RACECRAFT
The Soul of Inequality in American Life

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VERSO
London • New York
and ecclesiastics confronted evidence that extends to tens of thousands of cases, in almost every country of Europe. For them, as for less well-educated people, there was little to impose the idea of absurdity or of improbability on stories about “old women riding on broomsticks.”

What about here and now? Americans acquire in childhood all it takes to doubt stories of witchcraft, but little in our childhood leads us to doubt racecraft. For us, as for bygone believers in witches, daily life produces an immense accumulation of supporting evidence for the belief. Think no further than the media-borne miscellany of things tabulated “by race”—from hardy perennials like teenage pregnancy to novelties like “under-representation” among blood donors and “disproportionate representation” on Twitter, constantly churning out factitious evidence for an ever-expanding American immensity, the so-called racial divide. A recent instance, carried out under the sign of sociological theory, includes familiar features: for example, mapping genomic data onto “census” (that is, folk) racial categories and assuming a genetic origin for social conduct, with the absent supporting evidence expected any day now. Lecky’s subjects had authoritative sources in the science and law of the day. So do we. For them, but not less for us, it often is (or seems) “impossible for so much evidence to accumulate around a conception which has no basis in fact.” To them, witchcraft was obvious, not odd. Turn now to a tour of racecraft. Will its features seem familiar or strange, obvious or odd?

68 Lecky, Rise of Rationalism, 34.
72 Lecky, Rise of Rationalism, 39.
removing white persons from the stage. To spectators deceived by the trick, segregation seemed to be a property of black people, not something white people imposed on them. But Robert S. McNamara, in his memoir of service during the administration of Lyndon B. Johnson, recounts an incident that set all parties on the stage. While addressing business and labor leaders whom he had summoned to the White House to demand their help in passing the Civil Rights Bill, Johnson told his story of the day he and Lady Bird lived Jim Crow. Johnson was speeding along a road in Mississippi with his wife and their black longtime cook, Zephyr, when Lady Bird turned to him and said, "Would you please stop at the next gas station [restroom]?" They stopped. Not long thereafter, Zephyr said, "Mr. President, would you mind stopping by the side of the road?" The President replied with his well-known earthiness, "Why the hell didn't you do it when Bird and I did?" Zephyr answered, "Cause they wouldn't let me." (Notice Zephyr's "they").

At that point in the story, "LBJ pounded on the table and in a bitter voice said, 'Gentlemen, is that the kind of country you want? It's not the kind I want.' For a brief moment, Johnson had lived Jim Crow as Zephyr did. Ordinarily, white Southerners experienced Jim Crow as law and order, not as the ever-present disorder it was for black Southerners. So white Southerners did not notice, or need to notice, their own presence on the Jim Crow stage. McNamara's anecdote recaptures a moment when Jim Crow inconvenienced the President of the United States.

The disorder engendered by racecraft did not end with Jim Crow. What better typifies it than being killed by mistake, as happened not long ago to an Afro-American police officer? While pursuing a car thief, the officer was shot to death by a white brother officer, who took him for a criminal. The instant, inevitable—but, upon examination, bizarre—diagnosis of many people is that black officers in such situations have been "killed because of their skin color." But has their skin color killed them? If so, why does the skin color of white officers not kill them in the same way? Why do black officers not mistake white officers for criminals and blaze away, even when the white officers are dressed to look like street toughs? Everyone has skin color, but not everyone's skin color counts as race, let alone as evidence of criminal conduct. The missing step between someone's physical appearance and an invidious outcome is the practice of a double standard: in a word, racism. It was his fellow officer, not his skin color, that caused the black officer's death. Even so, the fellow officer was devastated by his error and its fatal consequence. His grief and that of other white officers visibly weighed down the sad procession in blue that conducted the dead policeman toward his final rest. Racism did not require a racist. It required only that, in the split second before firing the fatal shot, the white officer entered the twilight zone of America's racecraft.


2 Serge F. Kovaleski, "Two Officers' Paths to a Fatal Encounter on a Street
toward the white supremacist regime in what was then Rhodesia, he said it was no business of the United States how other countries dealt with their “minorities,” by which he meant the country’s black majority. The quantitative meaning slips again in the paradoxical formula “majority minority,” referring to the projected numerical predominance of non-white persons in the United States in the not-so-distant future. If the logic were harmless, it would be hilarious.

But “minority” is not harmless. Zigzagging between quantitative and invidious meanings, it justified a dragnet in September 1992 in which officers rounded up all the black and Hispanic men and some women in Oneonta, New York. Police deployed the dragnet after an elderly white woman, victim of an attempted armed robbery, described her assailant as a black male, possibly young and with an injured wrist. Is it imaginable that police would round up, detain, question, and search every white person in a town because an elderly victim of attempted armed robbery described her assailant as a white male, possibly young and possibly with an injured wrist? Would they, furthermore, obtain lists of all white students on the local campus of the State University of New York, question them, and check their arms for signs of injury; detain white men found arriving in or leaving the town by bus; pull over cars carrying white persons; and even stop a white female admissions officer en route to visit her ailing grandmother? When a group of students posed that hypothetical question to a police official, he answered that it would not have been “practical.”

Practical hid the qualitative and invidious meaning of “minority” inside the quantitative one. It would not have been practical to arrest and search every white man in town over a vague suspicion attaching to one; neither would it have passed muster as legitimate police work.

Next on the tour, consider a habit so fundamental that, without it, there can be no racecraft: the will to classification. Writing in the New York Times, a social work consultant describes his intervention to stop a young woman from slapping her young child on the subway. Ordering her to stop, he threatens to call the police. Of about thirty persons in the car, only a woman in her fifties seated near the young woman takes a hand, quietly suggesting ways to handle the child without slapping. A stranger from Mars (if suitably briefed about New York subways) might have considered intervention by two out of about thirty people a high percentage, whoever the interveners were. Observing through the smoke of racecraft, however, the New Yorker immediately shuffles the protagonists into categories: He, “a 54-year-old white Jewish guy”; the child-slapper, “a young African-American kid with a kid”; the quiet counselor, “an African-American woman in her fifties”; and two white men who congratulated him for intervening, after the fact and at a safe distance. His first impression, that the silent onlookers from whom he “wished [he] had received more support” were “mainly black,” gave way upon later reflection to the realization that, actually, “there were many more whites.”

Recounting the story to a friend, the consultant again classifies. His friend, a “30-something Arab-Canadian,” says, “I don’t get the white and black in this. Why would you want the black people to jump in and give you support? Are the black people her people and the white people yours?” The consultant regards his friend’s response as “a post-racial analysis.” Not so fast. The “Arab-Canadian” is the nearest equivalent to a stranger from Mars: a person raised outside the force field of American racism, whose view therefore is not distorted by the haze of expectations (in other

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words, racecraft) through which the American-bred consultant filters what he sees. The Canadian is the outsider who attributes a drought, a crop failure, or an illness to ordinary cause and effect; the American is the insider on the alert for witchcraft.

That imprint of American rearing is not limited to white Americans, nor does travel abroad automatically disable its mental apparatus. Thus: A black American woman professor, recently arrived in France, staggers into a sixteenth-century church to escape the hot sun of Bordeaux in August. Looking straight ahead from the entrance, her vision zooms toward an image at the very center of the stained-glass window behind the altar: a black slave, kneeling and in chains. She asks Bordeaux residents the why and wherefore of it. They are astonished to learn that such an image exists in that well-known old church. Some openly doubt the report: “Where?” And: “What makes you think it is a slave?” One Saturday afternoon, the parish priest arrives to prepare for a wedding, just as the American visitor from Mars is leading a tour for University of Bordeaux students. The priest is as amazed as the students.5 By rights, the window had other claimants to attention. A Crusader in his red-cross tunic stood prominently on the slave’s right; above him, a huge Mary rose toward heaven; yet the eyes of the American went straight to the man in chains.

Black people everywhere do not “see” alike. Persons from Africa and the Caribbean may not see what Afro-Americans see. Visualize the Afro-American professor again, this time in Washington, DC, en route to Union Station, on a rainy fall afternoon in 2008, flagging down a taxi. She is safely on board when the African driver spots a soaked white traveler, loaded with baggage. He glances at her through the rearview mirror to ask if it will be all right to pick up the other traveler as well. Why, of course! He pulls to the curb and proposes. The traveler jumps, his face the very portrait of fear. “No, thank you. No, no. Thank you.” Getting under way again, the driver again glances in the mirror. “What was wrong with him?” At the professor’s explanation, “He saw a car full of black people,” the driver exclaims, his face registering shocked understanding. Asked later where he is from, he says, “I am Egyptian.” In not instantly seeing the reality that both the white and the black American did, the African cab driver qualifies as a Martian, too.

So do children before they have absorbed the classification system. In late June of 2009, sixty-five children aged six to twelve, most of them Afro-American or Hispanic, bounced out of their bus and ran toward the pool of the Valley Club, in Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania, near Philadelphia.6 Their day camp, Creative Steps, had a contract with the club for swimming one afternoon each week. At first sight of the children, the club members at the pool rose and flew like startled birds.7 “Made for the exits” and “pulled their children out of the pool” were phrases that appeared in reports of the ensuing uproar. What exactly did “pulling their children out” look like? How must a child have felt to be pulled out or to see others pulled out? What about the three white children whose parents let them stay? Most of all, how is it that grown-ups decided, all at once, to run from children?

On the following day, the club banned all the summer camps that had contracted to use the pool, which prompted the Justice

5 The American visitor is footnoted in a local tour book as the “discoverer” of this monument to black people’s past presence in the city. See Danielle Pétrissans-Cavaïlès, Sur les traces de la traite des noirs à Bordeaux (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2004), 64.


Department to file suit. Members began explaining their actions to themselves and to the press. According to the club’s president, “There was concern that a lot of kids would change the complexion ... and the atmosphere of the club.” Encouraged to rephrase (one supposes), he later affirmed that the events had “nothing to do with race.” There simply were “too many children in the pool,” so the situation “went from a safe swim club to an unsafe swim club.” The director of Creative Steps pointed out that the contract specified sixty-five children, and that “no one was misbehaving.”

The campers overheard remarks, prompting a seven-year-old to ask if she was “too dark” to go swimming. Her white counterparts almost certainly made guesses of their own, but none were reported, as though only the black children had experienced and would remember those moments. To the contrary, interviews hint at discussions that almost certainly occurred within and among the families. One man, who seems to speak for others, tells CNN that, “as general members, we were not told that they were coming. If we knew we could decide not to come when the pool was crowded or come anyway. We could have had an option.” By contrast, the need for such an “option” does not seem to have crossed the mind of the club president or his wife, both white. He speaks with the personal burden of having negotiated the ill-starred contract. She recounts a birthday party for the camp director’s son and his friends, held at the pool without incident the week before.

In an on-camera interview, the couple face the arrows alone: no other club members stand nearby. They identify themselves as Obama voters (to the sneers of some bloggers). The husband confesses to a “poor choice of words” and disavows the sentiment; but, in the hubbub, his action (having negotiated the contract)

11 See above, p. 11.
12 Quoted by Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, “Strategies and Forms of Resistance: Focus on Slave Women in the United States,” in Gary Y. Okihiro, ed., In
Rules designed to promote feelings of inferiority and superiority travel in tandem with expectations of deference and with rituals that simultaneously create and express the requisite feelings. In the South just after the Civil War (and, depending on the place, for many years thereafter), a black person was required to step off the sidewalk when a white person approached and, if male, to uncover his head. Obedience usually concealed the intrinsic violence of the rule and kept black people visibly in their place. This etiquette was not unique to the United States. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud recorded his feelings when his father described the same ritual, as performed in the Moravian town of Freiburg. Well dressed and wearing a new fur cap, Freud senior was walking along one day, when “a Christian came up to me and with a single blow knocked my cap into the mud, shouting, ‘Jew! Get off the pavement!’” The younger Freud then asked his father, “And what did you do?” Freud senior said quietly: “I went into the roadway and picked up my cap.” Thus did the ritual pass from a bygone real world into the dream life of a new generation.

Freud’s sidewalk could as well be a highway. On May 24, 2009, just after 1:00 p.m., an ambulance owned by the Creek Nation Tribal Authority and an Oklahoma State Police cruiser are winding along the hilly road between Paden and Prague, one behind the other. What happened next, captured on a cell phone, traveled the world via YouTube. One blog yelled the headline: Cop pulls over EMT [Emergency Medical Technician] and gives him the CHOKING HOLD. Yikes! Holy crap!” Next came the news in brief. “It was a jarring scene, if only for its incongruity, a highway patrolman trying to arrest an EMT. All the while there was a woman in the ambulance on the way to the hospital.”

Because the man being choked was black and the trooper was white, the incident at first looked like an extreme case of “driving

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while black.” It was not. When the driver of the Creek Nation ambulance at last agreed to a TV interview, he turned out to be, to all appearance, a white man. At length (and under enormous pressure), the authorities released a video of the whole encounter, recorded second by second by the cruiser’s dashboard camera.18 Loudly and with vulgarisms, the trooper chews out the ambulance driver for failing to yield to an emergency vehicle (though he, too, was driving one) and for having allegedly “flipped a bird” out the window: “I don’t have to put up with this shit … this disrespect.” The paramedic, who to all appearance is black, and who, until then, has been in the back of the ambulance (treating the patient?), emerges through the back door of the ambulance, steps down, and, his back to the camera, walks slowly toward the trooper. “I am in charge of this unit,” he says. He gives his name, presents his card, and suggests that the cruiser follow the ambulance to the hospital; there is a patient. “I don’t want to talk to you,” says the trooper, “Go back in the ambulance … get your ass back in that ambulance.” He is determined to deal only with the apparently white driver. Freud asked his father, “And what did you do?” The paramedic’s question to himself must have been “What shall I do?”19

In response to the trooper’s repeated order that he get back in the ambulance, the paramedic makes no move to obey, but keeps intoning words like “patient,” “duty,” “interfering,” “emergency vehicle,” and “sworn to protect.” The patrolman moves to arrest him. A scuffle breaks out. The scuffle jolts the ambulance. The patient starts screaming. Newcomers enter the frame. Someone calls the police. The white trooper is heard screaming at the driver of the Creek Nation ambulance. “Tell your manager” and “Your supervisor … jail!” A second trooper arrives. A new scuffle ensues when the original trooper tries again to handcuff the paramedic. Though held in a chokehold, the paramedic never stops talking, always in low volume. The second trooper, who can also be heard talking in low volume, gradually calms the situation.

An observer from the blogosphere thought that the paramedic should have deferred to the trooper and that he “needed to be taken down a peg or two.”20 Uppity, was he, talking about his duty to his patient? And did the patient need taking down as well? No matter. The choices are not open to observers’ remaking after the fact and at a safe distance. The point to notice is that, in the paramedic’s encounter, as in the elder Freud’s, violence crackles like electricity. Both encounters show that the everyday routines that organize racism do not always, but always can, explode.

Those routines do not require a large stage. They are just as powerful in small events, such as the children’s expulsion from the swimming club, as they are in a duel between adults about deference and respect. Every one of the children present, black or not, participated in a routine of racism that might have ended in violence. (Imagine, for example, that just one of the camper’s mothers had been present to overhear.) On the spot, unwritten rules that had been keeping black children out became explicit. When children who looked wrong to club members materialized at the pool, all but three parents (Heroines of the Republic!) did the same thing at the same time, as if a fire alarm had sounded.

Sumptuary rules produce a regular supply of circumstantial evidence about what the world is made of and who belongs where within it. Not only can rules endowed with that power shape action in advance, they can also shape opinions of which the holders may be unaware until the moment they come into play. Such rules shaped the campaign-era mocking of Candidate Obama’s taste for arugula, the elegant tailoring of his suits, and, especially, his habit of speaking in complete, grammatically correct English sentences.

18 The cell-phone video created a stir that defeated the initial decision of the State Police to sequester the video taken by the cruiser’s dashboard camera.
20 Ibid.
Counterparts of the rules under which pundits mocked Obama’s speech daily materialize in inner-city schools whenever children learn to mock the use of Standard English as “trying to be white,” and to enforce use of “Black English” through bullying. The present authors were teased good-naturedly for “talking all proper” as elementary-school children newly arrived in Washington, DC, and for speaking Standard English with Pittsburgh accents. Daily enforcement of such rules among peer groups of children both creates and polices racial distinctness.

Turn now to a familiar scene in which the sumptuary code in effect, from beginning to end, would doubtless escape a foreigner. Shoppers are scrutinizing the cart of a black woman holding food stamps, judging the appropriateness of her selections. Are food-stamp sirloins to be carried away in a welfare Cadillac? Turn the scene around. Now a black woman is under scrutiny for a large order, paid for at the last minute by credit card. Do the racecraft exercise yourself, and then do it again with a black man buying a large grocery order with cash. Now contemplate a double whammy: You are a black woman stepping into a shabby little store in upstate New York. Is it safe? How far away is help? (Far.) And look at that line of white people ahead of you buying their groceries with food stamps! Whoa! On top of being a black person surrounded by white people in the deep North, here comes the jaw-dropping (but why jaw-dropping?) spectacle of the white woman in front of you. She’s coming out of her jeans pocket with a wad of food stamps in her fist.

Reason suggests that a racecraft short-circuit made the black woman’s jaw drop at a sight that should have looked normal. It certainly looked normal to the white people in line with their food stamps. If white people are a majority in the area, then most poor people there are white, just as most rich people are. Turn the scene around again. What would have happened if the black woman, in turn, had pulled out a wad of food stamps? And which would racecraft single out for condemnation: an uppity Negro paying with cash or an undeserving Negro paying with food stamps? Along that way, the sumptuary code shades into the peculiar American predicament of having multiple class resentments but no legitimate language for talking about class. In that setup, the question “Why food stamps?” has two stock answers, depending on the ancestry of the person using them: on the one hand, fecklessness; on the other, bad luck, plant-closing, and the like.  

Now try a final twist. The food-stamp program underwent rebaptism in 2008 as SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program). Sleek plastic cards replaced the old food-stamp vouchers. What else has probably changed?

What does not change is that racecraft generates a unique language, opaque to outsiders. The phrase “social equality” was once widely understood by everyone, and especially everyone living in the Jim Crow South. It denoted a precipice that might claim the liberty, or even the life, of any Afro-American who ventured too near (like the 14-year-old Emmett Till, pistol-whipped, shot, and his mutilated body dumped into the Tallahatchie River in 1955, because he allegedly said “bye, baby” to a white woman; or the young man whose misfortune is recounted below in Chapter 2). Social equality was the taboo that Theodore Roosevelt violated by inviting Booker T. Washington to dine at the White House. Today, “social equality” has become a sepia-tinted relic, familiar only to scholars and antiquarians. By contrast, “race relations,” which was coined in the same era, sounds ordinary, and to grasp its weirdness requires historical probing. Invented in the late-nineteenth-century heyday of the Jim Crow regime, the term “race relations” finessed the abrogation of democracy and the bloody

21 See Conclusion, p. 282.
vigilantism that enforced it. Unlike "social equality," "race relations" has outlasted the regime that gave birth to it and continues in wide use. A college administrator, discussing friction between black and white roommates, automatically placed it under the rubric of race relations, even while aware that the friction involved no more than the usual occasions for roommate disputes, from noise to unauthorized use of each other’s property. Then and there, through the transforming power of racecraft, an individual becomes a race, roommates become an "interracial pairing," and the outcome, whether friction or friendship, becomes "race relations."  

Sometimes the fog of racecraft rolls in at the last minute, as a derailing non sequitur to an otherwise logical argument. A few years ago, the New York Times reported that scientists who conducted an epidemiological study of asthma among schoolchildren in South Bronx produced damning evidence about environmental pollution caused by heavy truck traffic. Their study identified the particle emissions, cited the location of major highways, and, through resourceful data collection, drew conclusions about the children's exposure, in specific neighborhoods, at different hours of the day, to "very high fine particle concentrations on a fairly regular basis." The correlations emerged: "Symptoms, like wheezing, doubled on days when pollution from truck traffic was highest." It would seem as clear as noonday that class inequality had imposed sickness on these American schoolchildren. Yet the article's summary tails off into confused pseudo-genetics. To a list of contributors to high asthma rates that includes heavy traffic, dense population, poorly maintained housing, and lack of access to medical care, the article adds "a large population of blacks and Hispanics, two groups with high rates of asthma." Racecraft has permitted the consequence under investigation to masquerade among the causes. Susceptibility to filthy air does not depend on the census category to which the asthma sufferer belongs. And even if that susceptibility is (to whatever degree) genetically determined, Dr. Venter's account of his own asthma stands as a reminder that "genetic" is not equivalent to "racial" or "ethnic."  

Some of the oddest racecraft moments come when scientists yoke modern genetics to folk notions. In the controversy over Dr. James D. Watson's remarks in London, some of his defenders charged his critics with a "politically correct" retreat from science, insisting that good science requires a free marketplace of ideas. Researchers must be free, they implied, to salvage the old bio-racist ranking of superior and inferior races, regardless of the collapse as science of its core concept, race. But it is doubtful that those foes of political correctness would wish to rehabilitate that part of bio-racism that once identified inferior white races.

If they took their own position seriously, they would applaud the writings of such eminent American scientists of the late nineteenth century as Edward Drinker Cope and Nathaniel Southgate Shaler (dean of Harvard's Lawrence Scientific School during the 1890s) on the inequality of races, not simply their work on dinosaurs and the earth's history. Cope advocated both the "return of the African to Africa" and restrictions on immigration by "the half-civilized hordes of Europe." Shaler agreed, characterizing those hordes as inferior "by birthright," "essentially in the same state as the Southern Negro," and distinct from "the Aryan variety of

27 See above, p. 6. The evolutionary biologist Joseph L. Graves has clarified for a lay audience that "genetic" and "racial" are not synonymous, in The Race Myth: Why We Pretend Race Exists in America (New York: Plume Press, 2005), 103–136.
28 See above, p. 8.
mankind.” Popularizers hustled bio-racist “science” into public policy. Madison Grant, who advocated “Nordic” superiority in his 1916 best-seller, The Passing of the Great Race: The Racial Basis of European History, purported to map class inequality onto physical traits, such as height:

The Nordic race is everywhere distinguished by great stature. Almost the tallest stature in the world is found among the pure Nordic populations of the Scottish and English borders, while the native British of Pre-Nordic brunet blood are, for the most part, relatively short; and no one can question the race value of stature who observes on the streets of London the contrast between the Piccadilly gentleman of Nordic race and the cockney costermonger [street vendor] of the old Neolithic type.\footnote{30}

In 1924, the lay and scientific streams of bio-racism converged in the Immigration Act of 1924 (which excluded European races deemed undesirable) and the Virginia Racial Integrity Act (which prohibited “miscegenation”). In the same year, Virginia adopted a law (upheld by the US Supreme Court three years later) providing for compulsory sterilization of persons held to be “defective and degenerate,” a group that included “the shiftless, ignorant and worthless class of anti-social whites of the South.”\footnote{31} The Nazis fol-

lowed these developments closely. When they decided to weed out the “unfit,” they had American models of how to proceed, from administrative searching of family trees to sterilization. They became “the dark apotheosis of eugenics.”\footnote{32}

In 1946, Leslie C. Dunn, a distinguished geneticist and part of a group intent on severing genetics from eugenics, wrote that the field “had developed . . . out of the racial problems presented so vividly to the United States by the great immigration of the early part of the century.”\footnote{33} Consistent application of the “free marketplace of ideas” principle today would restore to bio-racism and eugenics the respectability they once enjoyed.\footnote{34} Instead, “inferior white races” vanished from the lexicon of bio-racism, to rematerialize outside its purview as “ethnic” groups. The “shiftless, ignorant, and worthless” white people vanished altogether.\footnote{35} No one attributes to political correctness the demise of bio-racism as applied to white persons. So, the free-marketplace-of-ideas apologia for Watson’s bio-racism as applied to black persons turns out to be a familiar interloper, the practice of a double standard.

One of the present authors some years ago tested the limits of the free market in racist ideas. A crotchety yet likable right-wing colleague approached, looking disquieted and in need of moral support. He was “having trouble” with a certain black student in

\footnote{29} Both quotations appear in William H. Tucker, The Science and Politics of Racial Research (Champaign, Ill: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 35. In a careful and closely documented analysis, Tucker shows how the racist ideas and goals current in a society can promote seeming “science” as an evidentiary platform for racist public policy.

\footnote{30} Madison Grant, The Passing of the Great Race: The Racial Basis of European History (New York: Scribner’s, 1916), 26. Even as he wrote, “great stature” began to fail as a marker of racial superiority when tall Nordics discovered taller peoples in Africa, such as the Luos, from whom President Obama descends on his father’s side.


\footnote{32} Richard Coniff, “God and White Men at Yale,” Yale Alumni Magazine (May/June 2012), 50.

\footnote{33} In 1935, horrified by the Nazis’ Nuremberg Blood Law, Dunn urged the Carnegie Institution to close down its eugenics enterprise at Cold Spring Harbor, Long Island. Black, War Against the Weak, 391, 413. Dunn spoke out again in 1960, when the old blood mystique had an American renaissance.


his bio-psychology class. What was wrong, he wondered, with saying that “black people may, or (mind you) may not, prove to be intellectually inferior to white people? In science, you frame a hypothesis, devise an experiment, find out.” The student raised her hand and, when recognized, blasted him. “Do you know So-and-So (the student in question)?” asked the bio-psychologist. (The author did happen to know the student in question, an eighteen-year-old single mother of twins who was as bright as they come and not one to brook insult.) “Why can’t she grasp that there’s a scientific approach to things, blah, blah?” Finally, the author put a question. “If, as you say, there is no hypothesis that science excludes, why not try this assignment? Let your students pick any white ethnic group and any stereotype commonly applied to it, greedy, mendacious, dumb, drunken, gangsterish, and so on, then formulate a hypothesis, design the experiment, find out.” The colleague’s face froze.

Years later, an exotic predicament of ethnicity arose in the classroom. A young woman raised her hand, but fumbled for words when recognized: “Some of us want … I mean, we think we need,” then said, “I wish I had a race,” and fell silent. After a wait, the black woman professor prompted, “What do you mean?” The student explained that her family had immigrated to the United States from Iran, then stopped again. Perhaps the rest seemed obvious to her. It was not obvious to the rest of the class or to the professor. When asked why she “wants” a race, she mumbled something about the census form. “To have to write ‘Other’ isn’t, well, it isn’t very nice.” Understanding then lit faces all around the room. For that young woman, not to “have” a race is to be less than fully American. What can she do but take America’s imprisoning social forms as she finds them?

In recombinant varieties they flourish in America’s prisons, where not “having” a race is worse than “not nice”; it can be a life or death matter. David Arenberg, a Jewish inmate in an Illinois penitentiary, has written movingly about how he has survived a five-race classification that leaves no room for him. There are “woods,” short for peckerwoods (Euro-Americans, distributed between Skinheads and Aryan Brothers), “kinfolk” (Afro-Americans), “chiefs” (Native Americans), “razas” (Americans of Mexican descent), and “paisas” (Mexican immigrants).  

36 Strictly enforced segregation creates the races: inmates may play team sports together but not individual games like chess; may visit each other’s cubicles but not sit on each other’s beds; may attend the same church services but not pray together. The prison’s segregated markets also set up monopolies, with their associated economic rents. For example, although the razas and paisas vend drugs considered better and cheaper, a “wood” may buy only from another “wood.”  

37 The rule that different races may not break bread together is “invocated,” with penalties ranging from beating to execution. Arenberg’s predicament is that he cannot “fit into the chow hall.” He may not sit with the “woods,” to whom Jews are “not white but imposters who don white skin and hide inside it for the purpose of polluting and taking over the white race.” He may not sit with “the other races who don’t understand the subtleties of my treachery and take me for just another wood.”  

38 Arenberg lives on the edge of survival. Finally, a “head” in the Aryan Brotherhood brokers a classic Jim Crow solution. Once a suitable quid pro quo has been worked out, the Jewish prisoner is authorized to “sit at certain white tables after all the whites have finished eating.”  

39 The Aryan Brother is in earnest. He is logical, practical, and inventive within the racist premises. There is grim American humor in the likelihood that he believes his own rationale even though, or perhaps because, it is absurd.


[38] See Chapter 2, below.

Both absurdity and grim humor, perhaps unintended, combined in an 1895 New York Times obituary of Frederick Douglass, the celebrated son of a slave and a slave master. The author of the obituary ruminated on the idiotic question that must have been percolating in many minds: Which race could justly claim this superlatively gifted individual?

It might not be unreasonable, perhaps, to intimate that his white blood may have something to do with the remarkable energy he displayed and the superior intelligence he manifested. Indeed, it might not be altogether unreasonable to ask whether, with more white blood, he would not have been an even better and greater man than he was, and whether the fact that he had black blood may not have cost the world a genius, and be, in consequence, a cause for lamentation instead of a source of lyrical enthusiasm over African possibilities. It is always more or less foolish to credit or discredit a race with the doings, good or bad, of a particular member of that race, but if it must be done, plain justice should see to it that the right race gets the glory or the humiliation.40

If anyone seeks a monument to racecraft, gaze at that one.

In The Ultimate Solution of the American Negro Problem (1913), the historian Edward Eggleston erected another. He solved the Douglass conundrum by invoking (of all things!) racial purity: "His father was a pure Anglo-American."41 Eggleston’s research on the general problem took him to a “Negro school” (Hampton Institute), where he noticed the prevalence of light-skinned students. He interviewed a “very intelligent and reliable colored man,” whom he described as “one-fourth Negro, one-fourth Amerind and the remaining half white man.” The “reliable” interviewee regards the pure Negro as far below the half-breed in intelligence, though the latter is generally more vicious and criminal, consequent, in part at least, upon a realization of his hopeless position as an inferior, apart from his individual worth, and especially because of his classification as a Negro.” Then the interviewee added a twist, which Eggleston transcribed without comment: “He also regards the mulatto as mentally and physically inferior to the pure-blooded white man, but holds that justice demands that they may be recognized as occupying an intermediate position between the two races.”42

While the “white races” of the past became ethnic groups, the opposite has happened to the census category “Hispanic.” Discussing the “mark one or more” option that appeared for the first time on the 2000 census, a reporter dutifully explained that “Hispanic” designates an ethnicity, not a race, and that “Hispanics can be of any race.”43 Such, in any case, was said to be official thinking when the Nixon administration concocted the term Hispanic for the 1970 census. (Be it remembered that Nixon’s infamous “Southern Strategy” required alertness to every political nuance of racecraft, North and South.)44 Whatever the official rationale claimed, a new “minority” was born. Census enumerators in California were soon locking horns with “Hispanic” families who rejected the term Hispanic. Some preferred “to identify with a specific country of origin or heritage.”45 Others insisted on their Indian ethnicity. (After all, they had been invited to “self-identify.”) By 2003, the Census Bureau was reporting that “Hispanics” had become the largest “minority group” in the

41 Edward Eggleston, The Ultimate Solution of the Negro Problem (Boston, MA: Gorham, 1913), 252.
42 Ibid., 250.
45 Bill Analysis of AB1281, Assembly Third Reading As Amended May 18, 2009, ftp://leginfo.public.ca.gov.
United States, still insisting in its press release that, unlike blacks and Asians, Hispanics are not a race.46

Blood-bank officials in Detroit evidently thought otherwise. When they set out in 1986 to search for rare blood types found “almost exclusively” among “minority” donors, they were determined to identify the donors by race. From that, it surely followed that “Hispanic” had its place alongside “black” and “white” in their reports.47 The new census category thus hatched a new pseudo-genetic population. Once hatched, the new population, by definition, would have its own distinguishing blood and rare antigens—though not so distinguishing as to rule out grouping “Oriental, Hispanic, and native American” donors together in the search.

By 2007, “Hispanic” had taken another step toward becoming a race when enterprising researchers sought, and received, taxpayers’ money for research on something called a “Hispanic” genome. A brief article on an inside page of the Washington Times disclosed that the researchers, having received money from the Veterans Affairs Department, “broke federal rules by crossing the US border to pay subjects in Mexico for blood samples.” The researchers’ travel invoice included “taking the government car into Juarez … to see a subject for the Latino Genetics Study.” Their work “involved testing to identify genetic tendencies in illnesses and disorders among Hispanics.” The researchers had established contact with twenty subjects, and paid $125 for two blood samples and an interview, when an anonymous whistleblower prompted an investigation. Eventually, the director of the New Mexico Veterans

48 The phrasing uncannily echoes an old race science treatise, originally commissioned in 1896 by the American Economic Association: Frank L. Hoffman, Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro, recently reissued with a new Introduction by Paul Finkelman (Clark, NJ: The Lawbook Exchange, 2004 [1896]).
extremely rare blood types as a racial characteristic, were strangely untroubled when nature had its say: Only fifty of the 7,706 black donors tested (fewer than 7 per thousand) carried the four rare antigens that they had sought “exclusively” among black donors.52 For a time, however, they were troubled indeed by a widespread public mistrust and by “recalcitrant groups” opposed to labeling by race. So they had to prove not only that their program was worthy but also that its motives were trustworthy.53 At a different level, the plot thickened over the practical question of how to determine an individual’s race; the result had to be valid yet voluntary. It would not do simply to look at a would-be donor and then decide; or, just as bad, to look and then ask. In the end they devised an incantation: “Interviewers were instructed to ask, ‘Which racial group should I record for you: black, white, Hispanic, American Indian, or other?’ This has been accepted well.” Talk of blood is as sticky and slippery as the substance itself.

Blood Works

Understood as kin and as kind, blood inhabits the profoundest layer of mystique that humanity has carried with it from time immemorial. As a natural substance, blood is far older than the mystique and entirely independent of it. When Karl Landsteiner described the A and B antigens in human blood (1900–1), he solved a puzzle: why transfusions helped some patients and killed others.54 That decisive work, for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1930, revealed natural blood’s own profound layers and biochemical properties, moving parts that have nothing to do with human groups. “The scientifically established universal truth,” declared the anthropologist Ashley Montagu, fuming over the Nazis’ efforts to read the evidence otherwise, “is that all human beings, no matter of what creed or complexion they may be, are of one and the same blood.”

By contrast, metaphorical blood can dispense with the moving parts of natural blood and has always had everything to do with human groups. When nature made room for human society, human beings made room for nature in society.55 And blood made in society by human beings has properties that nature knows nothing about. It can consecrate and purify; it can also profane and pollute. It can define a community and police the borders thereof. Natural blood never does that sort of thing; it only sustains biological functioning. If it is to perform metaphorical tasks, human beings must carry out those tasks on its behalf. This, Nazi scientists did in imagining blood type B (found somewhat more frequently among Eastern Europeans and Jews than among non-Jewish Germans) to be a “marker” of the “darker, Asiatic races.”56 Eventually, they claimed to have devised a blood test for “non-Aryanism.”

In 1946, as thoughtful observers drew lessons from World War II, Montagu dissected the popular belief that underpinned race: the belief that blood is equivalent to heredity, determining the quality of the person and his or her social as well as biological status. He numbered such ideas “among the oldest surviving from the earliest days of mankind.”57 Finding beliefs about blood implicated in the desolation of the recent war and genocide, Montagu reflected on the persistence of those beliefs in the twentieth century despite

52 Beattie and Shafer, “Broadening the Base of a Rare Donor Program,” 401.
53 Ibid., 402–3.
59 Montagu, Man’s Most Dangerous Myth, 214.
well-established scientific evidence of their falsity. He was not talking about the uneducated when he lamented that the thoughts of the great majority are controlled by “words, verbal habits,” while only a minority of people “control their words by thoughts.” Indeed, Montagu unwittingly illustrated the power of “verbal habits” by his own incomplete break with the folk notion of race.60

Blood in the form of words and verbal habits has proved to be an adroit stowaway. It crashed the celebration of Inauguration Day 2009. “We have our first bi-racial president,” the website of Project RACE exulted, adding that “even if Obama identifies as an African American, he cannot deny DNA.”61 Turbulence is inevitable when the concepts of modern genetics fly in the wake of folk notions. What can it mean to “deny DNA”? If spelled out, the statement becomes unintelligible: “Even if Obama identifies as an African American, he cannot deny DNA.” Substitute “blood,” however, and notice that it is instantly intelligible: “Even if Obama identifies as an African American, he cannot deny blood.” The scientific concept “DNA” has slid into a spurious synonymy with “blood,” the ancient metaphor of kinship and descent.62

When equated to “DNA,” “blood” resumes its prehistoric career. Only as metaphor may one speak of “black genes” and “white genes,” or of “white” and “black” blood. But once invoked, the metaphor launches a logical program of its own: If “blood” is synonymous with “race,” and “DNA” is synonymous with “blood,” then “DNA” is synonymous with “race.” Although spurious, that

synonymy engages a powerful logic in its turn. Invoke a race, and the notion of a distinguishing blood stands to reason. In the folk lexicon, that is precisely what race means. Invoke a disease, and a race-and-disease equation becomes plausible; as it did for the illicit research travelers to Juarez, mentioned earlier. If the race-and-disease equation does not work, a sub-program about disease process clicks on; as when researchers devised the infamous Tuskegee syphilis “experiment” to test the belief that syphilis killed black and white patients differently—though the test involved black subjects only.63 If the sub-program about “race-specific” disease process stalls for want of data, the input of a drug defined as “race-specific” can easily restart it. The power of this ancient metaphor reveals itself fully when news articles identifying a genetic basis for this or that medical condition are read, and even written, as if “genetic” and “racial” were one and the same. At that point, “gene” is no longer a scientific notion. It is a folk notion traveling incognito.

The equation of genetic with racial slides into research, as reported in a 1990 New York Times article headlined “Uneasy Doctors Add Race-Consciousness to Diagnostic Tools”:

One treatment for severe episodes of sickle cell disease, an inherited blood disorder that mainly affects blacks in this country, involves giving the patient blood transfusions. About one-third of these patients develop antibodies against foreign proteins in the donated blood, which makes it very difficult to find compatible blood for subsequent treatment ... Researchers determined that

62 Emile Durkheim recorded unforgettable images of blood symbolism in representations of kinship expressed as totems that join bounded groups of human beings to one another (but also to animals) and distinguished them from other human groups of the same kind. See Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of Religious Life, esp. 303–54.
82 percent of the antibodies produced by sickle cell patients were against four proteins commonly found in blood donated by whites and suggested that the complication was partly a result of racial differences.64

Even a cursory examination of the evidence proves that what the researchers identified was not a racial characteristic. Among Afro-Americans, a minority exhibit sickle-cell trait. Of that minority, a further minority develops sickle-cell disease. Of that minority, one-third produced the antibodies in question. In other words, the antibodies occurred in a minority of a minority of a minority of Afro-Americans. Why call something a racial characteristic that is neither racial nor characteristic?65

And what of the researchers' sickle-cell patients, also black and also recipients of blood from white donors, who, when transfused with what the researchers call “racially unmatched blood,” did not produce the same reaction? By the reasoning at work, race retained its explanatory status as a “cause” even though it failed to account for the outcomes of two-thirds of the patients. Calling genetic racial simplifies analysis by cutting it off.

One might expect scientific investigators to discard and replace a so-called explanation that fails to account for two-thirds of their results; or, if not that, to make room for fresh questions about the

65 In the footnotes to Chapter 3, “Of Rogues and Geldings,” you will find a reference to the effort of Steven Pinker, a distinguished scientist, to rehabilitate the conception of biological race by referring both to sickle cell trait and to Tay-Sachs disease. He has committed the same error: confusing “genetic” with “racial.”

ramifications of the disease itself; or at least to wonder whether doctors treating sickle-cell patients in Turkey, Italy, Greece, India, and elsewhere experience similar problems. After all, sickle-cell patients are not necessarily black Americans. The doctors who first described the sickle-shaped malformation of red blood cells were indeed treating a black patient (in Chicago in 1910). But by 1929, researchers had discovered it in white patients, documenting its existence in Southern Europe.66 In 1946, researchers in Tarsus (Saint Paul's birthplace), finding sickle-cell sufferers with light hair and green eyes, remarked: “Negroid features ... were not observable in any of the patients.”67

American folklore still calls sickle cell a “black” disease. In the 1950s, it figured in the vernacular of Southern campaigns to enact blood labeling by race into law.68 And when Richard Nixon signed the Sickle Cell Control Act of 1972, he first characterized the disease correctly (“an inherited blood disorder, caused by a genetically determined change in the chemical constituents of hemoglobin, thus affecting the oxygen-carrying capacity of the blood”) and in the next breath mischaracterized it as a disease that “strikes only blacks.”69 That mischaracterization enjoys a singular immunity to scientific disproof. During the fall of 2010, a hot exchange broke out at a respected medical school when a white woman doctor

stood in a public lecture to contradict a distinguished speaker who had observed, in passing, that sickle cell was not a "black" disease. Some Afro-Americans who do not even carry the trait embrace the disease as "racial identity"; Euro-Americans who do carry the trait and the disease have no public profile. As a disorder of the blood, sickle cell in America has become entangled in the folk notions surrounding the notion of blood-as-race.

A similar entanglement explains the contortions of a young woman, aspirant to a scientific career, as she lurches between scientific and folk conceptions. "Thanks to knowledge of DNA," she allows, "race is not scientific." But, she goes on to insist that race may, nevertheless, be "meaningful" in medicine and has dreams of studying "genetic health risks in the multiracial population." To do that, she must ignore inheritance through parents (a proper subject for genetic study) and pursue instead the faux-genetics of "the multiracial population," a purely political concoction. From the initial false premise, she proceeds through a series of non sequiturs to elaborate her professional aspiration: to discover "genetic predictors that help identify whether multiracial people may have higher or lower efficacy in response to a drug." If she means "higher or lower" compared to (supposedly) unmixed persons, she has reinvented pure races, the core fiction of bi-racist thought. And in identifying the offspring of mixed parents as a "multiracial population"—that is, literally sui generis, different from both parents—she has rediscovered a core fiction of folk-racism, unnatural neo-humans. It must bemuse any Martian who may be monitoring Earth from a distant outpost to find intelligent life studying nature, learning something about it, and then blithely discarding the results.

Lay persons are not the only ones who, like that young woman, conjure with metaphorical blood. Most scientists learned to think within the metaphor long before they learned to think outside it, as scientists, about actual blood. Might not even a scientifically literate person, upon reading deCode Genetics' disclosure about Dr. James Watson's genome, have offhanded something like, "To look at Jim [Watson] you'd never know he had black blood"? And of course you would not. Precisely the fear of not knowing has long amplified the dread of "miscegenation," a dread that even now, as President Obama has put it, evokes "a distant world of horsewhips and flames, dead magnolias and crumbling porticos."

William Faulkner captured the dread, and the blood fixation behind it, in his novel Light in August (1932). When a mob castrated the "white nigger" Joe Christmas, "the pent black blood seemed ... to rush out of his pale body like the rush of sparks from a rising rocket; upon that black blast the man seemed to rise soaring into [the townspeople's] memories forever and ever." Black blood exists only as metaphor. Faulkner's genius was to convey the metaphor, not by inventing a further metaphor, but literally and realistically. The members of the mob saw and remembered physical evidence that seemed to corroborate what, in fact, they saw only with the mind's eye. Their own actions created evidence, not of Joe Christmas's ancestry (which they never ascertained), but for the blood-is-race equation:

The black blood drove him first to the negro cabin. And then the white blood drove him out of there, as it was the black blood which snatched up the pistol and the white blood which would not let him fire it ... It was the black blood which swept him by his own desire beyond the aid of any man, swept him up into that ecstasy out of a black jungle where life has already ceased before the heart stops.

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70 Personal communication by a witness (name withheld) to this exchange.
and death is desire and fulfillment. And then the black blood failed
him again.\textsuperscript{74}

This extraordinary metaphysics, which Faulkner ascribes to a
Southern community circa 1932, animated the Frederick Douglass
obituary of 1895 and updated itself in 2009, to kidnap a young
woman’s precious dreams of work worth doing.

A similar metaphysics led to a clash between natural and
metaphorical blood under the Nazis’ Nuremberg Blood Law of
September 1935. The law forbade blood mixing but said nothing
about transfusion.\textsuperscript{75} An unsettling practical question rushed almost
immediately into that silence. A Jewish doctor had used his own
blood to give an Aryan patient an emergency transfusion. Having
a compatible blood type, he saved the Aryan’s life. The question
was “Did the life-saving blood reclassify his Aryan patient?” On
October 19, a certain Professor Leffler, highly placed in the racial-
political bureau of the National Socialist Party, dismissed any such
suggestion as “sheer nonsense,” a product of “mental confusion
due purely to the figurative use of the word ‘blood’ in the sense of
heredity.”\textsuperscript{76}

But the law, which spoke of “defilement,” that is, profana-
tion, possessed not “confusion” but terrible ritual clarity.\textsuperscript{77} By
definition, a profanation alters something or someone instantly
and absolutely; in the paradigm case, from life to death. As
both a scientist and a Nazi official, Leffler had his boots in both
natural and figurative blood. Therefore: The Jewish doctor’s
donation of natural blood saved an Aryan life, while his donation
of figurative blood justified his being sent to a concentration

camp.\textsuperscript{78} During the war, donors were compelled to prove their Aryan
descent. To the real world models of Faulkner’s Mississippians,
such a regulation would have seemed entirely justified, never mind
the likely cost in lives. In the words of a Louisiana politician of
the succeeding generation, when his state’s blood-segregation law
came under attack: “I would see my family die and go to eternity
before I would see them have a drop of nigger blood in them.”\textsuperscript{79}

The War Department appreciated the tenacity of such beliefs.
In 1940, the United States, not yet in the war, was aiding Britain
through the “Plasma for Britain” program, and calls went forth for
blood donation to save victims of the Blitz. Despite the urgency,
some questioned the propriety of sending “Negro blood” to the
British wounded and even turned away black would-be donors.
Their noise accompanied the work of Dr. Charles Drew, an Afro-
American surgeon and expert on blood storage, who built and
directed the program.\textsuperscript{80} His close colleague was Dr. John Scudder,
a professor at the Columbia University College of Medicine and
Surgery who, two years earlier, had chaired his doctoral disserta-
tion on blood storage. Drew had taken leave from his post
at the Howard University College of Medicine and deferred his
dream of training surgeons there. In New York, he worked with
the racist drumbeat ever at his back. As the United States readied
itself for war and the Red Cross Blood Bank’s preparations became
more urgent, the War Department silenced the drums. It ordered
segregation of the blood supply for what it called “reasons not
biologically convincing” but “commonly recognized [as] psychol-
ogically important in America.”\textsuperscript{81}

\textsuperscript{74} Faulkner, \textit{Light in August} (Norwalk, CT: Easton Press, 1992 [1932]), 344,
449, 464–5.

\textsuperscript{75} “Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor (September

\textsuperscript{76} Wireless to the \textit{New York Times}, October 20, 1935, 28. Collection of the
Boatwright Library, University of Richmond.


\textsuperscript{78} Wireless to the \textit{New York Times}, October 20, 1935, 28.

\textsuperscript{79} Lederer, \textit{Flesh and Blood}, 134.

\textsuperscript{80} Robyn Mahone-Lonesome, \textit{Charles Drew} (New York: Chelsea House,
1990), 49, 62, 72–3.

\textsuperscript{81} Quoted in ibid., 77. Norman H. Davis, Chairman of the American Red
Cross, answered a pointed question by Eleanor Roosevelt in almost identical
language; quoted in Lederer, \textit{Flesh and Blood}, 117.
“Indefensible from any point of view,” declared Drew who, after returning to Howard University, took part in the fight against the exclusion of black people from donating blood. If wartime sacrifice was every citizen’s duty, then giving blood was every citizen’s right. The campaigners won the point after a fashion, but the “victory” gave rise to blood labeling by race. The fight and its outcome soured Afro-Americans on blood donation for years thereafter. Scudder, who took over after Drew’s departure, presided over the logistics, sane and insane, of managing America’s stored blood in the war emergency. The insane logistics ranged from designating separate refrigerators (or labeled shelves therein) and separate days for black donors, to “do you mind?” queries addressed to transfusion patients. (Landsteiner, settled in the United States since 1922, must have felt like an Extraterrestrial.) Not until 1950, the year in which Drew died tragically, did the Red Cross announce that it had stopped the practice of segregating blood.

John Scudder added his own chapter to the ancient metaphysics of blood. At an annual convention of blood bankers in 1959, he and a Canadian colleague unveiled a “new philosophy” of racial blood that applied the blood-race equation to blood transfusion. Among other things, the new philosophy held that transfusion could be made safer by recruiting donors from the recipient’s “own race.”

By giving advance telephone interviews, Scudder promoted press attendance at the meeting and thereby stoked a national controversy. A New York Times headline homed in on Scudder’s key point: “Blood Expert Says Transfusion between Races May Be Perilous.” In the midst, and in the wake, of that controversy, some Southern states debated laws to require labeling or to prohibit transfusion between black and white persons. Dr. W. Montague Cobb, Drew’s colleague in the National Medical Association, immediately invited Scudder to submit to the Association’s journal “a concise statement of his premises and evidence” for review by scientific peers, a step Scudder had until then skipped.

Scudder’s argument, later reprised in a symposium in the Journal of the National Medical Association, rested principally on two cases. In the first, testing the blood of a white veteran,

83 The authors’ father used to sniff with contempt when driving with them, as children, past the Red Cross headquarters near the Mall in Washington, D.C.
84 Psychologically speaking, blood was no different from a movie theater, a bank, a dry goods store, or a train, in that it had to be made practical. In consequence, the planning of public space for different purposes took on strange similarities. See Robert R. Weyeneth, “The Architecture of Racial Segregation: The Challenges of Preserving the Problematical Past,” Public Historian 27:4 (Fall 2005), 11–44.
85 Lederer, Flesh and Blood, 122.
86 Ibid.
who was being prepared for open-heart surgery, had revealed an “atypical” antibody. Scudder attributed it to the “Negro donor” who had given him blood during an exploratory procedure conducted earlier. In the second, a black Canadian woman with sickle cell anemia began to have severe reactions after sixteen years of transfusion and many units of blood. Scudder ascribed her difficulty to the likelihood that, in the city of Hamilton, Ontario, all of her donors were white. The symmetrical case studies, one white and one black, set up Scudder’s slogan, “Unto each his own,” his version of the Sunday-go-to-meeting, best-for-all-concerned formulation of Jim Crow.

Scudder’s audience of scientists was riveted by the medical issue, safe transfusion, and thus by the moving parts of natural blood. In contrast, Scudder was addressing his other audiences as well. He freely intertwined his personal musings (about the superior rationality of arranged marriage under India’s caste system and about the proper breeding of great racehorses) with his discussion of the blood factors implicated in the two incidents. When focused on those incidents, Scudder argued that the danger of transfusion between black and white people arose because certain antigens occur in the two groups with different statistical frequency. But the particulars of the two incidents reveal a less tidy reality than Scudder envisaged.

The veteran in the first incident had been sensitized against an antigen that Scudder’s table showed to be statistically more frequent among black people (93 percent) than white (77 percent). Drawing attention to that table, one commentator pointed out what would have been obvious to anyone not viewing the evidence through the haze of racecraft: that the white veteran might well have been sensitized by a white donor’s blood. In the second incident, testing on the Canadian woman’s blood revealed antibodies against an antigen statistically more common in white donors than black. But his own table revealed that she had about one chance in four of being sensitized by a black donor’s blood. Furthermore, even then experts knew the risk of adverse reaction to be cumulative, and she had had a great many transfusions, over many years. One of the commentators, the president of the American Association of Blood Bankers, identified the key point: “Every individual has a complex arrangement of different blood factors, making his blood as unique as his own fingerprints.” In other words, the individual, not the group, is the appropriate unit of analysis. Guesswork rooted in statistical generalization is no substitute for individual testing to obtain the closest possible matching of blood.

End of story, it would seem. The ban on black blood donors ended before the war did. The commotion about blood segregation quieted in 1950, except in Deep South fastnesses, and is silent today. Leading American scientists refuted Scudder’s “new philosophy.” A new day seemed to dawn. Yet into that new light falls the shadow. The blood-race equation shambles from the grave in which Ashley Montagu’s generation tried to bury it. As George Santayana (almost) said, those who do not learn from history will have no idea what they are repeating.

In August 2010, the Atlanta office of the American Red Cross mailed an appeal to black college students at the Atlanta University Center. “African-American donors,” the letter explained, “provide the best chance of survival for patients of color with rare blood types or those who must have repeated transfusions for sickle cell anemia, heart disease, kidney disease, or trauma.” There followed a tag line straight from John Scudder’s “Unto Each His Own”

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philosophy: "Blood from a donor with a similar ethnic background to that of the patient is less likely to be rejected or cause complications or illness." A timeless time-traveler and agile shape-shifter, the blood-race equation is back, clothed in the good intentions of a Sickle Cell Awareness Month blood drive. Its generous message ("Come out and give blood") conceals a weird threat ("Because your loved one may not be able to accept white blood!").

Was there new evidence to support the old claim? In response to an inquiry, the Red Cross forwarded two items. One was a 2008 article describing (among other things) a proposed "transfusion model" under which sickle-cell patients would be given blood "from only AA [that is, African-American] donors," on the rationale that an "E-negative, C-negative, Fy(a)-negative, K-negative, and Jk(b)-negative red blood cell product is 93 per cent likely from an AA donor and only 7% likely from a white donor." But "AA" turns out to be a genetically meaningless category, for it includes persons who "identify with African American culture" or with "other cultural groups such as English-speaking Caribbean and African immigrants.”

That "English-speaking" and "identifying with African American culture" might be relevant to blood antigens came as news to the present authors. But most baffling was the inclusion of "African" in the catch-all "AA" category, since Africa's peoples are more diverse genetically than the rest of the world combined. The working assumptions of the article seem to be that all sickle-cell patients are black, that all black people have similar assortments of antigens, and that a 93 percent likelihood of safety is an acceptable (because cost-saving) alternative to individual testing. The authors concede that "no clinical trials have been performed to show that such an approach would reduce the rate of alloimmunization." Still, a question arises whether an Ethical Review Board would approve research founded on what amounts to a bet that, when the trigger is pulled, the hammer will fall on an empty chamber 93 percent of the time and on a bullet in the other 7 percent. What would a consent form for participants in such a study look like?

The other item that the Red Cross offered was the study of sickle-cell patients discussed above, notable for its "partly" racial causality that proved irrelevant for two-thirds of the patients, and for the reappearance of "black blood" in modern camouflage. Equally notable is its talk of matching blood "by race or antigen," that is, by either a census category or a natural substance. Another oddity is its junk comparison group: a small sample of "non-black" patients with miscellaneous anemias, drawn from a single hospital. The disinterment of that antiquated study prompted the present authors to read it along with the correspondence it provoked at the time. A group of doctors from Spain calculated the rate of mismatched red-cell antigens from data provided in the original article. They concluded that "racially mismatched blood would not be the cause of the high alloimmunization rate in patients with sickle cell anemia." A correspondent from Memphis wondered why the authors took for granted that the prevalence of antigens

97 Regional Office, American Red Cross, [To Blood Donors in Atlanta], August 19, 2010, in authors' possession.
98 Personal communication from Jonathan Marks, February 12, 2011. Consider this excerpt from a 1990 letter by Gerald M. Bordin, MD, to the New England Journal of Medicine: some blood banks "permitted delays in the initiation of transfusion therapy because racially matched blood was not immediately available (although blood from a racially different donor was available)." New England Journal of Medicine, November 15, 1990, 1420.
100 Ibid., 207.
would vary more between white and black populations than within those populations, when their own evidence showed the prevalence of the C antigen in the white American population, ranging from 68 percent to 83 percent. The Red Cross offered no guidance on these questions to the lay recipients of its supporting “evidence.”

And so the tour returns to its starting point, the mingling of peoples that goes back many generations in America. When, as mentioned above, Eggleston interviewed his “reliable colored man” at Hampton, he listed three sources of the man’s genetic inheritance: “one-fourth Negro, one-fourth Amerind and the remaining half white man” (see above, p.46). Many Americans of long heritage in the United States do not owe their genetic constitution to any one of those tidily bounded quasi-genetic units called races. The phrase “to all appearance” deliberately qualified our description of the dark-skinned EMT in charge of the Creek Nation’s ambulance as “black.” Was he related to the Creek Nation? In fact, his surname, “White,” appears on a genealogical list of “Black Creeks.” Nature need not follow the “one drop of blood” rule when passing along traits.

The idea of a one-drop-of-blood rule for identifying black persons carries no trace of oddity for most native-born Americans. Outside that gravitational field, however, such language can be, literally, unintelligible. When one of the authors lectured at Keio University in Tokyo some years ago, that expression stumped a group of students, proficient in English, who were interpreting for their classmates. Although human beings do not actually have some of this blood and some of that, Americans typically do not register the concept as metaphorical. Many non-Americans find it so bizarre as to defy translation. A Japanese colleague suggested that it smelled of the ghoulish, rather like speaking of someone’s having a pound of this flesh and a pound of that.

“Ghoulish.” fits the irruption of umbilical cord blood into politics, enlisting sensible efforts to “collect cord blood for public use and deposit in the national inventory” into a political project to create a racial classification. Umbilical cord blood, which holds the same promise for healing as embryonic stem cells, has no business in such company. Blood and state-sponsored racial classification form a political compound of known destructive power. But Project RACE has precisely that mission. Its motto is “Leading the movement for a multiracial classification.” (RACE is an acronym for “Reclassify All Children Equally.”) A 1996 bulletin urged participation in the bone marrow drive, proving that, if blood is the soul of racecraft and if the familiar recipe of politically concocted race calls for blood, then every phase of blood stands open to metaphorical application. To “ghoulish,” therefore, we add “instructive.”

Not all groups that might be thought akin to Project RACE, however, have traveled the same road, set the same goals, or reached the same conclusions. The logic to be examined now pertains to that organization and is not necessarily representative. Even Project RACE did not begin with blood. It launched itself with the claim that the new census classification would help to prevent mistaken diagnoses and thus “save lives.” In the early 1990s, a researcher repeatedly asked activists how a state-sponsored racial classification could possibly accomplish any such thing. No one proffered an answer. Indeed, no one seemed to have thought much, if at all, in terms of workaday cause and effect. What seems to have mattered was the thought-structure of racecraft, which readily dispenses with material causality. Within it, the notion of

103 Arturo Pereira, Roberto Massara, and Ricardo Castillo; and Barbara J. Wilson-Relyea; Correspondence, New England Journal of Medicine 323:20 (November 15, 1990), 1421–2.
105 Virginia’s “Racial Integrity Act of 1924” aimed for exhaustive enforcement of the “one-drop” rule. See Black, War Against the Weak, 167–81.
106 Kim M. Williams, Mark One or More: Civil Rights in Multiracial America (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 44.
a race dovetails with the folk notion that different races of people have differently constituted bodies and correspondingly different susceptibilities to illness. Whereas Jefferson cited that notion as a rationale for deporting freed slaves, its deployment today, with the rationale of “saving lives,” lends a beneficent veneer to folk racism. Indeed, the will to beneficence may explain how the census classification “Hispanic” was “not a race” in 2003 but, by 2007, had become the object of the taxpayer-funded “Latino Genetics Study,” which called for “testing to identify genetic tendencies in illnesses and disorders among Hispanics.”

By fall 1996, Project RACE believed in blood types called “ethnic” and “biracial/multiracial.” Their efforts, in the national campaign to encourage Americans to register as bone marrow donors, appeared on a bulletin titled “Urgent Medical Concerns.” Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., at top right of the screen, speaks as he did in 1966, arguing for Medicaid: “Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in healthcare is the most shocking and inhuman.”

Thirty years later, his memory and his words are annexed by a self-inventing new “minority” campaigning for the multiplication of racism rather than its uprooting, the antithesis of what King stood for. The bulletin warns the organization’s members that “donors for multiracial people are RARE because of the need for racial and ethnic matching.” The truth is that matching is individual, tragically so when (as in about 70 percent of cases) close relatives and even full siblings of the patient cannot provide a match. The bulletin’s blood-talk teeters on the edge of letting members imagine that they would be helping to prepare especially labeled supplies.

Pernicious falsehood seldom advertises its pedigree. Who would have thought, at this late date, that people would conceive a panicking to rehabilitate racist subcategories that were born centuries ago in every New World slave society except the United States—which made do with a categorical black/white distinction? Or would turn to primitive fascination with blood as a mystical symbol of group membership, and to genealogical investigation reminiscent of the estatutos de limpieza de sangre that once identified Jews for persecution in Spain and Spanish America? Yet it is today’s news. In early 2009, the Project RACE organization’s website editorialized about two pending bills that it supported as components of a single agenda. One, “The California School Racial Equality Designation Act” (AB1281), “outlined a way for any educational system to allow biracial and multiracial children the respect and dignity they deserve ….” The other, “The California Umbilical Cord Collection Program” (AB 52), had general application, but it would “also help save the lives of multiracial children and adults, as a medical program similar to bone marrow donation.”

On April 24 of that year, the California Assembly passed AB 52 with wording that, without fully endorsing the bogus medical claims, allowed the activists to declare victory. It passed AB 1281 as well. In advertising the presence of six “multiracial”

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108 See above, p. 18.
109 See above, p. 47. To complicate further, “the census figures for ‘white’ refer to those who are not of Hispanic ethnicity,” while Hispanic, “for purposes of defining interracial marriages … is counted as a race.” Hope Yen, “Multiracial People Become Fastest-Growing US Group,” AP, May 28, 2009.
111 “First National Effort to Reach Multiracial Bone Marrow Donors a Success,” www.projecttrace.com (emphasis in the original).
employees in his office, the politician who godfathered AB 52 implied that those employees would share in the life-saving medical benefits. The suggestion was nonsense. Like the far more numerous people of mixed descent not classified as multiracial, those employees will be saved from nothing by this pastiche of last-headline science and make-believe genetics. Set aside the medical nonsense, though, and notice the wide-awake shrewdness applied to repackaging the stuff of nightmares. This purposefully encoded, politically deployed racecraft serves as a reminder that what depends on imagination and action is more flexible than nature, and has the power to create a quasi-nature more convincing than nature itself.

How Americans Look

This tour began with aspects of racecraft that depend on what another person looks like, at a glance, to a viewer observing quickly and superficially. Deference rules, variable sumptuary codes, mistaken shootings by police, and border monitoring of segregated spaces all stand in reference to a person as a seen “object.” That reference entails, besides, a seeing object and of course a seeing subject. These varied sightlines of racecraft are not separate phenomena. They occur together or in rapid sequence, and in constantly shifting perspective. To conclude, therefore, our tour examines in close-up the intimate yet public practices that organize individual perception of physical appearance, including one’s own, as subject. If physical appearance belonged to nature, it would be no more meaningful to a casual viewer than the pattern of stripes on a zebra’s back. In fact, Americans observe themselves and each other through their own eyes and those of others, all the while classifying and evaluating. Thus racecraft has an inner horizon that turns out to be densely populated with sometimes peculiarly selected physical traits. A living person, to be met presently, ascribes meaning to the shape of his jawbone. And Jefferson preferred the skin color of white people, with its “fine mixtures of red and white,” to that of black people, “that external monotony, that immovable veil of black which covers all the emotions.”

That “veil of black” can also unleash emotions, as happened when the portrait of a dark-skinned woman appeared on the cover of a scholarly journal. The artist intended to illustrate an article about the “morally destructive” content of Aunt Jemima as a representation of Afro-American women. As provocative as the essay was in content and form, the image proved to be more so. The artist had painted a young black woman, standing or seated nowhere in particular, with the skin color, nose, lips, and stocky build that many black women have. She had tied her hair with a colorful scarf (as black women, and not only black women, often do, especially on bad-hair days). She wore no lipstick and no smile. And her remarkable eyes looked straight ahead with a neutral expression. What she might be thinking, and what to think about her, the artist left to the viewer’s imagination. The viewers did, indeed, imagine. Many who wrote to protest, black and white, saw a reinforcement of the very stereotype that the author had set out to overthrow. The author of the article herself objected to the illustration, writing that “the Aunt Jemima logo in some form” would have been “a more accurate image.” In fact, the young woman of the cover is unlike the Aunt Jemima of the pancake box. Aunt Jemima is middle-aged, wears lipstick, smiles, and is understood to be at work in someone’s kitchen.

So what sparked the commotion? One correspondent hinted at a truth that the others avoided: that the artist’s unsmiling

young woman was too dark-skinned to refute the caricature. To succeed, though, a racist caricature must have the viewer's assent to its point of view. Neither the pancake-box image nor the portrait can make dark skin, in and of itself, hard to look upon. The viewer must bring that reaction to the picture or, for that matter, to a real person. Physical features simply are what they are. But they are also what they can become in a workaday encounter: in a grocery line, taxi, country club pool, and so on; or, indeed, in a police operation like the one that ended in tragedy when a white police academy graduate killed his black classmate, having failed to recognize him. In that dreadful instance, split-second judgment explosively merged a person with a stereotype. That judgment exposed parts of racecraft’s inner horizon that inhabit perception itself.

Our tour ends on an Internet site where Americans can be overheard thinking aloud about perception. Does physical appearance register ancestry and, if so, how? An “Undecided Question” appeared at Answers.yahoo.com in April 2008, at the height of that year’s presidential primary election: “Why do Caucasian people have ethnic traits sometimes?” We neither analyze nor edit the responses, but simply note that most respondents posed further questions, such as: “Do I look fully caucasian in these pictures?” “I don’t have a Hispanic-like jaw I have a caucasian jaw why?” “Why is there full Hmong people with Caucasian features such as blond, reddish hair Colored eyes, etc.? “Are freckles caucasian traits?” (The “Best Answer” to the last question, decided by vote, was “no its not,” for which its contributor, “bAdHaBi,” offered proof by signing off as “black n rican with freckles.”) “In MIXED RACE

people, why are Caucasian traits expressed LESS than the other race’s traits? I’d like to understand WHY genes seem to be ‘subordinate’ or ‘submissive’ when they mix with another racial group. I’ve been curious about this for a long time.” “Why do Caucasians have a wider range of physical traits, like hair color and texture and eye color, than other races?”

A reply from “Overeducated” redirects the conversation: “Maybe because all these white supremacists (although I’m white) are wrong in thinking the Caucasian race is a single, pure race ... maybe the Caucasian race is a little more mixed up than they’d like to admit.” Three months later, an answer came from “Richard. yo,” who in the meantime had looked up “Caucasian” in a reference book: “Here is the anthropology definition. ‘Of or being a major human racial classification traditionally distinguished as very light to brown skin pigmentation and straight to wavy hair, and including peoples indigenous to Europe, northern Africa, western Asia, and India. No longer in scientific use.” Therefore, he concludes, “It covers a wide variety of people, it’s to be expected that they would have a wider range of physical traits.” Alongside this exchange, an unidentified questioner in the sidebar wonders: “Once you are born, can you genetically change your eye color or hair color genes?”

Taking up the subject of variation, “68 charger” suspected that “we are the most mixed race but have no facts to substantiate that claim. Maybe someone more knowledgeable than myself will.” “King of Sexytown” rejoined: “Maybe we are all one race and the range of physical traits is just that wide.” Here speaks “only humane”: “Lets go back to the beginning. Lets take Adam. Adam was created from the earth from the lightest hue to the darkest, the smoothest to the roughest. We are children of Adam and Eve, Eve was also created from Adam (one of his ribs) so knowing that In My Opinion it leads me to believe that we are all related all races, regions and climates can contribute for our more distinctive features but the features of some race groups can come out at any time

120 Googling “Caucasian” and “traits” yielded these results.
in any race. I think it's God's way of reminding us who's in control. Just a thought."

In his study of European witchcraft, from the vantage point of nineteenth-century Britain, W. E. H. Lecky sought to identify the moment when "the idea of absurdity" began to travel alongside stories of "old women riding on broomsticks," the moment when the improbability of such stories could be felt, at long last. What seemed obviously true to his long-dead historical subjects seemed as odd to him, in his day, as it does to Americans of the present. Since our task is to look forward from today's America, we try in the coming chapters to put on display the oddness of social beliefs and practices that Americans continue to take for granted, to show where they come from historically, and to share the clues we have about how they work. We conclude that racecraft has nothing to recommend it or to redeem it as truth about the world. Accordingly, we invite our fellow Americans to explore how the falsehoods of racecraft are made in everyday life, in order to work out how to unmake them. Once we Americans learn to see them for what they are, we can make sense of our past and therefore of our present. Then we may at last be ready to write a new chapter.

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2 Individual Stories and America's Collective Past

To write a new chapter requires awareness of a past that all Americans share, whatever their ancestry. The wizardry of racecraft makes Jim Crow appear to have affected black Americans alone. It also makes slavery appear to have involved the South alone and to have vanished without repercussions when the Civil War blew it away in 1865. In the teaching of American history, perhaps the most difficult lesson to convey is that slavery once held the entire country in its grip. It was not just the business of enslaved black people, slaveholders, or the South. Slavery engaged an immense geography of connected activities that no Americans could escape, whoever they were and wherever they lived. What is more, slavery does not belong only to America's past, but is the heritage of all Americans alive today, including those of recent vintage. Slavery enthroned inequality both among free citizens and between slaves and owners and, in the manner of its ending, left inequality as a permanent bequest to America's future.

The "history writ large" of most schoolbooks is better at linking events in the past than at discerning continuity between past and present. Stories about actual people and their lives in real worlds of the past dramatize that continuity. In our first appearance on a platform together, at the Fourth Southern Conference on Women's History at the College of Charleston in June 1997, we presented the script that follows to other teachers, and publish it here for the first time. The stories it recounts concern Americans, in diverse historical circumstances, who

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