

Working Against Racism from White Subject Positions:  
White Anti-Racism, New Abolitionism & Intersectional Anti-White Irish Diasporic Nationalism

By

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## ABSTRACT

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This dissertation is an intervention into Critical Whiteness Studies, an 'additional movement' to Ethnic Studies and Critical Race Theory. It systematically analyzes key contradictions in working against racism from a white subject positions under post-Civil Rights Movement liberal color-blind white hegemony and "Black Power" counter-hegemony through a critical assessment of two major competing projects in theory and practice: white anti-racism [Part 1] and New Abolitionism [Part 2].

I argue that while white anti-racism is eminently practical, its efforts to hegemonically rearticulate white are overly optimistic, tend toward renaturalizing whiteness, and are problematically dependent on collaboration with people of color. I further argue that while New Abolitionism has popularized and advanced an alternative approach to whiteness which understands whiteness as '*nothing but* oppressive and false' and seeks to 'abolish the white race', its ultimately class-centered conceptualization of race and idealization of militant nonconformity has failed to realize effective practice.

Part 3 considers alternative identities to whiteness, argues for a stronger race-centered definition of whiteness as a secular coalition of previously antagonistic european peoples forged on global frontiers for the purposes of dispossessing, exploiting, and killing people of color, advances a framework for understanding processes of 'becoming white' without 'necessary correspondence to class', and proposes an alternative approach to 'abolishing the white race' focused on its internal 'ethnic fissures' called intersectional, anti-white, Irish Diasporic nationalism.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ..... 1

LIST OF FIGURES ..... vi

DEDICATION ..... vii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ..... viii

INTRODUCTION ..... 01

**A. ‘Critical Whiteness Studies’**

**B. Methods**

**C. Roadmap**

CHAPTER 1: An Epistemology of Critical Whiteness Studies:  
    Critical Race Theory, Standpoint & Intersectionality ..... 09

**A. Critical Race Theory & Liberal Color-Blind White Hegemony**

**B. Feminism & Standpoint**

**C. Black Feminism & Intersectionality**

**D. Black Women’s Standpoint & ‘Transversal Dialogue’**

**E. Black Feminism, White Feminists &’ Transectional Empathy’**

**F. Critical Race Theory, Standpoint & ‘White Cognizance’**

**G. Critical Whiteness Studies: As Field, Method & Practice**

PART 1: WHITE ANTI-RACISM IN THEORY & PRACTICE

CHAPTER 2: White Anti-Racism in Theory ..... 22

    I. THE WHITE ANTI-RACIST ‘WE’

**A. Howard Winant & Rearticulating Whiteness**

**B. White Anti-Racist Role Models**

**C. The Tential Force of Whiteness**

**D. "White" as Field Specific Sign**

    II. WHITE ANTI-RACISTS & COUNTER-HEGEMONIC POLARIZATION

**E. Positivation of the Negative**

**F. Neutralization & Positivation of Counter-Hegemonically Negative "White"**

**G. Naturalization of Whiteness**

**H. Meaning & Power**

**I. Conclusion**

CHAPTER 3: White Anti-Racism in Practice: Confession, Conversion & Collaboration ...	33
--	----

- A. Confession: Solidifying Positional Consciousness**
- B. Conversion, Standpoint & Incompleteness**
- C. Conversion: Starting from the Standpoints of People of Color**
- D. Conversion: People of Color as a Barometer of Knowing**
- E. Conversion: The Use of Privilege**
- F. Ideal White Anti-Racist ‘Autonomy’**
- G. Andrea Smith’s The Problem with ‘Privilege’ & Ideal Collaborative Structures**

CHAPTER 4: White Anti-Racism’s Collaborative Demand, ‘Commitment’ & ‘Martyrdom ...	42
--	----

- A. Proximal Empathy & Segregation as Problem**
- B. White Anti-Racist Bodies: A Clear & Present Danger**
- C. White Anti-Racist Choice & Collaborative Spaces**
- D. Collaboration, Uncertainty & Experimentation**
- E. ‘The Role of the White Liberal’ is a ‘Martyr’s Role’**
- F. White Anti-Racist ‘Commitment’ & ‘Martyrdom’**
- G. White Anti-Racist ‘Martyrdom’ & Armed Struggle**
- H. Conclusion: ‘Martyrdom’ for a Different Project**

PART 2: NEW ABOLITIONISM IN THEORY & PRACTICE

Introduction to Part 2 .....	59
------------------------------	----

CHAPTER 5: An Epistemic, Organizational & Biographical History of New Abolitionism .....	61
---	----

I. ‘REPUDIATING WHITE-SKIN PRIVILEGE’: AN ALTERNATIVE ‘WHITE COMMUNIST’ APPROACH TO ORGANIZING THE WHITE WORKING CLASS

- A. Ignatin & Allen’s 1967 White Blindspot Formulation**
- B. White Blindspot & SDS**
- C. White Blindspot & The Weather Underground Organization**
- D. Ignatin, RYM-II, the Sojourner Truth Organization, & his Choice of CLR James**

II. J. SAKAI’S SETTLERS: MARXIST STANDPOINT THEORY & THE ‘REVOLUTIONARY POTENTIAL’ OF WHITE WORKERS

- E. Sakai & Allen: Two Historical Definitions of Whiteness with ‘Necessary Class Belonging’**
- F. Gilbert & Ignatin Respond: Taking Stock of Efforts to ‘Repudiate White-Skin Privileges’**
- G. The Possibilities & Historical Realities of Exceptionality**

CHAPTER 6: New Abolitionism in Theory: Key Ideological Elements & Discursive Strategy .....	83
<b>A. Whiteness as Mutually Constitutive</b>	
<b>B. James Baldwin &amp; the Choice to ‘Abolish’ Whiteness</b>	
<b>C. ‘Race Traitor: The Journal of the New Abolitionism’</b>	
<b>D. The New Abolitionist ‘Movement’</b>	
<b>II. NEW ABOLITIONIST DISCURSIVE STRATEGY</b>	
<b>E. Denaturalizing &amp; Problematizing "White"</b>	
<b>F. Problematic Resignifications &amp; Designifications: "Europeans", "Fair Complexions" &amp; Default Humanity</b>	
<b>G. ‘Race Treason:’ A Placeholder</b>	
<b>H. "Race Treason", "Anti-Racism" and Institutional Racism</b>	
<b>III. TOWARDS A NEW STYLE SHEET FOR THE ABOLITION OF WHITENESS</b>	
CHAPTER 7: New Abolitionism, Liberal Color-Blindness & “Black Power”: Confession, Conversion & Whiteness .....	102
<b>A. New Abolitionism &amp; Liberal Color-Blindness: Confession, Conversion &amp; Whiteness</b>	
<b>B. Confession: Demonstrating ‘Positional Consciousness’</b>	
<b>C. Conversion: Embracing the ‘Task’ of ‘Abolishing the White Race from Within’</b>	
<b>D. ‘Starting from’ the Standpoints of People of Color, Choice &amp; Interpretation</b>	
<b>E. New Abolitionism &amp; the Standpoints of People of Color</b>	
<b>F. Ideal Collaboration, Provisional ‘Autonomy’</b>	
<b>G. ‘Autonomy’, Masculinity &amp; Intersectional Feminism</b>	
<b>H. Conclusion</b>	
CHAPTER 8: New Abolitionism in Practice .....	120
<b>A. The Exemplar of John Brown: Defining the Threshold of ‘Race Treason’</b>	
<b>B. ‘Individual Breaks with White Solidarity’: Disrupting White Racial Bonding Through Confrontational Disidentification</b>	
<b>C. A ‘Critical Mass’ to Reach Escape Velocity</b>	
<b>D. The New Abolitionist Concept of a Monolithic ‘White Race’ &amp; Adaptive Whiteness</b>	
<b>E. A ‘Collective Break with White Solidarity’: Copwatch</b>	
<b>F. Conclusion: John Brown, Vanguardism &amp; ‘the Martyr’s Role’</b>	

PART 3: ALTERNATIVES TO WHITENESS

CHAPTER 9: New Abolitionists & Political Blackness as Alternative Identity ..... 138

- A. ‘**Treason to Whiteness is Loyalty to Humanity**’
- B. **New Abolitionist Disidentification & ‘Becoming Black’**
- C. **Race Treason & ‘Crossing Over’ into Blackness**
- D. **Rachel Doležal: A Delayed Exemplar of ‘Race Treason’ Through Blackness?**
- E. **Doležal’s ‘Radical Experimentation’ & Dilemmas of ‘Crossing Over’**
- F. **Deconstructing Blackness, Naturalizing Race**
- G. **Doležal & New Abolitionism**
- H. **‘Crossing Over’ & “Black Power”**
- I. **Conclusion: Viable Alternatives to Militant Nonconformity & ‘Political Blackness’?**

CHAPTER 10: ‘Becoming White’: A Race-Centered Definition of Whiteness ..... 155

- A. **European Proto-Racism, Britain & the ‘New World’**
- B. **‘English’ Rights & ‘Europeans’ in the Anglo-American Colonies**
- C. **“White” as Cognate for ‘Civilized-European-Christian’ in Anglo-American Colonies**
- D. **Whiteness & the British Empire**
- E. **Conclusion**

CHAPTER 11: American Nationalism, Pan-European Whiteness & Its ‘Ethnic’ Fissures .... 168

- A. **Scientific Racism & the Rights of Man [1740-1795]**
- B. **The White Republic & Anglo-Conformity**
- C. **The ‘Ethnic Fissures’ in Whiteness**
- D. **Ideal Pan-European Whiteness & U.S. Empire**
- E. **American Nationalism, Liberal Color-Blindness, “Black Power” & ‘White Ethnic Revival’**
- F. **Conclusion**

CHAPTER 12: ‘Becoming Irish’: An Alternative Approach to Whiteness ..... 183

- A. **Anti-Irish Racism, Irish-Americans & The Choice of Whiteness**
- B. **Towards Intersectional & Anti-Racist Irish Diasporic Nationalism**
- C. **Tom Hayden, White Irish-Americans & the Choice of Whiteness**
- D. **Hayden’s Proposal for Irish Whiteness: Confession, Conversion & Dissimilation**
- E. **Irish History: ‘White Interests’ vs. ‘Irish Interests’**
- F. **The ‘Tendential Force’ of “Irish”, Collaboration, ‘Autonomy’ & ‘Feasibility’**
- G. **White Anti-Racists, New Abolitionists, Nationalisms & Decolonization**

CONCLUSION ..... 205

REFERENCES ..... 211



## LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1. [p. 175]. Depiction of racial hierarchy combining Johann Blumenbach's pyramid structure, which reconciled Classical and Biblical proto-racial axes with global empire allowing infinite hierarchical differentiation from a 'Caucasian' pinnacle, and Charles Mill's (1997) consideration of 'the fuzzy status of inferior whites'.

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## INTRODUCTION

After the second World War, Black people<sup>1</sup> in the U.S. boldly asserted their rights as humans and citizens in campaigns of direct action known collectively as the Civil Rights Movement. They were emboldened by the post-war delegitimization of scientific racism, the national liberation movements of colonized peoples around the world, and the NAACP's Supreme Court victory over racial segregation in Brown vs. Board of Education. Their resistance to 'Jim Crow' reanimated 'domestic' antagonisms—between North and South, Federal and State,—drew world attention to the white supremacist character of the 'leader of the free world', and ultimately forced a 'Second Reconstruction' (Brauer, 1977; Marable, 1984) of american<sup>2</sup> society.

At the dawn of the 1960s, young Black people staged spectacular grassroots lunch counter sit-ins across the South and formed the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee [SNCC] which quickly emerged as the cutting edge of the U.S. Civil Rights Movement. Sponsored and advised from its founding by Southern Christian Leadership Conference [SCLC] Interim Director Ella Baker, many in SNCC came to see themselves as building a prototype of what Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (2000 [1957]) called the "Beloved Community," a radical humanist organization of society "committed to the idea of seeing the spark of the sacred in every human being, no matter how vile or how violent" (J. Lewis & D'Orso, 1998, pp. 193-194) which underpinned action for 'nonviolent racial integration'. As part of their project of replacing 'Jim Crow' segregation with this 'Beloved Community', some further believed that "if we couldn't integrate the white community, we'd integrate the black community instead" (C. Hayden, 2000, p. 355). In an organization founded entirely by young Black people in the 'Jim Crow' South, this idealistic strategy of 'integrating the Black community' manifested in the construction of particular support roles for 'white liberals'. Local boycotts and sit-ins to break exclusion from white-only businesses and public spaces did not require collaboration with white people, but other direct actions against segregation, like the Freedom Rides in 1961, were crucially dependent on the instrumental use of white bodies, and early white staff entered SNCC

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<sup>1</sup> "Black" will be the primary term used in this text to signify people alternatively called "American Negroes" (Du Bois, 1903; Woodson, 1933; Haywood, 1948; Fanon, 1967 [1952]; King Jr., 2000 [1957]), "Afro-Americans" (Wells, 1892; Woodson, 1933, El-Shabazz, 2013 [1964]-a; Foreman, 1968; Haywood, 1978), "African-Americans" (S. Carmichael & Hamilton, 1967) and "Africans born in America" (Ture, 1992, p. 189), because, in my experience, Black is "[still] the popularly accepted term" (Ibid.) – see page 25 for further discussion of these terms.

<sup>2</sup> "America" is widely used to describe the territory of the United States of America, and "American" the nationality of U.S. citizens, but the term also signifies the whole western hemisphere and the people living in North, Central, South 'americas' and the Caribbean islands. Because "america" is contested, vague, inaccurate, and foreign, and because there is no easy adjective form to distinguish *United States of Americans* from other 'americans', these terms are not capitalized in this text unless they begin a sentence, appear in a heading, or are used in conjunction with a proper group name, i.e. African-American, Mexican-American, Asian-American, Irish-American, etc. This decapitalization is a form of '*sous rature*' performed to call attention to the ways naturalization of 'america' as a term perpetuates U.S. chauvinism, doctrines of 'discovery', white settler-colonial violence, and Monroe-doctrinaire imperialism. See pp. 89 & 100 for a fuller discussion of *sous rature*.

in specifically delineated administrative, technical, advisory, diplomatic and financial ‘support’ roles.

The increasing involvement of “white radicals and white liberals” (Vernon, 1964) in SNCC’s ‘Beloved Community’ reached its numerical and ideological zenith during the 1964 Mississippi Summer Project [a.k.a. ‘Freedom Summer’] which sought to gain sympathy from white America by using “the flesh-and-blood form of their own sons and daughters” (J. Lewis & D’Orso, 1998, p. 242) as part of “a monumental confrontation between the Mississippi authorities and the federal government” (Cummings, 1985, p. 240). Those who proposed and supported the Summer Project reasoned that “With a thousand [white] volunteers, we could turn the eyes of the country onto the state of Mississippi and its legal reign of terror” (King, 1987, p. 369) and present an undeniable moral case to the Democratic Party for replacing segregationist delegates from Mississippi [‘Dixiecrats’] with delegates from the alternative, ‘interracial’, ‘Beloved Community’, Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party [MFDP]. Those in SNCC who opposed the Summer Project’s strategic reliance on thousands of white bodies, white lawyers, white donors, and the Democratic Party itself, argued that “SNCC always had been and should be black-led and black dominated” (Foreman, 1997, p. 421) with limited and clearly defined roles for white supporters (Ibid., p. 373; Chafe, 1993, p. 187; King, 1987, p. 369; J. Lewis & D’Orso, 1998, p. 240; Ransby, 2003, p. 314; Stanton, 2003, p. 155). They asked: “shouldn't there be something in American society where Negroes could lead?” (quoted in Zinn, 2002 [1964], p. 189).

The final plan for ‘Freedom Summer’ was only approved over these objections by one vote in the Executive Committee of SNCC (Cummings, 1985, p. 242; Foreman, 1997, p. 373; Stanton, 2003, p. 155). After the massive effort was ultimately betrayed by the Democratic Party to conciliate ‘Dixiecrats’ that August, an increasingly open schism emerged between those who believed “the civil rights movement could gain nothing without President Johnson's support” (Bayard Rustin [1967] quoted in D’Emilio, 2003, p. 445) and were willing to compromise with the hope of gradual ‘integration’ of the Democratic Party, and those “working to develop black power independent of white power” (Carmichael quoted in Jet Magazine, 1966, p. 9). As this schism developed, opposition to the Democratic Party alliance was powerfully articulated by Malcolm X [El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz]<sup>3</sup> who had founded his Organization of Afro-American Unity [OAAU] amidst ‘Freedom Summer’ on June 28, 1964.

Between September and February, El-Shabazz’s explicitly Black and Pan-African OAAU program, dedicated to achieving political and economic self-determination for Black people through internationalism, anti-imperialism, socialism, and armed self-defense, “converged with ideas gaining acceptance in SNCC” (Carson, 1995, p. 135). After El-Shabazz was assassinated

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<sup>3</sup> The previous year, Malcolm (2013 [1963]) had levelled a devastating critique of the Democratic Party-endorsed 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom and the ways in which ‘integration’ and reliance on the Democratic Party weakened Black liberation: “It's just like when you've got some coffee that's too black, which means it's too strong, what you do? You integrate it with cream. You make it weak. If you pour too much cream in, you won't even know you ever had coffee. It used to be hot, it becomes cool. It used to be strong, it becomes weak. It used to wake ya up, now it'll put you to sleep. This is what they did with the March on Washington. They joined it. They didn't integrate it; they infiltrated it. They joined it, became a part of it, took it over. And as they took it over, it lost its militancy. They ceased to be angry. They ceased to be hot. They ceased to be uncompromising. Why, it even ceased to be a march. It became a picnic, a circus. Nothin' but a circus, with clowns and all.”

on February 21, 1965, many in SNCC continued working to develop grassroots projects which embodied his unapologetically Black and independent approach to liberation. These efforts coalesced in the 1966 “Black Power” program of SNCC which formally abandoned a strategy of “begging” white america to recognize Black humanity (Carmichael [1966] quoted in Goudsouzian, 2014, p. 143) in favor of “organizing the strength of Negroes as a group force” and securing rights for Black people “through negotiation - from strength, rather than weakness” (New York Office of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, 1966).

While the Democratic Party had acceded to the most basic legal demands of the Brown vs. Board Civil Rights Movement for ‘equal rights’ by the Spring of 1966 with sweeping reforms which outlawed “overt” anti-Blackness, SNCC did not believe that white Democrats had any interest in correcting “institutional racism” (S. Carmichael & Hamilton, 1967, p. 4)—the deeper structures of U.S. society which had superordinated white people above Black people for more than three centuries. White domination was still very much a ‘fact on the ground’ in both the South and the North, and like it reconsolidated itself as ‘Jim Crow’ after the abolition of chattel slavery, ‘white supremacy’ now adjusted itself to primarily operate in a “procedural,” or *de facto*, manner rather than the “substantive,” or *de jure*, character which defined ‘Jim Crow’ (Delgado, 1990, p. 105).

By outlawing explicit ‘Jim Crow’ forms of segregation and discrimination, and slowly and symbolically “‘integrating’ its political structures” (Ture, 1992, p. 190), the ‘leader of the free world’ was able to declare itself a racially meritocratic society and white americans could “absolve themselves” (S. Carmichael & Hamilton, 1967, p. 5) from structural oppression of Black people while at the same actively maintaining and extending white domination around the world “without any overt reference to race” (Haney López, 1996, p. 178). This post-‘Jim Crow’ reform of white hegemony has been variously described as “Racism without Racists” (Massey, Scott, & Dornbusch, 1975), the “New Racism” (Collins, 2004; Dreyfuss, 1978; Sivanandan, 1983), or “Color-blind Racism” (Bonilla-Silva, 2003, 2006), and will be labeled “liberal color-blind white hegemony” or “liberal color-blindness” in the following text. Liberal, in the classical sense, because “whites rationalize minorities’ contemporary status as the product of market dynamics, naturally occurring phenomena, and blacks’ imputed cultural limitations” (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 2), and ‘color-blind’ because “contemporary racial inequality is reproduced through...practices that are subtle, institutional, and apparently nonracial” (Ibid., p. 3).

Under this new liberal color-blind hegemony, both ‘liberal’ and ‘conservative’ white forces appropriated and abstracted the already ‘liberal’ Civil Rights Movement demands for ‘equality under the law’ and to be ‘judged by the content of their character’, in order to protect institutionalized ‘white privilege’ and oppose demands for deeper ‘institutional’ reform with charges of ‘reverse racism’ (see D. Bell, 1992, pp. 369-370). White ‘conservatives’ worked to curtail civil rights legislation, devise institutional strategies that would ‘covertly’ or implicitly reinscribe racial segregation, and “‘tried to shift the responsibility for the degrading position in which blacks now find themselves away from the oppressors to the oppressed” (Central Committee of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, 1966). White ‘liberals’ kept the pace of change excruciatingly slow and sought to reframe policy interventions in terms of class instead of race [i.e. the ‘War on Poverty’].

Having forced the federal government to take responsibility for its primary campaigns of desegregating public spaces and breaking prohibitions to Black voter registration across the South by 1965, SNCC rededicated itself to “the empowerment of black people” (Cleveland Sellers quoted in Greenberg, 1998, p. 157) and systematically reformed itself [back] into an

unapologetically ‘Black-led and Black-dominated’ organization. White bodies, once useful in certain direct actions and symbolic of the ‘Beloved Community’ in formation, became a dangerous liability in many rural areas across the South (see S. K. T. Carmichael & Thelwell, 2003, pp. 466-470), and SNCC moved toward “Black Self-Determination” as a “black-staffed, black-controlled, and black-financed” organization which could no longer justify employing white staff in technical, administrative, and diplomatic roles (The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, 1966). This moment of organizational ‘reform’ shocked the contemporary sensibilities of ‘white radicals and white liberals’ committed to ‘Beloved Community’ principles and raised significant questions about what roles, if any, white people in ‘the movement’ could perform.

Black Power (1967) offered two clearly defined roles:

[1] Continue to “support indigenous black movements across the country” with “specific skills and techniques” which “black-led” organizations might still need [i.e. legal counsel] (pp. 83-84) and, most importantly,

[2] organizing “their own [white] communities....along lines necessary and possible for effective alliances” with Black liberation (pp. 81, 83).

Exhaustive discussions in SNCC on the roles, benefits, and consequences of ‘integration’ and coalition with ‘white radicals and white liberals’ in this “Black Power” moment brought unprecedented international attention to the contradictions of white people working against the structural privileges of whiteness, and significantly contributed to generating more than five decades of discourse on ‘the white question’ under liberal color-blind white hegemony.

Can white people do anything constructive to end racism? If so, what should they do, and how? These questions continue to reverberate through social movement spaces, college classrooms, and social media, and every individual and organization working against racism must contend with them. Answers are contingent on diverse definitions of racism as social phenomenon, and particularly how “white” is conceptualized. This dissertation works to systematically describe, analyze, and assess this complex and voluminous discourse about ‘white allies’ and the contradictions of working against racism from a white subject positions under liberal color-blind white hegemony through a close examination of two major competing projects—white anti-racism [Part 1] and New Abolitionism [Part 2]—which have been developed by white supporters of Black liberation to organize ‘their own [white] communities’ over the last fifty years.

The centering in this text of contradictions particular to resisting racism from white subject positions and the formulations of people structurally positioned as white working through them in no way endorses the view that resolving such contradictions is necessary for the liberation of people of color. Some fairly bold and forthright claims are made in these pages, and whether they are ultimately accepted or not, the goal of this text is to provide a strong foundation for renewed discussion and debate on the contradictions, limitations, and possibilities of people working against racism from white subject positions.

### **‘Critical Whiteness Studies’**

This dissertation is necessarily situated in the ‘field’ of Critical Whiteness Studies which has been described as an “additional movement” to the Critical Race Theory and broader Ethnic



Studies ‘movements’ in academia (Delgado & Stefancic, 1997, p. xviii). Black / African-American / Africana / Diaspora Studies and Third World / Ethnic Studies emerged quite spectacularly on U.S. college campuses in the late Sixties as extensions of the “Conscious political coalition” between Black liberation and “other oppressed nationalities” (Ture, 1992, p. 192) [i.e. people of color] which were, in large part, structured by the 1966 “Black Power” program of SNCC and its interpretations (e.g. “Red Power”, “Yellow Power”, “Chicano Power” movements, see Ginzberg & Dawson, 2016). Critical Race Theory similarly emerged through the work of legal scholars of color in the 1980s who applied “Black Power” approaches to the study of liberal color-blind white hegemony, and through the ‘second wave’ activism of students of color like those in the Third World Coalition at Harvard University (Crenshaw, 2002). Critical Race Theory coalesced in 1989 as a split with the ‘integrated’ Critical Legal Studies around a “scholarly agenda that placed race at the center of intellectual inquiry” (Ibid., p. 1345), and quickly proliferated beyond its origins in legal studies during the 1990s to diverse fields including “education, cultural studies, English, sociology, comparative literature, political science, history, and anthropology” (A. Harris, 2001, p. xx). The term is “now used as interchangeably for race scholarship as Kleenex is used for tissue” (Crenshaw, 2002, p. 1361).

Critical Race Theory broadly reflects the ‘radical’, color-conscious, and internationalist tendencies of “Black Power” in the academy through their generally “sympathetic understanding of notions of nationalism and group empowerment” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 5), as well as longer Black intellectual traditions, particularly the work of W.E.B. Du Bois. But it is also “fundamentally eclectic” (Crenshaw, 2002, p. 1361) and also “draws from certain European philosophers and theorists, such as Antonio Gramsci and Jacques Derrida [Gramscian post-structuralism], as well as from the American radical tradition exemplified by such figures as Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass...Cesar Chavez [and] Martin Luther King, Jr.” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 4).

Like “the Black Power and Chicano movements of the sixties and early seventies” (Ibid.), ‘Ethnic Studies’ and Critical Race Theory have also critically engaged questions of white participation:

Was CRT a product of people of color, or was CRT a product of any scholar engaged in a critical reflection of race? Because I subscribe to the latter position, I regard the traditional exclusion of whites from our workshop as an unfortunate development. But, of course, opinions on this and similar issues vary considerably among original and subsequent workshop participants (Crenshaw, 2002, p. 1363).<sup>4</sup>

‘Ethnic Studies’ and Critical Race Theory are fields where “a majority of...authors are existentially people of color” and such ‘considerably varying’ opinions on white participation have, like “Black Power”, constructed particular roles for “Those critical race theorists who are white [to be] cognizant of and committed to the overthrow of their own racial privilege” (D. A. Bell, 1995, p. 898). ‘Critical racists who are white’, therefore, not only study race from particular and liminal white positions, but are also themselves exemplars of working against racism from white [academic] subject positions.

‘Ethnic Studies’ and Critical Race Theory are ideally coalitional fields, with “subgroups”—i.e. African-American Studies, Xicanx / Latinx Studies, Asian-American Studies,

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<sup>4</sup> See also Deloria Jr., 1999, p. 155, for similar reflections on white participation in ‘Ethnic Studies’ / American Indian Studies.

etc.—which particularly study “the ways the dominant society racializes different minority groups at different times” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, pp. 6, 8). In the context of such ideal coalition, Critical Whiteness Studies might be intellectually defined by its particular task of studying the state of ‘being white’, or whiteness, using similarly ‘eclectic’ methodological approaches “under the umbrella of critical race theory” (Ibid., p. 6). But because it is also generally, although not entirely, populated by ‘Critical Race Theorists who are white’, Critical Whiteness Studies is regarded as an ‘additional movement’ to Critical Race Theory and ‘Ethnic Studies’—rather an entirely constitutive ‘movement’—dedicated to both the intellectual study of whiteness at-large and working through contradictions of resisting and studying racism from white subject positions.

And whereas ‘Ethnic Studies’ and Critical Race Theory are well-organized fields with professional associations, regular conferences, and departments with dedicated faculty, Critical Whiteness Studies has very little by way of particularly defined principles or methods, and there are no Critical Whiteness Studies departments or professional associations. A considerable amount of scholarship continues to be produced through the frame of ‘Critical Whiteness Studies’, but conferences are few and far between, and its spatial manifestations are typically limited to themed panels at the meetings of more established disciplines, rare courses particularly dedicated to the topic, and units of broader courses. None the less, like Ethnic Studies and Critical Race Theory scholarship, Critical Whiteness scholarship has a strong relationship to reflecting on and supporting ‘white community organizing’. Robin DiAngelo’s fairly recent (2006) ‘white fragility’ framework is exemplary in this regard, with hundreds of community events organized around using it as a resource.

## **Methods**

From within the liminal space of Critical Whiteness Studies as ‘an additional movement’ to ‘Ethnic Studies’ and Critical Race Theory, this dissertation builds on major Critical Race Theory frameworks and uses a similarly ‘eclectic’ mix of methods and approaches. As this introduction suggests, history is a primary approach in this text, and the following chapters will build on the historical narrative presented here to further contextualize the development of Critical Race Theory, Critical Whiteness Studies, and particularly the field’s two “differing tendencies” (Ignatiev, 1999a)—white anti-racism and New Abolitionism.

A broad form of genealogy (Nietzsche, 2006 [1887]) has been used to collect as much discourse on ‘the white question’ as possible and to understand the “origins” and “descent” (p. 4) of white anti-racism and New Abolitionism as projects. Data has been collected over twenty years from a broad set of sources, including physical, microform, and digital archives, social movement memoirs, biographies, histories, and publications, websites, social media, music, and academic texts in the fields of Critical Race Theory and Critical Whiteness Studies.

A broad form of Foucault’s (1972) further Archeological approach has also been used to “explain” and “analyse the formation and transformations of” white anti-racism and New Abolitionism as “discursive [practices] and [bodies] of revolutionary knowledge that are expressed in behaviour and strategies” (Ibid., p. 215). The historical narrative and conceptual framework works to situate the development of these ‘discursive practices’ within “the set of [discursive] conditions” of both liberal color-blind white hegemony and “Black Power” counter-hegemony which “define the positions and functions that the [white] subject could occupy” (p. 220) and “in accordance with which [each of these practices] is exercised” (p. 230). Only a small percentage of the discourse I’ve collected and reviewed is exhibited in this text, but the texts

exhibited herein are, in my estimation, the best, most representative, original, useful, influential, exceptional, rigorous, and / or insightful exemplars of Anglophone discourse on the ‘white question’ and the social and theoretical contexts in which it has been produced.

The central role of Black organizations like the OAAU, SNCC, Black Student Unions, and more recently Black Lives Matter in the broader ‘Third World’ movement against racism, and in critical studies of race from W.E.B. Du Bois to Derrick Bell and The Combahee River Collective, have prompted critiques from ‘non-Black people of color’ that popular and scholarly frameworks for the study of race and racism are organized around an entrenched ‘Black/white’ binary in which “‘Race’ means quintessentially, African American [and] Other groups, such as Asians, Indians, and Latino/as, are minorities in so far as their experience and treatment can be analogized to that of blacks” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, pp. 67-68). Work in moving ‘Ethnic Studies’ and Critical Race Theory beyond this ‘Black/white binary’ has helped to “deepen and complicate our understanding of how race is employed ideologically and materially, to extend the theoretical and empirical utility of CRT” (Dumas & ross, 2016, p. 417), and to create conditions which might “[strengthen] solidarity, [and increase] opportunities for coalition” between people of color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 70).

Black liberation organizations and Black intellectual traditions are also primary points of reference for Critical Whiteness Studies, and because, until recently, so much of the available discourse on ‘the white question’ has been produced by Black people and their ‘white allies’, this dissertation is almost entirely composed along the ‘Black/white binary’.<sup>5</sup> But to the extent that the “Black Power” critique of liberal color-blind white hegemony has been central to the development of ‘Ethnic Studies’ and Critical Race Theory as broader coalitional fields for the general study of racism under liberal color-blind white hegemony, I contend that much of the discourse produced by “Black Power” and its ‘white allies’ on ‘the white question’ has been similarly central to framing a broader set of conditions and contradictions shared by ‘white allies’ of ‘non-Black people of color’. The broader term “people of color” will be used often in this text to indicate such broader applications. I have also made a concerted effort to include key contributions to this discourse by ‘non-Black people of color’, and particularly work to address the racialization of ‘non-Black’ Indigenous peoples and global Decolonization in Chapters 10-12.

Describing the given ‘discursive conditions’ established by “Black Power” and Critical Race Theory in resistance to liberal color-blind white hegemony, identifying ‘regularities’ in the set of contradictions which arise under these given ‘discursive conditions’, and explaining the ‘formation’ of white anti-racism and New Abolitionism as particular projects in theory and practice, provides the foundation for what is an ultimately a theoretical intervention into Critical Whiteness Studies, and a dialectical approach to further ‘working through’ the contradictions its two major projects seek to mitigate / overcome. Have white anti-racist and New Abolitionist approaches “obstructed or promoted” (Nietzsche, 2006 [1887], p. 4) resistance to racism by

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<sup>5</sup> From its founding, SNCC had been the primary Civil Rights organization young ‘white radicals and white liberals’ identified with. It had strong organizational and personal links to the National Student Association and its ‘New Left’ opposition. As the price of loyalty to the Democratic Party quickly increased in relation to the expansion of U.S. war in South East Asia, SNCC was also a leading force in shaping and inspiring many of the white-dominated social movements which defined the rebellious ‘Sixties’. SNCC staff, volunteers, and ‘friends’ were key leaders in the Free Speech Movement, Second Wave Feminism, the Anti-Vietnam War movement, and the ‘Hippie’ movement.

people structurally positioned as white? Are these projects “a sign of distress, poverty” in strategies designed to facilitate work against racism from white subject positions? “Or, on the contrary, do they reveal the fullness, strength and will of [some white people, their] courage, [their] confidence, [their] future?” (Ibid.). What “value” (Ibid.) do these projects have to the liberation movements of people of color?

## **Roadmap**

Chapter 1 will continue to develop a basic conceptual framework to ground this study of white anti-racism and New Abolitionism, drawing from “Black Power”, Critical Race Theory, Marxism, Gramscian Post-Structuralism, Black [and] Marxist Feminisms, and Critical Whiteness Studies itself. Chapter 2 will also introduce a further Semiotic framework for analyzing the ‘formation, discursive practice, behaviour and strategies’ of white anti-racism and New Abolitionism.

Part 1 [Chapters 2-4] will contextualize, describe, analyze, and assess white anti-racism—the dominant and most practicable ‘formation, discursive practice, behaviour and strategy’ in social movement spaces and Critical Whiteness Studies which seeks to produce ‘non-racist or anti-racist’ ways of being white.

Part 2 [Chapters 5-8] will contextualize, describe, analyze, and assess New Abolitionism, the highly generative and controversial ‘competing tendency’ to white anti-racism in Critical Whiteness Studies which seeks to ‘abolish the white race’.

In Part 3, Chapter 9 will particularly consider the New Abolitionist proposal that ‘political Blackness’ might serve as an alternative identity to whiteness, and Chapters 10 and 11 work against their class-focused explanation and definition of whiteness to propose an alternative race-centered explanation and definition which might serve to better root Critical Whiteness Studies inquiry. Based on this alternative definition, and assessments of both white anti-racism and New Abolitionism over the course of this dissertation, Chapter 12 proposes a ‘third’, particularly Irish, approach to working against racism from white subject positions which I call intersectional, anti-white, Irish Diasporic nationalism.

Over the course of this dissertation I also propose several original terms. “White positional consciousness” is introduced to describe and define the particular possibilities and limitations of consciousness development by people structurally positioned as white under liberal color-blind white hegemony [see Chapter 1]. “Transectional empathy” is introduced to describe and define suggestions that white people oppressed by intersecting systems of capitalism, patriarchy, and heteronormativity, etc., might use those experiences as resources to better understand racial oppression [see Chapter 1]. And ~~whiteness~~ whiteness is introduced to better describe and define work toward ‘abolishing the white race’ from white subject positions [see Chapter 6].

## CHAPTER 1

### AN EPISTEMOLOGY OF CRITICAL WHITENESS STUDIES: CRITICAL RACE THEORY, STANDPOINT & INTERSECTIONALITY

This dissertation is situated in the field of Critical Whiteness Studies, and the following chapter will further describe and define Critical Whiteness Studies in relation to intersectional Critical Race Theory. While both fields of inquiry share a core political commitment to demystifying the ‘New Racism’ of post-Civil Rights America, and both employ analytic frameworks generally rooted in Gramscian post-structuralism, Marxist standpoint theory, and intersectionality, I argue that these shared commitments, methods, and social context have constructed Critical Whiteness Studies as an “additional movement” (Delgado & Stefancic, 1997, p. xviii) to Critical Race Theory populated by Critical Race Theorists who are ‘mostly white’ with a particular and peculiar mandate to study and resist racism from white subject positions.

The first section of this chapter explains the ‘eclectic’ Gramscian post-structuralist approach of core Critical Race Theory texts to social formation and change. The second section describes the development of Marxist standpoint theory by [white] Marxist-Feminists, and the third section traces Black Feminist ‘Intersectionality’ which joined Critical Race Theory and Marxist-Feminist Standpoint Theory under a unified approach to the study of oppressive social structures and produced the basic analytical frameworks which underpin global ‘identity politics’. The fourth section describes the ways in which Black feminists have refined “Black Power” approaches to coalition-building, and the fifth and sixth sections explain how this refinement has further elucidated the methodological and practical conditions which require a distinction between the scholarship of people of color and white people on race and make it difficult for white people to effectively support Black liberation. The seventh section considers Critical Whiteness Studies as ‘an additional movement’ encouraged and shaped by Critical Race Theory, and introduces white anti-racism and New Abolitionism, its two main competing approaches to studying and resisting racism from white subject positions.

#### **Critical Race Theory & Liberal Color-Blind White Hegemony**

Building on “Black Power” critique of the “institutional” form of white hegemony which replaced “overt” forms of ‘Jim Crow’ (Bell Jr., 1973, p. 193), those who would come to call themselves ‘RaceCrits’ further elucidated how “whites have developed powerful explanations—which have ultimately become justifications—for contemporary racial inequality that exculpate them from any responsibility for the status of people of color” (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 2) and which “allow Whites...to support a host of punitive policies that reinscribe social hierarchies of race” (Collins, 2000 [1990], p. 279) ‘without any overt reference to race’.

As it coalesced into a distinct academic field of study around demystifying these “hegemonic ideologies that claim that racism is over” (Collins, 2004, p. 54), Critical Race Theory was also greatly influenced by post-structuralism and the work of Antonio Gramsci (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, pp. 4-5), particularly their conception of hegemony as an uneven, complex, “sedimented” (Collins, 2004, p. 55), plural, historically “contingent” (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001 [1985]), and adaptive, cultural and discursive articulation of “contradictory and discordant” (Gramsci, 2000 [1935]-b, p. 192) and antagonistic (Laclau, 1977) social elements to “secure the hegemony of a dominant group over a series of subordinate ones, in such a way as to

dominate the whole social formation” (Hall, 1980, p. 338). While Gramscian post-structuralism is rooted in Marxist methods of social analysis, it assumes that mutually constitutive processes of articulation in advanced capitalist societies which secure majoritarian conformity or “collective will” (Gramsci, 2007 [1975]-a) to cement a given “historical bloc” (Gramsci, 2007 [1975]-b) have “no necessary correspondence” to class (Hall, 1985, p. 94; Laclau, 1977). By detaching explanatory frameworks for social relations from a necessary “class belonging” (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001 [1985], p. 67), Gramscian post-structuralists have further politicized what seem to be natural, essential, or immutable conditions of inequality, opened a traditionally class-oriented ‘left’ academy to a field of social relations “replete with possibilities” (Gramsci, 2000 [1935]-a, p. 260) for “war of position” (Gramsci, 2000 [1935]-c, p. 227) which might prioritize liberation struggles traditionally understood by Marxists as ancillary to, or symptomatic of, class struggle, and allowed RaceCrits to adapt Marxist methodologies to a critical study of race without having to explain race in terms of class. By centering race in a Gramscian post-structural framework, RaceCrits have explained liberal color-blindness as a rearticulation of white hegemony (Winant, 2004, p. 52)—a reproduction, reinterpretation, and relinking of social relations in the aftermath of ‘Jim Crow’ which enabled a particular ‘liberal color-blind’ reassertion of white domination—and have continued to “register” (Hall, 1980, p. 342) subsequent shifts and readjustments in this liberal color-blind epoch of white domination through ‘multiculturalism’, the ‘war on terror’, and the “Obama phenomenon” (Crenshaw, 2011, p. 1314).

### **Feminism & Standpoint**

‘Second wave’ feminism was deeply inspired by the Civil Rights Movement and “Black Power”, from Casey Hayden and Mary King’s post-‘Freedom Summer’ SNCC Position Paper on Women in the Movement (1964) which argued that “this is no more a man's world than it is a White world,” to the National Organization for Women [NOW]’s Statement of Purpose [Friedan et al., October 29, 1966] which announced “a civil rights movement to speak for women,” to “The lesbian wing of the movement” (R. M. Brown, 1972, p. 14) which centered itself around “the primacy of women relating to women...pride and strength” (Radicalesbians, 1970, p. 4). Like “Black Power” opposed “integration as an insidious subterfuge for white supremacy” (Carmichael quoted in Jet Magazine, 1966, p. 8) and argued against ‘coalition with white radicals and white liberals’, political lesbians understood “compulsory heterosexuality” (Rich, 1980) as “a heterosexual structure that binds us in one-to-one relationships with our oppressors” (Radicalesbians, 1970, p. 4) and argued “men are so far off, that coalition is impossible” (R. M. Brown, 1972, p. 15).

Over the same period which Critical Race Theory was coalescing as a distinct academic field of research on race by people of color using a Gramscian post-structuralist approach to ‘deconstructing’ liberal color-blind white hegemony, feminists of color and white feminists, were also adapting Marxist methodologies of critique to the study of the sex/gender system, particularly concepts of ‘class consciousness’ and ‘standpoint’. While basically an elaboration on the common folk wisdom that ‘Who feels it knows it,’ Marxist conceptualizations of ‘consciousness’ and ‘standpoint’ in relation to material conditions and the “the most general phases of the development of the proletariat” (Marx & Engels, 1848), helped feminists to better articulate women’s liberation and political lesbianism growing out of the ‘consciousness raising’ dialogues between women around “the problem that has no name” (Friedan, 1963, p. 19). These “Black Power”-inspired feminist movements of late-Sixties similarly detached Marxist ‘standpoint’ from necessary ‘class belonging’ to center dialogue between women, and this mode

of knowledge production was methodized as a 'feminist standpoint' by emergent Women's / Feminist / Gender Studies. This feminist adaptation of Marxist 'standpoint' post-"Black Power" was greatly inspired by the 1971 English translation of Georg Lukács' 1923 History and Class Consciousness (see Hartsock, 1997), and Black Feminism joined this Marxist-Feminist theorization of 'standpoint' and "the resemblance of standpoint theory to the norm of racial solidarity" in Black liberation (Collins, 2003, p. 205), advancing an intersectional approach to Critical Race Theory. In the rest of this section, I will use Lukács text as a way of introducing Marxist standpoint theory, intertwining Black / feminist texts with it to demonstrate the ways in which, detached from Marx and Lukács' 'necessary class correspondence,' Black / women theorists have adapted 'standpoint' to Black / women's liberation.

In Lukács' (1971 [1923]) Marxist formulation, the objectification of workers as labor by capitalism is "*the indispensable precondition*" for the development of class consciousness (p. 172). External objectification of the worker by capitalism increasingly contradicts 'his' self-recognition as a person and creates a "split" subjectivity (p. 168), or in the words of early advocate for Black Studies W.E.B. DuBois (1903), a "double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others" (p. 3). Overcoming this contradiction between "self-valuation" (Collins, 1986, p. S16) and structural and discursive devaluation "is a matter of life and death" (Lukács, 1971 [1923], p. 164) for workers / people of color, and because it is only 'a matter of life and death' for workers / people of color, they are the only class / racialized groups who can develop critical consciousness of their systematic oppression by capitalism / racism. "This consciousness is the revolutionary force from which all else will follow" (Radicalesbians, 1970, pp. 3-4). The critical consciousness of workers / queer / women / people of color begins to demystify the reified and naturalized hegemonic ideology of capitalism / patriarchal hetero-normativity / racism as a partial and problematic "process" of knowledge production emanating from social relations (Lukács, 1971 [1923], p. 184). Through this "second-sight" (Du Bois, 1903, p. 3), which can only be developed by those dehumanized by a given system of oppression, "the world of men stands revealed as a system of dynamically changing relations" in which workers (Lukács, 1971 [1923], p. 185) / women / queer / people of color can intervene as historical actors.

Having developed this consciousness of systematic oppression, the worker / woman / colonized / person of color "prepares to act" (Fanon, 1967 [1952], p. 222) and "acts in accordance with her inner compulsion to be a more complete and freer human being" (Radicalesbians, 1970, p. 1); "to merge his double self into a better and truer self" (Du Bois, 1903, p. 4). Such conscious action "is directed objectively towards a transformation of totality" (Lukács, 1971 [1923], p. 175) and further reveals the contradictions of capitalism / hetero-normative patriarchy / racism to the class / gender / racialized group. Because the oppressed class are the only class capable of objectively understanding the given system which oppresses them, it is only their conscious action which "can point to the way that leads out of the impasse of capitalism" (Ibid., p. 76) / hetero-normative patriarchy / racism.

As these conscious actions by workers / queer / women / people of color reach "ideological maturity" (Ibid.), they "make available a particular and privileged vantage point...which can ground a powerful critique" (Hartsock, 2003, p. 284). This 'standpoint' is articulated through collective dialogue between subordinated subjects based on common experiences of domination and interests as a class / gender / racialized group. Cycles of action and reflection over time incrementally establish, clarify, and revise basic counter-hegemonic truths, producing archives of historically situated knowledges, diverse repertoires for action, and

sedimented multi-generational traditions of resistance to capitalism / patriarchy / racism. ‘Standpoint’ is not the production of any one subject, organization, formation, or generation, but the collective and concatenated production of the subordinated as a class / gender / racialized group for the purposes of liberation. The increasingly coherent standpoint-based action of workers / women / people of color ruptures hegemonic ‘common sense’ and forces hetero-normative patriarchal / racist / “bourgeois society into a self-knowledge which would inevitably make that society appear problematic to itself” (Lukács, 1971 [1923], p. 228). The development of a ‘standpoint’ is, therefore, the necessary precondition for a transformation of social relations, and only conscious action by the oppressed “to liberate themselves” (Freire, 2009 [1970], p. 44) can create crises which hold the potential of forcing self-consciousness on superordinated classes and destroying “all the inhuman conditions of life in contemporary society which exist in the proletariat [queer / women / communities of color<sup>6</sup>] in a concentrated form” (Marx quoted in Lukács, 1971 [1923], p. 20).

### **Black Feminism & Intersectionality**

The Combahee River Collective Statement (2000 [1977]) emerged out of Black women’s “disillusionment” with “the white male left,” patriarchal projects which characterized many forms of “black nationalism” (p. 265), and white feminist “separatists” (p. 267). As Black working-class lesbian women, the Collective not only experienced the multiply ‘split’ subjectivities created by being working-class queer women of color under racist-hetero-patriarchal-capitalism, but also the “need to split our political energies between [these] sometimes opposing groups” in pursuing their liberation (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1252). Black women’s multiply split subjectivity facilitated critical consciousness of the “mutual elisions” (Ibid.) in “oppositional politics of mainstream feminism and antiracism” (Crenshaw, 1992, p. 1468) created by the “disaggregated” (Crenshaw & Harris, 2009, p. 1) standpoint-based approaches of Socialism, “Black Power”, and Women’s Liberation, and this multiply critical consciousness suggested that Black women “might use our position at the bottom...to make a clear leap into revolutionary action” (Combahee River Collective, 2000 [1977], p. 270). Based on the contention that hegemonic oppressive systems “generate some uniformity in the epistemologies used by subordinate groups” (Collins, 2000 [1990], p. 269), or “that the social consciousness of past ages, despite all the multiplicity and variety it displays, moves within certain common forms, or general ideas” (Marx & Engels, 1848), this ‘clear leap’ from the standpoint of Black women ultimately manifested in social movement theory as ‘Intersectionality’.

The term “intersectionality” was “coined” (Crenshaw & Harris, 2009, p. 2) by Black Feminist RaceCrit Kimberle Crenshaw (1989, 1991) and has come to represent “a heterogeneous set of practices” (Collins, 2009, p. viii) which “unfolded in the last three decades of the twentieth century” (Collins, 2009, p. vii) through the work of women of color in late ‘second wave’ feminism,<sup>7</sup> and has become integral to the post-structural ‘third wave’. Intersectional critique

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<sup>6</sup> In this text, [brackets] will be used to mark edited or additional text within quotations as well as all parenthetical notation outside of quotations. [Brackets] distinguish my own edits and notation from citation and original notation in quotations which will be marked with (curved parentheses).

<sup>7</sup> Delia Aguilar (2012) provides a genealogy of the concept which traces it to SNCC Black Women’s Liberation Committee member Fran Beale’s (1969) concept of “double jeopardy,” which she used to describe the double oppression of Black women, through the Third World Women’s Alliance’s (1970) concept of “triple jeopardy,” used to describe the intersections of



demonstrates the ways in which major systems of subordination and superordination [i.e. racism, patriarchy, capitalism, ableism, ageism] are “intertwined” (Collins, 2004, p. 5), “overlapping and multiply-constituted” (Crenshaw & Harris, 2009, p. 3) and “cannot be separated” (Crenshaw, 1992, p. 1468) in analyzing the “compoundedness” (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 150) of concrete lived experiences. Whereas systems of oppression seek to establish “equivalence” of subordinate and superordinate groups [Black is ‘this’, women are ‘that’], intersectional analyses approach social groups as “multidimensional” (Crenshaw & Harris, 2009, p. 2), recognize that structural domination and subordination can exist simultaneously in a single person [e.g. a white women is both oppressed by gender and privileged by racism], and draw together epistemologies of women’s, proletarian, queer, dis/abled, and people of color liberation to analyze complex social phenomena, keeping oppressive systems “analytically distinct” (Collins, 2004, p. 97) but not “mutually exclusive and separable” (Crenshaw & Harris, 2009, p. 2), and centering the experiences of those facing “multiple subordination” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1251) and “compound marginalization” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1282), particularly queer working-class women of color.

The centering of Black women’s standpoint in a Gramscian post-structural Critical Race Theory framework has developed “increasing sophistication about how to discuss group location, not in the singular social class framework proposed by Marx, nor in the early feminist frameworks arguing the primacy of gender, but within constructs of multiplicity residing in social structures themselves” (Collins, 1997, p. 377). In a given historical moment, ‘major’ systems of oppression—racism, patriarchy, heteronormativity, ableism, and capitalism—serve as “axes” (Dill & Zambrana, 2009, p. 4; Omi & Winant, 1986, p. 61) which variously locate subjects in a hegemonic “matrix of domination” (Collins, 2000 [1990], p. 18), making it possible to describe the same social formation as “white hegemony” (Doane, 2003; Leonardo, 2002), “patriarchal hegemony” (A. Davis, 1999), “heterosexual hegemony” (Butler, 1993), “ableist hegemony” (P. Smith, 2005) and even “bourgeois hegemony” (Foucault, 1978) depending on the primary ‘axis’ of critical analysis. Black feminists have, therefore, provided a unified “analytical strategy—a systematic approach to understanding human life and behavior that is rooted in the experiences and struggles of marginalized people” (Dill & Zambrana, 2009, p. 4) and have made “a strong case...that the most critical resistance strategy for disempowered groups is to occupy and defend a politics of social location rather than to vacate and destroy it” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1297).

### **Black Women’s Standpoint & ‘Transversal Dialogue’**

The centrality of standpoint in post-Civil Rights movements collectively described as ‘identity politics’, and its expression in theories of social change and knowledge production, has raised significant questions about the ability of those who are superordinated by a given axis of oppression to equally participate in the liberation struggle of those subordinated along the same axis (Hartsock, 2003, p. 285), as well as significant promises, like Gramscian post-structuralism, for understanding and overcoming antagonisms and contradictions among ‘civil society’ in advanced capitalist societies. Intersectionality has further illuminated the ways in which processes of consent and coercion in a given ‘matrix of domination’ are facilitated by embodied “positionalities” (Spivak quoted in Spivak & Harasym, 1990, p. 57), variously privileged and

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racism, imperialism and sexism, and the Combahee River Collective’s (1977) contention that these “major systems of oppression are interlocking.” To be fair, however, it should also be recognized that the NOW Statement of Purpose (1966) also made clear reference to “Negro women, who are the victims of double discrimination of race and sex.”

subordinated along major axes of oppression, and the uneven and multi-dimensional nature of the subject within these complex relations ensures that a vast majority of subjects in a given society are in some way both privileged and subordinated by one or more 'axes' of oppression which prop up a given 'matrix of domination'. This complex, hierarchical, unevenness creates a plurality of contradictions and antagonisms which would seem to tend towards mass forms of 'critical consciousness' and ideally suggests mass possibility for breaking down the barriers which prevent oppressed people from taking power (Crenshaw, 1992, p. 1468).

However, 'intersectionality' is ultimately rooted in Black women's standpoint, and guided by the principle that "If Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression" (Combahee River Collective, 2000 [1977], p. 270). Strategies for liberation which might overcome the antagonisms preventing Black women from being 'free' must necessarily be 'led' by working-class queer Black women and grounded in Black / feminist / queer / proletarian standpoints. The Combahee River Collective was organized around these standpoints as a "collective of black feminists" (Ibid., p. 264), structurally limited to Black queer / women. From this position and organizational form, they considered avenues of coalition-building along the four major axes of oppression which intersect to oppress them, but ultimately prioritized "solidarity around the fact of race" alongside "progressive black men" (Ibid., p. 267). Their reasoned prioritization of Black solidarity rejected racially integrated "lesbian separatism because it is not a viable political analysis or strategy for us" (Ibid., p. 269), and reformulated the "Black Power" directive for 'white radical and white liberal' feminists: "Eliminating racism in the white women's movement is by definition work for white women to do" (Ibid., p. 273).

Building on the Collective's coalitional priorities, Patricia Hill Collins's Black Feminist Thought (2000 [1990]) similarly centers her primary dialogical space among 'African-American women' and outlines a process of "coalition-building" as "Transversal dialogue" where "African-American women and other comparable groups" bring "a 'rooting' in their own particular group histories, but at the same time realize that in order to engage in dialogue across multiple markers of difference, they must 'shift' from their own centers" (p. 245). The language 'comparable groups' is key. In Collins's formulation, such 'transversal dialogues' occur "among African-American women and other historically identifiable oppressed groups" in relation to particular axes of oppression in spaces where

Each group speaks from its own standpoint and shares its own partial, situated knowledge. But because each group perceives its own truth as partial, its knowledge is unfinished. Each group becomes better able to consider other groups' standpoints without relinquishing the uniqueness of its own standpoint or suppressing other groups' partial perspectives (Ibid., p. 270).

While she is not entirely explicit about it, Collins proscribes a variety of prioritized 'shifts' for Black women from their own dialogical 'center' which refines the Combahee River Collective's priorities. Articulating "Black Power" internationalism with feminist standpoint, Collins' first priority for transversal 'shift' is to recognize that "U.S. Black women's experiences are an American version of an important transnational phenomenon" (Ibid.), and repositions the 'center' of dialogue from 'African-American' women to African Diaspora women, "Black women in Africa, the Caribbean, the United States, and Latin America" whose experiences "demonstrate common differences" (Ibid.). In this first re-centered dialogue between African

Diaspora women in relation to “global gendered apartheid,” Collins theorizes that all similarly oppressed Black women “should benefit from the multiple angles of vision that accompany multiple group standpoints” (Ibid., p. 249).

Collins’s next priorities for ‘transversal dialogue’ are with Black men as part of the “Black Power” / pan-African movements, and then “Latina lesbians, Asian-American women, Puerto Rican men, and other groups with distinctive standpoints” (Ibid.) around racist patriarchal heteronormativity. She almost begrudgingly allows that “coalitions with some groups of White men [perhaps queer, working-class] are necessary for some issues, but virtually impossible on others” (Ibid., p. 247), and while Collins credits the concept of ‘transversal dialogue’ itself to Italian feminists, and a large share of her audience is undoubtedly white-american feminists, her “Black Power” approach limits possibilities for coalition with white women against racism.

### **Black Feminism, White Feminists & ‘Transectional Empathy’**

Collins argues that “White women and African-American men *both* experience the victimization that can serve as a foundation for building empathy with other groups, *and* bear some responsibility for systematic violence targeted to other groups” (Ibid., p. 247), suggesting similar possibilities for ‘transversal dialogue’ along distinct axes of gender and race where “Empathy, not sympathy, becomes the basis of coalition” (Ibid.). The ability to ‘empathize’ with other groups in Collins’s formulation is rooted in subordination along the same axis oppression, so while white women can build ‘empathetic’ coalition with Black women around heteropatriarchy, they can only feel ‘sympathy’ for Black women around anti-Blackness. “[P]enalized by their gender but privileged by their race” (Ibid., p. 246), white women cannot develop the necessary ‘empathy’ to ‘fully participate’ in ‘transversal dialogue’ with Black women and men on racism.

Other women of color, however, have argued that the subordination white people experience along other axes of oppression [gender, sexual orientation, class, ability] can be leveraged to build ‘empathy’ with those subordinated by racism. When Gloria Anzaldúa (2009 [c. 1988]), for example, observes that “White lesbians forget that they too have felt excluded, that they too have interrupted women-of-color-only space, bringing in their agenda and, in their hunger to belong, pushed ours to the side” (p. 143), she suggests that white lesbians might develop ‘empathy’ for people of color by ‘remembering’ their own domination by heteropatriarchy and extrapolating from those experiences to imagine how people of color might feel in terms of racism. White feminists, particularly white lesbian ‘separatists’ like Marilyn Frye (1992), who “tried to identify and change the attitudes and behaviors which blocked our friendly and effective comradeship with women of color and limited our ability to act against institutional racism” (p. 147) similarly theorized that “white women can learn [empathy for people subordinated by racism] from our own experience [of subordination] *a propos* (most often, white) men” (Frye, 1983, p. 121). At the same time, however, Anzaldúa’s dialogical network of Black, Xicana, American Indian, and Asian women writers—like “Black Power”, the Combahee River Collective, and Collins’ formulation—recognized that “we can’t do the white woman’s homework [on racism] for her” and made “Third World women *the first priority*” (Anzaldúa, 1981, p. 168).

The potential for grafting experiences of domination along other axes [class, gender, ability, age] to build what I call ‘transectional empathy’ for people of color around racism is what ideally allows for overcoming antagonisms and correcting ‘mutual elisions’ between intersectionally privileged and oppressed social elements, like Black Power’s imagination of a future class-based “coalition of poor blacks and poor whites” against capitalism (S. Carmichael

& Hamilton, 1967, p. 82). But while this is the ideal promise of Marxist, and particularly Gramscian post-structural, intersectional analysis from the standpoint of Black women, the very real antagonisms constructed by the superordination of white workers / queer / women must be understood and overcome before “the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority” (Marx & Engels, 1848) can be realized. As Frye (1992) recognized, “It is one thing to 'deconstruct' a concept [through critical analysis], another to dismantle a well-established, well-entrenched social construct” (p. 164), and because the standpoints of people of color are the driving force in demystifying and ‘dismantling’ racism, “a white woman is not in a good position to analyze institutional or personal racism and a white woman's decisions about what to do about racism cannot be authentic” (p. 148).

### **Critical Race Theory, Standpoint & ‘White Cognizance’**

Intersectional Critical Race Theory is constructed as a forum for ‘transversal dialogue’ and “coalition between men and women of color...straight and gay people of color” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1299) to produce standpoint-based research on racism and challenge ‘institutional racism’ in academic spaces. The explicit distinctions Critical Race Theory has made between the intellectual production of people of color and ‘those cognizant and committed critical race theorists who are white’, along with similar distinctions concerning the positions and work of men in Women’s / Gender Studies, and heterosexual and cisgendered people in LGBT studies, which in large part, constitute the ‘discursive conditions’ of ‘identity politics’, distinguish these adaptations of ‘standpoint’ from Marx’s own formulations.

The Communist Manifesto, for example, argued that “in times when the class struggle nears the decisive hour...a small section of the ruling class...who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole” might join “the revolutionary class, the class that holds the future in its hands” (Marx & Engels, 1848). While there may be white RaceCrits who “defend not their present, but their future interests” they cannot, like members of the privileged classes under Capitalism, fully “desert their own standpoint to place themselves at that of the proletariat” (Ibid.). At the same time that Critical Race Theory and Feminism were coalescing around their respective standpoints, Marxist ‘correspondence theory’ was elucidating the ways in which class subordination is ingrained in working-class and lumpen proletarian subjects through education, socialization, or acculturation (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Willis, 1977), but these studies predominantly focused on the intergenerational reproduction of working-class subordination and only implicitly address the extent to which bourgeois superordination is also ‘ingrained’. While there is certainly a robust criticism in socialist movements concerning bourgeois ‘tendencies’, ‘illusions’, ‘attitudes’, ‘ideologies’, etc., Marxist theory has not foreclosed the possibility that members of privileged classes can ‘become’ proletarian, perhaps in part because such a negation might jeopardize the validity of Marxism itself because Marx and Engels were born into, and lived much of their lives as members of, the ‘petit-’ / Bourgeoise rather than as ‘proletarians’ who had nothing to sell but their labor and ‘nothing to lose but their chains’.

Some RaceCrits, perhaps closer to the original, more accessible, Marxist theorization of standpoint contend that intellectual, political, personal, familial, and other forms of proximity to people of color allow white people greater understanding of racial subordination. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2006), for example, evaluates the ‘racial progressivism’ of white research participants by their views on “interracial marriage, [and having] close personal relations with minorities in general and blacks in particular” (144-145), and cites “growing up in 'integrated’

neighborhoods” and having “minority friends while growing up” as a factors in “the development of empathy toward people of color” (146). Gloria Ladson-Billings (1998) makes a similar argument:

To the extent that Whites (or in the case of sexism, men) experience forms of racial oppression, they may develop such a standpoint. For example, the historical figure John Brown suffered aspects of racism by aligning himself closely with the cause of African American liberation. Contemporary examples of such identification may occur when White parents adopt transracially. No longer a White family, by virtue of their child(ren), they become racialized others (p. 11).

This paradigm of knowing, closer to ‘Beloved Community’ principles than “Black Power”, theorizes that intimate proximity to people of color and ‘committed’ action against racism exposes normally segregated white people to experiences of institutional racism and these experiences might allow them to develop the necessary consciousness to participate in standpoint-based dialogue. Following “Black Power”, however, most Critical Race Theory scholarship assumes that whiteness is an “inalienable” source of structural privilege under present conditions (C. I. Harris, 1993, p. 1731) and that, while research on racism “can [and does] come from whites themselves,” such research “is not generated from their social position or experience. Rather, it comes from the experiences of people of color” (Leonardo, 2009, p. 111).

Liberal color-blindness might ‘claim racism is over’, but the ‘fact’ of ‘race’ remains very much alive, and biological notions of whiteness, though no longer hegemonically endorsed, continue in a “vestigial” state (Winant, 2000, p. 171), “banished” but not “destroyed” (Delgado, 1990, pp. 105-106), such that people of color cannot ‘become’ white and white people cannot ‘become’ people of color. While Critical Race Theory contends that race is a social construction with no basis in nature or biology, this continuing biologized character of race under liberal color-blind white hegemony fixes white subjects more firmly in a superordinate racial position than Marxist standpoint theory conceptualizes the positions of ‘middle’ / ‘petty’ / bourgeois subjects and requires a stronger distinction between people of color and white people in terms of the content of their research and form of their organizing. As Pan-Africanist Congress founder Robert Sobukwe said in 1959 Apartheid South Africa: “there are Europeans who are intellectual converts to the African's cause, but, because they benefit materially from the present set-up, they cannot completely identify themselves with that cause” (quoted in Gerhart, 1978, p. 196), cannot ‘empathize’ with the experience of racial subordination, cannot ‘fully participate’ in the liberation movements of people of color because their whiteness is ‘inalienable’ under liberal color-blind white hegemony.

Models for ‘transversal dialogue’ and ‘coalition’ between scholars / activists of color and white scholars / activists under liberal color-blindness have, therefore, been far more akin to standpoint-based resistance to systems of oppression which have some small but meaningful basis in biological differences, particularly feminism [which allows for the possibility of ‘feminist men’], and to a lesser extent queer, differently abled, youth or elder movements [which also develop particular roles for ‘allies’]. Critical Race Theory explicitly distinguishes between RaceCrits and RaceCrits ‘who are white’, but it does not, perhaps cannot, explicitly exclude white RaceCrits from its academic forums for ‘transversal dialogue’. This necessary intellectual and practical distinction between Critical Race Theory, as a standpoint-based intellectual

movement against liberal color-blind white hegemony, and the research of ‘cognizant and committed’ white scholars on racism requires a separate classification of their work. This need for a separate classification has, in large part, defined what is known as Critical Whiteness Studies.

### **Critical Whiteness Studies: As Field, Method & Practice**

A “long, rich, varied and unsurpassed tradition” of critical scholarship (D. R. Roediger, 1998, p. xi) and popular discourse (hooks, 1992) by people of color about white people and whiteness has produced a number of important works including The Souls of White Folk (Du Bois, 1910), The Ways of White Folks (Hughes, 1933), White Radicals and Black Nationalism (Vernon, 1964), Baldwin’s The White Problem (2010 [1964]) and On Being White and Other Lies (1984), and J. Sakai’s Mythology of the White Proletariat (1983). In many ways Critical Race Theory itself, in essence, is a study of whiteness. But beginning in the 1990s, as intersectional Critical Race Theory consolidated itself around standpoints of people of color and white reactions to ‘affirmative action’ reached a pitch, studies of ‘whiteness’ took on a new character. Some of this white reaction, although not academically serious, came from white people who had “assimilated the rhetoric of cultural diversity” and cynically demanded studies that would portray ‘white culture’ in a positive light (Back, 2002, p. 38; see also V. Ware & Back, 2002, p. 13), but more broadly, standpoint-based critiques of white scholarship on people of color led many white scholars to abandon studies of racialized ‘others’ in favor, rightly or wrongly, of a focus on “all things white” (Back, 2002, p. 37; see also Delgado & Stefancic, 1997).

This shift in focus among white scholars quickly became “an academic industry” (Ignatiev, 1999a), “something of a bandwagon to be jumped on by a host of writers anxious to explore their particular disciplinary take on the idea of whiteness” (V. Ware, 2002, p. 21). Amidst this fad, ‘cognizant’ and ‘committed’ white scholars greatly contributed to a serious body of work on whiteness in conversation with intersectional Critical Race scholarship using similarly ‘eclectic’ and post-positivist methodologies including “frequent use of the first person, storytelling, narrative, allegory, interdisciplinary [approaches], and the unapologetic use of creativity” (D. A. Bell, 1995, p. 899). For the purposes of this dissertation, it is this type of scholarship which is most valuable, and which I will label, as others have, Critical Whiteness Studies. While scholars of color have also continued to produce critical studies of whiteness through the ‘whiteness studies’ fad—including Morrison (1992), Cheryl Harris (1993), Haney López (1996), Mills (1997), Churchill (2000), Dyson (2004), Leonardo (2009) and Painter (2011)—Critical Whiteness Studies has been primarily defined as a field by ‘cognizant’ and ‘committed’ white scholars shifting their focus onto ‘whiteness’ and following “Black Power” directives to educate and organize ‘their white communities’ against racism.

In terms of ‘being cognizant’, Critical Whiteness Studies has been explicitly dedicated to “studying white identity as a problem” and marking it “as a particular—even peculiar,—identity, rather than as the presumed norm” (D. R. Roediger, 2002, p. 18 & 21). In the tradition of Ted Allen and Noel Ignatin’s White Blindspot (1967),<sup>8</sup> much Critical Whiteness scholarship views whiteness as a structural privilege which prevents cross-racial common cause in resisting other

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<sup>8</sup> An influential document in Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) at a time when the frameworks that “organized white thinking on racial questions were virtually in disarray” (Blauner, 1989, p. 42) as a result of the emergence of liberal color-blind whiteness and the “Black Power” disarticulation of the “Beloved Community” Civil Rights Movement [see Chapter 5].

oppressive structures and “[arises] predominantly out of feminism, labour history, and lesbian and gay studies, in other words, what has come to be called identity politics” (R. Dyer, 1997b, p. 8). Critical Whiteness scholars have accordingly focused their attention on the intersectional margins of whiteness, be they working-class (D. R. Roediger, 2000 [1991]), ethnic (Brodkin, 1998; Ignatiev, 1995), gendered (Frankenberg, 1993), queer (Bérubé, 2003), or youth (Giroux, 1998), and such studies have further challenged and complicated white left narratives that conceptualize whiteness as only “a rich man's strategy for control” (Sonnier & Tracy, 2011), a device for settler-colonial elites to impose “spatial segregation between enslaved and indentured workers” (Epperson, 1997, p. 11), or a narrative to justify imperial domination. They maintain that whiteness was invented, at least “in part” (D. R. Roediger, 2000 [1991], p. 9), by “average” (Leonardo, 2009, p. 82) white people in order to build solidarity and community on “ethnically diverse” settler-colonial frontiers (Knouff, 2004, p. 244), and to reap the “public and psychological wages” (Du Bois quoted in D. R. Roediger, 2000 [1991], p. 12) of a privileged social position. White people are not simply victims of an “ideological trick” but also “key agents” (Hall, 1980, 341) in the articulation and rearticulation of whiteness. As David Roediger (2000 [1991]) describes it, “white identity has its roots both in domination and in a desire to avoid confronting one's own miseries” (p. 186). Not only does whiteness always guarantee “certain privileges over colored people of whatever class,” gender, sexual orientation, or ability (Anzaldúa, 2009 [c. 1988], p. 149), but it also provides white people with “a socially constructed container through which [they] project [their] inner world onto others” (S. Clarke, 2003, p. 11), and “a racial ideology” to help them “explain, and ultimately justify, contemporary racial inequality” (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 208).

But while much of the validity of ‘Ethnic Studies’ and Critical Race Theory is rooted in the experiences and standpoints of people of color, significant questions remain about the validity of Critical Whiteness Studies scholarship conducted from white subject positions. If RaceCrits ‘who are white’ must be ‘cognizant of their own racial privilege’, what are the conditions which allow them to become ‘cognizant’? How is this ‘cognizance’ related to the ‘critical consciousness’ and standpoint of people of color? Does this ‘cognizance’ allow white scholars to make original scholarly contributions to ‘the overthrow of their own racial privilege’ or is their work essentially derivative? Under liberal color-blind white hegemony, white people “don't think of ourselves as *white*” (Frye, 1983, p. 117), but standpoint-based liberation movements of people of color rupture this ‘white privilege’ of ‘thinking’ they are simply ‘human’, forcing white subjects into ‘cognizance’ of their superordinated social position amidst a deeply unequal ‘humanity’ and making liberal color-blind white hegemony ‘appear problematic to itself’. If oppression by racism is ‘the indispensable precondition’ for the development of ‘critical consciousness’, and only the standpoints of people of color ‘can point to the way that leads out of the impasse’ of racism, the ruptures of liberal color-blind white ‘common sense’ orchestrated by people of color liberation movements are ‘the indispensable precondition’ for the ‘cognizance’ of RaceCrits ‘who are white’. Within the white-dominated feminist movement, for example, the “topic of racism has arrived per force...because women of color have demanded it” (Frye, 1983, p. 111).

Howard Winant (2004), a ‘critical race theorist who is white’, argues that this ‘cognizance’ of social position allows “an extension to whites” of W.E.B. Du Bois’s concept of ‘double-consciousness’ (p. 50). Both the ‘double-consciousness’ of people of color and white positional ‘cognizance’ are certainly created by ‘looking at one's self through the eyes of others’, but one ‘gaze’ is hegemonic and the other is counter-hegemonic; one subordinates people of

color and the other articulates their liberation. Developing ‘cognizance’ of racism is not ‘a matter of life and death’ for white RaceCrits, but an uncomfortable moral, intellectual, and ethical, choice between ‘defending their future interests’ in being ‘human’ or ‘defending their present interests’ in the ‘public and psychological wages’ of whiteness. ‘Cognizance’ of one’s unjustly privileged social position in a system which subordinates people of color, or what I call “white positional consciousness”, is totally dependent upon the intellectual and social movement work of people of color, but not beholden to it.

The use of “white positional consciousness”—and its abbreviated form “positional consciousness”—in this text is not in any way formulated in relation to Sartre’s (1991 [1936]) concepts of “positional consciousness” and “non-positional consciousness”. Rather, it is developed from the Spivak’s term ‘positionality’ which more broadly describes the locations of both subordinated and superordinated subjects within a given ‘matrix of domination’. According to Standpoint Theory, the dehumanization of subordinated subjects makes it possible for them to develop ‘critical consciousness’ while superordinated subjects only gain consciousness of their position in oppressive social relations when the standpoint-based actions of subordinated subjects force them ‘into a self-knowledge which would inevitably make that society appear problematic to itself’. ‘Positional consciousness’ is used in this text, therefore, to demarcate a more nebulously conceptualized form of consciousness development among superordinated subjects from the more clearly conceptualized development of ‘critical consciousness’ by subordinated subjects, and particularly to represent the possibilities and limitations for people structurally positioned as white to develop any form of consciousness about racism.

The notion that such ‘white positional consciousness’ is somehow a comparable basis for generating original scholarship on racism is highly suspect within standpoint-based Critical Race Theory frameworks and broader liberation movements of people of color. The major theories of knowledge production which underpin Critical Whiteness Studies—‘positional consciousness’, ‘transectional’, or ‘proximal empathy’—construct its liminal validity in relation to ‘Ethnic Studies’ and intersectional Critical Race Theory as a scholarly coalitions rooted in the standpoints of people of color. White RaceCrits are, however, not only defined by ‘cognizance of their own racial privilege’ but also their ‘commitment to overthrowing it’, and many Critical Whiteness scholars work to mitigate the ‘incompleteness’ of ‘white positional consciousness’ through scholarly rigor and dedication to performing their particular roles as effectively as possible.

Situated in the field of Critical Whiteness Studies, dubiously ‘cognizant and committed to the overthrow of [my] own racial privilege’, and based upon this intersectional Critical Race Theory framework, the following pages work ‘rigorously’ to describe, analyze, and assess the contradictions of resisting racism from white subjects positions through a close examination of white anti-racism [Part 1] and New Abolitionism [Part 2] as projects in theory and form, including their definitions of race and whiteness, theories of social change, approaches to discursive representation, and strategies for ‘organizing their own [white] communities’ in practice.



PART 1

WHITE ANTI-RACISM IN THEORY & PRACTICE

## CHAPTER 2

### WHITE ANTI-RACISM IN THEORY

Intellectuals in the white anti-racist tradition theorize that "white"—like any complex social signifier—always contains ‘many meanings’ (McIntyre, 1997; Ellsworth, 1997) dependent upon its articulation in given social relations. They argue that some of these meanings of "white" are “nonracist or antiracist” (Giroux, 1998, p. 91) and can serve as the historical and discursive basis for an “oppositional white identity” (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2000) which can produce formations and actors, like white RaceCrits, who are capable of serving “as allies to people of color” (Wise, 2008, pp. 96, see also Frankenberg, 1993, p. 7; Giroux, 1998; Twine & Gallagher, 2008, p. 18). Color-conscious action as ‘white allies’ contends with liberal color-blind white hegemony and forms explicitly white counter-hegemonic communities of resistance which seek to “define for white people a coequal role in a racially diverse society” (Flagg, 1993, pp. 957-958). When the ‘war of position’ is won, and a critical mass of white ‘anti-racist’ subjects are produced, a collaborative ‘war of maneuver’ can realize this ‘co-equal’ and ‘racially diverse’ society where whiteness will no longer be ‘privileged’ or articulated to domination but instead coexists with people of color as a benign cultural expression—a decentered, neutral, non-racist, “new” or “postmodern” white “ethnicity” (Giroux, 1998, pp. 132-133).

Broadly based on Valentin Voloshinov’s (1986 [1929]) approach to signs as “the fundamental object of the study of ideologies” (p. 15), this chapter will analyze the white anti-racist project of producing white formations and actors who are capable of serving ‘as allies to people of color’ in terms of its discursive rearticulation of "white", as a signifier of people, with the sign "anti-racism".<sup>9</sup> Voloshinov’s formulation that signs, like "white", are basically “neutral with respect to any specific ideological function” (p. 14) and, therefore, have “the capacity to register all the transitory, delicate, momentary phases of social change” (p. 19), fits well with Gramscian post-structuralist anti-essentialism and its conceptualization that social ‘elements’ only gain their meaning through articulation in material and discursive relations of superordination and subordination, so an analysis of white anti-racist discursive strategies for rearticulating "white" to "anti-racism" should be very effective in clarifying its ideological project under liberal color-blind white hegemony. More specifically, this chapter will be organized around an analysis of two primary discursive strategies which define white anti-racism—the white anti-racist "we" and the repolarization of "white"—and ultimately argues that its project of hegemonically rearticulating "white" to "anti-racism" is both highly optimistic, because its chances of success are slim, and deeply pessimistic, because it is understood by its advocates as their only viable approach to resisting racism from a superordinated white subject position.

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<sup>9</sup> Signs are defined here as words / symbols which only gain meaning in the context of discourse. In their discursive context, these signs can be read as indicators of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic ideological processes at work. Particular signs under analysis in this text are represented within "vertical double quotation marks" to distinguish them from direct quotations represented within “curved double quotation marks”, quotations within directly quoted text represented with 'vertical single quotation marks', and previously established concepts represented within ‘curved single quotation marks’.

### **The White Anti-Racist 'We'**

Perhaps the most apparent articulation which registers white anti-racist counter-ideology is the use of the first-person plural "we" when speaking about white people (see for example Flagg, 1993; Jensen, 1998; McIntosh, 1992; Wise, 2008b). The articulation of "white" to "we" differentiates white anti-racism from hegemonic liberal color-blind whiteness which "Only rarely [declares] its presence" (C. I. Harris, 1993, p. 1791), and it marks a transgressive break from the nationalistic [american, british, canadian, australian] or universalistic [human] "we" of liberal color-blind individual rights-based discourses. The white anti-racist "we" is a necessary first step in constructing a counter-hegemonic white community, both real and imagined, which can rearticulate "white" to "anti-racism".

### **Howard Winant & Rearticulating Whiteness**

The rearticulation of "white" to "anti-racism" is based on two premises: [a] that "white" has 'many meanings' and is therefore rearticulateable, and [b] that some of the meanings of "white" are anti- or non-racist and are therefore articulateable to anti- or non-racist formations.

In terms of the first premise, that "white" has many meanings and is therefore rearticulatable, Howard Winant (2004) makes a compelling case. He extends the historical narrative of Critical Race Theory to argue that "The racial conflicts of the post-civil rights period have fissured white supremacy" (p. 51). Prior to WWII, hegemonic whiteness had a more "monolithic" form (p. 50), and after, it has taken on a liberal color-blind form "effective at reinterpreting (or 'rearticulating') movement demands in conservative and individualist, though ostensibly egalitarian, terms" (p. 33). The present liberal color-blind rearticulation of whiteness is far more "fluid, contradictory [and] contentious" (p. xiv) than previous racial formations and "An unprecedented period of racial anxiety and opportunity has resulted, in which competing racial projects struggle to reinterpret the meaning of race and to redefine racial identity" (p. 51). Contention between these competing projects "allows us to recognize that there can be no timeless and absolute standard for what constitutes racism" (p. 45) to such an extent, in his estimation, that "it is no longer possible to assume a 'normalized' whiteness" (p. 50). The neutralization of whiteness is his formulation is, therefore, already all but accomplished: "whiteness is no longer the negation of nonwhiteness but merely another form of racial 'difference'" (p. 51).

In terms of the second premise, that some of the meanings of "white" are anti- or non-racist and therefore articulateable to anti- or non-racist formations, Winant recognizes that the rearticulation of "white" to "anti-racism" is a "daunting task" (p. 65), and he spends much more time demonstrating how the liberal-conservative political spectrum has rearticulated whiteness [i.e. reproduced its superordinate position] than engaging concrete evidence for successful white anti-racist or non-racist rearticulation. In fact, white anti-racism is conspicuously absent in his characterization of "racial projects on the left" (p. 67). None the less, he proposes an identifiably white anti-racist program which includes embracing "race consciousness," building "transracial coalitions," and emphasizing "that whites can ally with racially defined minorities without renouncing their whiteness" (Ibid.). While Winant presents a compelling case that "white" is indeed rearticulateable, his contention that "white" is rearticulatable to anti-racism is much less convincing.

## White Anti-Racist Role Models

The second premise of white anti-racism, that some of the meanings of "white" are 'nonracist or antiracist,' is typically operationalized as a search for ancestors. The historical existence of white anti-racists—evidence that white people "have been activists for racial justice" (Warren, 2010, p. xi)—demonstrates that "white" is articulatable to "anti-racism", extends the counter-public back in time to construct tradition, and serves to instill pride and legitimacy through that invented tradition.

Tim Wise (2008b), for example, is very explicit about the importance of inventing tradition for the survival and maintenance of white anti-racism: "One of the biggest problems in sustaining white resistance [to racism] is the apparent lack of role models to whom we can look for inspiration, advice, and even lessons on what *not* to do...Although there have always been whites who fought" against "unjust privileges and institutional racism" (p. 91), Wise laments that "we typically don't learn of them in school nor from our parents" (Ibid.). Whereas 'white supremacy' as a tradition is presented in hegemonic narratives as monolithic, these narratives are "a prefabricated and utterly inaccurate understanding of what our options are" because they marginalize alternative "anti-racist" meanings of whiteness (p. 94). Wise takes an anti-essentialist approach to argue that "tradition is a choice we make. In other words, there are many traditions in our culture, and the ones we choose to venerate are not foregone conclusions but are the result of conscious volitional acts" (p. 93). He informs white anti-racists "that there [is] another tradition they could choose to uphold" (p. 94), a tradition of resistance to 'white supremacy' which includes advocates for American Indian rights going back to Bartolomé de Las Casas (p. 94), white Southerners who voted against succession and fought against the confederacy (p. 95), and white civil rights activists like his role model Ann Braden (p. 96).

Ann Braden placed similar importance on being connected to tradition. In 1951, a Black southern mentor, William L. Patterson, "told her that she didn't have to be part of the world of lynchers; she could join the 'other America,' the one that has been here since the first slave ship, the one of Negroes and whites who fought against slavery, lynchings, and injustice of any kind" (C. S. Brown, 2002, p. 89). The concept deeply resonated with Braden and she became a champion of it for the rest of her life. Recognizing that "you've got to have roots somewhere; people get real confused if they don't. I found my roots in 'the other America'" among 'whites who fought against' racism (Braden quoted in C. S. Brown, 2002, p. 89). These 'roots' gave her "this sense that I'm a part of this long movement that's like a chain back into the past and will go on after I'm gone" (Ibid.). While the deeper 'roots' of this white anti-racist 'tradition' are almost entirely invented, Braden's significant and direct influence on Wise and other white anti-racists is not. By joining real and imagined traditions of white anti-racism, the counter-public is enlarged and legitimized.

The existence of white anti-racists in the liberal color-blind era, like Braden and Wise and similarly committed individuals and groups over a longer period of time, suggests that "white" is indeed rearticulateable to "anti-racism" counter-hegemonically, in small and unsuccessful projects, but there is little evidence that "white" is hegemonically rearticulateable to "anti-racism". Moreover, the assimilation of highly problematic historical figures like Las Casas or white abolitionists to a tradition designed to legitimize and give 'roots' to white anti-racism often leads to [a] overly romantic and sanitized accounts of their actions, or [b] recognition of the ways which these 'role models' often reinscribed relations of racialized domination in their actions and therefore just how 'daunting' white anti-racism as a project has been (see Leonardo, 2009, p. 95).

## The Tendentia Force of Whiteness

In order to better understand the ‘daunting’ task of hegemonically rearticulating "white" to "anti-racism", the basic anti-essentialist supposition—that signs articulated in discourse and elements articulated in social formations are fundamentally arbitrary and neutral—should be revisited in the specific case of the white anti-racist project. While Stuart Hall contends that an element in a social formation, like religion, “has no necessary, intrinsic, transhistorical belongingness,” but he also cautions that

...there are powerful, immensely strong what I would call 'lines of tendential force' articulating that religious formation to political, economic and ideological structures. So that, if you move into that society, it would be idiotic to think that you could easily detach religion from its historical embeddedness and simply put it in another place (quoted in Hall & Grossberg, 1996 [1986], p. 142).

Given the historical centrality of whiteness to ‘political, economic, ideological’ and religious structures around the world through nearly four centuries, such strong ‘lines of tendential force’ seems to better explain the extent to which rearticulating "white" to anti-racism is ‘daunting’.

Hall’s example of religion is deeply informed by his important studies of Rastafari who, he argues, “remade themselves...positioned themselves differently as new political subjects [and] reconstructed themselves as blacks in the new world” (Ibid., p. 143). As Patricia Hill Collins (1986) argues, “defining and valuing one's consciousness of one's self-defined standpoint in the face of images that foster a self-definition as the objectified 'other' is an important way of resisting the dehumanization essential to systems of domination” (p. S18), indeed such ‘self-valuation’ through ‘self-definition’ may be one of the most basic expressions of ‘critical consciousness’. It is clear that people of color have had significant success in redefining their own racial identities in the second half of the twentieth century [e.g. ‘non-whites’ to ‘people of color’; ‘Negro’ and ‘Colored’ to ‘Black’, ‘African-American’, ‘Afrikan’, or ‘Africans in America’; ‘Hispanic’ and ‘Mestizo’ to ‘Latin@’ or ‘Chicanx’; ‘Indians’ to ‘Native American’, ‘American Indian’, ‘First Nations’ or ‘indigenous peoples’]. These counter-hegemonic racial projects have deeply disrupted hegemonic racial logic through self-definition. However, most of these rearticulations by people of color favored new signifiers rather than attempting to rearticulate an original sign.<sup>10</sup> To the extent that these projects were successful in ‘positivizing’

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<sup>10</sup> The reclamation of the N-word, ‘Chicano’ and ‘American Indian’ are certainly exceptions to this trend. In terms of the N-word, the project is anti-universal and seems better understood as an act of communal/national self-determination than counter-hegemonic rearticulation because it does not seek to impose the rearticulation on a total social formation. ‘Chicano’, an abbreviation of ‘Mexicano’, became an epithet among both Anglos and Mexican-Americans in the Southwest U.S. during the 1920s and 1930s. While initially controversial (García, 2014, p. 5; Rosales, 1997, p. 261), its rearticulation among militant youth was completed in the early 1970s by Civil Rights and “Black Power” influenced Mexican-American movements (Ibid., p. 183). The reclamation of ‘Indian’ seems to be somewhat necessary because there is no other term that has been invented to name the shared racialized experience of the hundreds of indigenous nations within the continental U.S. Dialogue and movement building between these nations with common interests in relation to particular U.S. domination has required a named identity framework. While in Canada, ‘Indian’ has been hegemonically rearticulated as ‘First Nations’, the corresponding movement in the U.S. for the rearticulating ‘Indian’ to ‘Native American’ has been less

groups of people of color, strategies of positivization most often relied on rearticulating their social 'element' to an alternative sign, rather than attempting to rearticulate the original sign. Similar attempts to resignify the "white" element to alternative signs ['White' to 'Caucasian,' 'Euro-American' or 'European'], in contrast, have sat very well with liberal color-blindness as ostensibly softer and milder signifiers which essentially reinscribe the same relations of domination and do not disrupt racial logic in any way. This is undoubtedly because both 'European' and 'Caucasian' are concepts coterminous with, and indistinguishable from, the earliest conceptualizations of whiteness under biblical, legal, philosophical, and scientific racism [see Chapter 10 for an extended explanation of this claim]. In contrast to dynamic, diverse, and deeply ideological processes of both rearticulation and resignification within communities of color, the white anti-racist reliance on rearticulating "white" discursively indicates that within the sign "white" there is "no base for resistance, no incipient rebellion, no inchoate uprising, no potential for insurgency" (King, 1987, p. 499), and much more limited possibility for white subjects to develop any sort of 'consciousness' because "white" sufficiently and effectively names a generally desired superordinate position.

### **"White" as Field Specific Sign**

"White" is the primary sign around which the modern concept of race has been formed. The strength of its articulation to particular relations of subordination and superordination defined by the concept of race seems to go beyond 'tendential force.' It may be that "white" is a sign where "the name (the signifier) is so attached to the concept (signified) that no displacement in the relation between the two is possible, [and] we cannot have any hegemonic rearticulation" (Laclau, 2000a, p. 57). Vološinov (1986 [1929]) discusses a type of sign which is "specialized for some particular field of ideological creativity" (p. 14). Unlike words which are essentially "neutral with respect to any specific ideological function," a field specific sign "is created by some specific ideological function and remains inseparable from it" (Ibid.).

While "white" as a chromatic designation long predates modern racism, it has also become a signifier for a variety of 'positive' values [good, pure, moral] or other abstract concepts [light, death, transcendence, absence]. This social history has made it suitable for appropriation as a signifier for a superordinate group of people (Bonnett, 1999, p. 202; R. Dyer, 1997b). These 'many meanings' of "white" seem to discount it as a field specific sign. But there is strong evidence that, as a signifier of a group of people, "whiteness has never existed for other reasons besides oppression" (Leonardo, 2009, p. 71). In its categorization of people, "white" seems to have all the markers of a field specific sign, and along with its cognates "Caucasian" and "European", articulates a group of previously antagonistic peoples for the purposes of dispossessing and exploiting people of color. It was created as a signifier of people for the sole

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successful. An earlier movement for rearticulating 'Indian' to 'American Indian' [as codified in the 1950 census], and its use as the favored political term of the Civil Rights Movement and "Black Power" influenced 1960s political revival [National Congress of American Indians, United Bay Area Council of American Indian Affairs, Survival of American Indians Association, American Indian Movement, etc.] has made 'American Indian' a preferable term in politicized circles for the purposes of dialogue and unity. 'Indigenous people' seems to be preferable to center a larger transversal global dialogue [discussed at greater length in Chapter 4], and 'Native' has become a popular short-hand, but neither term seems to have the ability to replace 'Native American' nor 'American Indian' as hegemonic markers for the specific experience of indigenous peoples within the jurisdictional boundaries of the U.S.

purpose of domination, has never hegemonically signified anything other than that ideology of domination, and cannot be separated from this ideological function in its articulation to people.

With no evidence that "white" has ever been hegemonically articulated to "anti-racism", and scant evidence that it has been counter-hegemonically so articulated, the white anti-racist project of "rearticulating whiteness in anti-essentialist terms" (Giroux, 1998, p. 91) and distinguishing "between whiteness as a dominating ideology and white people who are positioned across multiple locations of privilege and subordination" (Ibid., p. 90) is suspect. Whether "white" is hegemonically rearticulateable to "anti-racism" or not, the deeply rooted meaning of "white" as a signifier of a particular group of people makes the task quite 'daunting.' Somewhere between strong 'lines of tendential force' and a field specific sign, a "Sympathetic understanding of its origins and of the plight of many [intersectionally] suffering people [across multiple axes of oppression] who are thought of and see themselves as white does not change that reality" (D. R. Roediger, 2000 [1991], p. 186). In seeking to articulate "white" to "anti-racism", the white anti-racist project does not seem to "come to terms with the function of whiteness—why it was created, where it has been—but rather projects an ideal image of whiteness (what it would like whiteness to be)" (Leonardo, 2009, p. 101). The next section describes how this 'ideal image of whiteness' is projected by a juxtaposing "white" with 'negative' and 'positive' signifiers to repolarize its meaning.

### **White Anti-Racists & Counter-Hegemonic Polarization**

Standpoint-based movements of people of color in the post-Civil Rights Movement era have deeply problematized the hegemonic positivization of whiteness, and within spaces critical of 'institutional racism,' 'Eurocentrism' and 'white supremacy', "white" is conceptualized as a negative or neutral signifier which is only hegemonically positive as a result of white power. Operating within this counter-hegemonic logic, the project of white anti-racists is to distinguish "between whiteness as a racial identity that is nonracist [neutral] or antiracist [positive] and those aspects of whiteness that are racist [negative]" (Giroux, 1998, p. 91). They do so in a hegemonic context where "Whiteness is already defined almost exclusively in terms of positive attributes" (Haney López, 1996, p. 30) and where the 'positivity' of those attributes is directly tied to material, 'public and psychological' advantages. Whereas people of color have 'nothing to lose but their chains', white anti-racists act against the material and psychological advantages of their position on the basis of counter-hegemonic morality, and seek to construct a white counter-public that can 'positively' contribute to people of color liberation movements.

### **Positivization of the Negative**

Ernesto Laclau (2000b) describes counter-hegemonic discursive processes he calls "positivization of the negative" (185). The 'positivization of the negative' entails "the production of tendentially empty signifiers...which simply name the positive reverse of an experience of historical limitation: [e.g.] 'justice'...'order'...'solidarity'" and their articulation to "the social or political aims of various and divergent groups" (Ibid.). Social movements articulate these 'positive', but tendentially empty, signifiers to their political demands in order to discursively positivize these demands themselves. For example, in the post-WII period, explicit advocates for increasingly unpopular Jim Crow forms of white hegemony might describe 'separate but equal' as 'just' and opponents of Jim Crow forms of white hegemony might equally describe desegregation as 'just'. In both cases, "justice" signifies a 'tendentially empty' universal ideal which has "no *necessary* attachment to any precise content" (Ibid.) and is linked to a given

demand to present it as universally ‘positive’. Critical Race Theory has demonstrated the ways in which liberal color-blind white hegemony was successful in abstracting and rearticulating many of these tendentially empty signifiers from the Civil Rights Movement to repositivize and obscure whiteness in the face of unprecedented challenges. Laclau’s elucidation of this discursive strategy provides important insight into the white anti-racist project. By articulating tendentially empty signifiers like ‘anti-racism’, ‘solidarity’, ‘progressive’ or ‘ally’ to a "white" individual or group, white anti-racists are attempting to ‘name the positive reverse’ of their experience of limitation within the counter-hegemonic space of anti-racism where "white" is almost entirely defined as ‘negative’.

But given that "white" is already hegemonically positivized [i.e. does not face limitation in normative spaces], white-antiracist discursive strategy is a bit more complicated. Having resisted liberal color-blindness with color- / positional consciousness, white anti-racists develop and sustain a white counter-public through an ostensibly anti-essentialist discourse which neutralizes hegemonic "white" and then counter-hegemonically positivizes an anti-racist "white". Both are accomplished through a juxtaposition of "white" with charged signifiers. Hegemonic neutralization juxtaposes normally positive "white" with ‘negative’ signifiers developed by the liberation movements of people of color, and anti-racist positivization juxtaposes the counter-hegemonically negative "white" with alternative ‘positive’ signifiers developed by white anti-racism.

### **Neutralization & Positivization of Counter-Hegemonically Negative "White"**

In order to neutralize [or de-essentialize] "white", white anti-racists juxtapose the ‘negative’ meanings of whiteness in the counter-hegemonic discourses of people of color with the sign itself to create space between them. For example, the juxtaposition "white privilege" indicates that privilege is not an essential part of whiteness, "white supremacy" indicates supremacy is not an essential part of whiteness, and "white racism" indicates that racism “is not the sole property of whites” (Leonardo, 2009, p. 95). These counter-hegemonically negative juxtapositions accomplish four important tasks. First, the explicit naming of the articulation signals a break from hegemonic color-blindness. Second, the explicit naming of the articulation normalizes white anti-racist discourse within ‘color-conscious’ counter-hegemony. Third, the space between the signs created by juxtaposition proposes that "white"—like all signs—is essentially neutral and only gains meaning through its articulation in a given formation. Finally, the explicit color-conscious negative juxtaposition proposes the disarticulation of the two signs.<sup>11</sup>

The neutralization of "white" in anti-racist discourse could be understood as a variation on much older white discursive strategies of juxtaposition, central to the development and maintenance of whiteness itself. For example, in the mid-nineteenth century the term "white slavery" became popular in Democratic Party circles to decry the conditions of white workers in the North while at the same time justifying and naturalizing the enslavement of Black people in the South (Goldberg, 1991; D. R. Roediger, 2000 [1991], p. 68). More recently, the term "white trash" is used by bourgeois white people to convey the messages that "white" does not itself signify ‘trash’, that a given person is ‘trash’ only in spite of their whiteness, and that ‘white

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<sup>11</sup> There, are of course, exceptions and slippages to the interpretation I am imposing here, particularly when these juxtaposed terms are explicitly used within an intersectional analysis to differentiate ‘white privilege’ from ‘male privilege’, etc. I would argue however that when these ‘negative’ or ‘neutral’ juxtapositions are used alongside ‘positive’ juxtapositions in white anti-racist discourse, this interpretation generally applies.



trash' are deviant. For white working-class people, "white trash" is employed as an anti-elitist reclamation of common whiteness (for more CWS scholarship 'white trash' see Hartigan Jr., 2003; Newitz & Wray, 1997). The use of juxtaposition in these cases is deployed to separate ideologically undesirable associations from a hegemonically positivized "white" and cast these negatives upon those who are not categorized as "white". In the case of 'white slavery,' the juxtaposition is used to argue that white people are, and should be, 'free' while people of color are, and should be, slaves. The bourgeois 'white trash' it is meant to purify whiteness of associations with 'trash', and the working-class 'white trash' is meant as a reclamation of racial pride and parity of esteem through asserting common whiteness.

'Negative' juxtapositions like "white privilege", "white racism" and "white supremacy" are deployed in white anti-racist discourse to neutralize the counter-hegemonically undesirable articulations between whiteness and domination, and to construct "white" as a social category that gains "its meaning only in conjunction with other identities" (Giroux, 1998, p. 134). Once the sign 'white' is made neutral—"neither enemy nor ally" (Leonardo, 2009, p. 186)—through the discursive repetition of what might be perceived as hegemonically redundant phrases like 'white privilege' and 'white supremacy,' white anti-racists are then discursively free to imbue the neutral concept with their own 'positive' counter-hegemonic meanings.

New 'positive' juxtapositions like "white anti-racism", "white progressive", "white solidarity", "white radical", "white anti-imperialist", or "white ally" are deployed to rearticulate "white" to anti-racist counter-hegemony. The tension between the counter-hegemonically 'negative' modifiers [privilege, racism and supremacy] and the counter-hegemonically 'positive' modifiers [progressive, anti-racist, and ally] clearly registers the white anti-racist ideological project to wrest control over what is conceptualized as an ultimately neutral "white" sign from its articulation to domination.

### **Naturalization of Whiteness**

The white anti-racist conceptualization of "white" as *both* inescapable *and* rearticulateable "beyond...identity politics' fixed boundaries" (Giroux, 1998, p. 90) ultimately gives whiteness a naturalized form. Standpoint-based politics require a distinction between people of color and subjects categorized as white, and the extent to which liberal color-blind white hegemony shields white subjects from the 'self-knowledge' forced upon them by the liberation movements of people of color, a necessary precondition to resistance is positional / color consciousness. White anti-racists conceptualize their position as both one which requires critical self-knowledge and one which "Whites have to learn to live with" (Giroux, 1998, p. 134). The absoluteness of the distinction enforces whiteness as an inalienable condition. As SNCC White Community Organizer Sam Shirah told volunteers at a training for the 1964 Freedom Summer campaign, "You can't be black, so don't try" (quoted in Zinn, 2002 [1964], p. 184), or as former white SNCC staff member and manager for Peter Tosh Theresa Del Pozzo puts it, "there's no way you can step out of your own skin" (Del Pozzo, 2000, p. 197).

In response to what white anti-racists conceptualize as a hegemonically monolithic and essentializing form of whiteness, they advance an anti-essentialist but similarly reified white 'we'. By countering an essentialized *meaning* of "white" with an essentialized *condition* of "white" that can have many meanings, white anti-racists threaten to derail the entire project of demystifying race a social construct. While the meaning of "white" is politicized through negative and positive juxtaposition, the sign itself is depoliticized and reproduced as "mythical signifier" (Barthes, 1972 [1957]). The problem of "white" is displaced onto the problems of

‘supremacy’ or ‘privilege’ or ‘domination,’ and whiteness is imagined into the past and future as a natural, objective, inescapable fact.

### **Meaning & Power**

If "white" is ultimately ‘neutral’, and can be rearticulated to "anti-racism", the question which remains is one of power. Counter-hegemonic projects emerge in and against hegemonic meanings. These meanings are hegemonic because they represent and reinforce the legitimated power of the historical bloc, and are institutionalized through what Althusser (1971 [1968]) calls Ideological State Apparatuses: religious, educational, legal, political, familial, trade-union, media and official cultural institutions (pp. 142-143). Hegemonic whiteness may not control all meaning in all places, but became hegemonic by exercising significant power in organizing the majority of that meaning. The success of white anti-racism as a counter-hegemonic project—its ability to rearticulate "white" hegemonically—also directly corresponds to its ability to exercise power. The white anti-racist contention that "white" is hegemonically rearticulateable to "anti-racism" is, therefore, demonstrated precisely by its manifestation and reach.

White anti-racism is the dominant ideology linked to people of color liberation movements for producing ‘white allies’ and regulating white bodies in counter-hegemonic spaces. It has been over the entirety of the liberal color-blind era—from late Civil Rights, “Black Power” and Black feminist movements, to Indigenous rights and liberation movements, the Anti-Apartheid and Latin American solidarity movements during the 1980s, the anti-globalization movement during the 1990s, the Palestine solidarity, Muslim civil rights, immigrant rights, and ‘Black Lives Matter’ movements of the 2000s. White anti-racism has as much power in that articulation as those liberation movements have given and continue to give it. In addition to this dominant position in counter-hegemonic spaces, of course, white anti-racism has even greater power in its practice by subjects and elements privileged by white hegemony. Ostensibly, the use of that hegemonic ‘white privilege’ to procure additional resources for people of color liberation movements and extend access into white institutional spaces increases the power and reach of people of color.<sup>12</sup> The use of this hegemonic privilege has been highly controversial over the entirety of the liberal color-blind era, and early “Black Power” era distinctions made between "white liberals" and "white radicals" or more recent distinctions made between the increasingly banal sign "allies" and more militant "co-conspirators" (Feminista Jones quoted in Hackman, 2015) or "accomplices" (Indigenous Action Media, 2014) work to recognize and endorse those white anti-racists who demonstrate greater ‘cognizance’, ‘commitment’, and militancy.

From this complex, limited, and embattled subject position, white anti-racists contend with a hegemonic force, ‘white supremacy’, which has proven itself highly adaptable and effective in securing the hegemony of people categorized as white over three centuries of global domination. Liberal color-blindness is the top layer of a long line of sedimented racial formations with a broad repertoire for reproducing white hegemonic power blocs. Critical Race Theory elucidates how the liberal color-blind formation was very successful in rearticulating itself to absorb and diffuse the robust civil rights and liberation movements of the post-WWII period, and the appropriation and reappropriation of ‘tendentially empty’ signifiers from those very movements was particularly central to its formation. Indeed, liberal color-blindness has shown itself to be highly resistant to more than a half-century of the color-conscious project to rearticulate "white" to "anti-racism".

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<sup>12</sup> This assumption is, of course, highly contentious in practice, and is addressed at greater length in Chapter 3—Use of Privilege.

Events over the last decade have indicated that aspects of white anti-racist dialect are finding their way into hegemonic discourse. The “Black Lives Matter” movement which coalesced during the second term of Barack Obama, in particular, forced widespread positional consciousness upon white people across the Anglosphere and beyond, and there has been a major proliferation of ‘allied’ white anti-racist organizations, actions, and social media discourse. The white anti-racist “we”, and Critical Race Theory’s ‘institutional racism’ marked the recent Democratic Party primaries, most notably during the Flint, Michigan debate between Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders [6 March 2016]. In England, David Gillborn (2006) has observed that the tendentially empty signifier “anti-racism” itself “has been tacitly redefined so that it can mean almost anything” (15). The sign has been ‘neutralized’ by liberal discourse such that an “analysis of institutional racism (as being frequently unintended and hidden) has been lost” and, consistent with liberal color-blindness, perpetuates an “illusion that something meaningful has actually changed in the way that public services are delivered. The language has changed but not the reality of race inequality” (Ibid.).

It is perhaps too early to tell whether these appearances of white anti-racist dialect in hegemonic discourse are indications of success, or further appropriation. For all his pessimism about the diffused meaning of “anti-racism” in England, Gillborn does not abandon the white anti-racist project. Rather, he proposes that “The absence of an anti-racist orthodoxy can be a source of strength. Racism takes many forms and so anti-racism must be flexible and constantly adapt” (13). But can white anti-racists adapt at the necessary rate in order to turn the tide? Is it possible for their project to dialectically outpace the rearticulatory / appropriative powers of liberal color-blind whiteness? White anti-racists must continually attend to both ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ meanings of “white” and split hairs between what is ‘bad’ white and what is ‘good’ white in order to disparage ‘bad’ whiteness and promote ‘good’ whiteness. The complex repolarization maneuver within a sign which is already overwhelmed by hegemonic positivity is suspect, and it seems that no amount of conceivable intervention can adequately police the border between ‘negative’ ‘neutral’ and ‘positive’ representations of “white”. It is difficult to conceive of the time and resources, the army of activists, and the mass of ‘good’ deeds by white anti-racists that would be required to successfully rearticulate whiteness as something neutral, let alone positive.

When white anti-racists seriously argue for “creating a positive, proud, attractive, antiracist white identity that is empowered to travel in and out of various racial/ethnic circles with confidence and empathy” (Kinchloe & Steinberg, 1998, p. 12) it is hard not to be struck by the irony of it all. People categorized as “white” already have a ‘positive, proud, attractive’ identity. People categorized as “white” have ‘travelled in and out’ of people of color’s spaces without permission, exuding ‘confidence’ through power that instills fear, and feigning paternalistic and maternalistic ‘empathy’ for centuries. The only thing that distinguishes Kinchloe & Steinberg’s statement above from ‘white supremacy’ is the attachment of “anti-racism”—like a ‘tendentially empty’ drop in a bucket of normative whiteness.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has defined the white anti-racism as an approach to working against racism from white subject positions which conceptualizes whiteness as ‘inalienable’ and rearticulateable and therefore develops an anti-essentialist program to embody and rearticulate “white” to “anti-racism” through a ‘positive’ white ‘anti-racist’ identity rooted in ‘traditions’ of white people who resisted racism and seek to enlarge that identity to the level of hegemony by realizing a ‘post-

racial' society where "white" signifies a benign 'ethnicity'. But given that "white" appears to be a signifier with strong lines of tendential force which articulate it to racial domination, the feasibility of this project is questionable. White anti-racists inevitably face significant challenges "working through whiteness" (Levine-Rasky, 2002), particularly differentiating between 'good anti-racist' whiteness and 'bad racist' whiteness due to the incompleteness of their 'positional consciousness'. They pursue this approach because it seems to be the most logical and practicable, and accept their 'daunting' task "without guarantees" of success (Hall, 1986) and the understanding that, despite a shaky theoretical foundation, white anti-racism must "be *constructed* through practice" (Hall, 1985, p. 95). The next chapter describes the white anti-racist program for producing white people who can serve 'as allies to people of color' as one of confession, conversion, and collaboration.

## CHAPTER 3

### WHITE ANTI-RACISM IN PRACTICE: CONFESSION, CONVERSION & COLLABORATION

Just as Black SNCC staff were divided between ‘Beloved Community’ and ‘Black Power’ approaches to Black liberation, white SNCC staff were divided between ‘integrating the Black community’ and ‘working in the white community’ as developed and championed by Ann Braden. Braden and her partner Carl had been deeply ‘committed’ to supporting Black liberation since 1954 when they “purchased a home in [white] suburban Louisville in order to deed it over to an African American couple” and, as a result, were indicted for “sedition against the state of Kentucky” (C. S. Brown, 2002, pp. 78-79). In 1957, they became field secretaries for the Southern Conference Education Fund [SCEF], a left-oriented organization formed during the early ‘New Deal’ phase of the Civil Rights Movement, “to travel around the South to reach white people” (Ibid., p. 97). The Bradens were close friends of SNCC advisor Ella Baker, and in 1961 SCEF began funding “a white field secretary [in SNCC] to recruit students at white colleges” (Carson, 1995, p. 52). Bob Zellner, the first White SNCC Field Secretary [1961-1962], “felt more comfortable in the midst of the black community” (Michel, 2004, p. 20) and was drawn toward ‘integrating’ SNCC’s direct actions against Jim Crow. But Sam Shirah, the second White SNCC Field Secretary [1962-1964], was “more committed to campus organizing among white southerners” (Fosl, 2002, p. 279) and “untiring in his effort to organize white support for the movement” (Michel, 2004, p. 21). Together with Ed Hamlett, the third White SNCC Field Secretary [1964], Shirah, advisors Ann Braden and Myles Horton, and other “white students in Nashville” (Ibid., p. 25), built the Southern Student Organizing Committee [SSOC], “a ‘coordinating group’ of predominantly white campus activists” (Robb and Dorothy Burlage quoted in Ibid., p. 29). The SSOC was dedicated to “offering sympathetic whites the same type of organizational support that SNCC had given black college students when it first emerged in 1960” (Ibid., p. 24) with the formal endorsement of the Executive Committee of SNCC, SCEF, and Students for a Democratic Society [SDS].

The 1966 SNCC “Black Power” program directives to ‘white radicals and white liberals’ two years later were essentially a continuing endorsement of Braden and the SSOC’s approach which assumed that “Negroes did not need me or want me to either lead them or organize them” (Braden, 1966b, p. 1) and that, as a white person, “my job was to reach the white people of my community---and wherever else I could reach them---and convince them of the evils of racism and of the meaning or real democracy” (Ibid., p. 2). Because of this relationship with emergent “Black Power”, the work of Braden and the SSOC toward ‘organizing the white community’ is foundational to the white anti-racist program under liberal color-blind white hegemony, but while “Black Power” quickly reorganized social movement relations and logics, the SSOC approach did not immediately expand or produce explicitly white anti-racist organizations. Most ‘radical’ or ‘New Left’ white supporters of “Black Power” in the U.S. interpreted its directives toward organizing white people around transectional axes of oppression, particularly poor and working-class white people, with the shared “[hope] that eventually there will be a coalition of poor blacks and poor whites” against capitalism (S. Carmichael & Hamilton, 1967, p. 82). To the extent that these projects organized white people “on the low rungs of the ladder” (Braden, 1966b, p. 4) without confronting them “with this whole question of racism and what it has done

to [them] from the very beginning” (Ibid., p. 3), Braden condemned them, and such explicit confrontation of white people with their position in ‘this whole question of racism from the very beginning’ is the core of the white anti-racist program devised to compliment “Black Power”.

Because “Black Power” was the leading force in demystifying and acting against racial oppression, even ‘white liberals’ ultimately developed approaches similar to Braden and the SSOC’s in “the ‘consciousness-raising’ or ‘awareness-training’ forms of anti-racism that rose to prominence in the 1970s and early 1980s” (Bonnett, 1999, p. 207). Judith Katz’s White Awareness: Handbook for Anti-Racism Training (1978), for example, locates “the problem” of racism in “the White community” (unnamed woman of color quoted in p. vi) and advocates for explicitly “White-on-White groups as a way to address racism in White people” (p. vi, see also Alcoff, 1998, pp. 12-13). The discourses of ‘liberal’ and ‘radical’ white anti-racist projects all working to ‘organize their own white communities’ along interpretations of the “Black Power” critique of liberal color-blind white hegemony in the 1970s and 1980s were the substance of Critical Whiteness Studies and a much larger ‘second wave’ of white anti-racist groups in the 1990s and 2000s—including Challenging White Supremacy/the Catalyst Project, Heads Up Collective, John Brown Gun Club/Redneck Revolt, Alliance of White Anti-Racists Everywhere [AWARE], Showing Up for Racial Justice [SURJ] and the White Noise Collective.

While the membership of these explicitly white anti-racist organizations still only captures a small fraction of all subjects operating on white anti-racist principles, basic regularities in white anti-racist practice, from both ‘first’ and ‘second’ waves, and across the ‘liberal’-‘radical’ spectrum, reveal a program comprised of three basic steps: confession, conversion and collaboration. ‘Cognizance’ of their social position under liberal color-blind white hegemony requires confession, ‘commitment’ to rearticulating "white" requires conversion to white "anti-racism", and the myriad contradictions in white anti-racist practice which proliferate from the incompleteness of white ‘positional consciousness’ ultimately require collaborative regulation by people of color. This chapter will describe and analyze these three basic steps and their consequences.

### **Confession: Solidifying ‘Positional Consciousness’**

In order to become ‘cognizant’ of racial oppression against liberal color-blind ‘hegemonic ideologies that claim that racism is over’, people structurally positioned as white must understand the mechanisms of ‘institutional racism’ which superordinate them in relation to people of color. Their acceptance that, under present conditions, white people “should not—indeed, cannot—escape being part of ‘their racial group’, or its attendant political conservatism” (Bonnett, 1999, p. 208) is frequently referred to as “owning” one’s whiteness (Blitz, 2006; Katz, 1978; Leonardo, 2009, p. 185; McLaren, 1998; McWhorter, 2005; Probyn, 2004; Whites Educating Whites, 2012), and fixes the white anti-racist with an uncomfortable association with normative whiteness which ideally leads to taking responsibility for their complicity with ‘white supremacy’ (R. Dyer, 1997b, p. 7; Fosl, 2004, p. 178; Frye, 1992; Weather Underground Organization, 2006 [1971]). Because ‘positional consciousness’ is a necessary precondition for any action by white people against racial oppression, ritual acknowledgement or confession of whiteness constructs entry into anti-racist spaces, and once ‘cognizant’ of their own unearned position, white anti-racists are ideally ‘committed’ to “raise [other white people’s] daily consciousness” (McIntosh, 1995 [1988]).

### **Conversion, Standpoint & Incompleteness**

Having demonstrated a degree of ‘positional consciousness’ by acknowledging their whiteness, white anti-racists must also recognize that they are “not in a structural position to see” (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 9) the myriad ways that whiteness shapes individual behaviors, ideologies, and institutions. Liberal color-blind whiteness “appears to be both everywhere and nowhere, simultaneously a pervasive normative presence and an invisible, largely undiscussed, absence” (Bonnett, 2000, p. 143) which is more “clearly visible to those who don't enjoy its protection” (Bérubé, 2003, p. 256). ‘Seeing’ is a pervasive ableist metaphor for consciousness in both Marxist standpoint theory and Critical Whiteness Studies<sup>13</sup>, but the metaphorical conceptualization of white subjects as incomplete, ‘blind’, or in need of ‘guidance’, is crucial to understanding the white anti-racist need to seek “the completion of the self through the other” (Leonardo, 2009, p. 99). And whereas the metaphor of ‘blindness’ is central to standpoint-based conceptualizations of white subjects as unable to develop ‘critical consciousness’ because they are superordinated by racial oppression, the metaphor of addiction is central to embodied white-anti-racist practice.

Some white anti-racists have explicitly made analogies between their project and twelve-step recovery programs (M. Johnson, 1995), others have employed the analogy cautiously (Poulshock, 2004, p. 281; Segrest, 2001, pp. 61-63), and still others have dismissed it as “fatally flawed” (Wellman, 2000, p. 29), but it is hard to ignore the similarities. Like Alcoholics Anonymous [AA], the first step of the white anti-racist program is to ‘admit’ that one is white and complicit in ‘white supremacy’. This admission indicates positional consciousness and structures entrance into a community of support dedicated to recovery of ‘humanity’ and rehabilitation for ‘positive’ action as ‘allies’ to people of color. Like alcoholism, whiteness is conceptualized as an inescapable condition, and the threat of ‘falling off the wagon’ is always present.

Using the related metaphor of religious conversion, James Baldwin (1985) says,

conversions are notoriously transitory: within days, the reformed...have ventilated their fears and dried up their tears and returned to their former ways...But it does not demand a mass conversion to persuade a mob to lynch a nigger or stone a Jew or mutilate a sexual heretic. It demands no conversion at all (p. xvii).

Like an AA meeting, or the sabbath, anti-racist meetings occur maybe once a week for the average convert, but the pull of normative whiteness is a constant “mob-like activity” in which the “will of the mob does not seem reducible to the aggregate of the intentions of discrete mob members” (Dwight Boyd quoted in Applebaum, 2007, p. 457). White people are “unavoidably part of something that is doing something in [them], for [them], through [them], as [them]” (Ibid.), and “A woman who attends an unlearning racism workshop and learns to acknowledge that she is racist is no less a threat than one who does not” (hooks, 2000, p. 56). Those working as “white allies have often furthered white supremacy without the whites involved realizing it, or

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<sup>13</sup> For examples in Critical Whiteness Studies, see Dyer (1997a), Frankenberg (1993), Hartmann, Gerteis & Croll (2009), Ignatin (1976 [1967]), McIntosh (1995 [1988]), and Poulshock (2004). As Applebaum (2006) explains, “the persistent figurative use of vision for knowledge and deficiency of vision for ignorance invokes and perpetuates negative images of disability” (p. 347), and for this reason the signifier “see” will be placed in ‘single quotations’ or replaced with “perceive”.

even wanting to do so” (S. Carmichael & Hamilton, 1967, p. 46). The strong material and psychological pressure to relapse into normative whiteness requires white anti-racists to center the program in their lives and “learn to live with their whiteness” (Giroux, 1998, p. 134) because “if not faced honestly and quickly by the afflicted, it can be crippling” (quoted in Zinn, 2002 [1964], p. 182). Finally, like AA or Christianity, the convert is required to recognize the harm they have caused others and make amends. In white anti-racism this manifests as ‘starting from’ the standpoints of people of color and taking action for ‘racial justice’.

### **Conversion: Starting from the Standpoints of People of Color**

Standpoint theorists have suggested that superordinated subjects can and should “place themselves at” (Marx & Engels, 1848), “take up inquiry” (D. E. Smith, 1987, p. 165), or “start from” (Harding, 1995) the standpoints of subordinated subjects. To the extent that intellectual and cultural resistance traditions of people of color are increasingly documented and available to white subjects who are ‘cognizant’ and ‘committed’, these standpoint-based products provide a variety of windows into people of color’s world views. “[A]lly-based antiracism positions people of color as experts on racism, and situates whites as ‘nonknowers’ of racism” (Ringrose, 2002, p. 303) and while white anti-racists “cannot totally participate” (B. Ware, 1967, p. 1282) in dialogues which produce standpoint because of their racially superordinated position, they can be “guided by non-white discourses” (Leonardo, 2009, p. 186), follow processes of standpoint-based knowledge production by people of color and consume their products, study dialogical regularities, discuss particular concepts, and even become ‘experts’ in the intellectual traditions of people of color, producing their own ‘rigorous’ works inspired by these traditions. In a most ideal sense, the availability and proliferation of standpoint-based commodities extends the reach of counter-hegemonic communities of resistance. White anti-racists expand the market, provide income for the producers, and gain resources for deepening white anti-racist consciousness.

In practice, however, white anti-racists exercise choice in selecting and interpreting ‘useful’ knowledge from a wide variety of intellectual and cultural products. Inevitably exercising such choice “means treating the scholarship of people of color like ‘a box of chocolates’ from which we comfortably select our favorite bonbons and bons mots” (hooks taken up by Thompson, 2003, p. 13). The ability to choose and tailor standpoint-based guidance to themselves can establish “an acquisitive relation” (Fanon, 1967 [1952], p. 128) between ‘blind’ white people and ‘seeing’ people of color, and tends toward ‘tokenization’ of people of color as interchangeable and exchangeable sources of racial knowledge (see for example Anzaldúa, 2009 [c. 1988], p. 144; M. Davis et al., 2004, p. 435; Muñoz, Ordoñez Jasis, Young, & McLaren, 2004, pp. 173-174) or “a frame of mind which distances those one is learning about as ‘objects of study’” (Frye, 1983, p. 118). Moreover, the choices that white anti-racists make undoubtedly shape production by people of color, particularly when availability is mediated through profit-driven apparatuses. The consumer power [demand] of white anti-racists ensures availability of standpoint-based and standpoint-adjacent products appealing to their tastes [supply], while at the same time white anti-racist distance from the point of production allows even greater freedom in how the standpoint-based products of people of color might be interpreted or used.

Misinterpretation is inevitable when standpoint-based ‘truths’ rooted in the particular experiences of people of color are abstracted from their contexts by white anti-racist consumers, particularly given that many available ‘truths’ are already produced and selected for white audiences [anti-racist or otherwise]. Standpoint is developed primarily from experiences of systematic dehumanization and “White radicals have nothing in their experience that equips



them to understand this complex of feeling in a real human sense” (Vernon, 1964). A studious approach to available standpoint-based resources, and a requisite “attentiveness to those who experience marginalization” (Applebaum, 2006, p. 354), cannot overcome a lack of “experiential knowledge, drawn from a shared history as 'other'” (Barnes, 1990, p. 1864). While white anti-racists “can participate on an intellectual level. The[y] cannot participate on an emotional level” (B. Ware, 1967, p. 1282). So, in order to overcome selection bias and problems of interpretation on an ‘emotional level’, the white anti-racist practice of ‘starting from’ the standpoints of people of color in order to ‘see’ requires intervention [over-sight, super-vision, in-spection, guidance] from people of color.

### **Conversion: People of Color as a Barometer of Knowing**

The ultimate barometer of white anti-racist work which ‘starts from’ the standpoints of people of color is the approval of people of color themselves, creating a relationality which scripts people of color in the role of teachers and disciplinarians serving white anti-racist demand for guidance. As ‘students’ in this relation, white anti-racists both demand and fear critical feedback. The well-intentioned white anti-racist always faces the looming possibility that a person of color will stand up and say something like: “Yes, but that is a white perspective” (unnamed Black woman quoted in Lareau, 2003, p. 10). When this inevitable moment arrives, there are “no guidelines” for how to overcome such an impasse and “none are considered appropriate” (Levy, 1968, p. 82). Such an intervention can be met by the white anti-racist in two ways: arguing the point [the path taken by Lareau] or deference.

If the white anti-racist subject attempts to argue the point, “any defense against the accusation gives an appearance of defending oneself, rather than a principle” (Levy, 1968, p. 72). Whether the ‘accusations’ have merit or not, the white anti-racist will likely never be in a position to dispute the charges because they “cannot monitor every moment that privileges them” (Leonardo, 2009, p. 71) and the person of color, with their structural potential for ‘seeing’, “has the authority for defining the accusation. There is no way of contradicting his estimate of how a White is regarded” (Levy, 1968, p. 72). Such intervention is, of course, potentially educative for the white anti-racist and might serve as another moment of forced ‘positional consciousness’. In worst-case scenarios, the white subject will learn how to cynically avoid similar discomfort in the future, or even brand the intervention with the reactionary liberal color-blind epithet of ‘playing the race card’. But assuming the white subject is ‘committed to the overthrow of their own racial privilege’, these experiences of intervention ideally continue to deepen their ‘positional consciousness’ and lead to redoubled efforts to learn. It is equally, if not more likely, however, to be a moment of “paralysis” (Giroux, 1998, p. 134; Levy, 1968, p. 82, see also Frye, 1983, 1992) in which the white anti-racist subject will realize how steep the path to ‘co-equal’ rearticulation is and how little scaffolding exists to help get them there.

Regardless of the consequences for the white anti-racist, the ultimate determinant of whether a given moment of ‘paralysis’ can be surmounted is the extent to which the person of color is willing to invest the time and patience and emotional work required to explain, discuss, debate, and instruct. Many scholars and activists of color have expressed that this pressure to educate white people is often a burden which hinders their ability to focus on building standpoint-based power among people of color (see for examples Anzaldúa, 2009 [c. 1988], p. 146; Bell Jr., 1970, p. 545; A. P. Harris, 1990; Jackson, Smith, & Hill, 2003, p. 557; Villalpando, 2003, p. 630). Educating white people is a secondary priority to dialogue between the racially oppressed and building their power as a class. This prioritization does not, of course, preclude

such work, particularly if it is seen as a moral responsibility or a necessary strategy for liberation. So, while ‘guidance’ from people of color is a structural necessity in all forms of white anti-racism, it is secondary and elective for “Black Power” approaches to liberation. White anti-racists, therefore, cannot assume that their demand for ‘guidance’ will always be met by people of color, and by their own logic, when left “on our own” (Braden, 1966a, p. 0812), there is a strong tendency that white anti-racists will reproduce normative whiteness.

### **Conversion: The Use of Privilege**

The use of privilege in the service of people of color’s liberation is the primary, and perhaps only, reciprocity that white anti-racists have to offer in exchange for standpoint-based guidance. It is the central defining feature of white anti-racist action, and indeed all white action, explicit or otherwise. Whereas ‘conservative’, ‘liberal’ and ‘radical’ color-blind white action often operates without acknowledgment of ‘white privilege’, white anti-racists ‘are cognizant of and committed to the overthrow of their own racial privilege’ and take actions which explicitly mobilize their white “credentials” (Braden quoted in Fosl, 2004) to represent an alternative ‘anti-racist’ whiteness. But, as Albert Memmi observes of *The Colonizer Who Refuses* (1991 [1957]): “It is not easy to escape mentally from a concrete situation, to refuse its ideology while continuing to live under the sign of a contradiction which looms at every step, depriving him of all coherence and all tranquility” (p. 20). The contradiction of ‘owning’ and rearticulating a sign that is so attached to superordination inevitably results in the white anti-racist “renouncing...part of himself” while at the same time “He participates in and benefits from those privileges which he half-heartedly denounces” (Ibid). Whiteness is a hegemonically superordinated position, biologized and immutable in the present racial formation. The white anti-racist subject cannot simply ‘renounce’ structural privilege because it is ‘inalienable’ so long as biologized whiteness is hegemonic. Because “no decision I make here can fail to be an exercise of race privilege” (Frye, 1983, p. 113), white anti-racism sanctions the use of ‘white privilege’ “to weaken invisible privilege systems” (McIntosh, 1995 [1988], p. 81) or “for purposes of racial justice” (Leonardo, 2009, p. 93) while also requiring constant attention to how ‘white privilege’ is deployed in any given moment.

At a basic level white anti-racism might ‘positively’ produce more voices, bodies, signatures, votes, etc. against ‘racism’, but the only particularly ‘positive’ contribution white anti-racists can make to the liberation movements of people of color is through the specific privileges of their social position—status, legitimacy, access, technical expertise, resources. The “invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions” (McIntosh, 1995 [1988], p. 71) which all white anti-racists carry is made visible in color-conscious counter-hegemonic spaces and offered in service to the movement. There are few clear guidelines, if any, about which uses of white privilege are acceptable, productive, useful, or transformative, and which are not, so these decisions are local, situational and contingent. As in all spaces, the ‘knapsack’ empowers the white anti-racist subject within the counter-hegemonic spaces of people of color, and because their unearned privilege defines the particularity of their contribution, it can also objectify them as a source of resources, access, status, legitimacy, etc. ‘White privilege’ is, therefore, ostensibly converted to serve movements ‘committed to the overthrow of their own racial privilege’ through self-objectification. But to extent that the white anti-racist subject exercises any agency in the deployment of their privilege, they risk being “removed from the realm of cooperation and participation to the more traditional (colonial, neo-colonial and anti-racist) role of paternalistic ‘concern’” (Bonnett, 1999, p. 208). Incomplete accountability to people of color unbalances the

exchange of privilege for guidance and can foster a dependence of people of color on these resources and the white anti-racists who offer / broker / extend them.

### **Ideal White Anti-Racist ‘Autonomy’**

The ability to relieve the burden of educating white people through effectively “studying one's own ignorance” (Frye, 1983, p. 118), to appropriately respond when a person of color intervenes, to have such mastery of counter-hegemonic discourse that such interventions are rarely necessary, and to use privilege accountably in the service of ‘racial justice’, is considered, in some models of white anti-racism as “Autonomy,” the “final stage” of “white racial consciousness” (Helms, 1984). Ideal theorizations of a white subject who can ‘autonomously’ distinguish ‘between whiteness as a racial identity that is nonracist or antiracist and those aspects of whiteness that are racist’ in practice seem to closely correspond with the ultimate goals of white anti-racism which hopes to hegemonically rearticulate "white" to "anti-racism" and ‘define for white people a coequal role in a racially diverse society’. Other white anti-racists, however, are deeply suspicious of rigid and certain developmental models of white positional consciousness, criticizing them as the idealistic pinnacle of a “moral/political framework” which is primarily “organized around individuals getting to feel good about being white in nonracist ways” and where “political action takes second place to personal integrity” (Thompson, 2003, p. 15). Those suspicious of ‘autonomy’ instead resign themselves to the more modest goals of overcoming “white fragility” (DiAngelo, 2006), avoiding ‘recentering’ themselves (Frankenberg, 1997; Olsson, 1997), and developing effective support relationships with people of color based on the exchange of privilege for ‘guidance’.

While a variety of white anti-racist projects have disclaimed the demand for intimate guidance from people of color, and have ostensibly taken up the “the role of whites” (Foreman, 1968, p. 452) to educate and organize white people against racism (S. Carmichael & Hamilton, 1967, pp. 82-84; Levine-Rasky, 2002, pp. 1-2; Minnis, 1966, p. 0486), these ideally ‘autonomous’ projects have done little to solve white anti-racism’s structural need to ‘see’ and ‘feel’ with people of color, the inherent dangers of exercising agency in the use of white privilege, choice and interpretation, nor have they demonstrated significant ability to outpace the adaptive hegemony of liberal color-blindness. All of these seemingly insurmountable challenges which proliferate from the theoretical incompleteness of white ‘positional consciousness’ ultimately tend back toward demand for more intimate and collaborative ‘guidance’ from people of color. To conclude this chapter, and transition to a discussion of white anti-racism’s collaborative demand, I consider Andrea Smith’s Unsettling the Privilege of Self-Reflexivity (2013b), a recent, influential, and exemplary critique of white anti-racism’s confessional model to demonstrate the ways in which the theories of ‘proximal empathy’ and ‘transectional empathy’ in intersectional Critical Race Theory have sought to rearticulate ‘Beloved Community’ ideals in relation to standpoint theory to authorize white anti-racist collaborative demand.

### **Andrea Smith’s The Problem with 'Privilege' & Ideal Collaborative Structures**

In Unsettling the Privilege of Self-Reflexivity and its more popular version The Problem with 'Privilege' (2013a), Andrea Smith critiques “rituals of confessing privilege” (p. 278) in “antiracist organizing projects” (p. 263) from an indigenous women of color standpoint. Many of her critiques are consistent with others already presented in this chapter, including the “ephemeral” and “temporary” (Ibid.) nature of confessional communities, their “self-help orientation” (Ibid.),

the convert's fear that people of color might "notice a mistake and question whether they have in fact become a fully developed antiracist subject" (p. 267), that people of color as a barometer of knowing tend to objectify "the colonized/racialized subject as the occasion for [white] self-reflexivity" (p. 264), and 'starting from' the standpoints of people of color "sets up the racial subject as one that is to be fully known and understood by the self-reflexive [and self-determining white] subject" (p. 270). Like Thompson, Smith argues that the ultimate 'problem' with ritual confessions of privilege is that they often focus on "individual confession at the expense of collective action" (p. 264). Instead, she proposes that "the undoing of privilege occurs not by individuals confessing their privileges or trying to think themselves into a new subject position, but through the creation of collective structures that dismantle the systems that enable these privileges" (Ibid.). The incompleteness of white positional consciousness in her formulation, is resolved through positionally diverse spaces which "address privilege on an organizational level" and "develop structures to address how privilege is exercised collectively" (Ibid.).

Smith's proposal of a collective approach in a collaborative space, very similar to SNCC's 'Beloved Community' model, is rooted in intersectionality and indigenous "principles of interrelatedness, mutuality, and global responsibility" (p. 271) [e.g. the Lakota 'mitakuye oyasin']. The goal of this model is developing "a different self-understanding that sees one's being as fundamentally constituted through other beings" (Ibid.) who are all "complicit in the structures of white supremacy/settler colonialism/ heteropatriarchy etc." (p. 277). This interpositional collective would together chart a path toward "complete transformation of subjectivity and humanity" (p. 272) that is "based on principles of loving rather than punitive accountability" (p. 278), a theorization that subject "positions are not ontologically fixed to particular bodies but are contingent, discursive positions" (pp. 269-270), and "a constant state of trial and error and radical experimentation" (p. 275) to develop "Alternatives to Confession" (Ibid.).

Smith roots her critique in "my experience with a plethora of antiracist organizing projects" (263), and specifically offers her work in INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence as model that addresses 'privilege on an organizational level'. The example of INCITE! is strangely out of place in an overall critique of confessional white anti-racism. Now called INCITE! Women, Gender Non-Conforming, and Trans people of Color Against Violence, the organization's membership is explicitly restricted to women- gender non-conforming- and trans people of color, and was limited by gender and race since its founding at The Color of Violence Conference in April 2000. INCITE! is rooted in a "Black Power," and particularly Black and Third World feminist, epistemology, but while Smith honors the "merit" of standpoint epistemology and "self-reflexivity" that underpin rituals of confession (p. 264), she primarily works to "imagine a liberatory [and decolonized] politic" (p. 270) where standpoint-based restrictions on transversal dialogue are overcome through collaboration.

In INCITE!, an organization whose dialogue is restricted to women of color, 'addressing privilege on an organizational level' means collective assessment of "disability, anti-Black racism, settler colonialism, Zionism, and anti-Arab racism, transphobia, and many others" (p. 277). These are important intersections *within* a women of color space. Class seems to have been particularly salient in the experience of Dr. Smith, because the only concrete example she provides for how 'collective structural assessment' practically works in INCITE! has to do with college education:

For instance, they might assess whether everyone who is invited to speak is a college graduate. Are certain peoples always in the limelight? Based on this assessment, they develop structures to address how privilege is exercised collectively. For instance, anytime a person with a college degree is invited to speak, they bring with them a cospeaker who does not have that education level. They might develop mentoring and skills-sharing programs within the group (p. 264).

So, while Smith's imagined organizational space would be "inclusive" (p. 272) and capable of building transformative and reciprocal relationships between people of all positionalities, ostensibly even bourgeois white cis heterosexual men, her reliance on INCITE! as a model suggests that there is no actual ground for such a space to exist. The INCITE! model of women of color organizing is deeply indebted to standpoint-based dialogical structures that Black and Third World women's liberation movements created in the aftermath of the "Black Power" counter-hegemonic shift. Smith's broad critique of ritual confession in intersectional spaces and her call to "open ourselves to new possibilities that we cannot imagine now for the future" (p. 278) idealistically speculates that the 'center' of transversal dialogue might be shifted to the center of 'humanity' without contending with the particular contradictions of liberal color-blind white hegemony and "Black Power" counter-hegemony which require prioritizations of 'transversal dialogue' and have encouraged the development of white anti-racist ritual 'confession' as an indication of 'cognizance' and 'commitment'.

## CHAPTER 4

### WHITE ANTI-RACISM'S COLLABORATIVE DEMAND, 'COMMITMENT' & MARTYRDOM

In a June 1966 letter to the editors of SSOC's newspaper, the New South Student, their mentor Ann Braden expressed concern with their response to SNCC's "Black Power" program. "Black Power" indicated to Braden that the "pendulum" of thinking in the movement was "swinging" toward her long-held approach to organizing white people against racism (Braden, 1966b, p. 2), and in addition to her condemnation of projects organizing white people around their economic and other transectional interests without confronting them 'with this whole question of racism and what it has done to them from the very beginning', Braden also vehemently disagreed with Black Power's "concept that they will organize these poor white Southerners completely apart from the Negro movement---and figure that somewhere down the road, maybe several years hence, maybe they'll get together in some sort of coalition" (Ibid.). This disagreement about collaboration between Braden and SNCC is also the core contradiction of white anti-racism in relation to "Black Power".

Many 'second wave' white anti-racist organizations trace their ideological lineage to Ann Braden, but while Braden recognized "Black Power" as a "valid" move "to build organizations of black people and build their consciousness as a people," she warned the SSOC against developing a corresponding "white consciousness" (Ibid., p. 3), and argued that when white people "are organized as white people, the groups they form may very well become expressions of that oppression" (Ibid., p. 4). In her experience, the most effective strategy was "to convince white people that their interest lies in teaming up with Negroes....with the specific and immediate goal of tying them in with [Black people] to work for common aims and on common problems...right NOW. Not tomorrow but now" (Ibid., pp. 4-5). Such a strategy is crucially dependent on 'interracial' organizing structures, and required Braden to push back against the "Black Power" disarticulation of these structures, arguing that "black organizers are [also] urgently needed to work in white communities" (Ibid., p. 3). Her firm position that immediate collaboration with people of color was a necessary safeguard against white anti-racist organizations 'becoming expressions of that oppression' only strengthened over the next decade, and by the 1980s, Braden was "Determined never again to create a mostly white organization, as SCEF had become in its last years" (C. S. Brown, 2002, p. 104).

Braden's formulation for white anti-racism, like Smith's, was both supportive of and discordant with the standpoint-based "Black Power" formulation. They ultimately theorize segregation as the primary impediment to ending racism 'in the white community', but adapt to "Black Power" directives while remaining firmly attached to 'Beloved Community' ideals. Braden's nuanced position has been operationalized by 'second wave' white anti-racist organizations in mission statements like: "We are committed to anti-racist work with **mostly white** sections of left/radical social movements with the goal of deepening anti-racist commitment in white communities and **building multiracial left movements for liberation**" (The Catalyst Project, 2017, emphasis added).

Deeply critical of the imagined and ideal state of white anti-racist 'autonomy', most iterations of white anti-racism work to counteract the incompleteness of white 'positional consciousness', the 'addictive' and mob-like tendencies of normative whiteness, problems of

choice and interpretation, and the unaccountable use of privilege, with a requirement to work in the collaborative space of alliances (Edwards, 1979; Grossman, 2002; Kinchloe & Steinberg, 1998; Thompson, 2003), coalitions (Danzig, 1966; Giroux, 1998), solidarity (Theodore Allen, 1976; Berger, 2006; Sartre, 1991 [1961]), “long-term connectedness” (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 5), or ‘interracial’ organizations (Fosl, 2002, p. 301; Howard, 2006; Michel, 2004, p. 30; Warren, 2010). Collaboration is theorized as necessary, not only as ‘guidance’ or ‘oversight’, but also for the development of ‘empathy’, and as a site for innovation toward ‘co-equality’. This chapter will analyze the collaborative requirement in white anti-racist intersectional standpoint-based ‘coalition’ building, the consequences of white anti-racist demand for collaboration on “Black Power” and ‘Beloved Community’ movement structures, and the limited possibilities for white anti-racism to make a ‘positive’ contribution to standpoint-based people of color liberation movements.

### **Proximal Empathy & Segregation as Problem**

In order to counteract the ‘incompleteness’ of ‘positional consciousness’, white anti-racists believe the best way to help white people ‘see’ and ‘feel’ with people of color and check unaccountable uses of privilege is for white people to have “direct experiences” with people of color (Warren, 2010, p. 59). They theorize that these “new experiences” (Braden, 1966a, p. 0812) create a “moral impulse to act” for “racial justice” (Warren, 2010, p. 59), and that “white activists learn to care about racism through caring about real people of color” (Ibid., p. 75). Unlike the “Black Power” model, the ‘Beloved Community’ and Bradenite models of white anti-racism depend on social proximity, intimacy, and empathy to develop consciousness. They seek to combat the “social distance” (Emory Bogardus [1928] taken up in Sacks & Lindholm, 2002, p. 129)—which defines explicit Jim Crow segregation, implicit liberal color-blind segregation, and “Black Power” movement segregation—by developing social proximity, “True boundary spanning” (Sacks & Lindholm, 2002, p. 147), ‘real’ intimate relationships with people of color.

In an interview with Joseph Cuomo, W.G. Sebald discusses how, as a young non-Jewish Bavarian, the racialization of Jewish people was abstract. Sebald attributes this abstraction to segregation. Growing up in post-WWII Germany, “you never bumped into a Jewish person, so you didn’t know who they were” (quoted in Cuomo, 2007 [2001], p. 105). After emigrating to Manchester and settling amongst a population of exiled Jews, Sebald learns that his Jewish landlord is from Munich and “was skiing in the same places where I went skiing. That somehow then sets you thinking” (quoted in Cuomo, 2007 [2001], p. 106). For Sebald, having a personal relationship and ‘knowing better’ are deeply linked in this moment. Personally relating to a ‘real’ Jewish person propelled him to take seriously the problem of their racialization. As Theodor Adorno, part-Jewish philosopher from Frankfurt and critic of fascism, reasoned: “surely one may assume that there is a relation between the attitude of ‘not having known anything about it’ and an impassive and apprehensive indifference” (Adorno, 2003 [1960], p. 4). If ‘not having known’ means ignorance and apathy, then intimate relation generates ‘consciousness’, ‘empathy’, and action.

While “sensitive” white anti-racists in the Bradenite tradition might “understand” why standpoint-based dialogue and restrictions on their participation in counter-hegemonic structures are necessary (B. Ware, 1967, p. 1283), their model ultimately requires collaboration with people of color and seeks to overcome ‘incompleteness’ through ‘interracial’ organizing structures (Fosl, 2002, p. 301; Giroux, 1998, pp. 134-135), or in the strongest cases, direct leadership from people of color (Michel, 2004, p. 30; Wise, 2008b, p. 120). And while the Black Power

formulation, which essentially endorsed Braden's approach to organizing white people in SCEF and the SSOC, made allowances for her collaborative demand—"Black and white can work together in the white community where possible" (S. Carmichael & Hamilton, 1967, p. 83)—organizing white people is not a priority for people of color building standpoint-based dialogue against racism. As Anzaldúa (2009 [c. 1988]) wrote, the "drawbridge" extended to form alliances can always be drawn (p. 148), or as Lenin (1916) said when he offered Communist support for national self-determination: "a free union is a lying phrase without right to secession." To the extent that 'working together' with "Black Power" organizations is not possible, the collaborative demand of white anti-racism tends toward building 'coalition' with those people of color who refuse to "embrace the very concept of racial discrimination that we were fighting against" or hold themselves "apart from someone else simply because he or she was white" (J. Lewis & D'Orso, 1998, pp. 193-194).

In response to "Black Power", however, even these 'Beloved Community' ideals, once morally absolute, have been increasingly justified by utilitarian criteria, and 'coalition' more explicitly dependent upon the extent which people of color deem white 'allies' strategically, ideologically, or morally, necessary. In December 1966, for example, the architect of "Black Power" Stokely Carmichael reportedly argued against total disarticulation of SNCC's 'Beloved Community' relationships with 'white liberals' because SNCC "needed white financial support and a 'buffer zone' of white liberals to forestall repression" (Carson, 1992, p. 42), and in a very public debate that September, Carmichael's main 'liberal' political adversary, Bayard Rustin, had opposed the "Black Power" disarticulation of coalitions with 'white liberals' because "one-tenth of the population [i.e. Black people] cannot accomplish much by itself" (Rustin, 1966, p. 36). For many people of color across the political spectrum, coalition with white 'allies' is contingent, context specific, centered on people of color's interests, and the utility of the exchange is always open for reconsideration. Whether moral, idealistic, or practical, the continued existence of 'Beloved Community' principles among people of color liberation movements, and the collaborative demand of white anti-racists, tends toward 'coalition' between white anti-racists and more 'liberal' people of color on the basis of theorizing that [a] race as a problem of segregation, [b] people superordinated as white can better develop their abilities to 'see' and 'feel' through intimate relationships with people of color, and [c] that 'committed' proximity to people of color implicates white anti-racists in conditions of oppression which allow them to develop 'critical consciousness' and participate in standpoint-based dialogue.

Critics of such conceptualizations that relationships with people of color are a solution to white ignorance and apathy argue that whiteness is intensely relational already. Due to its basis in chattel slavery, whiteness in the U.S. is even more horrifically so. The relationality of whiteness in the U.S. is both discursive [deployed from afar] and physically intimate. One need only to consider the intensely intimate experiences of kidnapped Africans held as property on small plantations to recognize that power, and not segregation, is the problem. The small plantation owner became the 'king of his castle', a patriarch of a small fiefdom that mirrored the larger patriarchal settler-colonial confederation, and captive African subject in this sick relation were "'like' family" (Collins, 2006, pp. 45-46). Technologies of chattel slavery enabled large plantations to develop and for the white patriarch to have more distance from zones of the "living dead" (Mbembe, 2003, p. 40). Such distance was enabled through an internalization of the slave master's panoptic gaze, "the penetration of regulation into even the smallest details of everyday life through the mediation of the complete hierarchy that assured the capillary functioning of power" (Foucault, 1995 [1977], p. 198). Following 'emancipation', increasingly efficient



technologies of discipline allowed for Jim Crow segregation and the development of “internal colonialism” (Blauner, 1972; S. Carmichael, 2007 [1967]). The increasing spatial distance between the oppressor and the oppressed, however, has not fully replaced the intimate relation of chattel slavery for people of African descent, but rather perpetuates it through ingraining a “double consciousness” (Du Bois, 1903). As Fanon’s frequent conversations with his ever-present white specter attest: “not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man” (Fanon, 1967 [1952], p. 110). The deep historical rooting and always already present sickness of this existing relation can make, in Collins’s (2000 [1990]) formulation, collaboration between white men and African-American women “virtually impossible” (p. 248).

The white discursive construction of people of color from afar, the centrality of this oppression in their own identity formation, necessarily also involves white people in such intimate relationality. One might say that the entirety of liberal color-blind white identity is built on this deeply intimate, but safely distanced, discursive relation with people of color. There is always already a feeling of intimacy in white people for people of color even if they have never been out of a ‘lily white’ segregated space, and the ‘truth’ of this intimacy is immaterial for the purposes of this point. The relative ‘truth’ of intimacy is, however, crucial in terms of white anti-racist collaboration for the purposes of developing consciousness and empathy, but ignoring the history of intimacy in relations between white people and people of color through a theorization that segregation is the problem risks reproducing the spatially intimate violence of earlier racial epochs where proximity rarely produced empathy or ‘more authentic’ understandings of people of color. Saidiya Hartman (1997) argues that the white anti-racist attempt to develop empathy—their desire to both ‘see’ and ‘feel’ with people of color—is ultimately rooted in imaginations of their white subjectivity in the place of a person of color who is experiencing racism, à la the old adage ‘put yourself in that person’s place, how would you feel?’ She describes nineteenth century abolitionist attempts at empathy as a “phantasmic slipping into captivity” which deletes Black subjectivity and occupies Black bodies with white subjectivity (p. 21).<sup>14</sup> In anthropological terms, the white anti-racist is imagining the experience of people of color “in contrast to his own” (Evans-Pritchard, 1976, p. 242) white subjectivity. The fanciful ‘how would I feel if’ of white anti-racist ‘sympathy’ is substantially different from the ‘how do I feel that’ of standpoint-based ‘empathy’, tending toward “standing over and against” people of color and forcing them “back into this relationship to [whiteness] as the normative realm” (Heidegger, 1977 [1938], p. 131).

Such a failure to both ‘see’ and ‘feel’ with people of color was central to one of the strongest arguments in favor of ‘expelling’, ‘excluding’ or ‘firing’ the remaining white SNCC staff in May 1967 (The Central Committee of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, 1967). In Some Comments on the [SNCC] Staff Meeting and Why White People Should Be Excluded from the Meeting (1967), Bill Ware argued that

Because of the very nature that their participation has, whites, by their very history in this country cannot totally participate in a Black man’s struggle... They can participate on an intellectual basis; they can participate on a 'principled' basis; they can participate in a vaccum [sic] basis; they can participate on an esthetic basis; they cannot participate on a human basis... they cannot participate on both an intellectual and emotional basis... They

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<sup>14</sup> A particular “thank you” to Dr. Omar Ricks (2014) for introducing me to Hartman’s work and explaining this particular argument about empathy (pp. 81, 90).

can only participate on the level where intellect is necessary. What is right and what is proper for them (p. 1282).

The thoroughly compromised abilities for white anti-racists to perceive, both intellectually and emotionally, from the standpoints of people of color reinforces their ‘incompleteness’—they cannot “totally participate” (Ibid.) in people of color liberation movements nor reach a state of ‘autonomy’. And while white anti-racism’s structural demand for collaboration with people of color is designed to overcome its own contradictions, SNCC ultimately expelled remaining white staff because intimate collaboration itself was insufficient to overcome these contradictions.

### **White Anti-Racist Bodies: A Clear & Present Danger**

The problems of a white anti-racist practice are “not exclusively a matter of doing or not doing [how they define their work, or how they do it,] but often a matter of just being” (Applebaum, 2007, p. 456). The white anti-racist is inevitably faced with the fact that “no matter how ‘liberal’ a white person may be, he cannot ultimately escape the overpowering influence—on himself, and on black people—of his whiteness in a racist society” (S. Carmichael & Hamilton, 1967, p. 61).

First, the very presence of white people in the same space with people of color can elicit a psycho-physical response. Fanon describes this in his experience moving from a Black space [the Antilles] to a white space [France]. In the Black space of his youth Fanon was “among his own” and had “no occasion, except in minor internal conflicts, to experience his being through others” (Fanon, 1967 [1952], p. 109). But when “the occasion arose when I had to meet the white man’s eyes[,] An unfamiliar weight burdened me. The real world challenged my claims” to humanity. Meeting “the white man, who had woven me out of a thousand details, anecdotes, stories” induced a physical reaction—“difficulties in the development of his bodily schema” (Fanon, 1967 [1952], p. 111)—and a psychological reaction—“I took myself far off from my own presence, far indeed, and made myself an object” (112). While Fanon reports that “In the main, the panic soon vanished” (Fanon, 1967 [1952], p. 113), his qualification ‘in the main’ indicates that, in his experience, such feelings never totally disappeared.

There was a similar discourse in SNCC, even before the 1967 translation of Peau Noire, Masques Blancs into English. During the preparations for Freedom Summer, some of those who opposed inviting hundreds of white northerners to the South did so on the grounds that they worried “the presence of rich white students might reinforce a deferential ‘slavery mentality’ in southern blacks” (Ransby, 2003, p. 314). In 1966, staff members from SNCC’s Atlanta project argued that “A single white person who participated in a meeting of black people could change the tone of that meeting,” preventing black people from “freely express[ing] themselves” (Carson, 1995, p. 197). This is, of course, not to say that Black people are irrevocably traumatized or damaged, nor to portray them as essentialized victims, but only to say that this is one potential outcome of white anti-racist presence in spaces of people of color, and one that is totally out of their individual or collective control.

Second, the participation of white people in people of color spaces can produce false hope among the racially oppressed that, if some white people can be converted to their cause, there is a possibility that many white people can be converted. As Fanon (1991 [1961]) argued, those “Certain settlers” who “do not join in the general guilty hysteria” and who come to support the liberation of the colonized should not be encouraged to participate in the anti-colonial struggle because they “disarm the general hatred that the native feels toward the foreign

settlement” (pp. 145-146). Such false hope might blunt the anger of the oppressed and forestall the development of ‘critical consciousness’ in favor of liberal accommodation which might further entrench relations of superordination and subordination. Similar reasoning is evident in Bill Ware’s (1967) argument [as continued from the block quote in the previous section]:

They cannot participate because they cannot negate their history. Their history is a history of suppression of us. They cannot negate that. They cannot turn against their mothers and fathers; they cannot kill their traditions; they cannot kill their past. They cannot totally negate their past because that would negate themselves. So whites in the movement serve as a stop-gap; a moderating influence; a means of keeping us pacified; a means for keeping us deceived; a means for telling us that white people don’t have a conspiracy; as a decoy; as a means of deceiving us into believing that we can still go to white people and get what we want by asking (p. 1282).

Third, Ware also argued that white anti-racist participation in standpoint-based dialogical spaces is inherently divisive and “negates the organization of Black people, organized around their Blackness” (Ibid.):

As long as white people are in the movement then they become the issue about the Black man's strategy. They become the issue to the extent that there will always be somebody to raise the question of their presence and some Blacks will begin to defend them on the role of whites in the Movement and this is very important. This debate prevents Black people from talking about themselves, but they talk about the role of white people with Black people (Ibid.).

The risks of psycho-physical damage, diffusing anger, negating standpoint, and causing division, are all present at the mere thought of collaboration, before any white anti-racist even says a word or takes a position. When combined with inevitable exercises of white anti-racist agency in decisions about if, when, where, and how to ‘show up’ for ‘racial justice’, risk multiplies.

### **White Anti-Racist Choice & Collaborative Spaces**

Just as white anti-racists can exercise problematic and self-interested choice to meet their demand for standpoint-based intellectual products of people of color, they also exercise this choice when engaging with people of color counter-hegemonic spaces.

The first aspect of this choice is, of course, “whether or not to engage in action that contributes to the dismantling of White supremacy” (Flagg, 2005, p. 8). Whereas the liberation movement is a “life sentence” for people of color which is “implanted in their pigment,” white anti-racist involvement lasts “only so long as we cared to identify” (Belfrage, 1965, p. 80). This power to “return to a white refuge” at any time is inalienable, “implanted in the pigment” of white anti-racists (Ibid.). Returning to the last chapter’s semiotic approach for a moment might help to illustrate this point better. Whereas some have theorized that proximity and relationships with people of color lead to stigmatization of white anti-racists which might allow them to develop ‘critical consciousness’, these stigmas are often both markers of deviation and invitations back into the fold of normative whiteness. One of the most common terms which so stigmatizes white anti-racists is “white niggers” (Selma Sheriff Jim Clark quoted in Lewis, 1998, p. 331) or “wigger” for short (see Hill, 2000; D. R. Roediger, 2002, p. 222). In contrast to the n-

word, which only dehumanizes and excludes when spoken from a white subject position, the juxtaposition "white nigger" communicates a corrective tension between ownership and rejection. When white anti-racists are greeted with statements like: "Here's some damned white girls who say they're colored" (Atlanta City Jail corrections officer quoted in King, 1987, p. 175), the message delivered is that 'normative whiteness finds your life choices reprehensible—in fact you're damned because of them—but you're always welcome back because you're inalienably white'

A second aspect of white anti-racist choice in spaces of people of color is interpretive. Just as white anti-racists exercise choice in selecting and interpreting 'useful' knowledge from a wide variety of intellectual and cultural products, they also exercise choice in selecting among organizations and individual people of color who are putting these ideas into practice. These choices similarly encourage 'an acquisitive relation' and 'tokenization' which can tailor discursive standpoint-based guidance to white anti-racist interests. Consider the 'tendentially empty' signifier "justice" which white anti-racists must give meaning through endorsing a particular framework. Such meaning is "bound up in how one defines the problem" (Meira Levinson quoted in Applebaum, 2007, p. 465). Is "justice" defined as 'co-equality' within a liberal democratic society? 'Co-equality' within the framework of a 'post-racial' socialist society? An independent Black nation in the South? Reparations to people of color for the myriad horrors of racism? The return of indigenous sovereignty over all colonized lands? Choices between definitions of "justice" by white anti-racists inevitably tend toward protecting and expressing their own interests.

A third aspect of this choice concerns *which* people of color white anti-racists will align with. While white anti-racists are abstractly aligned with all people of color against racism, the reality of people of color liberation movements is far more factional and antagonistic. To the extent that these factions and antagonisms exist, white anti-racists have choice between particular individuals and organizations who define the problems of racism differently and propose a variety of solutions. The white anti-racist collaborative demand tends toward 'coalition' with people of color organizations which adhere to varying degrees of 'Beloved Community' principles, and those white anti-racist projects with explicit attachments to "Black Power" principles must necessarily either [a] attempt to counteract the ephemeral and transitory nature of white anti-racism by doubling down on 'commitment' and 'accountability' to people of color liberation movements as 'radicals', 'co-conspirators', or 'accomplices', or [b] focus their efforts on organizationally separate 'white community organizing' more loosely aligned with particular standpoint-based people of color organizations with the expectation that "some amount of inter-racial cooperation" is necessary to "get [white] people's minds straightened out" (Bob Zellner quoted in The Central Committee of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, 1967, p. 1159).

In exercising necessary decisions about *which* people of color to align with, white 'allies' are factionalized to the same extent that the people of color liberation movements are factionalized. Most, if not all, people of color factions have white anti-racist counter-parts. The exchange of white privilege and hegemonic legitimacy for standpoint-based guidance and counter-hegemonic legitimacy precariously try to avoid long histories of intimately oppressive relations. In following the leadership of a particular faction, white anti-racists attempt to mirror their counterpart, but whereas the basic spark for freedom in Fanon's formulation is "That impulse to take the settler's place" (Fanon, 1991 [1961]-a, p. 53), white anti-racist choices about which leadership to 'sympathize' with and support operates as a 'phantasmic slipping into

captivity'. With limited ability to 'see' and 'feel', such mirroring tends toward self-reflection, like Elvis who slicked back his hair to imitate Black artists, who in turn were using lye and pomade to get a straightened, whiter look. 'Accomplices' increase levels of commitment to these relationships, when possible, with the hope that falling into the looking-glass will shatter the deleterious relation maintained by white anti-racist 'sympathy'.

White anti-racist choices about where and how to interact—even when invited, or undertaken with the best intentions—can disrupt dialogue and function as part of a long colonial “principle of divide and rule” (B. Ware, 1967, p. 1283), a microcosm of the age-old “duty of white Europe to divide up the darker world and administer it for Europe's good” (Du Bois, 1920, p. 459). Just as the consumer power white anti-racists exercise undoubtedly shapes the production of standpoint-based intellectual products, choices made between various factions within people of color liberation movements undoubtedly have significant impact on shaping the outcomes of people of color liberation movements. For example, through their choices about which faction to support, 'liberal' and 'radical' white 'allies' played a major role in determining that the African National Congress would 'liberate' South Africa and that the Pan-Africanist Congress and Black Consciousness organizations would not 'liberate' Azania. Similarly, white 'allies' in the U.S. played a major role in ensuring that more 'liberal' factions of the Civil Rights Movement would survive to be today's 'Black leaders' while those who sought to operationalize “Black Power” were pursued, persecuted, and prosecuted. Even within the “Black Power” movement, white 'allies' instigated and influenced factional disputes. For example, the July 1969 change in Point 3 of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense's Ten Point Program from “We want an end to the robbery by the *white men* of our Black Community” to “We want an end to the robbery by the *capitalists* of our Black Community” (emphasis added, see Bloom & Martin Jr., 2013, p. 312; or the relevant issues reproduced in Hilliard, 2007).

If given standpoint-based organizations refuse to collaborate with them, white anti-racists have greater justification for claims that they 'just didn't know'. If given standpoint-based organizations critique white anti-racists in ways that they do not like, they can choose to work with another organization, and if all else fails, they can choose not to participate at all.

### **Collaboration, Uncertainty & Experimentation**

White anti-racist projects may accept an ancillary status to standpoint-based dialogue, but they continue to rely on guidance from people of color for the development of consciousness and gauge success through non-antagonistic collaboration 'where possible'. Myriad problems with both the theory and practice of white anti-racism have led some white anti-racists to entertain notions that “The dilemmas raised in working through whiteness are sufficient in number and significance to tempt abandonment of the whole project” (Levine-Rasky, 2002, p. 12). But having [a] become 'conscious' of the ongoing horrors of 'white supremacy' through people of color liberation movements, [b] wanting to deepen that consciousness through closer proximity to these movements, [c] with a viral discourse criticizing white 'allies', and [d] without practical alternatives for taking action against 'white supremacy', some white anti-racists have sought to rearticulate their problems in practice as opportunities.

Chapter 2 concluded with the suggestion that the problems of the white anti-racist project in theory might be resolved through committed practice. In the face of the 'dilemmas' of practice, it has also been suggested that these 'dilemmas' might be resolved through even better practice. While David Gillborn suggests that 'The absence of an anti-racist orthodoxy can be a source of strength... anti-racism must be flexible and constantly adapt', Levine-Rasky (2002) and

Thompson (2003) argue that a self-reflexive white anti-racist practice which “does not muffle its own internal conflicts” can “be exploited for its potential to generate energy” (Levine-Rasky, 2002, p. 12). Understanding that “Face-to-face involvement” in intimate collaborative spaces “calls for a complex, immediate, and at times uncomfortable kind of responsiveness” from white anti-racists (Thompson, 2003, p. 14), collaboratively grappling with contradictions, tensions, and present impossibilities might be generative for new models which “we cannot yet imagine” (Thompson, 2003, p. 21). These calls for research and development to address the ‘dilemmas’ of white anti-racism correspond with Andrea Smith’s (2013) imagination of an inclusive, interrelational, decolonial, and expansive counter-hegemonic space.

Smith’s proposed approach to the “creation of new worlds and futurities for which we currently have no language” (p. 274), or ways of being “not only beyond privilege, but beyond the sense of self that claims privilege” (p. 278), was inspired by “one of my activist mentors, Judy Vaugh[a]n” (p. 264), a white Catholic nun, liberation theologian, feminist, anti-racist, director of the National Assembly of Religious Women, and founder of Alexandria House, a transitional women’s residence and important center for feminist organizing in Los Angeles. Vaughan’s axiom that “You don’t think your way into a different way of acting; you act your way into a different way of thinking” (quoted in *Ibid.*) undergirds Smith’s conceptualization of movement spaces as “a constant state of trial and error and radical experimentation” (p. 275). Like Smith and Vaughan’s ‘radical experimentation’, many white anti-racists have expressed hope for experiments which abandon the “Western philosophical and political paradigm” of “certainty, control, and predictability” in favor of “a commitment to complexity, self-reflexivity, moral dilemma, and struggle with foundational perspectives” (Levine-Rasky, 2002, p. 13). Such experiments would involve “Performatively trying on new assumptions about what is appropriate, reasonable, and fair” in order to test “temporary, working values” and “develop new embodied values” (Thompson, 2003, p. 21).

Such proposals for ‘radical experimentation’ seem to be nothing more than a simple reframing of people of color as ‘knowers’ and white anti-racists as ‘non-knowers’, teachers and students, leaders and led. Positioning people of color as researchers, white anti-racists as research subjects, and movement spaces as laboratories for solving the problems of white anti-racism similarly requires white anti-racist self-objectification and places additional responsibilities on people of color which center white ‘allies’ in counter-hegemonic spaces at the expense of standpoint-based dialogue. To the extent that this ‘radical experimentation’ is undertaken by white anti-racists ‘autonomously’, and given that the barometer for success of ‘autonomous’ white anti-racist action is also non-antagonistic collaboration with people of color, such experimentation would inevitably manifest as white bodily experimentation in ‘interracial’ spaces without ‘oversight’ or informed consent, treating already precarious ‘coalition’ spaces with people of color as testing grounds for white anti-racist hypotheses and observed reactions of people of color as evidence of success or failure. Such a methodology seems to reproduce the violently intimate relationalities of white science to people of color and dramatically increase the already significant risk of white bodies in people of color spaces. If these risks are not enough reason for abandoning such ‘experimentation’, the likelihood that white anti-racists could adequately design such experiments and correctly interpret their results is also highly suspect. The hope that ‘radical experimentation’ might provide a way resolve the ‘dilemmas’ of white anti-racism is just that, hope. There is no evidence that such a project can escape from these ‘dilemmas’ without significant investment from people of color, both in ‘guidance’ and risk, and

if such a will to invest existed, it would have already been invested in continuing and developing 'Beloved Community' models over the past fifty years.

### **'The Role of the White Liberal' is a 'Martyr's Role'**

This first major source that Black Power used in its discussion of 'white liberals' ["The Myths of Coalition"] was a study by Florida State University sociologists Lewis Killian and Charles Grigg entitled "The Role of the White Liberal" (1965). This remarkable example of systematic sociological research observed and anticipated the emergence of the particular hegemonic and counter-hegemonic formations central to this text—liberal color-blindness, "Black Power", and white anti-racism—and came to many of the conclusions that the last two chapters have. I will summarize Killian & Grigg's argument alongside my own thus far to demonstrate the 'dilemmas' of white anti-racist practice under liberal color-blindness, and make some final points about the relation of 'commitment' to overcoming the 'dilemmas' of the white anti-racist project in theory and practice.

Their definition of "white liberal" in 1965 is strikingly similar to how this text has defined white anti-racists. The growing standpoint-based resistance of Black people in the South was forcing consciousness on white Southerners and Northerners alike, and the 'white liberal' emerges through an individual rejection of Jim Crow "segregation and the categorical inferiority of the Negro as values" (p. 92). But while 'white liberals' may have developed "individual" consciousness of, and even commitment to, people of color's demands for 'justice', "The social structure and the normative order" continues to exert significant influence over their actions and "Overt compliance may occur without private acceptance of the norms" (p. 93). The 'mob'-like quality of structural positioning as white and "the conformity of fair-weather liberals serves to perpetuate the status quo" (Ibid.). Killian & Grigg use the language of disability to argue that "the white liberal is handicapped, whether he knows it or not, by a vested interest in the existing order" (p. 95), and they likewise identify the problem of standpoint as one of 'sight':

...most white Americans, even those white leaders who attempt to communicate and cooperate with their Negro counterparts, do not see racial inequality in the same way that the Negro does...he must exert a special effort to expose himself to the actual conditions under which large numbers of Negroes live. Even when such exposure occurs, his perception is likely to be superficial and distorted...Even more important, he does not perceive the subjective inequalities inherent in the system of segregation because he does not experience them daily as a Negro does (quoted in S. Carmichael & Hamilton, 1967, p. 61).

In terms of taking 'positive' action for "racial democracy" (Killian & Grigg, 1965, p. 97), these standpoint- and interest-based 'disabilities' tend toward moderate approaches where, as this chapter has demonstrated, choice and interpretation allow white anti-racists to 'learn' or 'take action' while at the same time protecting and extending their own white interests.

Killian & Grigg observe a significant critical discourse about the lack of commitment of 'white liberals' who are blamed "as the greatest sinners because they have done so little when presumably they could have accomplished so much" (p. 92). Like the later debates between 'white liberals' and 'white radicals', or 'allies' and 'accomplices', these discourses theorized that greater commitment and stronger collaboration might overcome the 'dilemmas' of the 'white liberal'. Even before the "Black Power" directive for whites to 'organize their own

communities', Killian & Grigg further observe the emergence of an explicit and identifiable project of rearticulating "white". Like white anti-racists who hope to forge an 'alternative' and 'anti-racist' whiteness to combat and ultimately eclipse normative whiteness, they observe that "Southern liberals have been held up as evidence that the white South is not indeed 'solid'" and that these 'white liberals' imagined they "will constitute the embryo of a new southern leadership" who will "cast a deciding vote in the contest between the Negro protest and southern resistance" (p. 91). Killian & Grigg also correctly trace the roots of the standpoint-based "Black Power" program of SNCC and its endorsement of Braden's approach to the Committee's founding, quoting Braden comrade Myles Horton who, in May 1960, interpreted the establishment of the 'black-led and black dominated' student organization as an indication of a [re]new[ed] standpoint-based politics: "'Negro college students are excluding white youth from inner circles of their demonstration movement' because 'they fear the whites may take over the leadership and in some cases don't trust them'" (p. 96). Bradenite white anti-racism both accepted the 'value' of "Black Power" standpoint-based dialogue and inherited the moral task of winning "the hearts and minds of white men" (p. 91) from the 'Beloved Community' Civil Rights Movement.

Ultimately, Killian & Grigg conclude that the white anti-racist project of hegemonically rearticulating "white"—the "dream...that if only he will raise his voice a chorus of the more timorous will join in"—is nothing more than "an illusion" (p. 100). In their assessment, 'white liberals' are "a political minority with little power and small expectation of soon achieving power" (p. 91). Instead, "Changes are most likely to result from a conflict-negotiation-compromise cycle," i.e. building standpoint-based power, and "not from mass conversion within one of the warring factions" (p. 99), i.e. the conversion of enough white people to hegemonically rearticulate "white" to "anti-racism". In this "battle for status between two hostile interest groups" (Ibid.), Killian & Grigg argue that "the really dynamic agents in changing patterns of race relations are Negro protest leaders and white defenders of the status quo" (Ibid.). The inability of white anti-racists to 'see' and 'feel' with people of color, and their interests as a superordinated element in social relations prevents them from contributing anything significant to standpoint-based anti-racism, and they have yet to demonstrate the ability to outpace the adaptive hegemony of liberal color-blindness in rearticulating "white".

Killian & Grigg further observe that the 'Beloved Community' model sustains "an exaggerated notion of the influence their white liberal friends are able to exert" and the white anti-racist 'illusion' of hegemonically rearticulating "white" "may contribute to such an unrealistic assessment of their influence by optimistic predictions of the amount of support they might be able to rally" (p. 99). Fanon and Ware both extend such analysis of the white anti-racist 'illusion' to argue, respectively, that the very presence of white 'allies' can 'disarm the general hatred that the native feels toward the foreign settlement' and 'serve as a stop-gap; a moderating influence...a means of deceiving us into believing that we can still go to white people and get what we want by asking'. Considering the psycho-physical and 'divide and conquer' effects of white anti-racist bodies in people of color spaces, along with the inherent dangers of autonomously using white privilege, and the influence of choice and interpretation, it is not surprising that Levine-Rasky considers that 'the dilemmas raised in working through whiteness are sufficient in number and significance to tempt abandonment of the whole project'. Killian & Grigg conclude that, in the absence of possibility for hegemonically 'rearticulating whiteness', the only role that white anti-racists can hope to play is the "the martyr's role" (p. 100), with all its attendant morality.



### **White Anti-Racist ‘Commitment’ & ‘Martyrdom’**

While ‘the martyr’s role’ might not be decisive, Killian & Grigg argue that it “may be functional” (Ibid.) and sketch two forms of ‘white liberal’ martyrdom: ‘waiting’ and ‘nonconforming’.

The ‘waiting role’ is linked to ‘white community organizing’ which requires a degree of “maintaining his solidarity with the white ingroup, challenging the norms subtly and strategically. It involves supporting, rather than threatening, people who are just beginning to question the validity of these norms” and “this role is likely to seem dull, insignificant, and unsatisfying” (Ibid.). The scarce evidence that such efforts have been or will be successful—that “white” can be hegemonically rearticulated to “anti-racism”—makes such activity a certain type of martyrdom. Killian & Grigg’s ‘waiting role’ and has striking resemblance to Braden’s own reflection on her life’s work in 1999:

Mass movements always come as the product of long years of mundane work by unsung heroes, but no one can predict when the upsurge will crystallize. No one could have predicted that it would happen in 1955 in Montgomery. We cannot predict today when it will happen again, and I am not at all sure I will live to see it. But as surely as I know that dawn will come tomorrow morning, I am convinced that it will happen. And when it does, a huge question will be how many white people will understand that this upsurge holds hope for their lives, too, and will therefore go through the personal metamorphosis that will be needed to join this new movement (quoted in C. S. Brown, 2002, p. 109).

This ‘waiting role’, this ‘white people work’, this task of hegemonically rearticulating “white” with “anti-racism” is perhaps best understood as a Sisyphean task, pushing a stone uphill with little hope of reaching the top. Such action is futile but at the same time demanded. If “You can’t change the color of your skin... and guilt is not productive” (Braden quoted in Fosl, 2004, p. 122), yet “Action is demanded” (Fosl, 2004, p. 122) by the moral framework of positional consciousness, white anti-racism can be defined as nothing more than a self-chosen penance with little productive contribution to people of color liberation movements beyond additional bodies and some-time strategic utilitarianism.

Discourses on increased commitment as a solution to ‘dilemmas’ in white anti-racist theory and practice demand copper-fastened adherence from white anti-racists to this ‘waiting role’, in both the ‘mundane work by unsung heroes’ and the imagined ‘dawn’ when an ‘upsurge crystallizes’, with the hope that something ‘positive’ can be added through organized white anti-racist action. The failures of white anti-racism can be blamed on unfavorable conditions and, rather than ‘abandoning the project’, this “all-weather liberal” (Simpson & Yinger quoted in Killian & Grigg, 1965, p. 98) might spend their entire life ‘waiting’ and ‘preparing’ for such favorable conditions to present themselves. As Killian & Grigg observe, “the martyr cannot expect to enjoy the fruits of his sacrifice” (p. 100), and therefore this ‘waiting’ type of martyrdom is, at its best, monastic, ascetic, and unfulfilled.

But discourses on increased commitment as a solution to ‘dilemmas’ in white anti-racist theory and practice also tend toward a more classical and spectacular form of martyrdom in the form of “the white liberal who has consciously reached the conclusion that there is a continuing crisis” and “refuses to comply with the norms, or challenges them verbally” (p. 94) or otherwise attempts “to precipitate a crisis... thereby bringing such values as fair play and justice into focus” (p. 103). Killian & Grigg argue that such active ‘nonconformity’ may be ‘functional’ in that “It challenges the complacency of white society by confronting the members, and particularly the

leaders, with a moral decision of inescapable gravity” and “It may also dispel the illusion of unanimity” (p. 100), contributing to white anti-racist visibility, existence, and tradition. But provocative or disruptive action also “marks” the white anti-racist “in the eyes of his [white] fellows” (p. 94). To the extent that these acts do not result in the objective death of the martyr, and ‘commitment’ prevents them from returning to a ‘white refuge’, the disruptive action can result in a type of social death. The committed ‘nonconformist’ must subject normative whiteness “to constant criticism on the basis of a single issue of racial values” (p. 95), breaking the degree of ‘solidarity with the white ingroup’ often required for ‘white community organizing’.

A commitment to ‘nonconformity’ might “jeopardize other values” (Ibid.), like ‘empathetic’ participation in white-dominated working-class, feminist, queer or dis/ability movements, and potentially marginalizes white anti-racists within the white ‘left’. Their ‘cognizance’ stems from people of color, ‘nonconformity’ marks then as “deviant” within the “cultural framework” of normative whiteness (Killian & Grigg, 1965, p. 94), diminishing their ‘solidarity with the white ingroup’ required for ‘white community organizing’. Marginalized from ‘the white community’, their ‘commitment’ to ‘anti-racism’ draws them toward ‘Beloved Community’ ideals, but their inability to ‘fully participate’ in these spaces prevents them from finding ‘refuge’ with people of color. All of these forces triggered by ‘commitment’ combine to diminish the amount of power white anti-racist use of privilege can add to this ‘battle for status’ while also increasing their imposition on people of color for ‘refuge’.

Ware (1967) extended this power analysis of ‘white radicals and white liberals’ in his argument to “eliminate white participation in the form it is now” (p. 1282):

The role of the individual white person participating with Black people in the Black struggle is over. Because, we have discovered that those individuals don't have a white base to back up whatever it is they want to do. Now their presence devoid of their power helps nullify our power... The only people in this country who can tear down racism by their organization is Black people. This has to be Black People not Black and white people because the presence of white people negates the organization of Black people, organized around their Blackness. So white people as individuals should not be allowed to participate in our programs in the future (Ibid.).

To the extent that hegemonically rearticulating "white" to "anti-racism" is an ‘illusion’, and without the ability to contribute anything significant to standpoint-based people of color liberation movements, all of the work of white anti-racists over the last half century has built a cul-de-sac of overly optimistic counter-hegemonic practices which evidence suggests can only function as a small, symbolic, dangerous, but sometimes useful, social element. These ‘martyr's roles’ may be ‘practical’ and ‘functional’ but white anti-racists have yet to come to terms with the mismatch between their objectively limited position and their grandiose project.

### **White Anti-Racist ‘Martyrdom’ & Armed Struggle**

To the extent that people of color recognize that white anti-racists can only function as martyrs, Killian & Grigg observe that “the Negro leader is likely to demand more of white liberals than they are willing to give” (p. 99). These demands intersect with discourses which consider greater ‘commitment’ as a solution to the ‘dilemmas’ of white anti-racism and produce the ‘white liberals’ vs. ‘white radicals’ and ‘allies’ vs. ‘accomplices’ debates. Many of these debates can be

traced to El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz and his OAAU position on ‘white liberals’. The most quoted part of this position comes from a speech delivered to the Militant Labor Forum of New York [a branch of the white-led and class-centered Socialist Worker’s Party] on January 7, 1965, as printed in the final chapter of Malcolm X Speaks (1965):

when a white man comes to me and tells me how liberal he is, the first thing I want to know, is he a nonviolent liberal, or the other kind. I don't go for any nonviolent white liberals. If you are for me and my problems—when I say me, I mean us, our people—then you have to be willing to do as old John Brown did (p. 225).

In the last year of his life, El-Shabazz frequently offered John Brown as his exemplary white ‘accomplice’. Over the Summer, El-Shabazz was asked “Will you accept white members in your new organization?” and he replied “Definitely not” but added the caveat that “If John Brown were still alive we might accept him” (quoted in Massaquoi, 1964, p. 40). On July 5th, Brown had played a major role in el-Shabazz’s speech to the Second OAAU rally. Consistent with Killian & Grigg’s argument that the committed ‘nonconformist’ tends toward being “regarded as a ‘crank’” (Killian & Grigg, 1965, p. 97), El-Shabazz summarized official discourse on John Brown as such: “White people call John Brown a nut” (El-Shabazz, 2013 [1964]-b). El-Shabazz sought to rearticulate Brown as a ‘positive’ exemplar, saying “If you want to know good white folks in history where black people are concerned, go read the history of John Brown. That's what I call a white liberal...if we want some white allies, we need the kind that John Brown was, or we don't need you” (Ibid.). Short of total ‘exclusion’, this endorsement of John Brown as an exemplary ‘white liberal’ is perhaps the most limited and grim kind. The only ‘good white liberal’ in the OAAU formulation is a martyred ‘white liberal’.

But the question of ‘going for violence’ emerged as a “Black Power” litmus test for ‘white radicals and white liberals’ in the mid- to late-1960s. El-Shabazz himself was perhaps most explicit about this point: “I use [John Brown] to give you an example of how to test the white man who says he's your friend. Let him go down with some action similar to John Brown's. If he's willing to die for you and all of that, then let him go ahead and do it” (El-Shabazz, 2013 [1964]-b). In his 1967 letter to SNCC, Ware also linked ‘going for violence’, white positional interests, ‘commitment to the overthrow of their own racial privilege’, and the inability to ‘see’ and ‘feel’ with Black people:

they cannot participate on both an intellectual and emotional basis. They cannot participate where arms are necessary to get what you need. They cannot participate where violence is necessary. They cannot participate where anger is necessary. They cannot participate where revenge is necessary. They cannot participate where hate is necessary. They cannot participate where emotions like these are necessary. They can only participate on the level where intellect is necessary. What is right and what is proper for them (B. Ware, 1967, p. 1282).

While Ware’s argument was designed to ‘exclude’ white bodies from SNCC, similar lines of argument like El-Shabazz’s have been interpreted by some ‘radical’ white ‘accomplices’, like the Weather Underground Organization [WUO], as a challenge to demonstrate ‘commitment’.

After they won the national offices of SDS in June 1969, the Weathermen faction considered, tested, and ultimately decided to explore the contention that “only those who die are

proven revolutionaries” (Weather Underground Organization, 2006 [1970], p. 164), but on March 6, 1970, three of their members—Ted Gold, Diana Oughton and Terry Robbins—made a mistake while building a bomb in a rented Greenwich Village townhouse and blew themselves up. “The deaths of three friends ended our military conception of what we are doing” (Ibid., p. 163) and precipitated a shift in Weather strategy from ‘armed struggle’ to ‘armed propaganda’ (Berger, 2006, p. 130); from ‘killing pigs’ to attacking symbols of their institutions “while taking great care not to hurt anyone” (D. Gilbert, 2012, p. 121). The shift was formally outlined in December 1970 through a communiqué called New Morning-Changing Weather (2006 [1970]), which concluded that the short-lived experiment in armed struggle ‘may have been functional’ in that “The world knows that even the white youth of Babylon will resort to force to bring down imperialism” (p. 165), but it could not live up to its grandiose goals of significantly contributing to people of color’s liberation: “most of our actions have hurt the enemy on about the same military scale as a bee sting” (p. 164).

New Morning-Changing Weather concluded that their classical ‘martyr’s role’ was not as ‘functional’ as the WUO had hoped and, being “a group of outlaws...isolated” them from ‘white community organizing’ and opportunities to “develop strategies that grow to include large numbers of people” necessary for rearticulating “white” to “anti-imperialism” (p. 164). Having observed the growth of white youth counter-culture, the WUO had corrected this “military error” (Ibid.) and now believed that organizing white youth for “mass actions against the war and in support of rebellions [will] make a difference” (p. 162). Their extreme experiment in demonstrating ‘commitment’ through ‘violence’ failed to overcome the ‘dilemmas’ of white anti-racism, and it did not advance a project of hegemonically rearticulating “white”. To the extent that their critical evaluation concluded that armed struggle should be abandoned because it was not effective, they are in agreement with El-Shabazz who qualified his endorsement of ‘white radical’ armed resistance as a path to acceptance by the OAAU with the caveat that it must be effective: “All the dying they do is for naught if the situation remains the same” (El-Shabazz, 2013 [1964]-b). But the WUO’s shift on the spectrum of ‘commitment’ from armed ‘nonconformity’ toward ‘the waiting role’ can be read through El-Shabazz’s framework as a backwards step which ultimately protected their white interests, namely their lives, and their retreat into white youth counter-culture spaces could literally be read as a return to a ‘white refuge’. Their abandonment of greater ‘commitment’ as a solution to the ‘dilemmas’ of armed struggle in favor of the well-worn pathways of white anti-racism traded one form of martyrdom for another, ultimately allowing them to ‘resurface’ in the white community and regain optimism through the ‘illusion’ of hegemonically rearticulating “white”.

### **Conclusion: ‘Martyrdom’ for a Different Project**

As this chapter has demonstrated, “white” may be rearticulateable to “anti-racism” counter-hegemonically, and with significant unresolved ‘dilemmas’. The grandiose and unsubstantiated promises of hegemonically rearticulating “white” to “anti-racism” may be functional as a recruiting tool and a justification for ‘a seat at the table’ of ‘multi-racial’ anti-racist movements, but remains an ‘illusion’. Given the potentially damaging ‘dilemmas’ of action designed to pursue this ‘illusion’ and the severely limited ability of white anti-racists to contribute anything significant to people of color liberation movements, continuing to pursue the white anti-racist project is either cynical or misguided, but it none the less constitutes the most viable way for people positioned as white to ‘take action’ against racism.

Through the 1990s, however, at the same time as ‘second wave’ white anti-racism consolidated itself, another approach with roots in ‘white radical’ interpretations of “Black Power”—New Abolitionism—also consolidated itself as a critique of white anti-racism. In theory, New Abolitionism considers whiteness to be “nothing but oppressive and false” (D. R. Roediger, 1994, p. 13) and rejects the idea that “white” is hegemonically rearticulable to “anti-racism”. Organized around the exemplar of John Brown, New Abolitionism retains some of the ‘radical’ white anti-racist conceptualization that commitment can overcome the ‘dilemmas’ of white anti-racism, but it embraces a ‘martyr’s role’ disarticulated from the white anti-racist ‘illusion’ of rearticulating “white”. Whereas Killian & Grigg frame the actions of committed ‘nonconforming white liberals’ as harmful to a degree of white ‘ingroup solidarity’ necessary to hegemonically rearticulate “white” to “anti-racism” (Killian & Grigg, 1965, p. 97), New Abolitionists embrace “a strategy of creative provocation” executed by a determined minority which would “break the laws of whiteness so flagrantly as to destroy the myth of white unanimity” (Ignatiev, 1997b). They argue that such a strategy of ‘nonconformity’ and disruption, disarticulated from a project to rearticulate “white”, could make whiteness “unreliable as a determinant of behavior” and “set off tremors that will lead to its collapse” (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1993c). Rather than to win control over the ‘union’ of whiteness for ‘anti-racism,’ these New Abolitionist ‘traitors’ would “create as much division in the white community” (Ralph Featherstone quoted in The Central Committee of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, 1967, p. 1158) through ‘nonconformity’ as possible in order to break the ‘union’ and / or disrupt the hegemonic white bloc to such an extent as to “make [it] less effective in the promotion of any of its values” (Killian & Grigg, 1965, p. 97). Part 2 will consider New Abolition as an alternative approach to white anti-racism in theory and practice.

PART 2

NEW ABOLITIONISM IN THEORY & PRACTICE

## INTRODUCTION TO PART 2

### NEW ABOLITIONISM IN THEORY & PRACTICE

The publishing of the first issue of Race Traitor: Journal of the New Abolitionism in 1993 was a watershed moment in post-“Black Power” social movement theory for those working against racism from white subject positions under liberal color-blind hegemony. Its editors, Noel Ignatiev and John Garvey, opposed white anti-racism’s project of working to hegemonically rearticulate “white” to “anti-racism”, arguing instead that “white” is “*nothing but* oppressive and false” (D. R. Roediger, 1994, p. 13), a sign and system which fully captures its ‘ideological function’ of racial subordination [see Chapter 2]. This definition of “white” was almost entirely derived from the work of James Baldwin [1963-1989] (see D. R. Roediger, 2017, p. 61), but as advanced forcefully by people categorized as white, New Abolitionism significantly disrupted counter-hegemonically dominant common sense about white anti-racism, advanced “a new way of thinking” about resisting whiteness from white subject positions (Ignatiev, 2010 [2002]), forced white anti-racists to clarify their program, and inspired significant consideration of alternative projects to “Abolish the White Race: By Any Means Necessary” (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1993c).

‘Abolishing the white race’ in practice, however, proved to be quite difficult. Because of the overwhelming contradictions and failures of the New Abolitionist project to articulate or inspire a workable alternative given the same conditions of liberal color-blind whiteness, white anti-racism ultimately emerged from the crisis better understood critically, and even more entrenched in counter-hegemonic common sense as the only practical way of working to ‘overthrow their own racial privilege’ under liberal color-blind white hegemony. But despite its fairly spectacular failures putting the idea of ‘abolishing the white race’ into practice, New Abolitionist critiques of white anti-racism and its efforts to develop an alternative approach demand close attention for those who cannot cynically accept the significant ‘dilemmas’ in white anti-racism and believe that more effective modes of resisting racism from white subject positions are possible in theory and practice.

A study of New Abolitionism faces significantly different challenges than a study of white anti-racism. It is fairly easy to identify the discursive regularities and structural limitations of white anti-racism because it is the dominant counter-hegemonic common-sense mode of working from white subject positions under liberal color-blindness. The New Abolitionist project, on the other hand, was not only an effort to build a movement around an idea which had no material precedent, but it was also so deeply associated with a small number of people and their personal and political contradictions that it is difficult to make valid generalizations. The ideas which defined New Abolitionism were quite distinct from, but grafted over, previous alternative projects to Bradenite / SSOC white anti-racism after “Black Power”, and while Race Traitor was imagined as the ‘intellectual center’ of efforts to ‘abolish the white race’, it was ultimately more of a loose forum for a variety of contradictory proposals than a focused, coherent project. Indeed, there is so much ideological difference and contradiction between those who operated under the ‘New Abolitionist’ banner that it is quite difficult to define clearly what New Abolitionism actually was beyond an attempt to build a new approach to resisting racism for racially superordinated subjects which would not reproduce whiteness.

Part 2 works to explain the complex and poorly understood historical development of New Abolitionism and evaluate its successes and failures in theory and practice. Chapter 5 will trace the development of New Abolitionist theory through an historical narrative structured around Noel Ignatiev's life in order to better elucidate its epistemology in relation to "Black Power" and to develop key concepts necessary for a conceptually clear discussion of New Abolitionism in the early 1990s. Chapter 6 will describe the consolidation of New Abolitionism and evaluate its basic discursive strategies, Chapter 7 will evaluate its alternative approach to the 'dilemmas' of working against racism from white subject positions under liberal color-blind white hegemony, and Chapter 8 will evaluate its proposals for individual and collective action.



## CHAPTER 5

### AN EPISTEMIC, ORGANIZATIONAL & BIOGRAPHICAL HISTORY OF NEW ABOLITIONISM

New Abolitionism has been primarily centered around the work of Noel Ignatiev [née Ignatin]. This chapter historically analyzes the development of his alternative to white anti-racism through two periods of movement debate on ‘the white question’—the immediate period after “Black Power”, and the 1980s as intersectional Critical Race Theory consolidated itself—to describe and define key debates and formulations which authorized New Abolitionism, in theory and practice, as a major force in Critical Whiteness Studies during the 1990s. The first section explains the influences behind his publication of White Blindspot (1967), particularly Ted Allen, its central importance in the response of Students for a Democratic Society [SDS] to “Black Power”, and its interpretations in practice by two major factions of SDS’s pro-“Black Power” Revolutionary Youth Movement [RYM]—the Weather Underground Organization [WUO] and Ignatin’s Sojourner Truth [Communist] Organization [STO]. This history is necessary to understand Ignatin and Allen’s call for white workers to ‘repudiate the system of white-skin privileges’, its roots in Marxist-Leninist theory concerning ‘the national question’, how those who embraced their formulation sought to implement it, and the relation of these ‘white communist’ projects to people of color liberation movements. The second section is centered around the responses of David Gilbert [WUO / May 19<sup>th</sup> Communist Organization] and Ignatin [STO] to J. Sakai’s Settlers (1983), allowing space to consider the similarities and differences between Sakai and Allen’s historical definitions of whiteness, the reflections of key practitioners of Ignatin and Allen’s 1967 formulation, and the adjustments they made to their divergent interpretations amidst the consolidation of intersectional Critical Race Theory.

#### ‘REPUDIATING WHITE-SKIN PRIVILEGE’: AN ALTERNATIVE ‘WHITE COMMUNIST’ APPROACH TO ORGANIZING THE WHITE WORKING CLASS

Noel Ignatin was born in Philadelphia to lower middle-class parents who were former members of the Communist Party USA (Ignatiev, 2015b). His grandparents were “eastern-European immigrants of Jewish background” who immigrated at the turn of the century (Ibid.). A top student at Central High School, in January 1958 Noel also joined the CPUSA, and was drawn towards the “ultra-left” and “anti-revisionist” Marxist-Leninist Caucus (Ignatin, 1979) which opposed

Khrushchev's line of peaceful coexistence with imperialism and peaceful transition to socialism, identifying instead with the current, headed by the Communist Party of China, that looked to the national liberation movements in Asia, Africa and Latin America and the upsurge of black militancy in the U.S. (Ignatiev, 2015a).

That August, the Caucus formally split from the CPUSA as the Provisional Organizing Committee to Reconstitute the Marxist-Leninist Communist Party [POC] and Ignatin went with it. While the POC “soon descended into irrelevance” (Ibid.), two of its founding members, Harry Haywood and Ted Allen, were particularly important in shaping Ignatin’s political views.

In his Draft Theses on National and Colonial Questions for the Second Congress of the Communist International (1920), Lenin argued that “all Communist parties should render direct aid to the revolutionary movements among the dependent and underprivileged nations,” including “the American Negroes,” and that this “duty of rendering the most active assistance rests primarily with the workers of the country the backward nation is colonially or financially dependent on.” A young Harry Haywood returned to Chicago after serving in a ‘Jim Crow’ regiment of the US Army during the Great War, , was radicalized by ‘Red Summer’. He joined the African Blood Brotherhood, “a secret, all-Black, revolutionary organization to which some of the Black [Communist] Party [USA] members belonged” (Haywood, 1978, p. 122), and then the Young Communist League of the CPUSA itself. He spent four-and-a-half years in the Soviet Union, was a member of the Negro Commission of the Sixth World Congress of the Comintern (Ibid., p. 228), and was crucial to its “Resolution on the Negro Question” (1928) which recognized “the right of the Negroes to national self-determination in the southern states [‘Black Belt’], where the Negroes form a majority of the population” (quoted in Young, 1998 [1975]). This Comintern resolution laid the groundwork for the CPUSA to take stronger positions in support of Black national self-determination over the following years (Ted Allen, 1976 [1973], p. 3) and, following Lenin’s directives in relation to ‘the national question’, constructed a particular task for [white] Communists in the U.S. to aid Black liberation which most visibly manifested in efforts to organize and support Sharecroppers Unions across the ‘Black Belt’ in the early 1930s.

Haywood participated in efforts to organize the ‘Black Belt’ before leaving for Spain in the Spring of 1937 to serve as an officer in the Fifteenth International Brigade, and ten years later his arguments for Black self-determination were presented at length in Negro Liberation (1948). Haywood was a staunch supporter of armed self-defense, and the Sharecroppers Unions were, in many ways, an historical precursor to the ‘Black Panther Party’ in the Alabama ‘Black Belt’ thirty years later. Like Black Power, Haywood conceptualized “the Black Belt [as] a kind of ‘internal colony’ of American imperialism” (p. 146), centered “The unsolved Negro question [as] a focal point of vulnerability of American imperialism” (p. 218), and argued that Black self-determination would structure a more effective movement against capitalism “with the full participation of their allies among the disfranchised white minority” (p. 157). While Haywood was ultimately committed to a ‘united’ and ‘interracial’ Communist Party, both Negro Liberation and Black Power conceptualized white working-class people as future allies in the struggle against capitalism with particular tasks to organize ‘their white communities’ against racism before meaningful collaboration is possible.

Theodore William Allen was born on August 23, 1919, in Indianapolis, Indiana to a middle-class family (Ignatiev, 2014) who moved to Huntington, West Virginia when Ted was ten (Perry, 2012). After graduating high school, Allen joined the CPUSA there, and worked in a coal mine—“where the extent of interracial unity very much shaped the prospects of unionism” (D. R. Roediger, 2017, p. 53). After suffering a back injury (Perry, 2012), Allen moved to New York City in 1948, where he “taught economics at the Communist Party’s Jefferson School... math at the Crown Heights Yeshiva in Brooklyn and the Grace Church School” (Ibid.) and worked as “a factory operative, retail clerk, draftsman...and later a mail handler, museum worker, and librarian at Brooklyn Public Library” (D. R. Roediger, 2017, pp. 53-54). In the 1950s, Allen was active in the CPUSA in New York (Perry, 2012), serving as the Party’s District Organizer for West Virginia (Haywood, 1978, p. 611), and in 1958, he helped to found the POC.

Ignatin dropped out after his first year at the University of Pennsylvania and “took a job at a factory in Philadelphia...to be close to what I regarded as the revolutionary class of our age;

and...to help the class in its struggle for communism” (Ignatiev, 2015b). He first worked at an “all white” factory which built “the lamps that were suspended over the city's streets” and organized with a “little communist cell” there (Ibid.). He also worked with the POC “against police brutality in the North Philadelphia ghetto,” in support of the Cuban Revolution, and particularly “rank and file labor organizing” (Ignatin, 1979). Haywood had left the POC shortly after its founding, and Allen left in 1962, but Ignatin stayed on with the Party, leaving Philadelphia for a series of jobs and organizing assignments as far west as San Francisco until he was “expelled” in 1966 (Ibid.). In the Winter of 1966-67, he wrote a letter to the Progressive Labor Party [PLP] critical of their response to “Black Power”. While the PLP refused to publish Ignatin’s letter in their newspaper, it helped to rekindle his relationship with Allen, and together Ignatin’s letter and Allen’s “Letter of Support” were circulated as White Blindspot, gaining the attention of PLP’s opponents in Students for a Democratic Society. The SDS Radical Education Project printed White Blindspot and Allen’s own article Can White Workers Radicals be Radicalized?, the three pieces together became central documents in clarifying the response of the emergent Revolutionary Youth Movement [RYM] tendency in SDS to “Black Power”, and Ignatin “was recruited to join SDS partly on the basis of his letter” (Staudenmaier, 2012, p. 26).

### **Ignatin & Allen's 1967 White Blindspot Formulation**

To the extent that Critical Whiteness Studies can be defined as ‘an additional movement’ to Critical Race Theory dedicated to shifting white positioned gazes from ‘racial others’ onto whiteness and ‘marking white identity as peculiar and problematic rather than the presumed norm’, many of its roots can be found in Ignatin and Allen’s 1967 arguments that “what we are talking about is NOT the Negro question...but (as some Negro publicists have previously put it) the 'white question” (Ted Allen, 1976 [1967], p. 32). This “white question of questions” (Ibid.), for Ignatin and Allen, is “the central problem for the [white] radical movement of today and tomorrow” (Ted Allen, 2011 [1967], p. 171).

Ignatin and Allen defined “white supremacy” as a type of social contract between white workers and the bourgeoisie, a “deal, worked out over the three hundred year history of the development of capitalism in our country” (Ignatin, 1976 [1967], pp. 26-27). In exchange for helping the bourgeoisie “conquer the world and enslave the non-white majority of the earth's laboring force” (Ibid., p. 27), white workers are assured a variety of “white-skin privileges,” including “a monopoly of the skilled jobs...cushion...against the most severe shocks of the economic cycle...health and education facilities superior to those of the non-white population... [and] freedom to spend your money and leisure time...without social restrictions” (Ibid.). This definition was deeply influenced by the standpoint-based products and guidance of people of color, and they “acknowledge our debt to the black liberation struggle for this advance in our understanding” (Ted Allen, 2011 [1967], p. 171). In addition to Haywood, they are particularly indebted to the work of W.E.B. Du Bois, whose racial subordination as “black helped him to see” (Ibid., p. 170)—in spite of his petit-bourgeois class position—that white-worker attachment to these privileges, both “material and spiritual” (Ignatin, 1976 [1967], p. 27), prevent class-based coalition against capitalism.

While Ignatin and Allen, as Marxist-Leninists, conceptualized the proletariat as the only force which can make revolutionary change, and envisioned its emergence “stripped...of every trace of national character” in “one national struggle between classes” (Marx & Engels, 1848), they also recognized, like Haywood, that this vision would require “the elimination of the forcibly imposed distinction between oppressed and oppressing nations” and “the abolition of all

and sundry privileges of one nation over the other” (Haywood, 1948, p. 158). They argued therefore, that the “white-skin privilege system” (Ted Allen, 2011 [1967], p. 177) functions as an “infection” (Ibid., p. 173) or “ideologic[a]l barrier to the achievement of [white] proletarian class consciousness, solidarity and political action” (Ignatin, 1976 [1967], p. 26). White workers, “In spite of their privileges...are exploited proletarians” (Ignatin, 1976 [1967], p. 27), but their ‘material and spiritual’ attachment to ‘white supremacy’ in the form of ‘white-skin privileges’ has “blinded them” (Ted Allen, 2011 [1967], p. 180) to their “day-to-day real interests...in the development of an ever-expanding union of class conscious workers, white and black” (Ibid., p. 174).

Ignatin and Allen essentially endorsed and translated “Black Power” for ‘their own white [communist] communities’ without sacrificing either the principle of Black self-determination nor an ultimately class-centered analysis that white workers can be mobilized against racism based on their material interests. They argued that Black organizations like the Black Panther parties in Alabama and Northern cities [BPP-SNCC], the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party [MFDP], and the Mississippi Freedom Labor Union [MFLU] represent “the kernel of a potential workers’ controlled labor movement for all workers” (Ignatin, 1976 [1967], p. 30) and that, in order to realize such a ‘labor movement for all workers’, “white communists” have a particular “task” to fulfill (Ibid., p. 29) in fighting “white supremacist attitudes within the [white] working class” (Ted Allen, 2011 [1967], p. 171) to make coalition against capitalism possible. As “white workers” succeed in this task to “break the links which tie them to the bosses,” and “white supremacy is eliminated as a force within the working class, the decks will be cleared for action by the entire class against its enemy” (Ignatin, 1976 [1967], p. 28).<sup>15</sup>

Ignatin and Allen’s 1967 formulation may seem like a simple adjustment in class-centered analysis to accommodate “Black Power”, or theories that transectional [specifically class] empathy can overcome white working-class ‘blindness’ to racial oppression, and in many respects it is, but what defined it as distinct [from Bradenite white anti-racism or projects which sought to organize white workers without confronting them ‘with this whole question of racism and what it has done to them from the very beginning’] was their argument that “the *only way possible*” for “white workers to fight against white supremacy” is “by *repudiating* their white skin privileges and joining in a struggle with the rest of the working class for the demands of the entire class” (Ignatin, 1976 [1967], p. 28). They did not seek to develop a ‘positive white anti-racism’ which endorses the use of white privilege for the purposes of ‘racial justice’ and exchanges accountable uses of white privilege for people of color standpoint-based guidance, nor did they assume that capitalist crises will inevitably ‘strip’ workers ‘of every trace of national character’ and allow white workers to spontaneously realize their ‘day-to-day real interests in the development of an ever-expanding union of class conscious workers, white and black’. Rather, they explicitly tasked ‘white communists’ with the destruction of the ‘white-skin privileges system’ which “will not ‘go away’...will not be taken away,” regardless of inevitable capitalist crisis, because it functions as the “keystone and mortar” securing the “over-arching power” of the bourgeoisie (Ted Allen, 2011 [1967], p. 174).

In practice, ‘white communists’ following Ignatin and Allen’s strategy of ‘repudiating their white-skin privileges’ would

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<sup>15</sup> Such a strategy is also entirely consistent with the Gramscian concept of a ‘war of position’ which articulates the necessary elements to form an historic bloc capable of waging an eventual ‘war of maneuver’ against capitalism.

go to the white workers and say frankly: you must renounce the privileges you now hold, must join the Negro, Puerto Rican and other colored workers in fighting white supremacy, must make this the first, immediate and most urgent task of the entire working class, in exchange for which you, together with the rest of the workers will receive all the benefits which are sure to come from one working class (of several colors) fighting together (Ignatin, 1976 [1967], p. 29).

Once white “radicals adopt such an approach to radicalizing the white masses” and begin to convince white workers to “face the problem of the necessity to repudiate the white-skin privilege,” these groups would direct their actions at “violating the white 'gentleman's agreement' as completely as you can at every opportunity...just make a list of the privileges and start violating them” (Ted Allen, 2011 [1967], p. 181).

In the absence of a ‘Beloved Community’-type Communist Party which could represent the interests of ‘all workers’ and guide the efforts of ‘white communists’ to organize white workers against racism, Ignatin and Allen’s definition of ‘white supremacy’ and their militant non-conformist strategy of ‘repudiating white-skin privilege’ seemed to provide a path forward for northern ‘white radicals’ to autonomously build an anti-racist ‘poor white power bloc’ which could meet Black Power’s criteria for coalition against capitalism.

### **White Blindspot and SDS**

By 1969, Ignatin was working at International Harvester in Chicago, and close to the emergent Revolutionary Youth Movement [RYM] faction of SDS who were at odds with the Worker Student Alliance [WSA] of the PLP. Despite Braden’s advice in 1966, the SSOC continued to operate as an explicitly white student organization, and in the intervening years had a hard time competing with SDS, which was rapidly growing in the South. With many “joint SSOC/SDS chapters,” SDS politics became increasingly significant in the SSOC, and both RYM and WSA/PLP “attacked SSOC for being liberal and white” (Thrasher, 2000, p. 240). There was a growing sentiment in SDS that “an organization devoted to working with white students was politically incorrect” (Ibid., p. 241) and the SSOC disbanded during its Summer 1969 conference at Mt. Beulah Conference Center in Edwards, Mississippi (Ibid., 240). In the closing years of the 1960s, the center of debate over how the white ‘New Left’ would react to “Black Power” had shifted almost entirely to SDS.

RYM was in favor of taking up Black Power’s call to “support indigenous black movements across the country” (S. Carmichael & Hamilton, 1967, p. 84) and anti-imperialist struggles abroad, whereas WSA/PLP took an anti-nationalist stance in favor of organizing [white] workers based on ‘their own class interests’. In 1968, these different approaches led the two factions to take opposing positions on movement events. For example, during the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Teachers Strike of 1968 the PLP sided with the teachers’ union against the Black community’s demands for local control while RYM understood the issue as one of national self-determination and supported local control. The awkwardness of white radicals in acclimating to “Black Power” also became evident during the Columbia University occupation in 1968, one of the first major manifestations of “Black Power” in Northern student activism (Bradley, 2009). In the early hours of the occupation of Hamilton Hall, the Student Afro Society [SAS] asked Columbia SDS to leave. Columbia SDS took over the Low Library, and other New York SDS supporters later took over the Math building. The event highlighted contradictions between “Black Power” and SDS. The primary SAS demand was nationalist—an end to the

university's encroachment into Harlem, and the primary SDS demand was anti-imperialist—an end to the university's collaboration with the Institute for Defense Analysis. SAS sought to make a material change that immediately affected Black people, while SDS sought to raise consciousness among white students and radicalize them against the war in Việt Nam. Excluded from “Black Power” organizations and direct actions, these white supporters of Black liberation struggled to develop new strategies that could resolve contradictions of whiteness which continually resulted in separate spaces, goals, analyses, etc.

Disagreement between RYM and PLP-WSA came to a head at SDS's National Convention in the Chicago Coliseum, June 18-22, 1969. Andy Kopkind's (1969) RYM-oriented account of the “convulsive convention” portrays it as a “*High Noon*” (emphasis original) moment, another instance of “the Movement fighting off a destructive force” which ultimately resulted in the “split between SDS [RYM] and PL [WSA] into rival organizations.” While debate at the convention included a diverse set of collectives and organizations competing and collaborating for the future of SDS, the Weathermen were “the most significant ideological force within SDS” and RYM, and the adoption of their proposal “was the first major overhaul SDS has had since the 'Port Huron Statement' and 'America and the New Era'” (Ibid.). In brief, the Weathermen proposal was based on resistance to U.S. imperialism [particularly in Việt Nam] and white support for “Black Power” (Rudd, 2009, p. 147). In the opening lines of his narrative, Kopkind reaffirms the centrality of SDS to the white left: “for white radicals, the Students for a Democratic Society has always been the only show in town,” but the only show in town for ‘white radicals’ shattered that weekend in Chicago over how to relate to “Black Power”, and those in attendance were left to make do with the pieces. RYM itself quickly split into Weathermen and RYM-II factions, both deeply influenced by Ignatin and Allen's 1967 formulation but with different programmatic interpretations.

### **White Blindspot & The Weather Underground Organization**

The Weathermen worked to ‘repudiate white-skin privilege’ through their October ‘Days of Rage’ which sought to ‘Bring the War Home’ through street fighting against the police. Their militant non-conformist direction was heavily criticized as left-adventurist and derisively described as “fighting the people” (quoted in Berger, 2006, p. 96), particularly white people, instead of ‘organizing their white communities’. Fred Hampton, then chairman of the Illinois Black Panther Party, opposed the ‘Days of Rage’, worked behind the scenes to “tone down” the violent language of the event beforehand (Ibid., p. 108) and when he was unsuccessful, publicly denounced the Weathermen as “anarchistic, opportunistic, individualist, chauvinistic and Custeristic” (quoted in Ibid.). In many respects, however, the militant nonconformist action of early Weather was a very valid interpretation of Ignatin and Allen's formulation, particularly its principled autonomous action, ‘violating the white 'gentleman's agreement' as completely as you can at every opportunity’, and the celebration of John Brown in White Blindspot—particularly the closing section of Ignatin's letter which criticized “the fashion in American left-wing circles to pay homage to old Osawatomie, while... dismissing his use of armed struggle under the pretext that it was 'appropriate for another era'” (p. 31).

As discussed in Chapter 4, New Morning (1970) marked a fairly sharp turn away from ‘fighting the people’ towards a more recognizable white anti-racist project, but the WUO's continued commitment to building an ‘underground’ through ‘armed propaganda’ maintained a tension, as David Gilbert (2012) reflects, “between two contradictory poles” (p. 182)—militant nonconformist action and the degree of ‘solidarity’ with a larger group of white people necessary

for organizing and participating in the ‘mass’ movement of rearticulating "white" to "anti-racism". Armed struggle was seen as both a demonstration of their ‘commitment’ to “full solidarity with the Third World” and an example of radically repudiating ‘white-skin privileges’, but Weather people also viewed themselves as a white “Left leadership” whose task was to make “white people...ready for revolutionary action” (Ibid., p. 183). After New Morning, this ‘revolutionary action’ would take the form of symbolic property destruction because “the killing of ruling class individuals or their armed enforcers, no matter how justified by the bloody war they waged on the oppressed, would be hard for those who hadn't experienced the repression directly, even radical white youth, to accept” (Ibid.). Like Killian & Grigg’s elucidation of the trade-offs between two types of ‘martyrdom’, fully pursuing ‘armed struggle’ would jeopardize building “a significant mass base” among white youth necessary “to sustain armed struggle on any level” (Ibid.) and ‘Armed propaganda’ was, therefore, an attempt “to be a bridge between those two poles” (Ibid.). In Ignatin and Allen’s formulation, however, “Don't alienate the whites!” is the reflex at the heart of white reformism and the “epitaph on the tomb of labor's buried dreams” (Ted Allen, 2011 [1967], p. 171).

The New Morning strategy of ‘armed propaganda’ was perhaps most prolifically critiqued in an Open Letter to the Weatherman Underground from Panther 21, published in the East Village Other on January 19, 1971, and a number of other white left newspapers in the following months. The Panther 21 were BPP members in the New York City area who had been arrested on April 2, 1969 and accused of planning to bomb the New York Botanical Gardens (kioni-sadiki & Meyer, 2017). After their acquittal, a number of them would go on to form the offensive Black Liberation Army [BLA], including Sundiata Acoli, Kuwasi Balagoon, Jamal Joseph, Sekou Odinga, and Dhoruba bin Wahad. Their Open Letter to the WUO was written in “a spirit of revolutionary love and solidarity” (The Panther 21, 1971, p. 3) by “fellow guerillas in the revolution” (Ibid., p. 20) but, having “picked up whiffs of retreat” in the WUO shift from armed struggle to ‘armed propaganda’ (D. Gilbert, 2012, p. 167), was mainly critical and didactic. Like El-Shabazz’s OAAU program, the Panther 21 pressed Weather people toward the ‘full solidarity’ poll, with future collaboration at stake: “the degree of racial co-existence [sic] greatly depends on your successes” (The Panther 21, 1971, p. 20). They argued that “revolution is – in the final analysis – ARMED STRUGGLE” (Ibid.), chastised Weather people for scaling back their operations because of their comrades’ deaths, and argued that “a revolutionist” must not only be “ready to die” but also “ready to KILL to change conditions” (Ibid.). Conversely, The Panther 21 were very pessimistic about the possibilities for organizing a ‘new white youth nation’ without armed struggle to support and shape mass demonstrations, and about the ‘revolutionary potential’ of white youth in general. They observed that “most [white] youth culture communes smack heavily with escapism” and racism (Ibid., p. 3), and that white youth opposing the war in Việt Nam “are out there, not because they feel a solidarity with the Vietnamese, but [either] because they don't like war” (Ibid.)—an ideological position which places them “in the ranks of the oppressors” (Sartre quoted in Ibid.)—or because “they are really Amerikkkan – they don't subconsciously want this imperialistic country - their home - to be whipped” (Ibid.). Gilbert reports that the WUO leadership dismissed the Panther 21 criticisms as “a misunderstanding” and he laments that the organization never “responded to this thoughtful effort at dialogue” or “even considered doing so” (Ibid., p. 167).

The Weather Underground’s ‘armed propaganda’ combined the militant and sensational action of guerilla bombings with brief messages. For example, a week after the Attica Uprising of September 9, 1971 was crushed by the state with murderous force, a Weather cell bombed the

New York State Department of Correctional Services headquarters after hours and released a message which, along with providing basic facts and context about the uprising, included a white anti-racist message drawing a line between ‘bad’ white and ‘good’ white: “The main question white people have to face today is not the state of the economy (for many, the question of selling their second car) but whether they are going to continue to allow genocidal murder, in their name, of oppressed people in this country and around the world” (Weather, 2006 [1971], p. 180). The action was thoroughly marked by their armed white anti-racist project, directed at confronting white people over their complicity with ‘white supremacy’ and using the sensation of militant non-conformism to interpellate ‘radical white youth’ toward resistance. The cell made “a point of bombing DOCS offices at a time when no one was there” in order to avoid casualties, and “While many prisoners felt buoyed by the action” there was also “criticism of our purely symbolic action” when “Prisoners had been murdered wholesale, without any firearms to fight back, and continued to be tormented, yet the authorities responsible had paid no price at all” (D. Gilbert, 2012, p. 182).

In working to interpellate ‘radical’ white youth, the organization continued to “shift to a more white-centered view of the world” (Ibid., p. 212). In Gilbert’s analysis, this “opportunism” meant that “every single major arena of struggle, from fighting racism to women’s liberation, now became at its heart a ‘class question’” and “in defining all those issues as primarily...about class, the analysis wiped out the real legacies and ongoing fundamental structures of white and male supremacy, as well as undercut the basis for the oppressed to have independent organizations and to lead their own struggles” (Ibid., p. 213). The organization increasingly promoted “a more traditional white Left line” (Ibid., p. 217) of ‘Black and white unite and fight’ calling for a unified “multinational working class” (Ibid., p. 214) at the expense of “explicitly challenging white privilege” (Ibid., p. 215).

After the WUO unraveled in 1976, Gilbert and other Weather people formed the May 19<sup>th</sup> Communist Organization, a more recognizably white anti-racist group based on the principles of “operating under Third World leadership and the responsibility to use white privilege to provide material aid” (Ibid., p. 262). A number of May 19<sup>th</sup> organizers, including Gilbert, were strong proponents of armed struggle as a path to overcome the ‘dilemmas’ of white anti-racism. After a short period trying to come ‘above ground’ like most other Weather people, Gilbert “was anxious to reestablish myself as a ‘revolutionary on the highest level,’ as ‘the most anti-racist white activist’” (Ibid., p. 304). This desire led him, his partner Kathy, Judy Clark, and Marilyn Buck, to volunteer for a Black Liberation Army operation to expropriate capital from a Brink’s armored truck on October 20, 1981. Several of the Panther 21 were also involved in the operation, including Kuwasi Balagoon, Jamal Joseph, and Sekou Odinga, and the joint offensive operation, which moved the May 19<sup>th</sup> activists back toward the ‘full solidarity’ pole, in many ways fulfilled the Panther 21’s 1971 Open Letter promise of ‘racial co-existence’ through armed struggle. One of the truck’s guards and two police were killed. The operation also fulfilled, in some respects, Allen’s prediction that “the first white-skin privilege to fall will be the low ratio of whites to blacks in the prison population” (Ted Allen, 2011 [1967], p. 180).

### **Ignatin, RYM-II, the Sojourner Truth Organization, & his Choice of CLR James**

In the months after the SDS national conference, Ignatin was a leading figure in RYM-II, and was particularly impressed by the emergence of the Detroit-based League of Revolutionary Black Workers who focused on organizing Black working class people in factories, as opposed to the BPP’s focus on organizing the Black lumpen proletariat (Staudenmaier, 2012, pp. 1-2). In



the Fall, the factory where he was working, “International Harvester Tractor Works in Chicago, which employed about 3,000 people...announced its intention to close the plant” (Ignatiev, 2012). RYM-II activists in Chicago “made the plant a focus of its October action, intended as an alternative to the Weather Days of Rage” (Ibid.). After unsuccessfully proposing the formation of a larger Marxist-Leninist party at the RYM-II conference in Atlanta that November (Staudenmaier, 2012, pp. 33-35), Ignatin, his partner Hilda Vasquez Ignatin [also a Young Lord], Carol Travis, Don Hamerquist, Lynn French [also a Chicago Panther], Marilyn Katz, Evie and Mike Goldfield, founded the ‘mostly white’ Sojourner Truth [Communist] Organization [STO] “around Christmas/New Years of 1969-70” (Ignatiev, 2012; Staudenmaier, 2012, pp. 27-33). STO would try to operationalize Ignatin and Allen’s program of ‘repudiating white-skin privileges’ through ‘mass’ organizing at the ‘point of production’ using an eclectic mix of Marxist, Leninist, Gramscian and, most importantly for Ignatin, Jamesian frameworks.

Having formed around the October International Harvester campaign, the STO’s initial “emphasis was on organizing at the point of production” (Staudenmaier, 2012, p. 3). They conceptualized established unions as trapped in a “bourgeois legality compromise” (quoted in Staudenmaier, 2012, p. 3), and advocated autonomous direct action by organized workers along the lines of the International Workers of the World [IWW] (Staudenmaier, 2012, p. 49). Very much influenced by CLR James, who Ignatin saw speak in Chicago in 1968 (Ibid., p. 27), they imagined a “New Society” being built from ‘mass’ uprisings of interconnected autonomous working class collectives like “The Paris Commune. The Flint Sitdown [Strike]. The Montgomery Bus Boycott. [Or more recently,] Tahrir Square” (Ignatiev, 2016 [2015]) and the Arab Spring-inspired Occupy Movement (Ignatiev, 2011). Also following James, and unlike many other Marxist-Leninist groups, the STO did not understand their role as the vanguard of ‘mass’ uprising but believed the essential revolutionary character of the industrial working class would inevitably produce such uprising. Their role was “not to organize the workers but to organize themselves – to discover those patterns of activity and forms of organization that have sprung up out of the struggle and that embody the new society, and to help them grow stronger, more confident, and more conscious of their direction” (Ignatiev, 2010c, p. 16).

On a micro level, a good example of the type of action STO anticipated and sought to support was a walk-off at International Harvester Melrose described in the November/December 1971 issue of their newspaper, the Insurgent Worker. A “‘notorious racist’ foreman” was unjustly withholding the bonus of “an older black worker” and the worker and his union steward went to file a grievance with the foreman (Staudenmaier, 2012, p. 79). But against union policy, and attempts to “broker a compromise,” the workers in his department and others left their stations and “gathered spontaneously outside the office of the racist foreman” (Ibid.) where they “stood their ground until the company agreed” to pay the worker his bonus (Ibid, p. 80). The action “represented a way of dealing with grievances outside of the whole management-union contract system” (Ignatiev, 2010c, p. 15), and signaled the “emergence on the shop floor of social relations counter to those imposed by management and the union, relations that prefigured the new society” (Ibid., p. 7). This exemplary action also demonstrated how race and class oppressions were interlinked in the workplace. It was made possible by, and also developed, the unity and resolve of workers on the ‘interracial’ factory floor. While the injustice was primarily perceived through the lens of race, and the action was “initiated and led by black workers” who had an immediate interest in fighting “discrimination,” the Insurgent Worker article particularly highlighted that “the majority of white workers supported the action and joined the walkout” (quoted in Staudenmaier, 2012, p. 80), understanding that an injustice to one Black worker “as

their problem” as well (Staudenmaier, 2012). Having overcome their ‘White Blindspot’, the white workers not only ‘did the right thing’, but had also clearly strengthened their power as part of a unified class.

As a ‘mostly white’ organization, STO worked with ‘all’ workers in Chicago area factories, but focused on the particular task of convincing white workers to ‘repudiate’ their ‘white-skin privileges’. In doing so, their efforts were closely aligned with CLR James’s vision for an integrated ‘Marxist organization’ of the industrial working class which shared and supported the commitment of ‘white communists’ to

educate above all white workers in their understanding of the Negro question and into a realization of their own responsibility in ridding American society of the cancer of racial discrimination and racial consciousness. The Marxist organization will have to fight for its own position, but its position will not be the wearisome repetition of “Black and White, Unite and Fight.” It will be a resolute determination to bring all aspects of the question into the open, within the context of the recognition that the new society exists and that it carries within itself much of the sores and diseases of the old (quoted in Ignatiev, 2010c, p. 14).

The quote above is taken from the final chapter of Facing Reality (1958) by CLR James, Grace Lee [Boggs] and Pierre Chaulieu [Cornelius Castoriadis], a key text elucidating the ideology of their Correspondence Publishing Committee which was formed after James split from the Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party [SWP].

Grace Lee and her partner James Boggs broke with CLR James and the Correspondence Committee in 1962, and while the split had several dimensions, the most important for our purposes here is the disagreement between James and the Boggses over Black nationalism. The Boggses and James agreed that Black self-determination was important, and that Black workers were the leading force for proletarian revolution in the U.S., but James, like Ignatin and Allen, worked to build a unified ‘marxist organization’ or ‘communist party’ of ‘all’ workers. The Boggses, however, were increasingly aligned with the growing nationalist tendencies in the Civil Rights Movement, North and South, which were formed around Black standpoint. Before their split with James, the Boggses, along with activists from another ex-SWP formation called the Workers World Party, were a significant part of the support network for armed self-defense advocate Robert Williams in Monroe, North Carolina. After the split with James, they became increasingly aligned with El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz’s OAAU, and on May 1, 1965, less than three months after Malcolm was assassinated, the Boggses co-founded the Organization for Black Power (Boggs & Boggs, 2011 [1966], p. 166) along with many of the most important left advocates of Black nationalism of the time, including the Revolutionary Action Movement.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> The Revolutionary Action Movement [RAM] had its roots in “a chapter of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) called Challenge” which was “formed at historically Black Central State University in Wilberforce, Ohio” and “composed primarily of [Black] students who had been expelled from southern schools for participating in sit-ins and freedom rides, as well as disgruntled activists from the Nation of Islam and other black nationalist organizations” (Ahmad, 2006, p. 252). After these students left Wilberforce, the group’s base moved to Temple University in Philadelphia and developed links with Malcolm X, “Ethel Johnson, a colleague of North Carolina NAACP leader Robert F. Williams”, black nationalist and “former Communist Party organizer” Queen Mother Audrey Moore, and several other “key Black activists” who

The Boggses were also key mentors of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, the Black Marxist force which STO was most closely aligned in its early years of its existence.

There were two main, and interrelated, aspects of the Boggses ideological move toward Black nationalism: [1] a theorization that Black people are the proletariat in the U.S., and [2] a loss of faith in collaboration with white workers. In theorizing the relationship between race and class, the Boggses came to the conclusion that in the U.S., “What began as a class issue and was made into a race issue by the simple act of separating the Negroes on the basis of color” in order to more intensively exploit their labor (Boggs, 2011 [1962], p. 73). Because of the particular history of chattel slavery and Jim Crow, Black people “have always represented and still represent the great mass bloc of the lowest stratum of workers in this country” (Ibid., p. 72), and to the extent that the proletariat can only emerge from this ‘lowest stratum’, they argued that “Negroes constitute this revolutionary social force” (Organization for Black Power Conference Statement, quoted in Boggs & Boggs, 2011 [1966], p. 166). The Boggses argued that “the concept of 'Black and White, Unite and Fight' has never had any basis in fact in this country” because Black and white workers do not share the same basic class interests (Boggs, 2011 [1962], p. 73). Whereas Black workers in the U.S. are the ‘lowest stratum’ with ‘nothing to lose but their chains’, White workers “are like the petty bourgeoisie of Marx’s time...they collaborate with the power structure and support the system because their high standard of living depends upon the continuation of this power structure and this system” (Boggs, 2011 [1967], p. 173). As a result of this superordinated position in both racial and class relations, white workers “cannot at this historic juncture identify both racism and capitalism as the enemy that has to be destroyed” (Boggs, 2011 [1969], p. 205). While “millions of whites are also exploited, frustrated, and angry” (Ibid.), “all the white man has is his 'white'” (Boggs, 2011 [1963], p. 159), and because this is their only competitive advantage, “The white worker is becoming more of an enemy every day” (Ibid., p. 160).

Based on their race and class-centric theorization of the proletariat in the U.S. and their pessimism about the ‘revolutionary potential’ of white workers, the Boggses rejected the collaborative demand of ‘white communists’ who,

Under the guise of combating the racism of whites...have actually been trying to bring about collaboration between the oppressed race and the oppressing race, thus sabotaging the revolutionary struggle against oppression which, by virtue of the historical development of the United States, requires a mobilization of the oppressed blacks for struggle against the oppressing whites (Boggs, 2011 [1967], p. 173).

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formed a “study/action group” in Philadelphia that “evolved into the Revolutionary Action Movement” (Ibid., pp. 254-256). RAM organized clandestinely as “Black revolutionaries” (Ibid., p. 255) in “a supporting but important role in the struggle for nationhood in the South” and to “transform the Civil Rights Movement” into a revolutionary movement (Ibid., p. 259). To accomplish this, “Political units were organized to actively infiltrate the Civil Rights Movement [particularly SNCC], and lead the Black liberation movement” (Ibid., p. 256). One of the most successful of these RAM operatives in SNCC was Bill Ware, whose letter in support of firing white staff in 1967 was quoted extensively in the last chapter. RAM was a key ideological and organizational force in the emergent “Black Power” movement, including the Black Arts Movement and many early chapters of the Black Panther Party.

The Boggses rejection of collaboration with white workers, and their shift toward “The clarion call 'black people of the world, unite and fight'” (Ibid., p. 176), was consistent with Black Power’s formulation, and to the extent that their analysis was influential with STO’s chosen ‘leadership’ in the League of Revolutionary Black Workers and with workers of color on the factory floors which they organized, the possibilities for Jamesian ‘white communists’ like STO to build a united ‘marxist organization’ or ‘communist party’ of ‘all workers’ were severely limited.

As the WUO and the STO worked to implement very different interpretations of Ignatin and Allen’s 1967 formulation, Allen poured his intellectual energy into “researching the role of white supremacy in United States history, documenting and analyzing the development of the ‘white race’” (Ignatiev, 2014) in publications like White Supremacy in US. History (1976 [1973]) and ‘...They Would Have Destroyed Me’: Slavery and the Origins of Racism (1976). He ultimately came to acutely focus on an historical project, most fully realized in The Invention of the White Race: Volumes I (1994) & II (1997), which sought to demonstrate that ‘the concept of Black and white unite and fight’ had a basis in early colonial Virginia before the Planters “deliberately contrived” the ‘white-skin privileges system’ in order to prevent the unity of “white and Black labor” and “to use the poor whites as the instrument of social control over the Black workers” (Ted Allen, 1976 [1973], p. 2). The split between Jamesian and Boggsian conceptualizations of the ‘revolutionary potential’ of white workers continued to sustain a strong critique of Ignatin and Allen’s formulation throughout the 1970s and reemerged in the 1980s with the publication of J. Sakai’s Settlers: The Myth of the White Proletariat (1989 [1983]), a Boggsian riposte to Allen’s research, and early Critical Race Theory-style movement text focused on ‘the white question’.<sup>17</sup> Settlers elicited thoughtful responses from both Ignatin [STO]

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<sup>17</sup> In many ways, J. Sakai’s Settlers is very compatible with the race-centered approach of Critical Race Theory which developed during the same period. Like Critical Race Theory, Sakai observes that when Jim Crow whiteness could no longer retain hegemonic control over people of color liberation movements in the 1960s, the white power bloc transformed itself to accommodate minor demands by people of color to undercut major ones and re-secure white hegemony in a sustainable way. For Sakai, this was particularly evident in the academy, where “the 1960’s breakthrough of ‘ethnic studies programs’ at universities has been dialectically turned around and used against us” (Sakai, 1989 [1983], p. 2). The ‘additive approach’ of emergent liberal multiculturalism in response to calls for ‘affirmative action’ functioned “Like ju-jitsu[—]our original demand that our separate and unique histories be uncovered and recognized is now being used to throw us off our ideological balance. The imperialists promote watered-down and distorted versions of our pasts as oppressed Third-World nations and peoples” (Ibid.). Sakai particularly laments the ways in which this ‘ju-jitsu’ had incorporated “Some of the most prominent Third-World intellectuals in the U.S. Empire [who] are getting paid good salaries by the imperialists to teach us our histories” (Ibid., p. 1). But while he is deeply suspicious of the academy, Sakai is largely in agreement with Critical Race Theory and the later ‘additional movement’ of Critical Whiteness Studies in opposing the ‘additive approach’ of liberal multiculturalism and the treatment of people of color as “objects of investigation” through “Euro-imperialist” disciplinary lenses. Instead, he argues, “Now it is time to scientifically examine the oppressor society” (Ibid., p. 3). From the standpoints of people of color, he frames his research into the ‘white question’ as a form of “reconnaissance into enemy territory” (Ibid., p. 4), much the same way that Critical Race Theorists and Critical Whiteness Studies scholars would describe their work a decade later.

and David Gilbert [WUO] in the decade before New Abolitionism, and continues to have significant influence among certain circles of white ‘allies’ and ‘accomplices’. In the next section, I will put Sakai and Allen into conversation to highlight key differences in their historical conclusions, and then consider the conversation between Sakai, Gilbert and Ignatin as a snapshot of developments in their ideas prior to the emergence of New Abolitionism.

#### J. SAKAI’S SETTLERS: MARXIST STANDPOINT THEORY & ‘THE REVOLUTIONARY POTENTIAL’ OF WHITE WORKERS

J. Sakai graduated high school in the San Fernando Valley in the late 1950s (Sakai, 2014). His Japanese-American family was interned during WWII (Sakai & Aguilar, 2014 [2003], p. 436) and he was educationally tracked toward a working class career (Sakai, 2000). He moved to the Bay Area shortly thereafter, worked with Oakland CORE in the early 1960s (Sakai, 2014), resisted the draft (Ibid.), and was involved with Dr. King’s Poor People’s Campaign, particularly the Resurrection City encampment on the Mall in Washington D.C. after King was assassinated (Sakai & Aguilar, 2014 [2003], p. 428). It is not clear if he was formally involved with any of the RYM factions but he was certainly influenced by James and Grace Lee Boggs (Sakai, 2000) and became involved with the League of Revolutionary Black Workers while working at an auto parts plant in the early 1970s (Sakai, 2000). Like the Boggses two decades earlier, “As a revolutionary, I had been taught all this stuff about class unity and how white workers and workers of color were going to unite. Except in real life I didn’t actually see that” (Sakai & Aguilar, 2014 [2003], p. 422). In 1975, amidst diverse theorizations about the ‘white question’, he began to consider whether “the wonderful working class history that the movement had taught us was a lie” (Sakai, 2000) and began to research the historical relationship between socialism and the white working class “instead of just taking it as a given” (Sakai & Aguilar, 2014 [2003], p. 422), asking “where did racism in the white working class actually begin? Was there a point where they started selling out or got misled or something?” (Sakai & Aguilar, 2014 [2003], p. 422). He began working from the left’s basic “conclusion...in the mid-1970s, that white supremacy ruled the white working class” and “researched going back in time, trying to find that event, that turning point when working class unity by whites had dissolved into racial supremacy” (Sakai, 2000).

#### **Sakai & Allen: Two Historical Definitions of Whiteness with ‘Necessary Class Belonging’**

Sakai’s research covers much of the same historical terrain as Allen in White Supremacy in US. History (1973), but in greater breadth and depth. And while Settlers is clearly, at least in part, a rejection of Allen and Ignatin’s formulation and the ideologies of RYM-descended organizations, he only acknowledges Allen’s work superficially and obscures Ignatin and Allen’s thesis by lumping it in with other white left theorizations of the white working class. None the less, Sakai’s conclusions about the white working class in the “1930s, 1920s, pre-World War I, Black Reconstruction, Civil War [and the] 1700s” (Sakai, 2000) are nearly identical to Allen and Ignatin’s:

the white settler population has essentially had a historic 400-year pact with capitalism, which is that they will get the best of everything. Maybe that won’t be a lot, but it will be the best of the little. They will get the best of everything that is available in return for

supporting capitalism and the U.S. Empire and its conquest over other people (Sakai & Aguilar, 2014 [2003], p. 434).

The key difference between Sakai's historical thesis and Allen's has to do with their analyses of the early colonial U.S.

Through extensive primary source research on social formation in early colonial Virginia [c. 1610-1680], Allen argued that "little distinction was made in the status of Blacks and English and other Europeans held in involuntary servitude" and that "Their common lot led them to make common cause" (Ted Allen, 1976 [1973], p. 1). Despite nascent attempts by the Virginia planters to divide 'European' from 'African' workers, in "the hundreds of cases of the oppression of bond-laborers and the resistance by them" which Allen found it was "exceptional" for "European-American bond-laborers" to express any "desire to disassociate their sufferings and struggle from those of the African-American bond-laborers" (T. W. Allen, 1997, p. 162). On the contrary, Allen found it was far more common during this period for 'European' and 'African' bond-laborers to have intimate relationships with each other, to plot and scheme against the planters, and to rebel against their 'common' class oppression. In Allen's analysis, the threat posed to the Virginia planters by such a development of proletarian consciousness 'stripped of any trace of national character' reached its crescendo during Bacon's Rebellion [1678-1679]. What started as "a contradiction within the bourgeoisie" in terms of how to conduct their "war of extermination against the Indians" evolved into an opportunity for "Black and white bond-servants...to strike for their freedom" (Ted Allen, 1976 [1973], p. 2). Some "eighty Negroes and twenty English" (quoted in *Ibid.*) who had been recruited to Bacon's forces ultimately held out after an accord between "their masters" was reached (*Ibid.*) and "fought side by side for the abolition of slavery" (T. W. Allen, 1997, p. 215). In the decades that followed [1682-1705], the Virginia planters "deliberately contrived" a "policy of differentiation between white and Black labor through the system of white skin privileges for white labor" which "allowed the bourgeoisie to use the poor whites as the instrument of social control over the Black workers" (*Ibid.*). If Allen's historical claim that race was not a salient factor in dividing the working class in early colonial Virginia until the Planters 'invented' the 'system of white-skin privileges' is correct, then, he reasons, white workers are exploited proletarians capable of developing 'proletarian consciousness', and absent this system of privileges which has 'blinded them', there would be nothing to prevent the unity of Black and white workers today.

In Sakai's attempt to find the 'origin' of white chauvinism in the U.S., however, he "kept going back and back, treading water, trying to touch non-white supremacist ground. Only, there wasn't any!" (Sakai, 2000). While Allen worked to downplay differences in conditions among 'Blacks and English and other Europeans held in involuntary servitude', Sakai highlights key differences between "European indentured servants" and "chattel African slavery." Whereas people from Africa were bought, kidnapped, and otherwise forcibly transported, Sakai argues that the vast majority of Europeans "participating in the settler invasion of North America" were "middle class" and emigrated, in "a desperate venture for continued status and self-respect" (Sakai, 1989 [1983], p. 5). While he does not analyze primary sources from the early colonial period in great depth like Allen, Sakai briefly accedes to his claim that the "bottom layer of settler society...had the potential of proletarian class consciousness" (*Ibid.*, p. 11) as 'indentured servants', but moves quickly to assert that

Once these poor whites were raised off the fields and given the chance to help boss and police captive Afrikans, their rebellious days were over. The importance of this experience is that it shows the material basis for the lack of class consciousness by early Euro-American workers, and how their political consciousness was directly related to how much they shared in the privileges of the larger settler society. Further, the capitalists proved to their satisfaction that dissent and rebelliousness within the settler ranks could be quelled by increasing the colonial exploitation of other nations and peoples (Ibid.).

All of this is still entirely consistent with Allen's thesis, but Sakai dismisses the few formative decades so crucial to Allen's anti-essentialist argument and only cites Allen once, making it seem that Allen celebrates the "bourgeois-democratic measures" which followed Bacon's rebellion "as historic gains" (Ibid., p. 16). In doing so, Sakai falsely counterposes Allen's analysis of this period to his own, when, in actuality, both agree that "the essence of these reforms was the consolidation of a new [white] settler nation" at the expense of indigenous and African people (Ibid.). With the exception of the early colonial period, Allen and Sakai generally agree on the shape and form of the white working class 'pact', but they sharply disagree about [1] whether the white working class benefits from this 'pact', [2] whether it is in the interests of white working class people to fight against this 'pact', and, therefore, [3] whether the white working class, as an element in U.S. society, has any 'revolutionary potential'.

While both Allen and Sakai agree that "white-skin privilege...is the prerogative of every white person living in the United States" (Ted Allen, 2011 [1967], p. 175), Ignatin and Allen's formulation made a sharp division between "the masses of white workers" and their "mis-leaders" in the 'labor aristocracy' (Ignatin, 1976 [1967], p. 27)—those whose "white-skin privileges...do not permit them nor their children to escape into the ranks of the propertied classes" and those who receive a "special form of that privilege...which enables those few workers to escape in all but a formal sense from the proletarian to the petit-bourgeois life" in exchange for upholding the 'pact' which prevents 'the masses' of white workers from recognizing their 'day-to-day real interests' (Ted Allen, 2011 [1967], pp. 174-175). Sakai, in contrast, argues that "all [white] settlers gained and took part" (Sakai, 1989 [1983], p. 8) and benefitted from the "the miracle drug of 'New World' conquest" (Ibid., p. 6) to such an extent that it lifted "even the very lowest layer of white society...out of the proletariat by the privileges of belonging to the oppressor nation" (Ibid., p. 11). Like the Boggses argument that the white working class is like the petty-bourgeoisie of Marx's time, Sakai argues that the 'system of white skin-privileges' fundamentally changes the class position of all white workers and their class interests such that "in general in u.s. history the colonized peoples have been the proletariat, while the white working class has been a labor aristocracy" (Sakai, 2000). And also like the Boggses, Sakai argues race and class are so tightly intertwined that "race in Amerika has been used as an identifier for capitalism to form and control classes, that race is not just a metaphor for class, but an identifier of class in real terms" (Sakai & Aguilar, 2014 [2003], p. 435). White workers are "bourgeoisified, with a preoccupation for petty privileges and property ownership" (Sakai, 1989 [1983], p. 10) and not "the most exploited class from which capitalism derives its super profits" (Sakai, 2000). They have "no reason to develop a proletarian consciousness" necessary for overturning capitalism (Sakai, 1989 [1983], p. 10) and therefore have no "revolutionary potential" (Ibid., p. 25). In Sakai's formulation, "radical and democratic change

[in the U.S.] can only come against the wishes of the bribed majority. That may be tough to swallow for white folks, but reality is just reality” (Sakai, 2000).

Allen did not directly respond to Settlers, but he addressed similar Boggsian arguments more than ten years earlier, calling them “1) wrong; 2) dishonest; 3) cowardly” (Ted Allen, 2011 [1967], p. 175).<sup>18</sup> Arguments that the white working class in the U.S. is hopelessly attached to white supremacy and imperialism are ‘wrong’ and ‘dishonest’ because they conclude white workers have no interest in fighting the system of ‘white-skin privileges’. These same arguments are also ‘cowardly’ because they abdicate responsibility for ‘white communists’ to perform their particular task. Gilbert’s Looking At The White Working Class Historically and Ignatin’s Notes on Settlers (c. 1990)<sup>19</sup> are less contemptuously dismissive in their responses to Sakai, but ultimately agree with Allen that “for people attempting to intervene politically among European-Americans” Sakai’s pessimism is a “a dead-end” (Ignatin, c. 1990, p. 7), and both hold on to the class interest of white workers as a crucial resource in fighting ‘white supremacy’.

### **Gilbert & Ignatin Respond: Taking Stock of Efforts to ‘Repudiate White-Skin Privileges’**

After the significant legal battles following the Brink’s tragedy subsided, David Gilbert reviewed Settlers from his prison cell in Attica, together with two of Allen’s articles and W.E.B. Du Bois’s Black Reconstruction, which was a key text for both authors. Gilbert’s combined review, along with reflections on the Weather Underground’s strategy for organizing ‘their white community’, was published as Looking At The White Working Class Historically (c. 1990) and received a response from J. Sakai in 1992. The dialogue between Gilbert and Sakai is not surprising because they ran in common political circles. The first working draft of Settlers was completed in 1983 and originally intended “for internal education in the underground black liberation army coordinating committee” [BLA-CC] (Sakai, 2014). Gilbert was in jail for taking part in a BLA operation and the work of Gilbert’s co-defendant, Kuwasi Balagoon, was later published together with Sakai’s When Race Burns Class: Settlers Revisited (2000). Both Gilbert and Sakai were also aligned with the New Afrikan Independence Movement [NAIM], centered around “the above ground and legal” Republic of New Afrika [RNU] (D. Gilbert, 2012, p. 283) which worked to liberate and develop “a separate Black nation located in the five 'black belt' states in the South” (Ibid., p. 292) as the “National Territory” of “New Afrikans” (Sakai, 1989 [1983], p. 103).

Sakai’s position in Settlers is also very close to WUO’s initial ‘fighting the people’ strategy, and Gilbert was one of the most committed proponents of armed struggle in support of Black liberation long after the organization’s collapse. But Gilbert was also very committed to the New Morning white anti-racist project. The participation of May 19<sup>th</sup> members in the Brink’s operation both established them as the most ‘anti-racist white people’—ready to die and to kill—and satisfied their white anti-racist collaborative demand. But their moment of ‘co-equality’ was brief. While they awaited trial, fellow Brink’s accomplice “Judy Clark and I wrote a self-

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<sup>18</sup> Allen summarized the basic argument as follows: “Don't waste time on the United States white workers. For the time being, forget them. The privileges of these workers are paid for by the super-profits wrung out of the super-exploited black, yellow and brown labor of colonial peoples (including the special case of the oppressed Negro in the United States). The victorious national liberation struggles of these peoples will, sooner or later, chop off these sources of white-skin privilege funds. Then, though not before, the white workers will 'get the message!'.”

<sup>19</sup> Ignatin’s response was not published, but was circulated informally, and is quoted here with the permission of the author.



criticism of [May 19<sup>th</sup>'s] role as white allies” (D. Gilbert, 2012, p. 302). Gilbert reports that he and Clark were particularly critical of the organization’s exercise of white anti-racist choice and influence during the trial: “the offering of white resources played an inappropriately big role in deciding strategic differences within the NAIM” (Ibid.). More importantly, however, Gilbert and Clark revisited the mismatch between militant nonconformist action and a project of hegemonically rearticulating "white" to "anti-racism". Like New Morning, they argued that committed armed struggle as ‘a group of outlaws...isolated’ them from ‘their white community’ and tended toward “abandoning responsibility for building a movement that could sustain militant struggle against imperialism” (D. Gilbert, 2002 [c. 1990], p. 21). Their attempt “to maintain purity around racism and [imperialism]” (D. Gilbert, 2002 [c. 1990], p. 21) fostered an “‘exceptional white person’ mentality” (D. Gilbert, 2012, p. 304) which was incompatible with “any serious effort to organize other [white] people against racism” (D. Gilbert, 2012, p. 304). Having demonstrated their commitment as ‘accomplices’, and facing a life in prison, Gilbert and Clark were [again] shifting further away from a performance of the classic martyr’s role toward the ‘waiting role’ of ‘organizing their white communities’.

Both Gilbert and Ignatin recognize and respect Settlers as an artifact produced from the standpoints of people of color. Gilbert acknowledges that “Settlers is addressed, internally, for discussion among Third World revolutionaries” and argues that, even though it was not written for a white audience, “it is important for us to grapple with its politics and to apply those lessons to our own situation and responsibilities” (D. Gilbert, 2002 [c. 1990], p. 16). Ignatin acknowledges Sakai’s standpoint in much the same way: “If a black revolutionary group took the ‘Settlers’ view of European-Americans, and concluded from it that nothing good could ever be expected from them, I would not argue, for it is undeniably true that no black movement ever failed, no black person was ever lynched, for underestimating the good faith of white folks” (Ignatin, c. 1990, p. 7). This confessional recognition of the standpoints of people of color demonstrates white positional consciousness. Gilbert’s response is classically white anti-racist. He embodies whiteness and uses the white anti-racist "we" in order to rearticulate it. Ignatin, however, shows increasing discomfort with white anti-racist language. His vision of ‘dissolving’ whiteness tends toward resignifications of "white" social elements as "European-American", refers to white people in the third-person plural "them" and to himself in the detached and individualist first-person singular "I". Both further recognize a degree of ‘truth’ in Sakai’s formulation, and like Winant, acknowledge that organizing the white working class against ‘white supremacy’ is a ‘daunting’ but ‘necessary’ task. Confronted by a person of color on their ‘white perspective’, both choose to argue against Sakai’s conclusions because their entire ‘task’ as ‘white communists’ to educate and organize white workers based on class interest is at stake.

More than forty years after the CPUSA endorsement of Black self-determination and almost two decades after the “Black Power” moment, Sakai challenged ‘white communists’ to show progress in building an ‘anti-racist poor white power bloc’ capable of joining with people of color in the fight against capitalism. In his estimation, all of their efforts to fight ‘white supremacy’ seemed to have led to “zero revolutionary progress...Despite the history of bloody union battles, class consciousness [among white workers] has never moved beyond an embryonic form, at best” (Ibid., p. 153). Amidst the consolidation of power under the ‘New Right’ and major intensifications of neoliberalism and U.S. imperialism in the early 1980s, Sakai reasonably took stock: “we’ve waited 400 years for the unity [of white workers with workers of color], so if it can't come in 400 years, then how long are we supposed to wait for this stuff?” (Sakai & Aguilar, 2014 [2003], p. 422). In Sakai’s estimation, Black Power’s offer of a future

coalition against Capitalism had expired. With little progress in the ‘task’ of ‘organizing their white communities’, coalition remained impossible. It was increasingly evident to him that organizing white people, workers or otherwise, was an ineffective use of resources. The focus of Settlers on deconstructing unrealistic assessments of white influence, and building ‘power’ continued to endorse Killian & Grigg’s conclusion that ‘change was most likely to result from a conflict-negotiation-compromise cycle not from mass conversion within one of the warring factions’.

Like “Black Power” and Critical Race Theory, Sakai’s formulation centers dialogue in the ‘Third World’, between people of color, and based on similar approaches to developing “Self-reliance and building mass institutions and movements of a specific national character” (Sakai, 1989 [1983], p. 164). Much of the power of his critique comes from its application to the U.S. of historical materialist analyses fairly commonplace in describing the role of white industrial working classes in settler colonies across the Third World. Most ‘Third World’ revolutionaries had few illusions about the ‘revolutionary potential’ of Afrikaaner workers in Apartheid South Africa or Jewish Israeli workers in Palestine, instead theorizing that the masses of colonized workers in those countries and their allies across the global colonized proletariat were the key to liberation from both ‘white supremacy’ and capitalism. While Ignatin and Allen might have endorsed this analysis in the ‘Third World’, their formulation is specifically tailored to the U.S., where a majority of the ‘industrial working class’ was categorized as white. Under these conditions, Ignatin and Allen theorized that organizing white workers to ‘repudiate the system of white-skin privileges’ is necessary to realize a mass movement of ‘the working class’ against capitalism because “Socialist revolution is not possible where the majority of the workers do not want it and workers who want white-skin privileges do not want socialism” (Ted Allen, 1976 [1973], p. 4). Sakai significantly challenges this logic by arguing that white workers in the U.S. are “settler oppressors in the same way as Rhodesians, Boers, or Zionists in Israel” (Sakai, 2000) and situating white-american workers as a minority in a global context.

Gilbert agrees with Sakai that “There is nothing approximating the Marxist revolutionary proletariat within white America” and seriously considers Sakai’s challenge to Ignatin and Allen’s formulation: “As materialists we have to wonder why such a formidable consensus of a class and its organizations would hold a position over a long period of time that was opposed to their interests” (D. Gilbert, 2002 [c. 1990], p. 11). None the less, he holds on to the class interest of white workers as a key to how “the contradiction can be transformed” (Ibid., p. 6). As a guide for white organizers, Sakai’s formulation leads to “an elitist or perhaps defeatist view that dismisses the possibility of organizing significant numbers of white people particularly working class whites” (Ibid., pp. 5-6). Instead, Gilbert endorses Ignatin and Allen’s anti-essentialist argument that “A system of white supremacy [which] was historically constructed can be historically deconstructed” (Ibid., p. 23), but his replacement of Ignatin and Allen’s original “dissolved” with “deconstructed” is quite a telling recognition of the differences between his white anti-racist project and Ignatin and Allen’s ‘repudiation’. Whereas ‘dissolution’ seeks to destroy the ‘white working class’ as a social element, ‘deconstruction’ connotes a project of rearticulation.

In his unpublished response, Ignatin also reasserted the importance of class interest to organizing white people against racism, but did so in a much more nuanced, transectional, fashion than Allen which reflected the emergent intersectional turn. He rejected Boggs and Sakai’s arguments that ‘white-skin privileges’ change the class position of white workers, but intersectionally adapted Allen’s argument that fighting ‘white supremacy’ is in the ‘day-to-day

real interests' of white workers by separating 'class interests' from 'racial interests': Regardless of "however many [white workers] escaped the laboring class, and whatever their racial interests, the class interests of the laborers of European origin and descent were identical to those of all other proletarians, and remain so to this day" (Ignatin, c. 1990, p. 2). Ignatin's separation of 'class interests' and 'racial interests' here is a key development in his thought which demonstrates the importance of Gramscian post-structuralism and Black feminist intersectionality in overcoming the 'necessary correspondence' of all social relations to class.

Both Sakai and Allen's formulations adhere to an explicit Marxist-Leninist framework which explains all social antagonism in terms of class, but they come to radically opposed conclusions about the 'revolutionary potential' of white workers. While Sakai's approach is explicitly anti-essentialist, marking it as different from counter-racist narratives like the Nation of Islam's Yakub myth, it results in basically the same conclusion: "i doubt it's true that the white working class, shrinking and ever less important, will ever be progressive in our lifetime...they're **backward-looking**, nostalgic, literally reactionary and recoiling from the future" (Sakai, 2002 [1992], p. 29, emphasis original). Sakai's focus on the very strong tendential force articulating white workers to 'white supremacy' leads him to conflate the two. Allen, on the other hand, understands 'white skin privilege' as a system which prevents the development of a mass movement of workers against capitalism, but conflates this antagonism with the notion that white workers are [also] oppressed by racism. By detaching racial oppression from 'necessary class belonging', Critical Race Theory and Black feminist intersectionality provides a framework to reconcile these two currents of thought. White workers benefit from 'white supremacy' on a racial axis, but they are also oppressed on a class axis, and understanding the particular intersections of these interlocking systems of superordination and subordination as they function at given moments in a given social formation is key to determining counter-hegemonic possibility.

Ignatin's separation of 'racial interests' from 'class interests' in his response to Sakai preserved class antagonism as a central force for organizing white workers against capitalism, but tended toward an approach closer to 'transsectional empathy' than 'common interests'. The separation helped to bring clarity to his statement in the introduction of STO's 1976 reprint of White Blindspot that white workers, "like their black, brown and yellow brothers, have a 'world to win'. *But--they have more to lose than their chains; they have also to 'lose' their white-skin privileges, the perquisites that separate them from the rest of the working class, that act as the material base for the split in the ranks of labor*" (Ignatin, 1976 [1967], p. 27, emphasis original). The development of intersectional nuance significantly weakens Allen's position that 'repudiating the system of white skin privileges' is in the 'day-to-day real interests' of white workers, but perhaps places it on a more accurate and realistic basis without totally relinquishing 'class interest'.

Gilbert proposes that an interests-based argument for white workers to 'repudiate' "the more immediate relative privileges that imperialism has had to offer" (D. Gilbert, 2002 [c. 1990], p. 23) can only be made to white workers in two ways. Either it must be made alongside the offer of a tangible "revolutionary alternative" (Ibid.) or in the midst of "a situation where imperialism in crisis can't deliver ['white-skin privilege'] and...the possibility of replacing imperialism with a more humane system becomes tangible" (D. Gilbert, 2002 [c. 1990], p. 18). Both of these arguments had already been rejected by Ignatin and Allen. First, given its role as the 'keystone and mortar' of bourgeois control in the U.S., the 'system of white-skin privilege' will neither be 'taken away' nor will it 'go away' regardless of inevitable capitalist crisis. This was the core of

Ignatin and Allen's argument that white workers must actively 'repudiate' their superordinated social position. Second, offering any 'tangible revolutionary alternative' beyond the promise of a unified movement of 'all' workers would be making a sort of guarantee that white workers can co-equally share the world without making any significant sacrifices. Such a promise is tantamount to reproducing the same relation where white workers benefit from the sacrifices of people of color and would, in and of itself, constitute another 'white-skin privilege'. However, without 'revolutionary potential', the only alternative motivation for white workers to 'repudiate' their relative privilege is moralistic. They would have to take a major leap of faith. Retaining the grandiose and unsubstantiated theory that white workers will 'repudiate the white-skin privilege' based on their 'long term interests' may be functional as a recruiting tool for 'their white communist community', or serve as a mechanism to avoid acting as 'white saviors', but regardless of whether 'day-to-day real interests' interests, 'transsectional empathy', 'revolutionary alternative', capitalist crisis, or moral obligation might induce white workers to act against 'white supremacy', both Gilbert and Ignatin recognize that they are working against history.

Responding to Sakai's deeply pessimistic assessment of white workers' 'revolutionary potential', both Gilbert and Ignatin admit "that so far neither white workers nor any other sector of white society have separated themselves categorically from the entire infamy. Perhaps they never will" (Ignatin, c. 1990, p. 7). Like other white anti-racists, who find little alternative to following people of color leadership and 'working through whiteness', Gilbert recommitted himself to building a 'tangible revolutionary alternative' and expresses fatalistic hope in accepting the fact that "we have no map of what the future may bring" (D. Gilbert, 2002 [c. 1990], p. 23). Ignatin recommitted to his more autonomous formulation.

Regardless of whether the idea that white workers 'repudiating' their 'white-skin privilege' is an 'illusion' or not, Ignatin expressed that as a worker categorized as white he has no choice but to continue to work away at his own 'daunting' task, and like Ann Braden and the "the 'keep-on-pushin' types of the Southern Conference Education Fund," Ignatin and Allen would continue "exposing the poison of the privilege to the eyes of...white workers" (Ted Allen, 2011 [1967], p. 180). With tangible resignation in the face of Sakai's line of reasoning that white workers cannot contribute anything significant to the world proletarian revolution, Ignatin concludes that for "the relatively small number of European-Americans who are dedicated to the fight for a better world, and who think that revolution is necessary" there is no "better use of their time, intelligence, and energy...than the effort to crack open white society" (Ignatin, c. 1990, p. 7). In an expression of hope that commitment can overcome history and dreams of victory can overcome present privilege, Ignatin rejects Sakai's formulation in favor of "a theory that will point out the [intersectional] fissures in [whiteness], not deny [white workers'] existence" (Ibid.). He makes a choice between standpoint-based commodities and people of color leadership, rejecting Boggs and Sakai for C.L.R. James, because they perceived that to do otherwise would mean doing nothing. Theorizing the 'repudiation of white-skin privilege' as the only possible way to unify the U.S. working class and, therefore, the only worthwhile task for 'white communists', he agrees with Allen's fatalistically hopeful reflection that "God knows, our experience at repudiation is all too limited, but like a non-swimmer in deep water we have to begin to move and learn to swim by saving our lives" (Ted Allen, 1976 [1973], p. 4).

Ignatin would remain committed to exploring and expanding the class fissures in whiteness but, in doing so, he would all but abandon using his 'time, intelligence, and energy' to organize the 'masses' of white workers for a focus on militant nonconformist action by 'a determined minority' as a central element of his New Abolitionist project. In a strange RYM

rapprochement and role reversal, Gilbert's Weather path from armed struggle toward Bradenite white anti-racism and Ignatin's RYM-II path from 'mass organizing at the point of production' to militant non-conformist action were crossing. And to the extent that Ignatin abandons 'mass' organizing, he is in significant agreement with, perhaps even inspired by, Sakai's (2002 [1992]) response to Gilbert which praised 'exceptional whites'.

### **The Possibilities & Historical Realities of Exceptionality**

Sakai's formulation allows for "some good guys who were white, to be sure" (Sakai & Aguilar, 2014 [2003], p. 421), but in his experience, "these weren't folks trying to reform the white union" (Sakai, 2002 [1992], p. 29). These 'good' white people were Gilbert's 'exceptional' white people. They were not trying to rearticulate "white" to "anti-racism" or convince 'their white communities' to 'repudiate white-skin privilege'. They "wanted out, of their dead culture with its racist and repressive rules and loyalties, out of their sick nation, the whole thing. They were a small minority, of course (although still many thousands then)" (Sakai, 2002 [1992], p. 30). To the extent that these 'exceptional' white people, like Gilbert, historically pursued strategies of militant non-conformity up to, and including, armed struggle, they were, intentionally or unintentionally, "dis-united from their fellow settlers" (Sakai, 1989 [1983], p. 49) and had no real power in white labor movements which continually betrayed people of color (Ibid., p. 44-49). So, while Sakai concludes that 'repudiating white-skin privilege' is not in the interests of the 'masses' of white workers, he observes that 'some good guys who were white' objectively exist, and ultimately concludes, as the previous chapters of this text have, that the articulation of "white" to "anti-racism" is only possible in small counter-hegemonic efforts. Crucially for the development of New Abolitionism, Sakai argues these 'exceptional whites' must abandon their "delusions of maneuvering together a majority" of white people and "organize a working minority" (Sakai, 2000) which would be dedicated to getting 'out' of whiteness through 'full solidarity' with people of color liberation movements.

Sakai's celebration of 'some good guys who were white' abandons the white anti-racist project, "which [necessarily] sees aligning with the white settler majority and reform politics as the absolute necessity" (Sakai, 2000) for hegemonically rearticulating "white" to "anti-racism". It also implicitly abandons Ignatin and Allen's attachment to class interest as the primary force for producing these 'good' white people. Whereas Allen argues that "if we are to disregard the guiding principle of class interest, we may as well start with 'revolutionary' preachments to the power-elite, themselves" (Ted Allen, 2011 [1967], p. 171), Sakai theorizes that the possibility for building "small counter-currents of liberation in the overwhelmingly corrupt middle classes" are roughly equal to building them "in the white working class communities" (Sakai, 2000). The 'middle-class' and even bourgeois class positions of many Weather Underground activists seem to confirm this assertion.

Despite their different interpretations of the "Black Power" directive to 'organize their white communities', Ignatin, Allen, Gilbert and Braden all situate themselves within traditions of resistance that Ann Braden called 'the other America' [see Chapter 2]. These narratives necessarily emphasize the most militant and 'exceptional' white people in order to 'dispel the illusion of white unanimity'. Sakai's analysis, however, focused on the 'mass movement' contexts of these celebrated 'exceptional whites', arguing that small acts of militant nonconformity should not be mythologized and exaggerated as representative of the larger movements from which they emerged. Whereas John Brown may have been a 'good' white person in Sakai's formulation, he argued that

All tendencies of the Abolitionists contained not only those who defended the human rights of Afrikans, but also those who publicly or privately agreed that Afrikans must go. Gamaliel Bailey, editor of the major abolitionist journal *National Era*, promised his white readers that after slavery was ended all Afrikans would leave the U.S. The North's most prominent theologian, Rev. Horace Bushnell, wrote in 1839 that emancipation would be "one bright spot" to console Afrikans, who were "doomed to spin their brutish existence downward into extinction..." That extinction, he told his followers, was only Divine Will, and all for the good. Rev. Theodore Parker was one of the leading spokesmen of radical abolitionism, one who helped finance John Brown's uprising at Harper's Ferry, and who afterwards defended him from the pulpit. Yet even Parker believed in an all-white Amerika (Sakai, 1989 [1983], p. 30).

Sakai's focus on the larger movement contexts of such 'exceptional whites' further exposes the mismatch between militant nonconformist action and the 'mass' orientation of most 'white communist' formulations. Not only does militant nonconformist action 'isolate exceptional white people' from 'their social base' such that they are 'dis-united from their fellow settlers', but their own invented traditions celebrate this very contradiction between 'mass' projects and militant nonconformity. Moreover, while many of these 'exceptional white people' in history were from 'the working class', others were not, and a significant amount of revision is necessary to argue that all took action because they recognized 'repudiating white-skin privilege' was in their class interests. The most celebrated in Ignatin and Allen's formulation, John Brown, was more explicitly moved to action by moral [religious] concerns, and his actions were much more akin to the 'left adventurist' armed struggle of early Weather than the 'mass organizing' of the STO.

Ignatin's move away from trying to organize the 'masses' of white workers toward militant non-conformist action identified one of the key 'dilemmas' of white anti-racism—the contradiction between militant non-conformity and the 'solidarity with the white ingroup' necessary to hegemonically rearticulate "white" to "anti-racism", and his separation of 'racial interests' from 'class interests' seemed to indicate a significant shift toward emergent intersectional analysis. These adjustments to his 1967 White Blindspot formulation, along with his increasing collaboration with David Roediger, and their mutual inspiration by James Baldwin, formed the basis of a new approach to resisting racism from white subject positions which they called New Abolitionism. The next chapter will describe key ideological elements of New Abolitionism which distinguished it from Ignatin and Allen's 1967 formulation, and consider innovative New Abolitionist discursive strategies to represent their morally absolute position against 'owning' and rearticulating "white".

## CHAPTER 6

### NEW ABOLITIONISM IN THEORY: KEY IDEOLOGICAL ELEMENTS & DISCURSIVE STRATEGY

By the 1980s, large scale manufacturing in the U.S. was moving abroad and the possibilities for STO's program of 'mass' organizing at the 'point of production' had significantly diminished. "The decline of workplace struggles after 1975 led us to shift our focus to the global struggles against imperialism. As part of the shift, we became directly involved with groups fighting for the independence of Puerto Rico, against the Shah of Iran, and for the liberation of Palestine" (Ignatiev, 2010a). Ignatin continued to work in industry during these years, and "acquired the skills of a machinist and electrical repairman," but was "laid off from a steel plant" in 1984 and ended his career as an industrial worker. Around the same time that Sakai first published Settlers, Ignatiev was applying "to pursue a master's degree at Harvard in education" (Ignatiev, 2015b).<sup>20</sup>

As Ignatiev entered the academy, he became increasingly close to David Roediger. Roediger is a decade younger than Ignatiev but ran in similar political circles throughout the 1970s. He had joined the SDS chapter at Northern Illinois University as a first-year undergraduate in the fall of 1969, after "the organization had finished its national existence" (D. R. Roediger, 2017, p. 56), continued on an academic path after graduation, and developed a close relationship with Marxist-Jamesian historian George Rawick (Ibid., p. 58)<sup>21</sup>. Roediger met Ignatin "In the late 1970s" while completing his doctorate in History at Northwestern, and "Ignatin, Rawick, and I all" contributed to a 1981 "special issue" of the STO's Urgent Tasks "devoted to" C.L.R. James (Ibid., p. 58). In 1991, Roediger published The Wages of Whiteness, in 1993, Ignatiev [and John Garvey] published the first issue of Race Traitor: Journal of the New Abolitionism, and in 1994, Roediger published Towards the Abolition of Whiteness. These works defined New Abolitionism as a distinct tendency in Critical Whiteness Studies, developing Ignatin and Allen's 1967 formulation over the next decade in three key directions:

- [1] a more nuanced and intersectional approach to the 'interests' and agency of white workers,
- [2] a conceptualization that "white" is '*nothing but* [a] oppressive and [b] false' (D. R. Roediger, 1994, p. 13), and
- [3] a conceptualization that whiteness is an ideological choice.

The first sections of this chapter will describe how these three developments entered and defined Roediger and Ignatiev's work, and the remainder will analyze New Abolitionist discursive strategy.

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<sup>20</sup> He ultimately earned a Ph.D. in History of American Civilization (Ignatiev, 2010 [2002]) and his dissertation was published as How The Irish Became White (1995).

<sup>21</sup> As a professor living in Detroit in the early 1960s, Rawick had joined C.L.R. James' Facing Reality organization shortly after the split with the Boggesses over their "Black Power" direction (Ibid., p. 87), was "frequently a spokesperson for Facing Reality" (Ibid., p. 73) and even "traveled to London to work as James' personal assistant" [1963-4, 1967,68] (Ibid., p. 88).

### **Whiteness as Mutually Constitutive**

Roediger's The Wages of Whiteness precipitated a major departure from "traditional Marxist analyses of race," including Ignatin and Allen's formulation, which "concentrate on the ruling class's role in perpetuating racial oppression, and... cast white workers as dupes, even virtuous ones" (Ibid., p. 9). Instead, Roediger "takes the agency of working class people seriously" (Ibid., p. 11) and elucidates "working class 'whiteness' and white supremacy as creations, in part, of the white working class itself" (Ibid., p. 9). Like Gramscian post-structuralists, Roediger demonstrates the way in which white hegemony is mutually constitutive. The white working class is not simply "manipulated into racism" (Ibid., p. 12) in order to divide the working class, but actively invests in whiteness "to enhance their position in the labor market" (Ibid., p. 26), "embraces, adopts and, at times, murderously acts upon those ideas" in order to defend that position, and in doing so "comes to think of itself and its interests as white" (Ibid., p. 12). His historical focus on white working-class agency significantly contributed to answering one of the questions central to the Sakai-Gilbert-Ignatin debate which preceded it: "the question of why the white working class settles for being white" when their 'class interests' suggest they have a 'world to win' by uniting with workers of color (D. R. Roediger, 2000 [1991], p. 6).

While Allen, Ignatin, Sakai, and Gilbert, were all deeply influenced by W.E.B. Du Bois' Marxist-Weberian framework which "regards the decision of workers to define themselves by their whiteness as understandable in terms of short-term advantages" and demonstrated "that even when they 'received a low wage [white workers were] compensated in part by a ... public and psychological wage'" (Black Reconstruction quoted in Ibid.). Roediger's interpretation of Du Bois "not only emphasizes [the] status [of whiteness] but the extent to which [this] status was bound up with real social gains" (Ibid., p. 12). His emphasis, in this regard was, perhaps, closer to the Boggs / Sakai argument that whiteness 'lifts the white working class out of the proletariat' than Allen's interpretation of Du Bois which emphasized these "privileges" as little more than "crumbs from masters' tables... pitiable and fully worth rejecting" (D. R. Roediger, 2017). Roediger's more robust conceptualization of 'white privileges' as 'real social gains' at the expense of people of color, combined with Ignatin's separation of 'racial interests' and 'class interests', further aligned New Abolitionism at its emergence with intersectional Critical Race Theory without conflating race and class like Boggs and Sakai, nor relinquishing an ultimately transectional class-centered analysis which viewed whiteness as a block to coalition with "Black Power" against capitalism.

### **James Baldwin & the Choice to 'Abolish' Whiteness**

Roediger and Ignatiev's study of James Baldwin also brought significant clarity to underdeveloped aspects of Ignatin and Allen's 1967 formulation, particularly its approach to the sign "white". Like Du Bois, Carmichael & Hamilton, Allen, Ignatin, and Gilbert, Baldwin conceptualized 'white supremacy' as the primary contradiction preventing a 'unified' struggle of 'all' workers against capitalism in the U.S. In On Being White and Other Lies (1984) he argued that "There has never been a labor movement in this country" because "blacks have no power in the labor unions" and because white workers are attached to "a totally false identity" (p. 92). Baldwin's focus on 'white identity' itself, however, was a significant departure from projects which seek to rearticulate "white" to "anti-racism". Baldwin argued that "white" is not only 'a totally false identity' but, as a signifier of people, wholly determined by its oppressive function: "it is the Black condition, and only that, which informs us concerning white people. It is a terrible paradox, but those who believed that they could control and define Black people divested



themselves of the power to control and define themselves” (Ibid.). In Baldwin’s formulation, like Vološinov’s ‘field specific sign’, “white” was created for, and ‘inseparable’ from, the ‘specific ideological function’ of racial oppression and cannot, therefore, be rearticulated to ‘anti-racism’.

Baldwin’s clear and forceful reification of “white” was accompanied by a call on white people to disidentify from whiteness. Speaking at a SNCC-organized Freedom Day in Selma, Alabama on October 7, 1963, for example, Baldwin told his audience that “A white man is a white man only if he says he is—but you haven’t got to be white” (quoted in Zinn, 2002 [1964], p. 186). In his introduction to The Price of the Ticket (1985), he argued that “white people are not white; part of the price of the ticket is to delude themselves into believing that they are” (p. xiv). Baldwin conceptualized whiteness as ideology, not an identity, and people ‘who think they are white’ have a choice to keep ‘thinking’ and ‘being’ white or ‘think’ and ‘act’ their way out of whiteness. His formulation was perhaps most forcefully communicated in the posthumous documentary James Baldwin: The Price of the Ticket (1989), with a critique of the problematic relationality reproduced by white anti-racism—“As long as you think you’re white, I’m going to be forced to think I’m black”—and a condemnation of their rearticulatory project—“As long as you think you’re white, there’s no hope for you” (quoted in Thorsen, 1989).

Like Baldwin’s formulation, Ignatin and Allen’s Marxist-Leninist formulation for ‘repudiating white-skin privileges’ tended more toward disidentification than white anti-racist rearticulation, but its use of a ‘white communist’ “we” and white anti-racist juxtapositions like “white supremacy” and “white-skin privileges” somewhat obscured these important differences. Roediger’s eloquent interpretation of Baldwin in his claim that whiteness [the state and ideology of being white] is ‘*nothing but* oppressive and false’, along with Baldwin’s claim that ‘you haven’t got to be white’, formed the basis of a ground-breaking discursive strategy which more clearly distinguished New Abolitionism from white anti-racism. And together with Roediger’s more nuanced and intersectional approach to whiteness as mutually constitutive, and Ignatin’s shift from ‘mass’ organizing to militant nonconformist action, ‘starting from’ Baldwin’s formulation provided a much clearer “approach toward strategy which is manifested in the choice of slogans” (Ignatin, 1976b), particularly the slogans of Race Traitor which largely defined the new project—“Abolish the White Race: By Any Means Necessary”—and its program—“Treason to whiteness is loyalty to humanity.”

### **‘Race Traitor: The Journal of the New Abolitionism’**

The first editorial of Race Traitor, titled “Abolish the White Race: By Any Means Necessary” (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1993c), reflected many of Roediger and Ignatiev’s departures from Ignatin and Allen’s 1967 formulation: it fully reified whiteness as ‘*nothing but* oppressive and false’, focused on whiteness as a choice and the agency of white people in making that choice, and revises the assertion that white workers are ‘oppressed’ by whiteness to one more in line with intersectional standpoint theory’s contention that they are ‘dehumanized’.

First, Ignatiev & Garvey replace “the system of white-skin privilege” or “white supremacy” with the concept of the “white race” itself. Allen’s (1976 [1973]) statement that the “key to bourgeois domination in this country is white supremacy” is repackaged in the first editorial of Race Traitor as “The key to solving the social problems of our age is to abolish the white race” (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1993c, p. 1).

Second, Ignatiev & Garvey shift their focus from whiteness as a bourgeois ‘invention’ to the agency of average white people pursuing their ‘material and spiritual’ interests within intersecting systems of oppression. Whereas Allen (1976 [1973]) argued that “The principal

aspect of opportunism in the US working class movement is...the acquiescence of white workers in the system of white skin privileges imposed by the bourgeoisie,” Ignatiev & Garvey now argued that “The existence of the white race depends on the willingness of those assigned to it to place their racial interests above class, gender or any other interests they hold” (p. 2).

Third, like intersectional Critical Race Theory, Ignatin & Garvey now recognized the ways in which whiteness superordinates all white people: “The white race consists of those who partake of the privileges of the white skin in this society. Its most wretched members share a status higher, in certain respects, than that of the most exalted persons excluded from it, in return for which they give their support to the system that degrades them” (p. 1). Moreover, while in Ignatin and Allen’s formulation the ‘system of white-skin privilege’ oppresses white workers in ‘day-to-day real’ terms because it prevents them from fighting their oppression by capitalism, white people are now described as ‘degraded’, which seems to be more in line with Baldwin’s contention that white people have ‘divested themselves of the power to control and define themselves’, or standpoint theory recognition that superordinated classes may be “dehumanized” by given systems of oppression (Freire, 2009 [1970], p. 47) and “share...the reification of every aspect of its life” (Lukács, 1971 [1923], p. 149), but they are not oppressed by those systems, and therefore cannot develop the requisite standpoint “to lead this struggle” (Freire, 2009 [1970], p. 47).

These key departures from Ignatin and Allen’s formulation allowed Ignatiev & Garvey to more clearly define New Abolitionism as “distinct from what is called 'anti-racism'” which they astutely recognized “admits the natural existence of 'races' even while opposing social distinctions among them” (p. 1). Because they conceptualized “white” as ‘*nothing but* oppressive and false’, they argued that “so long as the white race exists, all movements against racism are doomed to fail” (pp. 1-2) and committed themselves to its ‘abolition’.

In terms of putting the ‘abolition of whiteness’ into practice, Ignatiev & Garvey theorized “The white race [as] a club, which enrolls certain people at birth” (p. 1), and argued that “The defection of enough of its members” will “make [the white race] unreliable as a determinant of behavior” and “set off tremors that will lead to its collapse” (p. 2). Race Traitor’s approach was very similar to Ignatin and Allen’s ‘repudiation of white-skin privilege’, but had two key differences from Ignatin’s RYMII-STO interpretation: it was adapted toward an increasingly service-based, rather than industrial, economy, and it embraced individual and ‘minority’, rather than ‘mass’, action. Whereas the STO’s Insurgent Worker celebrated when ‘the majority of white workers supported the action and joined the walkout’ and Ignatin (1976b) argued that “mass action is the decisive aspect” in ‘repudiating white-skin privilege’, Race Traitor celebrated ‘defection’ through non-conformist acts by individuals and / or a “determined minority” (Ignatiev, 1997 [1994]-b, p. 611) across a broader social spectrum not explicitly defined by class. This proposed militant non-conformist strategy ‘to make the white race unreliable as a determinant of behavior’ was very similar to the WUO “promising outlaws in every dorm room and commune, proclaiming that white skin didn't buy complicity” (Berger, 2006, p. 274), but this connection was not made, and the first editorial deferred more substantive discussion about what constitutes “Treason to whiteness” and “loyalty to humanity” to the future work of the journal. I will discuss and critique the New Abolitionist proposed strategy of ‘treason to whiteness’ at greater length in Chapter 7 and their conceptualization of ‘loyalty to humanity’ in Chapter 9.

## **The New Abolitionist ‘Movement’**

Race Traitor was imagined “as an intellectual center for those seeking to abolish the white race. It will encourage dissent from the conformity that maintains it and popularize examples of defection from its ranks, analyze the forces that hold it together and those which promise to tear it apart” (p. 2). Ignatiev & Garvey published sixteen issues between 1993 and 2005, with the hope that the journal would inspire a movement to ‘abolish whiteness’. During its early years, this ‘movement’ was built by adding ‘contributing editors’ to the journal’s editorial board, two student organizations formed around ‘the abolition of whiteness’,<sup>22</sup> and in the first weekend of May 1997 the editors held a conference in New York City entitled “Building a New Abolitionist Movement: A Race Traitor Conference” (Race Traitor #6, Spring 1997, p. 96). The conference was attended by “About 200 people...mostly from the northeast” (Ignatiev, Garvey, & Henson, 1999, p. 114) and resulted in the formation of The New Abolitionist Society [NAS] with ‘chapters’ in seven cities: Boston,<sup>23</sup> Chicago,<sup>24</sup> Los Angeles,<sup>25</sup> New York,<sup>26</sup> Phoenix,<sup>27</sup> Tulsa<sup>28</sup>, and Washington D.C.<sup>29</sup> The NAS continued work to develop a functioning New Abolitionist practice and published a newsletter, The New Abolitionist, from 1998 to 2000. The main activities of the NAS seem to have been selling copies of Race Traitor and The New Abolitionist, as well as organizing commemorations of John Brown. The content of the newsletter was basically indistinguishable from the journal except that it had two different editors, Chris Niles and Joel Olson.

At decade’s end, Ignatiev (1999 [1998]) observed that “‘white studies’ has become an academic industry. Scarcely a week goes by that does not see a new book on ‘the construction of whiteness.’ There are at least five college Readers on the subject [and] At least three universities have sponsored conferences on whiteness” (p. 3).<sup>30</sup> The provocative New Abolitionist slogans gained far-reaching attention amidst the fad of ‘white studies,’ New Abolitionism distinguished itself as an alternative approach to white anti-racism in both academic and social movement circles, and the editors of Race Traitor continued to leverage interest in their ideas toward building New Abolitionist organizations, but the project never managed to move much beyond the work of a small group of people. David Roediger was never formally involved in the publication of Race Traitor nor the NAS, but he adopted the New Abolitionist project in his own work and published six pieces in the journal during its existence (1993, 1995; 1998a, 1998b; 2000, 2001).

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<sup>22</sup> Students for the Abolition of Whiteness [SAW] at the University of Chicago (Kelley, Schuwerk, Krishnamurthy, & Kao, 1997), and New Abolitionist Students [NAS] at the University of Texas (Garza, 1997).

<sup>23</sup> Ignatiev & Beth Henson.

<sup>24</sup> Kingsley Clarke.

<sup>25</sup> Rob Schuwerk & James Kao, formerly of SAW.

<sup>26</sup> John Garvey.

<sup>27</sup> Joel Olson, and his Phoenix Copwatch / Bring the Ruckus Collective.

<sup>28</sup> James Murray and Lee Roy Chapman.

<sup>29</sup> Chris Niles.

<sup>30</sup> Conferences included “Then What Is White?: A Discussion of Racial Identity in the United States” at the University of California at Riverside [February, 1998] (D. R. Roediger, 2002, p. viii), and “Most strikingly, the April 1997 ‘Making and Unmaking of Whiteness’ conference [organized by the Department of Comparative Ethnic Studies] at the [University of California at Berkeley [which] drew extensive national and international press coverage” (Ibid., p. 19).

Having introduced and explained these key ‘New Abolitionist’ developments to Ignatiev and Allen’s 1967 formulation by Roediger, Ignatiev & Garvey, the remainder of this chapter will describe, critique, and propose additions to, innovative discursive strategies developed to represent the New Abolitionist project and to clarify those strategies which will govern the remainder of this text.

## NEW ABOLITIONIST DISCURSIVE STRATEGY

As discussed in Chapter 2, white anti-racists conceptualize "white" as both inalienable and rearticulatable. Perceiving no alternative to ‘working through whiteness’, their project is to build upon meanings of "white" which are ostensibly ‘non- or anti-racist’ for the purposes of hegemonically rearticulating "white" to "anti-racism". White anti-racist discursive strategy contends with liberal color-blindness through ‘anti-racist’ color-consciousness, inhabiting white subjectivity to repolarize "white" and create a ‘positive’ white identity capable of producing effective ‘allies’ to people of color liberation movements. In contrast, New Abolitionists, following Baldwin, conceptualize "white" as neither inalienable nor rearticulatable. New Abolitionist discursive strategy completely embraces the ‘negative’ definition of "white" in people of color’s counter-hegemonic logic and reifies all of its ‘many meanings’ as ‘*nothing but false and oppressive*’ in preparation for the abolition of the ideology and the social relations it structures. Whereas white anti-racists take an anti-essentialist approach to the sign "white" itself, New Abolitionists take an anti-essentialist approach to bodies categorized as white, and work to disarticulate those bodies from whiteness. If “The white race is a historically constructed social formation” (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1993c, p. 1), developed for the sole purpose of racial domination, then, in their logic, the “next step” (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1994b, p. 108) is not to reform "white" but to ‘abolish’ it.

The challenges of language in representing and discussing this entirely different approach to ‘the white problem’—one which has no historical or material basis—were both extremely difficult and highly productive. In contrast to white anti-racist discourse which uses juxtaposition to rearticulate "white", New Abolitionist discourse, at its best, isolates and problematizes "white" in preparation for its abolition. This strategy generally involves three basic steps:

- [1] Critical denaturalization of the sign "white" by either placing the sign in ‘scare quotes’ [hard double quotation marks; "white"] (Ignatiev, 1993b; Ignatiev, Garvey, Henson, & Sabra, 1997), or prefixing the sign with a phrase calling it into question like “so-called white” (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1993c, p. 4).
- [2] Disarticulation of subjects and social elements from the sign "white" through additional prefixes such as “those who think of themselves as white” (Baldwin, 1984, p. 92), “people commonly called whites” (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1993c, p. 5), “workers who identify themselves as white” (D. R. Roediger, 1994, p. 13), “someone who is nominally classified as white” (Ignatiev, 1997 [1994]-b, p. 607), “people who are categorized as white” (D. R. Roediger, 2000, p. 186), or “those people who are tempted to identify as white” (D. R. Roediger, 2002, p. 17).
- [3] Define those working to ‘abolish the white race’ as "race traitors".

The remainder of this chapter will consider the strengths and consequences of these three primary steps of New Abolitionist discursive strategy as well as problematic and contradictory departures from them which have undermined and confused understanding of this representational regime.

### **Denaturalizing & Problematizing "White"**

The use of “scare quotes” to displace certain signs or phrases from the text is a popular form of what Jaques Derrida called *sous rature* [under erasure] (Bevir, 2000). The purpose of this device is to problematize those signs necessary for making a point while at the same time “[making] room for 'the irruptive emergence of a new <concept,> a concept which no longer allows itself to be understood in terms of the previous regime” (Derrida quoted by Spivak, 1997 [1976], p. lxxvii). New Abolitionists use ‘scare quotes’ and prefixes to isolate "white" from surrounding text in order to ‘make room’ for the emergence of the "race traitor" as a ‘new concept’ which no longer allows itself to be understood in terms of the previous hegemonic and counter-hegemonic regimes. But while the editors of Race Traitor frequently employed the use of ‘scare quotes’ and prefixes to problematize and disarticulate "white" from subjects and elements, they were by no means consistent. Such inconsistencies reveal a lack of clarity and agreement about how to represent ‘the abolition of whiteness’, failures in maintaining their morally absolute position against reproducing "white", and compromises with white anti-racism and liberal color-blind ‘common senses’.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Many editorials and editorial responses in the journal used various forms of the sign—“white” (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1993d, 1996a, 1996c), and “whites” (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1996a, 1996e, 1996f)—without placing it in ‘scare quotes’ or adding the prefix ‘so-called’. Other editorials switch between marked and unmarked forms of the sign without any discernable rational (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1995b, 1996b). In their individual writings, Ignatiev switches between marked and unmarked uses of the sign, sometimes in the same article (see, for example, Ignatiev, 1993b), while Garvey never marked “white” (Garvey, 1993b, 1994, 1995) or “whites” (Garvey, 1993a, 1994) with either ‘scare quotes’ or the prefix ‘so-called’, but on one occasion he used the prefix “people who appear to be of African descent” (Garvey, 2000). To make matters more confusing, ‘negative’ and ‘positive’ white anti-racist juxtapositions also sometimes appeared in their texts— “white supremacy” is frequently used as a cognate of Ignatin and Allen’s ‘system of white skin privileges’ or the journal’s ‘white race’ (Ignatiev, 1996; Ignatiev & Garvey, 1993a, 1994b), and other white anti-racist juxtapositions like “white supremacist” (Ignatiev, 1994; Ignatiev & Garvey, 1996a, 1996c) and even “white allies” (Garvey, 1994, p. 53) appear from time to time.

In his own writing, Roediger uses ‘scare quotes’ and prefixes to mark the sign "white" very sparingly (D. Roediger, 1998a, p. 32; D. R. Roediger, 1994, p. 13; 1998, p. 24; 2000, p. 186). The unmarked versions of “white” and “whites” are far more common. And while Roediger coined the term "whiteness" as a replacement for Ignatin and Allen’s ‘system of white-skin privilege,’ and uses it frequently, he also occasionally uses “white privilege” (D. R. Roediger, 2002, p. 240), “white supremacy” (D. R. Roediger, 1994, p. 9; 2002, p. 231; 2017, p. 1), and even “white racism” (D. Roediger, 1993, p. 104) to signify that same system, as well as “racial justice” (D. R. Roediger, 2002, p. 213) to signify its reverse. The creep of these terms back into New Abolitionist discourse clearly marks compromise with white anti-racism. Such compromise is perhaps most evident in a joint call (Banks et al., 1999) for a commemoration of John Brown’s birthday: “If the task of the nineteenth century was to overthrow slavery, and the

While language was obviously a primary concern of the journal from its first editorial, inconsistencies in representing New Abolitionist ideas were not explicitly addressed until Chris Niles (1999b), one of the editors of The New Abolitionist, made an attempt to establish a style-sheet.<sup>32</sup>

At the *New Abolitionist*, we do not believe that the language of anti-racism is adequate to the politics of abolitionism, not to mention securing the deepest understanding possible of the political, social and economic history of race. So, we've developed some new language (p. 4).

Niles built from Ignatiev's rejection of the term "anti-racism" in the first editorial of Race Traitor<sup>33</sup> to additionally problematize related

wacky misleading constructs, e.g. "white racism," (implying that Black people can be racist, too, thereby missing the whole point of race), "reverse-racism" (implying that Black people's nasty attitudes towards whites is equivalent to white people's nasty attitudes toward Blacks), or "in-house racism" (implying that people who are racially assigned as black can be racist to one another) (Ibid.).

But rather than identifying the white anti-racist discursive strategy by its repolarization of "white" through 'negative' and 'positive' juxtaposition as I have in Chapter 2, Niles, like Ignatiev, focused in on the terms "racism" and "anti-racism".

Using the Merriam-Webster Dictionary definition which defines "racism" as "a belief that some races are by nature superior to others; discrimination based on such a belief" (quoted in Ibid.), Niles argued that "this definition of racism clearly assumes that there are such things as biologically identifiable races" (Ibid, p. 3). His acceptance of this definition is a bit lazy since a better etymological definition would recognize that the suffix "-ism" refers to a practice, system, or most specifically, an ideology. In this sense, "racism"—defined as an ideology and system of 'races' developed around the superordination of white people and domination of people of color—closely corresponds to the New Abolitionist consensus that whiteness is only 'oppressive and false'. But the more popular definition of "racism" as 'discrimination based on race' is better suited to Niles' purpose in the article.

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task of the twentieth century was to end legal segregation, the key to solving this country's problems in the twenty-first century is to abolish the white race as a social category—in other words, eradicate white supremacy entirely." The appended 'translation' at the end communicates equivalence between the New Abolitionist project and the white anti-racist project, undermining the morally absolute stance of New Abolitionism rather than clarifying it.

<sup>32</sup> The semi-editorial was not co-signed by his fellow editor, Joel Olson, nor the editorial board which included the editors of Race Traitor, but was none the less written in the first person plural.

<sup>33</sup> "The term 'racism' has come to be applied to a variety of attitudes, some of which are mutually incompatible, and has been devalued to mean little more than a tendency to dislike some people for the color of their skin. Moreover, anti-racism admits the natural existence of 'races' even while opposing social distinctions among them" (p. 1).

Instead of "racism" which popularly assumes the natural existence of "races", Niles proposes that New Abolitionists "use the term "whiteism" (first coined by Malcolm X)" (Ibid.),<sup>34</sup> and "instead of characterizing white people or their politics and behavior as 'racist'," he proposes "the politics and behavior of white people" should be represented "as 'whitist,' prowhite, anti-Black, etc." (Ibid., p. 4). Finally, he proposes that "this nation (and other nations where white rule is more or less central to the nations [sic] political and social economy)" should be represented "as a 'whiteocracy' or, alternately, a 'white democracy'" (Ibid.). In the text published by The New Abolitionist which followed, Niles' proposed regime was implemented fairly consistently.<sup>35</sup> But Niles' concerns about the limitations of 'anti-racist' language did not extend further. The white anti-racist juxtaposition "white privilege" appeared unproblematic in two subsequent articles (Garvey, 1999a; Reynolds, 1999), and the editors struggled with how to represent extreme and explicit advocates for 'the white race'. In one report, the editors refer to a "white power devotee" with "white supremacist views" (Niles & Olson, 1999c), and in another, a member of the editorial board also used the juxtaposition "white-supremacist" to describe explicit white nationalism / neo-nazism (Chapman, 1999). Both "white power devotee" and "white supremacist" are white anti-racist juxtapositions which communicate that the normative white subject is not devoted to 'white power' and that "white" is not inherently supremacist.

At roughly the same time that Niles outlined his style sheet for The New Abolitionist, Ignatiev (1999 [1998]) made a further breakthrough in displacing "white" when he identified white anti-racism and New Abolition as "two camps" with "differing tendencies" which he labeled "the preservationists and the abolitionists" (p. 3). Ignatiev described the "preservationists" as those who "seek to identify and preserve a white identity apart from white supremacy and racial oppression" (Ibid.).<sup>36</sup> The 'preservationist' categorization allowed Ignatiev to demonstrate the collaboration of white anti-racism with "the white power camp" in the "dangerous game" of developing "white ethnicity and white pride" (Ibid.). He recognizes that, in contrast, "We abolitionists have no such problem, since we are proudly anti-white" (Ibid., p. 5). This distinction between "preservationists" and "anti-whiteists" which allowed Ignatiev to re-establish and clarify the morally absolute position of New Abolitionists was made possible through Winant's own (2004 [1997]) clarification of the white anti-racist project through an attack on New Abolitionism.

In opposing New Abolitionism and clarifying white anti-racism, Winant uses 'scare quotes' to isolate the monolithically negative New Abolitionist "'whiteness'" (Ibid., p. 65) from

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<sup>34</sup> Niles' proposal to use of El-Shabazz's "whiteism" is likely developed from Roediger's (1998) praise for the term.

<sup>35</sup> Although the conjunction "whiteocracy" was never used again, the title of his co-editor Joel Olson's subsequent book was The Abolition of White Democracy (2004). Olson did use "whitist" as part of his article in the same issue (Olson, 1999), two of Olson's Phoenix Copwatch comrades referred to "institutional whiteism" (Villalobos & Brannon, 2000), another contributor from Oakland used "whitism" [without the 'e'] (L. Johnson, 1999), and the editorial board used both "whiteism" and the scare quotes version of "'racist'" in one statement (Chapman et al., 2000). A notable exception to this consistency was Derrick Bell (1999), co-founder of Critical Race Theory, who used "racist" normatively in his submission.

<sup>36</sup> Although the white anti-racist juxtaposition "white supremacy" is used in this same statement, and is itself juxtaposed to "racial oppression" as if the two were somehow different, in the context of his rejection of all forms of 'preservationism', the underlying meaning in his use of these juxtapositions as cognates of 'the white race' is revealed.

his text to make room for his idea that there are many ‘whitenesses’ and endorse a counter-hegemonic project of rearticulating "white" to "anti-racism". Winant acknowledges that the white anti-racist project of “rearticulation (or reinterpretation, or deconstruction)” is “daunting,” but argues that “it is not nearly as impossible as erasing whiteness altogether” (p. 65). In Winant’s formulation, the fracturing of Jim Crow whiteness “in the messy present” (Ibid.), across a variety of political projects in contention with each other, demonstrates “that racial identities are not either-or matters, not closed concepts that must be upheld in a reactionary fashion or disavowed in a comprehensive act of renunciation” (p. 68). The ‘openness’ of a fractured "white", he contends, allows the practical “process of reformulating, or synthesizing, a progressive approach to whiteness” to “begin easily” (p. 65). Winant’s clear argument for “rearticulation” over “repudiation” allowed Ignatiev to further clarify his New Abolitionist approach to "whiteness" as monolithically negative—from the most explicit and extreme advocates of white nationalism to committed white anti-racists—by arguing that Winant’s proposal “to rearticulate whiteness” was tantamount to one that would seek “to 'rearticulate' rape or child abuse” (Ignatiev, 1999 [1998], p. 7). The equivalency Ignatiev draws between racism, child abuse, and rape, to make his point is problematic in a number of ways, but it clearly communicates the morally absolute position of New Abolitionism against the white anti-racist project of rearticulation.

### **Problematic Resignifications & Designifications: "Europeans", "Fair Complexions" & Default Humanity**

Attempting to further disarticulate ‘so-called whites’ from the sign "white", New Abolitionists also sometimes problematically resignified them with the broad ‘historical’ category of “European”, or by the Physiological category of “people [with / of] fair [skin / complexion]” (Ignatiev, 1996, 2015 [2010]; Ignatiev & Garvey, 1993b). Both of these resignifications, like the journal’s use of "white supremacy" and "white-skin privilege", carried over from Ignatin and Allen’s 1967 formulation and ultimately became so problematic within the New Abolitionist regime that they were largely, but not totally, abandoned.

"European": While Allen continued to favor “European-American” (Ted Allen, 1993), the attempt to resignify ‘so-called whites’ as "European" was immediately rejected in Race Traitor’s first editorial on the grounds that the social element called white “is not coextensive with that portion of the population of European descent, since many of those classified as 'colored' can trace some of their ancestry to Europe, while African, Asian, or American Indian blood flows through the veins of many considered white” (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1993c, p. 1). Despite this clear rejection, however, “European American” (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1996e, p. 81), and “European Americans” (Ignatiev, 1997a, p. 200; Ignatiev & Garvey, 1996b, p. 42) occasionally crept back into their text without justification. Ignatiev (1999 [1998]) again rejected the resignification ““Euro-American" rather than "white," as some people in the academy, as well as some in the white power movement, are doing” (p. 2). This second rejection, on the basis that the "Euro-American" resignification project colludes with both liberal color-blind and explicit forms of white nationalism, is very different than their initial rejection which took a genealogical and physiological approach of ‘blood’ and ‘descent’. Ignatiev’s second rejection is more in agreement with Chapter 2 of this text which argues that the resignification of "white" as "European" reinscribes the same relations of domination because the two concepts are essentially coterminous in the earliest conceptualizations of whiteness under scientific racism and that such resignification does not in any way disrupt racial logic [see also Chapter 10].



"Skin": New Abolitionists have been particularly rankled by the white anti-racist juxtaposition "white privilege" because it pokes at a sore spot in the development of New Abolitionism from Ignatin and Allen's 1967 formulation. On the one hand, they claim that Ignatin and Allen coined the term, and on the other they lament the loss of control over its "popular meaning" to "non-Marxist variants" (D. R. Roediger, 2017, pp. 20-21).<sup>37</sup> Ignatin and Allen's original formulation "white-skin privilege" was a double white anti-racist juxtaposition. Not only does it indicate that there could be other 'skin privileges', but it also links whiteness—an ideology / social construction with no basis in biology—to the surface of bodies categorized as white, conceding a Physiological basis to the ideology of whiteness. In this double juxtaposition, Ignatin and Allen were, in some sense, reproducing the whole scientific racist project of the body as "legible text" (Somerville, 2000, p. 23). To the extent that the 'negative' white anti-racist juxtaposition "white privilege" originates in Ignatin and Allen's "white-skin privilege", clearly the intense naturalization of "white-skin" was even too much for the white anti-racists who ultimately took it up, but Ignatiev, in particular, remained somewhat attached to the 'skin'.<sup>38</sup>

These divers and contradictory efforts to resignify the mass of 'so-called whites' were another 'inadequacy in anti-racist language' recognized by Chris Niles in The New Abolitionist. His proposal to resolve them was quite simple and returns to the basic element of New Abolitionist discursive strategy which totally embraces negative meanings of "white" in the counter-hegemonic logic of people of color. In order to remove any ground for "white" to have genealogical, historical, or physiological bases, Niles proposes to "identify white people as simply "white"—a slanderous-enough term, we think" (p. 4). Combined with Roediger's preferred term "whiteness" to refer to the state of being white, Niles' proposal rejects any attempts to resignify "white", focusing New Abolitionist discursive strategy on committing 'treason' around the margins of the sign with 'scare quotes' and prefixes to make room for the

<sup>37</sup> "White-skin privilege" was an adaptation of Marx's own words in Capital, written at the height of scientific racism in the nineteenth century: "Labour cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black it is branded" (Marx, 1887 [1867], p. 287).

<sup>38</sup> Bridging Ignatin and Allen's formulation with the New Abolitionist project, the first editorial of Race Traitor defined "the white race" as "those who partake of the privileges of the white skin" (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1993c, p. 1). In its second issue, the editors responded to panicked correspondence with the reassurance that "people of fair skin etc. are human beings like anyone else" (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1993b), and Ignatiev (1996) gave a similar assurance to the spokesperson of the National Socialist White People's Party that he did not "wish to exterminate people of fair complexion, straight hair, etc." (p. 28). The cover art on that issue (No. 5) was an illustrated bottle of sun protection factor 50 branded "Save The White Race," further connecting biological lack of melanin to the state of being white. Moreover, appearing underneath the bold-face title of the journal, the image suggested that getting a sun tan [or burn] was a form of 'race treason'. In the closing years of Race Traitor, Ignatiev gave an interview in which he spoke of "[doing] away with the social meaning of the white skin" (Ignatiev, 2010 [2002]), and after Race Traitor, he argued that the 'white race' was a state project which "attached meaning to skin color," making "dark skin...the badge of slavery" and giving privileges to those with "fair skin" (Ignatiev, 2015 [2010]) and the physiological language was also repeated in the first editorial of his new publication, Hard Crackers, where he again wrote that the mission of Race Traitor "was to abolish the white race, that is, to do away with the privileges (and burdens) of the white skin" (Ignatiev, 2016a).

‘new concept’. In subsequent issues, the articles published by The New Abolitionist were fairly consistent in referring to white people as simply “white” (Garvey, 1999b; Ignatiev, 1999b; Reynolds, 1999).<sup>39</sup>

But while this simple use of the sign seemed to dissuade any attempts to resignify ‘so-called white’ people as “Europeans” or “people with fair skin”, it also seemed to encourage a very troubling increase in instances of de-racializing white subjects altogether. For example, a report from Olson’s Phoenix Copwatch clearly marks police action against “Chicanos” but documents other incidents involving racially unmarked “drivers” (Niles & Olson, 2000b). These ‘drivers’ were obviously ‘so-called whites’, but the New Abolitionist hesitation to articulate their bodies to “white” leads to a momentary, but complete, alignment with liberal color-blindness in the report which makes “white” the unspoken norm. Garvey (2000) commits the same grave sin when he criticizes the denial of taxi service to “people who appear to be of African descent” by contrasting ‘their’ experience to “Other people—those in wheelchairs, those with baby strollers, those with their furniture piled up on the sidewalk” who are “refused often enough” but for whom it is “not a routine matter.” In making this comparison, Garvey deletes the experiences of Black dis/abled people, parents, and those moving, making “white” the invisible norm for these experiences. In another article, editorial board member Beth Henson (1999) tells a strangely ‘color-blind’ story in “American Tragedy Revisited” with little discernable purpose. But such de-racialization is perhaps most glaringly on display in the editorial board’s response to the Columbine High School massacre in which they reference “an interview with the father of the Black kid who was shot and the brother of a girl who had also been killed” (K. Clarke et al., 1999a). In contrast to the “kid” and “father” who are marked as “Black”, the “brother” and the “girl” are not racially marked. This is a perfect situation for the use of a ‘scare quotes’ or a prefixed representation of “white”, but the presence of “Black” and the absence of “white” in this instance serves to displace full humanity from Black bodies and confer it, in a powerful invisible fashion, to bodies categorized as white.

Serious lapses aside, the refusal to rearticulate the sign in Niles’ formulation represents the primary distinction between white anti-racism and New Abolition. The displacement of the sign with prefixes and ‘scare quotes’ decidedly moves the New Abolitionist project away from rearticulating and resignifying “white” and toward ‘treason’ on its margins. Together, these best practices in discursive strategy ‘make room for the irruptive emergence of a new concept which no longer allows itself to be understood in terms of the previous regime’, which New Abolitionists signify as “race treason”.

### **‘Race Treason:’ A Placeholder**

Whereas the “white” in white anti-racism is conceptualized as necessary to signify positional consciousness and to build an alternative ‘non- or anti-racist’ whiteness to hegemonically eclipse ‘white supremacy’, New Abolitionists conceptualize “race treason” as a provisional position only necessary so long as the ‘white race’ exists; only useful in signifying the task of “race treason” itself and inevitably archaic once the ‘white race’ has been ‘abolished’. “Race treason” is, therefore, a place holder to mark the threshold between whiteness and non- or post-whiteness,

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<sup>39</sup> Notable exceptions include Garvey’s (1999a) use of a softer and more humanizing “white folk,” Niles’ (1999a) reference to “anyone with fair skin and European ancestry,” and a contributor who identified as a “European South African” and alternated between “European-Americans,” “so-called whites,” and “People with white skins” (L. Johnson, 1999).

between the ‘so-called white’ and the ‘new concept’ which will ‘abolish the white race’. Finding this threshold, the set of values and practices which signify a successful path to ‘dissolving’ or ‘breaking up’ the ‘white race’, represents the entirety of the New Abolitionist task. But having come to the conclusion that rearticulating "white" to "anti-racism" is ‘doomed to fail’, and despite the very bold and confident language of their first editorial, Ignatiev & Garvey’s ideas about how to ‘abolish the white race’ were quite rudimentary.

In order to recruit help for defining "race treason" in theory and practice, *Race Traitor* was imagined as a forum where "New Abolitionists" could learn to “speak treason...fluently” (The Adventures of Robin Hood [1938] quoted in Ignatiev & Garvey, 1993c, p. 8). But the discussion they curated in the journal was so contradictory to their own principles, including many articles which promoted white anti-racism, Ignatiev & Garvey felt compelled to add a “note” in Issue #3 (Summer, 1994), stating that “The editors publish things in *Race Traitor* because they think that publishing them will help build a community of readers. Their own opinions are expressed in editorials and unsigned replies to letters” (p. 112). The note was added to their “What We Believe” statement in subsequent issues, and stood there in juxtaposition to their strident values as a reminder of the difficulties the journal faced in popularizing those values until the statement itself was discontinued in Issue #12 (Spring 2001).

Before moving to a discussion of how New Abolitionists struggled to define and popularize "race treason" in relation to the ‘dilemmas’ of white anti-racism under liberal color-blindness [Chapter 7], I will continue this Chapter with a consideration of their choice of "race traitor" to signify the ‘new concept’ which they seek to ‘bring into being’. The term is somewhat problematic because it is highly contested by both advocates of extreme and explicit forms of whiteness and white anti-racists, and the New Abolitionist entrance into contestation over this sign encouraged further confusion in differentiating their project from white anti-racism. Finally, the commentary on New Abolitionist discursive strategy in this chapter will be synthesized in my own proposed style-sheet which will govern the remainder of the text.

### **"Race Treason", "Anti-Racism" and Institutional Racism**

Over the course of U.S. history, advocates for explicit and rigid forms of whiteness have referred to any white person who challenged them as a "race traitor". Theodore Roosevelt famously used versions of term to disparage both white women who decided not to engage in reproduction (Lovett, 2007, p. 92) and “men of education” who opposed the annexation of Hawaii (quoted in T. G. Dyer, 1980, p. 141). New Abolitionists are, therefore, choosing to reclaim a common epithet used to disparage any form of critique or ‘non-conformity’ from extreme and explicit versions of whiteness. In reclaiming "race traitor", New Abolitionists orient themselves toward direct contestation with advocates of explicit and extreme whiteness, and this basic orientation is perhaps best illustrated in a report by Lee Roy Chapman (1999), of the Tulsa New Abolitionist Society chapter, entitled “Don't Judge A Book By Its Cover.” Much of the activity of NAS chapters seems to have been selling *Race Traitor* and *The New Abolitionist* at various events, and on this particular occasion the Tulsa chapter was using the publications as a way to counter-interpellate people at a major gun show. Chapman reports that their table attracted many people who “thought [the journal] was from a white-supremacist view point” because "race traitor" was a common sign in those circles. So in this sense, the choice of reclaiming the epithet dovetailed with efforts to both confront ‘white supremacists’ and efforts to counter-interpellate some of them to the New Abolitionist project.

The term "race traitor" was also commonly hurled at white civil rights activists by defenders of Jim Crow in the 1960s (Bryan, 2001, p. 17; S. K. T. Carmichael & Thelwell, 2003, p. 308; Anne Braden, quoted in Fosl, 2004, p. 101; Segrest, 1994, p. 80). Most white civil rights activists rejected the term, and this rejection is perhaps the very condition which gives rise to white anti-racism. Ann Braden, who was formally charged with "sedition against the state of Kentucky," went so far as to shore up her white 'credentials' by declaring "that she was descended from the first white child born in Kentucky" (C. S. Brown, 2002, p. 79). But other white civil rights workers adopted this epithet as a badge of honor, including Mab Segrest in her Memoir of a Race Traitor (1994). The shared reclamation of "race traitor" during the first year of Race Traitor's publication associated Segrest with the New Abolitionist project, and the journal reprinted one of her speeches in its third issue (Segrest, 1994 [1993]). Segrest's project, however, was both "white" and "anti-racist". Her formal association with the New Abolitionist project by the publication of her speech in the journal is indicative of the difficulties the editors had in differentiating the two approaches, and in fully breaking from Ignatin and Allen's 1967 formulation.

The confusion between Segrest's work and New Abolitionism is perhaps due, in part, to her agreement with Ignatin and Allen's argument that whiteness works against the 'day-to-day real interests' of white workers. Segrest argues that "white queers...must respond to racism now for our own survival" (p. 24). However, her argument that action against "racism" is necessary "to save our little whites [sic] asses" (Ibid.), is certainly not in agreement with the New Abolitionist goal of 'abolishing the white race' nor their ultimate opposition to the naturalizing tendencies of "anti-racism". The contradictions between Segrest and New Abolitionism were, however, never addressed by the editors of Race Traitor and only somewhat identified by journal contributor Maryon Grey (1995) when reviewing Segrest's memoir in the following issue. Grey recognizes that Segrest endorses Ignatin and Allen's 1967 formulation that "white people were invented by the ruling class of the colonies to give Europeans a common identity against Africans" and that she "appreciates the role of the state and of capital in preserving and extending white skin privilege to maintain this racial division," but argues that she is also so "caught up in the urgency of working against far-right extremists that [she fails] to work against the state and other institutions that reproduce white supremacy" (p. 97). In praising Segrest's location of blame on the ruling class, and using 'white skin privilege' rather than 'the white race' to signify the problem, Grey confuses key differences between Ignatin and Allen's formulation and New Abolitionism. But, in defining New Abolitionist "race treason" as having a focus on the state and institutions rather than explicit and extreme forms of whiteness, Grey further clarifies a key distinction Ignatiev & Garvey tried to make between New Abolitionism and "anti-racism".

The New Abolitionist critique of "anti-racists" was based, in large part, around their engagements with anarchists. Beginning in the late 1970s and early 1980s, anarchism attracted a great deal of interest in Black and white left circles—including a number of former BLA soldiers like Gilbert's co-defendant Kuwasi Balagoon, Race Traitor contributing editor Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin (Issues #3-#15), and Ashanti Alston—and particularly white youth through punk music in the U.S., Britain and Germany. In the late 1980s, a mostly anarchist network called Anti-Racist Action [ARA] was formed in the U.S. to coordinate confrontations with neo-Nazis, KKK, and other extreme and explicit right-wing white formations. Ignatiev's own political evolution away from the 'mass' action of the Sojourner Truth Organization to the militant 'nonconformist' action of Race Traitor can probably be explained, at least in part, by an interest in anarchist approaches to resistance, and he was certainly aware of the formation and growth of

ARA. The relationship of Ignatiev with the anarchist movement in the late 1980s carried over to the formation of Race Traitor in the early 1990s,<sup>40</sup> and the main issue New Abolitionists had with ARA and other "anti-racist" organizations was their focus on "avowed white supremacists rather than the principal institutions that reproduce white supremacy" (Ignatiev, 1997a, p. 200). This editorial position was fairly consistent throughout the journal's existence (see Ignatiev & Garvey, 1995a, p. 110; Ignatiev, Garvey, Henson, & Sabra, 1998d, p. 114),<sup>41</sup> and Ignatiev & Garvey's stock explanation was that

Just as the capitalist system is not a capitalist plot, *race is not the work of racists*. On the contrary, it is reproduced by the principal institutions of society, among which are the schools (which define "excellence"), the labor market (which defines "employment"). The law (which defines "crime"), the welfare system (which defines "poverty"), and the family (which defines "kinship") (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1994a, p. 110).

Consistent with Critical Race Theory's critique of liberal color-blindness as a formation which reproduces relations of subordination and superordination 'without any over reference to race', New Abolitionists contend that these institutions, "which are in many cases being administered by well-intentioned people" (Ignatiev quoted in Wimsatt, West, & Ignatiev, 1997, p. 179), have a far greater and more insidious role in reproducing 'the white race' than those explicit and extreme forces who remain attached to Nazi and Jim Crow forms of whiteness.

The New Abolitionist opposition to directing significant resources toward fighting explicit and extreme white formations at the expense of fighting liberal color-blind white state institutions was ultimately taken up in a proposal by a Chicago-based ARA affiliate called The Autonomous Zone at the third ARA conference in Columbus, Ohio (Autonomous Zone, 1997). Their proposal included a "Note on terms" which suggested that the name of the organization should be changed from Anti-Racist Action to Anti-White Supremacist Action because "white supremacy'...implies an analysis of white skin privilege" (Ibid., p. 22). It was reprinted in Race Traitor, like Segrest's speech, without an editorial response.

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<sup>40</sup> For example, Christopher Day, a Contributing Editor for Race Traitor in issues 1-4, was also the Assistant Editor of Love and Rage, an anarchist newspaper founded in 1989 which later became Love and Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation (Staudenmaier, 2007). When the first issues of Race Traitor were published in 1993, the journal became "a common point of reference for the group...even among the substantial portion of the membership that disagreed with its analysis" (Staudenmaier, 2006b). Some issues of Love and Rage "adopted the ideas verbatim" (Bigby, 1995, p. 106), and Ignatiev himself "was briefly a member of L&R in the mid-90's" (Staudenmaier, 2006a). The brash, popular, and confrontational style of Race Traitor fit well with the 'zine culture associated with punk, and punk/'zine/anarchist culture helped to circulate New Abolitionist ideas (Alcoff, 1998, p. 14; Bigby, 1995, p. 106; Frazier, 1994, pp. 127-128).

<sup>41</sup> The major exception to this position was an editorial response to a letter from Skinhead Punks Against Racism in which the editors strangely declare that "You could not pick better enemies than those [neo-Nazis and KKK] who attack black people on the street and want to build death camps for any they regard as inferior. We admire you for fighting to make the streets safe, and we think you should be proud of yourselves" (Ignatiev, Garvey, Henson, & Sabra, 1998a, p. 110).

Ultimately, however, this attempt by the editors of Race Traitor to distinguish the New Abolitionist project from "anti-racism" on the basis of fighting institutional racism falls flat. There are many white anti-racists who have focused on institutional racism since the term was first coined in the "Black Power" moment. While the editors had a fairly consistent line against focusing on 'avowed white supremacists' and associated this approach with "anti-racists", they neither recognized this focus as an outgrowth of the larger white anti-racist project of defining 'positive white anti-racism' against 'negative white supremacism', nor that New Abolitionist reclamation of the 'white supremacist' term "race traitor" inevitably puts New Abolitionists in the same trench as white anti-racists in opposition to the same extreme and explicit 'white supremacist' forces. The choice of "race traitor" by New Abolitionists to signify their intention to 'abolish the white race' not only enters into a contest with explicit and extreme forms of whiteness, but also with white anti-racists who, like Segrest, reclaim it to signify their own struggle over the sign "white" itself. The shared reclamation project around the sign "race traitor", the implicit endorsement of Segrest by Race Traitor through publication of her speech, and poor identification of the elements which separate her project and theirs, indicated deep confusion within New Abolitionism about their own project, and encouraged confusion among their wider audience. Michael Eric Dyson (2004), for example, would refer to "David Roediger, Noel Ignatiev, Mab Segrest, and other new abolitionist thinkers" a full decade later (p. 127).

But perhaps the best example of the contest between New Abolitionists and white anti-racists over the sign "race traitor" occurred years after the journal had ended when Bradenite white anti-racist Tim Wise published Speaking Treason Fluently: Anti-Racist Reflections from an Angry White Male (2008a). Wise takes advantage of the journal's collapse, appropriates much of Ignatiev & Garvey's formulation without a single citation, and rearticulates their arguments to his white anti-racist project. The primary title of Wise's book is itself taken from the first editorial of Race Traitor without any acknowledgement, and Wise similarly defines "race treason" as "a betrayal of one's expected allegiance to one's *race*" (p. 4), complete with the use of a form of *sous rature* to problematize the concept of "race". But whereas the editors of Race Traitor are 'proudly anti-white', Wise articulates 'speaking treason' with being both 'an angry white male' and an 'anti-racist'. His claim to 'race treason' splits hairs by pleading "both guilty and not guilty to the charge of being antiwhite. I am guilty if by 'white' one means 'the white race' as a collective social unit, with all the privileges that unit receives. But I plead not guilty to the same charge if by 'white' one means white *people*" (pp. 4-5, emphasis original). Like Segrest, Wise endorses Ignatin and Allen's 1967 formulation that "whites should fight for an end to racism and privilege, not merely as an act of altruism toward others, but for our own sakes too" (p. 238) and that white people "are not ultimately served by whiteness, but harmed by it" (p. 5).<sup>42</sup> But while Segrest and Wise belatedly endorse the interests-based arguments of Ignatin and Allen, and these interest-based arguments continue to appear in New Abolitionist discourse, they obfuscate key intersectional elements in the emergence of New Abolitionism as a break from Ignatin and Allen's formulation and multiply confusion about what "race treason" ultimately means.

Wise's ability to appropriate so many aspects of New Abolitionist discourse to his white anti-racist project is an indication of the significant weaknesses in New Abolitionist discursive practice, particularly its shared contention with white anti-racists over the sign "race treason" to

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<sup>42</sup> The second statement, written from Nashville, one of the centers of the student lunch counter sit-in movement which became SNCC, is dripping in unintended irony—of course whiteness 'serves' white people.

signify the ‘new concept’ each project seeks to manifest. While New Abolitionist discursive strategy was a giant leap forward in their project of disidentification, its plethora of contradictions and limitations in practice were indicative the larger contradictions and limitations they faced in overcoming the ‘dilemmas’ of working against racism from white subject positions which emanate from the incompleteness of white ‘positional consciousness’ under liberal color-blind white hegemony alongside people of color liberation movements organized around standpoint-based dialogue. The next chapter will consider how the New Abolitionist program of ‘confession, conversion, and abolition’ addressed these ‘dilemmas’ in comparison to the tried, tested, and fairly predictable white anti-racist program. First, however, I will synthesize this chapter’s evaluation of New Abolitionist discourse into my own proposed style-sheet which will govern the remaining text.

### TOWARDS A NEW STYLE SHEET FOR THE ABOLITION OF WHITENESS

Building on the best practices of New Abolitionist discursive strategy in Race Traitor, Roediger’s work, and The New Abolitionist, I offer the following additional proposals to increase ‘fluency’ for ‘speaking treason’ and will work to demonstrate their utility in my own text for the remainder of this volume.

To clarify the best practices already advanced by New Abolitionists:

1. I agree with Niles that the sign "white" fully captures its ideological function of racial domination. There should be no attempt to rearticulate it.
2. I agree with Race Traitor and The New Abolitionist that "white" should be displaced from bodies through either prefixes, suffixes, or other forms of ‘scare quotes’. My preferred prefixes and suffixes are "people categorized as-", "people positioned as-", and "-from a white subject position".
3. Attempts to mechanically resignify people categorized as white with variations of ‘European’ or Physiological descriptions should be rejected. If ‘European’ is necessary to discuss historical antecedents to whiteness it should also be placed under erasure or at least decapitalized to call this category itself into question [see Chapter 10].
4. If reference to objective physical characteristics is necessary, it should be done with nuance which does not link such characteristics unproblematically to "white" in any way that provides whiteness with a biological basis.
5. While I agree with Niles that "whiteism" is an effective way to recenter the problem away from discrimination between neutralized and naturalized racial categories toward "white" itself, I believe that it is unnecessary to resignify "racism" to capture the ideology and system of "race" which was built around the idea of "the white race".

6. I agree with Roediger's "whiteness" as the correct sign to signify the superordinated state of being white as constructed by the mutually constitutive system and ideology of racism.

My own proposals are directed toward the project's two key signs "Race Traitor" and "New Abolitionism".

First, the sign "race traitor" is used by New Abolitionists to represent themselves, their task, and as a place holder for their 'new concept' which cannot be defined in terms of the current regime. Because the sign "race traitor" necessarily involves a contest over meaning with both extreme and explicit advocates of whiteness and white anti-racists, it is quite imprecise and subject to confusion. Moreover, in representing both 'conversion' to the New Abolitionist program and completing the 'task' of 'abolishing the white race', it tends to indicate that New Abolitionists have actually disarticulated themselves from whiteness. Ignatiev worked to clarify this confusion in an interview with Joel Olson's The Blast! magazine which asked "*In being a race traitor, to whom do you announce your treason—fellow so-called whites? Is it ever appropriate to tell a person of color that you have abandoned your whiteness?*" Ignatiev responded: "I would never say that, although I might say I was working on it" (Ignatiev, 1997 [1994]-b, p. 610). To signify those people categorized as white who are 'working on abolishing the white race' and the 'new concept' which cannot be defined by the current regime, I propose a more explicit form of erasure in line with New Abolitionism's rejection of any efforts to resignify "white".

In Heidegger's consideration of "being" he places forms of "being" under erasure, with an 'x', when he is at the limits of language to represent his line of philosophical reasoning. He decided that "[t]o make a new word is to run the risk of forgetting the problem or believing it solved" (Spivak, 1997 [1976]). In Of Grammatology, Derrida used both Heidegger's 'x' and single quotation marks to place terms under erasure. I interpret this difference as demarcating two forms of erasure: [a] explicit—crossing out with an 'x' signs that are the explicit object of a given statement or argument, and [b] sustained—placing in single quotations signs that are problematically necessary for making a point but which are not the specific object of a given statement or argument. Following this logic, I propose that the sign "~~white~~" is far more precise than "race traitor" when representing individual and collective actions explicitly intended to 'abolish the white race'. I also argue that "~~white~~" is a better signifier for the 'new concept' because [i] keeping "white" visible minimizes the risk of 'forgetting' the 'fact' that 'race traitors' remain categorized as white until the threshold of meaning is crossed and the 'new concept' can emerge, and [ii] the strikethrough itself better represents New Abolitionist intentions to abolish the sign. The simple ~~strikethrough~~ is used instead of Heidegger's 'x' in order to reduce technical problems for representation, but if these technical inconveniences can be easily resolved, a version of Heidegger's 'x' is preferred.

Second, instead of "New Abolitionism" I propose ~~whiteness~~. "New Abolitionism" is itself quite imprecise to represent the project at hand. Like "race traitor", "New Abolitionism" is also caught up in a contest with white anti-racists over the tradition of those who worked to abolish chattel slavery, and in using it to signify their particular 'task', it further communicates the false notion that those 'Old Abolitionists' were predominantly categorized as white. Moreover, "abolition" is a common sign with broad social application which has also been used to signify a variety of morally absolute social movements against nuclear weapons, abortion, poverty, capital punishment, fossil fuels, prisons, police, etc. While "New Abolitionism" should certainly be used



to describe the specific historical project of Ignatiev, Garvey, Roediger, Niles and Olson, and should be used to specifically refer to their formulations, I prefer their alternative reclaimed sign, "anti-white". Many critics of the idea of 'abolishing the white race' labeled New Abolitionists 'anti-white' and this was occasionally reclaimed by them as a badge of honor and alternative to "New Abolitionism" to define their project (Garvey, 2001, p. 7; Ignatiev, 1999 [1998], p. 5; D. R. Roediger, 1994, p. 16). "Anti-white" was also particularly used to distinguish their project from white anti-racists. Niles combined this reclamation with his proposal to resignify "racism" as "whiteism" to describe the New Abolitionist project as "anti-whiteism" (Niles, 2000). But while "anti-whiteism" is much clearer than "New Abolitionism" in representing the project's intention, just as "anti-racism" represents the shared practice of both "white anti-racists" and people of color in resisting discrimination based on racial categories, "anti-whiteness" better signifies the shared practice of both New Abolitionists and those people of color working against whiteness in which people of color are 'the main force' (see, for example, Olson, 1995, p. 10). It cannot, therefore, signify the particular task of white people "to Fight Being White" (Ignatiev, 1997 [1994]-a) in this larger "anti-white" movement. As such, I propose that whiteness is a more precise sign for representing the specific work of white people as part of anti-racist and anti-white movements led by people of color.

## CHAPTER 7

### NEW ABOLITIONISM, LIBERAL COLOR-BLINDNESS & “BLACK POWER”: CONFESSION, CONVERSION & WHITENESS

In Horace Ové’s (1969) film Baldwin’s Nigger, filmed at the West Indian Student Centre in London, James Baldwin was asked: “Do you think that there is any place for the white liberal in the ‘Black Power’ movement?” (28:58). Baldwin had already reiterated his position that “I don’t really believe in race, I don’t really believe in color” (16:44) during his speech, but his response to this pointed question very much agreed with “Black Power” concerning the central importance of standpoint-based dialogue between Black people and consequences of white bodies in Black spaces. Like SNCC’s “Black Power” program, Baldwin argues that “integration is not our goal, not at all” (28:49) and that standpoint-based dialogue is a necessary process for developing the self-determination of Black people (28:30). His claim that the standpoint-based action of Black people “will change not only the Black personality, but...will change the world” (23:42) preceded similar positions of the Combahee River Collective and intersectional Critical Race Theory decades later. Baldwin explains that the standpoint-based dialogue of Black people must exclude people categorized as white because

as a Black man...I’m compelled to doubt my history, to examine it, I am compelled to try to create it...Whereas, the white liberal is at precisely the opposite position, of being, in the main, **unwilling, as well as unable, to examine the forces** which have brought him to where he is, **which have created him in fact** (30:24, emphasis added).

For Baldwin, as a Black man, understanding ‘institutional racism’ is a matter of ‘life and death’ and the ‘necessary precondition’ for the development of critical consciousness which can ‘lead the way out’ of racial oppression. While people structurally positioned as white might be ‘dehumanized’ by whiteness, their ‘humanization’ can only come “through the [standpoint-based liberation movement of] Black people who have been submerged so long” (23:33). Because the standpoint-based dialogue and action of people of color is the only force which can overturn whiteness, the ‘fact’ of whiteness under biologized white hegemony not only structurally limits the participation of ‘white allies’, but their structural inability to ‘think’ and ‘feel’ from the standpoints of people of color “can be, in crucial moments, a *very* grave danger. It can menace, much-much more, than the white liberal can imagine” (31:40). Instead of ‘integration’, Baldwin fixes ‘white radicals and white liberals’ with an uncomfortable ‘color’ and challenges them to ‘face’ that they are ‘created in fact’: “You the white liberal in this context [of necessary standpoint-based dialogue excluding white bodies] suffer from your color exactly as I suffer from my color in another and more brutal context [of hegemonic racial oppression]. And you gotta face that. If one can face it, then it doesn’t matter” (33:10).

How do we reconcile Baldwin’s formulations [1963-1989] that whiteness is an ideological choice—which seems to point toward the New Abolitionist project of disidentification and ‘abolition’—with ‘facing’ this ‘fact’ and ‘danger’ of whiteness—which seems to point toward the white anti-racist project? This chapter will consider New Abolitionist approaches to the tensions of disidentifying from whiteness under liberal color-blind hegemony which might be defined as confession, conversion, and ~~whiteness~~.

### **New Abolitionism & Liberal Color-Blindness: Confession, Conversion & Whiteness**

New Abolitionism took a very different, radical humanist, approach to liberal color-blind whiteness than white anti-racism. Whereas white anti-racists ‘own their whiteness’ to resist the invisibilization of ‘white privilege’ and work to neutralize antagonisms with people of color through an alternative ‘non- or anti-racist white ethnicity’, New Abolitionists attempted to radicalize the supposed desires of average white people for ‘post-racial’ humanization. If liberal color-blindness represents a “mass questioning of whiteness as a trend and a possibility in the US” (D. R. Roediger, 1994, p. 16), all the better to “encourage the growth of a politics based on hopeful signs of a popular giving up on whiteness” (Ibid., p. 3). While normative liberal color-blind whiteness works to disassociate individual white people from culpability in structures of racial oppression and invisibilize the machinations which continue to superordinate them ‘without any overt reference to race’, New Abolitionists worked to ‘raise white people’s daily consciousness’ of liberal color-blind whiteness in order to honestly determine what actions would be necessary to realize genuine ‘post-racialism’. But because those desires are, to a large extent, already to some degree realized through the liberal color-blind insulation of white people, New Abolitionists must first define whiteness and demonstrate ‘positional consciousness’ in order to discuss why and how it must be ‘abolished’. For this reason, the New Abolitionist program is best described as confession, conversion, and whiteness—distinguished from white anti-racism in terms of its ultimate goal of ‘abolishing the white race’, but necessarily taking on much of the same form as white anti-racism in working toward that goal under liberal color-blind hegemony.

### **Confession: Demonstrating ‘Positional Consciousness’**

Like white anti-racists, New Abolitionists were certainly ‘willing to examine the forces which have brought them to where they are and which have created them in fact’. As a major force in Critical Whiteness Studies, they were particularly focused on the historical and cultural production and reproduction of whiteness in the U.S. from early colonial Virginia to hip-hop and school shootings. And generally embracing Baldwin’s formulation that whiteness is an ideological choice, they also made it clear that they “do not consider whiteness to be merely a mindset” and recognize that people categorized as white are in ‘fact’ white so long as this “system that privileges some and subordinates others” on the basis of race exists (Niles & Olson, 1999b, p. 6).

As the ‘intellectual center’ of New Abolitionism, Race Traitor was explicitly designed “to reach out to those who are dissatisfied with the terms of membership in the white club” (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1993c, p. 5) and “[engage] these dissidents in a journey of discovery into whiteness and its discontents” (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1993c, pp. 5, 6). Like Bell’s white RaceCrits who are ‘cognizant and committed to the overthrow of their own racial privilege’, the journal’s “primary intended audience will be those people commonly called whites who, in one way or another, understand whiteness to be a problem that perpetuates injustice and prevents even the well-disposed among them from joining unequivocally in the struggle for human freedom” (Ibid.). This audience of “So-called whites” was formed around “special responsibilities to abolition that only they can fulfill. Only they can dissolve the white race from within, by rejecting the poisoned bait of white-skin privileges” (Ignatiev, 1997 [1994]-b, p. 608). While New Abolitionists contend that “that there are no inherent affinities” between so-called whites beyond a superordinated social position as white (Hartigan Jr., 1999, p. 186), and that

“willingness to question their membership in the white club might be the only thing [the journal’s audience] hold in common” (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1993c, p. 6), their counter-public built around a task ‘only so-called whites can fulfill’ is structurally indistinguishable from the counter-publics of explicitly white anti-racist organizations.

### **Conversion: Embracing the ‘Task’ of ‘Abolishing the White Race from Within’**

Just as demonstrations of positional ‘cognizance’ and complicity with ‘white supremacy’ structure entrance into white anti-racist communities of confession and New Abolitionist communities of confession. Many of the contributions to *Race Traitor* were confessional (see Eakins, 1995; Friedberg, 1996a, 2000; J. Gilbert & Ignatiev, 1994; Henson, 1996a; Peeples, 1994; Power, 1996; Zaido, 1997), and while the editors were quite adamant that “we are not seeking converts” (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1993c, p. 7), they were certainly working to ‘raise the daily consciousness’ of people categorized as white and hoped that their audience “will come to have a great deal more in common” as New Abolitionists (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1993c, p. 6). Assurances that New Abolitionism was ‘not seeking converts’ were further undermined by explicit religious metaphor to describe their audience. The editors welcomed a wide range of people categorized as white to their ‘church’:

As the song says, 'All God's children got a place in the choir.' In our opinion, the New Abolitionist Movement needs the participation of Marxists, Christians, Buddhists, nudists, and everybody else who wants to eliminate the privileges of the white skin. The editors of *RT* have learned not to judge people by their labels (Ignatiev, Garvey, Henson, & Sabra, 1998c, p. 111).

This religious metaphor constructs New Abolitionism as a religious sect, its editors as pastors, the contributing editors as deacons, the contributors as the choir, and readers as the congregation. And like all churches, universal welcomes and doctrine are often at odds.

As discussed in Chapter 6 [‘Race Treason: A Placeholder’], an editorial note was added in third issue of the journal explaining that ‘The editors publish things in *Race Traitor* because they think that publishing them will help build a community of readers’ and clarified that ‘Their own opinions are expressed in editorials and unsigned replies to letters’. The note re-enforced their ‘clerical’ authority as ‘pastors’ who were guiding their congregation on “a journey of discovery into whiteness and its discontents...in the process of defining a new human community” (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1993c, p. 6), but it also revealed their significant difficulty in keeping the ‘choir’ of contributors singing on key. As Roediger (1994) observed from his experiences teaching race as a social construction, “students whose eyes have been opened concerning race...may argue a hodge-podge of political positions” (pp. 2-3), and ‘hodge-podge’ is as good a word as any to describe the variety of contributions published in *Race Traitor*. The journal was littered with classic white anti-racist contributions which went unchallenged by the editors and undercut their editorial line. Almost invariably, their most substantive editorial statements defining “New Abolitionism” and “race treason” were immediately followed by white anti-racist contributions.

The first editorial, which argued that ‘the abolition of the white race is distinct from what is called ‘anti-racism’...[which] admits the natural existence of ‘races’ even while opposing social distinctions among them’, was followed by an article celebrating “whites who said no to racism” during the Boston public school desegregation battles—“whites who by their action, by their

courage, give the lie to the impression that everyone...agreed with or went along with the demagogues who brought Boston to such sad times in the 1970s” (Fraser, 1993, p. 9). The explicit project of this article was to offer two "whites" who resisted the mass white working-class uprising against desegregation as examples of an “alternative” anti-racist whiteness.

The third issue featured a favorable review of Ruth Frankenberg’s White Women, Race Matters (1993) in which she expresses hope that “it may be possible to generate or work toward antiracist forms of whiteness, or at least toward antiracist strategies for reworking the terrain of whiteness” (p. 7). Despite the fact that Frankenberg’s white anti-racist project is directly opposed by both the editorial statements in that issue, the reviewer, Maryon Gray (1994) recommended her book as “a valuable contribution to the white feminist discussion of racism and white skin privilege” (p. 66). The journal also tacitly endorsed Gray’s favorable review by selling copies of the book, alongside Segrest’s memoir and others, through their short-lived “Book Service” (Issues #4 and #5).

In the tenth issue, a reprint of the important “Abolition and the White Studies Racket” by Ignatiev, which responded to Howard Winant’s criticism of New Abolition, was immediately followed by an article expressing hope for “a world where a white woman and a Black woman can live together as lovers” (Filemyr, 1999, p. 8) and encourages white people to “join with women and men of color and build alliances to challenge racist policing” (Ibid., p. 23). In the next article, the author describes using “My white skin...to get past the gatekeepers of the academic institution” and is “grateful that my whiteness has got me through the doors so I can try to disrupt the system from within” (Clark, 1999, p. 33).

Each of these contributions, the host of ‘off-key’ songs and notes published in Race Traitor as a way to develop a readership, continually undercut the ‘doctrine’ of the ‘church’ of New Abolitionism and represented a mix of pastoral confusion, failures to clarify doctrine, and opportunistic compromise with white anti-racism in order to increase their ‘congregation’. Beyond the editorials, much of the journal functions as an exhibition of all of the problematic tendencies and contradictions which Ignatiev fought to clarify and counter over the entirety of his adult life. While Race Traitor was designed as a forum to discuss potential methods for ‘abolishing the white race’, the wide variety of texts it published by non-normative white people ‘dissatisfied with the terms of membership in the white club’ under the heading ‘Race Traitor’ and ‘New Abolitionism’ significantly diffused the clarity of the project for editors, contributors, and readers. Like the Weather Underground’s white anti-racist New Morning strategy, New Abolitionism was caught between ‘between two contradictory poles’—militant non-conformity and building ‘a significant mass base’ among so-called whites. The New Abolitionist program can be ideologically distinguished from white anti-racism by its project to ‘abolish the white race’. Race Traitor’s audience is imagined as a provisional bloc of people categorized as white who, like in so many heist films, join together for ‘one last job’ before they ‘get out of the game for good’. But until that ‘job’ is completed, the structure of this counter-public is indistinguishable from a white anti-racist ‘confession’ and ‘conversion’.

The close formal similarities between New Abolitionism and white anti-racism in terms of ‘confession’ and ‘conversion’ has led some sympathetic critics like Zeus Leonardo (2009) to view ‘race treason’, not as a distinct project from white anti-racism, but as an additional step in the same program:

whites must first come to terms with what whiteness has made of them in order to consider the move towards abolitionism. It is difficult to imagine whites, many of whom

function through color-blindness, to take the radical leap of race treason. Because of their colorblindness, many whites may find it ironically convenient (and not in the sense that Ignatiev and Garvey predict) to use abolitionism as a way to further mask white privilege...But if after having participated in recognizing and then [working to rearticulate] whiteness, whites realize the emptiness of the category, the abolitionist position may not have started the story but would likely end it. So in the final analysis, there is a way that [white anti-racism] would provide the entrance into [acknowledging and resisting] whiteness and abolitionism its exit (p. 105).

Because 'color-consciousness' is a necessary starting point for any action under liberal color-blind hegemony, such an understanding of New Abolitionism is entirely reasonable, and it is completely consistent with Ignatiev's contention in his speech to the important "Making and Unmaking of Whiteness" conference at UC Berkeley (1997b) that "there are 'anti-racists' enough already to do the job." New Abolitionism was heavily invested in interpellating white anti-racists from their 'doomed' project of rearticulating "white" to "anti-racism", and in doing so, they were building upon whatever existent positional consciousness white anti-racism had already fostered. Many white anti-racists undoubtedly share[d] the ultimate New Abolitionist vision of a 'post-racial' society even though their project is geared toward hegemonically rearticulating "white" as a 'non- or anti-racist white ethnicity', and would have been quite amenable to an alternative strategy which would not reproduce whiteness in any form, if practical.

#### **'Starting from' the Standpoints of People of Color, Choice & Interpretation**

New Abolitionism explicitly conceptualized the Black liberation struggle as the leading force of the proletarian movement in the U.S., was entirely built on 'working from' the standpoints of people of color from Harry Haywood and Stokely Carmichael to James Baldwin, and like white anti-racists, faced the 'dilemma' of choice and interpretation. In the late 1960s, Ignatin & Allen's Marxist-Leninist commitments resolved the question of choice without a significant amount of consideration. Lenin's Draft Theses on National and Colonial Questions for the Second Congress of the Communist International (1920) argued that Communists should combat national chauvinism and bourgeois democracy in the industrialized states but "enter into a temporary alliance with bourgeois democracy [i.e. national liberation] in the colonial and backward countries" in order to "expose that constant violation of the equality of nations and of the guaranteed rights of national minorities which is to be seen in all capitalist countries, despite their 'democratic' constitutions." Communists, however, "should not merge with" bourgeois national liberation movements but instead "render direct aid to the revolutionary movements among [colonized] nations." Lenin's directive has been interpreted to mean that Communists should most actively support and align themselves with the most 'revolutionary', Marxist-Leninist elements of people of color liberation movements. In White Blindspot, Ignatin argued a much looser version of Lenin's directive—that a broader variety of Black liberation organizations represent 'the kernel of a potential workers' controlled labor movement for all workers', including labour [MFLU], bourgeois democratic [MFDP], and nationalist [SNCC-BPP] formations—but a more a more faithful interpretation seems to have guided his own choices from Harry Haywood to Fred Hampton to the League of Revolutionary Black Workers and CLR James.

This first editorial of Race Traitor made it quite clear that New Abolitionism recognized the standpoint-based actions of people of color as the driving force in producing white ‘positional consciousness’ in “rare moments [when] their nervous peace is shattered...and they are compelled to question the common sense by which they normally live” (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1993c, p. 4). Roediger similarly acknowledges that his work was only made possible by “the impact of African-American struggles...especially in the moment of Black Power” (D. R. Roediger, 2017, p. 60), and “the long, rich, varied, and unsurpassed tradition of Black thought about white people and whiteness” (D. R. Roediger, 1998, p. xi), particularly W.E.B. Du Bois, C.L.R. James, James Baldwin, (D. R. Roediger, 2017, p. 61), and his history professor Sterling Stuckey (Ibid., p. 63). In working from Black standpoint to develop ‘cognizance’ and build their New Abolitionist project ‘committed’ to abolishing ‘their own racial privilege’, Ignatiev and Roediger exercised significant choice and interpretation in choosing *which* Black intellectuals to honor and build upon and *how*, and like white anti-racism, many of these choices and interpretations overlapped with their own interests as people categorized as white working against whiteness.

Ignatiev and Roediger’s choice of CLR James, who supported and centered efforts to educate and organize white workers, over the Boggses, who did not, continued to structure New Abolitionist choice of ‘guidance’ and—in contrast to Ignatiev’s thoughtful [unpublished] consideration of Settlers which rejected Sakai’s formulation as a ‘dead end’—this choice of James is almost totally unexamined in their work. Consider, for example, David Roediger’s recent contention that C.L.R. James was “perhaps the senior Black radical intellectual most admired by young Black Power advocates” (D. R. Roediger, 2017, p. 73). This statement justifies Roediger and Ignatiev’s choice of James as broadly representative of “Black Power” and based on merit and abstract value, but it is a highly questionable claim. Not only did James object to the Boggses early move toward “Black Power” in the early 1960s, but he played almost no role in the “Black Power” movement after 1967. Not only was “Black Power” primarily a youth movement—driven by the intellectual work of ‘senior’ people who were recently deceased, like Fanon [leukemia] and El-Shabazz [assassinated], or other young people like Stokely Carmichael [Kwame Ture], Maulana Karenga, Max Stanford [Akbar Muhammad Ahmad], Kathleen Cleaver, Huey Newton, or Angela Davis—but in addition to Boggs, there were several other ‘senior Black radical intellectuals’ much more ‘admired’ by the “Black Power” movement than James, including Kwame Nkrumah [who was at bitter odds with James over the Sixth Pan-African Congress], Shirley Graham Du Bois, Elijah Muhammad, Queen Mother Audley Moore, Robert F. Williams, Sékou Touré, and Amilcar Cabral. CLR James was a choice, one which overlapped with their white positional interests, and New Abolitionists rarely reflected on the political implications of their close association with “the Johnsonite [Jamesian] tradition in American politics” (Ignatiev, Garvey, & Henson, 2001a, pp. 97-98), nor did they seriously consider the work of any of his competitor formulations.

As part of that Jamesian tradition, New Abolitionists aligned themselves with key elements of standpoint-based “Black Power” through “an appreciation of the centrality of the black struggle to the self-realization of the proletariat” (Ibid., p. 98), a “[recognition] that Afro-Americans and other people of color are at present the main force in the struggle against white supremacy” (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1993a, p. 126), and a theorization “that people of color currently act on [class] interests far more consistently...precisely because they are not burdened by whiteness” (D. R. Roediger, 1994, p. 17). But their definition of Black liberation in terms of ‘the self-realization of the proletariat’, whiteness as a ‘burden’, and the caveats ‘at present’ and

‘currently’, are important indications of a ‘softer’, class-first, conceptual approach to the standpoints of people of color than other, ‘harder’, and more integral, conceptualizations like Boggses formulation, Baldwin, Critical Race Theory, or even white anti-racism, which disentangle race from a ‘necessary class belongingness’ and theorize that white people are ‘unable’ to develop the standpoint crucial for ‘pointing the way out of the impasse’ of racism. Ignatiev & Garvey’s caveat ‘at present’ suggests that ‘race traitors’ might at some point equal, or even eclipse, people of color as the ‘main force’ in the struggle against racialized capitalism, and crucially, that New Abolitionists do not conceptualize the standpoints of people of color in the same way that they conceptualize the standpoint of the proletariat.

### **New Abolitionism & the Standpoints of People of Color**

In my introduction to New Abolitionism, I argued that Roediger’s more nuanced and intersectional approach to white worker agency and Ignatin’s separation of ‘class interests’ and ‘racial interests’ represented a significant break from Ignatin and Allen’s contention that the ‘system of white-skin privileges’ was ‘deliberately contrived’ by the bourgeoisie and worked against the ‘day-to-day real interests’ of white workers. His centering of Baldwin’s formulation that whiteness is ‘*nothing but* false and oppressive’ further aligned New Abolitionists with ‘harder’ conceptualizations of the standpoints of people of color and allowed New Abolitionists to nominally agree with other ‘anti-whiteists’ that “The problem is white people” (Sakai & Aguilar, 2014 [2003], p. 421). At the same time, Race Traitor articulated a New Abolitionism closer to intersectional standpoint theory’s contention that transectionally oppressed white people are ‘dehumanized’ but not ‘oppressed’ by racism.

Allen certainly understood Ignatiev and Roediger’s collaboration as a break from his formulation. While he was originally listed as a Contributing Editor to Race Traitor (Issues 1-5), Allen (1996) asked for his name to be removed over what he felt was a problematically revisionist adaptation of his 1967 formulation. He later wrote a critical review of Roediger’s The Wages of Whiteness which charged that “David has no interest in a class-struggle approach to the matter, or in blaming any 'rich and powerful' ruling class” (T. W. Allen, 2001, p. Point 25) and argued that Roediger “avoids invidious references to the ruling class, while ascribing white supremacy to the 'creative' powers of the European-American workers” (Ibid., Point 32), dispensing with “the Marxist proposition that, 'The ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of its ruling class’” (Ibid., Point 46) and failing to unequivocally describe “the 'white race'...as a ruling-class social control formation” (Ibid., Point 66).

Ignatiev’s own review of Roediger’s work (1992) was entirely positive,<sup>43</sup> and Race Traitor explicitly expressed the desire not “to minimize the complicity of even the most downtrodden of whites with the system of white supremacy” (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1993c, p. 6). The journal continued, on occasion, to distinguish “white people’s racial interests” from their class interests (Ignatiev et al., 1998d, p. 114), but New Abolitionism was ultimately not as significant a break from Ignatin and Allen’s 1967 formulation on the question of white worker ‘interests’ as one might be led to believe. In fact, it was far more common for Roediger and Ignatiev to endorse the idea that white workers are “racially privileged, but also burdened” (D. R. Roediger, 1994, p. x), that membership in the white race “leads some workers to settle for being 'white' when they could, with some effort, be free” (Ignatiev, 1997 [1994]-b, p. 609), that the function of whiteness is “not to exempt people from exploitation but to reconcile them to it”

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<sup>43</sup> If anything, his acknowledgement that “the pay is more than psychological” (p. 240) is even closer to the Boggs / Sakai’s contention that whiteness lifts white workers out of the proletariat.



(Ignatiev & Garvey, 1996b, p. 42); and that “many of the slaves think they are the master class, simply because they partake of the privileges of white skin” (Ignatiev, 1997a, pp. 199-200). The continued deployment of Ignatin and Allen’s 1967 formulation that white workers are ultimately oppressed by whiteness and that resisting whiteness is in their ‘day-to-day real interests’ interests, represents a serious conceptual prevarication on the standpoints of people of color in the struggle against racism.

This New Abolitionist approach to defining the ‘revolutionary potential’ of white workers, between centering class-interest like Allen and centering their ‘material and spiritual’ superordination like Boggs, was perhaps best described by Ignatiev & Garvey (1995b) through the Marxist concept of

working-class *morality*, which the German sage said the working class needs more than its daily bread. What is working-class morality? Solidarity. The conviction that an injury to one is an injury to all. Whiteness is the exact opposite of solidarity. It is an attempt by a part of the working class to cut a separate deal with capital (pp. 104-105).

By theorizing that basic class interest is the cement for a counter-hegemony which will link ‘the 99%’ together against ‘the 1%’, New Abolitionists may be retaining a proven recruiting tool among ‘their own white communist community’ and trying to avoid the ever present specter that white people working against whiteness will act as ‘missionaries’ coming to ‘save’ people of color with a spirit of ‘noblesse oblige’ by arguing that their “fight against white supremacy is not something to engage in as a favor to anyone” (Ibid.), but these arguments also tend toward the very ‘dangerous’ tendency of creating self-assured white agents. If race has ‘necessary class belongingness’, then so-called white poor and working-class people have the ability to develop the necessary ‘critical consciousness’ to understand its role in their class oppression. Ignatiev’s argument that white poor and working-class people have “an equal stake—yes, an equal stake—in overturning the system of white supremacy” (Ibid.) indicates that they have an equal ability to ‘see’ and ‘feel’ with people of color and participate in working class standpoint-based dialogue which can ‘show the way out’ of both racism and capitalism. As Ignatiev explains: “We are trying to awaken people to what is already within them—what they feel but have never had the tools or the awareness to express. We’re trying to put them in touch with each other, to give them some courage, so they can huddle together and learn to be bolder and more courageous” (quoted in Wimsatt et al., 1997, p. 179).

Race Traitor’s call for white people to practice ‘working class morality’ is emblematic of this ‘dangerous’ formulation. “Working-class” asserts that whiteness is a bourgeois tool for preventing the unity of ‘all workers’, that white workers have ‘an equal stake’ in fighting whiteness, an equal ‘ability’ to develop critical consciousness about racism, and centers class as the primary site of dialogue for the transformation of society. “Morality” further positions whiteness as a choice and condemns it as evil. ‘Class interest’ became a sort of liberation theology where “the old IWW...slogan, ‘An injury to one is an injury to all’” is equivalent to “the same instruction” from the Bible: “Remember them that are in bonds as bound with them” (Ignatiev, 1997 [1994]-b, p. 610). To the extent that John Brown, their exemplary ‘race traitor’, was hanged for “obeying the biblical injunction to remember them that are in bonds as bound with them” (Banks et al., 1999, p. 1), he was also, in this formulation, implicitly operating on class interest, even though he had much ‘more to lose than his chains’.

In reflecting on the movement to abolish chattel slavery, Ignatiev argues that:

By taking an absolute position, the ['old', white] Abolitionists were making their stand on the grounds of morality rather than expediency. It was not, as some have charged, that they ruled out the possibility of partial measures or compromise but that they thought it necessary to establish the movement on a firm foundation: slavery was evil and must be destroyed (Ignatiev, 2016b).

This is the undeniable strength of New Abolitionism, it takes an absolute position against 'the white race' as *'nothing but oppressive and false'*. Ignatiev further argues that the "unqualified commitment to emancipation [of the 'old', white Abolitionists] defined them as revolutionary, and led them to various positions that placed them in conflict with all those who sought to make the movement respectable" (Ibid.). This is an equally excellent assessment of the 'unqualified' New Abolitionist commitment to their task of 'abolishing the white race' which led them to identify and overcome key ideological contradictions in white anti-racism and gain clarity about their own project, particularly through the development of a fundamentally ground-breaking alternative discursive strategy. To the extent that John Brown's white superordination hindered development of a common class-consciousness with enslaved Black people, his morality and commitment overcame the incompleteness of white positional consciousness and 'defined him as revolutionary'.

As a work-around for their inability to 'see' and 'feel' with people of color, New Abolitionist 'working class morality' seems to create doubly righteous subjects—the 'class belongingness' of race allows '99%' of those categorized as white to develop the 'critical consciousness' necessary to 'lead the way out' of both racism and capitalism, and because whiteness is conceptualized as an absolute moral choice, New Abolitionists are imagined as exceptionally 'good' and 'moral' in contrast to the majority of white people who are making 'evil choices'. Like white anti-racist models of 'transectional empathy', the class-centered New Abolitionist 'working-class morality' formulation that "Relations must be based on solidarity" (Ignatiev, 1997 [1994]-b, p. 610) tends toward a 'Beloved Community' approach to fighting whiteness centered around 'common' class interest [collaboration], but unlike white anti-racist models, it also constructs 'race traitors' as having equal potential to act against racism as conscious subjects guided by their own feelings and experiences [autonomy]. While white anti-racist models which imagine ideal 'autonomy' do so as the 'final stage' of 'white racial consciousness' only accomplished through 'working' the white anti-racist program, New Abolitionism argued that 'autonomy' was inherently possible for most people categorized as white, without this program, so long as they had 'unqualified commitment' to fulfilling their 'special responsibilities' of 'race treason'. The next section will consider how New Abolitionist 'working-class morality' structured both ideal collaboration based on class, and provisional 'autonomy' in relation to "Black Power".

### **Ideal Collaboration, Provisional 'Autonomy'**

As Jamesians, New Abolitionists continued to idealistically prefer a 'Marxist organization' for 'all' workers which would facilitate both standpoint-based Black liberation and the particular 'task' of white workers to commit 'race treason'. Like Braden and Smith's 'proximal' and 'transectional empathy' formulations, this ideal 'integrated' structure would 'address privilege on an organizational level'. Roediger's Towards the Abolition of Whiteness (1994), for example, theorizes "that participation in authentic struggles against oppression and powerlessness" like "a

large, militant movement for decent health care” (p. 9) or some other “large student movement or class movement” (p. 3), might contribute to “the disarming of racism” (p. 17) and allow people categorized as white to “gain a sense of power and, in the course of struggle alongside the Black poor, question the myths” of liberal color-blindness (p. 9). This formulation is much closer to Ignatin’s STO than Ignatiev’s Race Traitor which was, in part, an abandonment of organizing the ‘masses’ of white workers in favor of ‘race treason’ by a ‘determined minority’.

The hopeful historical example Roediger provides of “white workers... agitating on both class and race issues” was not the STO, but the “striking success” of Jesse Jackson’s Rainbow Coalition “in moving young white workers to act on the perception that the fighting style of the Black freedom movement was more appropriate to their plight than anything in ‘white’ politics” (p. 15). And while Race Traitor would seem to indicate that Ignatiev had abandoned hope in the ‘revolutionary potential’ of white workers by the early 1990s, he demonstrated continued attachment to ideal collaboration in a speech to Occupy Boston, years after Race Traitor collapsed, when he argued that “a movement that brings together black and white is the most dangerous to the existing order” and challenged “the Occupy Movement...to transform itself into a solid movement embracing both the racially privileged and the racially oppressed” (Ignatiev, 2011).

Black Power, however, disarticulated the failed ‘Beloved Community’ coalitions of the Civil Rights Movement which embraced ‘both the racially privileged and the racially oppressed’ until those who theorize that white poor and working-class people have ‘revolutionary potential’, like Ignatiev and Roediger, can show and prove the validity of this assertion by developing a white anti-racist poor and working-class ‘bloc’ which can align with “Black Power” against racism and capitalism. Despite the ‘committed’ efforts of many ‘white left’ projects, no such bloc has ever materialized, the challenge remains unfulfilled, and the standpoint-based “Black Power” conceptualization that the liberation of people of color can only come through dialogue between people of color continues to structure social movement relations. In this counter-hegemonic context, New Abolitionist idealization and promotion of ‘Beloved Community’ organizing models, like Bradenite white anti-racism, ultimately rejects the standpoint-based approach of “Black Power”, but the two projects do so for different reasons, and these different reasons led to different forms. Braden ultimately saw “Black Power” as a ‘dead end’ because she theorized intimate collaboration with people of color was necessary to overcome the incompleteness of white positional consciousness and check the dangers of white people ‘organized as white people’, tending toward alignment with people of color who continued to adhere to a ‘Beloved Community’ approach to their liberation. New Abolitionists, on the other hand, saw “Black Power” as a ‘dead end’ because they theorize that workers categorized as white have an ‘equal stake’ in resisting racialized capitalism, fueling a largely ‘autonomous’ approach to fulfilling their ‘special responsibilities’ through ‘race treason’.

In their antagonistic formulations to “Black Power” around ideal collaboration and provisional ‘autonomy’, white anti-racism and New Abolitionism remained formally indistinguishable. Both projects opposed interpretations of the Black Power directive as “a strategy of ‘parallel struggles’ with each group fighting for ‘its own interest’ against the Establishment” and expecting that “Eventually our efforts will join when the long-range tasks are at hand” (Ted Allen, 2011 [1967], p. 173) in favor of strategies which confronted white people ‘with this whole question of racism and what it has done to them from the very beginning’. Both formulations ideally believed that white people should be convinced ‘that their interest lies in teaming up with Negroes’. And in the scarcity of standpoint-based ‘guidance’, New

Abolitionism similarly welcomed “all interested persons [i.e. people of color] to write for *Race Traitor*” (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1993a, p. 127), the journal was never a totally white endeavor,<sup>44</sup> and it formally operated as a ‘mostly’ white organization consistent with Black Power’s allowance that ‘Black and white can work together in the white community when possible’.

But while Bradenite white anti-racism tends toward ‘teaming up’ white people with those people of color who will ‘team up’ with them, New Abolitionism’s ultimate class-centered theorization of white ‘revolutionary potential’ did not require ‘Black organizers in the white community’ for standpoint-based guidance or to develop proximal empathy. While New Abolitionists “appreciate the unique contributions that persons of color, who have a wealth of experience with white authority” (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1993a, p. 127), and acknowledge that “if you have black friends, you learn things, you gain strength, it makes your life richer, and so forth and so on,” their formulation that race has a ‘necessary class belongingness’ ultimately means that “You don’t need to be friends with black folks to hate white supremacy and oppose it” (Ignatiev quoted in Wimsatt et al., 1997, p. 183). In Ignatiev’s New Abolitionist formulation, the key “test” that distinguishes a “race traitor” from an “anti-racist” is, therefore, not only “the willingness to confront, challenge, and...oppose the institutions that are reproducing race as a social category,” nor even their ‘commitment’ to the ‘abolition of the white race’ through militant non-conformity, but their theorization that “one can do that from wherever one lives. One can do that from North Dakota and Montana, where there’s not a black person within five hundred miles” (Ibid.).

Leaving aside the fact that there are, and have been, Black people in Montana and North Dakota, as well as some of the most significant indigenous nations in the continental U.S., what distinguishes the New Abolitionist program from the white anti-racist program is their ultimate belief that people categorized as white, as part of the ‘99%’, are indeed ‘able’ to develop the necessary ‘critical consciousness’ to work autonomously against whiteness without the rigorous white anti-racist positional consciousness-raising program nor its central collaborative demand designed to prevent dangerous exercises of white agency. ‘Working-class morality’ authorizes far greater ‘autonomy’ than most iterations of white anti-racism and its centrality to New Abolitionist practice—between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ conceptualizations of the standpoints of people of color, between formal similarities and deep ideological differences with white anti-racism, between militant non-conformity and building ‘a significant mass base’ among so-called whites to sustain it, and between ideal collaboration and provisional ‘autonomy’ without a copper-fastened need to follow the leadership of people of color—produced a confusing array of New Abolitionist approaches to collaboration with people of color.

For example, the New Abolitionist Students at the University of Texas reported in Race Traitor that

Our ethnic diversity has been a positive point when discussing whiteness and personal racial/racist incidents. People of color have been able to express feelings of discomfort when dealing with whiteness on a personal level. So-called whites have been able to show many of the people of color honest insider views of racial privilege and their own ambivalence towards it (Garza, 1997, p. 8).

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<sup>44</sup> Many people of color contributed to the journal, several served as contributing editors, and Adam Sabra was an editor (Issues 7-10).

Here, one of the first ‘New Abolitionist’ organizations after Race Traitor is describing their organization in unmistakably white anti-racist ‘Beloved Community’ terms: “so-called whites” are part of the organization’s ‘ethnic diversity’, they contribute to it by exchanging their ‘insider views’ for standpoint-based guidance, and proximal collaboration is conceptualized as crucial for developing ‘empathy’. These types of opportunities to realize ideal collaboration, however, were not guaranteed under “Black Power” counter-hegemony.

To the extent that “Black Power” excluded people categorized as white from Black standpoint-based dialogue, Allen (1976 [1973]) made the reasonable assumption that “whatever answer is ultimately accepted by the Black Marxist-Leninists” concerning the shape and form of Black national self-determination and the possibilities for a unified communist party, “It follows...that proletarian revolutionary strategy in the United States must direct the main blow at white supremacy” (p. 1). By loosening the collaborative demand of white anti-racism through their ‘working-class morality’ formulation and focusing on their ‘special responsibilities’ to deal a ‘blow’ to ‘white supremacy’ through ‘race treason’, New Abolitionists are enabled, in theory, to operate with greater ‘autonomy’ when such collaboration is not available. This ‘autonomy’ makes New Abolition potentially more compatible with the “Black Power” directive for ‘white radicals and white liberals’ to ‘organize their own communities’, and avoids potential ‘dangers’ of intimate collaboration. Instead of the white anti-racist collaborative demand for guidance, oversight, or direct leadership by people of color, New Abolitionists ultimately sought ‘approval’ from people of color for ‘autonomous’ ~~white~~ actions.

In response to Allen’s concern that New Abolitionism “is a European-American project, exclusively” (Ted Allen, 1993), the first issue of Race Traitor set forth ‘approval’ rather than collaboration as their barometer of success. Ignatiev & Garvey expressed “hope that Afro-Americans and other people of color will see this project as consistent with their own efforts” (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1993a, p. 127). As identified by Moon & Flores (2000), “approval from Blacks” (p. 101 & 107) was a key element in a number of descriptions of ‘autonomous’ New Abolitionist action. While I will engage the role of ‘approval’ in exemplary New Abolitionist practice at greater length in the next chapter, Ignatiev’s

observation has always been, in my years in the factories and so forth, that any time a white person challenged white supremacy, challenged the supremacist job classifications and all the rest of the stuff, with or without any advance discussion with black people, the black folks would always find a way of expressing their gratitude, their solidarity, their friendship, and their support. They would go out of their way to do that kind of thing (quoted in Wimsatt et al., 1997, p. 187).

Expressions of ‘approval’ are much less precise than direct ‘guidance’ or ‘leadership’ from people of color, and reading them assumes significant interpretive skill by actors positioned as white. Self-directed New Abolitionist actions seeking ‘approval’ from people of color may focus on ‘positive’ reactions and ignore ‘negative’ reactions—like the collaborative demand of white anti-racism tends toward ‘teaming up’ with people of color who will ‘team up’ with them—or the ‘working-class morality’ approach to standpoint and consciousness might encourage self-assured white actors who are oblivious to the reactions of people of color altogether. Like white anti-racist ‘radical experimentation’, ‘approval’ imagines integrated spaces, like the workplace, as a laboratories for experimentation, with people of color as subjects to be observed, and few checks on the ~~white~~ ‘scientists’ attempting to ‘act their way out’ of whiteness.

### **‘Autonomy’, Masculinity & Intersectional Feminism**

The consequences of New Abolitionist ‘autonomous’ certainty were perhaps most clearly on display in the response of The New Abolitionist editorial board to Michelle Billies and Jennifer Harvey. Billies & Harvey (1999) had “been working hard for over a year with an Abolitionist action group in New York” toward “abolishing the white race,” but wrote to the newsletter to take issue with a statement by its editorial board (K. Clarke et al., 1999c) which said

the storefront Afro-American church, a voluntary association where the lady who empties bedpans at the county hospital during the week enjoys as much prestige and authority as a lawyer or a doctor—if she can bake a good sweet potato pie...is the most advanced outpost of the society we seek to build.

Billies & Harvey expressed concern about the newsletter’s celebration of a generally patriarchal religious institution and “the reproduction of a demeaning and old image of the Black woman.” They argued that “Destroying whiteness entails understanding that whiteness operates differently at different intersections of oppression,” and suggested that the editors of the newsletter would benefit from reading “Collins, Lorde, Smith, Anzald[ú]a, Lugones, and many others [who] have been schooling us in the complexity of oppression, the intersection of oppression, the matrix of oppression, the interlocking nature of oppressions.”

The editorial board (K. Clarke et al., 1999b) quite rudely rejected their suggestion that intersectional women of color feminism would be of any value to the task of ‘abolishing the white race’. This rejection stood in stark contrast to the seemingly endless sympathy and patience Race Traitor expressed for explicit and extreme advocates of whiteness (see, for example, Ignatiev & Pendragon, 1996), and indeed which The New Abolitionist itself expressed in their very polite response to Louis Beam, a particularly extreme and explicit advocate of whiteness, in the same issue which the statement that Billies & Harvey were responding to appeared. In a repeat of the classic class-centered dismissal of ‘identity politics’ as ‘divisive’ and ‘distracting’ to ‘proletarian revolution’, and patriarchal dismissals of ‘women’s issues’ in both class-centered and race-centered movements dominated by men, the editorial board argued that

Like many in the sway of identity politics, [Billies & Harvey] cannot imagine a role for themselves in...the movement unless their own particular oppression and the constituency based on it is directly represented. The effect of their approach is to dilute the struggle against whiteness and discount the significance of the privileges they enjoy as whites.

The editors also published a letter from a “Black and Southern” woman in Tulsa to authorize their idealization of Black churches and ‘image of the Black woman’:

Billies and Harvey overcomplicate matters, arguing that sexuality is the prime tool of oppression [they did not]. This type of reasoning separates the oppressed, keeps us under the thumb of the state, spinning our wheels, fighting among ourselves....This [image of the Black church ‘lady’] is a cultural aspect of Black and Southern women, one prided by myself and many women I know in the communities of the South and Midwest. To label this as a sexist stereotype is to condemn it. Condemnation of a culture one may not share leads to cultural homogeneity, or totalitarianism. This is unacceptable (Douglass, 1999).

While there were a few white women involved in Race Traitor, like co-editor Beth Henson (Issues #7-#15), who was also on The New Abolitionist editorial board, and many women who contributed to both the journal and the newsletter, Billies & Harvey's letter was perhaps the most recognizably feminist *and* New Abolitionist contribution to either publication.

In contrast to relatively dynamic and thoughtful engagements with the rich dialogue between [exclusively male] Black and white Marxists, New Abolitionist engagements with the rich dialogue between feminists of color and white feminists are so sparse as to be chauvinistic, and their attempts to include women were decidedly 'additive' and gendered. For example, Race Traitor celebrated 'old abolitionist' Abbey Kelley, who

put off marriage and children for fear they would take her out of activity. And when she left her baby with her sister to go on the road again, she said nothing in her life ever hurt her as much as that, but she did it out of consideration for those mothers whose babies were sold away from them...Her husband, Stephen Foster, was even more radical than she... Her radicalism was of the mind as well as the heart, and although she could weep for the slave, she had not an ounce of sentimentality toward former comrades who sought to water down abolitionist principles to make the movement respectable (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1996e, pp. 77-78).

White anti-racists, perhaps because they conceptualize the standpoints of people of color more rigidly, have been generally more invested in intersectional and reflexive feminist approaches, and although Race Traitor promised to 'reject in advance no means of attaining their goal', The New Abolitionist's abrupt dismissal of Billies & Harvey's criticism, and women of color feminism in general, seems to be a very significant missed opportunity to engage with a body of theory central to the development of intersectional Critical Race Theory and Critical Whiteness Studies. It also represents another moment where New Abolitionists exercised problematic choice over which standpoint-based guidance to value, which to critically engage, and which to ignore. In this case, the choices made by New Abolitionists are not only problematic because they favor class-centered approaches over race-centered approaches, but also because they favor androcentric approaches over feminist approaches.

Given their suspicion of feminism, it is not surprising that New Abolitionists ignored the work of white lesbian feminist Marilyn Frye (1983, 1992), previously mentioned in Chapter 1, whose disidentificatory formulations preceded their own 'anti-white' formulations, and agreed to such an extent that it is tempting to conclude her work was a major inspiration to Ignatiev and Roediger. In her essays On Being White: Thinking Toward a Feminist Understanding of Race and Race Supremacy (1983) and White Woman Feminist (1992), Frye reflected quite insightfully on her experiences with the 'dilemmas' of working against racism from a white subject position under liberal color-blind white hegemony—including those described in this text as the incompleteness of 'positional consciousness', 'starting from' the standpoints of people of color, choice and interpretation, unaccountable use of privilege, and the tensions between collaboration and 'autonomy'—and like New Abolitionism a decade later, refused to accept "the hopeless moral position of one who believes in original sin but in no mechanism of redemption" (p. 126), proposing instead that white feminists have a choice to "develop toward a genuine disaffiliation from...whiteness" (p. 125). In developing a strategy of 'genuine disaffiliation'—whether by common influences or independent resonance—Frye was on a very similar path to New Abolitionism:

While Roediger (1991) argued that ‘working class ‘whiteness’ is a creation, in part, of the white working class itself’ and Ignatiev & Garvey (1993c) that ‘The white race consists of those who partake of the privileges of the white skin in this society. Its most wretched members share a status higher, in certain respects, than that of the most exalted persons excluded from it, in return for which they give their support to the system that degrades them’, Frye (1992) argued that “white is...a category that is persistently maintained by those people who are, in their own and each others’ perception, most unquestionably in it” (p. 149).

While Ignatiev & Garvey (1994b) argue “that the ‘white race’ is not a natural but a historical category” for the sole purpose of racial domination and the logical “next step” is to “abolish it”; Frye (1983) argued that “we are not white by nature but by political classification, and hence it is in principle possible to disaffiliate” (p. 118).

While Ignatiev & Garvey (1993c) say ‘The white race is a club, which enrolls certain people at birth, without their consent,’ Frye (1983) said that “‘white’...designates a political category, a sort of political fraternity” (p. 126); that “To be white is to be a member of an in-group, a kin group, which is self-defining. Just as with fraternities or sororities, the power to draw the membership line is jealously guarded” (p. 115). Frye (1992) further argued that “Your membership in it is in a way, or to a degree, compulsory—nobody gave you any choice in the matter—but it is contingent and, in the Aristotelian sense, accidental” (p. 150).

While Ignatiev & Garvey (1994b) argued that so-called white people should ‘violate the rules of whiteness, so flagrantly that they jeopardize their white standing,’ and “fight so hard against the barriers that exclude black people, against the barriers of white supremacy, that either you win and those barriers come down, or you are such a nuisance to the white people that they kick you out of those suburbs” (Ignatiev quoted in Wimsatt et al., 1997, p. 183), Frye (1992) suggests that “if you don’t like being a member of that club, you might think of resigning your membership, or of figuring out how to get yourself kicked out of the club, how to get yourself excommunicated” (p. 150).

While Ignatiev & Garvey (1994b) recognize ‘how devilishly difficult it is for individuals to escape whiteness...so that even those who step outside of it in one situation find it virtually impossible not to step back in later, if for no other reason than the assumptions of others’, Frye (1983) does “not suggest for a moment that I can disaffiliate by a private act of will, or by any personal strategy...To think it thinkable shortcuts no work and shields one from no responsibility” (p. 127).

While Roediger (1994) argued that white workers are “racially privileged, but also burdened” by whiteness, Frye (1992) expressed “some hope that if I can manage to refuse to enact, embody, animate this category—the white race—as I am supposed to, I can free up my energies and actions from a range of disabling confinements and burdens” (p. 164); and while ‘*Race Traitor* (1993c) aims to dissolve the club, to break it apart, to explode it’, Frye (1992) works to “align my will with the forces which eventually will dissolve or dismantle that race as such” (p. 164).

While Ignatiev’s ‘working-class morality’ formulation was ultimately class-centered, argued that the function of whiteness is ‘not to exempt people from exploitation but to reconcile them to it’, and urged workers categorized as white to ‘break the links which tie them to the bosses’, Frye’s (1983) gender-centered formulation argued that “Those who fashion this construct of whiteness, who elaborate on these conceptions, are primarily a certain group of males. It is *their* construct” (p. 114), and that “White women’s attachments to white men have a



great deal to do with our race privilege, with our racism and with our inabilities to understand these” (p. 121). Frye (1992) further argued that whiteness “is directly opposed to our liberation because it joins and binds us to our oppressors” (p. 162) and that “disengaging [from white men]...holds some promise of our rescuing ourselves from the degraded condition of women in white men’s world” (p. 166).

Frye’s formulation has received little consideration as a [particularly lesbian] feminist form of whiteness, and the engaged and critical consideration it deserves is beyond the scope of this text, but two key divergences from New Abolitionism regarding discursive strategy and tactics for ‘race treason’ are important to note.

First, Race Traitor’s (1993c) discursive strategy critically denaturalizes the sign "white" and works to disarticulate bodies from whiteness with prefixes like ‘so-called’. Frye (1983) similarly speaks about “members of the group called white” (p. 117) and was quite invested in the development of new language to represent her white project. In theorizing that ‘white women can learn from our own experience *a propos* white men’, Frye (1983) reasoned that whiteness as ideology and ‘club’ functions similarly to masculinity as ideology and ‘club’.

Feminists make use of a distinction between being male and being "a man," or masculine. I have enjoined males of my acquaintance to set themselves against masculinity. I have asked them to think about how they can stop being men, and I was not recommending a sex-change operation. I do not know how they can stop being men, but I think it is thinkable, and it is a counsel of hope. Likewise I can set myself against Whiteness: I can give myself the injunction to stop being White. (p. 127)

Frye (1992) built on this transectional “analogy” to propose “‘whitely’ and ‘whiteliness’” as “a term in the realm of race and racism whose grammar is analogous to the grammar of the term ‘masculinity’” (p. 151). Like New Abolitionists sought to reify "whiteness" as ideology, Frye’s "whiteliness" was designed to represent the ideology of whiteness, but despite significant care to demonstrate that whiteness as ideology does not have an objective biological basis (1983, pp. 113-114), the contradictions of feminism in relation to biology are grafted onto this ‘new term’ in such a way as to encourage the renaturalization of whiteness:

Being white-skinned (like being male) is a matter of physical traits presumed to be physically determined; being whitely (like being masculine) I conceive as a deeply ingrained way of being in the world. Following the analogy with masculinity, I assume that the connection between whiteliness and light-colored skin is a *contingent* connection: this character could be manifested by persons who are *not* “white;” it can be absent in persons who *are* (p. 151).

In Frye’s (1992) separation of ‘physical traits’ from ideology, "whiteliness" becomes a container for all the counter-hegemonically ‘negative’ “attitudes and behaviors which blocked our friendly and effective comradeship with women of color and limited our ability to act against institutional racism” (p. 147) under liberal color-blindness, and her strategy of “unbecoming whitely” (p. 163) which assumes that “white individuals in a white supremacist society are not doomed to dominance by logic or nature” (1983, p. 118) ultimately becomes a white anti-racist strategy of rearticulating "white" by separating ‘bad whiteliness’ from ‘good whiteness’ “to find a way to

think clearly about some kind of whiteness that is not essentially tied to color and yet has some significant relation to color” (1992, p. 151).

Second, while Ignatiev & Garvey theorized ‘working-class morality’ as essentially opposed to whiteness and reclaimed ‘race treason’ from explicit and extreme advocates of whiteness to signify their strategy of acting on those ‘moral interests’, Frye (1983) theorized that “our pursuit of our liberation [as women] is, whether or not we so intend it, disloyal to Whiteness” (p. 126), reclaimed white heteropatriarchal charges that “the white race is threatened with extinction” by white feminists (p. 122), argued that white women should “make this disloyalty an explicit part of our politics and embrace it, publicly” (p. 126) and proposed that “if we detach ourselves from reproductive service to white men (in the many senses and dimensions of ‘reproduction’), the threat we pose is not just to their male selves but to their white selves. White men’s domination and control of white women is essential to their project of maintaining their racial dominance” (p. 125). Frye’s particularly white feminist ‘treason’ against white men is quite a logical and insightful proposal which constructed ‘special responsibilities’ for white women to ‘abolish the white race’ within the well-established repertoire of ‘lesbian separatist’ strategies for liberation. It is hard to dismiss the possibility that androcentric, class-focused, New Abolitionists ignored her work because, as intended, it threatened their interests as white men.

The editors of *Race Traitor* (1993c) claimed their pastoral duty was ‘to reach out to those who are dissatisfied with the terms of membership in the white club’, said the ‘willingness to question their membership in the white club might be the only thing they hold in common’, theorized that ‘The existence of the white race depends on the willingness of those assigned to it to place their racial interests above class, gender or any other interests they hold’, and dedicated themselves to a project to ‘Abolish the White Race: By Any Means Necessary’. Their lack of engagement with Frye’s particularly white feminist program for accomplishing their common ‘task’ of ‘abolishing the white race’, however, undermines those claims and represents a huge missed opportunity for considering models of ‘race treason’ along other ‘axes’ of oppression in the given liberal color-blind white ‘matrix of domination’.

## **Conclusion**

While New Abolitionism was nearly identical in form to white anti-racism in relation to shared ‘dilemmas’ of working against racism from a white subject position under liberal color-blind white hegemony, they did not ultimately address the incompleteness of their ‘positional consciousness’ through a ‘collaborative demand’, but through a ‘working-class morality’ which authorized ‘autonomous’ action based on a ‘morally’ absolute refusal to rearticulate whiteness and a particular ‘commitment’ to the task of ‘race treason’. Like white anti-racism, New Abolitionism sanctioned the use of ‘white privilege’ for the purposes of ‘racial justice’, but its sanction was limited only to those actions which ‘fulfill’ the ‘special responsibilities’ of people categorized as white to ‘dissolve the white race from within’. And like those iterations of white anti-racism which theorize greater ‘commitment’ as a path to overcome the ‘dilemmas’ of white anti-racism, New Abolitionists advocated militant non-conformist action. What distinguished New Abolitionism was its advocacy for militant non-conformity to make whiteness ‘unreliable as a determinant of behavior’, like the early Weathermen’s armed struggle. And like the early Weathermen, the autonomous masculine certainty of Ignatiev’s ‘working-class morality’ tended toward “contempt for those who formed an independent women’s movement” (D. Gilbert, 2012, p. 60), and toward “glorifying violence and...macho challenges about individual courage” (D.

Gilbert, 2002, p. 18). The next chapter considers the types of 'committed' militant non-conformist actions New Abolitionists advocated as 'race treason'.

## CHAPTER 8

### NEW ABOLITIONISM IN PRACTICE

Beyond its ‘morally’ absolute approach to ‘abolishing the white race’, which was quite different than the white anti-racist project of hegemonically rearticulating it, New Abolitionism primarily distinguished itself from white anti-racism by its strategy of ‘race treason’ which called for a ‘determined minority’ of so-called whites to embrace militant non-conformist action against whiteness. As discussed at-length in previous chapters, some white anti-racists have embraced the classical ‘martyr’s role’ of militant non-conformist action as ‘accomplices’, and the Weather Underground did so, in part, as an interpretation of Ignatin and Allen’s 1967 formulation of ‘repudiating ‘white-skin privilege’’. While the forms of militant non-conformist action New Abolitionists advocated were often similar to acting as ‘accomplices’, and are similarly inspired by the figure of John Brown, they theorize the purposes of such ‘committed’ action differently. Whereas the Weather Underground were caught between poles of ‘full solidarity’ necessary for collaboration with “Black Power” and making ‘white people...ready for revolutionary action’ through ‘white community organizing’, ‘treason to whiteness’ by New Abolitionists is explicitly disarticulated from the project of hegemonically rearticulating "white" to "anti-racism" and instead designed to disrupt the functioning of, and ultimately destroy, the ‘white club’. This chapter I will describe the New Abolitionist strategy of ‘race treason’, provide some examples of how it was put into practice, and consider its viability as a strategy to ‘abolish the white race’.

#### **The Exemplar of John Brown: Defining the Threshold of ‘Race Treason’**

Ignatiev & Garvey’s program of ‘race treason’ is an attempt to translate John Brown’s nineteenth-century armed insurgency against slavery into an exemplar for those seeking to ‘abolish the white race’ under liberal color-blind hegemony today. In doing so, they build upon El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz’s ‘example of how to test the white man who says he’s your friend’ and other discourses which conceptualize commitment as a key to overcoming the ‘dilemmas’ of white anti-racism, but disarticulate such militant non-conformist action from both the project of hegemonically rearticulating "white" to "anti-racism" and its collaborative demands. While the ‘test’ for El-Shabazz, Bill Ware, the early Weather Underground, the Panther 21, and the BLA, was designed to determine what conditions would allow standpoint-based people of color liberation movements to meet the collaborative demand of white anti-racism, “The test” which New Abolitionists apply to identify the threshold between a ‘race traitor’ and an ‘anti-racist’ is not about having “black friends” but “the willingness [of people categorized as white] to confront, challenge, and provoke opposition, to oppose the institutions that are reproducing race as a social category” (Ignatiev quoted in Wimsatt et al., 1997, p. 183), and to do so with such commitment “that either you win...or you are such a nuisance to the white people that they kick you out” of ‘your’ white community (Ibid.). Their militant autonomous nonconformist strategy distinguished itself from militant white anti-racism through a particular historical interpretation of John Brown’s raid on Harper’s Ferry which argued that his action escalated an existent crisis in such a way as to force a reorganization of society.

Ignatiev & Garvey (1993c) argue that prior to the U.S. Civil War “the majority of white northerners...considered slavery unjust” but it was John Brown’s forces, acting on a morally absolute position and willing to “risk the ordinary comforts of their lives”, who lit a match to

“the hopes that still persisted in the northern population despite decades of cringing before the slaveholders” (p. 3). The fact that the raid was a total defeat in military terms was of no consequence. Rather, Brown’s willingness to transgress the bounds of acceptable protest struck fear among the Southern planters that others would follow. This fear intensified the Planters campaign for “a renewal of the national pro-slavery vows” (Ibid.) which “compelled the people of the north to resist” more forcefully (Ibid.), and set off “a chain of events that involved mutual actions and reactions on a scale beyond anything they could have anticipated” (Ibid., p. 5) i.e. the Civil War which abolished chattel slavery.

Whereas in the nineteenth-century “Nominally white” John Brown “made war against slavery” in the nineteenth century and precipitated a crisis which led to its abolition (Banks et al., 1999, p. 1), New Abolitionists defined a “traitor to the white race [as] someone who is nominally classified as white, but who defies the rules of whiteness so flagrantly as to jeopardize his or her ability to draw upon the privileges of the white skin” (Ignatiev, 1997 [1994]-b, p. 607), hoping to precipitate a crisis through anarchic resistance designed to frustrate assumptions that “those who look white” are loyal to whiteness (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1994b, p. 108), making it “unreliable as a determinant of behavior” (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1993c, p. 2) and “set off tremors that will lead to its collapse” (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1993c, p. 2). As discussed previously, New Abolitionist ‘race treason’ is strikingly similar to the early Weathermen’s promise of ‘outlaws in every dorm room and commune’ and its strategy “to destroy the myth of white unanimity” (Ignatiev, 1997b) through acts of “craziness” (Rubio, 1994, p. 80) which “go beyond socially acceptable limits of protest” (Ignatiev, 1997 [1994]-a, p. 613). But while the WUO was ultimately designed to establish them as the leaders of a ‘new white youth nation’, New Abolitionist anarchic autonomous action was theorized as inherently productive, whether those actions significantly ‘hurt’ white institutions or supported efforts to organize white people against racism. Unlike Weather’s New Morning, Ignatiev & Garvey fully embraced militant non-conformity without the ‘illusion that the more timorous will join in’, arguing that, like John Brown, “A small, isolated minority” (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1996e, p. 77) of people who “look white” but “have ceased to act white” might set off a chain of events that would force “the white race” to “undergo fission” (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1994b, p. 110).

In terms of the ‘chain of events’ that might lead to the ‘abolition of the white race’, Race Traitor was conceptualized as William Lloyd Garrison’s The Liberator and the New Abolitionist Society as the American Anti-Slavery Society. Whereas “Nat Turner plus William Lloyd Garrison gave rise to abolitionism” (Ignatiev et al., 1999, p. 114), New Abolitionists hoped that people of color liberation movements plus Race Traitor would accelerate ‘anti-whiteism’. And whereas “Abolitionism plus the [work of] fugitive slave[s] created John Brown[,] John Brown sparked the Civil War[,] And the Civil War opened the way for the slaves and others to move against slavery” (Ibid.), New Abolitionists hoped that publishing “personal accounts of individual and collective breaks with white solidarity” (Garvey & Ignatiev, 1996, p. 107) and the development of the New Abolitionist Society would contribute to creating “a new Harpers Ferry” which “will set off a series of tremors that will lead to the disintegration of the white race” (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1993c, p. 5). They were not concerned, like John Brown, about being “dismissed as hopeless fanatics even by many who agreed with their goal of abolishing” whiteness, nor with winning “a majority [of people categorized as white] to their point of view” (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1996e, p. 77), but with promoting principled and sustained nonconformist acts which would cast doubt on the sustainability of whiteness as a system for maintaining social control.

## **‘Individual Breaks with White Solidarity’: Disrupting White Racial Bonding Through Confrontational Disidentification**

On a very basic everyday “individual level” (Garvey & Ignatiev, 1996, p. 107), Race Traitor called on their readers to disrupt what one of their contributors, Christine Sleeter (1995), called “white racial bonding...interactions that have the purpose of affirming a common stance on race-related issues, legitimating particular interpretations of oppressed groups, and drawing we-they boundaries” (p. 18). In this section, I will critically review four examples of the types of individual actions New Abolitionists imagined would disrupt such ‘white racial bonding’ and embody their concept of ‘race treason’.

[Case #1: Newspaper Stand]: The clearest example New Abolitionists provided of an individual disrupting ‘white racial bonding’ came from journal contributor Edward Peeples (1994) who recounted an incident where he attempted to purchase a Black newspaper in Richmond, Virginia during the mid-70s. As Peeples went to pay for the paper, the white cashier said “You don't want this newspaper, it's the colored newspaper” (p. 45). The warning was a microcosm which represented countless “attempts at intimidation from whites when I showed interest or revealed respect for black people and their activities and culture in our city,” and he had “longed for effective techniques to elude the embarrassment and dangers of white measures designed to coerce non-compliant whites” (Ibid.). Peeples “had just recently met Ted Allen” who told him that he “did not have to be white” and, in doing so, “freed my tongue from the racial script so-called whites are expected to employ in their daily lives” (Ibid.). So equipped, Peeples responded “in a loud, crisp voice, 'You must think I'm white’” (Ibid., p. 46). He was quite proud of his newfound ability to resist such daily moments which called him to account, and his bold response was, in his estimation, “a profound act of racial sedition” (Ibid.). His example was a tangible way in which ‘race treason’ could be put into practice and quickly became a key New Abolitionist talking point (see Garvey & Ignatiev, 1996, p. 107; Ignatiev, 1997 [1994]-a, p. 613).

Peeples’ act of ‘sedition’ demonstrates the ways in which New Abolitionist disidentification disrupts ‘white racial bonding’ and empowers people categorized as white to take autonomous action. This autonomous action requires no collaboration with people of color because it is focused on interactions between so-called whites and offers a fairly simple and easy way for white people to disrupt interpellations to whiteness in the form of a boycott or strike; a refusal to ‘partake’ in common everyday “Herrenvolk” relations crucial to the normal functioning of whiteness (Mills, 1997, p. 108). The problem with Peeples’ example, however, is that it comes from the 1970s South, where Jim Crow whiteness was still very much entrenched, and requires an explicit “anti-black remark” (Garvey & Ignatiev, 1996, p. 107) to be made. It is far less useful for resisting the more insidious reproduction of white subjectivities by liberal color-blindness which does so ‘without any overt reference to race’.

[Case #2: Forms Collecting Racial Demographics]. A second example involves the everyday experience of filling in forms which ask for individuals to identify their ‘race’. Race Traitor published an account from a John Dailey (1997) who encountered such a form when attempting to purchase a handgun at a K-Mart in Fairbanks, Alaska. Dailey “explained to the clerk” that he “had no problem” filling in the boxes asking information about his “height, weight, hair color, eye color, etc... since these were objective criteria,” but said he was “far too uncertain of my race to fill in the race box” because “it was not an objective criterion” (p. 85). He suggested the clerk could make a decision for him, but the clerk “said that he couldn't d[o] that,” leading Dailey to threaten a withholding of his business. Ultimately, the clerk “allowed me to leave the box blank,” but not without a warning “that the Big, Bad, Boys from ATF would be

calling me” (Ibid.). The disruption was a teachable moment which opened a space for Dailey to propose a number of key positions of New Abolitionism. First, and most successfully, his feigned ignorance rejected the biological basis of race and questioned it as a problematic social construction. Second, Dailey rejected an everyday interpellation of his body to whiteness. Third, Dailey’s outspoken refusal to check a box, revealed the New Abolitionist contention that “When individuals question the rules, the officers are quick to remind them of all they owe to the club, and warn them of the dangers they will face if they leave it” (Garvey & Ignatiev, 1996, p. 105), and fourth, his steadfastness demonstrated that maintaining a principled position in the face of those threats was potential strategy to win. By enacting a form of New Abolitionist practice, Dailey “left with my handgun and felt wonderful” (Dailey, 1997, p. 85).

But while this enactment of ‘race treason’ accomplished some of the goals of New Abolitionism in a practical way, and left Dailey feeling empowered, there are significant questions left unanswered about what he actually accomplished by this act of non-conformism. The collection of racial demographic information is the result of ‘anti-racist’ pressure on the state to track patterns of institutional racism. While Ignatiev & Garvey perhaps rightly oppose ‘anti-racists’ who collaborate with state institutions and “turn themselves into bloodhounds and pointers for official repressive agencies” (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1996a), it is not at all clear that their critique of anti-racism is accomplished by refusing to check boxes that force positional consciousness on white people and collect racial demographics. It is more likely that Dailey’s refusal to check a box was read by witnesses as part of the popular white push-back against ‘anti-racist’ efforts to combat liberal color-blindness than a New Abolitionist refusal to be interpellated to whiteness.

Linda Martín Alcoff (1998) identified this “danger in the [New Abolitionist] strategy of disassociating” themselves from being white (p. 18). Consistent with the white anti-racist conceptualization of whiteness as inalienable, she argues that “whites cannot disavow whiteness. One’s appearance of being white will still operate to confer privilege in numerous and significant ways, and to avow treason does not render whites ineligible for these privileges, even if they work hard to avoid them” (p. 17). The danger in attempting to radicalize the desires of white people for ‘post-racialism’ under liberal color blindness is that New Abolitionists might also be collaborating with white desires to escape from being identified as white while keeping their “white privilege still largely in place” (Ibid.). Such individual acts of disidentification might instead allow white people to

feel entitled to disengage with whiteness without feeling any link of responsibility for white racist atrocities of the past [and present]; or...consider a declaration that they are 'not white' as a sufficient solution to racism without the trouble of organizing or collective action. This position would then end up uncomfortably similar to the 'colorblindness' attitude that pretends ignorance about one's own white identity and refuses responsibility” (Ibid.).

The danger in describing actors like Dailey as ‘race traitors’ risks ‘forgetting’ the central problem of liberal color-blind whiteness or ‘believing’ it ‘solved’. While the first editorial of Race Traitor said that they did not want “to exaggerate the significance of momentary departures from white rules” (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1993c, p. 6), the way they sought to “popularize examples of defection from its ranks” (Ibid.) like Dailey’s was a major point of contention for critics of New Abolitionism.

Sakai, for example, who elsewhere seems to be in total alignment with New Abolitionism when he argues that the ‘good guys who were white wanted out of their dead culture with its racist and repressive rules and loyalties, out of their sick nation, the whole thing’, mocks New Abolitionists as “middle-class white men claiming that they've 'given up being white'” (Sakai, 2000, pp. 3-4). He contends that “They haven't given up anything. Race as a form of class is very tangible, solid, material, as real as a tank division running over you...tank divisions, after all, are also socially constructed!” (Ibid, p. 4). In praising individual disidentificatory strategies such as Dailey’s, Race Traitor presented Baldwin’s conceptualization of whiteness as a choice, but “almost never interrogate their own participation in whiteness” (Moon & Flores, 2000, p. 106), particularly the dangers of believing themselves to be capable of developing the standpoint necessary to ‘see’ and ‘feel’ the myriad ways that whiteness operates to superordinate them under invisibilized and adaptive liberal color-blind whiteness. While they fulfill the “Black Power” directive to organize ‘their white communities’, a lack of critical attention to the ways in which such disidentificatory actions might fully collaborate with liberal color-blindness demonstrates an inattentiveness to Black Power’s contention that so-called white allies have often ‘furthered white supremacy without the whites involved realizing it, or even wanting to do so’.

The journal’s endorsement of Dailey’s refusal to fill out the racial demographics section on his form at K-Mart is almost indistinguishable from normative white responses to ‘anti-racist’ resistance against institutional racism, and it also seems to contradict the strong stance of New Abolitionists in favor of affirmative action—perhaps the most contentious strategy against institutional racism precisely because it relies on the color-conscious collection of racial demographics.

[Case #3: Academic Dean in Support of Affirmative Action]: Affirmative action was one of the core issues of New Abolitionism (see Ignatiev, 1999 [1998], p. 6; Ignatiev & Garvey, 1996e, p. 80; 1996f; Ignatiev, Garvey, Henson, & Sabra, 1998b; Ignatin, 1976a; D. R. Roediger, 1994, p. 17; 2002, pp. 55-67), and the journal published a narrative by Thomas Landefeld (1998) as an exemplary ‘individual break with white solidarity’ in support of it. Landefeld was an Assistant Professor in the Medical School and Interim Assistant Dean for Student & Minority Affairs at the University of Michigan who was “marginalized, disenfranchised, and eventually ostracized” (p. 99) by the university because of his ‘committed’ advocacy for students of color. Self-identified as “nominally...white” (p. 99), he argued that “If being a traitor to whiteness means fighting so hard against white supremacy that I have jeopardized my own ability to draw on the privileges of the white skin, then I would say I qualify” (p. 100). While “As a tenured professor, I could not be dismissed without cause,” he reports that he was “removed from all administrative responsibilities in the University, the Medical School, and the Department,” his “Department refused to recommend me for promotion to full professor,” and he was “denied normal pay raises” (p. 100). Landefeld ultimately chose “to file a lawsuit,” and because continuing advocacy at UMich was no longer possible, he “relocated to another university [California State University-Dominguez Hills], not because of the harassment but so I could continue to wage the struggle in this critical area” (Ibid.). Almost two decades later, Landefeld (2017) reports that he is now a full professor at the “Minority Serving Institution” and describes it as “perfect fit” to continue his work “addressing the under representation of minorities in the sciences.”

Landefeld’s argument that his actions at UMich qualify as ‘race treason’ are quite useful for considering the difference between ‘anti-racism’ and ‘race treason’. If his account is taken at



face value, he certainly ‘fought against’ institutional racism ‘so hard’ as to ‘jeopardize his own ability to draw on privilege’ in the context of UMich. But was his ‘white privilege’ ever in jeopardy? Was he treated any differently than a colleague of color who pursued the same course might have been? It would be hard to imagine that he wasn’t. But assume for a moment that he completely lost his ‘white privilege’ in the final years of his time at UMich because of his committed advocacy for students of color. Reflecting on the early 1960s ‘Beloved Community’ SNCC, Kwame Ture [Stokely Carmichael] argued that, by participating in committed resistance to Jim Crow alongside Black people, “Socially and politically[,] our comrades of lighter complexion stopped being 'white'... whatever class and color privileges they might have taken for granted were immediately suspended. At moments of confrontation they were at as great a risk as any of us, and as 'race traitors' were sometimes in even greater jeopardy” (S. K. T. Carmichael & Thelwell, 2003, p. 308). As discussed in Chapter 4, however, regardless of whether ‘white privilege’ was suspended in a given moment, ‘white allies’ always have the ability to ‘return to a white refuge’, to go somewhere else or recant their actions and become white again.

Landefeld may have ‘fought so hard’ at UMich that he was virtually evicted from the ‘white serving institution’, but he was not ‘evicted from the white club and denied the benefits of membership’ at-large. His choice to return to a ‘white refuge’ remains, he certainly still ‘enjoys the benefits of membership’ in contexts outside the university, and while he may not have returned to a ‘white refuge’, he found refuge in a predominantly people of color academic space at Dominguez, Landefeld which has been led by a president of color for almost the entirety of his tenure there. In that space he functions in a classic white anti-racist role. He retains the extreme race and class privilege of being a full professor, uses his unearned privilege to ‘uplift’ students of color, and receives support from his ‘Minority Serving Institution’ for this work rather than the discouragement from his former ‘white serving institution’. Moreover, while Landefeld may have jeopardized his privilege at UMich, there is little evidence that he ever exhibited any willingness to ‘go beyond socially acceptable limits of protest’ to further the cause of affirmative action there or elsewhere. With the exception of using New Abolitionist language to avoid rearticulating “white” in his journal submission, there is nothing which distinguishes Landefeld’s actions from committed white anti-racism.

[Case #4: Traffic Stop]: In the first editorial of Race Traitor, Ignatiev & Garvey (1993c) recounted an experience in which “one of our editors, unfamiliar with New York City traffic laws, made an illegal right turn there on a red light. He was stopped by two cops in a patrol car. After examining his license, they released him with a courteous admonition” (p. 4). Ignatiev & Garvey surmised that “Had he been black, they probably would have ticketed him, and might even have taken him down to the station,” and argued that the difference was, “at least in part because [the police] assumed, looking at him, that he was white and therefore loyal” (Ibid.). Such disproportionate treatment at the hands of law enforcement has long been one of the primary examples of institutional racism and police “courtesy” with people categorized as white a key ‘white-skin privilege’ “meant both to reward good conduct and induce future cooperation” (Ibid.) The editors of Race Traitor imagined an alternative scenario of ‘race treason’ in which “the [white] driver cursed them, or displayed a bumper sticker that said, 'Avenge Rodney King!'.” Such provocation might “make the cops doubt their ability to recognize a white person merely by looking at him or her” (Ibid.), lead to the “police, the courts, and the authorities...to start spreading around indiscriminately the treatment they normally reserve for people of color,” and with the degradation of ‘white privileges’ which keeps them loyal, nothing would prevent so-called whites from turning against the state and waging class war (p. 5).

This imagined scenario clearly demonstrates the way that Ignatiev & Garvey conceptualize greater commitment in the form of provocative ‘race treason’ as a path to overcome the ‘dilemmas’ of white anti-racism. While they “admit that neither gesture,” cursing the cop or displaying an intentionally confrontational bumper sticker, “on the part of a single individual would in all likelihood be of much consequence” (Ibid.), the imagined example is designed to communicate their purposes for promoting personal narratives of ‘race treason’. The editor in question did not engage in either of these imagined examples, because like El-Shabazz, they agree that ‘all the dying they do is for naught if the situation remains the same’. Actions must not only be militant but effective, and while “One John Brown - against a background of slave resistance - was enough for Virginia” (Ibid.), one person categorized as white who gets into a scuffle with police will probably not lead to the state revoking ‘white privilege’ at large. White people curse police every day. The journal published these individual accounts, not because they represented the types of ‘race treason’ necessary for collapsing ‘the white race’, but because they hoped “such examples will contribute to altering current notions of what constitutes reason, and will encourage others to be still bolder” (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1994b, p. 109). They theorized that these individual “moments when the routine assumptions of race break down are the seismic promise that somewhere in the tectonic flow a new fault is building up pressure” (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1993c, p. 5).

#### **A ‘Critical Mass’ to Reach Escape Velocity**

While Race Traitor publicized a variety of individual actions which were called ‘race treason’, they argued that “the white race will undergo fission” only through the actions of “a critical mass of people who, though they look white, have ceased to act white” (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1994b, p. 110). Because whiteness was understood as a social construction which kept intersectionally oppressed people categorized as white loyal to the capitalist system that oppresses them, ‘ceasing to act white’ was defined entirely as the willingness “to undertake outrageous acts of provocation” against whiteness (Ibid., p. 109). Such a ‘willingness to go beyond socially acceptable limits of protest’ is not only “the dividing line between ‘good whites’ [white anti-racists] and traitors to the white race” (Ignatiev, 1997b), but “The defection of enough of its members” is also necessary to cross the threshold between inconsequential individual actions and making ‘the white race’ “unreliable as a determinant of behavior [and] set off tremors that will lead to its collapse” (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1993c, p. 2). New Abolitionists, therefore, have two major programmatic concerns, defining the threshold of what separates their militant non-conformism from militant white anti-racist nonconformism, and answering the question of “How many dissident so-called whites would it take to unsettle the nerves of the white executive board” (Ibid., p. 5) to such an extent that “the confidence of the police and other representatives of official society in their ability to differentiate between friends and enemies by color” (Garvey & Ignatiev, 1996, p. 107) would be so undermined that ‘they’ would revoke ‘the system of white-skin privilege’ at-large?.

Ignatiev & Garvey admit “It is impossible to know” (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1993c, p. 5) how many ‘race traitors’ are necessary to undermine official confidence in whiteness as a “badge of loyalty” (Garvey & Ignatiev, 1996, p. 106), but they theorize that identifying this threshold “is a bit like the problem of currency: how much counterfeit money has to circulate in order to destroy the value of the official currency? The answer is, nowhere near a majority—just enough to undermine public confidence in the official stuff” (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1994b, p. 109). They estimate that “five to ten percent fake has proven enough to undermine public faith” (Garvey &

Ignatiev, 1996, pp. 106-107). The theorization that a ‘critical mass’ of non-conformist action will collapse whiteness is what differentiates New Abolitionist strategy from a project of hegemonically rearticulating "white" to "anti-racism". But how is Ignatiev & Garvey’s conceptualization that interpellating ‘five to ten percent’ of people categorized as white different than Weather’s New Morning contention that their armed struggle project needed ‘a significant mass base’ of support among white youth? If there are ‘enough white anti-racists to do the job’ and white anti-racism is already a field of action where thousands are working against institutional racism in a formally indistinguishable manner from New Abolitionism, what demarcates ‘anti-racism’ as ‘official currency’ and ‘race treason’ as sufficiently ‘counterfeit’? The allegory of ‘official’ and ‘counterfeit’ is far too simplistically binary, too reliant on a monolithic conceptualization of whiteness, for effective answers these questions.

### **The New Abolitionist Concept of a Monolithic ‘White Race’ & Adaptive Whiteness**

As discussed in Chapter 2, Howard Winant’s major argument for the rearticulation of "white" to "anti-racism" is based on his observation that whiteness is deeply fissured after the fall of Jim Crow. He observes a variety of projects working to rearticulate "white" hegemonically across the political spectrum, and rejecting the notion that whiteness can be abolished, argues that conditions are ripe for the white anti-racist project. Ignatiev & Garvey, on the other hand, argue that “The white race is like a private club, which grants privileges to certain people in return for obedience to its rules. It is based on one huge assumption: that all those who look white are, whatever their complaints or reservations, fundamentally loyal to it” (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1994b, p. 108). In conceptualizing ‘the white race’ as ‘a private club’, they theorize that “The weak point of the club is its need for unanimity...the white race must have the support of all those it has designated as its constituency, or it ceases to exist” (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1993c, pp. 2-3). In their formulation, “The white race does not voluntarily surrender a single member” (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1994b, p. 109) and “imposes a stifling conformity on whites” (Ibid., p. 108). As a result, they argue that “The way to abolish the white race is to disrupt that conformity...so flagrantly that...it becomes impossible for the upholders of white rules to speak in the name of all who look white” (Ibid., p. 109). This conceptualization of ‘the white race’ as a monolithic and hierarchical entity is fundamentally misleading, incorrect, and completely contradicts their arguments that whiteness is not simply a ‘ruling class social formation’ or ‘race is not the work of racists’, but a highly adaptive discourse and social formation which confers agency on all people categorized as white, and which ‘is a creation, in part, of the white working class itself’. Racial superordination allows so-called whites the ‘freedom’ to pursue a variety of social and political positions autonomously. There is no ‘executive board’. Whiteness is a broad variety of individuals, social elements, and political projects using the discourse and system of whiteness to pursue conflicting interests, including resistance against capitalist and racist oppression. The central problem with whiteness, the only aspect which unites this diverse and contradictory field of activity, is not that it “depends on the willingness of those assigned to it to place their racial interests above class, gender or any other interests they hold” (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1993c, p. 2), but that white people pursue all of these interests, albeit in an arguably more limited fashion, through whiteness, and therefore through the subordination of people of color. This is why New Abolitionists argue that "white" is not rearticulateable to "anti-racism", why ‘so long as the white race exists, all movements against racism are doomed to fail’, and ultimately why whiteness functions as a block on the unity of ‘the 99%’.

While Winant correctly recognizes that whiteness is deeply fissured and articulated to a variety of projects, he fails to recognize that "white" can only be hegemonically rearticulated by projects which will reproduce the superordination of people categorized as white and the subordination of people of color. Ignatiev & Garvey's development of a strategy of militant non-conformity based on the conceptualization that whiteness requires 'unanimity', on the other hand, fails to recognize that whiteness has never been monolithic. When they argue that New Abolitionism means "developing programs to confront the institutions that reproduce race...oppose tracking in the schools, oppose all mechanisms that favor whites in the job market, and oppose the police and courts, which define black people as a criminal class [and] not merely oppose these things, but seek to disrupt their functioning" (Garvey & Ignatiev, 1996, p. 107), they fail to recognize that such a program is indistinguishable from the activity of many white anti-racists. And when they argue that a "critical mass" of such opposition constitutes 'defection' which will 'make [whiteness] unreliable as a determinant of behavior' and 'set off tremors that will lead to its collapse,' they fail to acknowledge that such activity has been occurring for decades on a fairly large scale but has not resulted in the collapse of whiteness. Their monolithic conception of whiteness does not recognize the ways in which whiteness is highly adaptive and capable of incorporating a wide variety of expressions, including white anti-racism and New Abolitionism, and is deeply intertwined with their failure to recognize that the problem with white people is not only that they are 'unwilling', but also 'unable', to examine the forces which have brought them to where they are, which have created them in fact'.

Such failures are painfully evident in the primary model of collective action promoted by both Race Traitor and the New Abolitionist Society: Copwatch.

#### **A 'Collective Break with White Solidarity': Copwatch**

In 1996, selections from Race Traitor were published by Routledge in an anthology, dramatically expanding their audience and winning them an American Book Award. In their introduction to the anthology, Ignatiev & Garvey (1996d) acknowledged that the journal "suffers from a shortage of accounts of collective struggles against whiteness" which embody New Abolitionist principles "because few such struggles are taking place involving so-called whites" (p. 3). They note, however, with cautious hope, the recent emergence of

small groups of people [who] have begun implementing "copwatch" programs, campaigns to observe and record police (mis)conduct. While these programs are still too new to allow for definite conclusions, we believe that, if conducted properly, they will lead to confrontations with the thin blue line of force that defines black people as a criminal class. For so-called whites, these programs are examples of race treason because those who patrol the police repudiate the protection of the white skin (pp. 3-4).

Their brief promotion of copwatch as 'a collective action' in the book was expanded upon in Race Traitor #6 (Summer 1996) which celebrated the strategy on its cover and included a number of positive references. An editorial review in the issue sheds light on the cover of the anthology which depicts a blond spikey-haired white male subject using his body to shield a Black male subject from two white police with batons. The review quotes a piece entitled "The Perquisites of Whiteness" by "Robert Lowe, a European American" who:

recounts [his experience of ] being arrested at some demonstration. In jail awaiting arraignment and release he met a young black man in for confronting a cop beating a black woman. Lowe writes, “I knew I would be out of jail by morning, and would have legal counsel to exonerate me. He, on the other hand, would go to prison and do serious time. Although many whites have demonstrated against the Klan and neo-Nazis in typically ritualistic, face-to-face confrontations, I know of neither individual whites who have interceded with the police the way that young man did, nor of white groups who have followed the example...” (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1996e, p. 81).

The editors conclude that Lowe’s imagination of fighting the police instead of ‘the Klan and neo-Nazis’ “is as succinct a statement of what *Race Traitor* is about as any we have seen” (Ibid). While Lowe’s example is still individualistic, copwatch initiatives became the central collective action that *Race Traitor* promoted as an alternative in Anti-Racist Action to opposing extreme and explicit advocates of whiteness. In 1997, Ignatiev reported that he had been promoting the idea to his students at Harvard “for the last two years,” with the argument that they should “send their precious little white bodies out to patrol the neighborhoods and stand between the police and the black victims” (Ignatiev quoted in Wimsatt et al., 1997, p. 195). He believed it was a concrete way “for small numbers of folks to take risks that are reasonable—not suicidal, not bound for martyrdom—but reasonable risks that possibly may ignite a larger movement” (Ibid.).

Ignatiev’s idea that copwatch programs leverage ‘precious little white bodies’ to protect Black bodies from racist police was reflected in a report written by ‘Selena’ and ‘Katrina’ of Minneapolis Anti-Racist Action and published in the journal:

Although it's not only white folks who do Copwatch, we are predominantly white. Being seen as 'white' can be an advantage. We can get away with things cops would never tolerate from people of color, such as taunting and yelling at them. It is important for white folks to take a stand against the cops, to show we are not loyal to this oppressive system. A part of what we are doing is trying to shift the repression by police away from African-American teenagers onto us (Selena & Katrina, 1996, p. 19).

The way in which copwatch was uncritically promoted by Ignatiev & Garvey as a collective embodiment of New Abolitionist practice is highly problematic. Their basic model of copwatch is that white people scrutinize police action with the hope that their gaze and bodily presence will pressure police to treat their targets humanely and in accordance with the law.

The original model for copwatch was pioneered by groups like the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense who relied on guns to secure their authority as observers. In this white iteration, white activists are armed only with their whiteness, and while we are led to believe that they ‘break the laws of whiteness so flagrantly as to destroy the myth of white unanimity’, the fact is that they are extending the respect police accord to their ‘precious little white bodies’ in order to protect people of color. They ‘get away with things cops would never tolerate from people of color’ only because of their whiteness. There was never any indication that any of the police repression was shifted onto them, no reports of police beating copwatch activists, nor calls to free copwatch activists arrested because they threw their bodies between police and people of color. Such a spectacular exercise of whiteness in this context highlights and strengthens the white copwatch activists’ superordinated racial position in relation to the people of color they were seeking to protect. Rather than ‘destroying’ the system which privileges them, they

demonstrated how entrenched ‘white privilege’ is, and strengthened the system which confers it. Furthermore, by using their whiteness to ensure that ‘the law’ is followed by the police, copwatch is also strengthening the laws of the state. Such efforts, based on ‘knowing your rights’ as informed citizens, are well ‘within the limits of socially acceptable protest’ and use privilege in a classically white anti-racist way.

The report by Selena & Katrina in Issue #6 was reprinted from The Blast! magazine edited by Joel Olson, who would later serve as co-editor of The New Abolitionist. When Olson moved from Minneapolis to Phoenix a few years later, and having assumed a leading role in developing the New Abolitionist Society chapter there, he also helped to found Phoenix Copwatch (The Ruckus Collective, 2001; Villalobos & Brannon, 2000). In this iteration, however, the whiteness of the participants was replaced by video cameras so that “Everyone can be Copwatch” (Villalobos & Brannon, 2000). The shift from whiteness to cameras as the primary force of protection allowed the group to define itself as a ‘Beloved Community’ composed of “a variety of people from various backgrounds and political schools of thought” with the “common belief” that “something must be done about police brutality” (Ibid.). The ‘diverse’ camera-based program became even more of an exercise in citizenship: “The police are public servants whose salaries are paid for by tax dollars. That means that we should feel comfortable questioning their behavior and their performance because we are their employers” (Ibid.). They report that “We consider it a success when a cop stands up straighter, acts polite for the camera, and doesn’t abuse his authority...When we are out on the streets, the police change their behavior, and people feel a lot safer. The threat of brutality goes down when the camera turns on” (Villalobos & Brannon, 2000). But what happens when this small group of people are not out on the streets? What happened to the New Abolitionist expectation that such action would lead to ‘confrontations with the thin blue line of force that defines black people as a criminal class’? At what point did the people categorized as white taking part in these patrols ever ‘repudiate the protection of the white skin’?

That same year, Ignatiev argued that police “upheld white supremacy not because they are ‘racists’...but because they uphold the law which is white supremacist in its effect” (Ignatiev, 2000). How does Phoenix Copwatch working to ensure that police ‘follow the law’ fight institutional racism? How is ensuring that police ‘don’t abuse their authority’ any different than fighting explicit and extreme proponents of whiteness? How is advocacy for “the creation of local civilian review boards, whose purpose would be to investigate police complaints” (Ibid.) any different than becoming ‘bloodhounds and pointers for official repressive agencies’? None of these questions were addressed. All of the New Abolitionist engagement with the copwatch strategy was entirely positive and both Race Traitor and The New Abolitionist lauded such action as an embodiment of ‘race treason’. Like the ‘individual breaks from whiteness’ they promoted, the only substantive and concrete collective action advanced by New Abolitionists did not challenge institutional racism in any meaningful way, expanded the power of ‘white privilege’, and was utterly indistinguishable from white anti-racism.

Despite its position as the primary example for New Abolitionist practice, copwatch certainly does not embody the major principles advanced by Ignatiev & Garvey in theory. Ignatiev himself allowed that “We’ll make a lot of mistakes in the process, but” he personally guaranteed that “we will find ways of doing it” (quoted in Wimsatt et al., 1997, p. 189). The New Abolitionist Society and The New Abolitionist collapsed around 2001, and Race Traitor published only one issue after 2001 without adding anything significant to resolving the myriad contradictions of New Abolitionism.

### **Conclusion: John Brown, Vanguardism, and ‘the Martyr’s Role’**

The core of New Abolitionist practice is formed around the ideal figure of John Brown, who Ignatiev (2010 [2002]) argued “came closest of any European-American to escaping the bounds of whiteness,” and who Niles & Olson (1999b) described as “a call to traitors to the white race to join the rest of humanity through direct action to overthrow that system” (p. 6). In returning to this central and consistent idealization of Brown’s life as an exemplary ‘race traitor’ over the course of the New Abolitionist project, this rather long concluding section will attempt to assess why New Abolitionism failed to develop a working practice which embodied their interpretation of Harper’s Ferry.

The idealization of Brown by both ‘committed’ white anti-racists and New Abolitionists follows El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz’s idealization of Brown as a ‘good white ally’ because he engaged in armed struggle and was willing to die for the liberation of Black people. Like El-Shabazz (2013 [1964]-a) made “By any means necessary...our motto” at the OAAU founding rally, Ignatiev & Garvey (1993c) used this motto for the title of their first editorial “Abolish the White Race: By Any Means Necessary,” and argued that New Abolitionists “reject in advance no means of attaining their goal” (Garvey & Ignatiev, 1996, p. 107). The Weathermen took the idealization of John Brown in the work of Ignatin, Allen and Shabazz quite literally and decided that engaging in armed struggle was the most promising path to ‘repudiating white-skin privilege’. While Ignatin initially believed ‘mass action is the decisive aspect’ in RYM-II and STO efforts to ‘repudiate white-skin privileges’, as a New Abolitionist he came to agree that militant nonconformist action by a ‘determined minority’ was the ‘necessary’ way to ‘abolish the white race’ and, in doing so, intensified the role of John Brown in New Abolitionist rhetoric as an ideal ‘race traitor’. Just as El-Shabazz argued that Brown was regarded as a ‘nut’ in normative white logic, but a hero in the counter-hegemonic logic of Black people, Ignatiev & Garvey (1994b) asked their readers to engage in “committed acts which defy [normative white] reason but which turn out to have been socially effective” because they “contribute to altering current notions of what constitutes reason [toward the counter-hegemonic logic of people of color], and will encourage others to be still bolder” (p. 109).

While the major New Abolitionist proposals for individual and collective actions did not explicitly promote armed struggle, much of their rhetoric seems to indicate that it was their ultimate goal. One particularly controversial Race Traitor editorial, “Aux Armes! Fomez Vos Bataillons!” (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1996c), was a veiled call for New Abolitionists to form armed groups to compete with ‘white supremacists’ over the growing militia movement. Three years later, the editorial board of The New Abolitionist (K. Clarke et al., 1999c) positively revisited the ‘Aux Armes!’ editorial and mentioned “our militia movement (in formation)” (p. 3). Two years after that, the penultimate issue of Race Traitor, which also positively revisited the ‘Aux Armes!’ editorial, was led by an article by Garvey which mourned “The lost possibilities” of Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh’s life. Garvey celebrated the fact that McVeigh and his co-conspirators were “willing to act on the strength of their convictions” (Garvey, 2001, p. 7) and imagined that, if McVeigh “had the benefit of sustained contact” with people of color, “he might have done something different from what he did. He might even have become the John Brown of our day” (Ibid., p. 8). All of these statements seem to indicate that the editors of Race Traitor were looking forward to the day when their “weapon of criticism” would be replaced by “the criticism by weapons” (Ignatiev et al., 1999, p. 114) as the ultimate realization of their program of militant nonconformist action.

But while Ignatiev argues that “In our view, nothing offers so great a possibility of turning this country around as a general assault on whiteness and its ways, by a force that includes a band of renegades—race traitors—who look white but do not act white” (Ignatiev, 2010 [2002]), there was very little reflection on the Weather Underground’s ‘group of outlaws’ in the pages of Race Traitor or The New Abolitionist, even though it seems to have embodied ideal New Abolitionist practice. The first editorial of Race Traitor anticipates a “new Harpers Ferry,” but at no point did the journal consider the eerie similarities between the 1981 Brink’s operation and Brown’s Harper’s Ferry raid. The purposes of both raids were to expropriate resources for building a larger campaign—one guns and the other funds. Both operations were intentionally ‘interracial’, but whereas Brown invited Black abolitionists to his raid, the BLA invited May 19<sup>th</sup> activists to theirs. Both were explicit attacks to further the liberation of people of color, yet people of color were killed—the first casualty of Brown’s Harper’s Ferry raid was a Black guard, and one of the police killed in the Brink’s raid was the first Black officer in the Nyack, New York, police department. Both operations were spectacular failures in military terms but had far reaching social consequences, and years later, just as El-Shabazz had praised Brown as an exemplary ‘white ally’, Kwame Ture [Stokely Carmichael], the architect of “Black Power”, praised Marilyn Buck as an exemplar of “the essence of humanity” (Ture, 2004 [1998]).

But the Brink’s operation, a little more than a decade before the launch of Race Traitor, did not cause ‘the white race to undergo fission’. What differentiates New Abolitionist ideal practice from the strategies and actions of the Weather Underground or May 19<sup>th</sup>? How is the contradictory coexistence in the pages of Race Traitor between militant editorials calling for the ‘abolition of the white race’ alongside liberal reformist white anti-racist contributions ‘because they think that publishing them will help build a community of readers’ any different than Weather’s attempt ‘to be a bridge between the two poles’ of ‘full solidarity’ and building ‘a significant mass base’ among white youth? How could Race Traitor idealize John Brown’s ‘unreasonable’ Harper’s Ferry raid, while at the same time promoting copwatch as a way for New Abolitionists ‘to take risks that are reasonable—not suicidal, not bound for martyrdom—but reasonable risks that possibly may ignite a larger movement’? How is this contradictory approach any different than Weather’s New Morning strategy of ‘armed propaganda’? The most obvious difference is that Weather people actually engaged in armed struggle and property destruction while New Abolitionists did not.

Ignatiev recognizes the ‘old’, white Abolitionists as “a small but prophetic vanguard of white men and women” (Paul Goodman quoted in Ignatiev, 2016b) engaged in a strategy of militant, morally absolute, nonconformist action, but to the extent that Ignatiev and Roediger saw themselves as the inheritors of ‘the Johnsonite [Jamesian] tradition in American politics’, they resisted acting as the ‘vanguard’ of New Abolitionism. In so much as Weather people were significantly influenced by the work of Ignatin and Allen, the difference between New Abolitionists and Weather seems to map onto the relationship between James and his student Walter Rodney. James’s strategy for change, as adopted by Ignatiev and Roediger, was almost entirely academic: “C.L.R. James says somewhere that in this world if you have an idea and get together with a few friends and publish your idea, you never know what will happen” (Ignatiev, 2010 [2002]). They did not imagine their role as a ‘vanguard’ but as ‘observers’ who work to “to discover those patterns of activity and forms of organization that have sprung up out of the struggle and that embody the new society, and to help them grow stronger, more confident, and more conscious of their direction” (Ignatiev, 2010b, p. 16). Ignatiev and Roediger were also heavily influenced by the Surrealist movement, who understood their role similarly: “surrealists



need not prescribe forms that Black radicalisms, revolts against patriarchy, race treason, and other pursuits of freedom might take, but rather to observe, support, and participate in the forms they do take” (D. Roediger, 2001, p. 207). Well and good. But this observational role is completely contradictory to the task of repudiating ‘white-skin privilege’ which cannot spontaneously happen because it is not in the ‘racial interests’ of white people. James’ approach was attuned to class-centered approach of social change and rooted in the idea that proletarian interest would inevitably create a mass movement of ‘all’ workers against capitalism. Walter Rodney ultimately rejected his teacher’s ‘observational’ approach and returned to his native Guyana where he waged a short-lived armed struggle campaign against the CIA-backed authoritarian regime which ruled it. He ultimately died, like the three Weather activists in the New York townhouse, when a bomb went off prematurely. In James’ post-mortem criticism, he chided Rodney’s left-adventurism, saying “A revolution is made with arms, but a revolution is made by the revolutionary spirit of the great mass of the population. And you have to wait for that” (James, 1982 [1981]).

Through New Abolitionism, Ignatiev abandoned the ‘waiting role’ and trying to convince ‘the masses’ of white workers to ‘repudiate their white-skin privilege’ in favor of organizing a ‘determined minority’ or ‘band of renegades’. This strategic adjustment seemed to help resolve the white anti-racist contradiction of deploying militant minority action in the service of hegemonically rearticulating “white” to “anti-racism”, but by retaining the Jamesian and Surrealist approach of ‘observing, supporting, and participating’ in the forms of ‘race treason’ that they imagined would inevitably emerge—maintaining the “faith...that the majority of so-called whites in this country are neither deeply nor consciously committed to white supremacy” (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1993c, pp. 3-4) and dreaming the ‘dream that if only he will raise his voice a chorus of the more timorous will join in’—Ignatiev and other New Abolitionists remained in thrall to the ‘illusion’ that ‘repudiating the system of white-skin privileges’ is in the ‘day-to-day real interests’ of white workers and abdicated their responsibility to lead by example. Having broken from ‘mass’ organizing toward advocating a militant ‘vanguard’ strategy similar to John Brown or the Weather Underground, Ignatiev seems content to perform the role of Garrison and leave the dirty work of John Brown to others. By following the Jamesian and Surrealist role of ‘observing, supporting, and participating in the forms that action will inevitably take’, he eschews all responsibility for leading that action. Rather, Ignatiev & Garvey (1993c) ‘prophesize’ that “a new Harpers Ferry is being prepared. Its nature and timing cannot be predicted, but of its coming we have no doubt. When it comes, it will set off a series of tremors that will lead to the disintegration of the white race. We want to be ready, walking in Jerusalem just like John” (p. 5).

Ignatiev & Garvey’s self-imagined role as Garrison inspiring the next John Brown, or the prophet John awaiting the arrival of a ‘race traitor’ messiah, is deeply intertwined with ‘working-class morality’, their theorization that 99% of white people can develop the necessary ‘critical consciousness’ to act autonomously against whiteness, and their approach to liberal color-blindness which seeks to radicalize supposed white desires for genuine post-racialism. If ‘race treason’ is inevitable, then it makes sense to ‘observe, support, and participate in the forms that it takes’, but the fact that New Abolitionism remained associated with such a small group of individuals demonstrates that, in fact, ‘race treason’ is not inevitable. The failure of the New Abolitionist project to develop a workable practice indicates that liberal color-blindness does not contain ‘hopeful signs of a popular giving up on whiteness’ and that the masses of white people have no interest in ‘abolishing the white race’. No commander should order a soldier to do

something that they themselves would not do. If 'race treason' requires risk, New Abolitionists should be willing to take that risk and lead by example. Whereas Ignatiev argues that "The four people who sat down at the lunch counter in Greensboro, in 1960, did not wait for a majority" to set off a chain of events which would lead to the end of Jim Crow, but rather "They seen their duty and they done it" (quoted in Wimsatt et al., 1997, p. 195), he may have 'seen his duty', and advocated this 'duty' to others, but he never 'done it' himself.

By the end of the 1990's, the reluctance of the New Abolitionist Society to act as a New Abolitionist vanguard was on full display. When readers would write to them asking what they could do (e.g. Barbara, 1999, p. 6), the standard response was that "we maintain a web site and publish a journal and newsletter" (Niles & Olson, 1999a, p. 6), and that "The journal, the newsletter, and the website exist to serve a movement. The Society will do whatever its members want it to do. If you want to take part, we can put you in touch with other readers in your area. Perhaps you can develop something" (Ignatiev et al., 1999, p. 114). This contradiction between passionately advocating 'race treason' and their intellectual approach which eschewed any responsibility to lead the 'vanguard' necessary to 'do' the 'task' is perfectly illustrated in a report by Kingsley Clarke, frequent contributor to Race Traitor, contributing editor (Issues #2-15), member of the editorial board of The New Abolitionist, and leader of the Chicago chapter of the New Abolitionist Society:

On November 14th I marched in Decatur with approximately 3,000 people, led by Reverend Jackson. I estimated that about 2,900 were black and 100 white. I saw no Latinos and the only Asians were two women working for television. Of the whites in attendance, there were precious few who might be viewed as abolitionists or race traitors (K. Clarke, 2000, p. 2).

Clarke gives no indication of how he would identify a 'race traitor' if he saw one, and as a leader of the closest New Abolitionist Society chapter to Decatur, you'd think he would already know any 'race traitors' through his organizing efforts. Consistent with the Jamesian approach to 'observing the forms' that revolution will inevitably take, Clarke seems to expect that 'race traitors' will simply appear at a Jesse Jackson march in Decatur, Illinois. And if New Abolitionist define 'race traitors' as those who engage in militant nonconformist action against institutional racism, Clarke was not a 'race traitor' himself.

He reports that Jesse Jackson was arrested and "was surprisingly surrounded by about twenty young Black men who chanted 'Hell no! We won't go!' and struggled with the police. Two police were supposedly injured." Considering that the cover of the Race Traitor anthology four years earlier featured an idealized image of a 'race traitor' shielding the body of a Black man being beaten by the police, why wasn't Clarke the first, or the twenty-first, body to join them in resisting the police? The idea that showing up to a march, selling your organization's newsletter, urging people categorized as white to act in militant nonconformist ways that jeopardize their privilege, wonder why they don't act on those politics when you yourself don't embody them, and then write an article about it entitled "Where are the Race Traitors?" will advance the New Abolitionist political project is quite ridiculous. 'Race traitors' will not spontaneously appear. If 'race treason' ever emerges in a 'critical mass', it can only do so through organizing and leadership by example. It did not during the publication of the journal, hasn't since, and probably never will if its most committed proponents approach the 'task' as Clarke did. The fact that The New Abolitionist printed his report without any sort of discussion

reveals that the New Abolitionist Society, seven years after the first issue of Race Traitor, had absolutely no practical program for ‘abolishing the white race’. The following Spring, the editors of Race Traitor confirmed as much: “Frankly, we had hoped that, by this time, supporters of our project would have been able to establish functioning new abolitionist chapters across the country and that those chapters would have been able to develop effective public projects embodying abolitionist politics. This has not happened” (Ignatiev et al., 2001a, p. 95).

While New Abolitionists defined ‘race treason’ as “fighting against [white supremacy] politically so hard that either they win and the barriers comedown or they are evicted from the white club and denied the benefits of membership” (Niles & Olson, 2000a, p. 6), they did nothing to embody those politics. If we imagine that a ‘determined white minority’ were to act more militantly, their resistance would be quickly moved from the streets to the prison, and from the prison to the hole, “unless, like John Brown,” as Ignatiev argues, “they have the good fortune to be hanged” (Ignatiev, 1997b). Indeed, as Allen imagined, those who “cast off the albatross of privilege and to take the side of the Negro workers instead of the white bosses” may demonstrate that “the first white-skin privilege to fall will be the low ratio of whites to blacks in the prison population” (Ted Allen, 2011 [1967], p. 180). The individual privileges of this determined white minority would certainly be reduced by imprisonment or death, but imprisonment would not reduce their privilege in relation to people of color in a similar situation. They would, for example, continue to have access to a greater humanization and attention. Nor would death allow them to realize “the hope that they can step outside of their color” (Banks et al., 1999, p. 1). More than one hundred and fifty years after John Brown was hanged, New Abolitionists themselves are still interpellating his ‘moldering’ body to whiteness, ironically, for the purposes of making him their exemplary ‘race traitor’. As Ignatiev recognizes, it is “devilishly difficult...for individuals to escape whiteness. The white race does not voluntarily surrender a single member, so that even those who step outside of it in one situation find it virtually impossible not to step back in later, if for no other reason than the assumptions of others” (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1994b, pp. 109-110).

The Weather Underground represents a more recent example of what New Abolitionists propose, but even those in Weather most committed to armed struggle, like Gilbert, fail to indicate that the most extreme acts of militant nonconformity will cause ‘the white race’ to undergo fission’, and have themselves abandoned the classic ‘martyr’s role’ and ‘isolation’ in favor of ‘the waiting role’ and organizing “white” people against “racism”. It could be argued that Weather or May 19<sup>th</sup> were not operating on a developed New Abolitionist critique. It could be argued that they did not reach a ‘critical mass’. It could also be argued that they were not militant enough, or last long enough, but the basic fact remains that the rhetorically ideal proposal for New Abolitionist praxis relies on a tactic, and a generally impractical one, which can only be tested at the highest possible cost.

Even if armed struggle is not the New Abolitionist ideal, the threshold of ‘race treason’ is defined as all or nothing action, victory or [social] death. Such action must erase their ability to return to a ‘white refuge’, meaning that a ‘race traitor’ would either have nowhere to go except destitution or prison or to a community of color who would be expected to take responsibility for their survival. Developing better models of collective action to cross the additional threshold of building a ‘critical mass’ would need to be tested without any idea of how many people will have to be martyred to reach that threshold and without a plan for who will take care of the casualties. In this sense, New Abolitionism would, like white anti-racism, require radical experimentation, but rather than conducting such experiments in people of color spaces in order to find a winning

formula for harmonious collaboration, these experiments could only be conducted on ‘so-called whites’. Again, if such risky experiments are to be conducted, it seems that the proponents of ‘race treason’ should volunteer themselves as the first subjects. To the extent that they have, none of their experiments, like ‘copwatch’, have required the risk necessary to test their highest ideals, and have therefore led to nothing consequential. Their search for a New Abolitionist practice is, therefore, at best, only tested at the highest possible cost, and at worst a celebration of [other people’s] martyrdom.

Is it possible develop a practical and sustainable abolitionist practice? If so, how? Can we imagine that a ‘determined white minority’ could be created in a way that would make their resistance effective and sustainable? The main slogan of New Abolitionism was ‘Treason to Whiteness is Loyalty to Humanity’. The penalty for ‘treason’ is often death and, as Killian & Grigg astutely observe, those who perform the classical martyr's role should not expect to reap the fruits of their sacrifice. But ‘treason’ might also involve relocation. A ‘traitor’ to one ‘nation’ often does so on behalf of another, or might otherwise seek asylum under protection of a rival power. The final Part of this text considers New Abolitionist engagements with ‘humanity’ and Blackness as alternative identities to whiteness, proposes an alternative definition for whiteness as a form of ideal pan-european nationalism for the purposes of dispossessing and exploiting people of color, and the final chapter proposes intersectional Irish Diasporic nationalism as an alternative approach to the ‘abolition of the white race’ which might provide a more effective and sustainable whiteness which is not exclusively reliant on the classic ‘martyr's role’.

PART 3

ALTERNATIVES TO WHITENESS

## CHAPTER 9

### NEW ABOLITIONISTS & POLITICAL BLACKNESS AS ALTERNATIVE IDENTITY

As discussed in the previous chapter, the New Abolitionist strategy of ‘race treason’ is ultimately a tactic conceptualized as a solution, or at least a precondition to people categorized as white participating in solutions. Their proposals for practice were far more invested in precipitating a crisis than defining the ‘new society’ which would emerge after the abolition of whiteness and, as such, they did “not offer up a specific [alternative] identity since abolition [of whiteness] is precisely the assertion of a non-identity” (Leonardo, 2009, p. 105). White anti-racist critics argued that “It is unlikely that a mass movement will grow around” the oppositional identity of ‘race traitor’ because it leaves people categorized as white “little to rally around or affirm” (Kinchloe & Steinberg, 1998, p. 21). While such criticisms are perhaps ultimately correct, they do not sufficiently contend with New Abolitionist work on the question of ‘alternative identities’ to whiteness. In this chapter, I will consider the New Abolitionist appeal to ‘humanity’ as an alternative identity to whiteness, their definition of ‘humanity’ in the U.S. as Black, their interest in the phenomenon of white people ‘crossing over’ into Blackness, and their proposals that ‘rallying around or affirming’ Blackness might serve as an ‘alternative identity’ to whiteness. I will then evaluate the practical implications of their proposal for people categorized as white to embrace political Blackness through a consideration of Rachel Doležal as exemplary ‘race traitor’.

#### **‘Treason to Whiteness is Loyalty to Humanity’**

The editors of Race Traitor were “frequently asked: without whiteness as a social identity, what would those presently defined as white be? Our standard response is, first, that it is not possible to say in advance, and, second, that people must use their imaginations” (Ignatiev, Garvey, & Henson, 2001b, p. 1). This response was consistent with both their hesitancy to perform the role of a ‘prophetic vanguard’ and their messianic anticipation of a ‘new Harper’s Ferry’. They imagined the ‘abolition of whiteness’ as a sort of rapture in which people categorized as white would shed their white bodies for a more essential “human” form in “a raceless society” (Ignatiev, 2010 [2002]). Ignatiev described the New Abolitionist program of precipitating this transformative crisis as ‘race suicide’ in which “so-called whites must cease to exist as whites in order to realize themselves as something else” (Ignatiev, 1997b), or “To put it another way, they must commit suicide as whites to come alive as workers or youth or women or artists or whatever other identity will let them stop being the miserable, petulant, subordinated creatures they now are and become freely associated, developing human beings” (Ignatiev, 1997a, p. 200).

But what is it to be “human”? The notion of who, and what, is “human” has been deeply determined by the same philosophical and scientific institutions which have hegemonically defined and reproduced whiteness. The contest over which bodies and social norms can be hegemonically defined as “human” is at the very heart of racism. Through every epoch of race and white identity formation in the U.S. and around the world, “human” has been hegemonically articulated to “white” (Leonardo, 2009, p. 37; Mills, 1997; Sartre, 1991 [1961]; Seshadri-Crooks, 2000) and has therefore never been a readily available alternative identity to whiteness. Under Jim Crow whiteness, white people were considered fully human because they were explicitly

categorized as white. After Jim Crow, the central feature of liberal color-blindness is that white people have been resignified as individual, and ostensibly 'co-equal', members of 'the human race' without substantively displacing their bodies and norms as the substance of default humanity (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). White people can therefore disclaim any responsibility for the facts on the ground which defined normative 'humanity' through the exclusion of people of color, and maintain their superordinate social position by fending off demands for the major structural changes which would be necessary to 'co-equally' redefine a normative 'human' inclusive of people of color.

For this reason, New Abolitionist appeals to "humanity" as an alternative identity alongside their disidentificatory approach to whiteness seem to be indistinguishable from the way that hegemonic liberal color-blind whiteness allows white people to "mask white privilege" (Leonardo, 2009, p. 105) and avoid "collective responsibility" (Flagg, 2005, p. 10) for their crimes against 'humanity'. To the extent that New Abolitionists "believe that without racial oppression, the only 'race' is the human" (Ignatiev & Pendragon, 1996, p. 18), and look forward to a time when 'whites can be workers or youth or women or artists', such criticisms might ring true. As Killian & Grigg (1965) observed, the "the white man does not think of himself primarily as a white man. He thinks of himself instead in his other roles as a businessman, a parent, a teacher, a church member, a worker, a politician, or what have you" (p. 95). This ability to avoid racial consciousness and define oneself as normatively "human" is a central aspect of 'white privilege' under all epochs of whiteness. But the New Abolitionist imagination of 'a raceless society' is not an endorsement of present liberal color-blind ideology. Rather, their appeal is underpinned by the promise of actually realizing what they perceive as a "deep desire for the United States to stop being a white nation" (D. R. Roediger, 2002, p. 15). They center whiteness and advance a militant color-conscious non-conformism to realize a 'raceless society' based the notion that, "Since non-white racial identities arose largely as responses to white supremacy...abolishing the white race will lead to the elimination of race as a social category" (Ignatiev & Pendragon, 1996, p. 18).

Under liberal color-blind white hegemony, "human" is not only an enduring cognate of "white", but it is also the primary signifier for the "transcendental signified" (Derrida, 1997 [1967]) of people in imagined non- or post-racial worlds. It is the radical humanist project of disarticulating "white" from "human" which is invoked in 'human rights' discourses and in Race Traitor's slogan 'Treason to whiteness is loyalty to humanity', and which expresses the goal of transcending the present structural reality of "humanity" in its limited, exclusive, and white existence in order to realize an ideal, universal, and inclusive "humanity". But because the sign "human" gains so much of its meaning from the organization of contemporary social structure, and its epistemological relation to the production of whiteness and all other modern forms of oppressive hegemonic normativity, its ideal 'post-racial' form is overwhelmed by its normative 'white' form. Most expansive conceptions of 'humanity' today, as throughout Modernity, open the doors of 'humanity' to people of color, women, queer, trans, dis/abled, poor and working class, people of color, without substantially decentering its bourgeois white 'able-bodied' heterosexual male norms. In the same way that the New Abolitionist 'race traitor' is a problematic identification because it risks 'forgetting the problem or believing it solved', it is equally problematic to propose that those who aspire to whiteness can be 'loyal to humanity' when such an ideal "humanity" does not yet exist and can only be 'co-equally' redefined through the successful liberation of all oppressed people.

The New Abolitionist invocation of "humanity" as a future post-racial subjectivity is ultimately a repackaging of The Communist Manifesto's prediction that capitalism will eventually create a proletariat 'stripped of every trace of national character'. Super-exploitation on a global level will dissolve all arbitrary differences between people in a global melting pot, creating the molten "human" essence which will form a new socialist world order. 'Treason to whiteness', the repudiation of the privileges which protect white workers from super-exploitation, is the necessary price to pay for entering into this process of proletarianization. But, to the extent that they planned to survive militant nonconformist action, New Abolitionists struggled to define any specific 'born again' subjectivities which would allow them to participate in the construction of "humanity" with the peoples of the world under given political conditions.

The primary feature which differentiated New Abolitionist invocations of "humanity" from liberal color-blind invocations of "humanity" was that their "humanity" was explicitly Black. Just as Ignatin had argued that the Black liberation movement is 'the kernel of a potential workers' controlled labor movement for all workers' in White Blindspot, New Abolitionists conceptualized Black identity and culture as the 'kernel' of a common proletarianized humanity. Roediger, for example, argued that "to be Black is to be more human and more able to resist the alienating aspects of late capitalist life" (D. R. Roediger, 1994, p. 67). Phil Rubio, a contributing editor for Race Traitor [Issues #2-#15], argued that, like capitalism inevitably causes proletarianization, "White supremacist culture has created the conditions for its opposite [Blackness] to arise and destroy it" (Rubio, 1993, p. 75). And Ignatiev likewise argued that "The black proletariat forms the historical antipode to capital" (Ignatiev, 1993a, p. 48).

In this conception of Blackness as emergent 'humanity', New Abolitionists are in general agreement with "Black Power", Critical Race Theory, Black feminist intersectionality, and white anti-racism that people of color, and Black people in particular, are the leading force for 'humanizing' the world. These New Abolitionist conceptions of 'humanity' as Black are quite similar to Baldwin's argument that the standpoint-based action of Black people 'will change not only the Black personality, but will change the world', the Combahee River Collective's argument that 'If Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression', or David Gilbert's (2002 [c. 1990]) argument that "Black culture" contains "more humane values of social consciousness, emotional expressiveness, and sense of community" (p. 19). But whereas "Black Power", Critical Race Theory, Black feminist intersectionality, and white anti-racism work to strengthen and respect the standpoint-based dialogue and action of people of color, and particularly Black people, Roediger and Race Traitor suggested that people categorized as white should work to 'become Black'.

### **New Abolitionist Disidentification & 'Becoming Black'**

When Baldwin spoke at the West Indian Student Centre in London (Ové, 1969) and responded to the question "Do you think that there is any place for the white liberal in the 'Black Power' movement?" (28:58), Dick Gregory was on the program with him, and also responded to the pointed question. Gregory fully endorsed Baldwin's formulation that white people must disidentify from whiteness if they are to have any 'hope', but unlike Baldwin who endorsed the "Black Power" disarticulation of 'Beloved Community' spaces, Gregory used Baldwin's formulation that whiteness is 'a totally false identity' and an ideological choice as a bridge between the radical humanist 'Beloved Community' model of the Civil Rights Movement and "Black Power". Whereas King asked white americans to 'judge a person by the content of their



character not the color of their skin,' Gregory argued that "white is not a color, it's an attitude" (41:14). In contrast to the Black Power directive for white people to organize 'their white communities' three years earlier, Gregory extended a challenge to people categorized as white: "Can you come with us, and cease being white?" (40:22). His challenge is an invitation to Blackness as an oppositional 'attitude', a proposal to extend a political and cultural blackness to all "cats that think Black regardless of how white you are" (40:30). While formally 'anti-white', Gregory's challenge constructs an ideal 'Beloved Community' collaborative space which would include white bodies; an 'integration of the Black community' in which Black leadership would facilitate the 'special responsibilities' of so-called whites to commit 'race treason' by providing them with an alternative Black citizenship. Gregory's development on Baldwin's formulations and his invitation to a political and cultural blackness more precisely spoke to the hopes of New Abolitionists. While Baldwin joined "Black Power" in theorizing that 'white radicals and white liberals' are 'unable to examine the forces which have created him in fact', Gregory, like New Abolitionists, theorized that people categorized as white were indeed 'able' by adopting a 'Black attitude'.

The New Abolitionist proposal that Blackness might serve as an alternative identity to whiteness in the present rests on a conception that Blackness is as an expansive proletarian identity at the heart of the productive forces of capitalism which is inherently opposed to both capitalism and whiteness and capable of assimilating people categorized as white. Following his mentor George Rawick's work, Roediger argues that African-American identity is a melting pot, a "welter" (D. R. Roediger, 2002, p. 231), or "mixing of various African ethnicities" (D. R. Roediger, 2017, p. 73) formed by the super-exploitation of "slavery and [the] creative self-activity" of slave resistance which "melded" a diverse group of people "into an African American people" (D. R. Roediger, 2002, p. 231). Like Dick Gregory argued that "white is not a color, it's an attitude. Black is not a color, it's an attitude" (quoted in Ové, 1969 @ 41:14), Ignatiev (1997 [1994]-b) defined "black and white as political, not cultural, categories" (p. 611) in which "whiteness is the willingness to seek a comfortable place within the system of race privilege [and] Blackness means total, implacable, and relentless opposition to that system" (p. 609). By disidentifying from whiteness and engaging in 'race treason', Ignatiev argued that people categorized as white "can be said to have washed away their whiteness and taken in some blackness" (Ibid.). Ignatiev & Garvey (2015) further observe an historical "willingness of black communities to welcome white defectors." Together, these definitions suggested that Blackness is the 'kernel' of an expansive proletarian identity which has "the uncommon ability...to incorporate difference, even across the color line" (D. R. Roediger, 2017, p. 73) and might serve as a melting pot into which "the white race" might be "dissolved" (Ignatiev, 1993b, p. 66). New Abolitionists imagined that "When the workers of the world learn to say... 'I'm black and I'm proud'--the modern rendition of 'Workers of all countries, unite!'--then the new world will be at hand" (Ignatiev, 1993a, p. 48).

### **Race Treason & 'Crossing Over' into Blackness**

Like their approach to radicalizing what they saw as a 'deep desire for the United States to stop being a white nation' under liberal color-blindness toward their project of 'abolishing the white race', New Abolitionists also sought to radicalize white engagements with Black culture as a potential vehicle for 'race treason'. Both Roediger and Race Traitor invested a great deal of effort observing and analyzing 'crossovers'—those people categorized as white attracted to Black musical forms—from blackface minstrelsy (D. Roediger, 1993; D. R. Roediger, 2000

[1991]; Wray, 1996), to the blues (Garon, 1995; Zaido, 1997), jazz (Henson, 1996b), African drumming (Friedberg, 1996b), rhythm & blues, rock & roll (Henson, 1996a; D. R. Roediger, 2002), soul, funk, techno (Duncan, 1996), and hip-hop (K. Clarke, 1996; Day, 1993; Hill, 2000; Ignatiev & Garvey, 1994c; D. R. Roediger, 2002); see also (Rubio, 1993; Washington, 1994). Following Martin Luther King, who expressed that the popularity of Black music “paved the way for social and political change by creating a powerful, cultural bridge between black and white” which gave young people “a common language” (quoted in D. R. Roediger, 2002, p. 213), New Abolitionists argued that the attraction of working-class and poor whites to Black music was a “confession that white culture was bankrupt and sterile in comparison to the real or imagined fascinations of African-American culture” (D. Roediger, 1993, p. 107) and an expression of alienation from capitalism which “imagined a culture which featured joy, ties to the land and a refusal to be governed by clocks and bosses” (D. Roediger, 1993, p. 107). To the extent that even explicitly racist engagements with Black culture like blackface minstrelsy represented “a telling sign of the dissatisfaction of white youth with whiteness” (D. R. Roediger, 2002, p. 213), they viewed such attractions to Black culture as an already existent “form of political awareness” which might be leveraged toward “political defection from the white race” (Rubio, 1993, p. 80).

In their role ‘observing, supporting, and participating’ in the emergent forms of ‘the new society’, however, New Abolitionists recognized that “By itself, crossover represents a potential for race treason, not the actuality” (Ignatiev, 1997 [1994]-b, p. 609), and “to imagine that the bridge King described can bear all the weight of transforming racial capitalism and white investments in it is to court disaster” (D. R. Roediger, 2002, p. 213). Their critical approach to ‘crossover’ was designed to “transcend crossover and build a better bridge” (Ibid., p. 214) by politicizing such attractions and linking them to a committed project of ‘race treason’. Cultural expressions of “Black Power” in 1990s hip-hop from Public Enemy to Tupac Shakur seemed to be a particularly promising concrete terrain on which to enact such a strategy.

Unlike rock, which brought whites to African American music but quickly diluted the Black influence and threw up white performers as the most celebrated stars, hip-hop is embraced by whites without any sharp tendency to expropriate it...Hip-hop offers white youth not only the spontaneity, experimentation, humor, danger, sexuality, physical movement and rebellion absent from what passes as white culture but it offers an explicit, often harsh, critique of whiteness. Of course it would be ridiculous to claim that every white hip-hop fan is finding a way out of whiteness, let alone racism...Historically, the use of an (often distorted) image of African American life to express criticisms of 'white culture', or longings for a different way of life, has hardly been an antidote to racism....whites are confessing their confusion about whether it is really worth the effort to be white. We need to say that it is not worth it and that many of us do not want to do it. Initiatives...should not only be class oriented and antiracist, but also in a sense explicitly antiwhite, with a central focus on exposing how whiteness is used to make whites settle for hopelessness in politics and misery in everyday life (D. R. Roediger, 1994, pp. 15-16).

Not only was hip-hop more explicitly rooted in the standpoints of people of color and critical of whiteness than previous popular Black musical forms, but New Abolitionists also believed that “the process of social dissolution is now more advanced” (Ignatiev, 1997 [1994]-b, p. 609),

providing an unprecedented “opportunity to take the historically marginalized 'exceptional white'—the race traitor—from cult to mainstream” (Rubio, 1993, p. 80).

But like their strident advocacy for militant nonconformism without engaging in it themselves, New Abolitionists were ill-equipped to participate in hip-hop culture in any meaningful way. Aside from voicing support for the “Free to Be Me” group—young white women “at North Newton Junior-Senior High School near Morocco, Indiana” who garnered national attention for “braiding their hair in dreadlocks and wearing baggy jeans and combat boots, a style identified with Hip-Hop culture” and faced violent repression from fellow white classmates for “acting Black” (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1994c)—as middle-aged white scholar-activists, New Abolitionists did not seem to have any means to make a significant impact toward ‘building a better bridge’.

In practice, however, Ignatiev and Roediger’s relationship to political and cultural Blackness were much more recognizably white anti-racist, like Roediger’s academic mentor and fellow Jamesian, George Rawick. Roediger’s (2017) reflection on Rawick’s life seems to equally apply to the positional strategies of New Abolitionists academics. Roediger, Ignatiev, and Rawick each gained positional consciousness from the standpoint-based actions of people of color, and “Black workers' attempts to figure things out, however variously, contradictorily, and imperfectly, have to be one of our starting points” (p. 97). Their “longstanding political agreement with radical Black Power's impulses...gave [them] a voice, and a capacity to refrain from always using it” (Ibid.), and “At a time when so many white scholars cast themselves as victims of the allegedly silencing impact of Black Power, [they] worked across color lines” (Ibid.) in collaboration with elements of the Black liberation movement who would work with them. Like Bradenite white anti-racists, they were “beneficiaries of the openness of Black communities, movements, and intellectuals” (p. 73) as part of “the beloved community of scholars studying African-American history” (Ibid.); “white intellectuals” who “entered Black intellectual life” (Ibid.) based on a counter-hegemonically normative white anti-racist program, not people categorized as white ‘becoming Black’. And while they invested a great deal of effort toward studying the potential of ‘crossing over’, during the decade of *Race Traitor*’s publication, they ultimately seem to have recognized that “so large a proportion of the white population now engages in some form of wholesale crossracial cultural borrowing and/or impersonation...that positive changes ought already to be showing up if such borrowings really chart the way forward” (D. R. Roediger, 2002, p. 238). Roediger and Ignatiev never explicitly abandoned the idea, however, and it is therefore important to assess here whether a program which proposes political / cultural Blackness as an alternative identity to whiteness has any potential given present conditions.

### **Rachel Doležal: A Delayed Exemplar of ‘Race Treason’ Through Blackness?**

While the New Abolitionist theorization that Blackness offered an expansive proletarian identity capable of serving as alternative identity to whiteness never showed significant signs of viability in the 1990s, the recent case of Rachel Doležal provides an opportunity to reflect on an exemplar who seemed to dedicate her life to ‘crossing over’. This section will compare and contrast Doležal’s memoir, *In Full Color: Finding My Place in a Black and White World* (2017) with New Abolitionism in order to demonstrate the usefulness of her lived experience for evaluating the possibilities for white americans ‘crossing over’ into Blackness today.

Doležal graduated high school and left her parents’ rural Montana home to attend college in Mississippi in 1996 at the height of *Race Traitor*’s public attention. While she does not cite

Race Traitor in her memoir (Doležal & Reback, 2017), her “exodus from the white world in which I was raised...toward the Black one” (p. 4) was marked by many aspects of New Abolitionist promotion of Blackness as an alternative identity to whiteness. Montana was an exemplary location of Race Traitor’s target audience, which Doležal similarly describes as “about as far away from Black America as you can get and still be in the United States” (p. 9), and her strategy of “crossing the color line” (p. 2) was the conscious and political act of a “traitor” to “white folk” (Ibid., see also p. 248). Like New Abolitionists conceptualized Blackness as an expansive ‘humanizing’ identity diametrically opposed to whiteness and capable of assimilating people categorized as white, Doležal understood that identifying “as Black” (p. 1) meant “acknowledging our common human ancestry with roots in Africa...understanding the legacy and context of Blackness beyond the physical into the realms of the spiritual, psychological, historical, and emotional” and “fighting for freedom, equality, and justice for people of African heritage around the world” (p. 271). She identified as “Black” rather than “African-American” because it is “a much broader term” (p. 216) and her identification was preeminently ‘political’.

New Abolitionists worked to politicize ‘crossovers’ attracted to Black culture toward action against institutionalized whiteness, and Doležal seems to have lived a life which responded to this call. She began braiding her hair and “and sporting dashikis and African-patterned dresses” (p. 84) at the same time as joining her mostly white college’s Black Student Association, served as the club’s historian for four years, “developed a radar for anything which that seemed inequitable to or dismissive of the college’s Black students and committed myself to changing it” (p. 81). She “helped to create the first African American history course ever taught there...worked with the college’s president to increase the recruitment and retention of Black students” (p. 80), and “wrote a petition” to get the school to recognize Martin Luther King Day as a holiday (p. 81). Later, Doležal served as an “unofficial” faculty advisor for the Black Student Union at Eastern Washington University (p. 192), became the President of the Spokane chapter of the NAACP (p. 193), and represented a pro-Black Lives Matter position on the city’s Office of Police Ombudsman Commission (p. 189), fighting both explicit and institutional forms of racism.

At the same time that Race Traitor was advocating actions of provocative disidentification on official forms which collected racial demographics, Doležal was also struggling with how to engage with these forms. As a college student, she found inspiration from “some of my biracial friends [who] would play around with these forms, alternately checking WHITE, BLACK, or OTHER, just to see how it would affect the way people responded to them” and “thought it was a clever idea and a useful sociological experiment” (p. 85). Later, after moving to Spokane, she began consistently “claiming my identity and checking BLACK” (p. 149). Like Race Traitor, she felt identifying as Black on official forms was a liberating act of political resistance through self-definition and believed that “If Black-categorized and white-categorized people could choose which racial identity to adopt...it would dismantle the hegemony white people have enjoyed since this nation’s birth” (pp. 247-248).

Like Ignatiev & Garvey defined a ‘race traitor’ as someone ‘who defies white rules so strenuously as to jeopardize his or her ability to draw upon the privileges of whiteness’ and pointed to groups like Free to Be Me which showed “the tremendous power of crossover culture to undermine both white solidarity and male authority” (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1994c), Doležal recounts that her work with her college Black Students Association and “The increasingly Afrocentric look I sported invited all sorts of criticism” (Doležal & Reback, 2017, p. 85) from

white students. Perhaps more importantly, when she later explicitly identified as Black, Doležal argued that “any whiteness I possessed became invisible to the people collecting the forms and even to the doctors examining the most intimate parts of my body” (p. 149), resulting in “social stigma and hardship” (Ibid.). She was tested for HIV “every time I went to the health clinic,” beauticians complained about her “African American hair,” and “routine police stops took on a hostile feel...I got so many traffic tickets I had to go to online driving school to keep my license” (Ibid.). She is also convinced that her ‘outing’ as a white woman was part of a campaign against her ‘treason’ by the Spokane Police and her family (pp. 209-211), and that “The furor surrounding my racial identity provided city officials with the perfect smokescreen to distract people's attention while they led a witch hunt against the three most principled members of the [Office of Police Ombudsman] commission” (p. 224). Doležal’s college period could certainly also be described as ‘breaking the laws of whiteness so flagrantly as to destroy the myth of white unanimity’, the juxtaposition of her identity with people who “often get called 'Oreos’—Black on the outside and white on the inside” (p. 115) sounds very similar to Ignatiev’s call for “a critical mass of...reverse oreos” (Ignatiev, 1997b), and finally, the “media firestorm that followed [her] ‘exposure’” and “sparked an international debate about race and racial identity” (Doležal & Reback, 2017, p. 4) could certainly be seen as a ‘moment when the routine assumptions of race break down’ and ‘the seismic promise that somewhere in the tectonic flow a new fault is building up pressure’ which might explode in a ‘new Harper’s Ferry’. But there were also important differences between Doležal’s lived experience identifying as Black and New Abolitionist formulations, including [i] her work to ‘look Black’, [ii] a crucial moment of strategic whiteness in pursuing a sexual harassment complaint, and ultimately [iii] her pursuit of a liberal and biologized political project instead of militant nonconformism and demystification.

The theoretical power of Ignatiev’s ‘reverse oreos’ proposal was that they would ‘look white but not act white’, eroding the ability of state institutions to determine loyalty by phenotype, forcing the state “to start spreading around indiscriminately the treatment they normally reserve for people of color” (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1993c, p. 5), and, as a result, perhaps starting a ‘chain of events’ which would lead to ‘fission of the white race’. Doležal, however, took a great deal of care, particularly in later years, to ‘look Black’. Ignatiev’s formulation for ‘reverse oreos’ requires two key elements: actors would have to consciously maintain a ‘white look’ and they would have to clearly define ‘acting black’. Both of these requirements are highly problematic in practice, and they come into direct contradiction with the New Abolitionist promotion of ‘crossovers’ like the Free to Be Me group who primarily created controversy through outward expressions of ‘braiding their hair in dreadlocks and wearing baggy jeans and combat boots, a style identified with Hip-Hop culture’. In the realm of style, there is an indeterminate line between ‘looking’ and ‘acting’ and Doležal walked this line for two decades. In college, she began braiding her hair in “*Poetic Justice* box braids and sporting dashikis and African-patterned dresses” (Doležal & Reback, 2017, p. 84) which caused controversy among white students who had observed her transformation and knew she was “not Black” (p. 85). But while ‘destroying the myth of white unanimity’ and ‘undermining white solidarity’ were certainly among her goals in ‘acting Black’, she was more focused on assimilating showing solidarity to and gaining acceptance from Black students. In this context, she viewed braids as “the great equalizer, leveling the playing field between women born with fine, wavy hair and those with thick, kinky hair” (p. 94).

Whereas New Abolitionists were most interested in upsetting white solidarity without much care for how such actions affected their relationships with people of color, Doležal was

more interested in improving her relationships with Black people and assimilating to Black culture. Over time, her commitment to an “ethnically indeterminant look” (p. 85) increasingly frustrated people who “didn't know what to make of me” (p. 84). While, at first, she describes answering questions about her identity honestly, with “long rambling answers” which required her to tell “them nearly *everything* about my life” and “seemed to bore the pants off most” (Ibid.), she soon abandoned justifying her decisions and instigating controversy with her ‘crossover’ style to create opportunities for difficult conversations. Instead, she transformed her public protest into a personal ‘sociological experiment’ by letting people, Black and white, “make assumptions about me” (Ibid.). What Ignatiev & Garvey imagined as an explicit strategy which used Black style as a weapon against white conformity became, for Doležal, a personally empowering and private act of ‘getting over’ on people. Abdicating any feeling of obligation to justify her stylistic choices allowed her to momentarily overcome ‘dilemmas’ of white anti-racism. She “noticed how much more relaxed and comfortable Black people who assumed I was Black were around me” (p. 84), and she reveled in this insider status.

### **Doležal’s ‘Radical Experimentation’ & Dilemmas of ‘Crossing Over’**

Doležal justifies “wearing such a culturally specific style” [box braids] and conducting ‘sociological experiments’ passing in Black spaces without informed consent from participants with a sustained insistence that they were always conducted with “permission from the Black women who knew me best” (p. 93). Her choice of Black ‘supervisors’, however, is caught in the familiar ‘dilemmas’ of white choice and interpretation and their correspondence with her interests is insufficiently examined. In college her friend Donna, who believed that “to copy is to compliment” (quoted in p. 91), was her ‘supervisor’. At the end of her senior year, she married a Black co-worker from her night job at the United Parcel Service, and he became a very different ‘supervisor’ when the couple moved to Washington D.C. for Doležal to attend graduate school at Howard University. Kevin “preferred my hair straight—and bleached blonde...forbade me from wearing braids or Black hairstyles,” and “dissuaded me from sitting in the sun, preferring my skin to be as pale as it could possibly be” (p. 115). She “acquiesced” to his authority, believing it to be her duty as his wife, but viewed conforming to a ‘white look’ as a “step back” in her “evolution toward Blackness” (Ibid.).

In Washington, her struggles against whiteness and patriarchy became increasingly intertwined. On one hand, her resistance to white norms was a resource in resisting the authority of her husband Kevin. On the other, her whiteness became a resource in resisting sexual harassment by her department chair at Howard. When she sued, “my attorney advised me to broaden the scope of the lawsuit...to include race because he thought it would be more effective” (p. 118). She decided to “play the race card” and claim racial discrimination against the HBCU “because we were in such dire straits financially, and with me in my third trimester of my pregnancy, we needed all the help we could get” (Ibid.). Instead of ‘owning’ this deeply problematic ‘step back’ into whiteness as a strategic deployment of her white womanhood in her own self-interest, she blames it on her attorney as works to spin it as a personal sacrifice made in the interests of her [Black] family. Doležal divorced Kevin as ‘partner’ and ‘supervisor’ three years later. Like Ignatiev & Garvey’s observation that the Free to Be Me group’s actions demonstrated ‘the tremendous power of crossover culture to undermine both white solidarity and male authority’, Blackness was a key element in Doležal’s “emancipation” (p. 121) from Kevin, and her reclamation of bodily autonomy: “I started dating, men and women, and I once again embraced my inclination toward Black aesthetics” (p. 129). In addition to “expressing myself

again through [Black] hairstyles” (Ibid.), this time she also explicitly worked to darken her skin as well.

While Doležal denies getting “melanin-stimulation shots or...[otherwise altering] my body or skin” through other medicinal or surgical means, she “sunbathed” and worked to “keep a tan as long as I could in the winter” (Ibid.). She uses feminist arguments for bodily autonomy to justify her intentional efforts to be read as a light-skinned Black woman, saying that “Many women surgically alter their bodies in ways that make them look different from how they were born,” and that “how I did my hair and makeup and treated my skin was a personal decision” (p. 235). But given that her ‘beauty routine’ was developed for the primary purpose of more easily claiming Black identity, these personal decisions were also certainly political, and became even more so after she gained custody of her Black younger adopted brother Izaiah. When Izaiah came to live with Doležal, the teen expressed to her that he wanted to “be part of a Black family” and call her “mom” in order to “blend in” and avoid having to answer questions about his complicated past (p. 173). Doležal agreed and, in some sense, Izaiah became the new ‘supervisor’ for her ‘sociological experiment’ in becoming Black: “After that conversation, I never wore my hair straight or unaltered in public, and I consciously maintained some warmth of color in my skin, whether through sunbathing or bronzer sprays...and fully [committed] to a look that made visual sense to people who knew me as Izaiah's mom” (Ibid.). This ‘permission’ from her teenage brother provided Doležal with the justification she desired for “running full steam ahead” towards assuming a Black identity, and doing so “allowed” her “to bloom” into “a prominent civil rights leader and defender of human rights in the region” (p. 148).

Like New Abolitionists, Doležal theorized that she was able to develop the standpoint necessary to understand and fight whiteness, and “If every step toward Blackness was a step away from whiteness,” she felt confident as a “fully conscious, woke soul sista...someone who was eager to not only model the philosophy of a great activist like Angela Davis but to sport similarly textured hair as well” (Ibid.). She believed that becoming Black allowed her to overcome the ‘dilemmas’ of white positionality and “work for the Cause,” not “from the outside as a white ally, but from the inside as a Black leader” (Ibid.). At the same time, however, she also knew for “a long time” that her ‘sociological experiment’ was highly suspect and she “would need to talk about it eventually” (p. 4), she had no exit plan and arrogantly “hoped” that she could pull it off until “I could choose the time, the place, and most importantly the method” of reporting her findings (p. 4). Her choice to recognize Izaiah’s request as ‘permission’ for accelerating her ‘sociological experiment’ overlapped with her own desire to shed an uncomfortable association with whiteness, and she recognized how flimsy this justification was in the context of a larger Black community who would not have given her such ‘permission’.

Instead of redefining herself as a fully ‘emancipated’ and autonomous Black actor, Doležal’s fear of being exposed functioned as a significant constraint on her social activity: “Every job I took on, every relationship I entered, every word out of my mouth was a risk. I was stuck in an awful limbo” (p. 155). This fear did not, however, prevent her from taking even greater risks by accepting high profile positions of leadership in Spokane’s Black community. What may have started as an attempt “to undo white supremacy” (p. 230), had transformed into personal and private ‘sociological experiment’, and ultimately a self-interested quest to successfully ‘cross over’ into the Black community of Spokane at their expense and without their consent.

## Deconstructing Blackness, Naturalizing Race

Unsurprisingly, Doležal's reckless 'experiment' exploded, and "didn't just upend my life but also the lives of everyone around me" (p. 249). Not only did she disregard the already significant risks to undertaking such 'experimentation' as a white woman in people of color spaces, but despite knowing for 'a long time that I would need to talk about it eventually', Doležal was also totally ineffectual at explaining herself, much less using the crisis to critique whiteness. She seemed completely taken off-guard when her 'white lie' was exposed and, rather than attempting to use the moment of popular attention to precipitate a crisis in whiteness, she focused her deconstructive lens on the Blackness of light-skinned Black people to justify her own inclusion. She compared herself with MSNBC-BLK journalist Amber Payne who, "If she'd run a flat-iron down her hair...could have easily passed for Italian" (p. 238), and NAACP president Ben Jealous "whose complexion was even lighter than mine" (p. 165), and further questions Ben Jealous's relative claim to Blackness by repeating his DNA test results from Henry Louis Gates' Finding Your Roots program, "that he is 80 percent European and **only** 18 percent sub-Saharan African" (p. 165, emphasis added), and Gates's joke that Jealous is the "whitest Black man we've ever tested" (quoted in Ibid.). Doležal never subjected herself to a similar test, but her strategy of questioning the Blackness of light-skinned Black people simultaneously endorses an essentialist biological definition of Blackness and undermines Black people's right to collectively determine who they recognize as Black.

Doležal's pointed questioning of light-skinned Black people in response to initial criticism was the tip of what might be described as a liberal color-blind neo-sexological framework which appropriates and rearticulates counter-essentialist elements from queer and mixed-race discourses to propose a "spectrum of racial identification" (Doležal & Reback, 2017, p. 274). Drawing from heteronormative discourses, she argued that the 'aesthetic' choices she made to 'look Black' reflected something "instinctual, coming from some place deep inside of me" (p. 9). Through familiar language associated with successful counter-essentialist projects to justify queer desire as 'natural' (see Webber, 2012), Doležal sought to naturalize her choices to 'become Black' as expressions of a mystical internal desire or 'soul' in order to place them beyond the realm of legitimate public scrutiny. Her claim that she was 'born this way' similarly invited psychologists to pathologize her non-normativity as a 'disorder', and to counter this pathologization, she particularly appropriates counter-essentialist strategies of transgendered people which appeal to natural authority, and extends their taxonomies to construct a new essentialized category which justifies her desire: "Just as a transgender person might be born male but identify as female, I wasn't pretending to be something I wasn't [sic] but expressing something I already was. I wasn't passing as Black; I *was* Black" (p. 148).

In making this 'transracial' claim, she equates experiences of gender dysphoria with her attraction to Blackness, endorses both queerness and Blackness as "transhistorical or 'natural' categories of human beings" (Somerville, 2000, p. 2), and cynically throws both of these counter-essentialist strategies of LGBTQ++ people around herself as protection. To the extent that Black / LGBTQ++ people have built power through reclaiming and rearticulating externally imposed categories through counter-naturalization, Doležal insulates herself with the discourses which have enabled this power, but by deploying them in defense of her very different and highly problematic project designed to transgress the protective boundaries erected by Black communities, and with no interest whatsoever in challenging cisgenderism, she also significantly undermines that very power. In short, when 'exposed' and called to account for her problematic 'social experiment', she simultaneously drew power from Black/queer counter-essentialist



strategies to justify her right to ‘become Black’, and threw critical attention onto their validity to insulate herself.

Having been popularly banned from claiming Black identity after her ‘exposure’, Doležal’s contingent and defensive deconstruction of Blackness and appropriation of LGBT counter-essentialist strategy were combined with elements from ‘mixed-race’ discourses to propose her ‘spectrum of racial identification.’ In his consideration of what he calls The Colorblind Multiracial Dilemma (1997), RaceCrit John A. Powell is deeply critical of the two major ‘multiracial’ approaches to representation under liberal color-blind white hegemony: biological and experiential. From his perspective, the *biological* approach which argues for representation based on concepts of “mixed blood or mixed genetic material,” problematically endorses “the racist science of the last century” (p. 797), and the *experiential* approach, which asserts the rights of ‘mixed-race’ people to “define themselves” and advocates “an increase in the number of racial categories will soften, if not completely destabilize, the existing racial hierarchy” (p. 799), does not sufficiently contend with sociohistorical contexts where racial categories have proliferated but “did little to destabilize the white hierarchy” (p. 800).

Many of Doležal’s early decisions in Mississippi seem to accord with New Abolitionist attempts to politicize ‘cross overs’ with a ‘politically black’ identity, but whereas the college-age Doležal seems to have endorsed contentions in Critical Race Theory and Critical Whiteness Studies “that to destabilize racial hierarchy, we start with whiteness” (p. 805), Doležal’s increasing commitment to physically and socially ‘passing’ in Black communities and her ‘post-exposure proposal for a ‘spectrum of racial identification’ ultimately has more in common with liberal color-blind white hegemony than with the politicization of ‘crossing over’. She not only works to rearticulate elements of radical humanist Civil rights discourses to ‘camouflage’ her superordinate structural position, but she also further appropriates elements of colorism, queer, and ‘mixed-race’ discourses for the same purpose, transforming what was once a potentially transformative project of ‘race treason’ into—as the subtitle of her book states—‘Finding her place’ within the existing racial order.

Like the experiential ‘mixed-race’ approach to representation which Powell describes, Doležal advocates for the proliferation of racial categories without any engagement of historical contexts where such categories have proliferated, and she reconstructs herself as a champion for those “just like me, [who] feel trapped somewhere in the confusing grey zone between the Black and white worlds” (Doležal & Reback, 2017, p. 274). Her ‘spectrum of racial identification’ similarly leaves “the extreme poles of whiteness and blackness undisturbed” (Powell, 1997, p. 801), and makes the same “false claim...that we can define ourselves in isolation” (Powell, 1997, p. 801) within a familiar, abstract universalist liberal framework which ultimately contends that, “At the end of the day, we’re all part of the same group: human” (Doležal & Reback, 2017, p. 267).

Like the biologized ‘mixed-race’ approach to representation, Doležal’s ‘spectrum of racial identification’ relies on ‘the racist science of the last century’, particularly sexology, to naturalize her desire to ‘become Black’. Her political transformation from ‘becoming Black’ to ‘finding her place on the spectrum of racial identification’ was accompanied by a rearticulation of her ‘aesthetic’ from box braids to wearing “my hair in a loose wavy pattern” that was curled and dyed black, and “an ethnically indeterminate look” which continued to include skin darkening to “[underscore] that I wasn’t going back to looking white while not, I hoped, offending anyone who felt I wasn’t Black” (p. 255). But while her ‘spectrum of racial identification’ formulation acquiesced to demands by Black people that she stop identifying

herself as Black, Doležal “remains unapologetically Black” (p. 267), continues to explain her attraction to Blackness as “the essential essence of who I am” (p. 271), and has legally changed her name to Nkechi Amare Diallo, a name “given to me by a man from the Igbo tribe in Nigeria” (p. 273).

### **Doležal & New Abolitionism**

Despite all of their investments in the potential of ‘crossing over’ during the 1990s, David Roediger did not publicly respond to the global Doležal controversy and Ignatiev & Garvey only wrote one short article entitled Beyond the Spectacle: New Abolitionists Speak Out (2015), most of which simply reiterated core arguments published in Race Traitor editorials for those who were not familiar with them. The title and tenor of Ignatiev & Garvey’s statement suggests they felt pressured to enter into the debate and they “confess that had Rachel Dolezal submitted an account of her life, we probably would have published it—not without reservations,” but leave it to readers to try to decide what those reservations might be in light of their general principles rather than using the moment to clearly reassess their specific proposals that ‘political blackness’ might serve as an alternative identity to whiteness.

Instead of analyzing Doležal’s project and the ‘spectacular’ discourse it elicited in relation to their own, Ignatiev & Garvey dismissed its import as a “local” story blown out of proportion by mass media. While they reference one moment from her Today Show interview with Matt Lauer to this effect, their analysis is thin and opaque and does not substantially engage the hundreds and thousands of responses by Black people, most of which vociferously rejected her ‘sociological experiment’ and the possibilities for white people to ‘cross over’ into Blackness. Ignatiev & Garvey’s focus on the ‘most watched moment’ suggests that they were primarily interested in ‘the tremendous power of crossover culture to undermine both white solidarity and male authority’ at the very top of the mass white media and had little interest in addressing the impacts of her actions on Black people. Instead, they vaguely express that “the more we saw the wolves circling around, the more we came to sympathize with her,” all but endorse her efforts to depoliticize and personalize the ‘spectacle’ and generally disclaim any stake in the conversation, saying “We’re inclined to think that judgements about her actions and explanations are mostly a matter for discussion among her immediate family members (specifically her son and her adopted brother), her friends, perhaps her students at Eastern Washington University and her political associates.”<sup>45</sup>

### **‘Crossing Over’ & Black Power**

The New Abolitionist proposal that Blackness might serve as an alternative identity to whiteness seems to be willfully ignorant of Black liberation discourse in the four decades which preceded it. The ‘Beloved Community’ of civil rights movement organizing against Jim Crow was based

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<sup>45</sup> Even more troubling, they conclude their article with a striking suggestion that—because Barak Obama was elected president, there are more Black people among “the ranks of the rich and powerful, and even the ‘middle class,’” and that the lives of these upper and middle-class Black people “are not defined by the official repression in the way they were in the past”—the U.S. may be entering a moment where “race is again being redefined [so] that the degraded race will no longer be all those who share the characteristic of the visible black skin but only those who are poor and workers.” These brazen suggestions that institutional anti-Blackness might be over, and that working-class might be ‘the new Black’, seems to fully endorse a reactionary class-first analysis resurgent among much of the white left after the election of Barak Obama.

on the idea that “if we couldn't integrate the white community, we'd integrate the black community instead” (C. Hayden, 2000, p. 355). The ‘integrated’ Black community would form the seed for a liberal democratic ‘interracial’ America, not unlike Ignatiev & Garvey’s Jamesian ‘new society’, and like Smith, Braden and Allen’s ideal organizations, the ‘integrated’ Black community would address privilege at an organizational level. While the ‘Beloved Community’ model was radically humanist, ‘committed to seeing the spark of the sacred in every human being’, the desire for white civil rights activists to convert to Blackness was explicitly rejected. At the height of the ‘Beloved Community’ civil rights movement, white volunteers at the Mississippi Summer Project training were explicitly instructed that “You can't be black, so don't try” (Sam Shirah quoted in Zinn, 2002 [1964], p. 184). The failures of ‘Beloved Community’ organizations to address the deeply problematic impacts of white bodies in people of color spaces, and the appropriation of their radical humanist principles by liberal color-blind white hegemony, led to the “Black Power” disarticulation of those spaces and the emergence of Bradenite white anti-racism as the normative mode for organizing against racism from white subject positions.

Three decades before New Abolitionists proposed that people categorized as white might ‘commit suicide as whites to come alive’ as ‘humans’ through Blackness, Black Power explicitly condemned it:

many young, middle-class, white Americans, like some sort of Pepsi generation, have wanted to 'come alive' through the black community and black groups. They have wanted to be where the action is—and the action has been in those places. They have sought refuge among blacks from a sterile, meaningless, irrelevant life in middle-class America. They have been unable to deal with the stifling, racist, parochial, split-level mentality of their parents, teachers, preachers and friends. Many have come seeing "no difference in color," they have come "color blind." But at this time and in this land, color is a factor and we should not overlook or deny this. The black organizations do not need this kind of idealism, which borders on paternalism. White people working in SNCC have understood this. There are white lawyers who defend black civil rights workers in court, and white activists who support indigenous black movements across the country. Their function is not to lead or to set policy or to attempt to define black people to black people. Their role is supportive (S. Carmichael & Hamilton, 1967, pp. 83-84).

It is hard to imagine that Roediger, Garvey and Ignatiev didn't read Black Power, which suggests that they did, but chose to ignore its conclusions on the possibilities of ‘becoming Black’ as a viable alternative identity to whiteness. In any case, the New Abolitionist proposal that people categorized as white might be ‘dissolved’ into Blackness directly contravenes principles of Black self-determination—from Haywood to Carmichael—and ultimately proposes an even more intense version of ‘Beloved Community’ collaboration because it not only seeks to normalize white bodies within a ‘human’ community, but also seeks to normalize them within a ‘Black’ community.

Even if Black people had an interest in converting people categorized as white to their communities, the same dangers and ‘dilemmas’ that “Black Power” identifies, and white anti-racism seeks to address, remain present. None of these dangers and ‘dilemmas’ are addressed by the New Abolitionist proposal, including the problems of white positionality for ‘seeing’ and ‘feeling’ with people of color, the demand for guidance and collaboration, the ‘addictive’ and

mob-like tendencies of normative whiteness, choice and interpretation of standpoint-based guidance, unaccountable exercises of agency and use of privilege, and the potential dangers of white bodies in people of color spaces [diffusing of anger, potential for psycho-physical damage, and their function to ‘divide and conquer’]. While New Abolitionists nominally celebrate El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz, it is hard to imagine that their proposal to ‘dissolve’ white bodies into Blackness through ‘crossing over’ would have any other result than ‘pouring cream’ in the ‘coffee’ (X, 2013 [1963]), diffusing and negating the standpoint of Black people.

In a blog posting entitled Passing (2015b), in which he compares himself Doležal, Ignatiev reflects on his efforts to become proletarianized as an industrial worker. Even though he was “lower (definitely lower) middle-class,” and “In spite of my politics,” Ignatiev concludes that “I was never able to achieve the total, visceral separation from bourgeois values” to the same extent as “someone born to the proletariat.” He recognizes his own inability to develop the standpoint necessary to ‘lead the way out’ of capitalism as part of a “legacy of my class background,” and seemingly endorses a rigid approach to class mobility approaching Correspondence Theory. But in order to overcome his ‘middle-class’ dilemma of standpoint on a class axis, he imagines that identifying as ‘Black and Proud’ would help him to transcend both his class and racial ‘blind spots’.

While Doležal’s ‘social experiment’ departs significantly from aspects of the New Abolitionist attempt to radicalize ‘crossover’, it demonstrates that identifying as Black did nothing to deepen her ability to develop the standpoint necessary to lead the way out of racism while at the same time problematically leading her to believe that she was ‘fully woke’. Moreover, while she believed that ‘crossing over’ allowed her to ‘come alive’, her conversion, desire to ‘blend in’, and fear of ‘exposure’, placed her in what seems to have been an even more constraining political and sociocultural ‘limbo’. Like Ignatin, Garvey, and Roediger venerate figures like Malcolm X but chose to follow CLR James, Doležal says she modeled her actions on “Black historical figures such as Malcolm X and Assata Shakur” (Doležal & Reback, 2017, p. 90), but converted to Blackness within spaces already based on ‘Beloved Community’ principles—the West Jackson Voice of Cavalry Fellowship and the NAACP—and chose to follow the ‘guidance’ of her younger brother / son instead of her supposed ideological leadership. Even though she believed Blackness was the ‘the essential essence of who I am’, she used her whiteness in the lawsuit against Howard, and there is still nothing preventing her from returning to a ‘white refuge’ at any time. Her identification as Black also did nothing to diminish the risks posed by white bodies in Black spaces, and her ‘exposure’ was accompanied by global ‘divide and conquer’ debates. Not only did her ‘social experiment’ serve as a wedge issue between those Black people who condemned her and those who expressed sympathy for her, but her justifications which deconstructed Blackness amplified colorism within Black discourse, and all of this had to be addressed by Black people at a time when the streets of Baltimore were exploding over the death of Freddie Grey in police custody.

While some quarters of the “Black Power” movement like Gregory and RaceCrits like powell (1997) have expressed potential in ‘reconstituting’ a ‘political blackness’ as ‘attitude’ in the U.S. and beyond on the, now antiquated, English model as a sociocultural category inclusive of “All groups that are not categorized as white,” and further suggested that this ‘political blackness’ might also to “include those who would have been formally designated as white but have rejected that ‘privilege’” (p. 805), the case of Rachel Doležal seems to convincingly demonstrate that the choice New Abolitionists propose between whiteness as privilege and status and Blackness as solidarity and resistance is not a real choice for people structurally positioned

as white. Under liberal color-blind white hegemony and “Black Power” counter-hegemony, any attempt for someone structurally positioned as white to ‘become Black’ seems foolish and dangerous. An exchange between white Australian journalist George Negus and Jamaican musician Bob Marley (Negus & Marley, 1979, @4:07) is illustrative of the ways in which ‘political Blackness’ is a choice for people categorized as Black and ‘mixed’, but not for those categorized as white:

Negus: “What would I have to do to be a Rastafarian?”

Marley: “Well, the first thing you'd have to do is be born again.”

Negus: “Born again...”

Marley: “Yeah.”

Negus: “Would I have to be Black?”

Marley: “Do you have a choice? If you have a choice- You'd better be Black if you have a choice. But if you don't have a choice, come as what God said you is, right?”

The Rastafari movement emerged as an expression of Black self-determination and pan-African liberation in Jamaica from traditions of Queen Nanny, Captain Cudjoe and Sam Sharpe to Paul Bogle, Alexander Bedward, Robert Love, the prophetic Marcus Garvey, and the deified philosophy of Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia (see Campbell, 1987; R. Lewis, 1987; Price, 2003). Like Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association, the Nation of Islam, Malcolm’s Organization of Afro-American Unity, “Black Power”, and Black Feminism in the U.S., this nationalist / pan-African tradition in Jamaica is existentially centered around Black standpoint. One of Paul Bogle’s slogans for the Morant Bay Rebellion of 1865 was ‘Cleave to the Black’, calling on all people of African descent in Jamaica, regardless of colorist hierarchy, to dialogue and action against racial oppression. Bogle’s rebellion posed a choice for all people of African descent in Jamaica between collaboration with whiteness and loyalty to Blackness.

While of these nationalist / pan-African formations have posed a similar choice between collaborating with whiteness and ‘political Blackness’, the New Abolitionist proposal that this choice might be extended to those categorized as white is dependent on a necessary diffusion of Black standpoint development. Rachel Doležal’s ‘sociological experiment’ was designed to test the limitations of such inclusion, and while there are undoubtedly thousands of other ‘exceptional’ white people conducting similar ‘experiments’, the spectacular ending to Doležal’s experiment seems to demonstrate quite convincingly that ‘political Blackness’ is not a viable alternative identity to whiteness for those structurally positioned as white because it emerges from, and exists within, the development of Black self-definition, Black standpoint, and Black self-determination. The question is, then, as Marley articulates it, what can someone structurally positioned as white, like Negus, do with ‘what God said he is’? While Roediger seems to have come to the conclusion in 2002 that that ‘crossing over’ into Blackness is not a viable option to ‘chart the way forward,’ Ignatiev & Garvey’s Beyond The Spectacle indicates that New Abolitionists are still reticent to finally disclaim their proposals for ‘political Blackness’ as alternative identities to whiteness and have not developed any other proposals. The white anti-racist program has a clear, consistent, and practicable answer to this question, but if Baldwin was correct when he said ‘As long as you think you're white, there's no hope for you’, what alternative non- or anti-white identifications are actually available for white people to ‘rally around or affirm’?

### **Conclusion: Viable Alternatives to Militant Nonconformity & ‘Political Blackness’?**

While there is no convincing evidence for New Abolitionism’s two central practical proposals [i] that militant non-conformism by people categorized as white can overcome dilemmas of white positionality and create conditions for ‘the abolition of the white race’, and [ii] that people categorized as white might overcome dilemmas of white positionality by ‘dissolving’ into Blackness, a third aspect of New Abolitionist work remains relatively unexamined as a practicable avenue to whiteness. In the first editorial of Race Traitor, alongside descriptions of their project as ‘abolishing’ and ‘dissolving’ the white race, Ignatiev & Garvey also described their project as working to “break it apart” (p. 2), and later argued that “what was historically constructed can be undone” (Garvey & Ignatiev, 1996, p. 105). ‘Break apart’ and ‘undo’ elicit very different imagery than ‘abolish’ and ‘dissolve’. Whereas ‘abolish’ represents their proposed strategy of militant nonconformity modeled after John Brown, and ‘dissolve’ represents their proposed strategy of ‘becoming Black’, ‘breaking apart’ and ‘undoing’ whiteness seem to represent a strategy of disarticulating whiteness along its historical and contemporary fissures.

As Marxists, Ignatiev, Roediger and Allen were primarily focused on disarticulating whiteness along class lines based on the premise “that the alliance between a real-estate tycoon and people who live in shacks and trailer parks is unstable and cannot endure” (Ignatiev, 2016a). The idea was to disarticulate white working-class and poor people from the [white] bourgeoisie and rearticulate them to working-class and poor people of color. In the years prior to Race Traitor, Ignatiev had responded to Sakai’s pessimistic assessment of white working-class ‘revolutionary potential’ with a proposed course of action which would work to ‘point out the fissures [pl.] in whiteness’, but as Chapter 7 on this work discusses at length, his New Abolitionist project which followed continued to primarily focus on class. The New Abolitionist rejection of more intersectional approaches to ‘the white question’ in favor of a ‘necessary correspondence with class’ severely limited inquiry into the possibilities of other intersectional fissures in whiteness. Frye, Billies & Harvey demonstrate that such intersectional anti-white alternatives to the New Abolitionist project exist and suggest significant possibilities for inquiry into ‘breaking apart whiteness’ along its sex/gender fissure. There is certainly much more to be said about the possibilities for ‘breaking apart’ whiteness along its intersectional fissures, but another possible direction for developing functional whitenesses calls out from the larger anti-essentialist projects of Critical Race Theory and Critical Whiteness Studies, one which does not work to ‘point out’ fissures in whiteness along its intersections with other major systems of oppression like class, sex/gender, age, and ability, but one which works to ‘point out’ ethno/national fissures *internal* to whiteness itself.

Like Black identity was effective in ‘melding’ together very diverse groups of African people for the purposes of survival and resistance under common chattel slavery conditions, White identity was also very effective in ‘melding’, or articulating together, very diverse groups of European people for the purpose of dispossessing and exploiting people of color. In addition to ‘pointing out the fissures in whiteness’ created by intersections of class, sex/gender, ability and age, an anti-white approach to ‘undoing’ the social construction of whiteness seems to point particularly towards possibilities in working to disarticulate whiteness along one or more of its historically constitutive ethno/national fissures. In the two remaining chapters, I will argue that the sociohistorical construction of modern white identity was primarily an uneven process of coalition building between previously antagonistic European people for the purpose of dispossessing and exploiting people of color, and I will propose consideration of a strategy which would work to disarticulate whiteness along its Anglo/Irish fissure.

## CHAPTER 10

### ‘BECOMING WHITE’: A RACE-CENTERED DEFINITION OF WHITENESS

As discussed at length in Chapter 5, Ignatin & Allen’s 1967 ‘White Blindspot’ formulation defined "white" as a ‘deal’ between ‘European laborers’ and the ‘propertied classes’ made in the British colony of Virginia after Bacon’s Rebellion. This historically and geographically specific class-oriented definition was generated as a resource for organizing ‘white communists’ in response to, and contention with, standpoint-based “Black Power” positions on ‘the white question’. In response to “Black Power” directives to ‘organize their own white communities’ Ignatin & Allen proposed a particular ‘task’ for ‘white communists’ to organize white workers against ‘the system of white-skin privileges’, and in contention with arguments like the Boggses formulation that ‘Negroes constitute this revolutionary social force’ while white workers ‘are like the petty bourgeoisie of Marx’s time’, Ignatin & Allen argued that ‘repudiating whiteness’ was in the ‘day-to-day real interests’ of white workers as ‘exploited proletarians’. While, as discussed at length in Chapter 7, Roediger, Ignatiev & Garvey significantly departed from Allen’s ‘class struggle approach’ toward a more nuanced and intersectional New Abolitionist approach concerning the ‘interests’ and agency of white workers, New Abolitionists have continued to endorse Allen’s basic definition of "white" in terms of class as “the package of mostly petty preferences offered to all whites and especially to poor whites, in order to create a cross-class, elite-dominated political coalition policing (enslaved) Black labor and keeping propertyless whites out of mobilizations challenging the wealthy” (D. R. Roediger, 2017, p. 20).. Their class-focused definitions of "white" in academia have similarly placed New Abolitionist formulations in contention with the norms of intersectional Critical Race Theory which contends that race is an analytically distinct system of oppression “which cannot be subsumed under or reduced to some broader category or conception” like class (Omi & Winant, 1986, p. 61-62). But while Allen, Ignatiev & Roediger’s ambitious historical inquiries into the social construction of U.S. whiteness over the following decades were guided by respective class-focused definitions, their work ended up strongly alluding to another historical definition of "white" which might be more compatible with conceptualizations of racism as an analytically distinct system, one which might define "white" as a process of ‘melding’ together various peoples from Europe, of all classes, for the purposes of dispossessing, exploiting, and killing people of color.

Like their approach to whiteness as ‘*nothing but* oppressive and false’ and an ideological choice, Ignatiev and Roediger’s work telling the story of how “some despised and poor European immigrants ‘became white’ in the United States, very much grew from the essays of James Baldwin” (D. R. Roediger, 2017, p. 61). In *On Being White...And Other Lies* (1984), Baldwin describes the “portion of the North American continent that calls itself America” as “the European vision of the world” (p. 90), a place in which various antagonistic peoples in ‘Europe’ could be united in contrast to “Negroes” and “Indians”. Baldwin draws a hard line separating people in Europe—who are Irish, German, Italian, Jewish, English, French, Swiss, Polish, or Norwegian—and those in America who “opted to become white” (Ibid.). His argument that “No one was white before he/she came to America” (Ibid.) posits that whiteness is a modern social formation consolidated on European imperial frontiers, and that to be Irish, German, Italian, Jewish, English, French, Swiss, Polish, or Norwegian is not necessarily to be white. In fact, he argues, some of these historically and culturally distinct European peoples, like Jews, “came here

from countries where they were not white, and they came here, in part, because they were not white” (Ibid.). While white hegemony in 1984 “pretends to include” (Ibid.) these various European peoples, Baldwin argued that the residual ‘ethnic’ existence of these European diasporas in America not only “bears terrifying witness to what happened to everyone who got here” (Ibid.), but that sociopolitical contrast between some of these ethnic remnants in the U.S. and their transatlantic ‘homes’ in Europe—e.g. “Poles: in Warsaw (where they would like us to be friends) and in Chicago (where because they are white we are enemies)” (Ibid.)—is a resource to historicize and demythologize whiteness.

Baldwin, Ignatiev and Roediger were certainly not the first of the post-civil rights scholars of race to examine this process of ‘becoming white’. As Omi & Winant (2015) explain, twentieth century Sociological studies on ‘white ethnicity’ in the U.S. were key bases for the development of Ethnic Studies and Critical Race Theory, particularly those, like the Chicago School, which treated ‘ethnic’ difference “as a socially constructed phenomenon” (p. 21). New Abolitionists did, however, play a major role in popularizing Baldwin’s ‘becoming white’ thesis as evidence for the social construction of race in the 1990s. David Roediger began to tell the story of Irish people ‘becoming white’ in Chapter 7 of The Wages of Whiteness (1991) entitled “Irish American Workers and Racial Formation in the Antebellum United States.” Allen continued developing this story in The Invention of the White Race (Vol. 1, 1994) which focused almost exclusively on the relationship between English colonization projects in Ireland and America [1200s-1900s], and Ignatiev “most ably claimed that space” (D. R. Roediger, 2017, p. 61) in his highly successful How the Irish Became White (1995).

These New Abolitionist studies particularly focused on ‘how the Irish became white’ demonstrated that showing processes of ‘becoming white’ required intensive, often geographically, culturally, and socio-historically specific studies. Their development and dissemination of Baldwin’s thesis “opened up a pathway” (Negra, 2006, p. 14) for such important works as Ian Haney López’s White By Law (1996), Charles Mills’ The Racial Contract (1997), Karen Brodtkin’s How Jews Became White Folks (1998), Matthew Fry Jacobson’s Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race (1998), Tom Hayden’s Irish on the Inside (2002), Guglielmo & Salerno’s (ed.) Are Italians White? (2003), Diane Negra’s (ed.) The Irish in Us (2006), and Lee & Casey’s (ed.) Making the Irish American (2006). With focuses spanning the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, these works demonstrate the depth, longevity, and complexity of ‘ethnic’ tensions within American whiteness, but Allen’s two-volume The Invention of the White Race (1994, 1997) stands out because, unlike the others, it attempts to explain and define “white” as a social construction by pinpointing its particular historical origins.

In this chapter, I consider the historical claims Allen makes to justify his class-centered definition of “white” as a deliberate and contingent decision by Virginia planters at the turn of the eighteenth century to achieve social control by conferring “social status” on ‘European proletarians’ instead of “property” (1994, p. 19). Through four roughly chronological critiques of Allen’s definition, I attempt to demonstrate that the emergence of the sign “white” in Virginia law at the start of the eighteenth century was not an ‘invention’ but a milestone in a much larger process of rearticulating proto-racist systems already existent in Europe to structure global empires. I argue instead, as Baldwin suggests, that “white” should be primarily defined as a supra-national coalition of ‘Europeans’ forged on colonial frontiers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries for the purposes of exploiting, dispossessing, and killing people of color.



In Chapter 11, I continue to track this "becoming white" definition through scientific racism and white republicanism in the eighteenth century with a focus on the particular role of the United States of America as a key site for realizing ideal pan-european whiteness in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. To the extent that Critical Whiteness Studies is 'an additional movement' to Critical Race Theory—a field focused on racism as an analytically distinct system as well as its intersections—I contend that a clear race-centered historical definition of whiteness is necessary for better anchoring anti-white approaches to Critical Whiteness Studies together with, rather than against, intersectional Critical Race Theory. The proposed race-centered definition does not discount the fact that whiteness can certainly be seen as a type of 'deal' between white workers and white bourgeoisie. As a form of supra-nationalism, the function of whiteness is to unite all members of the 'nation' for common causes in spite of class or any other antagonisms. White feminism and white homonormativity perform similar functions as 'deals' worked out between white women and men, white LGBTQIA++ and cis-hetero people, to share a more equitable role in the burdens and benefits of dispossessing, exploiting, and killing people of color. Sex, gender and class are important lenses for understanding and resisting whiteness, but a clear race-centered lens might help to better understand them as particular and peculiar intersections, sharpen Critical Whiteness Studies as a sub-discipline of Critical Race Theory focused on 'the white race', and open up further possibilities for action beyond the white anti-racist and New Abolitionist programs.

If "white" is a 'melding' together of previously antagonistic european peoples for the purposes of dispossessing, exploiting and killing people of color on global frontiers, with 'no necessary correspondence to class', then it follows that dissimulation—'breaking apart' whiteness along its constituent 'national' fissures rather than rearticulating "white" or 'becoming Black'—might be a viable path to practicable whitenesses. In the final sections of Chapter 11, I consider Black Power's formulations on Anglo-normative american nationalism, and the role 'borderline europeans' in what Matthew Frye Jacobson describes as the post-Civil Rights 'white ethnic revival', before proposing an alternative program for 'breaking apart' whiteness along its Anglo/Irish fissure in Chapter 12.

### **European Proto-Racism, Britain & the 'New World'**

"White", as a legal signifier of superordination, did not emerge as a moment of unprecedented evil genius among the Virginia planters, but as a further development in technologies of domination and narratives of superordination long proven in europe along two axes. Classical Greco-Roman hegemonies distinguished between "citizen", "slave", "barbarian", and "savage", and differentiated between people based on cultural conformity to 'civilization'. Greco-Roman Christianity reconciled these Classical distinctions with Biblical hierarchies of genealogical descent to define a hardened identity of 'Christian' against Pagan, Muslim and Jew and construct a privileged supra-national realm of 'Christendom' through the Roman Catholic Church.

As Jaski (2003) explains, the process of reconciling and amalgamating Classical distinctions between 'civilized' and 'uncivilized' with Biblical hierarchies of genealogical descent began as early as the Roman-Jewish historian Flavius Josephus in Book 1 of Antiquitates Judaicae (c. 94CE) which assigned "the known peoples of the [Greco-Roman] world" (p. 6) to the descendants of Noah in the Bible. Josephus's Three Continents Theory of Descent from Noah placed the 'autochthones' of 'mankind' at Mt. Ararat in Armenia where he believed "the ark rested" (see Josephus, 1737 [c. 94CE], p. Book 1) and claimed that the populations in the three 'old world' continents roughly trace themselves back to Noah's three sons: Shem [Asia],

Ham [Africa], and Japheth [Europe]. Josephus's scheme for amalgamating Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian history and belief systems was "subsequently adopted and somewhat expanded upon" by the early Roman Church, particularly Jerome in Hebraicae Quaestiones in Libro Geneseos (Ibid.). After the Edict of Theselonica (380CE), 'Christianity' operated as a sort of meta-citizenship which allowed even those on the fringes of the declining Roman empire who converted to Christianity to claim basic rights, and after the fall of Rome, notions of common descent from Noah's son Japheth further defined a privileged realm of 'Christendom' where 'Civilized Christians' were afforded certain basic rights and non-'Civilized Christians' could be stigmatized along both Classical and Biblical axes as 'uncivilized', 'illegitimate', and 'cursed'.

Popular acceptance of the Old Testament as infallible world history (D. C. Allen, 1963, p. 177) provided rich and varied discursive resources for justifying "the likes and dislikes, hatreds and loves, prejudices and fears, needs and rationales" (Braude, 1997, p. 142) linked to securing, contesting, and expanding existent relations of subordination and superordination in and out of 'Europe' during the Middle Ages. Biblical creation stories and lineages could be used to distinguish between specially ordained 'Adamite' peoples who have God-given 'dominion' (Genesis 1:26-28) over lesser 'pre-Adamite' beings [i.e. Polygenism], or descendants of Seth from descendants of the murderous Cain, or the legitimate and God-ordained line of Sarah and Isaac from the illegitimate and contingent line of the servant Hagar and Ishmael, et cetera. God's curse on Ham's son Canaan to be "servant of servants" (Genesis 9:25-26), connected to Africa, and compounded by the phonetic resemblance between "Canaan" and "Cain", would also ultimately provide a robust foundation for the intense anti-Blackness which accompanied the trans-Atlantic trafficking of African bodies and chattel enslavement regimes in the 'New World'.

Ivan Hannaford (1996) describes this process of forming a hardened 'Civilized Christian' identity in Medieval Europe along Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian axes as the 'pre-idea' of race, and Benjamin Isaac (2004) describes these longer antecedents as the prototypes for modern racism, or "proto-racism." Medievalists like Geraldine Heng (2018) have excavated "the nested discourses formative of race in the European Middle Ages" (p. 3), including the spatial, cultural and bodily stigmatization of Jews by anti-Semitic regimes, the term "Saracen" invented by Jerome to delegitimize Arabs which was later 'flattened' to legitimize crusades by 'western Christians' against 'eastern' Muslims (p. 111), imperiled 'Western' reactions to the 'Mongols', persecution of Roma people, and the ways in which aesthetic "*whiteness* became normative, integral, and central to Christian European identity in the thirteenth century" (p. 8). Categorizing and sorting people along these Classical and Biblical axes supplemented the authority of increasingly expansive monarchical states, contributed to the advent of defined national polities with common political, cultural and religious institutions. This concatenation of categories, discourses, and technologies for building national and pan-European identities along Classical and Biblical axes accompanied the expansion of European empires into Africa, Asia, and the 'New World' in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, providing the bases for the modern global system of race and its superordinated "white" position.

Forms of 'proto-racism' worked along Classical and Biblical axes across the continent, and authorized further innovations toward modern racism and whiteness in the transatlantic Portuguese and Spanish empires for more than a century before British trans-Atlantic empire emerged, but assessing Allen's particular claims which situate the 'invention of the white race' in British colonial Virginia requires additional context particular to the formation of proto-racial systems in Britain. Heng describes the Anglo-Norman regime which was formed in Britain during the eleventh and twelfth centuries as "the first racial state in the history of the West" (p. 58)

because its ‘domestic’ anti-Semitic and ‘foreign’ anti-‘Celtic’ structures contained many recognizable elements of modern racism. Allen engages Anglo-Norman, English and British colonialism in Ireland at length in Volume 1 of The Invention Of The White Race (1994) and recognizes that English discourses and structures in relation to Ireland “bore the hallmark of racial oppression” (p. 35), but his historical analysis does not have a strong enough framework for understanding English colonialism in Ireland as a microcosm of larger proto-racial processes in the Middle Ages nor how they further developed in Britain during the century before Virginia Colony was established.

In the Early Modern period the island of Britain became increasingly united around common ‘English’ and ‘British’ identities despite significant instability. Henry VIII’s break with the Catholic Church in 1534 was part of an unprecedented consolidation of English national identity and state power, but it also hardened antagonisms between those who remained loyal to him, his subjects who remained Roman Catholic, and between ‘Protestant’ and ‘Catholic’ across the continent. His daughter Mary I unsuccessfully attempted to restore Roman Catholicism, and as England was rearticulated as a ‘Protestant’ state, Classical and Biblical mythologies assumed a new relevance. ‘Protestant’ England came to express its history “as a re-run of the old testament” in which English people, and Protestants more generally, were a “‘chosen people’” who possessed a special relationship with God and were “surrounded by unbelieving pagans” (Claydon & McBride, 1998, p. 11). This increasingly righteous “sense of election fed an enhanced sense of destiny” (Ibid.), or ‘Providence’, which justified expanding imperial activities to dispossess, exploit, and kill non-English / non-Protestant / non-Christian / non-European / ‘Others’.

In 1603, James VI of Scotland also became James I of England, uniting the crowns and creating one royal hegemony over Britain. After more than a century of being a marginal player in genocidal colonization of the ‘New World’ and transatlantic chattel enslavement of people from West Africa, James made peace with Spain, allowing Britain to become a significant force in capitalist competition over the Atlantic. The ‘planting’ of colonists at Jamestown, Virginia in 1607 was a company project under royal charter, and English-Protestant laborers entered these plantations through their own consent [recruitment] or because of something they allegedly did [penal transportation]. They were regarded by law as English persons with “the presumption of liberty, the birthright of the poorest person in England” (T. W. Allen, 1997, p. 248) and protected by “English-style, term limiting indentures” (Ibid., p. 179). These rights superordinated English laborers, in theory, above ‘Indians’ and ‘Negroes’ who did not generally have limited term indenture contracts nor the presumption of personhood.

### **‘English’ Rights & ‘Europeans’ in the Anglo-American Colonies**

In Allen’s The Invention of the White Race (1994, 1997), he demonstrates that, in the early decades of the Virginia ‘plantation’, capitalism and the state of colonial exception allowed the planters to violate the basic rights of English laborers established by the colonial charter and English law in order to reduce them “from tenants and wage laborers to chattels” (1997, p. 105) who could be traded between ‘masters’ without their consent. He recognizes this “chattelization of [English] labor in the Virginia colony” (Ibid., p. 101) as a “monstrous social mutation in English class relations” (Ibid.), and argues that it reduced their status far enough to encourage English bond-laborers “to join with African-American bond-laborers in actions and plots against their bondage” (Ibid., p. 148). Allen’s thesis in the two-volume work, however, that the ‘invention of the white race’ was a deliberate and contingent decision by Virginia planters at the

turn of the eighteenth century to achieve social control by conferring “social status” on ‘European proletarians’ instead of “property” (1994, p. 19) is unconvincing.

Allen is absolutely correct to chastise those historians who retroactively ascribe the category "white" to English laborers in Virginia in the first half of the seventeenth century without any evidence that "white" as a signifier of people existed. However, he problematically does the same thing by resignifying them as "European" or "Euro-American". Allen recognizes that the default personhood of indentured servants in early Virginia law was “presumably English,” but there were also non-English others who entered the Anglo-american colonies through labor recruitment or penal servitude, and who were explicitly identified in official discourse, not as ‘Europeans’ but by ‘ethnicity’, i.e., “an Irishman” (1997, p. 149), a “Scotchman” or “a Dutchman” (Ibid., p. 154). He further recognizes significant social difference across colonial demarcations in continental north america, with Puritan Massachusetts, Catholic Maryland, and Dutch New Netherland to the north, and British, Spanish, French, and Dutch colonies in the Caribbean to the south, but Allen does not explain why, if the majority of indentured servants in colonial Virginia were "English", ‘the invention of the white race’ at the turn of the eighteenth century was “a new birthright not only for Anglos but for every Euro-American” (Ibid., p. 248). He tends to consider "English" and "European" as benign categories rather than proto-racial categories, and does not sufficiently explain how "Englishmen" were articulated, along with "Irishmen", "Scotchmen" and "Dutchmen" as "European", nor the relation of "European" to "white".

The question of English rights in the context of empire emerged quite dramatically during the English Civil Wars [1641-1649]. Parliament’s execution of Charles I and the governance of the empire as a ‘commonwealth’ for English / British men [1649-1660] were justified by republican arguments which defined common English / British rights by the authority of pan-European Biblical and Classical traditions. Hobbes’s *Leviathan* (1651), perhaps the most important philosophical text from the Commonwealth period, justified “Civil Government, or Common-wealth” (p. 86) in “Europe” (p. 184) by linking together the Greco-Roman “*Civitas*” (p. 137), Judeo-Christian “Covenant” (p. 58), and the Romano-Germanic “custome” of government by a paternalistic monarchy “derived into England, France, Spain and Italy, when in great numbers they either ayded the Romans or made their own Conquefts in thefe Westerne parts of the world” (p. 45). In the context of emergent British transatlantic empire, Hobbes constructed his ‘civilized Christian European’ subject against the “real life example” (Mills, 1997, p. 65) of people living in a “state of meer Nature” (Hobbes, 1651, p. 103): the “Idolaters” (p. 378) and “Savage people of America” (p. 176), whose “concord whereof dependeth on natural luft, have no government at all; and live at this day in that brutish manner” (p. 63). While “all men equally, are by Nature Free” (p. 111), and “*even Europeans* could descend to their state” of nature (Mills, 1997, p. 66), Hobbes proposes that the ancient “state of Civill Government” (Hobbes, 1651, p. 82) among ‘Civilized Christian Europeans’ superordinates them as part of “Civil History” (p. 40), while “the people of Asia, Afrique, and America,” for whom “there is not, nor was ever, any such thing” (p. 45), are dehumanized as part of “Naturall History” (p. 40).

English rights to ‘Civil Government’ were inseparable from shared ‘European’ philosophies created by Classical empires and the Catholic Church, and this ideal ‘European vision for the world’ was a proto-racial one, functioning as a sort of overarching affinity beyond and through state antagonisms. In the context of British empire, the dependence of English rights to continental philosophies tended toward equalization of status for all ‘Civilized Christian

Europeans' under English dominion. 'English', 'British', 'Christian', and 'European' were not, therefore, benign identity categories, but defined in relation to an increasingly concatenated nexus of proto-racial concepts which had authorized complex processes of pan-European identity formation against imperial frontiers in Asia and Africa for centuries before the first English colonists arrived in Virginia. The radical opposition Allen constructs between the 'social status' and 'property' minimizes the material value of rights. If 'social status' meant personhood in 'civil society' and lack of 'social status' meant subpersonhood in a 'state of nature', the difference is not immaterial, and these significant differences in 'status' existed, at least in theory, from the start of the Anglo-american colonial project. Chattelized indentured servants in 1620s Anglo-america may have complained about being "Sold...like a damd slave" (Thomas Best quoted in T. W. Allen, 1997, p. 107), but 'like' was never 'as'. Moreover, indentured servants from europe had resources in English law and established advocacy networks which 'Indians' and 'Negroes' never had. As Ignatiev has more recently acknowledged through the work of Barbara Fields:

Africans and Afro-West Indians had not taken part in the long history of negotiation and contest in which the English lower classes had worked out the relationship between themselves and their superior. To put it another way: when English servants entered the ring in Virginia, they did not enter alone. Instead they entered in company with the generations who had preceded them in the struggle; and the outcome of those earlier struggles established the terms and conditions of the latest one. But Africans and Afro-West Indians did enter the ring alone. Their forebears had struggled in a different arena, which had no bearing on this one (Barbara Jeanne Fields [1990] quoted in Ignatiev, 2014)

If, as Allen demonstrates, the reduction in 'civil rights' through 'chattelization' is what proletarianized 'European' bond-laborers in Virginia during the seventeenth century, and what he calls 'the system of white skin privileges' generally restored these rights by the eighteenth century in their expanded 'commonwealth' form, then by Allen's own logic these rights are not immaterial and cannot be radically separated from 'property' (see C. I. Harris, 1993). Even at the height of their exploitation by frontier capitalists, 'European' laborers in Virginia possessed the ability to argue that their conditions were a violation of basic rights, and they were presumed to have these rights under English law. As Allen himself demonstrates in his recounting of the Elizabeth Key case [1656-67], 'Negroes' and 'Indians' had no such presumption nor contractual basis, social or commercial, on which to make any argument except conversion to Christianity, Anglo-conformity, attaching themselves to 'European' men, and hope (1997, pp. 194-197). "White", as it entered into Virginia law after 1691, cannot, therefore, be primarily defined as a 'system of privileges' which superordinated 'European' bond-laborers as persons in 'civil society' above 'Indians' and 'Negroes' who were not, because this system of privileges existed, at least in theory, from the beginning of the Anglo-american colonial project.

The Restoration of Charles II in 1660 may have marked the official end of the Protestant republican commonwealth experiment, but the end to civil war saw relief to supporters of monarchy and Catholics throughout the empire which officially fostered greater toleration of intra-British and intra-'European' difference. The contingent category to equalize status across settler difference adopted by the Virginia legal code during this tumultuous period was "Christian" (Epperson, 1997, p. 10), a nebulous category which could both articulate and distinguish between Protestants and Catholics, royalists and republicans, Scots, Irish, Dutch,

French and English under British dominion, as well as people from other "Christian" dominions like Spain and Portugal, and, indeed, anyone willing to convert and conform to an acceptable "Christian" doctrine. The laws, however, operated on the basis of a "primary dichotomy" between "Christian" and "Negro" (Bonnett, 1999, p. 202) and "Christian" and "Indian", indicating that "Christian" in Virginia was a rearticulation of the hardened proto-racial 'Civilized Christian European' of Medieval Europe and signified personhood in 'civil society' rather than religious conviction. "Christian" was, however, ideologically vulnerable to conversions and liberation theology. In the 1670s, Quaker and Anglican campaigns to baptize Africans and American Indians in the Anglo-american colonies had the effect of "undermining the Negro/Christian dichotomy" (Epperson, 1997, p. 17) and requiring further rearticulation to preserve colonial hierarchy.

### **"White" as Cognate for 'Civilized-European-Christian' in Anglo-American Colonies**

As Terrence Epperson (1997) has demonstrated, Allen's "theory that whiteness was an intentional invention of the ruling class(es)" particular to Virginia at the turn of the eighteenth century fails to address the fact that "the first sustained use of the term 'white' occurs not in the writings of colonial governors or slave-owning tobacco and sugar planters [or Virginia law], but in the writings of Society of Friends (Quaker) missionaries" at Barbados in 1671 (p. 13). The collection of two letters and a sermon were produced by a delegation, led by First Quaker George Fox, during four months in Barbados, before continuing on to Jamaica, Virginia, Maryland, and New England. While Allen engages Fox's account of the trip and the significant threat of "Christian equalitarianism" it represented during this period (1997, p. 191), he does not acknowledge or engage the appearance of the sign "white" in the title and text of Fox's sermon, Gospel-Family Order, Being a Short Discourse Concerning the Ordering of Families, both of Whites, Blacks and Indians, delivered at a men's meeting in Barbados (1701 [1671]).

Fox's thesis was that "Negroes" can be Christian because of the historical precedent in Biblical history that "there was a Church of God in Egypt, Babylon and Ethiopia, who were Christians" (p. 16). He specifically acknowledged, and argued against proto-racist Biblical interpretations, exhorting his audience: "do not slight them, to wit, the Ethiopians, the Blacks now...Christ dyed for all...for the Tawnes [Indians] and for the Blacks, as well as for you that are called Whites....white People, so called by the Blacks" (Ibid., pp. 14, 16). The sermon form of the text highlights the emergent "white" in relation to proto-racial Biblical categories and, as Epperson observes, Fox's use of "white" to categorize people "appears indicative of a relatively new and unfamiliar term" (p. 15). Fox seems to have encountered the new categories in Barbados and he is translating, establishing equivalence between the Biblical designation "Ethiopians", the masters' term "Negroes", and what seems to be a popular term in Barbados—"Black". "White" also seems to be a popular term. Both of his uses of the term are prefaced by 'called', indicating translation, and the second 'so-called by the Blacks' particularly indicates translation of a term from 'Black' Bajan popular discourse to a 'white' Bajan audience—a reversal of the masters' "Negroes" which broke through into the consciousness and discourse of 'civilized Christian Europeans' through the sermon of Fox.<sup>46</sup> Two contemporary letters from

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<sup>46</sup> The only other use of "white" by Fox in his Journal (1911 [1672]), is from a final report concerning meetings in New England. He records a prophesy told to him by "an Indian" predicting the arrival of the English: "a white people should come in a great thing of ye sea..." (p. 251). This reference also suggests "white" as categorization for 'Europeans' originates from the colonial frontier, and perhaps even from the counter-hegemonic discourses of people of

Barbados by delegation members John Hull and John Stubbs, however, use the term normatively, setting “white people” and “whites” against “Black People,” “Negroes” and “Blacks” (quoted in Epperson, 1997, p. 14), indicating that these terms needed no translation for Quakers in England.

In any event, “white” seems to emerge into English colonial discourse as a cognate for “European” during an era of general religious tolerance and amidst campaigns to promote Christianity to American Indians and people of African descent in the Anglo-american colonies. It further seems that in order to make an argument for ‘Black’ and ‘Tawne’ Christians, the proto-racial “Christian” designation had to be disarticulated from ‘civilized Christian Europeans’ and another term substituted to signify the same social element without reference to religion. Continental sources like Hobbes (1651) and Locke (1689) use “European” rather than “white” for this purpose. “Whiteness” (p. 40) is associated in Leviathan with moral purity and divinity (see also pp. 249, 342), making it tendentially suitable as an additional signifier of colonial superordination, but its use in Hobbes demonstrates that it had not yet become such a signifier, at least in elite British circles of the mid-seventeenth century. Nearly four decades later, Locke’s Two Treatises of Government advanced the development of global racial hierarchy without any reference to “white” or any other physical descriptors. “White” as a physical descriptor was, however, particularly suited to scientific inquiry, but it would not gain legitimacy in the continental academy until the next century.

Epperson and Allen also engage with Anglican cleric Morgan Godwyn’s The Negro’s & Indians Advocate: Suing for their Admittion to the Church (1680), but neither appreciate the text as a resource to further observe the sign “white” as it entered English discourse alongside the concatenated ‘proto-racial’ categories used to justify settler colonialism and racialized chattel slavery in previous decades. Like Fox, Godwyn’s text explicitly argues against the major pillars of Judeo-Christian proto-racism used “to invalidate our Negro’s natural Right to the Privileges of Religion” (p. 86), including “Pre-Adamitism” (p. 18), “Cham’s African Race, and the Curfe said to be annexed there to” (p. 19). He spends considerable effort arguing against the latter (pp. 47-61) in order to demonstrate that “there remains not any likelihood for our Negro’s being concerned therein” (p. 47). Godwyn further demonstrates the interchangeability of Hobbes’s “Europe” and the popular “white” when he translates: “the White Servants (the general name for Europeans)” (p. 83), and the way that both terms served the same function as ‘Christian’, expanding “English” rights to non-English europeans: “the English and White people also” (p. 84). Finally, Godwyn’s response to distinctions by “Colours” (p. 24) indicates that this new physical categorization was particularly tied to scientific reasoning. He uses “white” in response to Polygenism—there is “nothing doubted (tho Black) to be of the same *species*, with the *Whiter*: As is seen of Birds, which do often differ much in the Feather, yet nevertheless are one and the same in kind” (Ibid.)—and he acknowledges the relation of “white” to the circulation of rudimentary Physiological arguments, asking “Why Colours should do more than Deformities” if “A Crooked Person, Dwarf, or Hermophrodite” is “capable of Benefices without Dispensation...and to be promoted to Holy Orders” (Ibid.).

Allen and Epperson juxtapose “Christian” with “white” in colonial Virginia as a key moment for observing the advent of racism, but in doing so they define “racism” entirely by Physiological categorizations at the expense of engaging with the relation of “white” to “Christian” and “European” as proto-racial categories signifying roughly the same group of

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color. The form of this prophesy seems to accord with elements of the Prophets of the Great Spirit (Cave, 2006), like the Delaware prophet Neolin, who guided many pan-Indian resistance movements over the following two centuries.

people. Epperson argues that the French physician “François Bernier was perhaps the first to use ‘race’ in the modern sense” (p. 18) in his Nouvelle Division de la Terre, par les Differentes Especies ou Race d’Hommes qui l’Habite [New Division of the Earth, by the Different Species or Race of Men who Inhabit It] (2001 [1684]). As Stuurman (2000) demonstrates, “Bernier submits that there is a scientific, objective way of classifying human beings according to physical characteristics such as skin colour, facial type and bodily shape, and that such classification of humanity is somehow more fundamental than the traditional geographical division of the world” (pp. 3-4). Stuurman, Epperson, and others argue that the Physiological element of Bernier’s formulation, and the transition from “Christian” to “White” in the Anglo-american colonies, mark a significant and definitive social and “intellectual transition” (Ibid., p. 3) between the “kaleidoscopic, ungoverned taxonomies of Renaissance cosmography” (Ibid.) which divided “the world into innumerable nations and tribes” (p. 15) and “the systematic spirit of classification that originated with Bacon and Descartes” (p. 3) which increasingly divided “humanity into a limited number of races” (p. 15). This formulation however, fails to take into account that such ‘Renaissance cosmography’ was already organized around three major continental divisions without any reference to Physiology. “White” was not a category which suddenly “superseded” a non-racial English colonial identity (T. W. Allen, 1994, p. 10), nor Hobbes’s ‘civilized Christian European’, but was an additional category signifying essentially the same group of people to harden colonial hierarchy in the face of evangelical Christianity, and particularly suited for the emergent scientific method. But while empiricism hegemonically ‘superseded’ and overturned many Medieval European epistemologies, philosophical and scientific racism in the eighteenth century, increasingly centered around the sign “white”, secured and modernized existent ‘civilized Christian European’ proto-racial categorizations.

“Whiteness” is a central sign and example in John Locke’s An Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1714 [1689]) which promoted empiricism, but he questioned claims like his colleague Bernier’s, “that a Negro is not a Man, because White Colour was one of the constant simple Ideas of the complex Idea he calls Man” (p. 284). For Locke, such a claim was indicative of “Maxims,” ideas without empirical basis, the result of “a loose and wandering Signification,” which are incorrectly “brought as Proofs to establish Propositions” and “do by their Authority confirm and rivet” (Ibid., p. 285). That same year, however, Locke would also advance modern racial philosophy in Two Treatises of Government (1698 [1689]), without any reference to Physiology, “race”, “species”, or “white” people. This Whiggish defense of William III’s claim to the British throne over the Catholic James II, heir by ‘custome’, was a resurrection of Commonwealth ideas which built on Hobbes’s formulation in Leviathan. Locke similarly defined European “civil society” against the “state of nature” with American Indians as a ‘real-life example’, but rather than differentiating ‘civilized European Christians’ from ‘Asians, Africans, and Americans’ by their ancient ‘custome’ of paternal monarchy, Locke places American Indians at the beginning of Protestant narrative of progress: “in the beginning all the World was *America*” (p. 201). Governance by “Arbitrary Power,” exemplified by the contemporary “Kings of the Indians in America,” was also the state of governance in “the first Ages in Asia and Europe” (p. 248) and, by implication, the state of England under the Catholic James II.

Unlike Bernier’s New Division of the World, which makes no reference to established Greco-Roman or Judeo-Christian proto-racial knowledge, Locke dedicates his entire first volume of Two Treatises to criticizing Biblical justifications for the divine right of kings descending from Adam and Noah in favor of the “Natural Freedom of Mankind” (p. 13). Unlike Fox,



Godwyn, and Bernier's use of "white" to detach "race" from such 'Renaissance cosmography', Locke proposes a neo-Classical division between "rational Creatures" (p. 234)—Protestant supporters of William III's constitutional monarchy, i.e. Whigs—and "irrational creatures" (p. 22)—Catholic supporters of James II, i.e. Tories, who acquiesce to "Arbitrary Power" (p. 345). British capitalist conquest of 'irrational creatures' was justified by a capitalist "Rule of Propriety, (viz.) that every Man should have as much as he could make use of" (p. 192). While "God gave the World to Men in Common," it was particularly given "to the use of the Industrious and Rational" (p. 190). The "Nations of the Americans...who are rich in Land" (p. 196), he argued, were not entitled to more land than they could 'use' and, therefore, forfeited not only their 'natural' dominion, but also any customary dominion, to 'industrious Protestants'.

In defining "white" as the system of privileges for 'European' laborers in Virginia, Allen not only misses the central function of the proto-racial "European" in continental philosophy and its cognate "Christian" in the Anglo-american colonies, but also of "white" as a key milestone in a process of 'melding' a very diverse group of peoples into a terrifyingly powerful global social formation. Because "Europeans" of all classes had to be articulated in order for "European laborers" to be articulated, the "white race" cannot be primarily understood as a "supra-class unity of European-Americans in opposition to African-Americans" (T. W. Allen, 1997, p. 162), but rather as a supra-national social formation which extended "English" rights to 'every Euro-American' regardless of class. As Epperson demonstrates, the first appearances of "white" in Virginia law, beginning with a 1691 law which referenced "English or other white man or woman" (quoted in Epperson, 1997, p. 12) came "only in conjunction with English," while "The first unambiguous legislative use of 'white' without the modifier 'English' does not occur until 1705" (Ibid.).

English rights were not only rooted in pan-European discourses, but the need to extend English rights to non-English 'Europeans' became particularly acute over the course of the seventeenth century as the coalitions which governed state relations in Europe and the settlers in the Anglo-american colonies were increasingly international. William III defeated his uncle-in-law James II from Holland with a remarkably broad transnational pan-Protestant coalition [1688-1691] justified by Locke's 'industrious rational Protestant'. But while this superordinated category might have been very effective in establishing Protestant supremacy in Britain and Ireland during the eighteenth century, it was less useful in areas of British dominion where Catholics were a minority and where the "Christian" population was increasingly diverse in terms of national origin. "English" was ill-suited to equalize status among the King's multi-national loyal subjects, "Christian" was failing its purpose due to strong evangelical arguments for the baptism of Black and Indian people, and the continental "European" was perhaps ill-suited for people making their lives across the Atlantic. The short-lived "Christian not being Negro, mulatto, or Indian" (1705 Virginia Slave Code quoted in Ibid., p. 13) was clearly unsustainable, and "white" emerged as a definitive way to signify a settler superordination squarely opposed to "Negroes" and "Indians". What distinguished "white", therefore, was not that it aligned "European planters" with "European laborers", but that it created basic legal parity for "Europeans" of all classes on global frontiers across imperial jurisdictions, languages, political ideologies, and religious sects, for the purposes of exploiting, dispossessing, and killing people of color.

## Whiteness & the British Empire

Allen's argument that 'the invention of the white race' was deliberate, particular, and contingent to material conditions in Virginia at the turn of the eighteenth century does not sufficiently take the authorizing role of proto-racial ideologies across the British empire into account, and it further relies on a problematically narrow definition of 'racial oppression' as opposed to 'national oppression' in comparing Virginia to Ireland and the Caribbean within that imperial context. Allen's materialist analysis contrasts the forms of social structure adopted by planters in the three major Anglo-american settler colonial dominions in the later seventeenth century—Ireland, the Caribbean, and Virginia. He argues that while Irish-Catholics in Ireland and Afro-Caribbean 'freedmen' ultimately "found entrepreneurial outlets" to the middle class (1997, p. 234), Virginia consolidated and superordinated 'Europeans' as "white" and imposed nearly absolute marginalization and exploitation on people of African descent. For Allen, these differences in each given social formation suggest that the role of racism was contingent on maintaining local bourgeois social control. The particular "circumstance that accounted" for 'the invention of the white race' in Virginia (1994, p. 19), he argues, was "the objective fact that in the West Indies there were *too few* laboring-class Europeans to embody an adequate petty bourgeoisie, while in the continental colonies there were *too many* to be accommodated in the ranks of that class" (1997, p. 244, emphasis original). With the question reduced to one of bourgeois social control, the solution particular to the Anglo-Caribbean was to allow real class-mobility for Afro-Caribbean and Indigenous 'freedmen', while in Virginia, the solution was to confer "'status' on european 'proletarians' instead of 'property'".

Allen defines this contrast, between Ireland and the Caribbean on the one hand and Virginia on the other, as the difference between "national oppression" and "racial oppression". National oppression, he argues, is the "fostering of social distinctions within the oppressed group" (1994, p. 241 n11) and "co-opting a stratum of the subject population into the system of social control" (1994, p. 36) to serve as a "buffer" between the colonial elite "over and against the masses of the super-exploited wealth producing laboring classes" who are also from the subject population (1994, p. 69). Racial oppression, on the other hand, is the "denial of the legitimacy of social distinctions within the oppressed group" (1994, p. 241 n11) such that "all members of the oppressed group [are reduced] to one undifferentiated social status, a status beneath that of any member of any social class within the colonizing population" (1994, p. 32). This categorical differentiation is too imprecise for the purposes of the historical analysis and significantly undermines the *raison d'être* for his research itself. Obviously 'racial oppression' does not have to be absolute for it to exist. If this is the definition of 'racial oppression' then there could be no 'racial oppression' after chattel enslavement, and Allen's life work to abolish the 'system of white-skin privileges' in the twentieth century would be moot. As discussed in Chapter 5, the first editorial of *Race Traitor* (1993c) offered a more nuanced and intersectional definition of 'the white race' than Allen: 'Its most wretched members share a status higher, *in certain respects*, than that of the most exalted persons excluded from it' (emphasis added). This 'shared status' of white people does not mean 'one undifferentiated social status' for people of color, and the qualification 'certain respects' allows for further intersectional nuance, e.g. a Black CEO might be bourgeois in real class terms but might also suffer discriminatory behavior from police, have trouble catching a cab, etc.

Allen conflates 'racial oppression' with settler colonialism and lifetime hereditary chattel slavery, 'national oppression' with imperial capitalist exploitation, and while he purports to explain the 'invention of the white race', his labor focused analysis seems to be primarily

explaining the peculiar formation of the colonial 'white working class' in the U.S. Without engaging the proto-racial ideological context of "European" and "Christian", nor "white" in the Quaker documents from Barbados, Allen misses the ways that all three areas of Anglo-colonial dominion were authorized by the same proto-racial ideologies and invariably secured 'civilized European Christian White' domination over Others considered less human. Irish people may have been structurally subordinated as inferior Europeans in Ireland and Britain, but they enjoyed basic status, in theory, as "white" in the Anglo-american colonies, and used that status to better their position in Ireland. In contrast, Afro-Caribbean 'freedmen' may have had greater class mobility in the Caribbean, but this status was never readily transferrable to America, Ireland, or Britain.

### **Conclusion**

As I hope this lengthy response to Allen's explanation has shown, the 'white race' cannot be ultimately defined as a 'supra-class' alliance between 'European planters' and 'European laborers' particular to Virginia. Rather, taking into account the proto-racial character of "European" and "Christian", the material worth of social status as persons in civil society, the appearance of the sign "white" in Quaker documents from Barbados, the function of "white" as a secular and Physiological category for extending English rights to non-English 'Civilized-Christian-Europeans' on global frontiers, "white" must be understood instead as a milestone in a longer process of 'melding' a diverse group of previously antagonistic 'European' peoples, of all classes, on a global scale, against 'Africans, Indians and Asians'. And while it did not immediately 'supersede' "European" nor "Christian" as racial signifiers at the turn of the seventeenth century, the physical and secular character of "white" was particularly suited to emergent scientific racism which would further consolidate and justify global imperial hierarchy in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries.

In the next chapter I build on Charles Mills' Philosophical definition of whiteness to continue outlining this definition of whiteness as the 'melding' together of previously antagonistic European peoples on global frontiers for the purposes of dispossessing, exploiting, and killing, people of color through the advent of scientific racism, neo-Classical 'humanist' philosophy, the emergence of the world's first 'white republic' in America in the eighteenth century, and the role of the United States in realizing ideal pan-'European' whiteness in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

## CHAPTER 11

### AMERICAN NATIONALISM, PAN-EUROPEAN WHITENESS & ITS 'ETHNIC' FISSURES

Based on the alternative explanations for the origin of "race" as a sedimented rearticulation of proto-racial technologies in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the 'invention' of "white" in Anglophone discourse as a secular category to equalize status among 'Civilized-Christian-European' settlers, regardless of class, on global frontiers in the late seventeenth century, this chapter builds on the work of Charles Mills to further develop a race-centered framework for 'pointing out' the 'ethnic' fissures internal to whiteness over the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In The Racial Contract (1997), Charles Mills defines whiteness as "the most important political system of recent global history—the system of domination by which white people have historically ruled over and, in certain important ways, continue to rule over nonwhite people" (pp. 1-2). I contend that Mills' race-centered definition of whiteness is a much better framework than Allen's to anchor Critical Whiteness inquiry into processes of 'becoming white', and to consider the potential of organizing around one or more of the 'ethnic' fissures internal to whiteness. Mills' framework accounts for racism as a 'recent' and 'global' rearticulation of proto-racial 'old world' supra-national distinctions, including "Europeans versus non-Europeans (geography), civilized versus wild/savage/barbarians (culture), Christians versus heathens (religion)" (p. 21), it is broadly supportive of New Abolitionist calls to 'race treason' (see p. 108), accords with Baldwin's formulations that "white" is 'a totally false identity' and an ideological choice, and demonstrates its intersectional conversance with class (see pp. 31-40), and sex/gender (see Pateman & Mills, 2007).

In the first section of this chapter, I build on Mills' Philosophical framework to outline how the eighteenth-century European academy codified the "white" which emerged as a secular way to equalize the legal status of 'Civilized-Christian-Europeans' on colonial frontiers at the end of the seventeenth century. Scientific racists like Carolus Linnæus and Johann Blumenbach, and neo-Classical philosophers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Immanuel Kant, significantly rearticulated the Medieval meta-citizenship of 'Civilized-European-Christians' into an ideal global 'supra-national' pan-European category for further dispossessing, exploiting, and killing people of color.

In the second section, I consider the tensions between the ideal 'cosmopolitan' pan-European whiteness codified by the European academy in the eighteenth century and the reality of Europe as a continent divided by proto-racial axes 'into innumerable nations and tribes' deeply antagonistic to one another. I contend that while the status of 'Civilized-European-Christians' was first equalized in the Anglo-American colonies through "white", and the ideal of white pan-European citizenship first found expression in the United States of America, whiteness in the Anglo-American colonies was ultimately an extension of English rights and continued to operate as such into the nineteenth century 'white republic'. The particular contention between "white" citizenship and entrenched structural Anglo-conformity in America is treated in this chapter as both the preeminent world experiment in 'melding' previously antagonistic European peoples across the 'ethnic fissures' internal to 'European-Christian-Civil Society', and as a microcosm of larger contentions between ideal 'pan-European' forms of whiteness and narrower, culturally,

geographically, and nationally specific definitions which continued to structure hierarchy among European ‘peoples’ at home and abroad.

In the third section, I will summarize and depict how Mills’ race-centered framework better recognizes, and explains, the myriad ‘ethnic fissures’ in whiteness, which proliferated in ‘Euro-centric’ social formations and the ‘European’ academy during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as distinctions between ‘full’ and ‘borderline’ whiteness. In the fourth section I continue to track the ‘ethnic’ tensions in American whiteness into the age of U.S. empire, and consider how nationalist strategies for ‘complete Americanization’ through two World Wars further consolidated an American whiteness which was both Anglo-normative and pan-European. In the fifth section I briefly consider alternative ‘melting pot’ American nationalisms inclusive of people of color and “Black Power” critiques of such efforts, describe the post-Civil Rights rearticulation of ‘white ethnicity’ as a key ‘frame’ of liberal color-blind whiteness through the work of Matthew Frye Jacobson and others, and consider the limitations of his framework for ‘pointing out’ the ‘ethnic fissures’ in whiteness, before proposing a particularly Irish approach to ‘breaking up’ whiteness in the final chapter of this text.

### **Scientific Racism & the Rights of Man [1740-1795]**

Over the course of the eighteenth century, ‘Renaissance cosmologies’ which authorized ‘proto-racism’ in the Middle Ages were reconstituted by the European academy on modern secular bases more suitable to rationalizing global empire. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Biblical and Classical axes of ‘proto-racism’ which governed the ‘old world’ became increasingly insufficient to govern the ‘new world’ and required significant rearticulation. Based on ‘traveller’ and settler observations like François Bernier’s, and the examination of body parts ‘collected’ from global frontiers, scientific racism reconstituted the Three Continents Theory of Descent from Noah into a global secular framework which could encompass peoples not accounted for in ‘Renaissance cosmology’. And despite early reservations about ‘color’ as a sufficient rational basis to rearticulate ‘European Christian Civilization’ on ‘Commonwealth principles’, Neo-classical philosophy increasingly endorsed scientific racial hierarchy. Together, the response of these two modes of inquiry “would consolidate an intellectual world in which [a] bestial state of nature would be reserved for non-white savages, to be despotically governed, while civil Europeans would enjoy the benefits of liberal parliamentarianism” (p. 66-67).

The Swedish naturalist Carolus Linnæus first applied taxonomic categories to people in the second [Stockholm] and third [Halle] editions of his *Systema Naturæ* (1740), expanding the three established continental groups in Biblical history with a fourth, ‘Americanus’, in order to account for the ‘new world’.<sup>47</sup> In these early taxonomies “Homo”, all four of these categories belonged to the same “Genus” [family], but Linnæus seemed unsure of how to quantify the magnitude of difference between them. The second edition listed them as “variat” [varieties] (Linnæi, 1740, p. 34) and the third edition listed them as distinct “Species” (Linnæi, 1740, p. 44). In both editions, the four categories were formed around continent and color: “Europæus albus” (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) or “Europæus albifcens” (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.) [white European], “Americanus rubifcens”

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<sup>47</sup> It seems that explaining America was a major challenge for neo-Classical philosophers and Scientific racists. Locke himself mocked Biblical explanations “concerning this Division of the World, *That some say it was by Lot, and others that Noah sail'd round the Mediterranean in Ten Tears, and divided the World into Asia, Africa and Europe, Portions for his three Sons. America then, it seems, was left to be his that could catch it*” (Locke, 1698 [1689], p. 137).

[red American], “Asiaticus fuscus” [brown Asian], and “Africanus niger” [black African]. By the twelfth edition (1772), Linnæus had made a slight but familiar adjustment to his continent-color scheme, replacing “Asiaticus fuscus” with “Asiaticus luridus” [pale yellow Asians], and had significantly expanded these simple continent-color categories with increasingly refined distinctions based on Physiological differentiation and cultural essentialism, including hair color and texture, eye color, nose shape, lip size, period of lactation [for Black women only], and style of clothes. As a medical doctor, Linnæus made connections between supposed Physiological difference and essential character attributes for each category of “Homo Sapiens” by mapping them on to the Medieval medical skema of four ‘humors’: the “Americanus” was “cholericus” [angry], the “Europæus” was “sanguineus” [happy], the “Asiaticus” was “melancholicus” [sad], and the “Africanus” was “phlegmaticus” [sluggish] (p. 20-21).

Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s A Dissertation on the Origin and Foundation of the Inequality of Mankind (1767 [1754]) followed Hobbes, Locke and other “philosophers who have enquired into the foundations of civil society” (p. 165) in further rearticulating Classical republican ideas to critique “arbitrary power” (p. 245) based on “paternal authority” (p. 241) through a framework which counterposes states of ‘nature’ and ‘civilization’. But unlike Hobbes and Locke who construct a narratives of ‘European’ or ‘Protestant’ progress against characterizations of the ‘Savage people of America’, Rousseau built on contemporary tropes of the ‘Noble Savage’ to argue that those living in a state of nature are essentially “good” (p. 275) and are “ruined” by “civilization” (p. 225), “which brought irretrievable destruction on natural liberty” (p. 235) and reduced people to “a state of wretched servitude” (p. 241). He exhorts his readers to take a cue from “free-born animals [who] dash their brains out against the bars of their cage,” or “naked savages, that despise European pleasures, braving hunger, fire, the sword, and even death itself, to preserve their independency” (Ibid.), and wrest back their ‘natural liberty from arbitrary power through the formation of a new “republican state...in which the legislative power should be vested in all its citizens” (p. 141). And like the ‘Noble Savage’ trope, Rousseau has no interest in aligning himself with the ‘Savage people of America’ nor in defending their ‘natural liberty’ against imperial domination. As Mills argues, “even if some of Rousseau’s nonwhite savages are ‘noble’...they are still *savages*...primitive beings who are not part of civil society, barely raised above animals,” and not “fully human moral agents” (p. 69).

Like Locke, Rousseau was critical of the emergent field of “comparative anatomy” as a “basis sufficiently solid for any rational system” (p. 168) because so much of the available evidence was being gleaned from the accounts of “people much more intent on filling their pockets with money than their heads with useful knowledge” (p. 298) rather than collected by “academicians” themselves (p. 295), but he none the less endorsed aspects of scientific racism, including the new category of “white”, and like Linnæus, expressed doubt about whether all ‘mankind’ were part of the same ‘species’:

Among the different species of men we are acquainted with, either from the information of history, or the relations of travellers; some are black, others white, and others red; some wear long hair, others have on their heads only wool; some again are in a manner covered all over with hair, while others have not so much as a beard (pp. 284-285).

Beyond the sign “white”, all of these listed differences are framed as deviations from implicit “white” Physiological norms. Rousseau may reject Hobbes’s cultural explanations for “why Europe hath been, if not sooner, at least more constantly and better civilized than the other parts

of the world” (p. 225) in favor of ‘natural’ and universalistic explanations concerning the “human race” (Ibid., p. 166), but his proposal to reform ‘Civil society’ on republican bases was meant for “just the people who count, the people who really are people” (Mills, 1997, p. 3), i.e. "white" people.

Perhaps responding to calls like Locke and Rousseau’s for a more systematic and empirical approach to ‘comparative anatomy’, Johann Blumenbach’s De Generis Humani Varietate Nativa [On the Natural Varieties of Humans] (1775, 1795) focused in on Linnæus categories of "Homo sapiens" to provide a more unified racial theory based on extensive physical examinations in his Göttingen lab. Blumenbach explicitly rejected arguments that groups of people constituted different “Species” [Polygenism] in favor of “Varieties” [Monogenism], and his theory of Degeneration provided a unified taxonomic approach to racially classifying "Homo sapiens" in a global context by rationalizing the four Linnæus categories with the three Biblical categories to create five primary "varieties" of "humans" based on how far they had "degenerated" from God-created perfection. A deeply ‘Christian’ man, Blumenbach believed that the Bible creation stories were historical fact, that the original God-created human was perfect, and that the entire earth was populated from Noah’s ark following variations on Josephus’s scheme. Like contemporary Biblical historians, Blumenbach believed that “Mount Caucasus” was the probable “autochthones of mankind” (Blumenbach, 1865 [1795], p. 269) because they theorized the ark came to rest there after the flood. Based on this logic, but without any explicit reference to it, Blumenbach coined the term "Caucasian" to resignify the concatenated categories of "Japhetic", "European", and "White", and argued that the “Caucasian variety” is “the primeval one” (Ibid., p. 265), i.e. the closest to God-created perfection. He theorizes that from this “mean and primeval type, the others diverge by most easy gradations on both sides to the two ultimate extremes” which he called the “Mongolian variety” and the “Ethiopian variety” (Ibid., p. 269-270).

Blumenbach’s triangular model of “Mongolian” and “Ethiopian” divergence from an original, normal, and ideal, “Caucasian” reasserted the authority of the Three Continents Theory of Descent from Noah under the cover of scientific objectivity while at the same time forcefully imposing a clear global hierarchy among the three primary continental categories. Linnæus’ additional "Americus" category was explained within the ‘gradations’ of Blumenbach’s pyramid as an “intermediate” variety (Ibid., p. 156) “between the Caucasian and Mongolian,” and balanced by another, “the Malay between the same Caucasian and the Ethiopian” (Ibid., p. 265). This pyramid structure fixed ‘Caucasians’ at the moral and physical pinnacle of humanity, superordinated over an almost infinite number of [de]gradations along two axes of ‘degeneration’, to construct a global racial theory compatible with Greco-Roman-Judeo-Christian proto-racism, and Linnæus taxonomy.

For Mills, Immanuel Kant is perhaps the “best illustration” (p. 69) of the ways in which scientific racism and neo-Classical philosophy worked together in the late eighteenth century to produce “a transnational white polity, a virtual community of people linked by their citizenship in Europe at home and abroad (Europe proper, the colonial greater Europe, and the ‘fragments’ of Euro-America, Euro-Australia, etc.” (p. 29). Kant was a zealous and important contributor to scientific theorizations of people of color as subpersons (see Mikkelsen, 2013) while at the same time advocating for a global system of cooperative and ‘cosmopolitan’ republican states developing toward ‘world citizenship’ and ‘universal civic society’ (Kant, 1824 [1784], 1986 [1795]). When Kant described his vision of ‘our human species’ cooperating around the world, he really meant ‘just the people who count, the people who really are people’. What made this

global "white" transnational polity the most important political system of recent global history' was not, as Allen argues, "the participation of the laboring classes" (1997, p. 251), but that it provided a "global theoretical framework" (Mills, 1997, p. 2) for "a particular power structure of formal or informal rule, socioeconomic privilege, and norms for the differential distribution of material wealth and opportunities. Benefits and burdens, rights and duties" (Ibid., p. 3), an idea 'supra-national' category which articulated antagonistic european peoples together across a whole variety of internal and intersectional 'fissures'. Indeed, this ideal "white" was itself legitimized in a supra-national 'intellectual world' where ideas circulated across frontiers of antagonistic european nation states and empires.

### **The White Republic & Anglo-Conformity**

Kant's ideal vision of peaceful coalition between european states toward 'world citizenship', or what Mills calls "international white racial solidarity" (p. 114), must have seemed far-fetched in a deeply divided europe, and it was, in many respects, from colonial frontiers, both real and imagined. Whiteness emerged "in the joint actions to suppress and isolate slave rebellions and colonial uprisings" (Ibid.) on the frontiers of empire where "Intra-European differences and conflicts were real enough but would be quickly put aside in the face of the nonwhite threat" (Ibid., p. 115). The notion of 'cosmopolitan' white "Pan-Europeanism" (Mills, p. 113), which was codified as a new scientific and political structure to govern european empire in the eighteenth century, could not be realized on the continent any more than the preceding 'Civilized-European-Christian' ideal. As Baldwin contends, 'No one was [or could be] white before [they] came to America' or other colonial frontiers, because whiteness was forged in frontier coalitions against 'non-Europeans.'

It is not surprising, then, that 'pan-European' formulations of "white" developed by the european academy first found expression in the constitution of a 'white republic' in america at the end of that century. 'America' was the site where "white" had first begun to assert a naturalized independence from "English", "Christian" and "European" in Anglophone discourse and increasingly "united an ethnically diverse Euro-American population" against "Negroes" and "Indians" (Knouff, 2004, p. 244). The 'discovery' of america had precipitated a deep crisis in 'Renaissance cosmology' which required significant rearticulation of proto-racial ideologies to structure and explain the epoch of global european empires, and particularly inspired two new academic fields of inquiry. Scientific racism emerged to reconstitute the Three Continents Theory of Descent from Noah on secular global bases, and "america" served as the exemplary 'state of nature' in neo-Classical philosophy for the reconstitution of government on secular / 'common-wealth' / republican bases.

Deeply influenced by emergent scientific racism and neo-Classical philosophy,<sup>48</sup> the american Declaration of Independence (1776) could claim "all men are created equal" with "unalienable Rights [to] Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness" to justify what was

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<sup>48</sup> Jefferson's Notes on The State of Virginia (1787), for example, demonstrates that he was well acquainted with the work of Linnæus and neo-classical philosophy. Jefferson's notion that American Indians were 'civilizable' is also very much in accord with Linnæus and Blumenbach's 'intermediate' positioning, and his relative anti-Blackness is also very much in accord with Linnæus and Blumenbach's particularly anti-Black formulations. Walker's Appeal (1830), which was written in response to Jefferson, also clearly demonstrates that Classical and Biblical proto-racial axes remained significant popular explanations for anti-Blackness in the early white republic alongside Modern global rearticulations well into the nineteenth century.



ultimately a white settler-slaveholder revolt against Britain's 'arbitrary power'. The secular constitutional federation of thirteen former colonies counted people of English, Scottish, Welsh, Irish, French, Spanish, Polish, Prussian, Bavarian, Dutch, Hungarian, Danish, Swedish, Italian, etc., origin, "including those bound for a Term of years," as "free Persons," while "Indians not taxed" were outside the bounds of civil society, and people of African descent held in chattel slavery were considered as "three fifths" of a person for the purposes of population-based representation benefitting their 'owners' (U.S. Constitution, 1787, Article 1, Section 2, Paragraph 3). States and municipalities primarily defined the franchise to propertied white men, and the First Congress's Act to establish an uniform Rule of Naturalization (1845 [1790]) clarified that federal citizenship would be available to "any free white person" (p. 103). But

While 'Civilized-Christian-Europeans' may have been increasingly united as "white" for the purposes of dispossessing, exploiting, and killing people of color on global frontiers, 'European' settler colonies around the world also remained deeply entangled in conflicts and competition between their respective 'peoples'. The definition of "white" in U.S. federal law seems to have been broad, secular, and self-evident in the early American republic, but it remained anchored in, and extended from an Anglo-normative "mytho-symbolic core" (Kaufmann, 2004, p. 12), and its default "white" personhood was proto-racially 'English', i.e. White Anglo-Saxon Protestant [WASP].

Fifty years after "white" first entered Virginia Law as an extension of 'English' rights to all 'Civilized-Christian-Europeans', Benjamin Franklin anonymously penned Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind, Peopling of Countries, &c. (1755). The tract proposes that the British pursue an explicit effort to expand the global white population, and written two decades before the American revolution, it is worth quoting at length as an example of early Anglo-American whiteness developed around WASP subjecthood. By Franklin's reasoning,

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*, and *French*, are generally of what we call a swarthy Complexion; the more northern Nations with the *English*, making the principal body of White People on the Face of the Earth (p. 53).

His narrow Anglo-centric and Physiological definition of "white" did not include 'Catholic-Mediterraneans', a popular sentiment which would continue in the U.S. through the early decades of the twentieth century. Franklin also advanced an early 'free-soil' white nationalist argument for ending the trafficking of enslaved African people into the Anglo-American colonies, nearly a century before it was a popular Northern Democratic Party alternative to Abolitionism:

why increase the sons of *Africa*, by Planting them in *America*, where we have so fair an Opportunity, by excluding all Blacks and Tawneys, of increasing the lovely White and Red? But perhaps I am partial to the Complexion of my Country, for such Kind of Partiality is natural to Mankind (54).

And in addition to his proposals to exclude 'Catholic-Mediterraneans' and 'the sons of Africa' to exclusively 'propagate' the 'northern Nations' in America, Franklin further proposed the exclusion of Protestant Germans:

Why should the *Palatine Boars* be suffered to swarm into our Settlements, and by herding together establish their Language and Manners to the Exclusion of ours? Why should *Pennsylvania*, founded by the *English*, become a Colony of *Aliens*, who will shortly be so numerous as to Germanize us instead of our Anglifying them, and will never adopt our Language or Customs, any more than they can acquire our Complexion” (p. 53).

The white republic that Franklin helped to found two decades later may have endorsed the ideal form of republican whiteness and counted an increasingly diverse group of European settlers as ‘free white Persons’ who were eligible for citizenship, and therefore “eligible for membership in the white race” (Ignatiev, 1995, p. 59), but the “racial credentials” of many of these immigrants “were not equivalent to those of the Anglo-Saxon ‘old stock’” (Jacobson, 1998, p. 4). Such tensions between Anglo-conformity and inclusive “white” citizenship as defined by U.S. federal law proliferated among the American settler public over the course of the nineteenth century. The decidedly secular white republic had abandoned state religion, which remained a key mechanism for establishing social hierarchies within and between European ‘peoples’, but Anglo-conformity ensured that ‘non-English’ cultural practices, values, languages, etc., like those of the ‘Palatine Boars’, would be marginalized and localized to ‘ethnic’ communities.

### **The ‘Ethnic Fissures’ in Whiteness**

Charles Mills recognizes that, while ideal ‘white racial solidarity’ constructed a global racial hierarchy in which “All whites are equal...and all nonwhites are unequal” for the purposes of inclusion in ‘Civil Society’ (p. 80), racism is ultimately, like Blumenbach’s theory of ‘degeneration’, constructed from a pinnacle of “full Whiteness” (p. 80) with the ability to make infinite hierarchical “distinction between full and question-mark humans” (p. 23). Blumenbach’s ‘intermediate types’ which marked ‘most easy gradations on both sides to the two ultimate extremes’ already posited that, within the ‘nonwhite’ category, “some are blacker, and so more unequal” (Mills, 1997, p. 80), and while Blumenbach was not focused on accounting for potential ‘inequalities’ within his ‘Caucasian’ category, many other scientific racists who followed were. As part of increasingly refined and debated racial taxonomies in the nineteenth century, many scientific racists rearticulated Classical and Biblical ‘proto-racial’ distinctions within Europe “into a hierarchy of plural and scientifically determined white races” (Jacobson, 1998, p. 7) whereby “one might be both white *and* racially distinct from other whites” (Ibid., p. 6, emphasis original). So whereas the ideal pan-European whiteness of the eighteenth century constructed a global ideal “white” where ‘All whites are equal’ in relation to people of color, Blumenbach’s ‘degeneration’ framework also accommodated more culturally, geographically, and religiously specific definitions of ‘full whiteness’ to stigmatize “what could be called ‘borderline’ Europeans, white people with a question mark—the Irish, Slavs, Mediterraneans, above all, of course, Jews” (Mills, 1997, pp. 78-79) with “the fuzzy status of inferior whites...‘off-white’ rather than nonwhite” (Ibid., p. 80). Combined with Blumenbach’s pyramid structure rearticulating Biblical and Classical ‘proto-racism’, Mill’s framework for describing racial hierarchy might be represented as such:

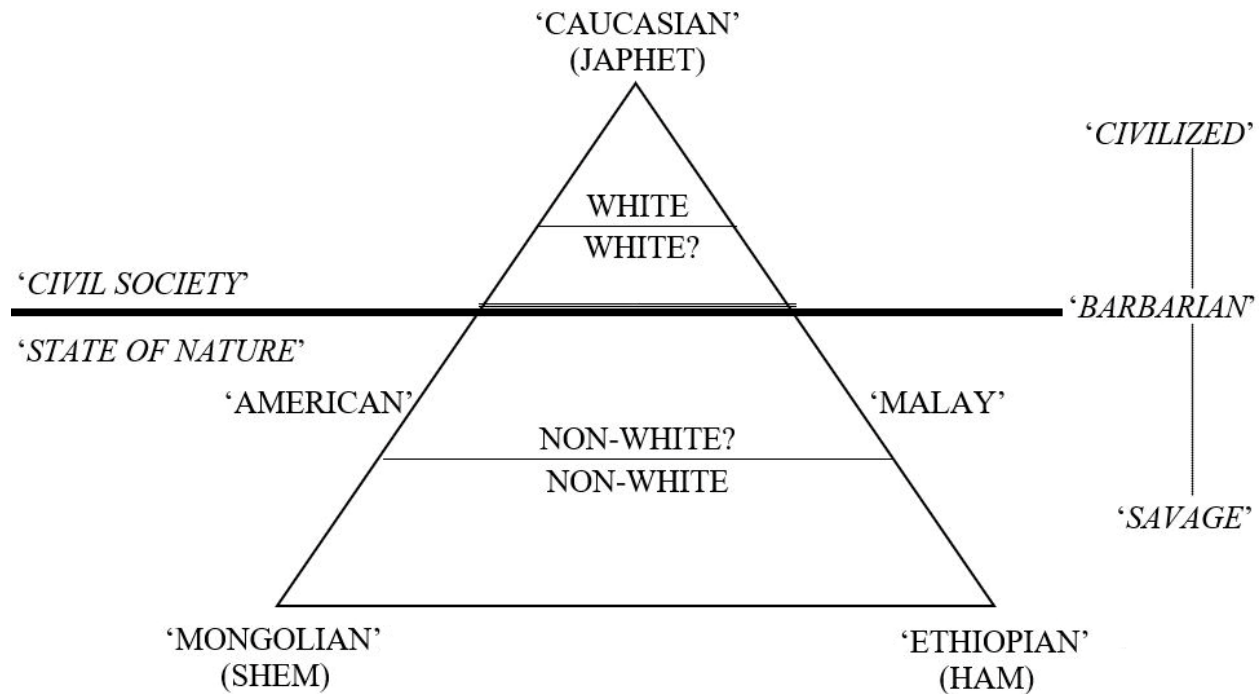


FIGURE 1

So while ideal ‘pan-european’ whiteness imagined a global structure which “eventually coalesced in the basic opposition of white versus nonwhite” (p. 21), this ‘coalescence’ was an ongoing process throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the case of america, the size of the ‘question mark’ hanging over non-WASP european ‘peoples’ represents their deviation from Anglo-normativity. According to the Baldwin-New Abolitionist ‘becoming white’ formulation, eligibility for idea white citizenship in america “did not guarantee their admission; they had to earn it” (Ignatiev, 1995, p. 59). Non-English ‘ethnic’ europeans mitigated question marks by assimilating to Anglo-american norms, but more importantly through asserting their common whiteness, “assimilating American racial attitudes” (S. K. T. Carmichael & Thelwell, 2003, p. 539), and “affirming their endorsement of the Racial Contract” (Mills, 1997, p. 58) by participating equally, if not more zealously, in the subordination of people of color. People “from Norway, for example, where they are *Norwegians*—became white: by slaughtering the cattle, poisoning the wells, torching the houses, massacring Native Americans, raping Black women” (Baldwin, 1984, p. 92).

The rapidly industrializing white republic continued to be a key observational site and testing ground for racial taxonomies following the Civil War as a vast spectrum of immigrants from around the world arrived and attempted to claim american citizenship. American whiteness was necessarily rearticulated after African-americans won ‘naturalized’ citizenship in 1866, but the basic pyramid racial structure was reinscribed rather than overturned by the end of the nineteenth century—Jim Crow resubordinated African-americans as sub-persons throughout much of the country, aggressive ‘Manifest Destiney’ settler-colonialism of American Indian lands resumed in the West, and the pan-European whiteness of american citizenship was further reasserted by explicit exclusion and limitation of non-‘Civilized-European-Christian’ immigrants.

The primary determinant of eligibility for citizenship, and therefore whiteness, under U.S. law in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was “the nationality of the immigrant” (United States Congress, 1925 [1924], p. 159) as determined by “country of birth” (Ibid., p. 160). With scientific racism as a primary guide, U.S. courts ruled definitively that East Asian immigrants and Pacific Islanders from China [1878], Hawaii [1889], Burma [1894], Japan [1894], Philippines [1912], and Korea [1921] were not white. The courts prevaricated on the whiteness of South Asian and ‘Middle Eastern’ immigrants from India, Syria, Armenia and Arabia, and further extended racial exclusion to U.S. residents with ancestry from any ‘nationalities’ ruled ‘non-white’, including those born in America (Haney López, 1996, pp. 203-208). But despite significant social and labor discrimination against non-English/WASP immigrants throughout the nineteenth century, there is no evidence that any of the millions of European immigrants before or after the Civil War were ever legally denied U.S. citizenship because their ‘nationality’ was considered ‘non-white’ by law. Rather, the U.S. “[stopped] short of [legally] racializing [‘borderline’ European] immigrants” as non-white, and “drew the color line around, rather than within, Europe” (Omi & Winant, 1986, p. 65).

The “surging forward of Irish and German, of Russian Jew, Slav, and ‘dago’” against Anglo-normative “social bars” to “place and power” in the white republic in the decades after the Civil War, while the U.S. state took an “unflinching and immovable stand” against African-Americans, American Indians, and non-European New Immigrants, served to further reinforce the articulation between American citizenship and ideal pan-European whiteness (Du Bois, 1920, p. 464). And as the preminent experiment in realizing ideal pan-European whiteness, this process of ‘melding’ an increasingly ‘borderline’ stream of European immigrants from Europe as structurally white in America also facilitated greater realization of ‘Pan-Europeanism’ in Europe. For those Europeans who, in Baldwin’s formulation, immigrated to America ‘because they were not white’ in Europe, the process of ‘becoming white’ in America provided new material and discursive resources for claiming ‘full whiteness’ in Europe. As Du Bois observed, they “carry and send the news back to the submerged classes in the fatherlands” (Ibid.).

In the mid-nineteenth century, Charles Darwin (1845, 1871) had also turned Blumenbach’s Theory of Degeneration on its head with his Theory of Evolution, reconstructing and reconsolidating Blumenbach’s pyramid structure on a purely ‘natural’ basis. Instead of variously ‘degenerated’ exemplars of ‘primeval’ perfection, Darwin hypothesized that “The varieties of man” (Darwin, 1985 [1845], p. 128) evolved from a “common progenitor” (Darwin, 1985 [1871], p. 188) and “graduate into each other” (Ibid., p. 187) with the “Caucasian” (Ibid., p. 184) at the pinnacle of humanity and “savages of the lowest grade” (Darwin, 1985 [1845], p. 76) at the base. As Darwin’s ideas gained acceptance, global genocide and exploitation of people of color continued apace, but it was now increasingly renaturalized as part of Evolution: “the stronger always extirpating the weaker” (Darwin, 1985 [1845], p. 128).

While Darwin’s attempts to explain human difference were a marginal part of his much larger Biological project, his work inspired others, like his cousin Sir Francis Galton, to focus in on the implications of Evolution for racism. Galton mixed Darwin’s theory of Evolution through Natural Selection with a form of Lamarckism (see Weikart, 2004, p. 9) to argue for “eugenics” (Galton, 1883, p. 24), or humans taking “a deliberate part in furthering the great work of evolution” (Ibid., p. 304). Eugenics intensified the linkage of racial theory to aggressive state-sponsored projects and inspired a generation of ‘eugenicists’ toward “watching for the indications of superior strains or races, and... favouring them” (Ibid., p. 307) in order “to

give...the more suitable races or strains of blood a better chance of prevailing speedily over the less suitable” (Ibid., p. 25N).

### **Ideal Pan-European Whiteness & U.S. Empire**

As the U.S. emerged as a global imperial power from the Spanish-American war at the turn of the twentieth century, and conflicts between ‘European’ states over colonial territory intensified in the decades before the Great War, tensions between “Political Anglo-Saxonism” (Jacobson, 2002, p. 188) and ideal pan-european whiteness in america also intensified. Immigration to the U.S. did not sever the political commitments of european immigrants, and many european-americans were significantly invested in various conflicts ‘at home’ which coincided and conflicted with emergent U.S. foreign policy. Official U.S. neutrality in the early years of the Great War allowed all supporters of opposing european factions, and opponents of the war itself, to continue organizing, but as the Anglo-normative U.S. state increasingly came to support the ‘Allied Powers’ [Britain, France, Russia, etc.], in the form of arms sales and loans, against the ‘Central Powers’ [Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, Turkey, etc.], and shifted toward ‘Preparedness’ for war in 1915, these tensions came to a head in a resurgence of nativism, the Preparedness Day bombing [July 22, 1916], and the passage of the Espionage Act of 1917. ‘Question marks’ hovering over the loyalty of Irish, southern, and eastern europeans in the U.S. prompted ‘Americanization’ campaigns to consolidate a “new and distinct” imperial american national identity, “by blood and culture kin to each of the nations of Europe...[but] also separate from each of them” (Roosevelt, 1916 [1915], p. 357); one which would not “imitate one of the older racial types, but...a new American type,” articulating “the best that each has brought to our shores” (Ibid., p. 372).

Speaking on Columbus Day 1915 as “an American of non-English blood” (Roosevelt, 1916 p. 43, note), Theodore Roosevelt strongly endorsed the full realization of ideal white american citizenship—“the experiment of making out of divers race stocks a new nation and of treating all the citizens of that nation in such a fashion as to preserve them equality of opportunity in industrial, civil and political life” (Roosevelt, 1916 [1915], p. 358)—in order to prevent the american republic from “[becoming] a tangle of squabbling nationalities, an intricate knot of German-Americans, Irish-Americans, English-Americans, French-Americans, Scandinavian-Americans or Italian Americans, each preserving its separate nationality, each at heart feeling more sympathy with Europeans of that nationality than with the other citizens of the American Republic” (p. 362). The U.S. entrance into global imperialist competition with other european powers had revealed the extent to which “elements of our nation are not yet properly fused” by ideal white american citizenship (p. 368), and Roosevelt reconciled Anglo-normativity with immigrant demands for equality by proposing that all european-americans disarticulate themselves from particular ‘ethnic’ interests in exchange for “complete Americanization” (p. 372). While the Anglo-normative state had long offered this deal, its stakes and rewards were now dramatically intensified by global war, and Roosevelt clearly spelled out the consequences: “For an American citizen to vote as a German-American, an Irish-American or an English-American is to be a traitor to American institutions; and those hyphenated Americans who terrorize American politicians by threats of the foreign vote are engaged in treason to the American Republic” (Roosevelt, 1916 [1915], p. 364).

The brief but definitive U.S. entrance into the war [1917-1919] in support of the ‘Allied Powers’ did not make it treasonous to ‘vote as an English-American,’ but it totally marginalized those who opposed the war or actively supported the ‘Central Powers’. This zero-sum resolution

to the question of 'American' loyalties was symbolized by the sensational Hindu-German Conspiracy Trial [1917-1918] brought against Irish nationalists, [East] Indian nationalists, and German imperialists who had combined to use the 'neutral' white republic as a staging ground to attack the British empire. At the same time, however, the U.S. role at the Paris Peace Conference toward 'cosmopolitan' white cooperation through a League of Nations, and the full circle of white citizens 'melded' together in the crucible of american republicanism returning to europe united as americans, began to establish the white republic's role as a "natural peacemaker" (Du Bois, 1920, p. 463) between european powers in service of the higher ideals of the global white polity. While the U.S. state quickly retreated from this role shortly after the war, it would assume it quite forcefully during and after World War II.

After the Great War, 'Americanization' and Eugenics converged in the Immigration Act of 1924 which severely restricted immigration in general, but also conservatively reinforced the balance of power within the white american coalition by placing an "annual quota of any nationality" fixed at "2 per centum of the number of foreign-born individuals of such nationality resident in the continental United States as determined by the [pre-imperial] United States census of 1890" (United States Congress, 1925 [1924], p. 159). This formula was particularly aimed at 'favouring superior strains' from northern and western europe and limiting 'inferior strains' from southern and eastern europe. Within the borders of the U.S., however, the decades after the war saw unprecedented realization of popular and inclusive whiteness for all european-americans, regardless of national origin, toward 'equality of opportunity in industrial, civil and political life' along the lines of Roosevelt's proposal (Jacobson, 1998; D. R. Roediger, 2005).

Eugenic projects 'favouring superior strains' from europe came to fruition in Nazi Germany where, what "until then had been reserved exclusively for the Arabs of Algeria, the 'coolies' of India, and the 'niggers' of Africa," was "applied to Europe" (Cèsaire, 2000 [1955], p. 36). Despite substantial domestic support for such projects, the 'western world' ultimately rejected the Nazi application of Eugenics, not because it was a "crime against man," which europeans had been committing against people of color for centuries, but because it was a "crime against the white man" (Ibid.), an unacceptable violation of ideal pan-European white solidarity underpinned by "a more exclusivist version of the Racial Contract than was globally acceptable at the time" (Mills, 1997, p. 78). The definitive ideological stand of the U.S. against this 'exclusivist version' of whiteness, the massive Jim Crow wartime mobilization, and internment of Japanese-americans, further 'melded' european-americans together. After nearly two centuries, from the emergence of "white" as a secular category to equalize status among 'Civilized-Christian-Europeans', to its ideal "white" constitution, to its emergence as 'leader of the free world', the white settler-colonial republic was a primary site for realizing ideal pan-european whiteness, and whiteness was a constituent and enduring aspect of what it meant to be "American" such that, as Toni Morrison (1992) concludes, "American means white" (p. 47).

### **American Nationalism, Liberal Color-Blindness, "Black Power" & 'White Ethnic Revival'**

The primary constitutional strategy of people of color and their white 'allies' during 'Jim Crow' was to disarticulate core american ideals from whiteness and rearticulate them to a vision of an 'interracial democratic' america in which a given 'non-white nationality' could claim equal citizenship and status. In doing so, they hoped to relight the forge of american republicanism, extend the 'melding' process which had articulated previously antagonistic european peoples together as "white", and, as Toni Morrison describes it, "struggle to make the term ["American"] applicable to themselves with ethnicity and hyphen after hyphen after hyphen" (Ibid.). From the

'Double V' campaign during WWII to support for Johnson in Việt Nam, the 'leadership' of the Civil Rights Movement framed a moral and legal argument against Jim Crow rooted in Christianity, respectability, loyalty and assimilation to Anglo-american norms. Given America's historic position as a lab for realizing ideal whiteness, and therefore euro-centric 'humanity', this project was both radically americanist and radically humanist. Advances toward full U.S. citizenship were seen as inextricably linked to realizing 'cosmopolitan' world citizenship. Because of these particular properties of U.S. citizenship, many white-american-marxist proponents of such radical humanist 'Americanization' also linked the forge of american republicanism to the global process of proletarianization under Capitalism. It was in this milieu that Ann Braden's white anti-racist 'Other America' program was developed, and in which Allen imagined that if a narrow Englishness could be "superseded" by whiteness in the Anglo-american colonies, "Might they not have experienced 'a new birth of freedom', and a new identity, American still, but simply human instead of 'white'?" (T. W. Allen, 1994, pp. 10-11).

Such 'Other America' strategies reached a pitch in the 'Beloved Community' Civil Rights Movement, and by the mid-1960s, had forced global consciousness of the contradiction between core american abstract universal ideals and Jim Crow. The crisis was only resolved by the liberal color-blind rearticulation of whiteness which appropriated the radical americanist and humanist ideals of the Civil Rights Movement in order to entrench "institutional racism" (S. Carmichael & Hamilton, 1967, p. 51). Amidst this rearticulation, Black Power concluded "that 'the American dream' wasn't designed for black people" (Ibid.), and if there was any possibility that "America" could be rearticulated to include African-americans equally, it would be accomplished through "the empowerment of black people" (Cleveland Sellers quoted in Greenberg, 1998, p. 157).

This admittedly "reform" strategy (Kwame Ture quoted in Ibid., p. 165) which rejected 'integration', centered Black standpoint, promoted self-determination, and embraced unapologetic Blackness was, however, perhaps equally informed by the strategies of 'borderline europeans' who used their basic rights as white citizens to build "Irish Power, Italian Power, Polish Power or Jewish Power" (S. Carmichael & Hamilton, 1967, p. 51) against 'Political Anglo-Saxonism'. Carmichael & Hamilton's invocation of 'Irish Power, etc.' as models for building "Black Power" also suggested an approach to coalition building which sought to assess and exploit the 'ethnic' fissures in american whiteness between Anglo-normativity and ideal pan-European white citizenship. When Black Power outlined conditions under which coalition with 'white radicals and white liberals' would be possible, one was that "both parties are not only willing but believe it absolutely necessary to challenge Anglo-conformity and other prevailing norms and institutions" (p. 62). In defining the white american power structure as Anglo-normative, and recognizing that "Anglo-conformity is a dead weight on [non-WASP european] necks too" (p. 82), Carmichael & Hamilton called attention to the ways in which 'borderline europeans' had, in many ways, surrendered their particular 'national' interests, their antagonistic histories, their languages and other lifeways for the status of being "white" in America, and implicitly invited 'borderline europeans' to reinvigorate movements for 'Irish power, etc.' to form coalitions Black people on the basis of shared interests against Anglo-normativity for the purposes of building a truly inclusive "America", and by extension, "humanity".

Based on "Black Power" directives "to create as much division in the white community or to really break up the power structure in the white community" (Ralph Featherstone quoted in The Central Committee of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, 1967, p. 1158), This dissertation has described and critiqued at great length the ways in which white anti-racists have

sought to rearticulate "white" to an alternative, "anti-racist", white [american] nationalism, Ignatin & Allen sought to 'break up' whiteness along class lines through the 'repudiation of white-skin privilege' and constructing a 'united' [american] working-class, New Abolitionism sought to 'break up' whiteness along class lines through 'treason to whiteness' and 'loyalty to humanity', and Frye sought to 'break it up' along the transectional fissures of gender and sexual orientation. While many 'white radical and white liberal allies' to "Black Power" were members of 'borderline european' groups in the U.S., none of the major efforts to 'organize their own white communities' expressed any interest in attempting to organize 'their borderline european communities' against 'white supremacy'. Without a cohesive 'white left' strategy concerning the role of 'borderline europeans', nor significant interest in organizing support for "Black Power" along these lines, 'white ethnicities' emerged from the crisis of "Black Power" as powerful liberal color-blind institutions deployed against the liberation movements of people of color. Matthew Frye Jacobson (1998, 2002, 2006) describes this rearticulation as the "White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America".

For most of Anglo-american history, the 'ethnic' hyphen was seen as treasonous to both Anglo-normativity and ideal 'cosmopolitan' pan-'Civilized Christian European' whiteness, requiring 'borderline europeans' to 'properly fuse' themselves to given 'national' norms through assimilation and collaboration, or to remain marginalized, unequal and vulnerable to stigmatization as 'inferior whites'. Ideal pan-European citizenship of the 'white republic' in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries allowed those european peoples who 'were not white' in europe to 'become white' in america, 'melding' a diverse and previously antagonistic mass of european peoples into an Anglo-normative american whiteness through active and passive dispossession, exploitation, and killing of people of color. But as the liberation movements of people of color in the post-WWII period "heightened whites' consciousness of their skin privilege, rendering it not only visible but uncomfortable" (2006, p. 2), many "so-called white ethnics", having exchanged national particularity for 'full Americanization', ignorantly, cynically, or maliciously deployed 'borderline european' identities to "conveniently disassociate themselves from the historic legacies of white privilege" (1998, p. 12), complicity in the crimes of the white republic, and the discomfort of white positional consciousness, "on the spurious basis of their parents' and grandparents' racial oppression" (1998, p. 7). As shown by Jacobson and other RaceCrits, this 'white ethnic' strategy of 'pointing out' the ethnic fissures in whiteness, without any interest in fighting 'institutional racism', has effectively worked "to couch and conceal major elements" of liberal color-blind white hegemony (2006, p. 244) by

[a] downplaying or ignoring the ways in which 'becoming white' superordinated 'borderline europeans' above people of color (see Gallagher, 2003, pp. 154-155),

[b] constructing false equivalence between the historical experiences of people of color and 'white ethnics' (see Sleeter, 1995, pp. 15, 17),

[c] using these false equivalences to "lead away from a consideration of whiteness itself" (Ibid., R. Dyer, 1997b, p. 4) and toward "evocations of pluralism and diversity that further mask reality" (hooks, 1992, p. 176),

[d] endorsing the idea that america is a multi-cultural republic where "racism no longer exists" (Ibid.),



[e] holding ‘white ethnics’ up as ‘model minorities’ who ‘lifted themselves up by their bootstraps’ (see Jacobson, 2006, p. 244),

[f] blaming continuing and systematic racial inequalities on people of color themselves, “suggesting that black folks who talk about the ways in which we were [and are] terrorized by whites are merely evoking victimization to demand special treatment” (hooks, 1992, p. 176), and

[g] actively opposing or counterposing any ‘special considerations’ designed to mitigate institutional racism like Affirmative Action, Black Student Unions, African Diaspora and Ethnic Studies, reparations, and other forms of standpoint-based ‘identity politics’.

This ‘white ethnic’ repertoire has facilitated the production of a “guilt-free revisionism where [‘borderline european’] whites did not benefit from the social, economic, and political arrangements of slavery and Jim Crow” (Gallagher, 2003, p. 154), and do not continue to benefit from whiteness under post-Civil Rights liberal color-blindness. Moreover, having participated in the consolidation of a generally ‘inclusive’ american whiteness in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, ‘borderline europeans’ can now celebrate their ‘full whiteness’ in the coded terms of ‘ethnicity’ as a safe and acceptable signifier of white citizenship. Whereas the ‘hyphens’ of ‘borderline europeans’ were once treasonous to the white republic, they now mirror and offset the hyphenated identities of people of color, and together provide a patchwork of ‘multi-cultural’ camouflage to shield ‘institutional racism’. Deployed in the service of liberal color-blindness—diffusing, confusing, resisting and dismissing color-conscious demands by people of color—the once treasonous ‘hyphen’ has been rearticulated into an expression of ‘white racial solidarity’ as a key ‘frame’ of liberal color-blind whiteness.

But while the ‘white left’ did not advance a clearly stated strategy around the ‘hyphen’, Jacobson acknowledges that “A more personal reflection on ethnic roots increasingly characterized the white student left in the wake of Black Power” (2006, p. 240). He traces some of the political expressions of these ‘personal reflections’ through “The Jewish, Italian, or Irish accents of white feminism” (Ibid., p. 248) and others from what he calls the “multicultural left” (Ibid., p. 239), particularly Tom Hayden’s post-”Black Power” engagement with Irish identity as described in *Irish on the Inside*. But while Jacobson’s analysis of the ‘white ethnic revival’ on the ‘white left’ approaches a consideration of a project which might link ‘preservation’ of a given ‘borderline european nationality’ to coalition with people of color against Anglo-conformity, he stops short of doing so, arguing only that the ‘white ethnic revival’ “was inadvertently a creation of the [white ‘multicultural’] left no less than of the right” (2006, p. 245). Jacobson’s focus is on ‘pointing out’ the white in ‘ethnicity’ rather than the ‘ethnic fissures’ in whiteness; more concerned with raising the ‘positional consciousness’ of ‘white ethnics’ under liberal color-blindness than considering any particular strategy of resisting racism from ‘white ethnic’ subject positions, more concerned with describing the ‘white ethnic revival’ than seeking to change it.

Jacobson’s work is a valuable and important resource in demystifying ‘white ethnic revival’ claims, but I will contend in the next chapter that [1] his broad ‘white ethnic’ lens precludes him from seriously considering the possibilities of invoking the particular histories of previously antagonistic european ‘nationalities’, [2] that the deployment of these false ‘white

ethnic' equivalencies also contain within them the specter of 'white ethnic' subjects developing a genuine interest in their particular histories which might supersede their loyalty to whiteness, and [3] Jacobson's Americentric lens leads him further away from appreciating or engaging important transatlantic antagonisms between Ireland and Irish-America around Black liberation, particularly during the post-Civil Rights era he addresses, and [4] without focusing on the particularity of Irishness in relation to whiteness, Jacobson cannot appreciate Hayden's proposal as an alternative to both white anti-racism, and New Abolitionism.

## **Conclusion**

If, as this chapter has attempted to demonstrate, race should be understood as an analytically distinct Eurocentric system of oppression, whiteness should be primarily defined as a 'melding together' of previously antagonistic European peoples for the purposes of dispossessing, exploiting, and killing people of color, and that, as Roosevelt argues, 'preserving' a 'separate nationality' and 'feeling more sympathy with Europeans of that nationality than with the other [white] citizens of the American Republic is to be a traitor to American institutions', then it seems to follow that a strategy of disarticulating a given European 'nationality' from the ideal pan-European white-American coalition might be a productive avenue to creating more practical, popular, and effective whitenesses. What would it mean to invest in 'national particularity' as an alternative identity to ideal pan-European whiteness? What would it mean to 'look white' but act 'national'? What would it mean to rearticulate a given 'national' community to "anti-whiteism" rather than attempting to rearticulate "white" to "anti-racism", or promoting a 'dissolution' of white subjects into abstract universal "humanity"? What would it mean to commit 'treason to whiteness' by threatening its pan-European cohesiveness through nationally specific 'loyalty' to people of color for the purpose of tearing down white "humanity" and building a new and inclusive humanity in its place? In the final chapter of this dissertation, I propose an alternative strategy of disarticulating the pan-European white coalition through the development of an intersectional diasporic anti-white Irish nationalism, dissimilating from whiteness, and "[assimilating] culturally and politically with the anti-colonial world" (T. Hayden, 2001, p. 83).

## CHAPTER 12

### 'BECOMING IRISH': AN ALTERNATE APPROACH TO WHITENESS

Chapters 10 and 11 offer an alternative to the New Abolitionist definition of whiteness as a 'deal' between 'European' workers and 'European' planters in America which has been continuously renegotiated over three centuries. While their definition certainly tells some truth, and New Abolitionists have contributed a very interesting and generative perspective on whiteness, their class-focused definition is ultimately too problematic and imprecise for grounding Critical Whiteness Studies as 'an additional movement' to intersectional Critical Race Theory. Whiteness can certainly be seen as 'deal' between workers and bourgeoisie through the lens of class interest, but as Frye has demonstrated, it can also be seen as a 'deal' between 'European' women and 'European' men and 'queer' and 'straight' Europeans through the lenses of sex/gender. It might also be seen as 'deal' between young, middle-aged, and old 'Europeans' through the lens of age, or a 'deal' between abled and dis/abled 'Europeans' through the lens of ability. The fact is that "white" is a 'deal' between 'Europeans'.

Through the lens of Baldwin's 'becoming white' thesis and the philosophical framework of Charles Mills, these chapters have worked to demonstrate how whiteness is 'deal' 'negotiated' between differently positioned and potentially antagonistic 'Civilized-Christian-Europeans' on global frontiers, and I have offered the alternative definition of whiteness as an uneven process of 'melding' previously antagonistic 'Europeans' on global frontiers for the purposes of dispossessing, exploiting, and killing people of color. It is my hope that this race-centered definition of whiteness can help to refocus and ground Critical Whiteness Studies as 'an additional movement' to intersectional Critical Race Theory which is concerned with studying the sociohistorical formation of white hegemony and particularly its superordinate "white" position. But whether the proposed definition is ultimately useful in grounding Critical Whiteness Studies inquiry at-large, it provides an additional lens through which to evaluate the two major 'tendencies' of Critical Whiteness Studies. If "white" is ultimately a 'deal' between 'Europeans', the class-focused New Abolitionist approach seems insufficient to contend with race as an analytically distinct system in theory and practice, and the white anti-racist project seems to begin with the assumption that ideal pan-European whiteness is a *fait accompli* and proceeds to advance an alternative, 'positive', white nationalism.

In this final chapter, I critically expand upon Tom Hayden's *Irish on the Inside* (2001) to propose an explicitly Irish Diasporic approach to 'breaking up' whiteness within and against the two existent Critical Whiteness Studies 'tendencies', and consider how such an approach might differently negotiate the 'dilemmas' of working against racism from white subject positions in theory and practice. While this proposal is most explicitly aligned with anti-whiteness, and endorses the basic Baldwin-New Abolitionist contentions that whiteness is '*nothing but* oppressive and false' and an ideological choice, it also endorses and repurposes certain aspects of white anti-racist strategy, to argue that by 'owning' our Irish history of 'becoming white', 'preserving' non-racist or anti-racist elements of Irishness through an intersectional, anti-white, Irish Diasporic nationalism, and rearticulating "Irish" to "anti-whiteness" might better work to 'break up' the pan-European white coalition. The frameworks of Baldwin, Mills and Black Power suggest a variety of anti-white 'ethnic' projects which might work to organize and rearticulate 'their own 'borderline European' communities' to anti-whiteness, but this proposal is

focused on considering the particular ‘task’ of organizing and rearticulating ‘my own Irish Diasporic community’. If it has any value for other ‘borderline europeans’ working along similar lines, it will be in its contribution to a sort of ‘transversal dialogue’ through modeling a socio-historically particular explanation of ‘how the Irish became white’ and the possibilities for developing a particular Irish whiteness rather than some easily generalizable and transferable formula.

The first section briefly considers the history of whiteness as an ideological choice for Irish Diasporans at ‘home’ and abroad. While in-depth historical analysis of the Anglo/Irish fissure in whiteness—from its antecedents in Roman Britain and Medieval Anglo-Norman conquest, through Protestant Modernity and white republicanism, to the present—is much needed, it is beyond the scope of this text and a direction for future work guided by the framework presented here. Instead, I attempt to sufficiently illustrate longer traditions of Irish anti-racism and the very real choice colonized and racialized Irish people have had between ‘melding’ into whiteness and ‘loyalty to Irishness’ through a mid-nineteenth century moment in which this choice was explicitly posed by Irish nationalists in Ireland to Irish Diasporans in the ‘white republic’.

The second section jumps ahead to consider post-“Black Power” developments in intersectional Irish Diasporic nationalism in Ireland and America, and intermittent dialogues between Irish and African Diasporic people which have continued to assert “Irish” as a potentially viable alternative identity to “white”. Particular attention is given to documenting the existence of counter-hegemonic projects which have sought to rearticulate “Irish” to “anti-racism” through collaboration with Black people against Anglo-normative white American nationalism and highlighting some of their strengths and weaknesses as bases for an Irish anti-white approach. The third section contextualizes Tom Hayden’s proposal for Irish whiteness in Irish on the Inside (2001) within these intersectional Irish Diasporic nationalist traditions, and the final sections of this chapter critically expand on Hayden’s proposal to consider how an intersectional, anti-white, Irish Diasporic nationalist approach to ‘breaking up’ whiteness might differently navigate the ‘dilemmas’ of working against racism from white subject positions under liberal color-blind white hegemony.

This proposal may seem far-fetched, and it is, in many respects, from Ireland, both real and imagined. It is also admittedly sketchy, hurried, and controversial, but along with the extended critical engagement with white anti-racism and New Abolitionism in the first two sections of this text, I hope it can further reinvigorate critical discussion on the current state of ‘white allies’ and Critical Whiteness Studies, and perhaps even advance a particularly Irish approach to resisting racism in theory and practice.

### **Anti-Irish Racism, Irish-Americans & The Choice of Whiteness**

The tension between ideal “white” American citizenship and ‘more exclusivist’ Anglo-normative whiteness was significantly tested in the 1830s when the extension of voting rights to all male citizens regardless of property [‘Universal Manhood Suffrage’] coincided with the first trickles of a massive wave of Catholic immigration from Ireland. The island had been a troublesome Norman/English/British colony for more than four centuries, Irish people were generally seen as subhuman in English discourse, and in the early nineteenth century, English racial scientists began to translate long-held proto-racial conceptions of Welsh, Scottish, and Irish people into the emergent field of Physiology. For example, British physical anthropologist and Blumenbach follower James Cowles Prichard (1813) worked to exclude the “the Celtic race” from equal

status with the superior “German race” [which included English people] based on their supposed “Asiatic origin” (p. 528). In addition to noting Celtic mythological “connexion with the narratives of the East” (Ibid.), Prichard makes Physiological claims that “The complexion of the Celtic race, when unmixed with the German, was dark,” and that “the form of the head and face [makes] some approach towards the character of the Mongole race” (Ibid., p. 535). But while the ‘Celtic fringes’ of the United Kingdom, particularly Irish-Catholics, were legally subordinated in the British empire by official Protestantism as well as Anglo-conformity, the secular american constitution barred religious discrimination, Irish-Protestants were a key element in the early white republic, and all people from Ireland, regardless of religion, were legally recognized as ‘free white persons’ under its federal law. Attacks on Catholic institutions and the surge of Anglo ‘nativism’ against Irish-Catholic immigrants in america during the middle decades of the nineteenth century exposed the Anglo-normativity of american whiteness.

The Irish-Catholic struggle for equal economic, social, and racial status in nineteenth-century america was a continuation of more than four hundred years of Irish survival, resistance, and assimilation under proto-racial English settler-colonialism. In an Anglo-normative society transposed to america which was governed by the new category of “white” as an extension of ‘English’ rights, however, Irish-Catholics were superordinated in social relations above ‘Negroes’ and ‘Indians’. The ideal pan-european republican whiteness articulated in the previous century, and institutionalized in american law, provided Irish people in america with new resources to justify their humanity, personhood, rights, and entitlement to equal of status with ‘Anglo-Saxons’ at home and abroad. In Baldwin’s formulation, Irish-Catholic immigrants of the mid-nineteenth century came to america from a British settler colony ‘where they were not white’ [i.e. where they were proto-racially subordinated] and emigrated to the white republic ‘in part because they were not white’. As ‘eligible’ citizens of the white republic, Irish-Catholics ‘became white’ by collaborating with other ‘Civilized-Christian-European’ settlers in the dispossession, exploitation, and killing of people of color, and by articulating their freedom in Ireland and america with the ideals of ‘white racial solidarity’. In Du Bois’ formulation, they ‘carried and sent the news back to the submerged classes in the fatherlands’, working to extend Irish-American whiteness ‘back’ to Irish people living in British colonized Ireland.

Mass Irish-Catholic immigration began during the presidency of Andrew Jackson, whose Democratic Party championed ideal pan-european white republican citizenship and celebrated popular whiteness through an extreme and explicit white nationalism. Born to Presbyterian ‘Scots-Irish’ parents from Ireland, Jackson was a major slave-holder and a central figure in ramping up genocidal campaigns against indigenous peoples, from dispossessing Creek nations during the War of 1812 to his zealous 1819 conquest of Spanish-Seminole controlled Florida and his leadership in replacing Jefferson’s federal ‘Civilization’ Indian policy with ‘Removal’. At the same time, Jackson was the first U.S. president to host a Catholic ceremony in the White House [1834], and Irish-Catholics became an increasingly important element in his pro-slavery, anti-Indian, white nationalist Democratic Party which articulated white industrial workers in the North with Southern planters. Amidst this process of ‘becoming white’ through the Democratic Party, however, a key political, moral, and ideological rupture between Irish in Ireland and Irish in america emerged over chattel slavery and anti-Blackness, exemplified by Daniel O’Connell’s Letter to the Cincinnati Irish Repeal Association (1863 [1843]).

O’Connell was known as ‘The Liberator’ for leading the mass movement which won ‘Catholic Emancipation’ in Ireland and Britain [Catholic Relief Act of 1829] and then leading the mass movement for Irish legislative autonomy [Repeal of the 1800 Acts of Union]. In his

letter, endorsed by the Committee of the Irish Repeal Association, O'Connell chastised Irish-American complicity and participation in "the most hideous crime that has ever stained humanity—the slavery of men of color in the United States of America." He drew a firm line between normative Irish morality and those inhumane "pseudo-Irishmen" who advocate and defend the system of slavery in America. Irish in America were given a clear choice by 'The Liberator'—either join "with your countrymen at home in one cry of horror against the oppressor" or break with them by supporting racialized slavery and becoming the oppressor. While white-Irish people in America generally chose to 'meld' into Anglo-American whiteness through Jackson's Democratic Party, the rupture stands as one of many instances which demonstrate Baldwin's 'becoming white' formulation. A clear schism emerged between Irish people 'at home' who 'would like us to be friends' and Irish-Americans who 'because they are white we are enemies'. This schism posed a clear choice to Irish in America—assert Irish 'national' interests and personhood against Anglo-normative whiteness alongside people of color and take part in an Irish Diasporic national liberation movement aligned with Black liberation 'in one cry of horror against the oppressor', or assimilate the 'racial attitudes' of Anglo-normative American whiteness and strive to be 'fully' included in a universalistic ideal white personhood built on the dehumanization of people of color.

Black people in the U.S. continued to pose this choice to Irish-Americans during Reconstruction and over nearly a century of Jim Crow through symbolic offerings of solidarity and invitations to transversal dialogue, from the Fourth California State Convention of Colored Citizens [1865], to W.E.B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, Claude McKay, Alain Locke, James Weldon Johnson, Anne Spencer, and Paul Robeson (see Dooley, 1998; Lloyd & O'Neill, 2009; Negra, 2006; Rolston, 2003). And while Irish-American communities generally continued to prioritize their interests in 'becoming white' over coalition against racism, the emergence of a Civil Rights Movement-inspired non-violence campaign by Irish-Catholics in the North of Ireland in the late 1960s again forced Irish-Americans to reconsider their choices to be white.

### **Towards Intersectional & Anti-Racist Irish Diasporic Nationalism**

In 1967, some eight months after "Black Power" had disarticulated the 'Beloved Community' Civil Rights Movement, activists in the North of Ireland, genuinely inspired by SCLC, NAACP, SNCC and CORE 'nonviolence' strategies, founded the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association [NICRA] to resist structural oppression against Irish-Catholics. Although there were substantial differences between the two movements and their contexts, there were also many similarities, and it is not at all surprising that Irish-Catholic people in the North of Ireland found inspiration in the U.S. Civil Rights Movement. King's 'nonviolence' strategy was inspired by Gandhi's 'satyagraha', which was in turn partly inspired by O'Connell's 'moral force' and the Land League's 'boycott' through a much more tangled and robust tradition of symbolic solidarity and transversal dialogue between Ireland, South Africa, and India under British empire. The explosion of 'Civil Rights' activity in the North of Ireland during 1968 reminded Irish Diasporans in the U.S. that their post-WWII 'full' whiteness was not shared by Irish-Catholics in the North of Ireland, and encouraged many to become more active in supporting Irish freedom, particularly after October 5th, when images of the Royal Ulster Constabulary [RUC] brutally attacking marchers singing 'We Shall Overcome' were broadcast around the world. But while many Irish Diasporans of the 'New Left' were moved to support NICRA, the organizations which traditionally supported the Irish liberation struggle in the white republic—including "the American Congress for Irish Freedom (ACIF), the Ancient Order of Hibernians

(AOH), and Clann na Gael—opposed the U.S. civil rights movement and supported the war in Vietnam” (Maney, 2000, p. 164). These ‘traditional’ Irish-American nationalist organizations remained committed to achieving ‘full whiteness’ in America and extending this status ‘back’ to Irish-Catholics in the North of Ireland. In a replay of the Irish Repeal Association’s conflict with Irish-America over racialized chattel enslavement of Black people, the anti-Black / pro-war positions of these Irish-American organizations clashed with the pro-Black / anti-war positions of both “the left-wing Republicans and Communists who now controlled NICRA in Belfast” (Ó Dochartaigh, 1995, p. 141) and “the left-wing Republican leadership in Dublin” (Ó Dochartaigh, 1997, p. 191). Instead, NICRA decided to endorse a recently established, untested, grassroots, ‘New Left’-oriented organization called the National Association for Irish Justice [NAIJ] as “their sole official representative and fund-raiser in the United States” (Ó Dochartaigh, 1995, p. 141).

The National Coordinator of NAIJ was Brian Heron [Brian Ó hEachthigheirn], Dublin-born grandson of James Connolly, the martyred Irish Republican Socialist Commandant-General of the 1916 Easter Rising in Dublin. His grandfather’s project was to articulate Irish independence with feminism and world socialism in an intersectional Irish

nationalism...capable of formulating a distinct and definite answer to the problems of the present and a political and economic creed capable of adjustment to the wants of the future.... a rallying point for the disaffected, a haven for the oppressed, a point of departure for the Socialist, enthusiastic in the cause of human freedom (Connolly, 1897, pp. 7-8).

Committed to the position that “he never reaches Heaven who marches thither in the company of the Devil,” Connolly argued that Irish nationalists should not “abate one jot or tittle of the claims of social justice, in order to conciliate the privileged classes,” and that such a principled approach to Irish liberation was not only “honorable” [moral] but also the most “feasible” [practical] (Ibid., p. 8).

Brian Heron’s mother Ina Connolly [Heron] was secretary of the Irish Republican youth organization Na Fianna Éireann’s Betsy Gray Slauch [Troop] in West Belfast, a leading member of Cumann na mBan [the women’s auxiliary to the Irish Volunteers and her father’s Irish Citizen Army], and after his execution in 1916, continued his work for socialism and Irish freedom. Living in California in the 1960s, Brian Heron also continued his family’s traditions of trade unionism as an organizer with the United Farm Workers [UFW], and in 1968, he founded Citizens for Justice in Ireland [CJI] in San Francisco to support NICRA, one of many local groups which sprung up in Irish communities across the U.S. that winter. With the support of Irish folk musicians The Clancy Brothers & Tommy Makem, Heron linked many of these local groups together in the Spring of 1969 as NAIJ, a ‘popular front’ organization (Murray, 1975, p. 3) headquartered in the Manhattan offices of the Peace and Freedom Party (Dooley, 1998, p. 86) and dedicated to supporting NICRA morally, politically and financially.

As the official support group for NICRA in the U.S., NAIJ attempted to work with both anti-Black / pro-war Irish-American groups and pro-Black / anti-war groups, including “the Black Panther Party, Communist Party USA, International Socialist Organization, Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Students for a Democratic Society, and Young Socialists of America” (Maney, 2000, p. 164). The tenuous relationship between NAIJ and anti-Black / pro-war Irish-American groups was severely tested that August, however, when the organization

coordinated the first U.S. tour of Bernadette Devlin [August 22-early September], a young militant working-class Irish-Catholic woman from the North of Ireland, the youngest woman ever elected to the United Kingdom Parliament [April 17], and hero of the recent 'Battle of the Bogside' [August 12-13] (see Devlin, 1969).

In the "Black Power" moment, Devlin represented a renewal of reciprocal symbolic solidarity and transversal dialogue between Irish people in Ireland and Black people in the U.S. which had been offered to Irish people by every generation of Black people in the century since O'Connell, but rarely received positive Irish response. When Devlin arrived in the U.S., "where the inspiration [for the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Movement] had come from" (Devlin McAliskey, 2015, @9:50), her principled "insistence on linking the civil rights struggle in Northern Ireland with that of the U.S." (Dooley, 1998, p. 88) was met with significant controversy and resistance from anti-Black Irish-American organizations and greatly complicated NAIJ's 'popular front' approach. For Devlin, these encounters with anti-Black Irish-America were "the first time that 'white' figured in [her] mind" (Devlin McAliskey, 2015, @10:00). To her surprise, "those who were supposed to be 'my people', the Irish-Americans who knew about English misrule and the Famine and supported the civil rights movement [in Ireland]...looked and sounded to me like Orangemen [Protestant supremacists in Northern Ireland]. They said exactly the same things about blacks that the [British] Loyalists said about us at home" (quoted in Dooley, 1998, p. 87). She was drawn instead toward transversal dialogue with women of color, and her understanding of this contradiction, this 'splitness' of being Irish in the white republic and supporting Black liberation, was significantly advanced by Black feminist intersectional approaches to struggle (see Devlin McAliskey, 2015, @18:47). Irish/Catholic/Nationalist/Republican people in the North of Ireland were structurally subordinated by a British/Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist statelet governed by vestiges of Anglo-Norman-Protestant proto-racism, and Irish-Americans were superordinated above people of color by ideal pan-european american white citizenship and their choices "to be white" (Ibid., @26:57).

But while Devlin spectacularly clashed with white Irish-Americans across the U.S. that August (Dooley, 1998, pp. 83-92; see also O'Brien, 2010, pp. 84-85), and gave NAIJ a reputation for principled linkage between Black and Irish civil rights struggles, the organization doubled down on their Ireland-focused 'popular front' approach at their conference in December by approving a constitution which stated it would "not take specific stands on issues not directly related to the Irish situation" (National Association for Irish Justice, 1969). Instead of open support for Black and Vietnamese liberation struggles, NAIJ members took a very cautious approach which expressed their commitments to people of color liberation movements, anti-imperialism, socialism, and feminism through vague, universalistic, and androcentric language—"equal rights for all people...the right of every man to a standard of living which allows him to live with dignity...the right of every nation to self-determination...opposition to any form of economic, political or military imperialism" (Ibid.), and the right of "local autonomous groups" to take whatever "specific stands" they wished. Despite this cautious approach in Irish-America, however, NAIJ collapsed the following year around violent political splits in the North of Ireland between the 'Provisionals' and 'Officials' who each reorganized their Irish-American support bases along more rigid Ireland-focused party lines into the Irish Northern Aid Committee [NORAI] and the Irish Republican Clubs [IRCs] respectively, and these party-oriented organizations further downplayed any relationships with Black liberation. The socialist IRCs, for example, were instructed that their role was to "strengthen the base in America in support of the



Irish Anti-Imperialist struggle,” and cautioned that “doctrinaire positions” in support of “Vietnam or the Blacks...can weaken your base among the Irish working class in America” (quoted in Hanley & Millar, 2009, p. 216). These instructions were, however, certainly not absolute. An IRC in Boston supported an NAACP pro-bussing rally in 1974 (Ó Dochartaigh, 1995, p. 154), and in San Francisco, the IRC reportedly “strongly supported African American civil rights” (Brundage, 2016, p. 202).

The core of NAIJ was itself “resurrected” as the National Association for Irish Freedom [NAIF] (Murray, 1975, p. 2) and retained their status as the official support group for NICRA in the U.S. With Dick Gregory and Rev. Ralph Abernathy [SCLC] as ‘sponsors’, NAIF continued to be the Irish organization most associated with linking Black and Irish ‘civil rights’ struggles into the mid-seventies, but while many in NICRA and NAIF may have sympathized with Civil Rights and “Black Power” in the U.S., NAIF’s reconstruction as a support group for NICRA continued to limit the development of meaningful relationships between Black and Irish people. The organization of NAIF, the IRCs and NORAID as support groups for particular organizations in Ireland demonstrated that Irish nationalists did not primarily view America as a front in a broader struggle against Anglo hegemony, but as a resource to be exploited for the exclusive benefit of Ireland. This acquisitive relation between Irish nationalists and the ‘white republic’ structurally discouraged open coalition with Black liberation because even symbolic gestures linking Irish liberation to Black liberation could jeopardize the Irish movement’s ability to rely on white Irish-America as a bank account, a refuge, and a political guarantor. As Bob Purdie argues, these Ireland-oriented support organizations were not designed to allow the Irish liberation movement to develop a more nuanced “understanding of the internal logic of the black civil-rights struggle, a grasp of the historical and societal context in which it operated and how its philosophy and methods could be translated into the very different context of Northern Ireland” (Purdie, 1992, p. 8). And when those ‘left’ organizations like NAIF and the IRCs at times expressed explicit support for aspects of Black liberation, these expressions often “[used] African Americans as a way to redefine Irishness,” appropriating language, strategies, tactics, and moral authority from Black people with “little reciprocity” (Onkey, 1999, p. 91).

Bernadette Devlin’s celebrity, however, afforded her unique opportunities to challenge and transcend the timid and acquisitive relationships structured by party-oriented Irish-American support organizations. After her first tour in 1969, Devlin continued to explicitly express support for Black liberation from Ireland, and returned to the U.S. again in 1971 with the purpose of building stronger relationships with Black liberation, particularly Kwame Ture [Stokely Carmichael], Angela Davis, and the Black Panther Party (Dooley, 1998, pp. 91-92). Devlin McAliskey linked Ture’s recently formed All-African People’s Revolutionary Party [A-APRP] with Irish republicans in the North of Ireland in the 1970s, particularly the Irish Republican Socialist Party [IRSP] which formed in 1974 with the support of Devlin McAliskey and Brian Heron’s aunt Nora Connolly. She resigned from the IRSP the following year, but continued to be a central arbiter of Black-Irish relations around the 1981 Irish Republican hunger strikes. On April 29, six days prior to the death of the first hunger striker Bobby Sands, for example, she spoke at a press conference with Dick Gregory in Belfast, and Gregory held a 24-hour fast in support of a ‘humanitarian’ solution (see Bennett Jr., 1981, p. 40). The following year a Black delegation from the U.S.—including Rev. Frederick Douglass Kirkpatrick [Co-Founder of the Deacons for Defense and Justice, Friends of SNCC, and SCLC Houston Project Director], Matt Jones [Director of the SNCC Freedom Singers], Rev. Herbert Daughtry [CORE, Operation Breadbasket, National Black United Front] and the writer Jean Carey Bond—visited the North of

Ireland to engage in transversal dialogue with a variety of groups, as documented in the film The Black and the Green [St. Clair Bourne, 1983] (see Dooley, 1998, p. 121).

Like O'Connell before her, Devlin McAliskey has consistently confronted white Irish-Americans with the same explicit choice between 'being white' and forming coalitions between the Irish liberation struggle in the North of Ireland, Irish Diasporans, and Black liberation in the U.S. based on shared interests against Anglo-conformity. And like Baldwin, she has born 'terrifying witness' to the 'price' Irish-Americans 'paid' to 'be white', provides a concrete example of how a race-centered Irish lens can powerfully elucidate the central position of Irish-Americans in making and keeping Irish white, and models an alternative, explicitly anti-white and intersectional, Irish Diasporic nationalism. Against the Irish-American strategy of securing 'full whiteness' in america and extending that 'full whiteness' to Irish people in Ireland 'where they are not fully white', Devlin McAliskey works to extend the Irishness of Ireland ['where they would like us to be friends'] to Irish in america ['where because they are white we are enemies'].

While the vast majority of Irish people in america continue to choose whiteness, and Devlin McAliskey is now banned from the U.S., she and others on the Irish left continue to pose this choice to Irish people in the U.S. and imagine the possibilities of a day when Irish-Americans will choose against whiteness. She laments, for example, "a moment of possible opportunity" (Devlin McAliskey, 2015, @28:04) during the Jesse Jackson for President Campaign, when "at the last minute the Irish in the Rainbow Coalition decided to pick the color of their skin, and in the Democratic [National] Convention they picked the last white man standing" (Ibid., @27:48). While she recognizes that Jackson's Rainbow Coalition was hardly "the seat of revolution" (Ibid., @27:22), she believes that if Irish-American Democrats had chosen to back his nomination, "the movement forward for America, for Black people in America, for civil rights in America, for social justice—the historic movement forward for the whole world would have been immeasurably different" (Ibid., @28:27).

Perhaps the most enduring organizational relationship between Black and Irish people in the U.S. has been between the All-African Peoples Revolutionary Party [A-APRP] and the Irish Republican Committees of North America [IRSCNA], which emerged as a support group for the IRSP in 1984. Various iterations of these two historical organizations have regularly exchanged messages and shared platforms since (see Dooley, 1998, p. 122), but like Devlin McAliskey, NAIJ/NAIF, and the IRCs who formed relationships with Black people across the major 'Beloved Community'-'Black Power' divide and factions within each tendency, the small number of Black and Irish people maintaining and building these relationships have not confined themselves to any one organizational or individual relationship. After Kwame Ture's death in 1999, for example, his mother Mrs. Mabel 'May Charles' Carmichael travelled to Dublin with Rosie Douglas [Dominican Labor Party, Prime Minister of the Dominican Republic] and was quietly honored by Sinn Féin ['Provisionals'] (see B. Brown, 2000; Teelucksingh, 2016, p. 199). And at the same time that they were building relationships with the A-APRP, the IRSP also worked with the African People's Socialist Party [APSP], and the two organizations recently renewed their 1982 "joint appeal...to Irish America...for unqualified support for Black Liberation" (African People's Socialist Party, 2015). The ways in which Black and Irish people have built relationships across major ideological divides and factions in their respective international relations might indicate a workable contingent approach to the problems of trans-Atlantic choice and interpretation, but they also seem to equally indicate dissatisfaction with any one relationship and the symbolic and superficial character of many well-intentioned Black-Irish encounters.

While this section has attempted to provide a brief overview of Black-Irish symbolic solidarity and transversal dialogue post-”Black Power”, the histories of these interactions and relations remain to be written, and a full and fair assessment of their successes and failures is beyond the scope of this chapter. The very fact that these histories are not widely known and discussed, even among Irish Diasporans, seems to indicate that these projects have, as Purdie argues, “[failed] to develop a practical internationalism” (Purdie, 1992, p. 8). In explicitly linking Irish liberation with Black liberation, expressing symbolic solidarity, and actively engaging in genuine transversal dialogue, these Irish people have maintained and developed an alternative way of being Irish, however marginal, to hegemonic liberal color-blind ‘white ethnic revival’ ways of being Irish. However, entanglements in the historically acquisitive relationship between Irish nationalists and the ‘white republic’ have frustrated the development of explicitly anti-racist and intersectional Irish Diasporic nationalist organizations in the U.S. which might view America as central front in the global struggle against racism, and move beyond occasional symbolic gestures to focused, meaningful, organized, reciprocal, and effective action with people of color in the U.S. based on shared interests against Anglo-conformity and settler-colonialism.

### **Tom Hayden, Irish-Americans & the Choice of Whiteness**

This section provides some context for Tom Hayden’s proposal of intersectional Irish Diasporic nationalism as an alternative anti-white approach to New Abolitionist formulations in Irish on the Inside (2001). The mere mention of Hayden’s name often elicits strong and diverse reactions across the political spectrum concerning his political trajectory from protesting the Democratic National Convention to joining it, his celebrity, his personality, or any of a number of contentious exchanges he had over a lifetime of nearly constant political involvement. For many people Hayden epitomizes the spectacular failures of the ‘Sixties white left’, and this text has no interest in defending him, much less valorizing him. Instead, I try to provide enough basic context for understanding the broader Irish political forces which informed Hayden’s proposal, and describe how his Irish ‘accented’ ‘New Left’ journey allowed him to effectively bring existent traditions of intersectional Irish Diasporic nationalism into conversation with the basic principles of New Abolitionism at the end of the twentieth century.

Hayden was an early member of SDS, a freedom rider, was briefly married to the longest serving white SNCC staff member Casey Hayden [née Cason], a high-profile anti-Vietnam war activist, and was coming down off his role in the 1968 Democratic National Convention protests when, like many other ‘white left’ Irish-Americans that October, he was “transfixed” by images of Civil Rights protesters being attacked by police in the North of Ireland (p. 101). But while he was certainly influenced by Bernadette Devlin’s explicit and spectacular approach to confronting white Irish-Americans the following year (p. 105), he does not seem to have had any contact with Brian Heron, CJI, or NAIJ. Hayden moved to Berkeley in 1970, joined a commune called The Red Family, and became a major ‘white ally’ to the Free Huey Campaign. He attempted to visit Ireland for the first time in 1971 through the Kennedy wing of the Democratic Party but was denied entry (p. 105-106).

After the ‘Chicago Seven / Eight’ trial was dismissed in 1972, Hayden married Academy Award winning actress Jane Fonda in 1973, the war in Việt Nam ended in 1975, and having narrowly failed in his bid to win a Democratic Party nomination for U.S. Senate in 1976, Hayden was, by his own estimation, finally “respectable enough” (p. 122) to visit Ireland. But instead of building relationships with remnants of the ‘Officials’, the IRSP, or Bernadette Devlin McAliskey, who had much stronger links to the Black liberation movement in the U.S., Hayden

sought out the ‘Provisionals’ [Sinn Féin]. His celebrity allowed him to circumvent NORAI, the Irish-American support network for Provisional Sinn Féin which had long been “captured” by “American right-wing politics” (p. 111), and build direct relationships with their young, broadly socialist and anti-imperialist, leadership in the North of Ireland who were emerging from their experiences in Long Kesh Internment Camp. Hayden was politically comfortable in his meetings with Danny Morrison<sup>49</sup> and Martin McGuinness<sup>50</sup>, and Sinn Féin’s offices in Belfast “reminded me of an SDS office in the sixties” (p. 128).

Hayden continued to support and correspond with Provisional Sinn Féin in the North of Ireland through the 1981 hungerstrikes, but he remained marginal to NORAI. His new career as an elected representative to the California Legislature [Democrat, Westside Los Angeles, 1982-2000] mirrored Sinn Féin’s move toward electoral politics after its prisoners Bobby Sands [MP] and Kieran Doherty [TD] won electoral victories in the North and South of Ireland while on hunger strike, and Hayden found a way to express his support for civil rights in the North of Ireland through the MacBride Principles campaign coordinated by the Irish National Caucus [INC]. In contrast to NORAI, the INC was a more ‘respectable’ lobbying-oriented Sinn Féin support group in the U.S. founded in 1974. Like the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Movement, had ‘adopted the fighting style of Black liberation’, the MacBride Principles campaign adapted the conservative ‘Sullivan Principles’ for corporate conduct in Apartheid South Africa,<sup>51</sup> to convince U.S. businesses, investors, local, state, and federal government entities to pressure desegregate places of employment in Northern Ireland and implement ‘affirmative action’ for Irish-Catholics. And like NAIJ/NAIF, the MacBride Principles was a broad Ireland-focused campaign. The INC’s leader Fr. Sean McManus similarly “drew connections between the two movements,” and put his words into action when he “was arrested outside the South African embassy in Washington” (Ibid., p. 210).

While Sinn Féin-NORAI chose not to pursue relationships with Black liberation in the U.S. during the 1970s, the leadership in Ireland had developed strong relationships with the African National Congress in Azania / South Africa on the basis of broadly socialistic anti-colonialism. By linking the support bases of the two movements in the U.S. through an Ireland-focused lobby, the MacBride Principles campaign functioned as a proxy structure in the U.S. which provided mediated interactions between Irish-Americans and ‘respectable’ Black people in the U.S. Signaling a continued interest in building alliances with Irish-Americans against Anglo-conformity, the INC’s MacBride Principles were endorsed by Randall Robinson, founder of TransAfrica, Democratic Party candidate for President Jesse Jackson, Mayor David Dinkins of New York, Mayor Willie Brown of San Francisco (Brundage, 2016, p. 210), and a sizeable share of the Congressional Black Caucus<sup>52</sup>. While Hayden was an active proponent of the McBride principles (T. Hayden, 2001, pp. 150-158), viewing them as an “effective legislative approach to

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<sup>49</sup> Editor of The Republican News.

<sup>50</sup> A commander in the [Provisional] Irish Republican Army / Óglaigh na hÉireann, later Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland [2007-2017].

<sup>51</sup> as advanced by Leon Sullivan, a Baptist preacher and General Motors board member (Brundage, 2016, p. 209).

<sup>52</sup> Major Owens [D-NY], Walter Fauntroy [D-DC], Edolphus Towns [D-NY], Ron Dellums [D-CA], Cardiss Collins [D-IL], Floyd Flake [D-NY], John Conyers [D-MI], Charles Hayes [D-IL], Kweisi Mfume [D-MD], Charles Rangel [D-NY], Julian Dixon [D-CA], Louis Stokes [D-OH], Carrie Meek [D-FL], Bennie Thompson [D-MS], Bill Clay [D-MO], Donald Payne [D-NJ], and Bobby Rush [D-IL]

addressing the root causes of the Northern conflict consistent with progressive politics in the States” (p. 150) and celebrating their linkage to the anti-Apartheid movement, he did little to build any grassroots Irish support for the linkage or deepen Irish coalitions with Black people in the U.S.

At the 1984 Democratic National Convention in San Francisco, he was a high-profile delegate for Gary Hart, undoubtedly one of those Irish-Americans in the Democratic Party who Devlin McAliskey criticized for not supporting Jesse Jackson’s nomination. And as a legislator focused on supporting Sinn Féin in a lobbying effort “across partisan and ideological lines,” he invested instead in a strategy to “reclaim the [Irish] nationalist position from the [Irish-American] right” (p. 150) by attempting to personally interpellate ‘right-wing’ Irish-Americans in the INC/NORAIID networks to more ‘progressive’ ways of ‘being Irish’. Hayden’s efforts to encourage the California State Legislature, Congress, and the Clinton Whitehouse to intervene in Northern Ireland were by some measure successful—including the approval of a visa for Sinn Féin president Gerry Adams to visit the U.S. in 1994, and the central role of the U.S. state in negotiating the 1998 Good Friday Agreement—but his attempts to move INC/NORAIID networks toward the ‘left’ were not. Like Devlin McAliskey, he continued to imagine a day when white-Irish people in the U.S. would work to build coalitions with people of color, and like Baldwin, the political contrast between ‘right-wing’ Irish-Americans and the broadly socialist and anti-colonial Sinn Féin leadership in Ireland gave some substantive hope to his imagination.

For all his political centrism and ‘respectability’, Hayden was still considered by NORAIID in San Francisco as “too radical and therefore ineffective” (p. 156), but he had a personal relationship with Adams, coordinated parts of the Sinn Féin President’s subsequent tours of America, and particularly worked to link him with people of color. The outpourings of support for Adams from Xicanx, American Indian, and Black people during these tours in the 1990s illustrated to Hayden that the choice of whiteness for Irish people in America posed by Douglass, O’Connell, Carmichael & Hamilton, Devlin McAliskey, Baldwin, the IRSP, A-APRP and the APSP to was still very real and available, that “it is not too late for...Irish Americans today to assimilate culturally and politically with the anti-colonial [indigenous, non-white] world, or [at least] the ranks of racial minorities and immigrants in America, instead of assimilating into the WASP establishment” (T. Hayden, 2001, p. 83; see also p. 177). Despite four centuries of Irish people ‘becoming white’ in America, people of color continued to support the Irish anti-colonial struggle and extend invitations to build relationships on the basis of shared interests against settler-colonialism and Anglo-conformity. In 2015 Black Lives Matter movement co-founder Patrisse Cullors stood with veterans of the Irish Civil Rights movement, including Devlin McAliskey, as part of the 43<sup>rd</sup> Bloody Sunday March for Justice in Derry. The primary question she discussed with her hosts—“which side of history are Irish people going to be on?” (Bailey, 2015)—further indicates that this choice is available to Irish Diasporans in America, but also that it will require explicit organized efforts by Irish people to ‘reclaim the Irish nationalist position from the Irish-American right’ and rearticulate “Irish” to anti-whiteness.

To my knowledge, Provisional Sinn Féin has never publicly and explicitly expressed support for any manifestation of Black liberation in the U.S. beyond praising universally venerated Civil Rights figures like Rosa Parks, and Hayden did little to meaningfully support Black liberation in the U.S. after the Sixties. Hayden’s mix of ‘personal reflections’, earnest historical research, and engagement with New Abolitionist ideas in Irish on the Inside highlights, intentionally and unintentionally, a broad range of contradictions, antagonisms, omissions, and possibilities of an Irish Diasporic anti-white project, and in my estimation, is generally effective

in articulating basic formulations for an explicitly Irish approach to anti-whiteness. While there is a great deal more to be said about such a project, the remaining four sections of this chapter will critically expand on key elements of Hayden's formulation and these broader traditions of intersectional Irish Diasporic nationalism to consider how an intersectional, anti-white, Irish Diasporic nationalist project might better contend with key 'dilemmas' of resisting racism from white subject positions under liberal color-blindness. First, I will introduce Hayden's basic proposal for Irish whiteness. Second, I will address questions of standpoint, development of 'positional consciousness', interests, morality, and 'transectional empathy' in a section organized around the particular 'Irish' task of contending with 'white ethnic revival' frames of liberal color-blindness like the 'Irish Slaves' myth. Third, I consider 'dilemmas' of 'collaboration', 'autonomy' and 'martyrdom' in a section organized around the 'tendential force' of "Irish" and the theoretical 'feasibility' of Irish anti-whiteness. Finally, I consider the particularly 'nationalist' form of intersectional, anti-white, Irish Diasporic nationalism in a final section addressing the broader conversance of such an approach with global decolonization movements beyond the 'Black-white' binary.

### **Hayden's Proposal for Irish Whiteness: Confession, Conversion & Dissimilation**

Hayden's proposal for an intersectional Irish Diasporic nationalism was loosely built on New Abolitionist epistemology<sup>53</sup>, but distinguished from it: "While some historians were writing about 'How the Irish became white,' I wanted more white people to become Irish" (p. 3). Whereas New Abolitionists seek to radicalize the supposed desires of individual white people to be 'human' under liberal color-blind white hegemony toward militant nonconformity and class-centered 'models of amalgamation' with Black people, Hayden takes the Baldwin-New Abolitionist 'becoming white' thesis and Ignatiev & Garvey's (1994b) argument "that what was historically constructed can be undone" quite literally, seeking instead to radicalize the supposed desires of white Irish people to disassociate from whiteness through post-Civil Rights 'white ethnic revival' Irish identities toward a serious project of Irish dissimilation from American whiteness. And whereas New Abolitionists believed that militant nonconformist action by a 'minority' of 'committed' whites had the potential to collapse whiteness, Hayden proposed that rearticulating "Irish" to "anti-whiteness" and forming explicitly "Irish" relationships with people of color on the basis of shared 'national interests' against settler-colonialism and Anglo-conformity could 'break' whiteness 'apart' along its internal 'Irish' seam: "if Irish America goes green, there goes white America" (p. 285); "When the Irish leave whiteness, there goes the neighborhood. America will become a community of ethnicities, no longer a white society with minorities" (p. 6). If whiteness is ultimately a 'deal' between 'Europeans', an intersectional Irish Diasporic national approach might serve to 'break' it up by committing 'treason' to this pan-European coalition through 'loyalty' to anti-white 'Irishness', and by extension 'humanity'.

Hayden's basic white Irish program might be distinguished from white anti-racism's program of 'confession, conversion, and collaboration' and New Abolitionism's program of

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<sup>53</sup> Perhaps because Hayden was fairly marginal to SDS during its final years when Ignatin & Allen's formulation so deeply influenced the organization's understanding of its relation to "Black Power", like many others, Hayden doesn't seem to fully understand the New Abolitionist project, nor the tensions between Ignatiev, Roediger and Allen, and rejects what he considers its 'moral' and 'economic' explanations for how the Irish became white in favor of a poorly developed psychologistic explanation of internalized anti-Irish racism projected onto Black people (see pp. 34-35).

‘confession, conversion, and race treason’, as a program of ‘confession, conversion, and dissimulation’. Like white anti-racism and New Abolitionism, Hayden’s proposal demonstrates ‘cognizance’ of ‘white privilege’ by recognizing the ‘fact’ of Irish-whiteness, and his ‘personal reflections’ in *Irish on the Inside* are written in a confessional style typical to both white anti-racism and New Abolitionism. Such ‘confession’ calls on Irish people categorized as white to ‘own’ the history of ‘becoming white’ and fixes us with an uncomfortable association with normative whiteness which ideally leads to taking responsibility for our Irish actions in ‘becoming white’. Hayden’s white Irish Diaspora formulation similarly imagines and constructs a counter-public of people categorized as white, but his counter-public is further limited to Irish people categorized as white who are [t]asked to ‘become Irish’ rather than ‘anti-racist white’, the more nebulously defined ‘race traitor’, or ‘politically Black’. White anti-racist and New Abolitionist tasks of ‘developing the daily consciousness’ of people categorized as white about ‘institutional racism’, the ways in which their superordinate position as white severely limits their ability to ‘see’ and ‘feel’ with people of color, and traditions of white ‘ancestors’ who fought against racism, are also further limited by Hayden’s formulation to ‘raising the daily consciousness’ of white Irish people about processes of ‘becoming white’, the ways in which the ‘fact’ of Irish-whiteness severely limits their ability to form coalitions with people of color, and particularly Irish Diasporic traditions which resisted racism. Such white-Irish positional consciousness is necessary to contest hegemonic deployments of Irishness in the service of the ‘white ethnic revival’ and advance alternative ‘non-racist’ or ‘anti-racist’ ways of ‘being Irish’, and it is here in its particular obligations to understanding both the sociohistorical processes of ‘becoming white’ and ‘being Irish’ where Hayden’s Irish white formulation meets a critical ‘dilemma’ in contending with the ‘white ethnic revival’ as a key ‘frame’ of liberal color-blind white hegemony.

### **Irish History: ‘White Interests’ vs. ‘Irish Interests’**

Like Ignatin & Allen’s formulation is contingent on its argument that ‘repudiating whiteness’ is in the ‘day-to-day real’ interests of white workers who are ‘able’ as ‘workers’ to develop ‘critical consciousness’ of capitalism and racism, Hayden is also quite invested in demonstrating that resisting Anglo-normative American whiteness is in the interests of white Irish-Americans. And like Allen’s exaggerated assessments of the ‘revolutionary potential’ of ‘European bond laborers’ in colonial Virginia based on downplaying very real differences in status between ‘indentured servitude’ and racialized hereditary chattel slavery, these similar investments in the question of ‘interests’ intersect in Hayden’s endorsement of ‘Irish slaves myth’ (see p. 10).

In justifying transversal dialogue between Irish and Black liberation by ‘shared interests against Anglo-conformity’, existent anti-racist Irish Diasporic projects often rely on many of the same historically inaccurate trans-Atlantic narratives used by the ‘white ethnic revival’ to establish false equivalence between Black and Irish historical experiences at the expense of addressing deep historical and current antagonisms which result from Irish-whiteness. For example, the 2015 IRSP-APSP statement which renewed their ‘joint appeal to Irish-America’ explicitly demands ‘unqualified support for Black liberation’ from Irish people in the U.S., but it does not explicitly address the whiteness of Irish-America as a monumental impediment to developing such ‘unqualified support’. Rather it seems to theorize that such ‘unqualified support’ should emerge organically because

Irish and Africans are united in our shared experience of oppression by white power. Both our peoples have been traded by the capitalist establishment as commodities, not like contemporary wage slaves, or debt slaves, but an entirely different type of slavery. Our shared experiences with oppression have led to physical, cultural and economic slavery...Historically, our men women and children were physically chained and sold for profit.

While, as Bernadette Devlin McAliskey more accurately argues that her experience as a working-class Irish-Catholic woman in a Northern Ireland statelet governed by Anglo-Norman-Protestant protoracism allowed meaningful transversal dialogue with working-class Black women in the U.S. because they were “in the same comparative position in many ways” (@12:40), the IRSP-APSP ‘appeal to Irish America’ chooses to “[equate] white indentured servitude with black chattel slavery [in the Anglo-american colonies] for political ends” (Hogan, 2016d).

Irish Historian Liam Hogan has tracked, exposed, explained, and debunked the explosion of this ‘Irish Slaves’ myth in popular discourse as fueled in recent years by the publication of Walsh & Jordan's White Cargo (2007) by way of texts like Allen's The Invention of the White Race (1994, 1997) and O'Callaghan's To Hell or Barbados (2000) see (Hogan, 2017b). Reaching a pitch in response to the Black Lives Matter movement, the ‘Irish Slaves’ myth is perhaps the best recent illustration of how the ‘white ethnic revival’ continues to function as a major frame of liberal color-blind white hegemony, how "Irish" has been hegemonically transformed into a key white institution, and Jacobson's argument that ‘the white ethnic revival was inadvertently a creation of the left no less than of the right’. In addition to general deployments of "Irish" by everyday white Irish people under liberal color-blindness as part of the broader ‘white ethnic revival’ project of disassociating from whiteness while celebrating it in the coded terms of a given ‘borderline ethnicity’ (Hogan, 2016a), Hogan's work traces three major forces who have circulated this myth for divergent purposes:

- [1] Ignatiev, Allen, and others on the ‘white left’ to justify the ‘revolutionary potential’ of poor and working-class white people, drawing significantly from Marx's descriptions of proletarian working conditions in Europe as a form of ‘slavery’,
- [2] white nationalists as part of a neo-‘white slavery’ strategy to counter the Black Lives Matter movement. Like Democratic Party forces deployed ‘white slavery’ in the mid-nineteenth century to counter the [old] Abolitionist movement by drawing false equivalencies between white workers in the North and enslaved Black people in the South, white nationalists today worked to disseminate the ‘Irish slaves’ myth to blame systematic anti-Blackness on Black people and interpellate ‘hard working’ Europeans to more explicit forms of white nationalism (Hogan, 2015a; 2016c, see also discussion of "white slavery" in Chapter 3, pp. 28-29).
- [3] Irish nationalists as a continuation of their own eighteenth and nineteenth century ‘Irish slavery’ discourses which overlap with both nineteenth century Marxism and ‘white slavery’ discourses in the U.S. (Hogan, 2015c, 2016b, 2017a). On the one hand, those projects which have sought to extend Irish-American whiteness to Irish people in Ireland have used “enslaved Africans as props to highlight British hypocrisy or to embellish [the



Irish] situation” (Hogan, 2017c), and on the other, those projects who are genuinely working to build solidarity with African Diasporans have worked to justify such ‘solidarity’ on the basis of ‘common’ experiences of ‘slavery’ [like the APSP-IRSP and Hayden<sup>54</sup>],

By rooting their ‘appeal to Irish America’ in a supposed shared history of ‘having been traded by the capitalist establishment as commodities’, those Irish nationalists who deploy the ‘Irish Slaves’ myth like the IRSP find themselves in the same trench as the ‘white ethnic revival’ and is emblematic of Jacobson’s argument that the ‘white ethnic revival was inadvertently a creation of the left no less than of the right’. But whereas more normative ‘white ethnic revival’ deployments cast “Irish” as “the ideal guilt-free white ethnicity of choice” (Negra, 2006, p. 11) and is so effective in disassociating white Irish subjects from whiteness and facilitating coded ways of celebrating white citizenship in the U.S. that “when Americans are asked to report their ethnic backgrounds, Irishness (once a socially stigmatized ethnic category) is now overreported” (Negra, 2006, p. 11), the ‘left’ white ethnic revival deployments, like the IRSP-APSP and Hayden’s, exaggerate equivalency of ‘historical experience’ to exaggerate the ‘revolutionary potential’ of Irish-America.

Perpetuation of ‘Irish Slaves’ mythology is ultimately detrimental to any project genuine about developing consciousness of ‘how the Irish became white’ because it demonstrates severely and dangerously ‘incomplete’ consciousness of an Irish history which contains plenty of other ‘common historical experiences’ of dehumanization, dispossession, and exploitation by Anglo-normative regimes:

This distortion of Irish history damages our actual history of oppression. There is no need to exaggerate what our ancestors endured. As Henry Parnell put it, 'you may trace Ireland through the statute-book of England, as a wounded man in a crowd is tracked by his blood.' This refusal to differentiate between indentured servitude and racialised perpetual hereditary chattel slavery via the transatlantic slave trade, only feeds white supremacist myths (Hogan, 2015b).

Hogan’s almost single-handed role in debunking the ‘Irish Slaves’ myth on social media is conversely emblematic of how a race-focused Irish lens can effectively expose and neutralize such embellished and inaccurate ‘accents’ of ‘white ethnic revival, both left and right’. His principled ‘commitment’ to understanding and acknowledging the material and discursive antagonisms between Irish and African Diasporic people as a necessary precondition for any coalition between us stands in stark contrast to crude comparative frameworks for building solidarity which ‘lead away’ from the central task of understanding how Irish people ‘became’, and significantly benefitted from ‘becoming’, white.<sup>55</sup> Finally, Hogan’s work exemplifies the

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<sup>54</sup> His ‘evidence’ for this myth is the work of Lerone Bennett Jr., a favorite source of both Allen (see Allen, 1976; 1994, p. 21) and Jordan & Walsh’s *White Cargo* (see Hogan, 2017b), as well as O’Callaghan’s *To Hell or Barbados* which Hogan identifies as a popular source for claims of ‘Irish Slavery’ among Irish nationalists.

<sup>55</sup> In his *Letter from a Region in My Mind* (1962), for example, Baldwin underscores this precondition in reflecting on a moment where Black-Irish ‘transversal dialogue’ may have been possible but ultimately functioned as disingenuous and disruptive ‘consolation’: “I didn't hear Malcolm's reply, because I was trying to explain to someone else that the situation of the Irish a

continuing productive intersections between Black liberation and Irish liberation, the ways in which Critical Race Theory and Critical Whiteness Studies have influenced particularly Irish inquiry into process of ‘becoming white’ in recent decades, and how such focused inquiry can provide resources to effectively resist both ‘white ethnic revival’ forms of Irishness and the appropriation of Irish history by more explicit white nationalists.

‘Irish Slaves’ mythology and other dangerous exaggerations aside, Hogan’s exemplary practice of explicating complex socio-historical processes of ‘becoming white’ through a race-centered Irish historical lens strengthens, and is ultimately in accord with, Hayden’s broader ‘confession, conversion, and dissimulation’ program because it effectively links the development of ‘positional consciousness’ among white Irish people, and resistance to ‘white ethnic revival’ deployments of Irishness, with particular ‘Irish interests’ in ‘preserving’ and understanding our histories as a colonized people.

If Irish Americans identify with the 10 percent of the world which is white, Anglo-American and consumes half the global resources, we have chosen the wrong side of history and justice. We will become the inhabitants of the Big House ourselves, looking down on the natives we used to be. We will become our nightmare without a chance of awakening from its grip (T. Hayden, 2001, p. 285).

Hayden’s formulation of “Irish” as a potential alternative identity to “white”, and his conceptualization of ‘Irish interests’ against Anglo-conformity and settler-colonialism which might structure coalition with people of color are ultimately—like Douglass, O’Connell, Carmichael & Hamilton, Devlin McAliskey, Baldwin, Cullors, and Hogan’s formulations—rooted in particular ‘appeals’ to ‘Irish’ morality, and ‘pride’, and potential ability to better understand anti-Blackness due to ‘common historical experiences’ rather than dependent on the need for those experiences to be ‘equivalent’.

As ‘moral appeals’, these Irish ~~white~~ formulations are quite similar to Ignatiev’s ‘working-class morality’, but constructed along the axis of race rather than along the transectional axis of class, they alternatively suggest that historical [and ongoing] Irish experiences of being dehumanized, dispossessed, and exploited on the basis of ‘being Irish’, that the ‘splitness’ of Irish people between ‘historic experiences’ of colonial and proto-racial subordination and present pan-european superordination, provides Irish people at-large with an additional resource for developing ‘critical consciousness’ and ‘empathy’ with people of color around racism. As an historical archives and repertoires for demythologizing and resisting particularly anti-Irish racism, this ‘Irish resource’ is akin to the standpoints of people of color, but not equivalent because most ‘Irish’ people have been superordinated to ‘full whiteness’. This history of superordination, however, is also a resource for understanding particular sociohistorical process internal to the social construction of whiteness.

Hayden’s suggestion that white Irish people “can learn from our origins to identify with the landless, the hungry, the poor, and the immigrants in our own country and abroad” (p. 269), intriguingly suggests what might be called ‘Irish standpoint resources’. The ability to imagine

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hundred years ago and the situation of the Negro today cannot very usefully be compared. Negroes were brought here in chains long before the Irish ever thought of leaving Ireland; what manner of consolation is it to be told that immigrants arriving here—voluntarily—long after you did have risen far above you?”

our present ‘white’ selves in those past / ‘at home’ / colonized ‘Irish’ selves might help white Irish people to ‘empathize’, to ‘see’ and ‘feel’ with people of color more ‘autonomously’, to ‘participate on an emotional level’, because the very forces ‘which created us in fact’ might better ‘equip [us] to understand the complex feeling of racial oppression in a human sense’. An anti-white intersectional Irish Diasporic nationalism might, therefore, link projects of developing positional white consciousness under liberal color-blind white hegemony with ‘our own Irish interests’ by further supplementing ‘starting from’ the standpoints of people of color with ‘starting from our own’ particular Irish positionality. Other scholars working along ‘ethnic fissures’ of whiteness, like Brodtkin in How Jews Became White Folks (1998) who similarly suggests that “a kind of double vision...comes from racial middleliness: of an experience of marginality vis-a-vis whiteness, and an experience of whiteness and belonging vis-a-vis blackness” (p. 2).

Claims about any potential relationship between ‘having been colonized and racialized’ and developing critical consciousness—like Winant’s claims that the post-Civil Rights fracturing of whiteness allows ‘an extension to whites’ of Du Bois’ ‘double-consciousness’, or New Abolitionist claims that white workers develop the necessary standpoint to ‘see’ through racism based on ‘class interest’—should be treated with suspicion and evaluated on what they produce. But if notions of ‘transectional empathy’ advanced by Marxists like Ignatiev and lesbian feminists like Anzaldúa and Frye, have any value in developing ‘critical consciousness’ about racism or ‘interests’ in understanding / mitigating / abolishing whiteness as a block to socialism, women’s and queer liberation, a particular Irish lens along the axis of race within a broadly socialist and feminist Irish Diasporic nationalist framework might provide a further, and perhaps even more relevant, resource for working-class / queer / disabled / young and old / Irish women who are categorized as white. Such questions seem to be a promising and necessary area for further research.

But even if ‘common historic experiences’ might constitute an additional resource for ‘rooting transversal dialogue’ with people of color, our Irish ancestors who ‘became white’ were objectively more landless, hungry, poor, immigrant, racialized, etc. It is unlikely that such ‘historical experiences’ can significantly offset our ‘racial interests’ as white or easily resolve primary ‘dilemmas’ of working against racism from a white subject positions which emanate from our white positionality any more than white anti-racist or New Abolitionist frameworks. Because most Irish Diasporans were ‘eligible’ for ideal pan-european whiteness in america, because most took advantage of this ‘eligibility’ to advance their own situations at the expense of ‘other racialized and colonized peoples’, and because Irish-whiteness, and Irish-Americanism in particular, has functioned as a ‘cushion against the most severe shocks’ of British colonialism over the twentieth century, we should not have any illusions that it is in the ‘day-to-day real’ interests of Irish people categorized as white, ‘at home’ or abroad, to commit ‘treason to whiteness’ nor build meaningful relationships of ‘solidarity’ with people of color liberation movements around these ‘Irish interests’. Like white anti-racist and New Abolitionist formulations, there is nothing ‘inevitable’ about rearticulating "Irish" to "anti-racism" or "anti-whiteness". That being said, the possibilities of ‘Irish interests’ and ‘Irish standpoint resources’, however minimal, seem to hold significant advantages when combined with the ‘tendential force’ of "Irish" as alternative sign, its potential to facilitate both collaboration and autonomy, and its Diasporic orientation beyond americentrism and the Black-white binary toward global decolonization.

### The 'Tendential Force' of "Irish", Collaboration, 'Autonomy' & 'Feasibility'

Like the Irish feminist socialist James Connolly (1897) argued for Irish anti-colonial nationalism as an 'honorable' way to advance socialism and feminism as well as 'the most feasible' for Irish people, Hayden's formulation similarly proposes 'becoming Irish' as a strategy that is both 'honorable' [moral] and 'feasible' [practical]. Historic 'moral appeals' to Irish-Americans based on 'common historical experiences' seem contain both the possibility of better 'seeing' and 'feeling' with people of color, and the conceptualization of "Irish" as a particularly weak link in Anglo-normative American 'white racial solidarity' because "Irish" is an historically powerful sign of resistance to Anglo-conformity and settler-colonialism. In this sense, an intersectional, anti-white, Irish Diasporic nationalist approach which seeks to rearticulate "Irish" with "anti-whiteness" has the additional resource of all its attendant history of resisting 'English' colonialism and anti-Irish racism, and this 'tendential force' of Irishness might also facilitate both collaborative and 'autonomous' modes of organization.

While the significant participation of "Irish" people in realizing ideal pan-European whiteness in America has hegemonically defined "Irish" as white 'in fact', it is not a sign developed for the particular ideological function of dispossessing and exploiting people of color, and therefore seems to hold greater possibilities for rearticulation than "white" itself, the more nebulous 'race traitor', or 'political Blackness'. In Anglophone discourse, "Irish" has historically signified resistance to dehumanization, settler-colonialism and Anglo-conformity providing exponentially greater opportunities for identifying forms of 'being Irish' which are 'non-racist', anti-racist, ~~white~~, or even anti-white. This 'tendential force' of Irish seems to make a project of rearticulating "Irish" to "anti-whiteness", "decolonization" and "anti-imperialism" much more plausible. Irishness as alternative identity might, therefore, greatly resolve a key 'dilemma' of the white anti-racist project in attempting to hegemonically rearticulate a sign which is '*nothing but* false and oppressive', and a key 'dilemma' of New Abolitionism by proposing a substantive alternative identity which is neither 'totally false', nebulously contested like 'race traitor', universalistic like 'human', 'transsectional' like 'working-class', nor appropriative like 'political Blackness'.

If whiteness must primarily be defined as a 'deal' between previously antagonistic European peoples for the purposes of dispossessing, exploiting, and killing people of color, then Hayden's explicit project of Irish dissimulation holds undeniable potential for 'breaking up' that white coalition. What would it mean for ~~white~~ Irish people to participate in, and build, an anti-white, inter/nationalist, and intersectional Irishness, one which can function collaboratively with, or 'autonomously' alongside, the liberation movements of people of color as part of local and global projects to realize a genuine ~~humanity~~? Unlike New Abolitionism's embrace of 'political Blackness' as an alternative to "white" which is ultimately in greater agreement with Gregory's and Doležal's interpretations, Hayden's project of rearticulating "Irish" to "anti-whiteness" seems to be in better agreement with Baldwin and Du Bois' formulations as a strategy of 'unbecoming white' which seeks to 'carry and send the news' of Irish in Ireland 'who would like us to be friends' to the masses of Irish Diasporans in America.

"Irish" is ultimately an expansive cultural and political identity forged in resistance to British domination rather than a racial category. In spite of mass efforts by 'Irish' people 'at home and abroad' to 'become white', there are also tens of thousands of Irish people of color in Ireland and throughout the Diaspora with equal claims to Irishness in terms of history, genealogy, birth, citizenship, residence, political and cultural affinities. Hayden's proposal for Irish ~~whiteness~~ was also imagined as an 'integration of the Irish community': "I wanted more

white people to become Irish, and non-white people were welcome to Irishness” (p. 3?). This ‘welcome’ is, however, much too paternalistic and constructs normative Irishness as ‘presumably categorized as white’. Intersectional Irish Diasporic nationalism is ideally oriented toward building a ‘new’ Irish community led by working-class / queer / differently-abled / young and elder Irish women / of color rather than ‘integrating’ Irish people of color into existent white or ~~white~~ Irish communities. While Hayden’s Irish ~~white~~ formulation is primarily focused on the ‘dilemmas’ of Irish people categorized as white working against racism, it also suggests a broader anti-white project potentially shared with Irish people of color based on common ‘interests’ in rearticulating “Irish” to “anti-whiteness”. To the extent that such a collaborative anti-white Irish space which ‘brings together privileged and oppressed’ is primarily rooted in the interests of Irish people of color, such spaces might ‘address privilege on an organizational level’ like Braden and Smith’s formulations, and like Ignatin & Allen’s Communist Party of ‘all’ workers, might ‘supervise’ the ‘special responsibilities’ of ~~white~~ Irish people to dissimulation. Anti-white Irish ‘national’ affinity may help to blunt the dangers of ‘interracial’ spaces for Irish people of color, and an explicitly Irish approach to ‘transversal dialogue’ may also better structure and formalize relations between ~~white~~ Irish people and the liberations movements of people of color. In such ideal collaborative Irish anti-white spaces, ~~white~~ Irish people privileged by social relations might have greater access to standpoint-based guidance, and a morally absolute position against white capitalist heteropatriarchy might also reduce the need for Irish people oppressed by ‘multiple axes of oppression’ to ‘split’ themselves between two or more antagonistic groups.

To the extent that such ideal spaces are impossible, however, intersectional Irish Diasporic nationalism does not structurally demand collaboration between ‘privileged’ and ‘oppressed’ Irish people. If such collaboration is not possible, a variety of more ‘autonomous’ Irish projects could operate independently while still engaging in principled dialogue at the level of ‘national’ interests until the antagonisms which prevent ‘unity’ can be resolved. Irish liberation, like the liberation movements of people of color, is a ‘coalition between Irish men and women, straight and gay Irish people,’ and a variety of Irish projects can work ‘autonomously’, each making principled choices over standpoint-based ‘guidance’ and ‘collaboration’, while remaining in dialogue and working toward the same goal of dissimulation. A greater diversity of anti-white Irish expressions can only increase the possibilities of success in this ‘task’.

Because so many Irish Diasporans are categorized as white, Irish Diasporic anti-whiteness seems to hold as much, if not more, possibility for creating ‘people who look white but don’t act white’ because they are speaking the Irish language, decolonizing themselves, building a collective, sustainable project of ‘race treason’ in theory, form, and practice; ready to disassemble “america” and “humanity” which are overdetermined by whiteness and join in rebuilding a genuine ~~humanity~~ on just and equitable bases. And like New Abolitionism theorizes that there are ‘enough white anti-racists to do the job’, there are certainly ‘enough white Irish people’, concentrated in the Anglo-normative seats of pan-european settler-colonial power, ‘to do the job’. For example, with some 12% of american citizens claiming Irish ancestry (United States Census Bureau, 2007), even if 1% of white Irish people in america were to place their ‘Irish interests’ above their ‘white interests’; even if 1% could break from, or significantly challenge, the Irish association with U.S. whiteness, it would mean some 300,000 potential ‘race traitors’ in the heart of the ‘white republic’.

Like New Abolitionism, Hayden’s project of dissimulation unites white Irish people for ‘one final job’ as subjects positioned as white, and ‘commitment’ to this program is similarly

essential if it is to succeed, but 'preserving' and developing an anti-white Irishness does not rely on high-risk tactics of militant non-conformity like 'race treason'. Rooted in an ancient, substantive, and dynamic 'human' culture which has survived centuries of colonial domination through a vast and varied repertoire of strategies and tactics, possible fields of struggle extend to every aspect of social, cultural, and political life. While anti-white intersectional Irish Diasporic nationalism demands 'race suicide' from Irish people categorized as white, by linking our 'Irish interests' to anti-whiteness, the communities it constructs might allow ~~white~~ Irish people to die as white people and to live as Irish people.

### **White Anti-Racists, New Abolitionists, Nationalisms & Decolonization**

New Abolitionists generally acknowledge and recognize the importance of symbolic solidarity and transversal dialogue between Irish and Black liberation, and in particular, the Irish-American rejection of O'Connell and the [old] Abolitionist movement as a key moment in "how the Catholic Irish, an oppressed race in Ireland, became part of an oppressing race in America" (Ignatiev, 1995, p. 1, see also pp. 3, 6-31). Ignatiev is perhaps most well-known for his work elucidating specific process and "choices made" (Ibid., p. 2) which relocated Irish people from an historically and culturally particular condition of racial oppression in Ireland to inclusion as part of the ideal pan-european universalistic 'white republic', and the focus of Ignatiev, Roediger, and Allen on the Irish case suggests it is particularly indicative of their interpretation of Baldwin's 'becoming white' formulation. But neither Ignatiev, Roediger, Garvey, nor Allen, have placed any value on Irishness as a potential alternative identity to whiteness in the present, despite the fact that both Roediger and Garvey have Irish ancestry. Just as the proto-racial categories of "Christian", "European", and "English" are ultimately neutral in their formulation, "Irish" is one of many 'european nationalities' which "only become white in certain relations" (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1995b, p. 102; see also Ignatiev & Pendragon, 1996, p. 18). Rather than conceptualizing american whiteness as a supra-national, ideally pan-european, formation rooted in Civilized-Christian-European-Englishness, New Abolitionists define it transectionally as a supra-class formation, which orients New Abolitionism toward building 'one national struggle between classes'.

In contrast to his ignorance of Frye's lesbian feminist formulation for ~~whiteness~~, however, Ignatiev acknowledged and expressed openness to "people seeking out the Celtic or Germanic tribes, or ethnicity, or anything else that can provide them with a vital alternative to whiteness" (Ignatiev, 1997 [1994]-b, p. 610). His consideration is, however, heavily laden with "doubts about how real these are or can be made to be for modern Americans, and the last time somebody built a mass movement around Germanic tribal myths it led to big trouble" (Ibid.). He equates nationalism with 'tribalism', uses the sub-racial / supra-national categories of 'Celtic' and 'Germanic' rather than actual existing 'nationalities' like "Irish", and suggests all nationalist projects in europe tend toward fascism. Ignatiev's devaluation of 'borderline european nationalities' as potential alternative identities to whiteness reflects his own disidentification from Russian-Jewish ancestry: "I do not consider myself a Jew...Like any person living in America, I am...'part Yankee, part Indian and part Negro,' with a pinch of ethnic salt...'African and Indian, Mexican, Mongolian, Tyrolean and Tartar" (Ignatiev, 2010b), i.e. "human". Instead of 'breaking up' ideal pan-european whiteness along its 'tribal' seams, he reasserts his Marxist-Jamesian commitment "to promote models of amalgamation" (Ignatiev, 1997 [1994]-b, p. 610). And in addition to 'political Blackness', 'hybridity', and 'one national struggle between classes', these New Abolitionist ideal 'models of amalgamation' are also ultimately 'american'.

Both white anti-racist and New Abolitionist ‘traditions’ are rooted in what Braden called the ‘Other America’, ‘the one of Negroes and whites who fought against slavery, lynchings, and injustice of any kind’ [see Chapter 2 - White Anti-Racist Role Models], and they interpellate the same ‘whites who fought against injustices of any kind’ to their respective projects. Bradenite white anti-racists theorize that "America", like "white", is both inalienable and rearticulateable and work to hegemonically replace ‘racist’ white american nationalism with this ‘Other’, ‘post-racial america’ in which "white" would signify a benign ‘ethnicity’. New Abolitionists similarly theorize american ‘nationality’ as a vehicle for realizing "humanity" by defining "america" as “incontestably mulatto. Without race prejudice, Americans might discover that culturally they are all Afro-American, as well as Native American, and so forth” (Ignatiev, 1997 [1994]-b, p. 610). Like the ‘Beloved Community’ Civil Rights Movement, both Bradenite white anti-racists and New Abolitionists hoped to relight the ‘melting pot’ of american nationalism to realize its radical humanist rhetoric that ‘all men are created equal and entitled to basic rights’ through ‘amalgamation’ as ‘americans’. Because New Abolitionists theorize that “the United States is an Afro-American country” (Ignatiev, 1993b, p. 63), to be ‘american’ is to be essentially Black, and therefore ‘human’. In working to rearticulate "american" to New Abolitionism, they offer a “choice between two identities...white and American” (Ibid., p. 67) with the assumption that “Whatever exists here is the product of the labor and genius, voluntary or involuntary, of all those who have ever been here, and they have earned the right for themselves and their descendants to enjoy it equally” (Ignatiev & Pendragon, 1996, p. 39). This theorization of "america" as a vehicle for ‘amalgamation’ was not only a further contradiction in New Abolitionism to the “Black Power” conclusion ‘that ‘the American dream’ wasn’t designed for black people’, but also directly antagonistic to the sovereign rights of American Indian nations to self-determination.

Given the central role of whiteness in the development of "america", and "america" in the development of ideal pan-european whiteness, it seems that New Abolitionists should have as much suspicion about the ‘tendential force’ of "america" as they do for "white". New Abolitionist engagements with American Indian liberation discourses are superficial and sparse, but one of Ignatiev’s proposals for ‘models of amalgamation’ is “The Seminole tribe” who “were composed of the remnants of several native groups who had earlier been dispersed, plus a number of runaway slaves, plus some [ostensibly white] deserters from the army” (Ignatiev, 1997 [1994]-b, p. 610). Like his proposals to embrace ‘political Blackness’ as alternative identity to whiteness, Ignatiev’s proposal of this ‘Seminole Beloved Community’ model of ‘amalgamation’ is entirely dependent on whether Seminole peoples today are ‘willing’, and ‘able’ to naturalize refugees from whiteness, and even then, such naturalization could only apply to their ancestral lands in the South-East U.S. or perhaps those lands under their jurisdiction in Oklahoma. His proposal that an expansive pan-Indian nationality might represent the ‘kernel’ of an ‘Other america’ without regard to Seminole self-determination seems to be a similar ‘phantasmic slipping into indigeneity’, and even the most ideal imaginations of "american" socialist ‘racial democracy’ reproduce deleterious relations with American Indian nations. If New Abolitionism is built on a morally absolute approach to whiteness, what would it mean to also take a morally absolute position that “the U.S.A. is a settler colony” and “only the indigenous people are its just owners” (Ture, 1992, p. 191)?

While O’Connell (1843) similarly envisioned Irish-American participation in the abolitionist movement as an opportunity to take part in “the brightest pages of the chapter of humanity and benevolence in [the] American story,” Hayden was more ambiguous on the role of

american nationalism in his proposal for Irish whiteness, arguing that ‘it is not too late for...Irish Americans today to assimilate culturally and politically with the anti-colonial world, or the ranks of racial minorities and immigrants in America, instead of assimilating into the WASP establishment’. This ambivalent statement hedges between "america" as vehicle for realizing ‘humanity’, and as white settler colony, closer to internationalist iterations of “Black Power” and Pan-Africanism.<sup>56</sup> Centering dialogue among Irish people is not necessarily tied to american nationalism, and Ireland was formed out of a similar experience of settler colonialism providing the possibility for addressing antagonisms and building coalition with indigenous peoples on the basis of that experience. Identifying primarily as Irish makes no basic assumptions of property or rights outside of Ireland, nor is Irishness confined to an americentric analysis of the world.

Like the British empire, the ‘sun never sets’ on the Irish Diaspora. Irish people scattered by British settler-colonialism had major roles in both building and resisting British Empire on global frontiers, and white Irish Diasporans are concentrated in its major historic settler-colonies, particularly the U.S., Canada, and Australia, as well as in Britain itself. This massive global Diaspora contains a multiplicity of avenues for ‘transversal dialogue’ structured by what Steve Salaita (2016) has recently described as “Inter/nationalism...

a certain type of decolonial thought and practice...[which] demands commitment to mutual liberation based on the proposition that colonial power must be rendered diffuse across multiple hemispheres through reciprocal struggle (p. ix) ...[through reciprocal] action and dialogue across borders, both natural and geopolitical—not the nationalism of the nation-state, but of the nation itself, as composed of heterogeneous communities functioning as self-identified collectives attached to particular land bases (p. xiv).

While Salaita’s ‘inter/nationalist’ formulation was particularly written to address Palestinian Diasporic relations with American Indians, after his first trip to Ireland the following year, he reported (2017) that “Ireland’s liberation [movement] features significantly in Palestine’s national consciousness,” that “The oppressed gravitate toward one another because empathy is a vital element of survival,” and that shared experiences of settler-colonialism and partition by the British empire allow Irish people and Palestinian people to ‘understand’ each other. There are already fairly significant bases in Ireland for dialogue with a broad spectrum of anti-racist, anti-colonial, anti-imperial liberation movements, and an intersectional, anti-white, Irish Diasporic nationalist approach seems to hold potential for making these dialogues and relations much available on similar conditions of ‘commitment to mutual liberation’.

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<sup>56</sup> As Kwame Ture [Stokely Carmichael] reflected “In order to understand Black Power we must look at some of the contradictions inside SNCC...The major contradiction in SNCC was between revolution and reform...At no time was the revolutionary aspect of SNCC dominant; at all times the reform aspect of SNCC was dominant, and certainly we can see that today from the activities of those who are no longer with SNCC....Its second contradiction was African nationalism versus American nationalism. The word 'African' here is to replace the incorrect word of 'black' nationalism” (quoted in Greenberg, 1998, p. 165).



## CONCLUSION

This dissertation has tried to systematically analyze the key contradictions of working against racism from white subject positions under liberal color-blind white hegemony through a close examination of two major projects—white anti-racism and New Abolitionism—which have sought to mitigate / overcome those contradictions in theory and practice.

In the Introduction, I defined liberal color-blindness as a hegemonic rearticulation of ‘Jim Crow’ whiteness in the mid-1960s which appropriated radical humanist discourse from the Civil Rights Movement and accommodated its most basic ‘liberal’ demands in order to undercut its more ‘radical’ demands and preserve white ‘institutional’ superordination ‘without any reference to race’. It described how the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee’s 1966 “Black Power” program countered emergent liberal color-blind whiteness with ‘color-consciousness’, centered standpoint-based dialogues between Black people ‘and other oppressed nationalities’, limited roles for ‘white radicals and white liberals’ in people of color spaces, and directed them to focus on ‘organizing their own white communities’ against racism.

In Chapter 1, I further explained how intersectional Critical Race Theory, as a broad expression of “Black Power” in the academy, has described and refined a robust critique of liberal color-blindness, how its Gramscian post-structuralist approach to ‘white hegemony’ conceptualizes race as an analytically distinct system and central axis in given ‘matrices of domination’ and constructs a field of ‘transversal dialogue’ based the standpoints of people of color. I explained the centrally important role of Black Feminists in linking together the ‘racial solidarity’ of Critical Race Theory and Marxist-Feminist Standpoint Theory to clarify the relation of positionality to liberatory knowledge production. Finally, in relation to this theoretical framework, I introduced central contradictions of working against racism from a white subject positions which emanate outward from the basic ‘incompleteness’ of ‘white positional consciousness’ and constructs Critical Whiteness Studies as a liminal ‘additional movement’ in the academy mirroring the liminal positions of ‘white allies’ to the liberation movements of people of color at-large.

Part 1 described, analyzed, and assessed white anti-racism, the main theoretical and organizational interpretation of “Black Power” directives for ‘white radicals and white liberals’, and historically contextualized its formation in relation to “Black Power” through the work of Ann Braden, the Southern Student Organizing Committee, Students for a Democratic Society, and white anti-racist theorists.

In Chapter 2, I introduced a further Semiotic framework to describe white anti-racism as an anti-essentialist project which conceptualizes “white” as a sign which is ‘basically neutral with respect to any specific ideological function’, and works to hegemonically rearticulate “white” to “anti-racism” by ‘owning’ whiteness and ‘repolarizing’ the sign through ‘negative’ and ‘positive’ juxtapositions. Setting up a later discussion of its competing New Abolitionist approach, I also introduced a major critique of their arguments that “white” has ‘many meanings’ and that some of those meanings are ‘non- or anti-racist’ through Stuart Hall’s concept of ‘lines of tendential force’ and Vološinov’s ‘field specific sign’. I argued that, while the white anti-racist conceptualization of “white” as both inalienable and rearticulateable seems to accord with “Black Power” directives to organize ‘their own [white] communities’ against racism, it also problematically tends toward renaturalizing “white” as ‘ethnicity’ rather than demystifying “white” as social construction in line with Critical Race Theory.

In Chapter 3, I described the white anti-racist program for resisting racism from white subject positions under liberal color-blind white hegemony as one of ‘confession, conversion, and collaboration’. I began to systematically identify how this basic program contends with ‘dilemmas’ emanating from the ‘incompleteness’ of ‘white positional consciousness’, including the ‘addictive’ and mob-like tendencies of normative whiteness, ‘starting from’ the standpoints of people of color, choice and interpretation of standpoint-based guidance, use of ‘white privilege for the purposes of racial justice’, and ultimately structural dependence on collaboration with, and ‘oversight’ by, people of color. In the final sections, I described white anti-racist critiques of ‘autonomous’ work against racism by white people given the ‘incompleteness’ of ‘white positional consciousness’, and introduced Andrea Smith’s exemplary ideal of collaborative structures which would ‘address privilege on an organizational level’. I argued that this structural demand for the ‘guidance’ of people of color through myriad ‘dilemmas’ and the idealization of ‘interracial Beloved Community’-type spaces is itself a major ‘dilemma’ which places white anti-racism directly at odds with standpoint-based “Black Power” exclusion and Critical Whiteness Studies liminality.

In Chapter 4, I focused in on this major contradiction between the ‘collaborative demand’ of white anti-racism and standpoint-based forms of “Black Power”, the white anti-racist conceptualization of segregation as the problem of racism, emphasis on developing ‘proximal empathy’ in ‘interracial Beloved Community’-type spaces, the potential ‘dangers’ of white bodies in the spaces of people of color, interested choice in which people of color to work with, and the risks of ‘radical experimentation’ to improve an, often admittedly, flawed program. The closing sections described post-“Black Power” theorizations that ‘commitment’ might be a path to overcome the myriad ‘dilemmas’ of the white anti-racist project in theory and practice, and ultimately argued that ‘committed’ white anti-racism is a form of ‘martyrdom’ which is proven in producing ‘white allies’ counter-hegemonically but is ultimately mismatched with a project seeking to hegemonically rearticulate "white" to "anti-racism".

Part 2 described and assessed New Abolitionism, a small but influential alternative interpretation of “Black Power” directives for ‘white radicals’ rooted in the work of Noel Ignatiev, Ted Allen, and David Roediger. I worked to explain how New Abolitionism popularized and advanced an alternative approach to working against racism from white subject positions which conceptualizes "white" as neither inalienable nor rearticulateable and attempted, but ultimately failed, to develop a practical program to ‘abolish the white race’.

In Chapter 5, I provided a brief history of precursor formulations to New Abolitionism, particularly Ignatin and Allen’s 1967 White Blindspot as a central post-“Black Power” document in Students for a Democratic Society. I traced its different interpretations by the Weather Underground Organization and Ignatin’s own Sojourner Truth [Communist] Organization into the Seventies and discussed Ignatin’s ideological choice of C.L.R. James over the Boggesses. The final sections considered Ignatin’s debate with J. Sakai [BLA-CC] and David Gilbert [WUO/May 19<sup>th</sup>] on the ‘revolutionary potential’ of white workers just before the launch of Race Traitor. This debate highlighted key ideological transformations in Ignatin’s thinking in the 1980s, particularly toward a more intersectionally nuanced conceptualization of ‘racial interests’ and from the ‘mass’ organizing at the point of production which characterized STO, toward the militant nonconformist action of a ‘determined minority’ which would characterize Race Traitor.

In Chapter 6, I explained how these key ideological developments to Ignatin and Allen’s 1967 formulation by Ignatiev, Garvey, and Roediger in the early 1990s, particularly its Baldwin-inspired conceptualizations of whiteness as ‘*nothing but* false and oppressive’ and an ideological

choice, and Roediger's focus on white worker agency, distinguished New Abolitionism as an alternative to Bradenite white anti-racism. I described how their radical humanist efforts to disarticulate people categorized as white from whiteness inspired an innovative and valuable discursive strategy to critically denaturalize and problematize "white". I evaluated the strengths and contradictions of New Abolitionist discursive strategy for 'abolishing the white race' as it developed into the new millennium, offered proposals to improve and clarify it in a section entitled 'Towards a New Style Sheet for the Abolition of Whiteness,' and have worked to demonstrate the utility of those proposals in subsequent chapters.

In Chapter 7, I defined the New Abolitionist program for working against racism from white subject positions under liberal color-blind white hegemony as one of 'confession, conversion, and race treason'. I demonstrated that this program is almost indistinguishable from white anti-racism in terms of confession, conversion, starting from the standpoint of people of color, the way their project was similarly caught 'between the two contradictory poles' of militant non-conformity and building 'a significant mass base', a similar idealization of 'Beloved Community'-type collaborative spaces, and similar 'radical experimentation' which was assessed by 'approval' from people of color. Beyond their opposite stated goals, I demonstrated that the New Abolitionist program can be distinguished from the white anti-racist program by a 'softer' class-centric approach to the standpoints of people of color which Ignatiev has described as 'working-class morality'. I argued that such an approach authorized greater 'autonomy' for New Abolitionists to the extent that this 'autonomy' was used for militant non-conformist action designed to 'abolish the white race', but that it also seemed to dangerously tend toward producing 'doubly righteous' white subjects, and combined with their strategy of militant non-conformity, this ultimate centering of class interest seemed to encourage a particularly masculine certainty which ignored feminist approaches to whiteness.

Chapter 8 focused in on the proposed New Abolitionist strategy of 'race treason' as an embrace of militant non-conformity designed to cast doubt on the power of whiteness to maintain social control and initiate a 'chain of events' which might lead to the 'abolition of the white race'. I argued that while they proposed some interesting individual non-conformist strategies for disrupting 'white racial bonding', such proposals seemed to tend toward collaboration with liberal color-blind white hegemony rather than radicalizing supposedly genuine desires of white people for a post-racial society, and did not, perhaps could not, rise to their own standard of a necessary 'critical mass'. I also argued that Race Traitor's promotion of 'Copwatch' as a collective action differed little from white anti-racist action, exposing significant failures in New Abolitionism to develop a working practice which embodied their stated approach. Ultimately, I argued that the ideal New Abolitionist strategy of 'race treason', built around the exceptional John Brown and militant non-conformity, was [1] over-reliant on a tactics which could only be tested at the highest possible cost, [2] advanced without any serious reflection on the failures of the Weather Underground / May 19<sup>th</sup>'s attempts to overcome the same 'dilemmas' of white anti-racism through armed struggle, and [3] that their unwillingness to lead by example seemed to assume that 'race treason' was inevitable.

In Chapter 9, I considered the New Abolitionist contention that 'treason to whiteness is loyalty to humanity', and their particular proposal that 'political Blackness' might serve as an alternative identity to whiteness. I explained how, based on their theorization of the Black Liberation movement as the 'kernels' of a meaningful working-class movement which could 'meld', proletarianize, and humanize 'all' workers in the U.S., New Abolitionists posed a choice between whiteness as privilege and status, and Blackness as solidarity and resistance, and were

deeply invested in white people who ‘crossed over’ into Blackness as potential harbingers of the possibilities of ‘becoming Black’. I argued that the more recent case of Rachel Doležal demonstrates that such an idea poses significant risks in practice and is ultimately not a real choice for most people categorized as white.

Chapters 1-9 are primarily dedicated to providing systematic description and critique of the two major ‘tendencies’ in Critical Whiteness Studies. An overarching historical narrative, an intersectional Critical Race Theory framework, and analysis of over fifty years of social movement and academic discourse on ‘the white question’, has worked to describe the formation of white anti-racism and New Abolitionism as competing projects in relation to the ‘discursive conditions’ of emergent liberal color-blind white hegemony and “Black Power” counter-hegemony. Each project was defined in theory through a Gramscian post-structural, and particularly Semiotic, framework, and analyzed in its contention with a shared set of contradictions under these given ‘discursive conditions’. I have further dialectically assessed the strengths and weaknesses of each project in terms of its stated goals, definitions, conceptual frameworks, discursive strategies, and programs of action in social movement spaces. If I’ve been successful in this task of systematically describing these complex, contentious, and perhaps inherently contradictory, projects, Chapters 1-9 should provide a robust guide to better understanding them.

Describing and analyzing the New Abolitionist project has been particularly difficult, and has taken the majority of space in this text. Perhaps these difficulties are why so few scholars have tried to understand and analyze the formulations and strategies behind its slogans and core principles, choosing instead to engage with isolated ideas and insights rather than the project as a whole. While my critical assessment of New Abolitionism might seem overly harsh or personal in places, I hope it’s clear that I’ve dedicated so much of this dissertation to understanding it because I, like many others, generally agree with its basic Baldwin-inspired critique of white anti-racism and project of ‘abolishing the white race’. In my assessment, New Abolitionism has been a crucial step forward in addressing key contradictions of counter-hegemonically normative white anti-racist theory and a spectacular failure in practice which must be learned from. White anti-racism remains the dominant approach to mitigating the contradictions of working against racism from white subject positions, but it has not, perhaps cannot, fully address the New Abolitionist critique with any certainty beyond its claims to eminent counter-hegemonic ‘practicability’.

New Abolitionism has been central to the articulation of ~~whiteness~~ as an alternative to white anti-racism, but failed to develop a workable program. This dissertation was written with a view that the general lack of critical assessment of New Abolitionist successes and failures is an impediment to developing and advancing ~~white~~ critique beyond their formulations. I’ve spent so much time and space ‘working through’ New Abolitionism in order to identify the elements which made it such a powerful and generative critique, and those which contributed to its failures. At the very least, I hope these chapters provide a useful framework and resources for ‘thinking through’ existent strategies for working against racism from white subject positions and some forthright assessment which might help to generate renewed discussion on ‘the white question’ in Critical Whiteness Studies, ‘Ethnic Studies’, Critical Race Theory, and beyond.

Many of the problems I’ve identified with New Abolitionism in Part 2 and Chapter 9 seem to emanate from their ultimately class-centered definitions of race and whiteness. Chapter 10 reconsidered New Abolitionist interpretations of Baldwin’s ‘becoming white’ thesis, and the possibilities of an alternative approach to ‘pointing out the ethnic fissures’ in whiteness guided

by a race-centered lens. I contended directly with Allen's class-focused explanation for The Invention of the White Race in Virginia at the turn of the eighteenth century as a 'deal' between 'European' workers and planters, and argued instead for alternative explanations of "race" as a sedimented rearticulation of European proto-racial technologies in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and "white" in Anglophone discourse as a secular extension of 'English' rights to all 'Civilized-Christian-European' settlers in frontier colonies, regardless of class. I proposed that these alternative, race-centered, definitions might better root Critical Whiteness Studies as a field in relation to intersectional Critical Race Theory.

Chapter 11 built on the philosophical framework of Charles Mills to consider the further development of whiteness over the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries as an ideal global pan-European coalition for the purposes of dispossessing, exploiting, and killing people of color. I particularly focused on tensions in the 'white republic between ideal pan-European white citizenship and institutional Anglo-normativity, and the special role of the U.S. in advancing global 'white racial solidarity' against 'more exclusivist versions' of whiteness into the twentieth century. I also briefly considered more recent 'ethnic fissures' in American whiteness between suggestions, like Black Power's, that coalition with 'borderline Europeans' might be possible on the basis of 'shared interests' against 'Anglo-conformity', and the liberal color-blind rearticulation of 'borderline European' identities as part of what Jacobson calls the post-Civil Rights 'white ethnic revival'. This race-centered sociohistorical approach to understanding racism as an analytically distinct system, and particularly the formation of its superordinate "white" position, seems to suggest an alternative, 'unbecoming white', approach to whiteness working primarily along a given 'national seam' in 'supra-national' pan-European whiteness rather than along transectional 'fissures' of class, like New Abolitionism, or gender, like Frye. 'Treason' against the 'melding' of a given European people into whiteness might significantly frustrate and demystify ideal pan-European whiteness, disarticulate universalistic white personhood, and produce white subjects who could better participate in processes of articulating a meaningful, inclusive, and inter/nationalist humanity.

In Chapter 12, I put forward a proposal for an explicitly Irish approach to whiteness and anti-whiteness within and against the two major 'tendencies' in Critical Whiteness Studies. While there is a great deal more to be said about such a project, I provided a basic sketch by describing, analyzing, and assessing historically intersectional and anti-racist Irish Diasporic nationalisms, and critically expanding upon key elements of Tom Hayden's white Irish formulation in Irish on the Inside in relation to key 'dilemmas' of working against racism from white subject positions under liberal color-blindness. I argued that an intersectional, anti-white, Irish Diasporic nationalist approach to 'becoming Irish' seems to hold significant potential in three areas—orientation toward history and the sociohistorical construction of whiteness, the 'tendential force' of "Irish" as a signifier of 'treason' against proto-racial Anglo-conformist settler-colonialism, and the national / Diasporic forms of "Irish" as potentially more compatible with global Decolonization.

'If, seems, might, could, possibly, perhaps...' This sketch of an intersectional, anti-white, Irish Diasporic nationalist approach is admittedly quite speculative, and like white anti-racism and New Abolitionism, its successes should be judged by what it can produce in theory and practice. It is in no way meant as a simple panacea for the contradictions of working against racism from white subject positions. But given that hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of people in the U.S. have been working against racism through white anti-racist approaches for the last fifty years and do not seem to have made much progress in hegemonically rearticulating

"white" to "anti-racism", and given that New Abolitionists have been working on 'abolishing the white race' for more than two decades but have not produced a workable collective program, why not try something else?

Perhaps white anti-racism is the best we can hope for, a practical way of mitigating the contradictions in serving 'as allies to people of color'. If so, this proposal does not threaten white anti-racism as the dominant approach to working against racism from white subject positions, and perhaps it can contribute to developing greater clarity about its strengths and limitations in theory and practice. But for those people who believe that 'As long as you think you're white, there's no hope for you', I hope this dissertation helps in contributing to a reassessment of the successes and failures of New Abolitionism and to renewed efforts in developing practicable whitenesses. At the very least, I hope the concluding proposal for an intersectional, anti-white, Irish Diaspora nationalism can serve as a further resource for 'thinking through' the 'dilemmas' of working against racism from white subject positions, and stimulate further discussion on 'the white question' in Critical Whiteness Studies, 'Ethnic Studies', Critical Race Theory, Irish Studies, the Irish Diaspora, and beyond.

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