

Historical Considerations on the Doctrine of White Supremacy and Its Status in the Post-Civil Rights Era

In an effort to develop a theory, or what he called a "frame of reference," for black politics Mack Jones argues that "one should begin by searching for those factors which are unique to the black political experience, for this is the information which will facilitate our understanding of blacks in the American political system."¹ Jones argues that those factors unique to the black political experience, that distinguish it from that of other ethnic or political communities, are racism—the ruthless subordination of blacks on the basis of their skin color—and the doctrine of white supremacy that is employed as its justificatory ideology. He writes, black politics is "essentially a power struggle between blacks and whites, with the latter trying to maintain their superordinate position *vis-à-vis* the former."² But this formulation is inadequate for distinguishing the phenomenon. Jones states:

However, we need to add one other specifying condition to further distinguish black politics from other extensions of the universal power struggle. That condition is the stipulation that the ideological justification for the superordination of whites is the institutionalized belief in the inherent superiority of that group. This condition cannot be overemphasized. It says that it is not their late arrival, their patterns of migration, their numerical strength, nor their cultural patterns which, beginning with Jamestown and continuing to the present, have underlain the differential treatment of blacks; it says further that any attempt to explain the black political experience in terms of any one or any combination of these will be insufficient.³

Racism and the doctrine of white superiority are thus two of the three essential components or distinguishing features of the black political experience in the United States and indeed everywhere that the African

and European encounter each other—Europe, the Americas, and Africa itself.⁴

It is clear that the notion of black inferiority has deep historical roots in this country. Kovel, for example, in his grimly pessimistic volume *White Racism: A Psychohistory* proposes “to delineate in depth what many know intuitively, that racism, far from being the simple delusions of a bigoted and ignorant minority, is a set of beliefs whose structure arises from the deepest levels of our lives. . . . Racism was an integral part of a stable and productive cultural order.”⁵ Or, as Lawrence, a legal scholar, has written more recently, “Racism in America is much more than either the conscious conspiracy of a power elite or the simple delusions of a few bigots. It is part of our common historical experience and therefore a part of our culture. It arises from the assumptions we have learned to make about the world, ourselves and others as well as the patterns of our fundamental social activities.”⁶ Kovel’s and Lawrence’s observations call attention to the importance of Jones’s idea that the ideology of white supremacy is institutionalized, emanating from the base and structure of the society, widely distributed throughout such that it exercises a continuous influence, conscious or unconscious, on attitudes and behavior. Thus, an effort to assess scientifically the status of racism today requires some inquiry into its historical development and institutionalization, what West calls “a genealogical inquiry into predominant European supremacist discourse—Judeo-Christian, scientific and psychosexual.”⁷

My purpose here is not to present anything like a full-scale genealogy or history of the origins and evolution of white supremacist doctrine. There are many competent studies in that regard.⁸ Rather, I rely on these studies in order to sketch the major doctrinal components of the ideology, show its relationship to European attitudes toward Africans and to the American doctrine of the equality of man. This accomplished, we are in a better position to assess the status of white supremacist doctrine in the post-civil rights era.

In his monumental study of the origins and development of white attitudes toward the Negro from the sixteenth century to the early years of the Republic, Jordan identified several of what he calls “first impressions” that ultimately structured relations between white and black. They include: (1) extremely negative attitudes toward the color black and a tendency to explain it, ultimately, in terms of God’s curse; (2) the notion that Africans were defective; (3) that the Africans were savages; (4) that Africans perhaps were little more than apes; and (5) that African men were “libidinous.”⁹ Although these negative attitudes or “first impressions” were later to be employed in the development of a sys-

tematic ideology to rationalize slavery and, to some extent, colonialization, it is not at all clear that most Europeans, even the English, believed them and it is certain that these negative attitudes about African color, religion, or culture were not determinative in the initial decision to enslave the African. Frederickson, for example, cites Davis's research to show that "distaste for blackness was not unanimous" and that indeed some early English and Dutch observers expressed admiration for African physical beauty.¹⁰ And Fields writes:

Even if these same Europeans were capable of writing, then or in retrospect, in terms of their superiority over their African hosts, they knew better . . . no trader who had to confront and learn to placate the power of an African chief could in practice believe that Africans were docile, childlike or primitive . . . traders afforded civilized amenities in the compounds of their African patrons could speak of African savages, white missionaries whose acquaintances included both Muslims and Christians could speak of pagan Africans; and later white slaveowners who lived in fear of insurrection could speak of docile Africans. Attitudes toward physical characteristics thus provide a poor starting point for understanding how groups of people define themselves in relation to other groups.¹¹

Thus, what is important for purposes of my analysis here is not whether these attitudes were accurate, whether they were believed to be accurate, whether they were held widely among English elites or masses, or whether they were casually bantered about to describe Africans or others. The point is instead to show how, after the decision was made to subordinate Africans through slavery and colonialism, these attitudes were resurrected in the United States in order to create and institutionalize a set of ideas that would rationalize and justify this historically extraordinary instance of the exploitation and degradation of one people by another. I emphasize "resurrected in the United States" because while these same general attitudes were current in South Africa and in Latin America they did not later give rise to an elaborate doctrine of race supremacy in those places as they did in this country.¹² This is so in part because of the doctrine of the equality of man that animated the founding of the Republic and is to this day an integral part of its creed. It is probable that, without the saliency of the ethos of equality, slavery and race subordination could have developed with less attention doctrinally to African inferiority and with a more uneven pattern of institutionalization. But Thomas Jefferson in the Republic's

founding document justifying the invention of America wrote, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights and that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of the happiness." Given the self-evident equality of men and their God-given right to liberty—a right that cannot be surrendered and ought not be taken—the obvious question is how one can simultaneously sanction slavery, the taking of the liberty of millions of men, women, and children. Logically, rationally—the inventors of America were quintessential rational men of the Enlightenment—one, of course, could not, except by denying their fundamental humanity. Thus, simultaneous with the elaboration of the doctrine of equality initiated with the Declaration began the elaboration of the ideology of black inferiority or black subhumanity as expressed in the Constitution's three-fifths clause, Article I, Section 2.¹³ The ideology of white supremacy as it evolved over the centuries was constituted by three major elements: the idea of the white man's burden, the notion of God's curse, and the concept that there was scientific proof of black inferiority. The first two of these elements maybe traced to the initial attitudes or "first impressions" of the English toward the Africans and were most influential in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. The so-called scientific basis for the doctrine has been and remains most salient in this century. I first examine the basis for the white man's burden and God's curse and then turn to the alleged scientific component of the ideology.

The notion that slavery and colonialization were the white man's burden derives from the complex of early attitudes that viewed the African as a heathen, savage, purely sensual people more akin to the apes of Africa than to the civilized English. Again, Jordan and others note that these attitudes were "first impressions" that long pre-dated slavery; however, once slavery was institutionalized, these early attitudes were in a sense rediscovered by white supremacist ideologues in order to justify the "peculiar institution" in the context of the nation's egalitarian ethos. Thus, slavery could be understood not as evil, not as the exploitation of a people but rather as a burden to be borne by the European and as a benevolence to be bestowed on the African. Ideologically, then, the institution was turned on its head in that the burden of slavery was now on the slavemaster rather than the slave. As Rudyard Kipling wrote:

Send forth the best ye breed/
 go bind your sons to exile/
 To serve your captives need/

To wait in heavy harness/
On fluttered folk and wild/
Your new caught, sullen peoples, half devil and half naked.¹⁴

Numerous accounts of African society and culture were reiterated so as to establish the European's burden to civilize the savages. One of these has its origins in Christianity's universalistic, proselytizing ethos, which requires that non-Christians, savage or not, be brought into the fold. It was this monotheistic notion that there was only one true, universal religion and that the duty of all good Christians was to spread the "word" throughout the world that lay at the core of its aggressive racism. Forrest Woods writes in his aptly titled *The Arrogance of Faith*, "Herein lay the fundamental component of the Christian's racism, his inherent inability to leave other people alone."¹⁵ But while Christianity may have been hostile to all other religions (Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, and so on, it was most extreme toward the religions of Africa and the Native Americans, arguing that they were either defective or indeed not religions at all. Jordan claims, "Englishmen were ill prepared to see any legitimacy in African religious practices. Judged by Christian cosmology Negroes stood in a separate category of men."¹⁶ Jordan, quoting some of the earliest English accounts of African culture in terms of religion, says they "were a people of beastly living, without a God, law, religion or commonwealth," or, in the words of another, "Negroes in color and condition are little more than devils incarnate . . . the devil . . . has infused prodigious idolatry into their hearts, enough to relish his palate and aggrandize their tortures when he gets power to fry their souls, as the raging sun has already scorched their cole black carcasses."¹⁷

Thus, one important part of the white man's burden was to Christianize the heathen, but Jordan states, "heathenism was for the Englishmen one inherent characteristic of savage men."¹⁸ Consequently, the Christian impulse aside, a further component of the white man's burden was related to the notion of civilizing the savage through the processes of slavery and colonialism. "Evidence" of savage behavior include reports of polygamy, infanticide, ritualistic murder, and food and dress patterns (the fact that men and women in certain parts of Africa wore very little apparel compared to the English). Interestingly, in light of late nineteenth-and twentieth-century stereotypes about blacks, Jordan reports that, a couple of hundred years before, the English described the Africans as "libidinous men, incapable of controlling their appetites sexual or otherwise." Africans were described as "very greedie eaters and no less drinkers," as large propagators of children, as "treacherous and thievish," and as "much addicted to uncleanness." Africans were

said to "lie constantly," to have a "vicious humor," and that "another innate quality they have is to steal anything they can lay their hands on, especially from whites."¹⁹ Variations on these negative stereotypes have characterized racist discourse about blacks from slavery to this day, but they have their origins in inconsequential "first impressions" that were resurrected, elaborately distorted, and institutionalized as an essential component of racism's justificatory ideology.

The most pervasive of these stereotypes is undoubtedly the sexual one. Jordan and other students of racist discourse have repeatedly remarked on the European fascination with African sexuality.²⁰ As shown below some of this fixation is rooted in the alleged sexual nature of the offense that led to God's curse of Ham, but, as Jordan observes, it runs throughout much of the early commentary. The sexual aggressiveness of black women was especially noted, as in this eighteenth-century observation about black women possessed of a "temper hot and lascivious, making no scruples to prostitute themselves to Europeans for a very slender sum, so great is their inclination to white men."²¹

The most dastardly lie about African sexuality was the attempt to link it to bestiality. As Jordan writes, "If Negroes were likened to beasts, there was in Africa a beast which was likened to men. It was a strange and eventually tragic happenstance of nature that the Negro's homeland was the habitat of the animal which in appearance most resembles man. The animal called the 'orang-outang' by contemporaries (actually the chimpanzee) was native to those parts of western Africa where the slave trade was heavily concentrated."²² This led to a series of speculations and assertions that there occurred in Africa a "bestial" copulation between apes and Africans. Although it was rarely asserted that the African himself was a beast, an offspring of this copulation, Jordan quotes the eminent sixteenth-century French political theorist Jean Bodin as stating categorically, "A promiscuous coition of men and animals took place, wherefore the regions of Africa produce for us so many monsters."²³ This absurd idea fits not only the stereotype of blacks as a lewd and lascivious people but takes to its ultimate logic the notion of the African as a subhuman being.

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries various of these notions purporting to show African savagery were employed by the propagandists for slavery in their efforts to provide justification for the manifestly unjustifiable. Similar rationales were employed to justify the colonialization of Africa and, to a lesser degree, the subordination of the native people of the Americas. But during this period the idea of slavery as the will of God was probably more influential than this secular notion of the white man's burden. Religion—specifically

Christianity—was much more influential in the thinking of both elite and mass in the early years of the Republic than was secular thought. And while it may seem paradoxical that adherents of a faith committed to the universalistic principle that all men share a common bond in Christ could embrace slavery, it only seems so, for as Wood writes, “English North Americans embraced slavery *because* they were Christians, not in spite of it.”²⁴ That is, “Christianity in the five centuries since its message was first carried to the people of the new world—and in particular to the natives and the transplanted Africans of English North America and the United States—has been fundamentally racist in its ideology, organization and practice.”²⁵

The resolution of the apparent contradiction largely involved a theologically contorted interpretation of a story not in the Christian New Testament but in the King James Version of the Judaic Old Testament and earlier Talmudic writings.²⁶ Jordan traces this interpretation of the African as the divinely cursed people to the attempt by the early English to explain the African’s black skin. This nexus between the curse, blackness, and slavery provides a parallelism, given the historic animus of the English toward blackness. Jordan notes that to the English “the most arresting characteristic of the newly discovered African was his color.”²⁷ Long before the English knew there were black people they held profoundly negative attitudes toward blackness in the abstract. Jordan quotes from the sixteenth-century Oxford English Dictionary definition of black:

Deeply stained with dirt, soiled, dirty, foul . . . Having dark, deadly purposes, malignant, pertaining to or involving death, deadly; baneful, disastrous, sinister . . . Foul, iniquitous, atrocious, horrible, wicked . . . Indicating disgrace, censure liability to punishment, etc.²⁸

Given the intense meaning of blackness to the English obviously they would seek an explanation of its cause(s) so as perhaps to understand its nature and significance. Jordan observes that the first explanation was in terms of climate; the extraordinary heat of equatorial Africa had literally turned the African black. This explanation was soon set aside as it became clear that skin color was invariant, a genetic characteristic. The explanation then turned to the Bible. In Genesis 9:10 the story is told that after the flood Ham had looked upon his father’s nakedness as Noah lay drunk, but the other two sons covered their father without looking at him. When Noah awoke he cursed Cannan, the son of Ham, saying he would be “servants of servants.” The theological

contortion here is that this story may logically imply slavery but it says nothing about color.²⁹ However, in Jewish folklore and the Talmud the story of Noah and his sons is told in a way that specifically makes black skin a curse. There are many versions of the story in Jewish tradition but the following makes the relevant point:

. . . therefore, it must be Cannan, your first born, whom enslave. And since you have disabled me . . . doing ugly things in blackness of night, Cannan's children shall be borne ugly and black. Moreover, because you twisted your head around to see my nakedness, your grandchildren's hair shall be twisted into kinks and their eyes red; again because your lips jested at my misfortune, theirs shall swell; and because you neglected my nakedness, you shall go naked and their male members shall be shameful elongated.³⁰

From the justification of slavery at the founding of the Republic to defense of segregation during the civil rights era, this notion of the curse has been a frequently invoked element of the doctrine of white supremacy and black inferiority and the consequent imperative of black subordination. This element of the doctrine resonated particularly well among white Christian fundamentalists in the south. (As a young person growing up in rural Louisiana in the 1950s and early 1960s, I often heard this notion of the curse and the idea that blackness denoted inferiority invoked by white radio preachers. This latter notion was explained by noting that most successful blacks at the time—Adam Clayton Power, Robert Weaver, and Ralph Bunche—had light skin color and thus “white blood” accounted for their relative success.) It was also not without influence throughout the country. But in the late nineteenth century and especially in the twentieth century science began to replace God as the most influential component of the doctrine of white supremacy.

The ideology of white supremacy as the justificatory basis for the subordination of the African really turns on the basis less of evidence of European or, in the United States case, Anglo-Saxon superiority and more on arguments for the inferiority of the African. If one views this ideology as constituted by the three principal components identified here, then it is possible to locate the influence of each component temporally. That is, it appears that the first two components were most influential in the United States during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries while the last has been most influential in this century. To be sure, each component has been influential throughout the country's history even now, thus it is a matter of the saliency of a given component at a particular time. The white man's burden and God's will were the prin-

cial rationales offered to justify the slave trade and slavery, while the scientific rationale came into prominence late in the nineteenth century as a justification for the overthrow of Reconstruction and the imposition of the system of racial segregation.³¹ Each component, therefore, may be associated with a particular mode or type of racial subordination. In addition, it is probable that the persuasiveness (at least at the elite level) of the arguments embodied in the white man's burden began to wane somewhat, constituted as it was by such obvious misconceptions, distortions, prejudices, and unsustainable assumptions. Similarly, the saliency of God's curse probably began to lose some of its power to persuade as the nation's culture became more secular (again this would perhaps especially be the case among the nation's liberal establishment centered in the northeast). Related to this is the progress of science itself, which contributed to the decline of religious doctrines as explanatory devices and made science the last word in the explanation of social as well as natural phenomena.

In any event, certainly by the dawn of the twentieth century so-called scientific proof of black inferiority was offered as the central rationale for their continued subordination. Rhett Jones's short but cogent essay suggests that this scientific "proof" may be divided into three "ideal types" or, in terms of academic organization, disciplines: sociological, physiological, and psychological.³² The sociological analysis sought to prove black inferiority on the basis of comparative analysis of statistical data on the social organization of black and white communities in terms of such things as unemployment, housing conditions, educational attainments, family dissolution's, out-of-wedlock births, alcohol abuse, and crime. On the basis of this type of analysis, sociologists concluded that blacks' moral attitudes were inferior to those of whites.³³ They also sought to demonstrate a "natural aversion" between the races that precluded equality and that those blacks who had achieved a measure of status in the United States were mulattos, thus proving again the superiority of "white blood."³⁴ The physiological approach usually dealt with brain or, more precisely, skull sizes, arguing that the average black brain was smaller than the average white brain and that there was a direct correlation between skull size and intelligence. Jones, for example, cites the work of Robert Bean, a professor of anatomy at the University of Michigan, that purported to show the following pattern: the largest brains were those of white males, followed by white females, black females, and black males in descending order.³⁵

It was, however, the discipline of psychology, not sociology or biology, that eventually became the principal means by which "evidence" of black inferiority was established.³⁶ This is so in part because socio-

logical explanations are inherently variable, given changes in the social environment, and the proponents of black inferiority were more interested in establishing an invariant, genetic basis for race group differences. Advances in sociological methods also undermined the validity of this work because the simple evidence of statistical disparities is not sufficient to establish race-based differences. For example, W. E. B. DuBois, in his classic sociological study *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899), also showed statistical disparities between the races but argued that they were to be explained on the basis of environmental rather than genetic differences between the races. And the physiological data on skull size, for example, was fairly easily discredited. Jones, for example, notes that Bean's results were based on flawed data. He used unclaimed bodies in order to measure skull sizes, which meant, as Jones writes, "The worse of whites were being compared to the entire black population. Bean argued that the lowest type of white person left a body unclaimed while all classes of blacks did so."

From the 1900s to the 1930s or 1940s (and, of course, as discussed later in this chapter, to some extent even today) psychology was, as one observer said, "the most powerful weapon in the arsenal of the racist." The fundamental premise of the research that sought to show that blacks were inherently inferior may be stated in terms of the "hereditarian doctrine," which asserted that given the obvious inherited differences in physical traits between the races—skin color, hair texture, facial features—and the manifest differences in levels of social and economic development between the races, it might be that these latter differences were also inherited. This, of course, is but a statement of one side of the familiar "nature vs. nurture" debate with respect to explanation of human behavior. On the one hand, the "nurture" school of thought views most differences in human behavior, especially at the group level, as a function largely of differences in environmental conditions that would change with changes in those conditions, while the "nature" school of thought views these group differences as invariant, a function of inherited, genetic differences between the races. Given its fundamental organizing assumptions about the source of group differences, the intelligence quotient (IQ) test became the principal tool to establish empirically the proposition of black inferiority.

The IQ test has a long, disgraceful, and by now largely discredited history as an instrument of ethnic and social class discrimination.³⁷ As Chief Judge Robert Peckham of the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California wrote in *Larry P. vs. Riles*:

We must recognize at the outset that the history of the IQ test . . . is not the history of neutral scientific discoveries translated into educational reform. It is at least in the early years, a history of racial prejudice, of social Darwinism and of the use of scientific “mystique” to legitimate such prejudices.³⁸

Many problems with the test in terms of race may be identified. It is beyond the scope of this analysis and my competence to review them all, but it is important to discuss the more significant ones. First, the key variables—race and intelligence—are not definable in an objective, universalistic way. With respect to the latter “most authorities agree that we can not define, much less measure intelligence and virtually all agree that standardized tests of whatever sort do not measure innate capacity. The tests measure the skills tested.”³⁹ And with respect to race Karen Fields is correct that “with a few well publicized exceptions, no one holding reputable academic credentials openly adheres to the view that race is a physical fact. Most now understand that, from a scientific standpoint, race can be no more than a statistical description of the characteristics of a given population—a description, moreover, that holds good only as long as the members do not marry outside the group.”⁴⁰ Although it is commonly held that humanity may be neatly divided into three races—caucasoid, mongoloid, and negroid—most scientists view these categories as more sociological rather than biological. Generally, homogeneous populations do not exist and traits are not discontinuous between populations, therefore a particular race can be classified only in terms of the relative frequencies of various traits. Moreover, it has been found that differences between individuals of the same race are often much greater than the differences between the “average” individuals of different races.

Second, as Wechsler wrote in 1944, “We have eliminated the colored vs. white factor admitting at the outset that our norms can not be used for the colored population of the United States. . . . We omitted the colored population from our first standardization because we did not feel that the norms derived by mixing the population could be interpreted without special provisos and reservations.”⁴¹ Yet the results were presented and interpreted to establish the case for the inferiority of blacks. A final point of manifest bias is in terms of how disparities in test results between males and females and blacks and whites were treated. Early versions of the Stanford-Binet test were modified because the results were different for males and females and the designers as-

sumed such differences were not valid. However, no such modifications to take account of racial differences in results have been tried by the various testing companies. As Professor Leon Kamin testified in *Larry P. v. Riles*:

If one looks at what happened, it is perfectly clear the testmakers have a pre conception that males and females do not differ in intelligence. It seems quite clear from the fact . . . that they continue to include in the test items which do discriminate between races or social classes . . . [that] at least they do not have a preconception that races and social classes are equal in intelligence.⁴²

Indeed, it is reasonable to assume the contrary; that the testmakers assume race differences in intelligence.

Apart from these rather obvious conceptual and methodological problems (and there are others, including problems in statistical analysis and interpretation), a brief inquiry into the history of the use of the test in the United States will serve to make the point that the so-called scientific proof of black inferiority has little more credibility than the notions of the white man's burden or God's curse. First, when Alfred Binet developed what was to become in this country the Stanford-Binet test he insisted that while it was useful in distinguishing between "backward" and "normal" children it did not measure a fixed, innate, or genetic characteristic. However, several years later, when Lewis Terman at Stanford developed his version of the test, he argued that it measured a fixed, innate ability and that it "will ultimately result in curtailing the reproduction of feeble mindedness and in the elimination of an enormous amount of crime, pauperism and industrial inefficiency."⁴³ We also now know—thanks to the skillful detective work of Kamin—that the work of Cyril Burt, the English psychologist who did much to establish the notion of the inheritability of intelligence, was a fraud, with Burt going so far as literally to falsify data to support his conclusions.⁴⁴ But perhaps the most telling evidence of the bankruptcy of the IQ test as it relates to ethnicity and race is the results of its use, viewed historically, which show quite clearly its ethnic and class bias, and, contrary to the hereditarian school, that (as measured) intelligence is a function of environmental or situational factors rather than some fixed, innate quality.

In the early part of this century, various versions of the IQ test were administered to selected ethnic and racial groups in the United States. The results mirrored almost exactly the ethnic status hierarchy in the country and the relative socioeconomic status of the ethnic groups

studied, with people of white Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) and Nordic descent testing high and Slavs, Jews, and blacks testing low.⁴⁵ For example, Carl Brigham in his 1923 book *A Study of American Intelligence* concluded that 83 percent of Jews, 80 percent of Hungarians, and 79 percent of Italians were “feeble-minded.” Brigham then generalized in the following language:

The Nordics are . . . rulers, organizers and aristocrats . . . individualistic, self reliant and jealous of their personal freedom. . . . As a result they are usually protestant . . . The Alpine race is always and everywhere a race of peasants. The Alpine is the perfect slave, the ideal serf . . . the unstable component and the lack of coordinating and reasoning power so often found among the Irish . . . we have no separate intelligence distribution for the Jews . . . [but] our army sample of immigrants from Russia is at least half Jewish. . . . Our figures, then, would rather tend to disprove the popular belief that the Jew is intelligent . . . he has the head form, stature, and color of his Alpine neighbor.⁴⁶

Nothing more clearly demonstrates the environmental rather than hereditary basis of intelligence as measured by these tests than the foregoing. In the early part of this century Jews, for the most part, were concentrated in poverty-stricken ghettos and *consequently* scored relatively low on the tests. Today, Jews are near the top of the social class structure and *consequently* score near the top in the various tests of intelligence. By contrast, blacks fifty years later remain near the bottom of the class structure and *consequently* continue to rank near the bottom in IQ scores.

Unlike with the other two elements of the ideology of white supremacy—the white man’s burden and God’s will—I have gone to considerable length to refute the scientific component. This is because the other components are based on obvious lies or distortions, myths, and religious prejudices that do not require refutation or are in their nature beyond rational discourse. Yet, in spite of the anemic status of the IQ tests as proof or evidence of black inferiority, they held near complete sway over mass and elite thinking and dominated scientific research until about World War II, institutionalized in the pages of the leading quality magazines and the curriculum of the nation’s leading universities.⁴⁷

By the 1930s and 1940s the dominance of the view of scientific proof of black inferiority was under effective challenge within scientific and intellectual communities. Even during its heyday and within the discipline of psychology, there were scholars who challenged the no-

tion of black inferiority, but it was a new generation of sociologists and anthropologists (particularly the latter's use of culture as a powerful explanatory concept) who as "cultural environmentalist" gained ascendancy over the geneticists.⁴⁸

By the end of World War II most social scientists (including psychologists) had come to the following rough consensus regarding the relationship between race and intelligence: If there are significant racial differences in intelligence, it is beyond the competence of science to demonstrate them. Thus, without evidence to the contrary science assumes equality of the races although this too cannot be scientifically demonstrated. Although there was ongoing work by scores of scholars that served to undermine the scientific basis of white supremacy,⁴⁹ perhaps no single work was more influential in the United States than Gunnar Myrdal's *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and American Democracy*, published in 1944.

Although Myrdal's work has been subject to extensive criticism by black scholars—in terms of its origins and inspiration, the selection of Myrdal and his team of scholars, which subordinated black scholars, and its use of the flawed moral dilemma notion as a conceptual framework—fifty years later its two volumes remain the most exhaustive, comprehensive study of race ever undertaken in the United States. The study was inspired by liberal, internationalist elements of the white power structure who, concerned about America's post war role, saw a need to abolish legalized racism if the United States was to be an effective competitor with the Soviet Union in the cold war battle for the support and allegiance of the third world. Familiar with the growing body of research that cast doubt on the scientific rationale for racism, these powerful white men thought that the most useful thing they could do at the time was to present the American people with the facts as a first step in the long struggle to abolish legal distinctions based on race. The Carnegie Corporation commissioned Myrdal, a relatively unknown Swedish economist and member of parliament with no interest or experience in research on race, to direct the research project. Myrdal was selected rather than one of the many well-qualified white American students or an African-American because it was thought he would bring a tone of neutrality and objectivity to the study that would enhance its credibility.⁵⁰ Myrdal then assembled a distinguished team of black and white students of race and American society and with ample time and money examined virtually every aspect of the "Negro problem"—physiological, historical, psychological, cultural, economic, and political—and its findings and conclusions demolished the hereditarian explanation of the status and condition of blacks and replaced it with

environmentalism. Immediately recognized as a classic, the work became the point of departure for postwar research on race.

In the introduction to volume 1 Myrdal succinctly stated the environmentalist thesis. He wrote that the "Negro problem" is really a "white problem," and "If the Negro was a 'failure' as he obviously was by every criterion that white society recognized as valid, then he was a failure because white America made him so." And then, noting the comprehensive character of his inquiry, he continued, "All recent attempts to reach scientific explanations of why the Negroes are what they are and why they live as they do have regularly led to determinants on the white side of the race line."⁵¹ In other words, it was not the Negro's skull size, the measure of his genetically endowed intelligence, or the retention of his African cultural heritage that accounted for the relatively low level of development of the race; rather, it was the environment of systematic subordination imposed and sustained by white people and the institutions of American society they controlled. This view slowly became dominant in intellectual circles in the United States. Thus, the last leg of white supremacism's three-leg stool of the white man's burden, God's curse, and science was broken.

On the Status of the Doctrine of White Supremacy in the Post-Civil Rights Era

Doctrinal expressions of racism in terms of the ideology of black inferiority have definitely declined in the post-civil rights era. Racism, in this sense, is no longer respectable. Formerly open white supremacists such as Governor George Wallace, Senator Strom Thurmond, or Rev. Jerry Falwell have repudiated the doctrine's three components, and even a virtually unreconstructed racist like Louisiana's state senator, David Duke, does not choose to justify his antiblack rhetoric and policies openly in terms of the ideology of white supremacy. Public persons simply do not express in public racist ideas of supremacy (what is said in private by whites, I, as an African-American, am not of course privy to).⁵² And when there is the occasional slip, as with remarks by Agriculture Secretary Earl Butz, television personalities Howard Cosell, Jimmy "the Greek" Snyder, and Andy Rooney, or Los Angeles Dodgers Vice President Al Campanis, there is usually a quick denial or an apology and frequently the censure or dismissal of the person, all amid much public handwringing about ethnic and racial sensitivities.⁵³ At the mass level openly white supremacist ideas are more frequently heard, yet as the attitude data analyzed in Chapter 3 reveals, there has been a substantial decline in expressions of black inferiority since the 1940s. Thus,

a canvas of material on the status of the doctrine in the post-civil rights era is sparse.

In terms of the uncivilized, savage, or animal-like character of blacks that burdens whites, one still occasionally reads echos of Kipling's ode. For example, during the Reagan administration, Marianne Mele Hall was nominated for a minor post in the federal bureaucracy. In the course of Senate consideration of her nomination, it was learned that she had coauthored a volume called *Foundations of Sand: A Hard Look at the Social Sciences*. The book suggested that the problems of the so-called black underclass could be traced to the several hundred-year-old stereotypes of black inferiority in terms of laziness and sexual promiscuity, arguing that as long as "blacks insist on their jungle freedoms, their women, their avoidance of personal responsibility and their abhorrence of the work ethic" there was nothing the government could do to solve their problems.⁵⁴ Frederick Goodwin, director of the Alcohol, Drug Abuse, and Mental Health Administration in the Bush administration's Health and Human Services Department, made similar remarks linking the behavior of young black men in the cities to jungles, apes, and hypersexuality. At a 1992 conference at the department dealing with inner-city violence, Goodwin said:

If you look, for example, at male monkeys, especially in the wild, roughly half of them survive to adulthood. The other half die by violence. That is the natural way of it for males, to knock each other off, and in fact there are some interesting evolutionary implications of that because the same hyper-aggressive monkeys who kill each other are also hypersexual, so they copulate more and therefore they reproduce more to offset the fact that half of them are dying. . . . Maybe it isn't just the careless use of the word when people call certain areas of certain cities jungles, that we may have gone back to what might be more natural, without all of the social controls that we have upon ourselves as a civilization over thousands of years in our evolution.⁵⁵

Such expressions of black inferiority by whites in the elite are relatively infrequent in the post-civil rights era but at the mass level such expressions are quite frequently reported during incidents of neighborhood turf conflicts between blacks and whites (see also the survey data discussed in Chapter 5).⁵⁶

There is, as has been the case historically, a psychosexual under-

tone or overlay to these expressions. The use by the 1988 Bush campaign of the now infamous Willie Horton ad was an indirect, subtle appeal to this racist stereotype. For twenty-eight days during the 1988 fall campaign an ad showing a picture of Horton, a person very dark in skin color and in a photograph that he himself said pictured him as "depraved and maniacal" and as "the devil incarnate" (Horton says at the time the photograph was taken he had not been permitted a shave or haircut for six months or more) was shown on national television.⁵⁷ A convicted murderer sentenced to life in prison, Horton was released on a weekend pass under the Massachusetts furlough program during which time he was accused of brutally raping a white woman and assaulting her husband (he proclaims innocence in both the murder and the rape). The ostensible purpose of the ad was to show that the Democratic nominee, the Massachusetts governor, was "soft on crime" but a clearly intended by-product, if not its primary purpose, was to arouse racial fears by appealing to the stereotype of the savage black wantonly raping a white woman.⁵⁸ As the Washington political scientist and commentator William Schneider observed at the time, "The fear of crime originates in racial fear . . . fear of crime is associated with blacks. I don't argue he is running strongly because he is racist. He is not a racist. But there is a racist component."⁵⁹ This component of racism in terms of the psychosexual was given its most explicit expression in terms of post-civil rights sensitivities on race in a column by Patrick Buchanan, the influential conservative columnist, television commentator, Nixon and Reagan administration functionary, and 1992 candidate for the Republican presidential nomination. In a column written in the immediate aftermath of the alleged gang rape of a young white woman in New York's Central Park by a group of young black men, Buchanan wrote a column dripping with the language and symbolism of the white man's burden.

How does a civilized, self-confident people deal with enemies who gang rape their women? Armies stand them up against a wall and shoot them, or we hang them. . . . If . . . the eldest of that wolf pack were tried, convicted and hanged in Central Park by June 1 and the 13 and 14-year-olds were stripped, horse whipped and sent to prison, the park might soon be safe again for women. Historically, civilized nations have put an end to savagery by traditional means. With their conquering armies they put fear of death into the barbarians, then, with religious conversion, they instilled

fear of God. Thus, did self confident nations "civilize" the barbarians.⁶⁰

A final example of the persistence of the psychosexual dynamic in post-civil rights era racism is the story of the eventual desegregation of the Forrest City, Arkansas, schools. In 1970 when Forrest City, Arkansas, was required to desegregate its schools it abolished the senior prom and did not reinstate it until 1988. At the first public meeting after the schools were ordered to be integrated, "The hall was packed with angry men shouting things like 'I won't have some black boy looking up my girl's dress.'" Finally, once the prom was reinstated, strict rules to forbid interracial intimate contact were established by school authorities because, as one white parent said, "It's a secret, unspoken fear around here. Dancing leads to touching, touching leads to mingling. Parents worry if I let my child go to an integrated dance, does that mean she'll start dating someone of the opposite race." And one white male student said, "Sure, I'd go to a mixed prom. But I tell you one thing. If some black guy started messing around with a white girl, that would be it. I'd be stroking heads."⁶¹ This would be a trivial and somewhat humorous commentary to most blacks on what Langston Hughes used to refer to as "the ways of white folks," but for familiarity with the deep-seated history of these remarks and their consequences for black access to education, employment, and housing, not to mention the consequences for the life of the African-American male caught in the wrong place at the wrong time.

A few quotations, columns, books, or news accounts do not suffice to establish a pattern. In fact, in isolation the anecdotes cited above might be viewed as innocuous compared to the earlier virulence of the expressions of the doctrine of white supremacy.

This may be so, but to be able to find "isolated" documentary material today is evidence of the tenacity in the minds of many Americans of their ancestors' "first impressions" of the Africans.⁶² It also strikes me (and this may be just a personal idiosyncrasy) that the role of black athletes in mass consumer sports—especially football and basketball (less so in baseball, where blacks are less dominant)—reinforces aspects of this component of white supremacist ideology.⁶³

Especially at the college level at places like Duke, Georgetown, or Georgia Tech, where black students and faculty are nearly as scarce as a black face in the United States Senate, it seems incongruous to see young black boys running up and down the floor or field for the fun and profit of white people.⁶⁴ There is also an incongruity in watching the even relatively well paid professional athletes in football and basketball do

the same thing while virtually all the owners, coaches, and highly paid sportscasters are white. This may contribute to or reinforce what one commentator refers to as the "pseudo-scientific prattle" about blacks excelling in athletics because of genetically distinct physical features.⁶⁵ As the coach of an American Olympic team was quoted as saying, "The Negro excels in the events he does because he is closer to the primitive than the white man."⁶⁶ Or as Underwood wrote in *Life*, "Even as the racial imbalance distorts the black youngsters, perception of sport as the most accessible avenue up and out, it reinforces the white man's unholy stereotype of the one-dimensional black gladiator. . . . The picture of the exuberant, intimidating, posturing, preening, trash talking black kid doing his end zone disco after a TD is the image of big money sport. It also happens to be the image of inner city youth."⁶⁷

This "unholy stereotype" is given further currency by the relatively low graduation rates of black athletes, the occasional press stories about black athletes in college who are unable to read, and by the sense that many are in college because of their muscles, not their minds. For example, when the National Collegiate Athletic Association instituted Proposition 42/48 requiring that students score a relatively modest 700 on the Scholastic Aptitude Test or 15 on the American College Test and earn a C average in specified courses more than 80 percent of those disqualified were black.⁶⁸ This stereotype even finds its way into the positions blacks have traditionally played. Ira Berkow, the *New York Times* sports columnist writes, "The prejudice was that blacks might be able to run, but they couldn't think, or even play under pressure. And quarterback was the ultimate thinking and pressure position."⁶⁹ Berkow notes that this barrier has now been broken, with a number of successful black quarterbacks and middle-linebackers but "now, however, there is another whispering refrain around college campuses' 'well, they can play all the positions but they still can't do it in the classroom.'"⁷⁰

Again, the view that the disproportionate representation and frequent exploitation of blacks in mass consumption sport represents symbolically stereotypical images of blacks incorporated in the white man's burden may be idiosyncratic and relatively inconsequential, but the foregoing suggests that my perspective is shared by respected sports commentators, who are white and therefore perhaps more conversant with what white people really think as they cheer "Magic," "Kareem," "Bo," and all the rest.

In the media one hears or reads relatively little about the second component of the ideology—the notion of God's curse.⁷¹ Many white churches and church leaders in the wake of the civil rights revolution explicitly repudiated the doctrine. Jerry Falwell, the influential leader

of the Christian right's political action network, renounced the doctrine although he initially denied having ever embraced it. But after he was given a tape of a 1958 sermon in which he espoused segregation on the basis of Genesis 9:18–27, he admitted that he had once preached the doctrine of the curse but now says, "he was wrong, that he knew [even in 1958] in his heart that segregation was wrong but he was influenced by his Bible college teaching."⁷² In the late 1970s the Elders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (the Mormons) repudiated their doctrinal teachings on the inferiority of blacks, in part as a result of pressure from Mormon politicians (such as Michigan Governor George Romney) with national political ambitions. And in 1990 even the dominant church authorities in South Africa moved officially to change their teachings on the biblical basis of apartheid. Thus, formally the doctrine of black inferiority on the basis of God's curse is largely extinguished, although not completely, as evidenced by the Bob Jones case decided by the Supreme Court in 1983, in which the Court held that the university's authorities apparently had a sincere religious belief that the Bible required racial discrimination.⁷³ Not so with the third component of the ideology—science which has experienced a modest resurgence in the post-civil rights era.

As in the past the IQ test is the principal tool of the racist ideologue in the post-civil rights era, but controversial research on skull size and its relationship to intelligence and social behavior also continues. At the 1989 meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Professor J. Phillippe Rushlon, a psychologist at Canada's University of Western Ontario, presented a paper on this subject. The paper argued that Asians have larger and heavier brains, Europeans fall in the middle, while Africans are last in brain size and weight, and that on over fifty different behavioral measures a correlation between race and brain size is observed, with Asians at the top in socially acceptable behavior, Caucasians in the middle, and Africans at the bottom. As examples, Rushlon noted that Asians mature more slowly, are less impulsive, more sexually restrained, law abiding, and stable in health and marriage. And again all this is said to be a function of relative differences between the races in terms of their brain sizes. Overall the paper concludes that the African is lowest on the "evolutionary ladder."⁷⁴

But the key work in science remains the IQ test. In 1969 Professor Arthur Jensen, an educational psychologist, published in the *Harvard Educational Review* the results of a study he had conducted among children of different races. The article contended that intelligence is heredi-

tary and is not susceptible to material alteration by the environment and that because blacks tend to inbreed, their genetic potential is depressed more than whites.⁷⁵ Although Jensen's study was vigorously refuted in a subsequent issue of the *Review*,⁷⁶ it became the most widely publicized and arguably most influential of the post-civil rights era treatises offering a scientific rationale for black subordination. Yet as Professor Jerry Hirsch shows in his aptly titled monograph "To Unfrock the Charlatans," it was Stanford University's William Shockley, a Nobel laureate, who played the crucial role in restoring the IQ test to a measure of respectability in scientific circles.⁷⁷ With substantial support from wealthy individuals and organizations devoted to overturning the *Brown* school desegregation decision and undermining the intellectual and legal rationales for the civil rights movement, Shockley engaged in a decade-long campaign to get the scientific community and policymakers to accept the proposition that blacks are genetically inferior to whites.⁷⁸ As Hirsch writes:

He [Shockley] had taken up the segregationists' cause and carried their fight to the inner sanctum of the country's highest tribunal of science, onto the pages of its most prestigious journal and also onto those of the most influential and widely circulating journal (*Science*), to the Congress of the United States and onto the pages of its influential and widely circulating *Congressional Record*, and into the White House in the person of the advisor to President Nixon for Science and Technology . . . and through presidential advisor Moynihan . . . even into a meeting of President Nixon's cabinet.⁷⁹

At a 1967 meeting of the National Academy of Science, Shockley presented a paper urging the Academy to adopt his proposal for what he called a eugenics approach to our "national human quality problems." The paper titled "Try the Simplest Cases Approach to the Heredity Poverty-Crime Problem" sought answers to such questions as "To what extent are urban slums the result of poor heredity? Is the genetic quality of the human population being eroded by differential birth rates in various social, economic and educational groups? Are genetic factors responsible for a significant part of the racial differences in educational and economic development."⁸⁰ The Academy accepted Shockley's proposal and appointed a committee on "Human Genetics and Urban Slums." However, in its report the committee rejected the

substance of Shockley's argument, noting that it did not state a scientific problem that could be addressed by any existing data or methods.

There is no scientific basis for a statement that there are or that there are not substantial hereditary differences in intelligence between Negro and white populations. In the absence of some now-unforeseen way of equalizing all aspects of the environment, answers to this question can hardly be more than reasonable guesses . . . [the report of the committee then expressed] the conviction that none of the current methods can produce unambiguous results. To shy away from seeking the truth is one thing; to refrain from collecting still more data that would be of uncertain meaning but would invite misuse is another.⁸¹

This, of course, was but a restatement of what had been the emergent consensus in the scientific community since the late 1940s. Yet five years later the Academy reversed itself in part on the basis of the influence of Jensen's article and pressure from those concerned about academic freedom and the right of scholars to pursue a line of inquiry, notwithstanding how the results might be misused. Thus, the Academy's 1972 report said, "Investigation of the nature and significance of . . . racial hereditary differences in the human species is a proper and socially relevant subject . . . to the extent which methodology gives promise of reasonable progress, the investigation should be encouraged."⁸²

Thus, although it is controversial and probably a minority view in the scientific community, the ideology of white supremacy is nevertheless clearly alive and well in the post-civil rights era, insofar as its scientific component is concerned. In a 1988 survey of 400 randomly selected high school science teachers (94 percent of whom were white) 26 percent said they believed (and perhaps therefore taught the children, black and white) that it was definitely or probably true that "some races are more intelligent than others."⁸³ And in 1991 in spite of criticism even from some of his conservative colleagues, Charles Murray, author of *Losing Ground: American Social Policy, 1950-1980*, a book that provided an influential intellectual rationale for the Reagan administration's anti social welfare philosophy and policies, is working (in collaboration with Richard Herrnstein, the Harvard psychologist) on a study to determine whether there are differences in intelligence between blacks and whites that might help explain differences in their social and economic standings (I would bet my tenure as to what the ultimate results, conclusions, and recommendations will be).⁸⁴ There is thus in respectable intellectual and policy-making circles today the view that the terrible

conditions of a large segment of the African-American community is a function not of centuries of racial subordination and exploitation but rather of their nature, their very being; doomed to be forever at the bottom of the social structure. In today's argot there is a "permanent underclass" for which government ought not—because it cannot—do anything to change. They still say about black people, incredibly, that "God made a creative error."