

Native American societies as cultural assets from which we could continue to learn. At present, none of our textbooks hints at this possibility; even the more enlightened ones merely champion better treatment for Indians and stop short of suggesting that our society might still benefit from Indian ideas.

Even if no Natives remained among us, however, it would still be important for us to understand the alternatives foregone, to remember the wars, and to learn the unvarnished truths about white-Indian relations. Indian history is the antidote to the pious ethnocentrism of American exceptionalism, the notion that European Americans are God's chosen people. Indian history reveals that the United States and its predecessor British colonies have wrought great harm in the world. We must not forget this—not to wallow in our wrongdoing, but to understand and to learn, that we might not wreak harm again. We must temper our national pride with critical self-knowledge, suggests Christopher Vecsey: "The study of our contact with Indians, the envisioning of our dark American selves, can instill such a strengthening doubt."¹²² History through red eyes offers our children a deeper understanding than comes from encountering the past as a story of inevitable triumph by the good guys.

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"Gone with the Wind"

The Invisibility of Racism in American History Textbooks

History, despite its wrenching pain,
Cannot be unlived, and if faced
With courage, need not be lived again.

—Maya Angelou¹

The black-white rift stands at the very center of American history. It is the great challenge to which all our deepest aspirations to freedom must rise. If we forget that—if we forget the great stain of slavery that stands at the heart of our country, our history, our experiment—we forget who we are, and we make the great rift deeper and wider.

—Ken Burns²

We have got to the place where we cannot use our experiences during and after the Civil War for the uplift and enlightenment of mankind.

—W. E. B. Du Bois³

More Americans have learned the story of the South during the years of the Civil War and Reconstruction from Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* than from all of the learned volumes on this period.

—Warren Beck and Myles Clowers⁴

WHEN WAS THE COUNTRY we now know as the United States first settled? If we forget the lesson of the last chapter for the moment—that Native Americans settled—the best answer might be 1526. In the summer of that year, five hundred Spaniards and one hundred black slaves founded a town perhaps near the mouth of the Pee Dee River in present-day South Carolina. Disease and disputes with nearby Indians caused many deaths in the early months of the settlement. In November the slaves rebelled, killed some of their masters, and escaped to the Indians. By then only 150 Spaniards survived; they retreated to Haiti. The ex-slaves remained behind and probably merged with nearby Indian nations.⁵

This is cocktail-party trivia, I suppose. American history textbooks cannot be faulted for not mentioning that the first non-Native settlers in the United States were black. Educationally, however, the incident has its uses. It shows that Africans (is it too early to call them African Americans?) rebelled against slavery from the first. It points to the important subject of three-way race relations—Indian-African-European—which most textbooks completely omit. It teaches that slavery cannot readily survive without secure borders. And, symbolically, it illustrates that African Americans, and the attendant subject of black-white race relations, were part of American history from the first European attempts to settle.

Perhaps the most pervasive theme in our history is the domination of black America by white America. Race is the sharpest and deepest division in American life. Issues of black-white relations propelled the Whig Party to collapse, prompted the formation of the Republican Party, and

caused the Democratic Party to label itself the “white man’s party” for almost a century. The second time Congress ever overrode a presidential veto was for the 1866 Civil Rights Act, passed by Republicans over the wishes of Andrew Johnson. Senators mounted the longest filibuster in U.S. history, more than 534 hours, to oppose the 1964 Civil Rights bill. Thomas Byrne Edsall has shown how race prompted the sweeping political realignment of 1964–72, in which the white South went from a Democratic bastion to a Republican stronghold.⁶ Race still affects politics, as evidenced by the notorious Willie Horton commercial used by George Bush in the 1988 presidential campaign and the more recent candidacies of the Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke. Race riots continue to shake urban centers from Miami to Los Angeles.

Almost no genre of our popular culture goes untouched by race. From the 1850s through the 1930s, except during the Civil War and Reconstruction, minstrel shows, which derived in a perverse way from plantation slavery, were the dominant form of popular entertainment in America. During most of that period *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was our longest-running play, mounted in thousands of productions. America’s first epic motion picture, *Birth of a Nation*; first talkie, *The Jazz Singer*; and biggest blockbuster novel ever, *Gone with the Wind*, were substantially about race relations. The most popular radio show of all time was “Amos ’n’ Andy,” two white men posing as humorously incompetent African Americans.⁷ The most popular television miniseries ever was “Roots,” which changed our culture by setting off an explosion of interest in genealogy and ethnic background. In music, race relations provide the underlying thematic material for many of our spirituals, blues numbers, reggae songs, and rap pieces.

The struggle over racial slavery may be the predominant theme in American history. Until the end of the nineteenth century, cotton—planted, cultivated, harvested, and ginned by slaves—was by far our most important export.⁸ Our graceful antebellum homes, in the North as well as in the South, were built largely by slaves or from profits derived from the slave and cotton trades. Black-white relations became the central issue in the Civil War, which killed almost as many Americans as died in all our other wars combined. Black-white relations was the principal focus of Reconstruction after the Civil War; America’s failure to allow African Americans equal rights led eventually to the struggle for civil rights a century later.

The subject also pops up where we least suspect it—at the Alamo, throughout the Seminole Wars, even in the expulsion of the Mormons from Missouri.⁹ Studs Terkel is right: race *is* our “American obsession.”¹⁰ Since those first Africans and Spaniards landed on the Carolina shore in

1526, our society has repeatedly been torn apart and sometimes bound together by this issue of black-white relations.

Over the years white America has told itself varying stories about the enslavement of blacks. In each of the last two centuries America's most popular novel was set in slavery—*Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe and *Gone with the Wind* by Margaret Mitchell. The two books tell very different stories: *Uncle Tom's Cabin* presents slavery as an evil to be opposed, while *Gone with the Wind* suggests that slavery was an ideal social structure whose passing is to be lamented. Until the civil rights movement, American history textbooks in this century pretty much agreed with Mitchell. In 1959 my high school textbook presented slavery as not such a bad thing. If bondage was a burden for African Americans, well, slaves were a burden on Ole Massa and Ole Miss, too. Besides, slaves were reasonably happy and well fed. Such arguments constitute the "magnolia myth," according to which slavery was a social structure of harmony and grace that did no real harm to anyone, white or black. A famous 1950 textbook by Samuel Eliot Morison and Henry Steele Commager actually said, "As for Sambo, whose wrongs moved the abolitionists to wrath and tears, there is some reason to believe that he suffered less than any other class in the South from its 'peculiar institution.'" ¹¹ "Peculiar institution" meant slavery, of course, and Morison and Commager here provided a picture of it that came straight from *Gone with the Wind*.

This is not what textbooks say today. Since the civil rights movement, textbooks have returned part of the way toward Stowe's devastating indictment of the institution. The discussion in *American History* begins with a passage that describes the living conditions of slaves in positive terms: "They were usually given adequate food, clothing, and shelter." But the author immediately goes on to point out, "Slaves had absolutely no rights. It was not simply that they could not vote or own property. Their owners had complete control over their lives." He concludes, "Slavery was almost literally inhuman." *American Adventures* tells us, "Slavery led to despair, and despair sometimes led black people to take their own lives. Or in some cases it led them to revolt against white slaveholders." *Life and Liberty* takes a flatter view: "Historians do not agree on how severely slaves were treated"; the book goes on to note that whipping was common in some places, unheard of on other plantations. *Life and Liberty* ends its section on slave life, however, by quoting the titles of spirituals—"All My Trials, Lord, Soon Be Over"—and by citing the inhumane details of slave laws. No one could read any of these three books and think well of slavery. Indeed, ten of the twelve books I studied portray slavery as intolerable to the slave. ¹²

Today's textbooks also show how slavery increasingly dominated our political life in the first half of the nineteenth century. They tell that the cotton gin made slavery more profitable. ¹³ They tell how in the 1830s Southern states and the federal government pushed the Indians out of vast stretches of Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia, and slavery expanded. And they tell that in the decades between 1830 and 1860, slavery's ideological demands grew shriller, more overtly racist. No longer was it enough for planters and slave traders to apologize for slavery as a necessary evil. Now slavery came to be seen "of positive value to the slaves themselves," in the words of *Triumph of the American Nation*. This ideological extremism was matched by harsher new laws and customs. "Talk of freeing the slaves became more and more dangerous in the South," in the words of *The United States—A History of the Republic*. Merely to receive literature advocating abolition became a felony in some slaveholding states. Southern states passed new ordinances interfering with the rights of masters to free their slaves. The legal position of already free African Americans became ever more precarious, even in the North, as white Southerners prevailed on the federal government to make it harder to restrict slavery anywhere in the nation. ¹⁴

Meanwhile, many Northern whites, as well as some who lived below the Mason-Dixon line, grew increasingly unhappy, disgusted that their nation had lost its idealism. ¹⁵ The debate over slavery loomed ever larger, touching every subject. In 1848 Thomas Hart Benton, a senator from Missouri, likened the ubiquity of the issue to a biblical plague: "You could not look upon the table but there were frogs. You could not sit down at the banquet table but there were frogs. You could not go to the bridal couch and lift the sheets but there were frogs. We can see nothing, touch nothing, have no measures proposed, without having this pestilence thrust before us." ¹⁶

History textbooks now admit that slavery was the primary cause of the Civil War. In the words of *The United States—A History of the Republic*, "At the center of the conflict was slavery, the issue that would not go away." Before the civil rights movement, many textbooks held that almost anything else—differences over tariffs and internal improvements, blundering politicians, the conflict between the agrarian South and the industrial North—caused the war. This was a form of Southern apologetics. ¹⁷ Among the twelve textbooks I reviewed, only *Triumph of the American Nation*, a book that originated in the 1950s, still holds such a position.

Why do textbooks now handle slavery with depth and understanding? Before the 1960s publishers had been in thrall to the white South. In the 1920s Florida and other Southern states passed laws requiring "Se-

curing a Correct History of the U.S., Including a True and Correct History of the Confederacy.”¹⁸ Textbooks were even required to call the Civil War “the War between the States,” as if no single nation had existed which the South had rent apart. In the fifteen years between 1955 and 1970, however, the civil rights movement destroyed segregation as a formal system in America. The movement did not succeed in transforming American race relations, but it did help African Americans win more power on the local level and prompted whites to abandon segregation. Today many school boards, curricular committees, and high school history departments include African Americans or white Americans who have cast off the ideology of white supremacy. Therefore contemporary textbooks can devote more space to the topic of slavery and can use that space to give a more accurate portrayal.¹⁹

Americans seem perpetually startled at slavery. Children are shocked to learn that George Washington and Thomas Jefferson owned slaves. Interpreters at Colonial Williamsburg say that many visitors are surprised to learn that slavery existed there—in the heart of plantation Virginia! Very few adults today realize that our society has been slave much longer than it has been free. Even fewer know that slavery was important in the North, too, until after the Revolutionary War. The first colony to legalize slavery was not Virginia but Massachusetts. In 1720, of New York City’s population of seven thousand, 1,600 were African Americans, most of them slaves. Wall Street was the marketplace where owners could hire out their slaves by the day or week.²⁰

Most textbooks downplay slavery in the North, however, so slavery seems to be a sectional rather than national problem. Indeed, even the expanded coverage of slavery comes across as an unfortunate but minor blemish, compared to the overall story line of our textbooks. James Oliver Horton has pointed out that “the black experience cannot be fully illuminated without bringing a new perspective to the study of American history.”²¹ Textbook authors have failed to present any new perspective. Instead, they shoehorn their improved and more accurate portrait of slavery into the old “progress as usual” story line. In this saga, the United States is always intrinsically and increasingly democratic, and slaveholding is merely a temporary aberration, not part of the big picture. Ironically, the very success of the civil rights movement allows authors to imply that the problem of black-white race relations has now been solved, at least formally. This enables textbooks to discuss slavery without departing from their customarily optimistic tone.

While textbooks now show the horror of slavery and its impact on black America, they remain largely silent regarding the impact of slavery on white America, North or South. Textbooks have trouble acknowledg-

ing that anything might be wrong with white Americans, or with the United States as a whole. Perhaps telling realistically what slavery was like for slaves is the easy part. After all, slavery as an institution is dead. We have progressed beyond it, so we can acknowledge its evils. Even the Museum of the Confederacy in Richmond has mounted an exhibit on slavery that does not romanticize the institution.²² Without explaining its relevance to the present, however, extensive coverage of slavery is like extensive coverage of the Hawley-Smoot Tariff—just more facts for hapless eleventh graders to memorize.

Slavery’s twin legacies to the present are the social and economic inferiority it conferred upon blacks and the cultural racism it instilled in whites. Both continue to haunt our society. Therefore, treating slavery’s enduring legacy is necessarily controversial. Unlike slavery, racism is not over yet.

To function adequately in civic life in our troubled times, students must learn what causes racism. Although it is a complicated historical issue, racism in the Western world stems primarily from two related historical processes: taking land from and destroying indigenous peoples and enslaving Africans to work that land. To teach this relationship, textbooks would have to show students the dynamic interplay between slavery as a socioeconomic system and racism as an idea system. Sociologists call these the social structure and the superstructure. Slavery existed in many societies and periods before and after the African slave trade. Made possible by Europe’s advantages in military and social technology, the slavery started by Europeans in the fifteenth century was different, because it became the enslavement of one *race* by another. Increasingly, whites viewed the enslavement of whites as illegitimate, while the enslavement of Africans became acceptable. Unlike earlier slaveries, children of African American slaves would be slaves forever and could never achieve freedom through intermarriage with the owning class. The rationale for this differential treatment was racism. As Montesquieu, the French social philosopher who had such a profound influence on American democracy, ironically observed in 1748: “It is impossible for us to suppose these creatures to be men, because, allowing them to be men, a suspicion would follow that we ourselves are not Christian.”²³

Historians have chronicled the rise of racism in the West. Before the 1450s Europeans considered Africans exotic but not necessarily inferior. As more and more nations joined the slave trade, Europeans came to characterize Africans as stupid, backward, and uncivilized. Amnesia set in: Europe gradually found it convenient to forget that Moors from Africa had brought to Spain and Italy much of the learning that led to the Renaissance. Europeans had known that Timbuctu, with its re-

nowned university and library, was a center of learning. Now, forgetting Timbuctu, Europe and European Americans perceived Africa as the "dark continent."²⁴ By the 1850s many white Americans, including some Northerners, claimed that black people were so hopelessly inferior that slavery was a proper form of education for them; it also removed them physically from the alleged barbarism of the "dark continent."

The superstructure of racism has long outlived the social structure of slavery that generated it. The following passage from Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*, written in the 1930s, shows racism alive and well in that decade. The narrator is interpreting Reconstruction: "The former field hands found themselves suddenly elevated to the seats of the mighty. There they conducted themselves as creatures of small intelligence might naturally be expected to do. Like monkeys or small children turned loose among treasured objects whose value is beyond their comprehension, they ran wild—either from perverse pleasure in destruction or simply because of their ignorance."²⁵ White supremacy permeates Mitchell's romantic bestseller. Yet in 1988, when the American Library Association asked library patrons to name the best book in the library, *Gone with the Wind* won an actual majority against all other books ever published!²⁶

The very essence of what we have inherited from slavery is the idea that it is appropriate, even "natural," for whites to be on top, blacks on the bottom. In its core our culture tells us—tells all of us, including African Americans—that Europe's domination of the world came about because Europeans were smarter. In their core, many whites and some people of color believe this. White supremacy is not only a residue of slavery, to be sure. Developments in American history since slavery ended have maintained it. Textbooks that do not discuss white involvement in slavery in the period before 1863, however, are not likely to analyze white racism as a factor in more recent years. Only five of the twelve textbooks list *racism*, *racial prejudice*, or any term beginning with *race* in their indexes.²⁷

Only two textbooks discuss what might have caused racism. The closest any of the textbooks comes to explaining the connection between slavery and racism is this single sentence from *The American Tradition*: "In defense of their 'peculiar institution,' southerners became more and more determined to maintain their own way of life." Such a statement hardly suffices to show today's students the origin of racism in our society—it doesn't even use the word! *The American Adventure* offers a longer treatment: "[African Americans] looked different from members of white ethnic groups. The color of their skin made assimilation difficult. For this reason they remained outsiders." Here *Adventure* has re-

treated from history to lay psychology. Unfortunately for its argument, skin color in itself does not explain racism. Jane Elliot's famous experiments in Iowa classrooms have shown that children can quickly develop discriminatory behavior and prejudiced beliefs based on eye color. Conversely, the leadership positions that African Americans frequently reached among American Indian nations from Ecuador to the Arctic show that people do not automatically discriminate against others on the basis of skin color.²⁸

Events and processes in American history, from the time of slavery to the present, are what explain racism. Not one textbook connects history and racism, however. Half-formed and uninformed notions rush in to fill the analytic vacuum textbooks thus leave. *Adventure's* three sentences imply that it is natural to exclude people whose skin color is different. White students may conclude that *all* societies are racist, perhaps by nature, so racism is all right. Black students may conclude that all whites are racist, perhaps by nature, so to be antiwhite is all right. The elementary thinking in *Adventure's* three sentences is all too apparent. Yet this is the *most substantial* treatment of the causes of racism among all twelve textbooks.

In omitting racism or treating it so poorly, history textbooks shirk a critical responsibility. Not all whites are or have been racist. Levels of racism have changed over time.²⁹ If textbooks were to explain this, they would give students some perspective on what caused racism in the past, what perpetuates it today, and how it might be reduced in the future.

Although textbook authors no longer sugarcoat how slavery affected African Americans, they minimize white complicity in it. They present slavery virtually as uncaused, a tragedy, rather than a wrong perpetrated by some people on others. Textbooks maintain the fiction that planters did the work on the plantations. "There was always much work to be done," according to *Triumph of the American Nation*, "for a cotton grower also raised most of the food eaten by his family and slaves." Although managing a business worth hundreds of thousands of dollars was surely time-consuming, the truth as to who did most of the work on the plantation is surely captured more accurately by this quotation from a Mississippi planter lamenting his situation after the war: "I never did a day's work in my life, and don't know how to begin. You see me in these coarse old clothes; well, I never wore coarse clothes in my life before the war."³⁰

The emotion generated by textbook descriptions of slavery is sadness, not anger. For there's no one to be angry *at*. Somehow we ended up with four million slaves in America but no owners! This is part of a pattern in our textbooks: anything bad in American history happened

anonymously. Everyone named in our history made a positive contribution (except John Brown, as the next chapter shows). Or as Frances FitzGerald put it when she analyzed textbooks in 1979, "In all history, there is no known case of anyone's creating a problem for anyone else."³¹

Certainly the Founding Fathers never created one. "Popular modern depictions of Washington and Jefferson are utterly at variance with their lives as eighteenth-century slave-holding planters."³² Textbooks play their part by minimizing slavery in the lives of the founders. As with Woodrow Wilson, Helen Keller, and Christopher Columbus, authors cannot bear to reveal anything bad about our heroes. Nevertheless, almost half of the signers of the Declaration of Independence were slaveowners.

In real life the Founding Fathers and their wives wrestled with slavery. Textbooks canonize Patrick Henry for his "Give me liberty or give me death" speech. Not one tells us that eight months after delivering the speech he ordered "diligent patrols" to keep Virginia slaves from accepting the British offer of freedom to those who would join their side. Henry wrestled with the contradiction, exclaiming, "Would anyone believe I am the master of slaves of my own purchase!"³³ Almost no one would today, because only two of the twelve textbooks, *Land of Promise* and *The American Adventure*, even mention the inconsistency.³⁴ Henry's understanding of the discrepancy between his words and his deeds never led him to act differently, to his slaves' sorrow. Throughout the Revolutionary period he added slaves to his holdings, and even at his death, unlike some other Virginia planters, he freed not a one. Nevertheless, *Triumph of the American Nation* quotes Henry calling slavery "as repugnant to humanity as it is inconsistent with the Bible and destructive of liberty," without ever mentioning that he held slaves. *American Adventures* devotes three whole pages to Henry, constructing a fictitious melodrama in which his father worries, "How would he ever earn a living?" *Adventures* then tells how Henry failed at storekeeping, "tried to make a living by raising tobacco," "started another store," "had three children as well as a wife to support," "knew he had to make a living in *some* way," "so he decided to become a lawyer." The student who reads this chapter and later learns that Henry grew wealthy from the work of scores of slaves has a right to feel hoodwinked.

Even more embarrassing is the case of Founding Father Thomas Jefferson. American history textbooks use several tactics to harmonize the contradiction between Jefferson's assertion that everyone has an equal right to "Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness" and his enslavement of 175 human beings at the time he wrote those words. Jefferson's slaveholding affected almost everything he did, from his opposition to

internal improvements to his foreign policy.³⁵ Nonetheless, half of our textbooks never note that Jefferson owned slaves. *Life and Liberty* offers a half-page minibiography of Jefferson, revealing that he was "shy," "stammered," and "always worked hard at what he did." Elsewhere *Life* contrasts Jefferson's political beliefs with Alexander Hamilton's and supplies six paragraphs about "Jeffersonian Changes" of Federalist policies, noting that Jefferson refused to wear a wig, repealed a whiskey tax, and walked rather than rode in his inaugural parade. *Life and Liberty* says nothing about Jefferson and slavery, however. *American History* offers six different illustrations of the man for us to admire but makes no mention of his slaveholding. *The Challenge of Freedom* mentions Jefferson on sixteen different pages but never in the context of slavery.

Even textbooks that admit that Jefferson owned slaves go out of their way to downplay the fact. *The American Way* buries his complicity with the institution in a paragraph about his opposition to the practice:

In his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, published in 1787, Thomas Jefferson spoke out against owning slaves. Slavery, he said, made tyrants out of the masters and destroyed the spirit of the slaves. . . . Although Jefferson and others who owned slaves spoke against slavery, many people did not believe that a mixed society of equals could work.

"Jefferson and others who owned slaves" is ambiguous. Only the careful reader will infer that Jefferson was a slaveowner. Also ambiguous is *Notes on the State of Virginia*, which contains lengthy arguments about why blacks and whites can never participate in society equally. The attempt "will probably never end but in the extermination of the one or the other race," Jefferson luridly concluded. *Way* has mischaracterized the source.³⁶

The paragraph in *American Adventures* is more forthright:

The idea of slavery bothered Thomas Jefferson all his life. As an adult, he himself owned many slaves. He depended on their labor for raising tobacco on his plantation. Yet he understood that slavery was wrong, terribly wrong. It was the opposite of the thing he valued most in life—freedom.

Again, the thrust of the treatment, the thing most likely to be remembered, is that Jefferson was an opponent of slavery, not a slaveowner.

Textbooks stress that Jefferson was a humane master, privately tormented by slavery and opposed to its expansion, not the type to destroy families by selling slaves. In truth, by 1820 Jefferson had become an

ardent advocate of the expansion of slavery to the western territories. And he never let his ambivalence about slavery affect his private life. Jefferson was an average master who had his slaves whipped and sold into the Deep South as examples, to induce other slaves to obey. By 1822, Jefferson owned 267 slaves. During his long life, of hundreds of different slaves he owned, he freed only three, and five more at his death—all blood relatives of his.³⁷

Another textbook tactic to minimize Jefferson's slaveholding is to admit it but emphasize that others did no better. "Jefferson revealed himself as a man of his times," states *Land of Promise*. Well, what were those times? Certainly most white Americans in the 1770s were racist. Race relations were in flux, however, due to the Revolutionary War and to its underlying ideology about the rights of mankind that Jefferson, among others, did so much to spread. Five thousand black soldiers fought alongside whites in the Continental Army, "with courage and skill," according to *Triumph of the American Nation*. In reality, of course, some fought "with courage and skill," like some white recruits, and some failed to fire their guns and ran off, like some white recruits.³⁸ But because these men fought in integrated units for the most part and received equal pay, their existence in itself helped decrease white racism.³⁹

Moreover, the American Revolution is one of those moments in our history when the power of ideas made a real difference. "In contending for the birthright of freedom," said a captain in the army, "we have learned to feel for the bondage of others."⁴⁰ Abigail Adams wrote her husband in 1774 to ask how we could "fight ourselves for what we are daily robbing and plundering from those who have as good a right to freedom as we have."⁴¹ The contradiction between his words and his slaveowning embarrassed Patrick Henry, who offered only a lame excuse—"I am drawn along by the general inconvenience of living here without them"—and admitted, "I will not, I cannot justify it."⁴² Other options were available to planters. Some, including George Washington, valued consistency more than Henry or Jefferson and freed their slaves outright or at least in their wills. Other slaveowners freed their male slaves to fight in the colonial army, collecting a bounty for each one who enlisted. In the first two decades after the Revolution, the number of free blacks in Virginia soared tenfold, from 2,000 in 1780 to 20,000 in 1800. Most Northern states did away with slavery altogether. Thus Thomas Jefferson lagged behind many whites of his times in the actions he took with regard to slavery.⁴³

Manumission gradually flagged, however, because most of the white Southerners who, like Jefferson, kept their slaves, grew rich. Their neigh-

bors thought well of them, as people often do of those richer than themselves. To a degree the ideology of the upper class became the ideology of the whole society, and as the Revolution receded, that ideology increasingly justified slavery. Jefferson himself spent much of his slave-earned wealth on his mansion at Monticello and on books that he later donated to the University of Virginia; these expenditures became part of his hallowed patrimony, giving history yet another reason to remember him kindly.⁴⁴

Other views are possible, however. In 1829, three years after Jefferson's death, David Walker, a black Bostonian, warned members of his race that they should remember Jefferson as their greatest enemy. "Mr. Jefferson's remarks respecting us have sunk deep into the hearts of millions of whites, and never will be removed this side of eternity."⁴⁵ For the next hundred years, the open white supremacy of the Democratic Party, Jefferson's political legacy to the nation, would bear out the truth of Walker's warning.

Textbooks are in good company: the Jefferson Memorial, too, whitewashes its subject. On its marble walls a carved panel proclaims Jefferson's boast, "I have sworn eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of men," without ever mentioning his participation in racial slavery. Perhaps asking a marble memorial to tell the truth is demanding too much. Should history textbooks similarly be a shrine, however? Should they encourage students to worship Jefferson? Or should they help students understand him, wrestle with the problems he wrestled with, grasp his accomplishments, and also acknowledge his failures?

The idealistic spark in our Revolution, which caused Patrick Henry such verbal discomfort, at first made the United States a proponent of democracy around the world. However, slavery and its concomitant ideas, which legitimated hierarchy and dominance, sapped our Revolutionary idealism. Most textbooks never hint at this clash of ideas, let alone at its impact on our foreign policy.

After the Revolution, many Americans expected our example would inspire other peoples. It did. Our young nation got its first chance to help in the 1790s, when Haiti revolted against France. Whether a president owned slaves seems to have determined his policy toward the second independent nation in the hemisphere. George Washington did, so his administration loaned hundreds of thousands of dollars to the French planters in Haiti to help them suppress their slaves. John Adams did not, and his administration gave considerable support to the Haitians. Jefferson's presidency marked a general retreat from the idealism of the Revolution. Like other slaveowners, Jefferson preferred a Napoleonic

colony to a black republic in the Caribbean. In 1801 he reversed U.S. policy toward Haiti and secretly gave France the go-ahead to reconquer the island. In so doing, the United States not only betrayed its heritage, but also acted against its own self-interest. For if France had indeed been able to retake Haiti, Napoleon would have maintained his dream of an American empire. The United States would have been hemmed in by France to its west, Britain to its north, and Spain to its south. But planters in the United States were scared by the Haitian Revolution. They thought it might inspire slave revolts here (which it did). When Haiti won despite our flip-flop, the United States would not even extend it diplomatic recognition, lest its ambassador inflame our slaves "by exhibiting in his own person an example of successful revolt," in the words of a Georgia senator.⁴⁶ Five of the twelve textbooks mention how Haitian resistance led France to sell us its claim to Louisiana, but none tells of our flip-flop. Indeed, no textbook ever makes any connection between slavery and U.S. foreign policy.

Racial slavery also affected our policy toward the next countries in the Americas to revolt, Spain's colonies. Haiti's example inspired them to seek independence, and the Haitian government gave Simon Bolívar direct aid. Our statesmen were ambivalent, eager to help boot a European power out of the hemisphere but worried by the racially mixed rebels doing the booting. Some planters wanted our government to replace Spain as the colonial power, especially in Cuba. Jefferson suggested annexing Cuba. Fifty years later, diplomats in the Franklin Pierce administration signed the Ostend Manifesto, which proposed that the United States buy or take the island from Spain. Slaveowners, still obsessed with Haiti as a role model, thus hoped to prevent Cuba's becoming a second Haiti, with "flames [that might] extend to our own neighboring shores," in the words of the Manifesto.⁴⁷ In short, slavery prompted the United States to have imperialist designs on Latin America rather than visions of democratic liberation for the region.

Slavery affected our foreign policy in still other ways. The first requirement of a slave society is secure borders. We do not like to think of the United States as a police state, a nation like East Germany that people had to escape from, but the slaveholding states were just that. Indeed, after the *Dred Scott* decision in 1857, which declared "A Negro had no rights a white man was bound to respect," thousands of free African Americans realized they could not be safe even in Northern states and fled to Canada, Mexico, and Haiti.⁴⁸ Slaveholders dominated our foreign policy until the Civil War. They were always concerned about our Indian borders and made sure that treaties with Native nations stipulated that Indians surrender all African Americans and return any runaways.⁴⁹

U.S. territorial expansion between 1787 and 1855 was due in large part to slavers' influence. The largest pressure group behind the War of 1812 was slaveholders who coveted Indian and Spanish land and wanted to drive Indian societies farther away from the slaveholding states to prevent slave escapes. Even though Spain played no real role in that war, in the aftermath we took Florida from Spain because slaveholders demanded we do so. Indeed, Andrew Jackson attacked a Seminole fort in Florida in 1816 precisely because it harbored hundreds of runaway slaves, thus initiating the First Seminole War.⁵⁰

The Seminoles did not exist as a tribe or nation before the arrival of Europeans and Africans. They were a triracial isolate composed of Creek Indians, remnants of smaller tribes, runaway slaves, and whites who preferred to live in Indian society. The word *Seminole* is itself a corruption of the Spanish *cimarron* (corrupted to *maroons* on Jamaica), a word that came to mean "runaway slaves."⁵¹ The Seminoles' refusal to surrender their African American members led to the First and Second Seminole Wars (1816–18, 1835–42). Whites attacked not because they wanted the Everglades, which had no economic value to the United States in the nineteenth century, but to eliminate a refuge for runaway slaves. The Second Seminole War was the longest and costliest war the United States ever fought against Indians.⁵² The college textbook *America: Past and Present* tells why we fought it, putting the war in the context of slave revolts:

The most sustained and successful effort of slaves to win their freedom by force of arms took place in Florida between 1835 and 1842 when hundreds of black fugitives fought in the Second Seminole War alongside the Indians who had given them a haven. The Seminoles were resisting removal to Oklahoma, but for the blacks who took part, the war was a struggle for their own freedom, and the treaty that ended it allowed most of them to accompany their Indian allies to the trans-Mississippi West.

This is apparently too radical for high school: only six of the twelve textbooks even mention the war. Of these, only four say that ex-slaves fought with the Seminoles; not one tells that the ex-slaves were the real reason for the war.

Slavery was also perhaps the key factor in the Texas War (1835–36). The freedom for which Davy Crockett, James Bowie, and the rest fought at the Alamo was the freedom to own slaves! As soon as Anglos set up the Republic of Texas, its legislature ordered all free black people out of the Republic.⁵³ Our next major war, the Mexican War (1846–48), was again driven chiefly by Southern planters wanting to push the borders

of the nearest free land farther from the slave states. Probably the clearest index of how slavery affected U.S. foreign policy is provided by the Civil War, for between 1861 and 1865 we had two foreign policies, the Union's and the Confederacy's. The Union recognized Haiti and shared considerable ideological compatibility with postrevolutionary Mexico. The Confederacy threatened to invade Mexico and then welcomed Louis Napoleon's takeover of it as a French colony, because that removed Mexico as a standard bearer of freedom and a refuge for runaway slaves.⁵⁴ Confederate diplomats also had their eyes on Cuba, had they won the Civil War.

For our first seventy years as a nation, then, slavery made our foreign policy more sympathetic with imperialism than with self-determination. Textbooks cannot show the influence of slavery on our foreign policy if they are unwilling to talk about ideas like racism that might make whites look bad. When textbook authors turn their attention to domestic policy, racism remains similarly invisible. Thus, although textbooks devote a great deal of attention to Stephen A. Douglas, the most important leader of the Democratic Party at midcentury, they suppress his racism. Recall that Douglas had bulldozed what came to be called the Kansas-Nebraska Act through Congress in 1854. Douglas himself, a senator from Illinois and seeker of the presidency, was neither for nor against slavery. He mainly wanted the United States to organize territorial governments in Kansas and Nebraska, until then Indian land, because he was connected with interests that wanted to run a railroad through the territory.⁵⁵ He needed Southern votes. During most of the 1840s and 1850s Southern planters controlled the Supreme Court, the presidency, and at least one house of Congress. Emboldened by their power while worried about their decreasing share of the nation's white population, slaveowners agreed to support the new territories only if Douglas included in the bill a clause opening them to slavery. Douglas capitulated and incorporated what he called "popular sovereignty" in the bill. This meant Kansas could go slave if it chose to, even though it lay north of the Missouri Compromise line, set up in 1820 to separate slavery from freedom. So, for that matter, could Nebraska. The result was civil war in Kansas.

While textbooks do not treat Stephen Douglas as a major hero like Christopher Columbus or Woodrow Wilson, they do discuss him with sympathy. In 1858 Douglas ran for reelection against Abraham Lincoln in a contest that presaged the ideologies that would dominate the two major parties for the next three decades.⁵⁶ Accordingly, textbooks give the debates an extraordinary amount of space: an average of seven paragraphs and two pictures.⁵⁷ Textbook authors use this space as if they

were writing for *Vanity Fair*. *American History* gives the debates sixteen paragraphs; here are two of them:

Even without his tall "stovepipe" hat, the six-feet, six-inch [the author has added two inches] Lincoln towered over the Little Giant. He wore a formal black suit, usually rumpled and always too short for his long arms and legs. Douglas was what we would call a flashy dresser. He wore shirts with ruffles, fancy embroidered vests, a broad felt hat. He had a rapid-fire way of speaking that contrasted with Lincoln's slow, deliberate style. . . .

Lincoln's voice was high pitched, Douglas's deep. Both had to have powerful lungs to make themselves heard over street noises and the bustle of the crowds. They had no public address systems to help them.

The author of *The American Way* concentrates in a similar fashion on appearances and voices:

One member of the audience, Gustave Koerner, reported how each of the candidates looked and what effect each had on his audience:

"Douglas was fighting for his political life. No greater contrast could be imagined than the one between Lincoln and Douglas. The latter was really a little giant physically . . . while Lincoln, when standing erect, towered to six feet four inches. Lincoln, awkward in posture and leaning a little forward, stood calm . . . He addressed his hearers in a somewhat familiar yet very earnest way with a clear, distinct, and far-reaching voice, generally well controlled, but sometimes expressive of sadness, though at times he could assume a most humorous and even comical look. . . ." [ellipses in the textbook]

So we learn that Douglas was a flashy dresser and spoke powerfully—but where are his ideas? What did he say?

Although *Way* quotes nine sentences of this bystander's description, all twelve textbooks combined give us just three sentence fragments from Douglas himself. Here is every word of his they provide:

"forever divided into free and slave states, as our fathers made it,"
"thinks the Negro is his brother," and
"for a day or an hour."

Just twenty-four words in twelve books! While celebrating the "Little Giant" for his "powerful speech" or "splendid oratory," nine textbooks silence him completely. Instead, the omnipresent authorial voice supplies his side of the debates: "Douglas was for popular sovereignty." This

summary from *Life and Liberty* is shorter than most but otherwise representative. Of course, phrased this abstractly, who would oppose popular sovereignty?

Douglas's position was not so vague, however. The debate was largely about the morality of racially based slavery and the position African Americans should eventually hold in our society. That is why Paul Angle chose the title *Created Equal?* for his centennial edition of the debates.⁵⁸ On July 9, 1858, in Chicago, Douglas made his position clear, as he did repeatedly throughout that summer:

In my opinion this government of ours is founded on the white basis. It was made by the white man, for the benefit of the white man, to be administered by white men. . . .

I am opposed to taking any step that recognizes the Negro man or the Indian as the equal of the white man. I am opposed to giving him a voice in the administration of the government. I would extend to the Negro, and the Indian, and to all dependent races every right, every privilege, and every immunity consistent with the safety and welfare of the white races; but equality they never should have, either political or social, or in any other respect whatever.

My friends, you see that the issues are distinctly drawn.⁵⁹

Textbook readers *cannot* see that the issues are distinctly drawn, however, because textbooks give them no access to Douglas's side. *American History* is the only textbook that quotes Stephen Douglas on race: "Lincoln 'thinks the Negro is his brother,' the Little Giant sneered."

Why do textbooks censor Douglas? Since they devote paragraphs to his wardrobe, it cannot be for lack of space. To be sure, textbook authors rarely quote anyone. But more particularly, the heroification process seems to be operating again. Douglas's words might make us think badly of him.

Compared to Douglas, Lincoln was an idealistic equalitarian, but in southern Illinois, arguing with Douglas, he too expressed white supremacist ideas. Thus at the debate in Charleston he said, "I am not, nor ever have been in favor of bringing about the social and political equality of the white and black races [applause]—that I am not nor ever have been in favor of making voters or jurors of Negroes." Textbook authors protect us from a racist Lincoln. By so doing, they diminish students' capacity to recognize racism as a force in American life. For if Lincoln could be racist, then so might the rest of us be. And if Lincoln could transcend racism, as he did on occasion, then so might the rest of us.

During the Civil War, Northern Democrats countered the Republican

charge that they favored rebellion by professing to be the "white man's party." They protested the government's emancipation of slaves in the District of Columbia and its diplomatic recognition of Haiti. They claimed Republicans had "nothing except 'nigger on the brain.'" They were enraged when the U.S. army accepted African American recruits. And they made race a paramount factor in their campaigns.

In those days before television, parties held coordinated rallies. On the last Saturday before the election, Democratic senators might address crowds in each major city; local officeholders would hold forth in smaller towns. Each of these rallies featured music. Hundreds of thousands of songbooks were printed so the party faithful might sing the same songs coast to coast. A favorite in 1864 was sung to the tune of "Yankee Doodle Dandy":

The New National Anthem "Nigger Doodle Dandy"

*Yankee Doodle is no more,
Sunk his name and station;
Nigger Doodle takes his place,
And favors amalgamation.*

CHORUS: *Nigger Doodle's all the go,
Ebony shins and bandy,
"Loyal" people all must bow
To Nigger Doodle dandy.*

*The white breed is under par
It lacks the rich a-romy,
Give us something black as tar,
Give us "Old Dahomey."*

CHORUS: *Nigger Doodle's all the go, &c.*

*Blubber lips are killing sweet,
And kinky heads are splendid;
And oh, it makes such bully feet
To have the heels extended.*

CHORUS: *Nigger Doodle's all the go, &c.*

I have shared these lyrics with hundreds of college students and scores of high school history teachers. To get audiences to take the words seriously, I usually try to lead them in a singalong. Often even all-white

groups refuse. They are shocked by what they read. Nothing in their high school history textbooks hinted that national politics was ever like this.

Partly because many party members and leaders did not identify with the war effort, when the Union won Democrats emerged as the minority party. Republicans controlled Reconstruction. Like slavery, Reconstruction is a subject on which textbooks have improved since the civil rights movement. The earliest accounts, written even before Reconstruction ended, portrayed Republican state governments struggling to govern fairly but confronted with immense problems, not the least being violent resistance from racist ex-Confederates. Textbooks written between about 1890 and the 1960s, however, painted an unappealing portrait of oppressive Republican rule in the postwar period, a picture that we might call the Confederate myth of Reconstruction. For years black families kept the truth about Reconstruction alive. The aging slaves whose stories were recorded by WPA writers in the 1930s remained proud of blacks' roles during Reconstruction. Some still remembered the names of African Americans elected to office sixty years earlier. "I know folks think the books tell the truth," said an eighty-eight-year-old former slave, "but they shore don't."⁶⁰ As those who knew Reconstruction from personal experience died off, however, even in the black community the textbook view took over.

My most memorable encounter with the Confederate myth of Reconstruction came during a discussion with seventeen first-year students at Tougaloo College, a predominantly black school in Mississippi, one afternoon in January 1970. I was about to launch into a unit on Reconstruction, and I needed to find out what the students already knew. "What was Reconstruction?" I asked. "What images come to your mind about that era?" The class consensus: Reconstruction was the time when African Americans took over the governing of the Southern states, including Mississippi. But they were too soon out of slavery, so they messed up and reigned corruptly, and whites had to take back control of the state governments.

I sat stunned. So many major misconceptions glared from that statement that it was hard to know where to begin a rebuttal. African Americans never took over the Southern states. All governors were white and almost all legislatures had white majorities throughout Reconstruction. African Americans did not "mess up"; indeed, Mississippi enjoyed less corrupt government during Reconstruction than in the decades immediately afterward. "Whites" did not take back control of the state governments; rather, *some* white Democrats used force and fraud to wrest control from biracial Republican coalitions.

For young African Americans to believe such a hurtful myth about their past seemed tragic. It invited them to doubt their own capability, since their race had "messed up" in its one appearance on American history's center stage. It also invited them to conclude that it is only right that whites be always in control. Yet my students had merely learned what their textbooks had taught them. Like almost all Americans who finished high school before the 1970s, they had encountered the Confederate myth of Reconstruction in their American history classes. I, too, learned it from my college history textbook. John F. Kennedy and his ghost writer retold it in their portrait of L. Q. C. Lamar in *Profiles in Courage*, which won the Pulitzer Prize.

Compared to the 1960s, today's textbooks have vastly improved their treatments of Reconstruction. All but three of the twelve textbooks I surveyed paint a very different picture of Reconstruction from *Gone with the Wind*.⁶¹ No longer do histories claim that federal troops controlled Southern society for a decade or more. Now they point out that military rule ended by 1868 in all but three states. No longer do they say that allowing African American men to vote set loose an orgy of looting and corruption. The 1961 edition of *Triumph of the American Nation* condemned Republican rule in the South: "Many of the 'carpetbag' governments were inefficient, wasteful, and corrupt." In stark contrast, the 1986 edition explains that "The southern reconstruction legislatures started many needed and long overdue public improvements . . . strengthened public education . . . spread the tax burden more equitably . . . [and] introduced overdue reforms in local government and the judicial system."

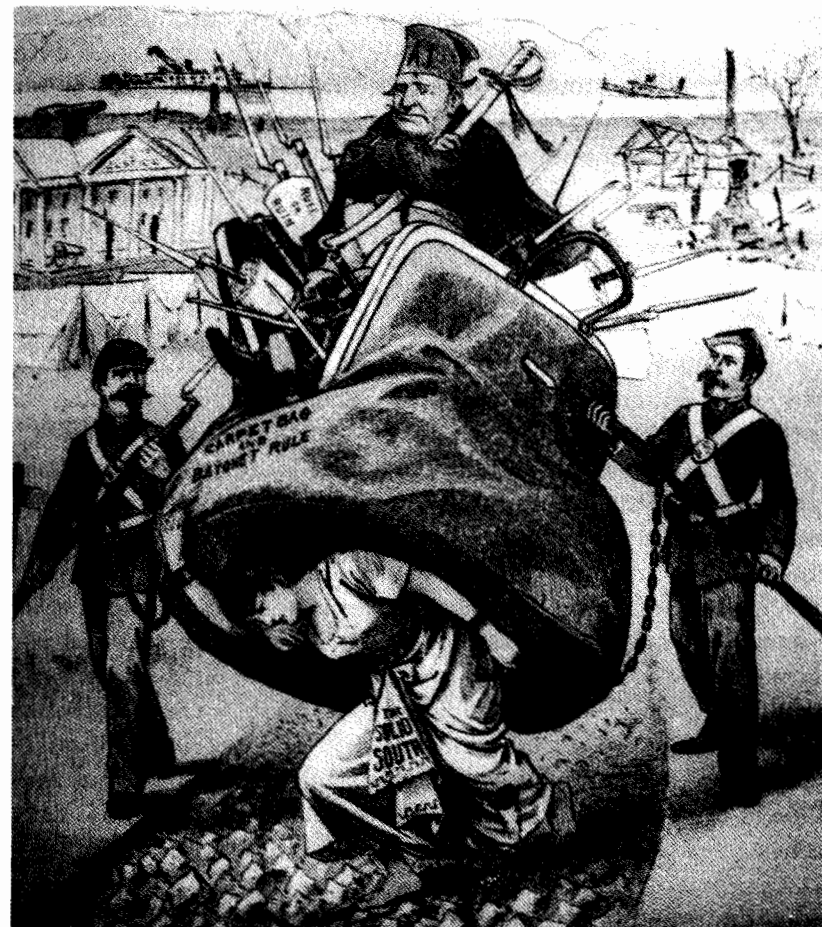
Like their treatment of slavery, textbooks' new view of Reconstruction represents a sea change, past due, much closer to what the original sources for the period reveal, and much less dominated by white supremacy. However, in the way the textbooks structure their discussion, most of them inadvertently still take a white supremacist viewpoint. Their rhetoric makes African Americans rather than whites the "problem" and assumes that the major issue of Reconstruction was how to integrate African Americans into the system, economically and politically. "Slavery was over," says *The American Way*. "But the South was ruined and the Blacks had to be brought into a working society." Blacks were already working, of course. One wonders what the author thinks they had been doing in slavery!⁶² Similarly, according to *Triumph of the American Nation*, Reconstruction "meant solving the problem of bringing black Americans into the mainstream of national life." *Triumph* supplies an instructive example of the myth of lazy, helpless black folk: "When white planters abandoned their plantations on islands off the coast of



This illustration of armed whites raiding a black neighborhood in Memphis, Tennessee, in the 1866 riot, exemplifies white-black violence during and after Reconstruction. Forty African Americans died in this riot; whites burned down every black school and church in the city.

South Carolina, black people there were left helpless and destitute.” In reality, these black people enlisted in Union armies, operated the plantations themselves, and made raids into the interior to free slaves on mainland plantations. The archetype of African Americans as dependent on others begins here, in textbook treatments of Reconstruction. It continues to the present, when many white Americans believe blacks work less than whites, even though census data show they work more.⁶³

In reality, white violence, not black ignorance, was the key problem during Reconstruction. The figures are astounding. The victors of the Civil War executed but one Confederate officeholder, Henry Wirz, notorious commandant of Andersonville prison, while the losers murdered hundreds of officeholders and other Unionists, white and black.⁶⁴ In Hinds County, Mississippi, alone, whites killed an average of one African American a day, many of them servicemen, during Confederate Reconstruction—the period from 1865 to 1867 when ex-Confederates ran the governments of most Southern states. In Louisiana in the summer and fall of 1868, white Democrats killed 1,081 persons, mostly African Americans and white Republicans.⁶⁵ In one judicial district in North Carolina, a Republican judge counted 700 beatings and 12 murders.⁶⁶ Moreover, violence was only the most visible component of a broader pattern of white resistance to black progress.



Although the narratives in textbooks have improved, some of the pictures have not. Four of the twelve textbooks feature this cartoon, “The Solid South” represented as a delicate white woman. She is weighed down by Grant and armaments stuffed into a carpetbag, accompanied by bluecoated soldiers of occupation. Textbook authors might discuss this cartoon to encourage students to analyze its point of view. The American Way at least asks, “How do you interpret this cartoon?” The other three textbooks merely use the drawing to illustrate Reconstruction: “The South’s heavy burden,” captions, Triumph of the American Nation.

Attacking education was an important element of the white supremacists’ program. “The opposition to Negro education made itself felt everywhere in a combination not to allow the freedmen any room or building in which a school might be taught,” said Gen. O. O. Howard, head of the Freedmen’s Bureau. “In 1865, 1866, and 1867 mobs of the

baser classes at intervals and in all parts of the South occasionally burned school buildings and churches used as schools, flogged teachers or drove them away, and in a number of instances murdered them.”⁶⁷

With the exception of *The American Way* and *Discovering American History*, each of the twelve textbooks includes at least a paragraph on white violence during Reconstruction. Six of twelve textbooks tell how that violence, coupled with failure by the United States to implement civil rights laws, played a major role in ending Republican state governments in the South, thus ending Reconstruction.⁶⁸ But, overall, textbook treatments of Reconstruction still miss the point: the problem of Reconstruction was integrating *Confederates*, not African Americans, into the new order. As soon as the federal government stopped addressing the problem of racist whites, Reconstruction ended. Since textbooks find it hard to say anything really damaging about white people, their treatments of why Reconstruction failed lack clarity. *Triumph* presents the end of Reconstruction as a failure of African Americans: “Other northerners grew weary of the problems of black southerners and less willing to help them learn their new roles as citizens.” *The American Adventure* echoes: “Millions of ex-slaves could not be converted in ten years into literate voters, or successful politicians, farmers, and businessmen.”

Because I too “learned” that African Americans were the unsolved problem of Reconstruction, reading Gunnar Myrdal’s *An American Dilemma* was an eye-opening experience for me. Myrdal introduced his 1944 book by describing the change in viewpoint he was forced to make as he conducted his research.

When the present investigator started his inquiry, the preconception was that it had to be focused on the Negro people. . . . But as he proceeded in his studies into the Negro problem, it became increasingly evident that little, if anything, could be scientifically explained in terms of the peculiarities of the Negroes themselves. . . . The Negro problem is predominantly a white . . . problem.⁶⁹

This is precisely the change textbook authors still need to make. Their failure to make it lies behind the appalling results of a 1976 national survey of first-year college students, a majority of whom ventured that Reconstruction led to “unparalleled corruption among the entrenched carpetbagger governors and their allies in the black dominated legislatures of the defeated states”—precisely the Confederate myth of Reconstruction.⁷⁰ Textbooks in 1976 no longer said that. But they failed and still fail to counter this pervasive myth with an analysis that has real power. As one student said to me, “You’ll never believe all the stuff I

learned in high school about Reconstruction—like, it wasn’t so bad, it set up school systems. Then I saw *Gone with the Wind* and learned the truth about Reconstruction!” What is identified as the problem determines the frame of rhetoric and solutions sought. Myrdal’s insight, to focus on whites, is critical to understanding Reconstruction.

Focusing on white racism is even more central to understanding the period Rayford Logan called “the nadir of American race relations”: the years between 1890 and 1920, when African Americans were again put back into second-class citizenship.⁷¹ During this time white Americans, North and South, joined hands to restrict black civil and economic rights. Perhaps because the period was marked by such a discouraging increase in white racism, ten of the twelve textbooks ignore the nadir. The finest coverage, in *American History*, summarizes the aftermath of Reconstruction in a section entitled “The Long Night Begins.” “After the Compromise of 1877 the white citizens of the North turned their backs on the black citizens of the South. Gradually the southern states broke their promise to treat blacks fairly. Step by step they deprived them of the right to vote and reduced them to the status of second-class citizens.” *American History* then spells out the techniques—restrictions on voting, segregation in public places, and lynchings—which southern whites used to maintain white supremacy.

Triumph of the American Nation, on the other hand, sums up in these bland words: “Reconstruction left many major problems unsolved and created new and equally urgent problems. This was true even though many forces in the North and the South continued working to reconcile the two sections.” These sentences are so vague as to be content-free. Frances FitzGerald used an earlier version of this passage to attack what she called the “problems” approach to American history. “These ‘problems’ seem to crop up everywhere,” she deadpanned. “History in these texts is a mass of problems.”⁷² Five hundred pages later in *Triumph*, when the authors reach the civil rights movement, race relations again becomes a “problem.” The authors make no connection between the failure of the United States to guarantee black civil rights in 1877 and the need for a civil rights movement a century later. Nothing ever causes anything. Things just happen.

In fact, during Reconstruction and the nadir, a battle raged for the soul of the Southern white racist and in a way for that of the whole nation. There is a parallel in the reconstruction of Germany after World War II, a battle for the soul of the German people, a battle which Nazism lost (we hope). But in the United States, as *American History* tells, racism won. Between 1890 and 1907 every Southern and border state “legally” disfranchised the vast majority of its African American

voters. Lynchings rose to an all-time high. In 1896 the Supreme Court upheld segregation in *Plessy v. Ferguson*. No textbook explains the rationale of segregation, which is crucial to understanding its devastating effect on black and white psyches. Describing the 1954 Supreme Court decision that would begin to undo segregation, *The American Way* says, "No separate school could truly be equal for Blacks," but offers no clue as to why this would be so.

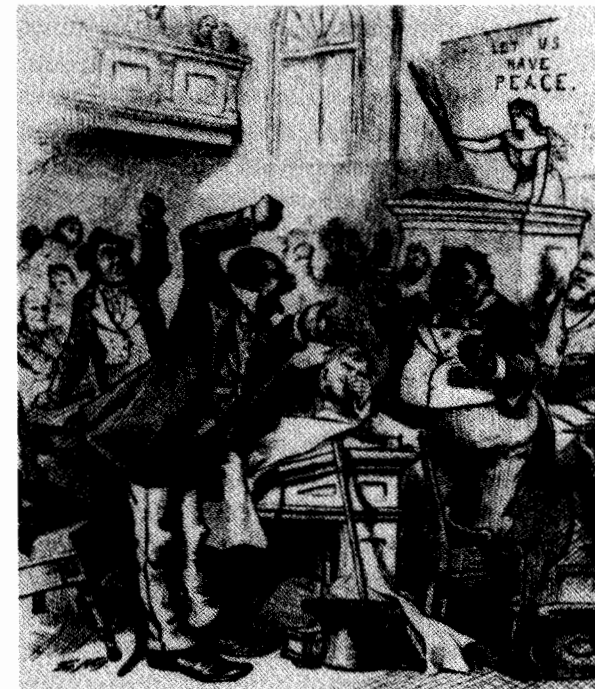
Textbooks need to offer the sociological definition of segregation: a system of racial etiquette that keeps the oppressed group separate from the oppressor when both are doing equal tasks, like learning the multiplication tables, but allows intimate closeness when the tasks are hierarchical, like cooking or cleaning for white employers. The rationale of



These cartoons by Thomas Nast mirror the revival of racism in the North. Above, "And Not This Man?" from *Harper's Weekly*, August 5, 1865, provides evidence of Nast's idealism in the early days after the Civil War. Nine years later, as Reconstruction was beginning to wind down, Nast's images of African Americans reflected the increasing racism of the times. Opposite is "Colored Rule in a Reconstructed (?) State," from the same journal, March 14, 1874. Such idiotic legislators could obviously be discounted as the white North contemplated giving up on black civil rights.

segregation thus implies that the oppressed are a pariah people. "Unclean!" was the caste message of every "colored" water fountain, waiting room, and courtroom Bible. "Inferior" was the implication of every school that excluded blacks (and often Mexicans, Native Americans, and "Orientals"). This ideology was born in slavery and remained alive to rationalize the second-class citizenship imposed on African Americans after Reconstruction. This stigma is why separate could never mean equal, even when black facilities might be newer or physically superior. Elements of this stigma survive to harm the self-image of some African Americans today, which helps explain why Caribbean blacks who immigrate to the United States often outperform black Americans.⁷³

During the nadir, segregation increased everywhere. Jackie Robinson was *not* the first black player in major league baseball. Blacks had played in the major leagues in the nineteenth century, but by 1889 whites had forced them out. In 1911 the Kentucky Derby eliminated black jockeys after they won fifteen of the first twenty-eight derbies.⁷⁴ Particularly in the South, whites attacked the richest and most successful African Americans, just as they had the most acculturated Native Americans, so upward mobility offered no way out for blacks but only made them more of a target. In the North as well as in the South, whites forced



African Americans from skilled occupations and even unskilled jobs such as postal carriers.⁷⁵ Eventually our system of segregation spread to South Africa, to Bermuda, and even to European-controlled enclaves in China.

American popular culture evolved to rationalize whites' retraction of civil and political rights from African Americans. The Bronx Zoo exhibited an African behind bars, like a gorilla.⁷⁶ Theatrical productions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* played throughout the nadir, but since the novel's indictment of slavery was no longer congenial to an increasingly racist white society, rewrites changed Uncle Tom from a martyr who gave his life to protect his people into a sentimental dope who was loyal to kindly masters. In the black community, *Uncle Tom* eventually came to mean an African American without integrity who sells out his people's interests. In the 1880s and 1890s, minstrel shows featuring bumbling, mislocuting whites in blackface grew wildly popular from New England to California. By presenting heavily caricatured images of African Americans who were happy on the plantation and lost and incompetent off it, these shows demeaned black ability. Minstrel songs such as "Carry Me Back to Old Virginny," "Old Black Joe," and "My Old Kentucky Home" told whites that Harriet Beecher Stowe got *Uncle Tom's Cabin* all wrong: blacks really liked slavery. Second-class citizenship was appropriate for such a sorry people.⁷⁷

Textbooks abandoned their idealistic presentations of Reconstruction in favor of the Confederate myth, for if blacks were inferior, then the historical period in which they enjoyed equal rights must have been dominated by wrong-thinking Americans. Vaudeville continued the portrayal of silly, lying, chicken-stealing black idiots. So did early silent movies. Some movies made more serious charges against African Americans: D. W. Griffith's racist epic *Birth of a Nation* showed them obsessed with interracial sex and debased by corrupt white carpetbaggers.

In politics, the white electorate had become so racist by 1892 that the Democratic candidate, Grover Cleveland, won the White House partly by tarring Republicans with their attempts to guarantee civil rights to African Americans, thereby conjuring fears of "Negro domination" in the Northern as well as Southern white mind. From the Civil War to the end of the century, not a single Democrat in Congress, representing the North or the South, ever voted in favor of any civil rights legislation. The Supreme Court was worse: its segregationist decisions from 1896 (*Plessy*) through 1927 (*Rice v. Gong Lum*, which barred Chinese from white schools) told the nation that whites were the master race. We have seen how Woodrow Wilson won the presidency in 1912 and proceeded to segregate the federal government. Aided by *Birth of a Nation*, which

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Not only industrial jobs but even moving services were reserved for whites in some cities.

opened in 1915, the Ku Klux Klan rose to its zenith, boasting over a million members. The KKK openly dominated the state government of Indiana for a time, and it proudly inducted Pres. Warren G. Harding as a member in a White House ceremony. During the Wilson and Harding administrations, perhaps one hundred race riots took place, more than in any other period since Reconstruction. White mobs killed African Americans across the United States. Some of these events, like the 1919 Chicago riot, are well known. Others, such as the 1921 riot in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in which whites dropped dynamite from airplanes onto a black ghetto, killing more than 75 people and destroying more than 1,100 homes, have completely vanished from our history books.⁷⁸

It is almost unimaginable how racist the United States became during and just after the nadir. Mass attacks by whites wiped out or terrorized black communities in the Florida Keys, in Springfield, Illinois, and in the Arkansas Delta, and were an implicit, ever-present threat to every black neighborhood in the nation. Some small communities in the Midwest and West became "sundown" towns, informally threatening African Americans with death if they remained overnight. African Americans were excluded from juries throughout the South and in many places in the North, which usually meant they could forget about legal redress even for obvious wrongs like assault, theft, or arson by whites. Lynchings offer evidence of how defenseless blacks were, for the defining

characteristic of a lynching is that the murder takes place in public, so everyone knows who did it, yet the crime goes unpunished. During the nadir lynchings took place as far north as Duluth. Once again, as *Dred Scott* had proclaimed in 1857, “a Negro had no rights a white man was bound to respect.” Every time African Americans interacted with European Americans, no matter how insignificant the contact, they had to be aware of how they presented themselves, lest they give offense by looking someone in the eye, forgetting to say “sir,” or otherwise stepping out of “their place.” Always, the threat of overwhelming force lay just beneath the surface.⁷⁹

The nadir left African Americans in a dilemma. An “exodus” to form new black communities in the West did not lead to real freedom. Migration north led only to segregated urban ghettos. Concentrating on Booker T. Washington’s plan for economic improvement while foregoing civil and political rights could not work, because economic gains could not be maintained without civil and political rights.⁸⁰ “Back to Africa” was not practicable.

Many African Americans lost hope; family instability and crime increased. This period of American life, not slavery, marked the beginning of what some social scientists have called the “tangle of pathology” in African American society.⁸¹ Indeed, some historians date low black morale to even later periods, such as the great migration to Northern cities (1918–70), the Depression (1929–39), or changes in urban life and occupational structure after World War II. Unfortunately, no textbook discusses the changing levels of white racism or black reaction in *any* of these periods. In any event this tangle was the result, not the cause, of the segregation and discrimination African Americans faced. Black jockeys and mail carriers were shut out, not because they were inadequate, but because they succeeded.

Several textbooks point out individual trees in the nadir forest. From *The American Way* students learn that “By the early 1900s, [white workers] had convinced most labor unions not to admit Blacks.” *Land of Promise* teaches that “Woodrow Wilson’s administration was openly hostile to black people.” *The United States—A History of the Republic* mentions the exodus to Kansas. Seven textbooks mention the Chicago riot. Several offer a description of lynchings. All twelve books mention *Plessy v. Ferguson*. *Life and Liberty* reveals that Southern states passed “laws that took the vote away from blacks.” *A History of the Republic*, *Land of Promise*, and *The American Pageant* provide enough trees that readers might infer some kind of forest, except that twenty pages on unrelated topics usually separate each tree from the next.⁸² Only *American History* and *The American Adventure* summarize the nadir period.⁸³ The other



Lynch mobs often posed for the camera. They showed no fear of being identified because they knew no white jury would convict them. Mississippi: Conflict and Change, a revisionist state history textbook I co-wrote, was rejected by the Mississippi State Textbook Board partly because it included this photograph. At the trial that ensued, a rating committee member stated that material like this would make it hard for a teacher to control her students, especially a “white lady teacher” in a predominantly black class. At this point the judge took over the questioning. “Didn’t lynchings happen in Mississippi?” he asked. Yes, admitted the rating committee member, but it was all so long ago, why dwell on it now? “It is a history book, isn’t it?” asked the judge, who eventually ruled in the book’s favor. None of the twelve textbooks in my sample includes a picture of a lynching. I hasten to reassure that no classroom riots resulted from our book or this photograph.

ten textbooks offer no clue that race relations in the United States systematically worsened for almost half a century. None of the textbooks analyzes the causes of the worsening.⁸⁴ Six textbooks imply or state that Jackie Robinson was “the first black baseball player ever allowed in the major leagues,” in the words of *Life and Liberty*, even though he wasn’t, leaving students with the unmistakable implication of generally uninterrupted progress to the present.⁸⁵

Textbook authors would not have to invent their descriptions of the nadir from scratch. African Americans have left a rich and bitter legacy

serious statement of comparative history—it is just ethnocentric cheer-leading.

High school students “have a gloomy view of the state of race relations in America today,” according to a recent nationwide poll. Students of all racial backgrounds brood about the subject.⁸⁶ Another poll reveals that for the first time in this century, young white adults have less tolerant attitudes toward black Americans than those over thirty. One reason is that “the under-30 generation is pathetically ignorant of recent American history.”⁸⁷ Too young to have experienced or watched the civil rights movement as it happened, these young people have no understanding of the past and present workings of racism in American society.

Educators justify teaching history because it gives us perspective on the present. If there is one issue in the present to which authors should relate the history they tell, the issue is racism. But as long as history textbooks make white racism invisible in the nineteenth century, neither they nor the students who use them will be able to analyze racism intelligently in the present.