he concluded.⁴¹ Slaves should, in short, remain slaves as nature intended. Agassiz admitted that science needed more study to prove the relative worth of each of the races, but he reminded readers that another renowned scientist, Samuel George Morton, had done much to prove the superiority of whites.

An avid collector of human skulls, Morton believed the size of the braincase, or cranium, directly reflected the intelligence of the individual and the individual's race. Through exhaustive (if heavily biased) research on cranial volume, he came to the conclusion in his *Crania Americana*, published in 1839, and in *Crania Aegyptiaca*, in 1844, that Native Americans and Africans did not match the cranial capacity and therefore the intelligence of whites.⁴² Josiah Nott, an Alabama physician, helped popularize Morton's ideas while also

making a name for himself as a leading racial theorist and an articulate and intelligent proponent of slavery.⁴³ Much more than an apologist for the South and its “peculiar institution,” his ideas placed him very much in the mainstream of American and European thought on race. He wrote, “Nations and races, like individuals, have each an especial destiny: some are born to rule, and others to be ruled. And such has ever been the history of mankind. No two distinctly-marked races can dwell together on equal terms.”⁴⁴ Slavery benefited blacks, for as lesser creatures they needed the regimentation and control it imposed, and, he argued, freeing them would place the superior race—outnumbered in many parts of the South—in the hands of an inferior race. More than folly, such a plan amounted to race suicide.

Nott also justified westward expansion by arguing that Anglo-Saxon whites had a duty to take these lands and write the next chapter in the westward march of Caucasians. Nott observed:

Some races, moreover, appear destined to live and prosper for a time, until the destroying race comes, which is to exterminate and supplant them. Observe how the aborigines of America are fading away before the exotic races of Europe. Those groups of races heretofore comprehended under the generic term Caucasian, have in all ages been the rulers; and it requires no prophet’s eye to see that they are destined eventually to conquer and hold every foot of the globe where climate does not interpose an impenetrable barrier. No philanthropy, no legislation, no missionary labors, can change this law: it is written in man’s nature by the hand of his Creator.⁴⁵

Here, he asserted, lay immutable natural laws governing white supremacy, and little could change this destiny of conquest, though even Nott hedged a bit, noting that Native Americans might still thrive in climates inappropriate to the white race.⁴⁶

These beliefs and ideas, the cultural baggage carried by any society, informed Americans’ views and justified their conquest, and they willingly toted them along with the rest of their baggage into the West. Some of this baggage, aptly captured in John O’Sullivan’s phrase *Manifest Destiny*, foretold God’s plan for Americans to “overspread and possess the whole of the continent.”⁴⁷ God sanctioned this conquest and blessed the success of America’s divine mission, but God had an ally in science. Race science claimed the inherent superiority of Anglo-Americans and the inevitability

of their conquest over lesser peoples, an argument that buttressed the divine mandate in Manifest Destiny. Filtering the new environments of the West—its vast plains, high mountains, and desiccated deserts—and the people who lived in them through their own biases and perceptions, they struggled to comprehend these seemingly strange landscapes and peoples, but racial science seemed to offer solace in the face of uncertainty. As Americans ventured into the West, they wore their beliefs in Manifest Destiny and their own racial superiority like armor, but like all armor it covered up their own uncertainty and vulnerability.

Would the academic arguments of polygenesis stand up to the West? Anglo-Americans, after all, would inevitably come into contact with supposedly inferior Indian and Hispanic peoples and unfamiliar climates that differed markedly from the East Coast or the ancestral homeland of Europe. Would white racial vigor triumph, or would racial degeneration and savagery overwhelm these newcomers, leaving them as weak and impotent as the Spaniards in the Spanish empire had allegedly become? If there existed a chance of degeneration, then could the West, on the other hand, be used as a kind of racial dumping ground, a place where freed African Americans and eastern American Indian peoples could be relegated to racially cleanse the nation? All of these seemed like possibilities as Americans stood on the shore of the Mississippi and looked west into the Louisiana Territory.⁴⁸ It was here that Americans first glimpsed the racial potential of the West. Would it be a dumping ground, an American Siberia, where the least desirable and compatible groups could be forever consigned to the margins of the nation, or would the region offer white Americans a never-ending frontier? It was here that the story of the white man's West began.

NOTES

1. Charles Fletcher Lummis, "Los Angeles: Metropolis of the Southwest," *Land of Sunshine* 3, no. 1 (June 1895): 43–48; quote on 46.

2. "Parade Characteristic of Wild and Woolly West," *San Angelo Standard Times*, October 4, 1910.

3. *Ibid.*

4. For more on this minor battle but major event, see Paul H. Carlson and Tom Crum, *Myth, Memory, and Massacre: The Pease River Capture of Cynthia Ann Parker* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2010).

5. "He Fought for a White Man's Country," *San Angelo Standard Times*, October 5, 1910. I am indebted to Matthew Johnston, an MA student in the Angelo State University history department, for finding this extraordinary quote.

6. See Gary Clayton Anderson, *The Conquest of Texas: Ethnic Cleansing in the Promised Land, 1820–1875* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005).

7. Elliott West, "Reconstructing Race," in *The Essential West: Collected Essays* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012), 100–126, quote on p. 117.

8. On Russell and Remington's work, see Richard W. Etulain, *Re-Imagining the Modern American West: A Century of Fiction, History, and Art* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996), 52–68.

9. This interesting comparison is discussed in Peter Coates, *American Perceptions of Immigrant and Invasive Species: Strangers on the Land* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

10. An interesting group of essays wrestles with this issue. See Stephanie Cole and Alison Parker, eds., *Beyond Black and White: Race, Ethnicity, and Gender in the U.S. South and Southwest* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004).

11. West's most recent discussion of these themes appears in West, "Reconstructing Race," 100–126.

12. David M. Wrobel, *Promised Lands: Promotion, Memory, and the Creation of the American West* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 176.

13. On the scary aspects of wilderness, see Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967). For the West as a land of promise and desire, see Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1950).

14. Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," in John Mack Faragher, ed., *Rereading Frederick Jackson Turner* (New York: Henry Holt, 1994), 31–60.

15. Benjamin Franklin, "Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind," in Leonard Labaree, ed., *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1961), 4:234.

16. *Ibid.*; italics in original.

17. The most recent effort to trace the development of whiteness theory, and a very helpful synthesis, is Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010).

18. *Ibid.*, especially chapters 9, 14, and 26.

19. Some of the more important works on whiteness theory are David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1991); Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006).

20. Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 6; italics in original.

21. Elliott Robert Barkan, *From All Points: America's Immigrant West, 1870s–1952* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 6–13. For the story of Anglo and Hispanic interactions, see David J. Weber, ed., *Foreigners in Their Native Land: Historical Roots of the Mexican-Americans* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1973; reprint, 2003); David J. Weber, ed., *New Spain's Far Northern Frontier: Essays on Spain in the American West* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1979); Arnolde De León, *Racial Frontiers: Africans, Chinese, and Mexicans in Western America, 1848–1890* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002); Arnolde De León, *They Called Them Greasers: Anglo Attitudes toward Mexicans in Texas, 1821–1900* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983); Mark M. Carroll, *Homesteads Ungovernable: Families, Sex, Race, and the Law in Frontier Texas, 1823–1860* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001). David M. Emmons traces the history of the Irish in *Beyond the American Pale: The Irish in the West, 1845–1910* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010).

22. Numerous works have addressed the status of Hispanics in the United States. For more on their generally poor treatment, see De León, *They Called Them Greasers*. For the political debates over ethnicity and citizenship, see David Gutierrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

23. Linda Gordon, *The Great Arizona Orphan Abduction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

24. Ian Haney López, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 1.

25. Cheryl Harris, "Whiteness as Property," *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 8 (June 1993): 1709–91.

26. On the origins of racial science, see William Stanton, *The Leopard's Spots: Scientific Attitudes toward Race in America, 1815–59* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960); Thomas F. Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea in America* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1963), 54–83; Robert E. Bieder, *Science Encounters the Indian, 1820–1880: The Early Years of American Ethnology* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986); Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins*

of *American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 116–57; Gustav Jahoda, *Images of Savages: Ancients [sic] Roots of Modern Prejudice in Western Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 63–96; Joseph L. Graves Jr., *The Emperor's New Clothes: Biological Theories of Race at the Millennium* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001); Stephen J. Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1981); Audrey Smedley, *Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a Worldview* (Boulder: Westview, 1993); Bentley Glass, Owsei Temkin, and William L. Straus Jr., eds., *Forerunners of Darwin: 1745–1859* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1959).

27. Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, 66, 401–12; Gossett, *Race*, 35; Jahoda, *Images of Savages*, 40–41; Graves, *The Emperor's New Clothes*, 38–39. Not everyone believes that Linnaeus was as color-blind as Gould asserts. See, for example, Patrick Brantlinger, *Dark Vanishings: Discourse on the Extinction of Primitive Races, 1800–1930* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 2, 17.

28. Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, 401–12; Graves, *The Emperor's New Clothes*, 40.

29. Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, 401–12; Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 47–48; Painter, *History of White People*, 72–90.

30. Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, 401–12; Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 47–48.

31. A concise biographical account of Smith's life and work, including his knowledge of Blumenbach, is found in the introduction by Winthrop D. Jordan in Samuel Stanhope Smith, *Essay on the Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1965), vii–liii. Also see Gossett, *Race*, 39–41; Stanton, *The Leopard's Spots*, 3–23.

32. On Rush and the problem of including African Americans in American society, see Ronald T. Takaki, *Iron Cages: Race and Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), 28–35.

33. Bruce Dain, *A Hideous Monster of the Mind: American Race Theory in the Early Republic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), viii.

34. For the early period of US Indian policy and early missionary efforts, see Francis Paul Prucha, *American Indian Policy in the Formative Years: The Indian Trade and Intercourse Acts, 1790–1834* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970); Francis Paul Prucha, *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians*, 2 vol. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984); James P. Ronda, *Lewis and Clark among the Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984); Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Converting the West: A Biography of Narcissa Whitman* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991). For general discussions of reformers' efforts to "civilize" Indian peoples after 1865, see Francis Paul Prucha, *American Indian Policy in Crisis: Christian Reformers and the Indian, 1865–1900* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1977);

Robert M. Utley, *The Indian Frontier of the American West, 1846–1900* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), 203–26.

35. Smith, *Essay on the Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species*, 44. It is interesting that poor whites have often been considered racially inferior; see, for example, Painter, *History of White People*, 256–77; Matt Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

36. Smith, *Essay on the Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species*, 45.

37. Discussions of polygenic versus monogenic origins are found in Conevery Bolton Valenčius, *The Health of the Country: How American Settlers Understood Themselves and Their Land* (New York: Perseus Books Group, 2002), 235–36; Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 44–45; Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, 71–74; Stanton, *The Leopard's Spots*, 1–15; Curtis M. Hinsley Jr., *Savages and Scientists: The Smithsonian Institution and the Development of American Anthropology, 1846–1910* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1981), 22–28; Gossett, *Race*, 44–51, 58–67; Graves, *The Emperor's New Clothes*, 37–52; Smedley, *Race in North America*, 234–43.

38. Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, 74–82; Stanton, *The Leopard's Spots*, 100–109.

39. Louis Agassiz, “The Diversity of Origin of the Human Races,” *Christian Examiner* 49 (1850): 123.

40. *Ibid.*, 126.

41. *Ibid.*, 144.

42. Reginald Horsman discusses Morton's influence in *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 125–27, and Stephen J. Gould exposes the flaws in Morton's work in *The Mismeasure of Man*, 82–104.

43. Josiah Nott's life is analyzed in depth in Reginald Horsman, *Josiah Nott of Mobile: Southerner, Physician, and Racial Theorist* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987). Nott's importance is also covered in Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, 101–2; Valenčius, *Health of the Country*, 234–35; Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 129–57.

44. J[osiah] C[lark] Nott and Geo[rge] R. Gliddon, *Types of Mankind: or, Ethnological Researches, Based upon the Ancient Monuments, Paintings, Sculptures, and Crania of Races, and upon Their Natural, Geographical, Philological and Biblical History* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo, 1855), 79.

45. *Ibid.*

46. On the supposed extinction of inferior peoples, see Brantlinger, *Dark Vanishings*; Brian Dippie, *The Vanishing American: White Attitudes and US Indian Policy* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1982).

47. Quoted in Richard White, “It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own”: A New History of the American West (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 73.

48. Winthrop Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550–1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), discusses the aborted attempts at establishing colonies for freedmen in the West. See especially pp. 546–69. On the creation of Indian Territory, see James P. Ronda, “‘We Have a Country:’ Race, Geography, and the Invention of Indian Territory,” in Michael A. Morrison and James Brewer Stewart, eds., *Race and the Early Republic* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), 159–76.

