

CHAPTER 15

RACE AND SLAVERY

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THE word "race" has become synonymous in modern parlance with skin color and is often associated with prejudice and violence: news bulletins, for instance, report "racially aggravated" attacks among Asians, whites, and blacks, while the "racial" issues of the United States, South Africa, Zimbabwe, or any other nation for that matter, invariably focus on the different treatment and experiences of those with specific skin tones. A notable exception to this generality was the demarcation of Jews as a racial group by the Nazis. Yet, as biologists and geneticists have conclusively shown, there is only one human race, with the degree of genetic difference among whites the same as between whites and blacks, or between any so-called "racial group." When scholars use "race" as a useful category of historical inquiry they are not suggesting that white people and black people, for instance, belong to different species. Instead they are concerned with the sociological meanings of race, whereby racial terms only have meaning because individuals or groups either attribute a significance to the differences between themselves and others, or impose such a significance on others. The bald fact that a person has designated "white," "black," or any other type of skin "color" is not what is important: it is the way that person was treated *because* of the perceived color of their skin, whether privileged or denigrated, and the mechanisms informing the social construction of color in a given historical context, that is significant. As Barbara Fields has shown us, the social interpretation of "race" has been of critical significance throughout American history because of the constant interaction among different types of people.¹ "Race," and how Americans of various sorts understood it, particularly in relation to slavery, is the subject of this essay.

EARLY CONSTRUCTIONS OF RACE

As historians of European expansionism have shown, race was not always synonymous with skin color. In the early modern period, when light-skinned Europeans started to come into regular contact with dark-skinned sub-Saharan Africans, they placed just as much significance on dress, religion, customs, language, and degree of civilization as they did on skin color.² Moreover, Mark Smith has recently argued that race was not only determined visually but could also be sensed by noses, ears, fingers, and even tongues.³ Clearly there were many different ways for Europeans to mark the differences between themselves and the new peoples they encountered. Race in this early period was not only about more than physical differences, it was also a flexible and adaptable identity. It was possible for non-whites to effectively "become white" by adopting Christianity, and by dressing or living like Europeans. English trader Bartholomew Stibbs, visiting the Gambia River in 1723, remarked, without apparent irony, that the local inhabitants were "as Black as Coal; tho' here, thro' Custom, (being Christians) they account themselves White Men."⁴ It was equally possible for whites to "go native" by adopting African lifestyles. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, skin color was often perceived to be a simple result of the degree of exposure to the sun. White people who lived in tropical climates became darker skinned, seemingly affirming this idea, though rather more puzzling was the fact that Africans who traveled to Europe remained "black."

The etymology of the word "race" helps to demonstrate its flexible usage. Entering the English language in the sixteenth century from the medieval Italian word "razza" (meaning "group"), "race" was simply a method of classifying any number of things—human, animal, or plant—into groups with ostensibly shared characteristics. Each European nation might therefore be termed a specific "race": Frenchmen, Italians, Germans, Englishmen; but sometimes there were additional races within a nation, such as Basques in Spain, or Bretons in France. None of these "races" was classified according to physiognomy but more often, as Denis Hay and more recently Michael Adas have argued, on custom, history, language and, most importantly, religion.⁵ The encounter with sub-Saharan Africans, from the mid-fifteenth century onwards, encouraged Europeans to conceive themselves as part of a broader grouping of white people, in contrast to the black-skinned Africans. Europeans inevitably made comparisons between themselves and Africans, and invariably found Africans inferior and less civilized.

But, if "race" was a construct, why did Europeans begin to "invent" it and, subsequently, denigrate "black" Africans? One answer is that all European elites at the time were obsessed with hierarchy and its preservation, believing that it denoted order in contrast to chaos.⁶ Peasants and serfs were meant to pay due homage to their local lords who in their turn were part of a detailed hierarchy of earls, counts, and dukes. Alongside this temporal hierarchy was a spiritual one of

people, priests, bishops, archbishops, Pope, and ultimately God. It was understood to be a natural part of life that some were "better" while others were "lesser" and the chances of moving from the lower order to the higher ranks were slim indeed. While status differences were often obvious, many European states passed sumptuary laws regulating the dress of the lower orders to prevent those of a lower social status passing themselves off as members of the elite. Such classificatory impulses, argue Alden T. Vaughan and Virginia Mason Vaughan, were easily imported in the context of European encounters with Africans.⁷ Some of the differences noted were physical, especially the hair, nose, lips, and sexual organs, but as often Europeans commented on the strange languages, lack of clothing, and "barbaric" customs of African peoples.

Attitudes such as these were not spontaneous but emerged from a long tradition of negative attitudes towards black-skinned peoples, dating back several centuries before Europeans began to explore the world. The Arab overlords of North Africa generally believed that sub-Saharan darker-skinned peoples were culturally and intellectually inferior, mocking their "wisdom, ingenuity, religion, justice and regular government," and they imported those attitudes with the conquest of most of Spain in the eighth century.⁸ During the long Reconquista of the Iberian Peninsula by the Christian kings of Castile and Aragon these negative stereotypes crossed over the cultural divide between Muslim and Christian. Winthrop Jordan was perfectly correct to point out the negative connotations of the word "black" in early modern English, and other tongues, and that people with black skin in effect suffered by association because of it, but the roots of European racism went even deeper than that.⁹ There is a clear lineage of negative racial imagery from Arabic to Hispanic to English thought. Arabs enslaved people from many different parts of the world, but tended to treat those with the blackest skin unsparingly, assigning them the most menial positions. Furthermore, it was Arabs who first arrived at the concept of the biblical curse as an explanation for the skin color of blacks. Since it was generally accepted that all humanity stemmed from a common root, namely Noah and his three sons as the only men to survive the flood, then the curse issued by Noah on his son Ham (or more specifically on Ham's son Canaan) (Genesis 9: 21-7), that he should be the "servant of servants" for gazing upon his father's nakedness, became of central importance. Yet, as Benjamin Braude has shown, there was nothing in the Bible that said Canaan was black. In medieval Europe all the descendants of Noah were portrayed as white since the lineage of Noah's sons was somewhat confused; indeed Ham's descendants were often believed to have populated Asia rather than Africa. During the early modern period, however, the Arab version that Canaan's descendants had been "marked" as servants by altered skin color became widespread in Europe as well.¹⁰ This belief fitted in neatly with preexisting negative attitudes towards black people and helped to confirm the idea that black skin was a mark of subordinate and inferior status.

Yet there were also those who commented positively on the black peoples during the seventeenth century: John Ogilby, visiting Africa, commented that "The Natives are very black; but the Features of their faces, and their excellent Teeth, being white as Ivory, make up together an handsom Ayre, and taking comeliness of a new Beauty," while Richard Ligon described a black woman in Barbados "of the greatest beautie" as "excellently shap't, well favour'd, full-eye'd, and admirably grac't."¹¹ Elite European attitudes towards Africans were therefore mixed, even plastic. They observed mainly with interest, occasionally with disgust, the major differences between whites (Christian, civilized, technologically advanced) and blacks (heathen, uncivilized, technologically backward) and it seems clear that an internal hierarchy of superiority and inferiority was part of the response of whites during these encounters. Yet Europeans were not so foolish as to try to treat all Africans the same, whatever they might have believed about their own elevated status, since they were acutely conscious that without the goodwill of local chiefs and princes their ships would have found trade goods as well as basic supplies hard to come by. Pragmatism, if nothing else, required that early modern Europeans responded to Africans on a case-by-case basis.

THE INTRODUCTION OF SLAVERY TO THE AMERICAS

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Quite how Africans came to be enslaved in America is something that has taxed some of the greatest historians of slavery since a general belief in negative stereotypes did not automatically equate to enslavement. As James Sweet has shown, Iberians had a reasonably lengthy history of enslaving Muslim prisoners of war long before 1492, and records indicate many thousands of slaves were brought to Europe in the second half of the fifteenth century.¹² While the enslavement of prisoners of war needed no justification, the expansion of the slave trade to include those purchased in Africa required, and received, papal sanction on the basis that these "pagans" would be brought into the "Christian family." The vast majority of these slaves had darker skins than those enslaving them, and again this helped to justify and reinforce early modern notions about the suitability of black people for slavery. Having said that, according to Winthrop Jordan, Europeans did not set out in the fifteenth century to explore the world with the express intention of subjugating more than ten million Africans; they were far more interested in securing trade routes to Asia that promised real wealth. After the somewhat accidental European discovery of America (Columbus was seeking China and Japan, and indeed never believed that he had been anywhere but Asia) and the gradual

conquest of the larger Caribbean islands and parts of mainland Central and South America, the demand for new labor to clear forests and foster productive land increased dramatically. Since voluntary waged labor was insufficient, the Spanish and Portuguese turned to a type of involuntary labor with which they were familiar: slavery. The various problems associated with the most obvious and convenient source of involuntary labor, Native Americans, led Europeans to seek an alternative. Africans proved more resistant than whites to certain tropical illnesses common to New World plantations. Furthermore, whereas Indian slaves found it relatively easy to escape and blend back into their own tribes, the skin color of blacks marked them readily as slaves and it was far more straightforward for whites to exercise tighter control over them. The fact that slavery existed within Africa, and that African princes were willing to deal in slaves, made the shift towards African slavery in America even easier.¹³

Historians have debated the association between racial attitudes and the introduction of slavery in the Americas, without coming to any clear consensus. Eric Williams first made the case for the primacy of an economic over a racial explanation for slavery in his widely read *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944). Williams's specific focus was the West Indies, but a few years after *Capitalism and Slavery* appeared Oscar and Mary Handlin arrived at a broadly similar conclusion for the infant Chesapeake colonies: that racial discrimination came after not before slavery.¹⁴ Carl Degler, on the other hand, stressed the marginalization and discrimination experienced by blacks in Virginia from the earliest colonial period, evidence he argued of long-standing and preexisting racial prejudices. Degler was later supported by the work of Winthrop Jordan and Alden T. Vaughan.¹⁵ Since the 1970s the economic argument has returned to favor, with Russell Menard pointing out dwindling supply of white servants in the later seventeenth century; Edmund Morgan suggesting that planters only plumped for slavery when the demography of the Chesapeake meant that it made economic sense; and Breen and Innes documenting the vast array of interracial cooperation between white servants and black slaves which tends to undermine the theory that all migrants to Virginia arrived with a fully formed racial consciousness.¹⁶

It is hard to chart a course between these differing interpretations, and perhaps the evidence simply does not exist to permit historians to make a definitive judgment, but certainly many white settlers did arrive in the Americas with an evolving and ever clearer sense of their own superiority over other people. Interracial cooperation, as outlined by Breen and Innes, does not necessarily mean that lower-class whites lacked any racial sensibility, only that they were capable of prioritizing alliances of convenience when it suited them. English settlers often accepted negative stereotypes about Africans at face value, most especially that they were incapable of the higher reasoning of Europeans, that they acted more emotionally, and that their putatively limited mental capacity coupled with their physical prowess suited them for directed manual labor. Significantly in North

America early European attitudes towards Native Americans were very different. Commentators and travelers praised the "noble" and "aristocratic" bearing of Native Americans, and especially their upright and open stance. As Karen Kupperman has recently argued, native peoples were perceived as heathens yet their lighter skin persuaded many that Indians were in fact born white, and that their skin darkened as adults because of exposure to the sun and tattooing. Indians could only be incorporated into the theory of monogenesis by taking on the mantle of one of the lost tribes of Israel, and as such Europeans sometimes believed that Indians were similar to their own ancestors, living in harmony with nature in an almost Edenic existence. In the early seventeenth century these attitudes protected Native Americans from widespread enslavement in North America, though the comparative military and political strength of native tribes compared to Europeans also made this a highly pragmatic decision.¹⁷ Attitudes towards Native Americans would of course change, particularly after the massacre of a quarter of the white population in Virginia in 1622, and the uprising which whites termed King Philip's War in New England in 1675, but the use of Native Americans as forced labor never reached the scale in North America that it did in Central and South America.¹⁸

White people's negative racial attitudes were not the only factor that led to the enslavement of millions of Africans in America. Even Degler and Jordan tend to accept that without a pressing economic need it is extremely doubtful that many Africans would have been imported into America. For all the talk about rescuing Africans from heathenism, or cannibalism, enslavement was never altruistic. Instead, it was principally economic and, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, economic imperatives combined neatly with racial prejudice to create a climate where the enslavement of Africans was a perfectly logical decision. Winthrop Jordan has described the development of slavery in English America as an "un-thinking decision" in the sense that no one really thought about it very much at all—the English just imitated the systems that had already been put in place by the Spanish and the Portuguese.¹⁹ It is certainly true that the English lacked the long experience of slavery possessed by the Spanish and the Portuguese, and indeed the legal systems to manage a large body of enslaved workers. At least some of the first Africans imported into North America ended up as free landowners, suggesting that there were certain similarities between the status of black workers and white indentured servants. The labor of both sets of workers could be traded, and neither were free to choose whom they worked for. Gradually however, a number of statutes began to appear in Virginia and Maryland regulating gun ownership and ordaining punishments for crimes which marked black workers as different from their white counterparts whose servitude, providing they lived, would eventually come to an end. By c.1660 status was beginning to be synonymous with skin color.

As Africans began to be imported into the Americas in large numbers it became necessary to clearly define who was and, therefore, who was not a slave. The first comprehensive slave code, passed in Virginia in 1705, was a little vague on the

subject of race, establishing only that all non-Christian "servants" imported into the colony would be considered slaves "and as such be here bought and sold." Only later in the eighteenth century was it thought necessary to spell out that "Negroes" would "remain for ever hereafter absolute slaves, and shall follow the condition of the mother."²⁰ In the seventeenth century some argued that it was the Christian faith of whites which exempted them from slavery in the Americas, but this definition quickly slipped out of fashion from fears that Christianized blacks would be able to claim their freedom. By the mid-seventeenth century white skin alone was sufficient to prevent enslavement. Once this principle became established in Spanish and Portuguese territory, where missionaries expended considerable efforts converting the enslaved, it was the template followed by future colonial powers such as the English. With the status and label of "slave" came additional discrimination, including a loss of civil rights and restrictions on sexual relationships with those from a different status group. As slavery and black skin became synonymous the importance of skin and bodily differences grew.

Racial categories, which had remained somewhat flexible during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, now became more rigid. Before 1700 it was possible for at least some blacks in the Americas to earn their freedom perhaps by purchase or via manumission, or even to arrive as a free settler, and subsequently own property, vote, and take a full part in civil society. In the eighteenth century, however, as what one historian has described as a "cultural consensus" emerged, racial attitudes hardened, and even free blacks found that their lives were becoming more difficult.²¹ New slave codes in the colonies established that all non-whites were to be considered slaves, unless they were able to prove otherwise. Manumission continued to be relatively straightforward, either by deed or by will, even if it was not as widespread in North America as it was in Latin America, and the free black population continued to grow slowly despite the erosion of their civil rights. The changes in racial attitudes can be blamed on enlightenment thinking, and historians such as William Stanton firmly link the emergence of a coherent racial ideology with a new scientific approach to the world.²² Naturalists began to explore the globe in the eighteenth century, classifying an immense amount of flora and fauna, and naturally they turned their attention to the various "types" of people found around the world. In particular they tried to measure the physical differences between populations, including head size (which they took to indicate intelligence), angle of face (the upright "flat" faces of Europeans being thought typical of those with high intelligence), and size of breasts (the large breasts of African women were interpreted as a sign of their high fertility). Studies by Johann Frederick Blumenbach and Charles White confirmed to Europeans that the physical differences between themselves and non-whites were simply signs of their own superiority and the inferiority of others.²³ Some even began to question whether it was fair to classify Africans as fully human. Edward Long's widely read *History of Jamaica* (1774), for example, suggested that subhuman blacks were "represented by

all authors as the vilest of the human kind, to which they have little more pretension of resemblance than what arises from their exterior form." By stressing that black people should be "distinguished from the rest of mankind" Long arrived at a novel conclusion that blacks were "a different species of the same genus" situated somewhere between fully human (whites) and the great apes of Africa.²⁴ Of course, if black slaves in the Americas were less-than-human "others" it became even easier to justify their harsh treatment. Contemporary with this new scientific thinking was the growth of a philosophy that moved away from monogenesis towards polygenesis, theorizing that God had actually made several different creations. Adam and the biblical creation was the last, and hence most perfect, creation, and less-perfect pre-Adamites populated east Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, and the Americas.²⁵

In North America Samuel Stanhope Smith made a link between the physical differences between whites and blacks and their innate characters. He believed that the degraded, ignorant, and barbarous lives of native Africans were a direct cause of their various physical "deformities" whereas the enlightened, graceful, and refined lives of whites were reflected in their upright bearing. In Smith's view blacks could never elevate themselves to the same level as whites, though they could make progress, and he cited the physical improvements of creole slaves born in America as proof.²⁶ Another good example of these changing racial attitudes is in Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*, published in 1787. Jefferson was clearly an educated and intelligent man who considered himself qualified, as a slave owner himself, to describe the attributes of Africans in America. For Jefferson the physical and behavioral differences between black and white were "fixed in nature." Blacks were not only born with black skin, they also "seem to require less sleep" and were "more ardent after their female: but love seems with them to be more an eager desire, than a tender delicate mixture of sentiment and sensation." Yet despite these clearly racialized sentiments, Jefferson conducted a long-term sexual relationship with one of his own mulatto slaves, Sally Hemings, and fathered several children with her.²⁷ This is evidence not just of Jefferson's own hypocrisy but also of the complex nature of race relations in the Americas. White men were seemingly repelled and attracted in equal measure by non-white women, frequently decrying their supposedly sexualized natures while being unable to resist their allures, especially when compared with the uptight morality that was imposed on white women. The frequent sexual relationships between white men and non-white women, often coerced but not always so, resulted in a large mixed-race mulatto population. In Latin America this population was particularly important since the small numbers of white women meant that significant numbers of white men, particularly from the lower classes, took non-white women as wives.²⁸ There was no such demographic necessity in North America where interracial marriage was often illegal. Even in places like South Carolina, where it was not banned by statute, social conventions meant that few white men actually married non-white women, though some, like Jefferson, conducted long-term relationships.

THE "MIXED-RACE" PROBLEM

The mulatto population in the Americas posed an interesting dilemma: while they were mainly enslaved because their mothers were enslaved, their white fathers often bequeathed them a lighter skin tone. Were they as inferior as other slaves, or elevated intellectually and morally because of their white blood? Most whites believed mulattos the most intelligent type of slave, in effect crediting white blood with the ability to improve the mind and morals of an individual. When a mulatto woman had mixed-race children herself, the offspring was sometimes able to pass as white, and some notable escapees from slavery used their lighter skin to their advantage in this manner. One of the children of Sally Hemings and Thomas Jefferson (with three white grandparents) was white enough to be described as white by one of the enumerators of the federal census in 1830, reinforcing the importance of personal perception in the description of race. Some master-fathers freed their mixed-race offspring, perhaps believing that their improved capacities no longer suited them for enslavement, but also sometimes out of simple love and desire to help their own children. Certainly mulattos were a disproportionate part of the free black population in the Americas.

While there is some evidence that mulatto slaves received preferential treatment from masters and mistresses, perhaps because of their perceived greater intelligence, and were more likely to be given positions of responsibility in the household or the plantation than darker-skinned slaves, it is not necessarily the case that the rest of the enslaved population accorded mulattos any special status. John Blassingame has suggested that mulattos could be treated with suspicion by other slaves, believing them to be too close to the whites and therefore untrustworthy. Their lighter skin could therefore act against them, excluding them from profiting from covert acts of resistance, such as stealing extra food or clothing, which were common on the plantations. At the very least mulattos would have to earn the trust of other slaves over a lengthy period of time. According to Blassingame true status among slaves was accorded to religious leaders, those with medical and magical skills, and the keepers of folklore, and not to those who whites believed were of higher status such as domestic slaves and drivers.²⁹

The existence of mulattos led some states to at least attempt some definition of how white you needed to be in order to qualify as white. A 1705 Virginia statute specified that those with one black great-grandparent were black, even though they might be seven-eighths white, though this rule was redefined after the revolution to allow those with more than 75 percent white ancestry to claim whiteness.³⁰ Elsewhere in North America the definition of just how much black ancestry was required to make someone black was rarely debated. In many states by the early nineteenth century a single proven black ancestor was sufficient to make you black—the so-called "one-drop" rule—but of course, application of the one-drop

rule required a detailed knowledge of the ancestry of every individual, something that was entirely impractical for communities where internal mobility was high. An attempt in Virginia to introduce a form of "one-drop rule" in the 1850s floundered mainly because it was totally unenforceable. Therefore, despite what statute law may have stipulated in any particular location, determining the race of any individual person was often a matter of highly subjective perception. If someone claimed to be white, looked white, spoke like a white person, smelled like a white person (or perhaps more accurately didn't have the peculiar "stink" that whites believed was a defining characteristic of black people), acted like a white person, and, significantly, had the wealth of a white person, then they were often treated by others as white, regardless of their biological ancestry.³¹ This was true in Central and South America as well as in North America. Conversely, if someone was known to be of black ancestry they would be treated as black by being denied various rights granted to whites, regardless of their actual skin color. In a revealing example in mid-1830s Virginia a self-styled free black, William Hyden, was taken up as a runaway slave and lacking the correct documentation was put up for public auction when no one claimed him. His extremely light skin saved him from enslavement since no one would buy him at any price—he was "too white," and "so bright that he might easily escape from slavery." When he escaped from jail this particular free black was able to evade capture by successfully passing as a white man.³²

In 1835 South Carolina judge William Harper confirmed that perception was crucial in determining racial status and that skin color was only part of what made someone white: "We cannot say what admixture of negro blood will make a colored person. The condition of the individual is not to be determined solely by distinct and visible mixture of negro blood, but by reputation, by his reception into society, and his having commonly exercised the privileges of a white man . . . it may be well and proper, that a man of worth, honesty, industry, and respectability, should have the rank of a white man, while a vagabond of the same degree of blood should be confined to the inferior caste. It is hardly necessary to say that a slave cannot be a white man."³³ This last sentence helps to explain why no Virginian would buy William Hyden even though the state believed him to be a slave.

Free mulattos such as William Hyden occupied a confusing middle ground between whites and blacks. In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries the relatively small number of free mulattos were relatively easy for whites to ignore but after the American Revolution thousands of mulattos were freed, especially in the Upper South, and a prominent free black community was formed in Baltimore.³⁴ Free mulattos posed a dilemma for elite whites. On the one hand their non-white skin color resulted in a denial of a number of civil rights, including often the right to vote, testify against whites in court, or engage in certain occupations. Most were required to have white guardians who would act on their behalf. On the other hand, their free status elevated them significantly above the enslaved population. They could live where they liked, worship freely, marry whom they chose,

and raise their children without the risk of them being sold away to suit the financial needs of a master. Historians have debated how far mulattos identified themselves with other freemen, and how far with non-whites. In the Caribbean and Latin America, in places like Jamaica, Haiti, and Suriname, where the number of "free coloreds" could outnumber free whites and the enslaved constituted 80 percent of the population throughout the eighteenth century, there was often a conscious effort made by colonial administrations to make allies of elite non-whites, though these efforts often did not filter down to the poorer free blacks. Elsewhere, in Curaçao and Puerto Rico for instance, a more even division between slaves, free blacks, and whites meant such an alliance of convenience did not occur.³⁵ Nowhere in the Americas did free mulattos consistently and systematically identify themselves with free blacks or with slaves and it seems that mulattos' conception of their own social position depended on their own economic circumstances. Those who owned property, ran businesses, and owned slaves considered themselves on a par with white freemen and could be accepted by white society precisely because they behaved like white people.³⁶ They created parallel community institutions to those of whites, such as charitable and fraternal societies and, where permitted, schools. Eligibility for charitable assistance was measured partly by status—only free people were able to apply—but also crucially by color. Mulattos were eligible, whereas those considered "black" were not. The Brown Fellowship Society in Charleston (founded 1790) restricted membership to free mulattos and in response free blacks in Charleston founded their own charitable society, the Free Dark Men of Color (1791), thus helping to perpetuate this unusual example of discrimination among non-whites.³⁷

THE PROBLEM OF POOR WHITES

Race, as a category of difference in the Americas, did not exist in a vacuum, rather it interacted with class and gender to create very complex and nuanced status gradations within societies. "Whiteness" was of course just as much a social construct as "blackness" but being white was not an automatic passport to wealth and status. Throughout the Americas there were large numbers of whites who lacked property and money, and who were an obvious embarrassment to those who believed that white skin made an individual inherently better than those without it. White skin was meant to endow those fortunate enough to possess it with greater intelligence, capacity for self-improvement, and entrepreneurial spirit. Yet in every slaveholding society there were whites who worked in menial jobs, who lived from hand to mouth, raising families in cramped and squalid housing, who

begged on the streets, and who relied on state handouts. They were hardly shining examples of the "master race." Yet even within this large class of non-slaveholding whites there were gradations. Some were perfectly respectable shopkeepers, farmers, and artisans to whom the expense and burden of owning slaves outweighed any potential benefit. It was not the lack of slaves that made you "poor," or indeed a general lack of wealth either. The widow who worked all hours of the day to support her children could be represented as a victim of circumstances, whose thrifty ways were evidence of her true character. Ultimately, therefore, "poor white" was a sociological status rather than a simple economic one. A "poor white" was one who did not behave as white people should, either by fraternizing with non-whites, or failing to improve and elevate themselves as white people were supposed to and as the status of "white" demanded.

Poor whites who interacted with non-whites posed a particular threat to the racial hierarchies of slave societies. Whites who were prepared to deal with non-whites on an almost equal basis, by frequenting the same bars, attending the same churches, trading, and even working alongside them, seemed to be suggesting that race did nothing to differentiate between peoples. Friendships could traverse racial boundaries, and there was more than one white person who assisted in the escape of a slave by writing a pass, or providing a safe haven. Plantation slaves were perfectly well aware of the existence of poor whites throughout the South, and often viewed them as idle and worthless individuals whose presence confirmed to them that whiteness per se did not, contrary to slaveholders' claims, convey any inherent privileges.³⁸

From the mid-1830s onwards elite whites in the American South made stronger efforts to draw a clear distinction between whites and blacks. Stung by abolitionists, southerners marshaled the pro-slavery defense which, among other things, argued strongly that blacks were inherently inferior to whites. In an 1833 pamphlet Richard Colfax argued that the shape of black people's heads was sufficient proof of their intellectual weakness, and hence "his want of capability to receive a complicated education renders it improper and impolitic, that he should be allowed the privileges of citizenship in an enlightened country."³⁹ A few years later Alabama physician Josiah Nott went further, claiming "that the human race is descended from several or many original pairs . . . there is not at present a single unmixed race on the face of the earth."⁴⁰ Nott repeated his argument, that whites and blacks were essentially different species, in a number of influential publications. Although this point had been made by Edward Long seventy years previously, Nott attempted to legitimize his conclusions that blacks were inherently inferior by pseudo-science: "The brain of the Negro . . . is, according to the positive measurements, smaller than the Caucasian by a full tenth; and this deficiency exists particularly in the anterior portion of the brain, which is known to be the seat of the higher faculties."⁴¹ Interbreeding produced mulattos who he believed were "certainly more intelligent than the Negro, [but] less so than the white," however Nott

claimed that he had never seen a southern mulatto "so fair that I could not instantaneously trace the Negro type in complexion and feature." After all, he commented tellingly, "it is a hard matter to wash out blood."⁴²

Elsewhere in the Americas the racial defense of slavery was often not so well articulated, but we should be careful not to infer from this that racial discrimination in the Caribbean and Latin America was less than in North America. While mulattos could sometimes rise to a semi-elite status they were still clearly not of "true" Spanish or Portuguese blood, and were denied important positions in two key institutions: the Church and the army. Furthermore, the systems of slavery enforced in Brazil, Suriname, and Haiti were among the most brutal ever devised, and many masters continued to make the economic calculation that it was easier to work their slaves to death, and then purchase more than to ease workloads and aim to grow the slave population by natural increase. Slavery in Latin America and the Caribbean was still a harsh system of racialized labor exploitation.⁴³

By the 1850s in the United States it was no longer sufficient to state that whites were free while blacks were not.⁴⁴ There were too many whites enduring living conditions that were worse than those of many slaves, while there were prosperous free blacks who clearly belied the myth of innate racial superiority. The differences between whites and blacks needed to be redefined, and it was to this end that several legal changes were implemented in the American South. Poor whites who traded with slaves were punished more harshly, and where legal sanctions did not work, extra-legal vigilante actions, such as burning down the store of someone who traded stolen goods in return for alcohol, were sometimes used.⁴⁵ Those in charge of evangelical churches that were popular amongst non-whites first constructed balconies to physically separate white and black worshipers, then set aside certain times for non-whites to hold their services, and finally built entirely separate buildings for white and non-white congregations.⁴⁶ Elite whites also went to increased lengths to persuade poor whites not to overlook racial differences, and emphasized the racial privileges that white people had. Only white people, for instance, had access to publicly funded systems of education (which expanded rapidly in the South during the 1850s), and they also received a disproportionate share of public welfare and a virtual monopoly of private charity.⁴⁷

Despite these changes, racial barriers continued to have something of a plastic quality in slave societies. Strictly policing racial boundaries required a considerable investment of time, effort, and money. Interaction which occurred behind closed doors, and not overtly, was often ignored as posing little threat to the social order. Furthermore, the existence of the legal institution of slavery provided all whites with a comfort blanket of superiority, even if the reality was quite different. No matter how miserable their own lives, poor whites could always tell themselves that at least they were free. Racial barriers became far more important to poor whites once slavery no longer existed to mark a clear distinction between black and white. Several million newly freed people after 1865 in the United States found that their

new status was sometimes freedom in name only, and that lynching became more common as a terror tactic to instill fear into the black population.⁴⁸

RACE AND NATIVE AMERICANS

Although the bulk of the existing historiography on race in the Americas concentrates on slavery and especially white attitudes towards Africans and African-Americans and black responses to enslavement, it should not be forgotten that there was a third distinct racial group in the Americas—indigenous people. Interaction between imported Africans, European migrants, and indigenous tribes occurred throughout the Americas, but it was not uniform. While in nearly all areas Native American populations declined rapidly due to disease, and were supplanted by Africans and Europeans, Native Americans did not treat all these newcomers the same. In Latin America, where Native Americans were enslaved in significant numbers, Indians often found common cause with the enslaved Africans who shared their marginal status, and the large maroon communities created in Brazil, Colombia, and Suriname were populated by fugitive slaves from both racial groups. Native tribes in Amazonia which had not been enslaved were also generally willing to assist fugitive slaves, by providing either shelter or food.⁴⁹ In general this sort of collusion amongst non-whites did not occur in North America. Native Americans were not widely enslaved in North America, except in early South Carolina, and were as likely to kill runaway slaves who entered their territory as help them. Part of the reason for the abandonment of Native American slavery in South Carolina was the fear that enslaved Indians might form common cause with imported African slaves and show them secret paths leading to safe havens. In order to limit the interaction between Indians and African slaves eighteenth-century whites encouraged the "natural Dislike and Antipathy" that already seemed to exist between their African slaves and Native American tribes. Certainly in North Carolina it was believed that far more slaves would flee into the woods and swamps "were they not so much afraid of the Indians, who have such a natural aversion to the Blacks, that they commonly shoot them when ever they find them in the Woods or solitary parts of the country." South Carolina resident George Milligan Johnston commented matter-of-factly that "it can never be in our Interest to extirpate them [Native Americans], or to force them from their lands; their Ground would soon be taken up by runaway Negroes from our settlements, whose Numbers would daily increase, and quickly become more formidable Enemies than Indians can ever be, as they speak our Language, and would never be at a Loss for Intelligence."⁵⁰ Using Indians as slave catchers was deemed a particularly effective way to "strike terrour" into the

slave population since first Native Americans were actually very good at finding runaway slaves who had secreted themselves in swamps and woods, and secondly they were often given license to kill and mutilate the bodies of those they found.⁵¹ Most Native Americans believed that as free sovereign peoples they were the equals of whites, and for much of the eighteenth century powerful tribes were treated as such by colonial governments who went to considerable lengths to avoid conflicts. Moreover, Native Americans were perfectly aware of the degraded status of black people in white eyes, and so it is not surprising that some tribes such as the Cherokee, Choctaw, and Chickasaw also accepted the principle of racial slavery and were willing to purchase and trade in black slaves just as whites did. Indeed, owning slaves was one way that tribes tried to demonstrate how "white" they were, though ultimately this did not prevent their forced migration west during the 1830s.⁵²

A singular example in North America of cooperation between Native Americans and imported Africans occurred in Florida. Florida had a long history of being a safe haven for runaway slaves from South Carolina and Georgia and, for a time, it was official Spanish policy to welcome runaways since it strengthened the underpopulated colony while weakening its northern neighbors. The effective disintegration of Spanish power in Florida in the early nineteenth century allowed an alliance to grow between the large Seminole tribe in northern Florida and escaped slaves from United States territory. The United States army fought three wars with the Seminoles and their black allies between 1815 and 1858, never entirely defeating them. Although often termed "black Seminoles" the relationship between the Seminoles and their black recruits was complex. Most blacks lived in their own villages, under their own government, and paid a form of tribute to Seminole chiefs in return for nominal protection. The creole heritage of most blacks, which meant that most spoke at least some English, and perhaps shared a common belief system based loosely on Christianity, set them apart from the Seminoles who generally remained unacculturated. Escaped slaves sometimes acted as translators and intermediaries between Seminole chiefs and white authorities, but they also took the lead in organizing military matters, knowing that military defeat would result in re-enslavement. The "black Seminoles" were regarded by American commanders as the more dangerous and effective enemy, inflicting several defeats on American troops.⁵³

FUTURE RESEARCH

Our understanding of the relationships between Native Americans and African Americans remains somewhat limited. Apart from the Seminoles there is surprisingly little scholarly work on Native American racial thought, and even less on

African-American racial attitudes towards Indians. Far more attention needs to be paid to the variations caused by geography and chronology. How were Native American racial attitudes altered by removal in the 1830s, for instance? Did they finally begin to appreciate that enslaved blacks might be useful allies against white aggression, or did they continue to cling to the hope that if they became sufficiently Americanized they might be treated as "white"? An additional area where there is considerable scope for new and innovative research is on "whiteness" more generally in the Americas. David Roediger published his groundbreaking *The Wages of Whiteness* back in 1991 but only part of that book was on the colonial and antebellum eras, and very little of it dealt with race consciousness and race making in slave societies. What did it really mean to be white in societies based on racial slavery? This question demands serious thought: was "whiteness" principally a negative construct, based on *not* having the skin tone, speech patterns, smell, or behavior of non-whites? Or was being "white" mainly about being "superior" to those considered "inferior"? How important was class and/or gender in influencing how whites thought about themselves? Research in the past decade, my own included, has tended to suggest that whiteness was not as important as one might think, especially in the colonial and early national eras. Examples exist of southern courts acquitting black men accused of raping poor white women; of whites working alongside free blacks or hired slaves without complaint; of interracial couples being tolerated by the community; and of common cause being made by the poor regardless of race against the white elite.⁵⁴ But was this the case throughout the history of slavery in the Americas? We know far more now about the importance of race in slave societies in the Americas that we did a generation ago, yet we still could learn far more about how contemporaries understood whiteness in different parts of the South, away from the older East Coast states, as well as elsewhere in the Americas, and how that understanding developed and evolved over time. Moreover there is plenty of serious research that needs to be done to delve deeper into how all types of Americans conceived of other racial groups, as well as how they saw themselves. Indeed is it worth considering whether the term "race" is still helpful. Does our use of the concept help to reinscribe "race" into analysis? If so, are we complicit in perpetuating what is, after all, a social construction?⁵⁵ I hope that a new generation of young scholars will continue to explore some of these themes and the key importance of race in slavery.

NOTES

1. Barbara J. Fields, "Ideology and Race in American History," in J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson (eds.), *Region, Race and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward* (New York, 1982), 143–77; and Barbara J. Fields, "Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America," *New Left Review*, 181 (May–June 1990): 95–118.

2. See for example Roxann Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Culture* (Philadelphia, 2000).
3. Mark Smith, *How Race is Made* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2006).
4. "Journal of a Voyage up the Gambia," printed in Francis Moore, *Travels into the Inland Parts of Africa* (London, 1738), 243.
5. Alden T. Vaughan and Virginia Mason Vaughan, "Before Othello: Elizabethan Representations of Sub-Saharan Africans," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 54 (1) (January 1997): 19–44; Denis Hay, *Europe: The Emergence of an Idea* (Edinburgh, 1957); Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Man: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance* (Ithaca, NY, 1989).
6. See R. H. Tawney, "The Rise of the Gentry, 1558–1640," *Economic History Review*, 11 (1) (1941): 1–38; and J. H. Hexter, "The English Aristocracy, its Crises, and the English Revolution, 1558–1660," *Journal of British Studies*, 8 (1) (November 1968): 22–78. On the English elite's reaction to the mobility of the lower orders, see Paul Slack, "Vagrants and Vagrancy in England, 1598–1664," *English Historical Review*, 27 (1974): 360–79.
7. See the examples cited in Vaughan and Vaughan, "Before Othello," 24.
8. James H. Sweet, "The Iberian Roots of American Racist Thought," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 54 (1) (January 1997): 146.
9. Winthrop Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes towards the Negro 1550–1812* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1968).
10. Benjamin Braude, "The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 54 (January 1997): 103–42.
11. John Ogilby, *Africa, being an Accurate Description of the Regions* (London, 1670), 318; Richard Ligon, *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbadoes* (London, 1657), 12.
12. Sweet, "The Iberian Roots of American Racist Thought."
13. Historians have hotly debated the impact of the slave trade on Africa, with some such as J. D. Fage, in *A History of Africa* (London, 1978), suggesting that the money injected into African economies balanced the population loss. Others such as Nathan Nunn, "The Long-Term Effects of Africa's Slave Trades," *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 123 (1) (February 2008): 139–76, argue that a negative relationship exists between societies heavily involved in the slave trade and subsequent economic growth. For the contours of the debate, see Joseph E. Inikori, "Ideology versus the Tyranny of Paradigm: Historians and the Impact of the Atlantic Slave Trade on African Societies," *African Economic History*, 22 (1994): 37–58.
14. Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1944). Oscar and Mary F. Handlin, "Origins of the Southern Labor System," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 7 (2) (April 1950): 199–222.
15. Carl N. Degler, "Slavery and the Genesis of American Race Prejudice," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 2 (1) (October 1959): 49–66; Jordan, *White over Black*; Alden T. Vaughan "Blacks in Virginia: A Note on the First Decade," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 29 (3) (July 1972): 469–78.
16. Russell Menard, "From Servants to Slaves: The Transformation of the Chesapeake Labor System," *Southern Studies*, 16 (1971): 355–90; Edmund Morgan, *American Slavery American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York, 1975); T. H. Breen and Stephen Innes, "Myne Owne Ground": *Race and Freedom on Virginia's Eastern Shore, 1640–1676* (New York, 1980).

17. Karen Ordahl Kupperman, "Presentment of Civility: English Reading of American Self-Presentation in the Early Years of Colonization," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 54 (1) (January 1997): 193–228; Joyce E. Chpalin, "Natural Philosophy and an Early Racial Idiom in North America: Comparing English and Indian Bodies," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 54 (1) (January 1997): 229–52. The only colony to enslave significant numbers of Indians was South Carolina, though most were shipped to the West Indies rather than being used in situ. After the Yamasee war in the early eighteenth century, South Carolinians turned away from enslaving Indians fearing that they might ally themselves with the French and the Spanish. See Alan Gallay, *The Indian Slave Trade: The Rise of the English Empire in the American South, 1670–1717* (New Haven, 2002), 345–9.
18. On the impact of the 1622 massacre see Alden T. Vaughan, "Expulsion of the Salvages': English Policy and the Virginia Massacre of 1622," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 35 (1) (January 1978): 57–84; on changing white attitudes more generally, see Alden T. Vaughan, "From White Man to Redskin: Changing Anglo-American Perceptions of the American Indian," *American Historical Review*, 87 (4) (October 1982): 917–53. Also relevant are Gary B. Nash, "The Image of the Indian in the Southern Colonial Mind," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 29 (2) (April 1972): 198–230; G. E. Thomas, "Puritans, Indians, and the Concept of Race," *New England Quarterly*, 48 (1) (March 1975): 3–27; William S. Simmons, "Cultural Bias in the New England Puritans' Perception of Indians," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 38 (1) (January 1981): 56–72.
19. Winthrop Jordan, *The White Man's Burden: Historical Origins of Racism in the United States* (New York, 1974), 26–54.
20. An act concerning servants and slaves (1705), *A Collection of all the Acts of Assembly, now in Force, in the Colony of Virginia* (Williamsburg, Va., 1733), 219. An act for the better ordering and governing Negroes (1740), *Acts Passed by the General Assembly of South-Carolina, May 10, 1740–July 10, 1742* (Charleston, SC, 1742), 3. The South Carolina act was later adopted almost verbatim by Georgia, see An act for ordering and governing slaves (1770), Robert and George Watkins (comp.), *A Digest of the Laws of the State of Georgia* (Philadelphia, 1800), 163.
21. Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race*, 240.
22. William Stanton, *The Leopard's Spots: Scientific Attitudes toward Race in America, 1815–59* (Chicago, 1960).
23. Johann Frederick Blumenbach, *De generis humani varietate nativa* (On the Natural Varieties of Mankind) (Göttingen, 1776); Charles White, *An Account of the Regular Gradation in Man, and in Different Animals and Vegetables* (London, 1799). Londa Schiebinger, "The Anatomy of Difference: Race and Sex in Eighteenth-Century Science," *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 23 (4) (1990): 387–405.
24. Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica. Or, General Survey of the Antient and Modern State of that Island: With Reflections on its Situation, Settlements, Inhabitants* (London, 1774), ii. 353–4, 356–78.
25. See Audrey Smedley, *Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a Worldview* (Boulder, Colo., 1993); Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (ed.), *Race and the Enlightenment: A Reader* (Cambridge, Mass., 1997); and Bruce Dain, *A Hideous Monster of the Mind: American Race Theory in the Early Republic* (Cambridge, Mass., 2002).

26. Samuel Stanhope Smith, *Essay on the Causes of the Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species* (Philadelphia, 1787).
27. For an interesting statistics-based analysis that proves beyond a reasonable doubt that Jefferson was the father of Hemings's children, see Fraser D. Neiman, "Coincidence or Causal Connection? The Relationship between Thomas Jefferson's Visits to Monticello and Sally Hemings's Conceptions," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 57 (1) (January 2000): 198–210.
28. See Verena Martinez-Alier, *Marriage, Class and Colour in Nineteenth-Century Cuba* (Ann Arbor, 1974).
29. John W. Blassingame, "Status and Social Structure in the Slave Community: Evidence from New Sources," in Harry P. Owens (ed.), *Perspectives and Irony in American Slavery* (Jackson, Mo., 1976), 137–51.
30. Joshua D. Rothman, *Notorious in the Neighborhood: Sex and Families across the Color Line in Virginia, 1787–1861* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2003), 204–5.
31. On the importance of non-visual senses to racial identification, see Smith, *How Race is Made*.
32. Rothman, *Notorious in the Neighborhood*, 216–17.
33. Cited in Joel Williamson, *New People: Miscegenation and Mulattos in the United States* (Baton Rouge, La., 1995), 18.
34. Christopher Phillips, *Freedom's Port: The African American Community of Baltimore, 1790–1860* (Urbana, Ill., 1997); for a similar community further south, see Whittington B. Johnson, *Black Savannah, 1788–1864* (Fayetteville, Ark., 1999).
35. See for example Gad Heuman, *Between Black and White: Race, Politics and the Free Coloureds in Jamaica, 1792–1865* (Westport, Conn., 1981); and Arnold A. Sio, "Marginality and Free Colored Identity in Caribbean Slave Society," *Slavery and Abolition*, 8 (1) (September 1987): 166–82.
36. See Michael P. Johnson and James L. Roark, *Black Masters: A Free Family of Color in the Old South* (New York, 1984).
37. Ibid. 212–22; Michael P. Johnson and James L. Roark, "'A Middle Ground': Free Mulattos and the Friendly Moral Society of Antebellum Charleston," *Southern Studies*, 21 (3) (Fall 1983): 246–65.
38. See Eugene D. Genovese, "'Rather be a Nigger than a Poor White Man': Slave Perceptions of Southern Yeomen and Poor Whites," in Hans L. Trefousse (ed.), *Toward a New View of America: Essays in Honor of Arthur C. Cole* (New York, 1977), 79–96.
39. Richard H. Colfax, *Evidence against the Views of the Abolitionists, Consisting of Physical and Moral Proofs, of the Natural Inferiority of the Negroes* (New York, 1833), 25v.
40. Josiah C. Nott, *Two Lectures on the Natural History of the Caucasian and Negro Races* (Mobile, Fla., 1844), 28.
41. Ibid. 35.
42. J. C. Nott and G. R. Gliddon, *Types of Mankind: or, Ethnological Researches Based upon the Ancient Monuments, Paintings, Sculptures, and Crania of Races, and upon their Natural, Geographical, Philological and Biblical History* (Philadelphia, 1854), 399–400.
43. Tannenbaum was the first to suggest that slavery was not as harsh in Latin America as in the British colonies, but the work of later historians has tended to disprove his assertions. See Frank Tannenbaum, *Slave and Citizen: The Negro in the Americas* (New York, 1946); Rolando Mellafe, *Negro Slavery in Latin America*, trans. J. w. S. Judge (Berkeley, 1975); Leslie B. Rout, Jr., *The African Experience in Spanish America: 1502 to the*

- Present Day* (New York, 1976); Stuart B. Schwartz, *Sugar Plantations in the Formation of Brazilian Society: Bahia, 1550–1835*. (New York, 1985).
44. For examples of confusions over determining the race of individuals, see Walter Johnson, "The Slave Trader, the White Slave, and the Politics of Racial Determination in the 1850s," *Journal of American History*, 87 (1) (June 2000): 13–38.
 45. For more on the interaction between poor whites and slaves, see Timothy James Lockley, *Lines in the Sand: Race and Class in Lowcountry Georgia, 1750–1860* (Athens, Ga., 2001) and Jeff Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Countryside* (Baton Rouge, La., 2006).
 46. See Christopher H. Owen, "By Design: The Social Meaning of Methodist Church Architecture in Nineteenth Century Georgia," *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 75 (1991): 221–53.
 47. Timothy James Lockley, *Welfare and Charity in the Antebellum South* (Gainesville, Fla., 2007).
 48. On the explosion of postwar violence against blacks see W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880–1930* (Urbana, Ill., 1993); W. Fitzhugh Brundage (ed.), *Under Sentence of Death: Lynching in the South* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1997). See also James H. Madison, *A Lynching in the Heartland: Race and Memory in America* (New York, 2001); and Martha Hodes, *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the 19th-Century South* (New Haven, 1997).
 49. See R. K. Kent, "Palmares: An African State in Brazil," Roger Bastide, "The Other Quilombos," Stuart B. Schwartz, "The Mocambo: Slave Resistance in Colonial Bahia," all in Richard Price (ed.), *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas* (2nd edn. Baltimore, 1979).
 50. John Brickell, *The Natural History of North Carolina* (Dublin, 1737), 263. George Milligen Johnston, *A Short Description of the Province of South Carolina* (London, 1770), 26. See also William S. Willis, "Divide and Rule: Red, White and Black in the Southeast," *Journal of Negro History*, 48 (3) (July 1963): 157–76v; James H. Merrell, "The Racial Education of the Catawba Indians," *Journal of Southern History*, 50 (3) (August 1984): 363–84; Gally, *The Indian Slave Trade*.
 51. South Carolina Commons House of Assembly Journal, 14 January 1766. UK National Archives, CO 5/488, 2–4.
 52. The best discussion of slave owning amongst Native Americans is Theda Perdue, *Slavery and the Evolution of Cherokee Society, 1540–1866* (Knoxville, Tenn., 1979).
 53. On the Florida maroons and their interaction with the Seminoles see Kenneth W. Porter, *The Black Seminoles: History of a Freedom-Seeking People* (Gainesville, Fla., 1996) and Kevin Mulroy, *Freedom on the Border: The Seminole Maroons in Florida, the Indian Territory, Coahuila and Texas* (Lubbock, Tex., 1993).
 54. Diane Miller Sommerville, "The Rape Myth in the Old South Reconsidered," *Journal of Southern History*, 61 (1995): 481–518; Lockley, *Lines in the Sand*; Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins*.
 55. Thomas C. Holt, "Marking: Race, Race-Making, and the Writing of History," *American Historical Review*, 100 (1) (February 1995): 1–20.

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CHAPTER 16

CLASS AND
SLAVERY

JONATHAN DANIEL WELLS

CLASS IN SLAVEHOLDING SOCIETIES

Class has often been a troubling and difficult subject for Americans, and hardly less so for scholars. At least since the Enlightenment, the notion that individual will and strength of character are more important influences on social mobility than the particular class into which one is born has become embedded in Western culture. From well-worn tropes such as the rugged frontier, the hard-working family farmer, the industrious businessman, and the toiling laborer, the notion that the individual determines his or her economic destiny through sheer will and diligence, notions powerful in Western society and especially in American culture, have often blunted class consciousness. The belief that all men are born with equal opportunities to make their way in life, that individual initiative can overcome any obstacle, that hard work and ambition override whatever circumstances into which one enters life, has veined American history. These prevailing cultural constructs have not only suppressed the emergence of class consciousness among white Americans but have surely quelled the potential for African-Americans and economically disadvantaged whites to join together in any shared class identification, especially in slaveholding societies.

Scholars have not infrequently struggled with the notion—and applicability—of class in history, debating whether to consider class as an objective element of the