

The Hierarchy of Race (1987)¹

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The Number of purely white People in the World is proportionably very small. All Africa is black or tawny. Asia chiefly tawny. America (exclusive of the new Comers) wholly so. And 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 Perhaps I am partial to the Complexion of my Country, for such Kind of Partiality is natural to Mankind. - Benjamin Franklin (1751)

Benjamin Franklin, that paragon of Enlightenment optimism, versatility, and virtue, was also a racist. He divided humanity according to skin color, assigning to each color characteristic traits. Indians he publicly condemned as “barbarous tribes of savages that delight in war and take pride in murder.” His private correspondence depicted them as ignorant, congenitally lazy, vain, and insolent. An occasional blow was essential to keeping them in line; even a hint of weakness was an invitation to trouble. A slave owner whose printing establishment profited from slave sales, Franklin regarded blacks as lazy, thieving, and improvident. He defended the severity of slave codes as appropriate to a people “of a plotting Disposition, dark, sullen, malicious, revengeful, and cruel in the highest Degree.” Even the “swarthy” German settlers in Franklin’s Pennsylvania, derogated by him as “Palantine Boors,” seemed undesirable aliens. They were worrisomely clannish, and some among them were even papists.

Franklin’s racism was in substantial measure a response to the spur of interest, both national and personal. He dreamed of a free English-speaking people in the Americas increasing in number, territory, strength, and commercial prosperity. Throughout his political career he followed this dream. It carried him toward the advocacy of colonial unity and ultimately of independence from Britain. It made him the proponent of the acquisition and opening of new lands, a task that he identified as the better part of statesmanship. Rulers that acquire new territory (even by removing “the Natives” if necessary), he wrote in 1751, “may be properly called the Fathers of their nation, as they are the Cause of the Generation of Multitudes by the Encouragement they afford to Marriage.” To the public good to be derived from the acquisition of new land for an increasing white population, Franklin could add the potential benefit to his private purse. As early as 1748 he had entered the game of land speculation, buying shares in companies with claims in the Ohio valley and Nova Scotia, and for fifteen years he lobbied in London to advance colonial claims to western lands.

The Indians by the simple fact of possessing much desirable territory could not help running directly athwart Franklin’s determination to obtain the land needed for future generations of whites. By obstructing the opening of new land and hence the opportunity of whites to get ahead, marry, and multiply, Indians were guilty of one of the most serious crimes in his book: “killing thousands of our children before they are born.” Franklin preferred to avoid a collision of interests, and he hated to see docile and accommodating Indians victimized-often indiscriminately killed-by anxious or grasping

¹ Michael Hunt, “The Hierarchy of Race,” from *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 46-91.

frontiersmen. Yet he could not help making the Indian his favorite target for racial stereotyping. He thus reflected and reinforced the prevailing prejudices of his countrymen and at the same time convinced himself of the necessity of vigilance and firmness in dealing with so dangerous a people. Surly and violent Indians, especially those that connived with the French against the interests of British America, should be summarily thrust aside and their land expropriated for others to put to better use.

Blacks and Germans were by contrast a less formidable, internal problem--a blotch on the existing pattern of settlement, to be sure, but not a fundamental threat to it from outside. They were either to be assimilated or to be excluded in favor of better stock. Personal involvement in the schooling of Philadelphia blacks disabused Franklin of any belief in their innate inferiority and by the 1770s made of him an opponent of slavery. But his commitment to maintaining the purity of the white settlement drove him to oppose allowing more blacks into the colonies, "as they every where prevent the Increase of Whites." Similarly his commitment to white supremacy led him to look uneasily on the large number of blacks already settled in the South. He regarded them, like the Indians, as a dissatisfied people that unfriendly outside powers such as France might stir to insurrection. The Germans too were of uncertain loyalty. Those already in the country should, if possible, be culturally transformed by free English schools, while those yet to arrive should be kept back in favor of better stock--the English, Welsh, and Protestant Irish.

Franklin's consciousness of color, fully shared by his contemporaries, figured prominently in the thinking of subsequent generations. Their conception of race, somewhat more elaborate and structured than Franklin's, was essentially hierarchical. They drew distinctions among the various peoples of the world on the basis of physical features, above all skin color and to a lesser extent head type (as the illustrations to follow suggest), and guided by those distinctions they ranked the various types of peoples in the world. Those with the lightest skin were positioned on the highest rung of the hierarchy, and those with the darkest skin were relegated to the lowest. In between fell the "yellow" Mongolians and Malays, the "red" American Indian, and the racially mixed Latino. Each color implied a level of physical, mental, and moral development, with white Americans setting themselves up as the unquestioned standard of measurement. "Superior peoples" thus spoke English or some language akin to it, responsibly exercised democratic rights, embraced the uplifting influence of Protestant Christianity, and thanks to their industry enjoyed material abundance. Those toward the bottom were woefully deficient in each of these areas.

This folk wisdom on race was reinforced from early in the nineteenth century by "scientific" investigation. Taken as a group, ethnographers, geographers, and historians offered complex and often contradictory conclusions on the nature of race. Were racial characteristics fixed or subject to change? Did races have multiple and distinct origins or a single common source? How did race relate to culture, civilization, and national character? If the findings of the learned had been an important source of American thinking on race, then their conflicting conclusions might well have cast doubt on the validity of race as a concept. But in fact the learned were important to popular thinking chiefly insofar as they focused popular attention on race by their persistent and often tortured effort to give it an empirical basis. In other words, their interest gave popular

legitimacy to race as a fundamental and objective category separating peoples of supposedly unequal gifts.

Blacks above all others served as the anvil on which Americans forged this notion of racial hierarchy and the attendant color-conscious view of the world. Colonists carried with them Elizabethan prejudices that associated the color black and by extension the dark-skinned peoples of Africa with baseness and evil. White stood as the moral and aesthetic opposite, the symbol of virtue, beauty, and purity. An English poem of 1620 played on this contrast by describing the African as “a black deformed Elfe” while picturing the white Englishman as “like unto God himselfe.

By the early eighteenth century Americans were applying explicitly racial formulations to blacks. In the South this intellectual legacy combined with economic self-interest to produce the most extreme negrophobia. Their exploitation of blacks had become a way of life, and their submission essential to a sense of security among often outnumbered white communities. The black was first abased in the Southern slave codes, and later, in the nineteenth century, his inherent inferiority was vigorously affirmed in response to abolitionist agitation and post-Civil War Reconstruction policy. The folklore of the region stigmatized enslaved blacks as incipient insurrectionists and brooding rapists. Close supervision and control and the threat of severe punishment, including castration for sexual as well as other offenses, served to keep them in check.

These racial views informed the Southern perspective on external affairs already in antebellum days. A horror of miscegenation at home translated naturally enough into censure of foreign peoples who tolerated racial mixing and suffered from its regressive social effects. Southerners, doubting the docility of their own blacks, took fright when Caribbean slaves slaughtered their masters or British abolitionists (and later social revolutionaries in Europe) promoted the radical doctrine of human equality. The emancipation of blacks after the Civil War brought about some shift in race relations, especially toward social segregation, but not in Southern white views of black bestiality and the fears and fantasies that those views stimulated in response to developments abroad no less than at home.

Though whites often disagreed on aspects of the “Negro question,” sometimes emotionally so, they nonetheless agreed almost universally on the fundamental issue of white supremacy and black inferiority. By the beginning of the twentieth century the issue of the place of blacks in American society rested on the same foundation that it had three centuries earlier—the protean association of inferiority with darkness of skin color. This strikingly persistent consensus on race was evident in scholarly work, but even more to the point it suffused the popular literature of the time. School texts, for example, consistently put across from decade to decade the same essential message: blacks occupied the bottom rung in the hierarchy of race dominated by whites. Blacks were “destitute of intelligence.” A geography of 1789 delicately explained, “They are a brutish people, having little more of humanity but the form.” At best these texts presented blacks as victims of slavery, incapable of climbing higher on their own, possibly educable as dependents of paternalistic whites, but also perhaps irremediably backward. A 1900 account probably reflected mainstream white attitudes when it glumly concluded, “In spite of the efforts to educate them...many [blacks] still remain densely ignorant.”

This conception of race, defined by the poles of black and white, carried over into American foreign policy. By its grip on the thinking of the men who debated and

determined that policy, by its influence over the press, and by its hold on the electorate, race powerfully shaped the way the nation dealt with other peoples. This included not just the Indian even before Franklin's day but also the peoples of Latin America, East Asia, and Europe as Americans developed their own independent foreign policy.

The idea of a racial hierarchy proved particularly attractive because it offered a ready and useful conceptual handle on the world. It was reassuringly hardy and stable in a changing world. It was also accessible and gratifyingly easy to apply. Rather than having to spend long hours trying-perhaps inconclusively-to puzzle out the subtle patterns of other cultures, the elite interested in policy had at hand in the hierarchy of race a key to reducing other peoples and nations to readily comprehensible and familiar terms. It required no more than an understanding of easily grasped polarities and superficial characteristics. Races were different and unequal. Some were more civilized or progressive, others were more barbaric or backward. By locating white Americans of old stock among the most advanced peoples, the racial hierarchy had the incidental attraction of flattering that elite's ego and lending credence to that other major pillar of American foreign policy, the commitment to greatness.

From the perspective of the chosen few who made and followed policy, the idea of a racial hierarchy had the additional virtue of being congruent with popular attitudes. Americans high and low absorbed an awareness of race in their schooling, in their homes, and in their work place. As a central point of cultural reference on which all were agreed, race could be applied to foreign problems without fear that the concept itself would arouse domestic controversy.

The national preoccupation with race was further reinforced and refined by contact with those peoples who fell in the path of the American pursuit of greatness across a continent and overseas. The first of these were the Indians, a cover-all term applied to peoples belonging to several thousand different native-American cultures. For three hundred years, both as colonials and as members of an independent nation, Americans warred against or formed alliances with the Indians, made treaties with them and broke those treaties, until the dominance of transplanted Europeans was established beyond the slightest challenge.

In the process, the Indians suffered enormous loss of life. That part of the Americas north of the Rio Grande boasted a pre-Columbian Indian population that scholars today estimate at ten million. Epidemic disease introduced from Europe carried away millions. Warfare and forced relocation, which brought starvation and exposure, made further substantial inroads. Between the early nineteenth century and 1930 the number of Indians living in the continental United States shrank from perhaps 600,000 to roughly half that figure. White Americans had not inherited the fabled empty continent. Rather, by their presence and policies, they had emptied it.

Successive generations had shared Franklin's view of the Indian as an impediment to acquiring new land cheaply. Just as Southern whites spawned virulent strains of negrophobia, frontier whites were the source of the most intense and violent Indian hating. And though their resort to fraudulent or violent methods collided with humanitarian principles and legal agreements (including formal treaties), the federal government and, it seems fair to say, most Americans endorsed or acquiesced in the

practice of Indian extermination and removal. The governor of Georgia, a state synonymous among Cherokees for land grabbing, explained in 1830 that “treaties were expedients by which ignorant, intractable, and savage people were induced without bloodshed to yield up what civilized peoples had a right to possess.... Thomas Jefferson was less blunt but no less devoted to an aggressive policy that would open vast new tracts of land to his beloved yeoman farmer. Later generations along the moving western frontier maintained the proposition laid down by these early Americans-savages would have to go, treaties or no treaties.

The claims of self-interest could not, however, entirely override the dictates of justice, and so there resulted a contradiction in Indian policy that became apparent in colonial times and carried over into the early national period. Missionaries and prominent American statesmen, Thomas Jefferson included, had hoped to dissolve the contradiction by promoting the cultural assimilation of the Indian. Education, conversion to Christianity, and the abandonment of hunting for farming on private land were the key steps toward realizing this goal. Assimilation had the substantial virtue of saving the national honor and preserving the existence of an otherwise doomed primitive people while also ensuring that large tracts of wasteland would be put to better use. Indians would turn part of the wilderness into farmlands for themselves, making the rest available for purchase by whites.

These high hopes were repeatedly shattered by the impatience, sharp dealing, and violence that characterized the actual workings of Indian policy and the day-to-day approach of whites to Indians generally. The government devoted scant resources to promoting assimilation and failed to enforce treaties guaranteeing Indians even their diminished holdings. Those Indians who did make substantial progress towards assimilation, such as the Cherokees, found whites insatiable in their appetite for land and unstoppable in their drive to acquire it. When local conflicts over land developed between whites and Indians, state authorities predictably favored whites. Indian resistance, leading occasionally to alliances with sympathetic European powers, set off in turn brutal frontier warfare that invariably brought Indian defeat and white retribution. The victors then pushed the vanquished aside. Colonial New Englanders and Virginians had set the pattern. They regarded the Indians as dangerous barbarians, to be segregated for better supervision or altogether removed beyond range of contact. A mailed fist and a readiness to use forceful if not brutal methods were essential to keeping them in check.

Andrew Jackson, a Tennessean and inveterate land speculator who had imbibed that heady frontier brew of land hunger and Indian hating, brought these methods to perfection, and in so doing he became the agent for the destruction of the Creeks, Seminoles, and other Indians of the Southeast. Through a series of military campaigns and imposed treaties in the 1810s, he shattered Indian power and forced open to speculation and settlement Indian land accounting for three-fourths of the territory of Florida and Alabama, one-third of Tennessee, one-fifth of Georgia and Mississippi, and smaller fractions of Kentucky and North Carolina. Later, in the 1830s, Jackson the president set in motion the policy-described by him as “not only liberal, but generous”-of removing the remaining sixty thousand Indians. By the 1850s the Indian question east of the Mississippi had been “solved” to white satisfaction.

The process of subjugation was repeated west of the Mississippi in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Thanks to new technology, especially armaments, railroads,

and telegraphs, the next round in the destruction of the American Indian proceeded just as inexorably and even more swiftly. Tribes long resident in the West and some ninety thousand Indians driven there from the East signed treaties with the federal government guaranteeing their land "as long as the waters run and the grass shall grow." These treaties were then universally and systematically violated. Once again local encroachments created tensions, which federal troops invariably settled to the disadvantage of Indians. Some tribes offered no resistance. Such was the case with the California Indians, who numbered one hundred thousand in 1848. In eleven years they were reduced by barbarous treatment to thirty thousand; by 1900 only fifteen thousand were left. Other tribes prudently retreated, seeking in renegotiated treaties to preserve some part of their everdwindling patrimony. Some, such as the Sioux, fought back, but even their small and temporary victories were purchased at the price of severe reprisals.

The federal government finally forced most of these battered peoples onto reservations, which were merely confined patches of marginal land where they were to live under governmental protection and supervision. While the Indians sought to salvage the last shreds of their cultural autonomy, their white overseers labored to eradicate the old "savage," nomadic patterns and to settle their charges into a new civilized, Christian way of life.

The army that guarded the peace of the West and policed the Indians was a worthy successor to Jackson's militia. It dealt with Indians according to the principles of group responsibility, expected treachery and bad faith from them as a matter of course, and anticipated their ultimate extermination. General William T. Sherman, who first commanded that Western army (and later supervised its campaigns from Washington), wrote in 1868, "The more we can kill this year, the less will have to be killed the next war, for the more I see of these Indians the more convinced I am that all have to be killed or be maintained as a species of pauper. Their attempts at civilization are simply ridiculous. Northeastern humanitarians protested in vain against outrages no worse than those their ancestors had perpetrated against other Indians in an earlier age.

By the 1870s an American policy of continental expansion initiated in that earlier age had run full course so far as the Indian was concerned. In 1871 Congress stopped making new treaties, and old treaties, the Supreme Court had ruled the year before, were no longer binding. Even autonomy was denied the Indian as the federal government extended its control over reservation life. The Dawes Act of 1887 completed the process of distributing tribal lands and undermining tribal power. Aside from sporadic outbreaks, the Indian now, ceased to be a foreign problem and could be neglected as a domestic one. The ties between the Indian and foreign policy, however, were not so much broken as transformed. The rationale used to justify the defeat and dispossession of one people would in the future serve to sanction claims to American superiority and dominion over other peoples.

With the brutal abasement of the Indian in real life went a tendency to ennoble him in myth. In the course of the nineteenth century whites showed a generous impulse, the prerogative of victors, to downplay old antagonisms and assign the Indian a flattering high place in the hierarchy of race. Viewed in the romantic afterglow of his defeat, he emerged near the top, just below whites and far above the lowly blacks. The Indian stood there as a melancholy, even tragic figure. He had been the victim of an abstraction, American progress. His sacrifice had been necessary, noted one school text

as early as 1813, “for the increase of mankind, and for the promotion of the world’s glory and happiness.” A child of the wilderness-simple, brave, enduring, and dignified-he had proven constitutionally deficient in those qualities of industry and self-discipline essential to getting on in a world being rapidly transformed by the forces of civilization. So, like the wilderness, the noble savage in this racial myth would simply have to fade away, thereby confirming that general law of nature: where two races meet, the inferior yields inevitably to the superior.

Latinos, the Spanish-speaking peoples of the Americas, occupied a position midway up the hierarchy of race. Their position there was fixed by the hold on the American imagination of the “black legend” with its condemnatory view of Spanish character. That legend had been part of the intellectual baggage that the English colonists had brought to the New World, and it was subsequently amplified by American merchants and diplomats who made direct contact with the newly independent Latin American states early in the nineteenth century. The resulting critique of Latin culture was perpetuated by school texts, kept fresh in cartoons, retailed in political rhetoric, and even incorporated into the views of policymakers, so that by the early twentieth century it had come to exercise a pervasive influence on the American approach to Latin America.

Narrowly construed, the black legend highlighted the cruelty with which Spanish conquerors had dealt with native-American populations. Driven by a taste for “carnage and plunder” (in the words of a 1794 text), these adventurers had overcome the Indians by a combination of brutality and deception and then exploited them unmercifully.

More broadly understood, the legend stood for all those undesirable characteristics that were Spain’s unfortunate legacy to much of the New World. An 1898 account written to justify the war against Spain drew on what had become a widely accepted notion of that legacy. “Spain has been tried and convicted in the forum of history. Her religion has been bigotry, whose sacraments have been solemnized by the faggot and the rack. Her statesmanship has been infamy: her diplomacy, hypocrisy: her wars have been massacres: her supremacy has been a blight and a curse, condemning continents to sterility, and their inhabitants to death.” Henry Cabot Lodge, an outspoken proponent of that war, characterized the foe as “mediaeval, cruel, dying” and “three hundred years behind all the rest of the world.” Returning from a tour of Cuba, Redfield Proctor delivered a major Senate speech in March 1898 flatly accusing Spain of “the worst misgovernment of which I ever had knowledge.”

From this legacy derived those qualities that Americans most often associated with Latinos-servility, misrule, lethargy, and bigotry. Latin governments were but parodies of the republican principles that they claimed to embody. John Randolph, a Virginia congressman, had looked south in 1816 and morosely observed that South Americans struggling for liberty would end up under “a detestable despotism. You cannot make liberty out of Spanish matter.” Secretary of State John Quincy Adams agreed. Latin Americans, he observed in 1821, “have not the first elements of good or free government. Arbitrary power, military and ecclesiastical, was stamped upon their education, upon their habits, and upon all their institutions.” The somnolent populations of that region, debilitated by their heritage and enervated by a tropical climate, neglected their rich natural resources, while the Catholic faith lulled them into intellectual passivity. “A

priest-ridden people,” Jefferson had predicted in 1813, were beyond “maintaining a free civil government.”

Color-conscious Americans came to incorporate yet another element into their view of Latinos, a horror over the wholesale miscegenation that had further blackened that people both literally and figuratively. With appalling freedom, white Spaniards had mixed with enslaved blacks and native Indians to produce degenerate mongrel offspring. This sexual license among the races set an example particularly disturbing to Americans dedicated to defending the color line at home. The woeful consequences of crossing that line were everywhere apparent in Latin America. All Latin countries fell under censure for lax racial standards and indifference to the social consequences of polluting the blood of whites. But the darker the complexion of the people in question, the sharper was the attack. In this respect Haiti, populated by descendants of African slaves, was repeatedly singled out as an example of what happened when dark-skinned people were left to run wild and to murder their masters and then each other.

The black legend provided Americans with the basis for a wide array of negative stereotypes. These were usually assigned—so far as the gender can be determined—to the Latin male. He was depicted, depending on the circumstances and the prejudice of the observer, as superstitious, obstinate, lazy, cowardly, vain, pretentious, dishonest, unclean, impractical, and corrupt. However, alongside this dominant conception of Latin incapacity and the image of the swarthy if not black Latin male that accompanied it, there developed a more positive picture of the Latino as an imminently redeemable, even desirable white. In this alternative embodiment, the Latin usually took the form of a fair-skinned and comely *senorita* living in a mongrelized society yet somehow escaping its degrading effects. This distinction so favorable to Latin women was drawn by early firsthand American observers, invariably males traveling alone, and it stuck in the minds of those at home, to be summoned up when the times called for saving Latins either from themselves or from some outside threat. A macho Uncle Sam would rush in and sweep the Latin lady off her feet, save her from her half-breed husband or from some sinister intruder from outside the hemisphere, and introduce her to the kind of civilized life she deserved.

Americans could thus choose their images of Latin Americans to fit the circumstances. During the period of continental expansion, the negative image of the male fated to give way before his betters was the most serviceable. Denigration of the Mexican, for example, developed apace with American interest in his land. The first wave of Americans to visit Mexico in the 1820s reported that they found a dark-complected, cowardly, and cruel people addicted to gambling and plagued by loose morals. A visitor to Mexico City early in the decade concluded that most of its people “want nothing but tails to be more brute than the apes.” Early Anglo settlers in Texas were quick to accept this harsh estimate. The folklore about “niggers” and “redskins” that many of them had brought from their homes along the Southern frontier predisposed them to a low regard for another dark-skinned people, the Mexicans, who stood in their way. As the contest for control of Texas and the Southwest proceeded, fellow Southerners and other Americans picked up and developed this theme of Mexican inferiority as a justification for American claims. Such a “colored mongrel race” had no claim to Texas, the influential senator from Mississippi, Robert J. Walker, insisted in 1836. A decade later, in the debate over Texas annexation, Pennsylvania’s Senator James

Buchanan, soon to become Polk's secretary of state, called for pushing aside "the imbecile and indolent Mexican race."

Once war began, James K. Polk and his expansionist supporters justified their aggressive course by denouncing the enemy in the conventional and contemptuous terms as "ignorant, prejudiced, and perfectly faithless." In this same spirit a New York paper declared, "The Mexicans are *aboriginal Indians*, and they must share the destiny of their race." So widely accepted had this negative stereotype become that even those who resisted the call of conquest and regeneration characterized the Mexican as a "half-savage" who would be difficult if not impossible to improve or assimilate. Whig critics of Polk's policy freely derided the Mexicans as a race that was "mongrel," "a sad compound," "slothful, indolent, ignorant," or simply "miserable."

When by contrast Americans saw themselves acting benevolently, they liked to picture the Latino as a white maiden passively awaiting salvation or seduction. During the Mexican War proponents of sweeping annexation indulged this fantasy. One patriotic poet imagined a union between "The Spanish maid, with eye of fire," and the Yankee, "Whose purer blood and valiant arms, / Are fit to clasp her budding charms." Cuba, which had awakened the interest of territorially acquisitive Americans as early as Jefferson's day, even more strikingly evoked this tendency to feminize the Latin. For example, in the 1850s, when calls for acquiring the island were frequently sounded, one enthusiast rhapsodized about Cuba as Uncle Sam's beloved "Queen of the Antilles...breathing her spicy, tropic breath, and pouting her rosy, sugared lips." Later in the century, Spanish atrocities committed in an effort to suppress a Cuban independence movement reawakened the vision of a feminine Cuba not so much ready for the taking as ravaged and desperate for rescue from her Spanish master, who fairly bristled with traits associated with the black legend.

The American drive for hemispheric preeminence at the turn of the century brought to the fore yet a third image: The Latino as a black child. Americans had intervened in Cuba to oust the Spaniards, appropriated Puerto Rico as their own, and encouraged a Panamanian secessionist movement against Colombia in order to obtain canal rights. The unexpected resentment and sullen defiance which these supposedly benevolent actions evoked proved puzzling and irritating. To compound the problem, Americans soon found themselves up against the psychologically troubling implications of continuing to portray the Latinos as mates. The picture of Uncle Sam in close proximity to a female Latin America carried strong sexual overtones and suggested the disturbing possibility of racial mixing. Americans uncomfortable over this prospect- yet unwilling to surrender claims to dominion found a way out by making the Latino into a black child. This new image was a hybrid, drawing on the chief characteristics of the two previously dominant stereotypes, the racially degenerate male and the dependent woman.

Again Cuba can serve as an example. The Cubans were initially pictured as hapless victims of Spanish brutality and colonial oppression. Cartoons that appeared during the Cuban insurrection played on the theme of womanhood outraged, while the reconcentration policy pressed by the Spanish commander ("Butcher" Wyler) and the sinking of the *Maine* were depicted as entirely consistent with the cruel and treacherous Spanish character. But criticism of Spain did not in the end translate into respect for the insurgents. That the Cubans were not to be taken as even approximate equals was clear in the response of Anglo policymakers even before the war began. Both the Cleveland and

McKinley administrations expressed a preference for the possibility of ordered Spanish rule over the certainty of anarchic Cuban self-government. Once the war came McKinley denied the Cubans recognition as a belligerent and afterward placed them under the control of an American military government. Closer contact now impressed on Americans the fact that many Cubans were swarthy, even black. Their army was a contemptible ragtag band (“made up very considerably of black people, only partially civilized”) whose leaders were insufficiently grateful for American succor. They might wish independence but were certain to mismanage it if left on their own.

These discoveries quickly transformed the cartoon Cuban into a petulant child whose place on the racial hierarchy was made clear by his stereotypical black features and his minstrel drawl. This picture of Cuban infantilism helped Americans to ignore the protests of this obviously immature and turbulent people against outside intervention and control, and it provided justification for a policy of keeping them in an appropriately dependent relationship to the United States. Thus the Cuban as mistress gave way to the Cuban as Southern black, “very poor and densely ignorant,” as a text of 1900 quick to adopt the new imagery observed, but “capable of advancement under proper guidance.”

Americans thus entered the twentieth century with three images of Latin Americans at their disposal. One, the Latin as half-breed brute, could be invoked to justify a contemptuous aloofness or a predatory aggressiveness. The second, of the feminized Latin, allowed the United States to assume the role of ardent suitor or gallant savior. The third of an infantile and often negroid Latin, provided the justification for Uncle Sam’s tutelage and stern discipline. In each case Americans stood in relation to Latinos as superiors dealing with inferiors.

These images, which had already helped rationalize the drive to expel Spain from North America and then to push the Mexican border south, also supported the ripening claim of the United States to the role of natural leader and policeman of an American system of states. That claim was embodied in the Monroe Doctrine, which began its career in 1823 as a bold but only partially enforceable pronouncement against the extension of European influence in the Western Hemisphere. By the 1890s it had evolved into a major principle of American policy, which not even Britain could safely ignore. With Europe fenced out, American policymakers with inherited pretensions to superiority over Latinos, and with ever-increasing power to make good on those pretensions, moved steadily toward making the hemisphere a U.S. preserve. Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and Colombians had already learned the practical implications of dominance by a people gripped by the black legend. Other Latin Americans, similarly stigmatized, would soon be subjected to the same hard education.

The peoples of East Asia, sometimes designated “the Mongolian race” but more popularly referred to as “Orientals,” were to win a permanent place in the American imagination by the latter half of the nineteenth century. In that period they came to stand, like the Latinos, somewhere midway on the racial ladder. Their place, however, is difficult to pinpoint since their image tended, again like the Latinos’, to be unstable.

In broadest terms, Orientals were seen as inscrutable and somnolent. An observer developing that image in a favorable direction might hold them up as a people of promise, on the verge of shaking off a stagnant cultural tradition and improving their

position in the hierarchy of race. Viewed in this light, they would appear admirably trustworthy, clean, and industrious. On the other hand, the image could evolve in a way that made Orientals into a disturbing, even dangerous, bundle of contradictions—subhuman yet cunning, unfeeling yet boiling inwardly with rage, cowardly and decadent yet capable of great conquests. In this latter guise they embodied the worst vices, were indifferent to the appeal of free institutions, and poisoned whatever environment they entered.

Thus Americans created for Orientals, just as they had for Latinos and Indians, two distinctly different images: a positive one, appropriate to happy times when paternalism and benevolence were in season, and a negative one, suited to those tense periods when abuse or aggrandizement became the order of the day.

The Chinese were the first East Asians to appear on the American horizon. Initially the Chinese had been seen secondhand, through the writings of European observers who filtered imperial China through the soft haze of their Enlightenment preconceptions. From a distance China appeared an ancient civilization whose cultured people and achievements in the fine arts and benevolently despotic government gave much to admire. But alongside this positive view prevalent among the American elite, there developed another strain of thought that was critically condescending toward a people who did not embrace free trade, who suspiciously held foreigners under control, and who followed pagan rites and such immoral practices as infanticide and polygamy. A 1784 geography embracing this latter view described the Chinese as “the most dishonest, low, thieving people in the world.”

In the early nineteenth century the image of a China distant, refined, and exotic began to give ground to that of a China repulsive, reactionary, and heathen as American visitors, above all the prolific and opinionated missionaries, broadcast their impressions back home. The country was a “moral wilderness,” its people ignorant, depraved, and dirty, reported the pioneer evangelists. Soon, in the 1850s and after, the arrival of Chinese immigrants to work in the labor-hungry economy of the American West swung the balance decisively against the Chinese. As had happened with other foreign peoples, the closer the contact and the larger the numbers of outlanders involved, the more elaborate and negative the American appraisal. By 1880, with over a hundred thousand Chinese in the United States, an intense nativist movement had grown up in the West, the main area of Chinese settlement. It demanded the exclusion of Chinese from the country and resorted to both mob violence and steady political pressure at all levels of government to achieve that goal.

Protagonists of the nativist cause reached many Americans formerly ignorant of or indifferent to the Chinese. The image they supplied was of an inherently inferior and intolerable foreign element “swarming” out of “a contiguous semicivilized empire” onto American shores. According to this image, the Chinese posed multiple threats. They came as servile “coolie” laborers who would take away the livelihood and destroy the dignity of white workingmen. They lived “huddled together...almost like rats” in pestilential ghettos, “Chinatowns” that endangered the health and welfare of the larger white community. Behind the apparently placid public demeanor of these Orientals lurked the sexually demonic. The “Chinamen” not only drove their own women into prostitution but also sought to debauch vulnerable white women—or so it seemed in the

sexual fantasy of their foes. At their most alarmist critics of the Chinese saw in these immigrants but the first wave of a great yellow tide that would sweep the entire continent.

The nativist movement won the West, and its indictment of the Chinese was powerful enough to gain wide acceptance elsewhere, including the White House. In 1888 the incumbent, Grover Cleveland, pronounced the Chinese “dangerous to our peace and welfare,” while his Republican challenger, Benjamin Harrison, attacked them in much the same terms, as an “alien” race whose assimilation was “neither possible nor desirable.” A series of treaties and congressional measures between 1880 and 1904 made exclusion of Chinese the stringently applied law of the land. The negative image of Chinese immigrants produced by this campaign would linger in the American imagination long after it had served its purpose.

But the nativists did not, even in their heyday, have a monopoly on interpreting the Chinese. The American community in China, which had grown in numbers and influence through the nineteenth century, had continued to emphasize the negative qualities of China as it was-weak, vulnerable, and backward. To that extent their evaluation simply reinforced the nativist message. These Americans, however, were more concerned with China as it might become under the patronage of American diplomacy and the invigorating influence of American finance, trade, and mission work. Enthusiastic agents of change, they made a case for China’s enormous potential for progress that appealed powerfully to their countrymen, ever on the lookout for an arena to exercise their greatness and conditioned to expect the westward flow of civilization. Asia would be moved; China would be the pivot; Americans would supply the initial shove. Thus at the same time that Americans were being told that Chinese were loathsome creatures to be kept at a distance at all costs, they were also hearing that China was a promising ward whom Americans had a special responsibility to tutor, protect against danger, and even punish for misbehavior.

It naturally followed that American policy, influenced by these divergent views, was curiously divided for a time. An open-door policy attuned to China’s future development coexisted uneasily with the exclusion movement. Finally, in the 1910s the tension between the two competing lines of policy was at last resolved. The conclusive triumph of a sweeping policy of exclusion had by then eliminated anti-Chinese nativism as a political issue, thus ironically opening the way for the ascendance of advocates of a special open door relationship with China. They would have Americans identify with China, sharing in her triumphs and despairing over her failures. By the early twentieth century Americans were again, after the passage of almost a hundred years, beginning to view China in a more positive light.

The Japanese were the other major “Oriental” people to command sustained attention. Like the Chinese, they too rose and fell in the estimation of Americans. Japan began its career in the nineteenth-century American mind a mystery, sealed off by a seclusion policy even more complete than China’s. Mistreatment of shipwrecked American sailors early in that century suggested that the Japanese were, if anything, barbarians insensitive to the dictates of common humanity and the law of nations. The Perry expedition seemingly changed all that. Perry’s success in 1854 in opening Japan to broader foreign contact, though in fact due largely to the accident of good timing, came to be celebrated in the United States as the indispensable impetus the Japanese had needed to begin a sweeping renovation. By the 1890s, with that process largely

completed, Japan had emerged in American thinking as a nation joining the march of civilization. Its achievements, including extensive domestic reforms and the resounding defeat of China in 1894 and Russia a decade later, evoked praise and admiration but also an undercurrent of concern. How far might this rising Asian power go, and with what consequences to American ambitions in the Pacific?

As had happened with the Chinese, the arrival of Japanese immigrants in the 1900s sent the pendulum of American opinion swinging sharply back the other way. The cases of the Chinese and Japanese were more than parallel; they were closely linked. Anti-Japanese nativism flourished in the same region, launched by the same alliance of labor and California's Democratic party, using the same methods-ranging from sporadic local violence to lobbying in Congress; it enjoyed the tolerance of the rest of the country; and after two decades it culminated in the complete exclusion of Japanese on racial grounds.

The arguments previously marshaled against one set of Orientals, the Chinese, were easily deployed against another. The interests of free labor should be protected from "Asiatic competition" and white morals defended against a corrupting race. A new generation of nativists warned of the dangers to the "pure maids of California" sitting in school beside "matured Japs, with their base minds, their lascivious thoughts, multiplied by their race and strengthened by their mode of life." Intermarriage would mean "corrupting the very springs of civilization." Calls were again heard for vigilance in the Pacific against attack by a wily people, especially one that had only recently defeated one European power, Russia, and had had the effrontery to claim Britain as an ally.

By the turn of the century a curious relationship had developed between American images of China and Japan. While they would individually rise and fall in American estimation, they would not both move in the same direction at the same time. Rather, a sort of compensatory principle seemed at work. When (as in the late nineteenth century) the Chinese as a nation seemed irremediably antiquated and as a people at close quarters simply repulsive, Japan was made the embodiment of American hopes for a civilized Asia. Conversely, when the Japanese fell into ill repute (as was beginning to happen by the early twentieth century), China was held up for admiration. Here, then, was the novel spectacle of the different branches of a single race simultaneously moving in opposite directions up and down the racial ladder. It seems that by juxtaposing these two oriental peoples Americans had found a means of keeping their hopes and anxieties in equilibrium. While oriental villains served as the lightning rod of American racial fears, more worthy Orientals could be summoned up to keep alive liberal dreams of a prosperous, stable, and democratic East Asia.

In the structure of American race thinking, Anglo-Saxonism-the belief that Americans and the British were one people united by uncommon qualities and common interests-occupied a central position. By the first half of the nineteenth century Americans had begun to claim with pride their place in a trans-Atlantic community of English-speaking people. Dimming memories of fratricidal conflict set off by the American revolution created the conditions favorable to the rise of Anglo-Saxonism in an increasingly firm national consciousness. School texts began to celebrate the trans-Atlantic tie. A poetic paean to "America and Britons" often reproduced in the 1830s and

1840s proclaimed, “The voice of blood shall reach, / More audibly than speech, / WE ARE ONE.” At the same time the proud American racial lineage assumed an honored position as a standard topic in public rhetoric. “Out of all the inhabitants of the world... a select stock, the Saxon, and out of this the British family, the noblest of the stock, was chosen to people our country.”

By the end of the nineteenth century the Anglo-Saxon spell had further strengthened its hold. Race thinking, widely retailed in properly impressive pseudoscientific terms, had given added plausibility to an older ethnocentric notion of Anglo solidarity and superiority. The racial traits of both peoples, as they were now defined, included prominently industry, intelligence, a keen sense of moral purpose, and a talent for government. Together they stood preeminent in world affairs. Already the British had achieved much: their empire embraced one-fifth of the world’s surface and one-quarter of its people, and their navy dominated the seas. Americans basked in the reflected glory of these accomplishments but they also knew that they, the child and heir of imperial Britain, were well on their way to eclipsing the parent in wealth and power. The United States was bound to become “a greater England with a nobler destiny,” proclaimed Albert J. Beveridge, one of the more nationalistic of the Anglo-Saxonists.

The arrival of large numbers of disturbingly foreign immigrants sharpened the sensitivity to racial differences even within the circle of European whites. The nativism of the antebellum period had revealed early on the determination of ethnic Anglos to preserve their cultural hegemony against alien newcomers, then chiefly Irish and Germans. The concerns felt during that era proved mild, however, compared to the anxiety provoked by an even greater influx of still more foreign peoples, from southern and eastern Europe, at the end of the century. From the racial comparisons then drawn by a defensive but culturally dominant Anglo elite, there emerged a clear and fixed pecking order even for whites.

The elite’s preoccupation with the differences among whites carried over into the fabric of thinking on world affairs. Anglo-Saxons clearly dominated the international stage. The Germans came next. They had the same qualities as their racial cousins save one—they had lost their love of liberty. This single serious defect set Germans just beyond the Anglo-Saxon pale and made this still-formidable people into a threatening global competitor, to be closely watched. By the turn of the century they were increasingly pictured as latter-day Huns, prone to the aggressive, even brutal behavior characteristic of a militaristic and autocratic system. The Slavs, half European and half Asiatic, were also formidable racial competitors on the international stage. Highly regimented and of rugged peasant stock, they had displayed great endurance, patience, and strength (if not intelligence and a knack for innovation) as they had slowly but irresistibly extended their control over much of the Eurasian land mass.

Lower down in the hierarchy were the Latin peoples of Europe, defined to include the French as well as Italians and Spaniards. They lacked vigor; they were sentimental, undisciplined, and superstitious; and consequently they were of small account in international affairs. Still farther back among the ranks of the unworthy appeared the Jews, depicted in explicitly racial, antisemitic terms. Predictably, farthest back were the peoples of Africa. In the popular literature of the late nineteenth century the “dark continent” began to emerge as the fascinating home of “savage beasts and beastly savages.” Above all other places Africa invited white dominion.

The popular vogue enjoyed by Darwinism further accentuated the tendency for Americans to think of themselves as a race in comparative and competitive terms and to locate themselves in an Anglo-Saxon community of interests. Given an optimistic twist, Darwinian notions served to reinforce preexisting ideas of Anglo-Saxon superiority. By the standards of industrial progress, military prowess, and international influence and control, Anglo-Saxons had an incontestable claim to the top of the racial heap. From that eminence they would point the way toward an era of unprecedented world peace and prosperity. Lesser races, awed and grateful, could follow the lead of the Anglo-Saxon-or drop to the bottom of the heap to meet their fate, ultimate extinction.

But Darwinism also led some contemporary Anglo-Saxonist observers to more somber conclusions. In international competition among the races victory might not go to the refined and peaceful peoples but rather to the amoral, the cunning, the fecund, and the power hungry. Anglo-Americans might then need to cultivate a sense of solidarity and a capacity for cooperation in order to hold at bay the hard forces of barbarism that might overwhelm them singly.

This world view dominated by a belief in the shared superiority of Americans and Englishmen is nicely illustrated in the outlook of Alfred Thayer Mahan, naval historian and influential strategist. Through the 1880s and 1890s Mahan steadily advocated Anglo-American cooperation, for “in political traditions as well as by blood we are kin, the rest alien.” He saw “the best hope of the world” in the union of the two branches of the race and the extension of their control over the multitude of peoples still in “the childhood stage of race development” and hence unfit for self-government. Of the Europeans Mahan regarded the Germans as the most progressive, though by 1897 Germany’s international misbehavior began to plant doubts. Slavs, he was certain, were cruel and barbarous, and the Russians, who combined that “remorseless energy” of their race with the “unscrupulous craft of the Asiatic,” particularly troubled him. He censured the French as fickle and false and the Latino (save for the entrancing women) as backward. The Chinese he viewed as both pitifully inert and dangerously barbaric, thus justifying on the one hand missionary ministrations and on the other strict exclusion from the outposts of civilization in Hawaii and the West Coast. He classified Filipinos as children and after some hesitations endorsed their annexation. Of the “Orientals” only the westernizing Japanese won his respect; they were “repeating the experience of our Teutonic ancestors.” Blacks stood at the bottom of Mahan’s racial hierarchy. They had been “darkies” and “niggers” since his youth, and even conversion to abolitionism had not shaken his conviction that they were the most primitive of all the races.

The appeal of Anglo-Saxonism and the related notions about the racial inferiority of other peoples, especially those of color, became dramatically apparent in the 1890s. At home the Southern effort to create a caste system fixing blacks in a place of permanent inferiority intensified; Congress passed new laws against Chinese immigrants and began to debate doing the same to some Europeans; the executive snuffed out the last embers of Indian resistance. Abroad involvement in Cuba and China both betrayed, as suggested above, the workings of deep-seated racial assumptions. In Hawaii and the Philippines, where a policy of intervention gave way to one of outright annexation, the issue of race emerged in more explicit form. Indeed, so prominent and pervasive an influence was race thinking that it figured in the armory of arguments of Americans on both sides of the

question. Then, as in the debates of the 1840s and 1850s, race served equally as a reason for a cautious, self-limiting policy and as justification for a bold, assertive one.

In the case of Hawaii, whose future had been argued intermittently in Congress since the 1850s, racial considerations had proven as important as economic, strategic, and constitutional ones. The vigor and superiority of Anglo-Saxons, one side contended, was evident in the way New England merchants, sea captains, and missionaries had gained a foothold on the islands and in the way their offspring, even though a minority, had won commercial and political dominance. The racially deficient natives had simply given way like the Indians. Annexationists saw as the logical next step acceptance by the United States of the white islanders' wish for union and of the remaining native Hawaiians' need for civilization. Critics, repelled by the prospect of incorporating masses of nonwhites, warned against the perils of miscegenation that would produce a feeble, half-breed race on the islands and stressed that the inherent inferiority of native peoples prevented them from rising to the level of full and responsible citizenship. They would remain mere subjects, unassimilable and forever a millstone around the national neck. In the first major contest over Hawaii's annexation in 1893, the critics prevailed only to find themselves reversed in the summer of 1898 when racial imperialism, brought to fever pitch by war with Spain, easily won out.

The Philippines issue, which arose later the same year, elicited the same conflicting set of views. Again annexationists argued for the mastery of the Anglo-Saxon with his capacity to rule and uplift. Beveridge assured the Senate after a visit to the islands that the Filipinos were "a decadent race," mere children who had been "instructed by the Spaniards in the latter's worst estate." The United States had a clear duty, McKinley argued, to redeem the Filipinos "from savage indolence and habits," and "set them in the pathway of the world's best civilization." That meant as much as a century of tutelage, according to William Howard Taft after his first exposure to those he described as "our little brown brothers." The opponents of annexation countered with their own battery of well-rehearsed racial arguments. The Filipino lived in an enervating tropical climate; even whites could not long submit to it without impairment. Further, the Filipino bore the indelible stamp of three centuries of Spanish misrule. Hawaii had at least had the benefit of a half century of American influence. Finally, the Filipino carried all those unpleasant traits that had made other peoples difficult to deal with. He was ignorant and servile like the black, impractical and infantile like the Latino, savage like the Indian, and impassive like the Oriental.

Had the issue of annexation been resolved on the basis of racial arguments alone, the opposition might well have stymied the McKinley administration. The foothold that victorious American forces had gained on the islands at McKinley's behest, however, introduced a feature that transformed the debate. Annexationists could play more directly on Anglo-Saxon racial pride. To return the archipelago to Spain would be cowardly and inhumane. To leave the Filipinos to their own devices would be irresponsible and dishonorable. Racial superiority carried obligations that could be ignored only at the cost of throwing doubt on that superiority itself. Though the earlier American record in meeting professed obligations to nonwhite peoples pointed to some troubling conclusions on this score, memory now proved conveniently short and selective. Once more annexationists carried the day.

The racial views embraced by Benjamin Franklin and carried forward by generations of his countrymen had not been an American invention, nor was race thinking an American monopoly. The American experience with race, and the closely related and formative experience with slavery, deserve to be seen as an extension of a variegated pattern of beliefs and practices extending back millenia and across cultures around the globe. There are, however, no easy generalizations to make about the American case or comparisons to draw between it and other cases. Only the obvious point remains-Americans were hardly unique. Gripped by ethnocentric impulses of seemingly universal force, Americans used race to build protective walls against the threatening strangeness of other people and to legitimize the boundaries and terms of intergroup contact. Moved no less by exploitative impulses, Americans followed other "master classes" in employing racial attributes to justify subordination of "inferior peoples," whether as black slaves, Indian wards, or Filipino subjects. Finally, Americans betrayed their common humanity by using the resulting collection of racial notions as an arena for the exercise of libidinous and other fantasies normally held in close confinement.

Americans inherited a rich legacy of racial thought from their immediate European ancestors. Westerners coming into contact with peoples of the "Third World" in the fifteenth century had already betrayed signs of racism. Well before Englishmen took that first step on the North American continent, they had absorbed Elizabethan myths about blacks and easily extrapolated them to other nonwhite peoples. These inherited views were greatly sharpened as Anglos began to contend with other expatriate Europeans, native Americans, and even Asians for a place on the new continent. For ambitious yet initially isolated British colonists, a picture of the world's peoples in which lightness of skin was tied to innate worth proved understandably attractive. Had there existed no ready-made Elizabethan notions about race, these colonists would surely have had to invent them. They used the racial hierarchy to underwrite their claim to lands they wanted and, once possession was secure, to justify the imposition of Anglo cultural values and institutions as well as the expulsion or political and economic subordination of lesser peoples. Race also provided a balm for the pangs of conscience over the inevitable instances of false dealing and the broader patterns of exploitation and dehumanization that attended this process of achieving white (and above all, Anglo) hegemony.

The attitudes toward race that developed in domestic affairs from black-white relations, and in the interstice between foreign and domestic affairs where the Indian and the immigrant were to be found, were in one sense a mosaic made up of pieces from different regions of the country. Each region had fought the war for racial supremacy in its own way and in accord with the economic prize in question, the nature of the opposing people, and the power disparities between them. Seizing Indian land in New England in the 1680s differed from holding a black population under control in the antebellum South, just as evicting Mexico from the Southwest and subordinating the resident Latino population differed from the struggle to control the immigrant tide washing the urban East at the turn of the century.

But the overall pattern of the mosaic was clear enough. Americans of light skin, and especially of English descent, shared a loyalty to race as an essential category for understanding other peoples and as a fundamental basis for judging them. They had, in

other words, fixed race at the center of their world view. Public policy in general and foreign policy in particular had from the start of the national experience reflected the central role that race thinking played. As Americans came into closer contact with an ever-widening circle of foreign peoples in the last decade of the nineteenth century, racial assumptions continued to guide their response. Those crying for a strenuous foreign policy invoked the need to enhance the racial vitality of the Anglo-Saxon stock and to honor the tutelary obligations superior races owed lesser ones, while those skeptical about foreign crusades and colonies either labored to repel charges that they were traitors to their kind or recoiled in horror from races they considered irredeemably backward. Accepted by the turn of the century as an important ingredient in a demonstrably successful foreign policy no less than in the established domestic order, race would pass to subsequent generations as a well-nigh irresistible legacy.