processing staff at UCLA. I will not forget the skill and patience of Nancy Rhan who has been straightening out my typescripts for twenty years.

Many of my colleagues have read portions of this work and improved it by their comments and suggestions. I am grateful to Lucie Cheng, Edna Bonacich, Jon McLeod, George Rawick and Michael Sprinker. In this same connection I want to thank the Los Angeles Social History Study Group for evenings of intense and critical discussion: Hal Barron, Roberto Calderon, Nancy Fitch, Jackie Greenberg, John Laslett, Gary Nash, Steve Ross, Cynthia Shelton, Frank Stricker, Dorothee Schneider and Devra Weber. I am especially indebted to Gary Nash, Dave Roediger, Bob Rydell and Ron Takaki for comments on the conceptualization and structure of the entire undertaking which were of great value to me. Copyediting, for the first time in my experience, was a pleasure rather than a burden. My thanks to Steven Hlatt, who made this necessary task a shared intellectual enterprise.

Introduction: Historical Explanations of Racial Inequality

This study in nineteenth-century political and cultural history is directed to the problem of ideology and change. Its focus is on a single but extended relationship—that between white racial domination in the United States and ideas and attitudes about race. My purpose is not to produce another intellectual history of racial thought, but to trace the continuity and modification of a major ideological construction. Three assumptions govern the sequence. They are that a theory of white racial superiority originated from rationalizations and justifications of the slave trade, slavery and expropriation of land from non-white populations; that this theory continued to hold a central place in various syntheses of ideas legitimizing power because it continued to meet justificatory needs of dominant groups in the changing class coalitions that have ruled the nation; and that these legitimizing syntheses, including specific constructions within them, remained in flux through ongoing processes of modification and readjustment. This book explores these assumptions within the time span of the nineteenth century.

Explore may be less presumptuous than demonstrate. What I intend by it is an effort to integrate the starting assumptions into a set of plausible and economical explanations for known developments, which I take to be the closest one can come to demonstrating causality in history. Limitation to the nineteenth century seemed advisable on two grounds. First, the complexity of carrying this inquiry into the twentieth century is large enough to warrant a separate project; and second, although these assumptions apply in part to an era before 1800, they have been more widely accepted for eighteenth-century America and therefore have been more fully elaborated. It is the explanation of continuity that remains tenuous.
because, since it has not been widely accepted (scholars generally having relied on economic competition or psychological factors to explain the continuity of white racism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries), it has not been tried out over any long span of American history.

The motivations that led to this study certainly were less abstract than my statement of its topic. Experience as an industrial worker and labor unionist faced me with perceptions of the centrality of race and racism in American society. Later, when I became a historian, I fixed the effort to arrive at some historical understanding of race as my chief goal. The project of the book, then, will be to bring together a viable historical explanation of the origin, and especially the continuity, of racial inequality in the United States. Why I see this as a study in ideology I will attempt to make clear in the remainder of this introduction.

For a book that focuses on racism and racial domination, terminology presents a special problem. In principle, anyone to whom historical experience has imparted a shared identity ought to be known by whatever name they choose to give themselves. Yet there is no escape from the underlying problem, which is that the scars of racial subordination continue to mark any set of terms we select. The terms I have used – aside from the obvious designations of nationality and origin – are African American, American Indian, Euro-American and Mexican American. The latter remains appropriate for the late nineteenth century even though it may no longer be so for the late twentieth. Black and white I have used generally as adjectives. In treating the central subject matter, white racism, it has often been necessary to speak of Europeans or Euro-Americans in juxtaposition to those ‘others’ who were the targets of racist ideology. The ‘others’ were in effect the remainder of the population of the world. I refer to them in this context as peoples of color, or simply as non-whites.

Explanatory Strategies

Contemporary literature on race falls mainly into the categories of histories of ideas about race, narrativizer or descriptive accounts of how race prejudice works, social surveys of its impact, and polemics against it. Awareness of a need for historical explanation is relatively recent. Until about the third decade of the present century, most people in the so-called western world, including most social scientists and historians, took for granted the hereditary inferiority of non-white peoples. Differential treatment required no special explanation so long as it could be understood as a rational response to objective reality in the same way that differential treatment of women and children was supposedly so understood.

Nineteenth-century racial doctrine began to be challenged during the first decade of the twentieth century. That critique took more than a generation and is probably not yet fully completed. It was only when racist doctrine showed signs of crumbling under the impact of scientific criticism and political and economic changes throughout the United States – indeed, around the world – that the differential treatment of non-whites came up for scrutiny as a phenomenon requiring special attention. Even then, causal explanations of racism had low priority because it was still assumed that exposure of the falsity of racist doctrine would automatically explain the differential treatment of non-whites as the result of misunderstanding or ignorance. This was the outlook, initially at least, that informed the Carnegie Corporation’s ‘comprehensive study of the Negro in the United States’, launched in 1937 under the direction of the Swedish social scientist Gunnar Myrdal.

The Carnegie report lies fifty years behind us, yet the gravitational field of that massive enterprise has influenced virtually everything since written on the subject of race in the United States. For this reason it offers a logical starting point from which to begin a survey of historical explanations of racial inequality. Myrdal’s explanation ran roughly as follows: Africans in North America were not at first treated differentially. Their status approximated that of European indentured servants. But as black servants ‘gradually were pushed into chattel slavery while the white servants were allowed to work off their bonds, the need was felt, in this Christian country, for some kind of justification above mere economic expediency and the might of the strong.’ A rationalization was constructed, mainly from the Old Testament. Africans had descended from Noah’s son Ham, whose progeny had been cursed, and blackened, by God, and so forth. As these figments of religious mythology wilted under eighteenth-century Enlightenment scrutiny, there came a shift – disastrous for the Africans – from ‘theological to biological thinking’. Given the new premise that human beings belonged to the biological universe, it was ‘natural’ for the unsophisticated white man to arrive at the opinion that blacks were biologically inferior.

In America, this opinion contravened what Myrdal called the ‘American Creed’ – a composite of values of liberty, equality and civility derived from the Enlightenment, from Christianity, and from English Common Law – which, in his view, served as a collective conscience or superego for the American nation. The title of his study, American Dilemma, referred to the dichotomy between this set of values and actual treatment of Africans, for here the ‘Creed’ operated in a ‘double direction’ – on the one hand forbidding inequitable treatment of any human being, while on the other requiring dehumanization of the black victims to justify the departure, in their case, from its proclaimed values. ‘Race prejudice’ was needed ‘for defense on the part of the Americans against their own
Thus racism proliferated, not only with the expansion of slave-based cotton culture before the Civil War; but afterwards as a rationale for the 'caste system' that became the 'social organization of Negro-white relations'. Racist beliefs were seemingly verified in everyday experience. African Americans did in fact fall below whites in social and economic status, in health, in life expectancy. Myrdal stressed the cumulative effects of deprivation and 'the early conditioning of the Negro child's mind by the caste situation'. Whites perceived these stigmas not as the wounds of imposed poverty, but as proofs of biological inferiority. Were they 'deliberately deceiving' themselves? 'Our hypothesis', Myrdal explained, 'is that the beliefs are opportunistic and have the “function” to defend interests.' Whose interests? The next sentence specified the interests of the 'ordinary American'; while an earlier section had described 'Negroes and the poor whites' as 'placed in an intensified competition'. Myrdal then quoted a Swedish proverb: "When the feed box is empty the horses will bite each other." Yet the concept of competition did not lead him to a conclusion that non-whites and working class or immigrant whites were equally badly off. The Negroes are set apart, together with other colored peoples, principally the Chinese and Japanese. ... Considerable efforts are directed toward "Americanizing" all groups of alien origin. But in regard to the colored peoples, the American policy is the reverse. They are excluded from assimilation.

Myrdal's collaborator, Ashley Montagu, went beyond Myrdal in contending that economic stress unleashed accumulated resentments that might cause aggression against racial minorities as well as others. This argument was based in part on the psychoanalytic theory of infant deprivation which had already become a standard feature in studies of prejudice. As Montagu outlined it, separation from 'the nipple, the mother’s body, uncontrolled freedom to exercise to and to suck' thwarted 'expected satisfactions'. Frustration led to fear, to hatred and to aggressiveness,' which 'must in one way or another find expression — “Race” hatred and prejudice merely represent familiar patterns of the manner in which aggressiveness may express itself.'

Myrdal's and Montagu's arguments are ideological in that they place white racism as a necessary cause for the differential treatment of non-whites. Racism they explain as the rationalization of an exploiting group. Neither Myrdal nor Montagu noted, apparently, that this argument might be criticized as circular: a system of ideas and attitudes that allegedly causes differential treatment of non-whites is said to originate as a result of such differential treatment. Both authors believed that racism, once it came into existence, would not only perpetuate itself but continue to reproduce similar patterns of behavior. Since this explanation involves a time span of several centuries, the authors attempted to bolster their construction by using additional factors (economic competition, frustration-aggression) to explain the continuing vigor of the original ideology. These additions, however, undermined the main argument because the added factors seemed to run counter to the starting assumption. An ideological argument, for example, must assume or demonstrate that racism exists because it serves the needs of an exploiting class or group; whereas the competition argument attributes racism to an exploited lower class. Or again, the ideological argument has racism serving socio-economic or political needs of an exploiting class, while frustration-aggression arguments stress a set of factors centering on the psychodynamics of individual personalities, presumably irrelevant to class situation. Moreover, frustration-aggression theory makes the victim extraneous to the generation of hostility. If racism is equated to other forms of internally generated, irrational prejudice it could focus as well on Catholics, Jews or Ulstermen as on African Americans. Frustration-aggression thus tends to undercut the interpretation of racism as a product of the rationalizing of slavery and imperialism to which Montagu as well as Myrdal had assigned priority.

Myrdal and Montagu both ended their examinations on notes of ameliorative optimism. Montagu concluded by assigning to education the keys to the future, a prognosis unfortunately negated by his ideological and psychological interpretations of racism. When Myrdal's report was published at the end of the Second World War the world situation was one in which the United States found itself competing for the allegiance of the world's largely non-white peoples. Racism was becoming dysfunctional, internationally at least. Myrdal invoked the 'American Creed' for his finale. America at last must reject racial favoritism in the name of liberty, equal opportunity, and due process of law. It would be difficult to pinpoint more precisely the central contradiction of Myrdal's study. While racism, especially as manifested in earlier centuries, is dealt with in the blunt language of dominance and exploitation, the American Creed — relied upon to right the wrongs of racism — is handled throughout in the non-ideological terminology of abstract idealism.

These contradictions and gaps in the work of Myrdal and Montagu are themselves illuminating since they point to logical difficulties that have proved recurrent. Thus the dilemma of the circular argument; the problem of joining supplementary to long-range arguments; and the disjuncture between psychological and either economic or ideological explication continue to appear in the literature on racial subordination. Beyond that, and more importantly, the report managed to identify major strategies that would dominate the complex debates it helped set in motion. Those strategies — economic, psychological and ideological — provide a convenient frame of reference for discussion of more recent work. The last
of these three strategies – the ideological – might be taken as a subset of the first; that is, ideological explanations are economic in derivation since their starting concept is that of a collective rationalization of class or group interest. In what follows, however, I will separate ideological from economic explanations because the introduction of collective consciousness as part of the apparatus of class domination adds such different dimensions to economic explanation as to comprise a distinct category.

**Economic Strategy**

The simplest form of economic explanation for the differential treatment of racial minorities is the argument from job competition. Two groups of workers compete for a limited supply of jobs; the less established undercut the more established, who respond with efforts to ostracize and exclude their competitors. Ostracism and exclusion are accompanied by expressions of distaste and hostility. If the more established have access to political power they may be able to give their exclusionary efforts the sanction of law. This argument has the effect either of obscuring racism as a factor, or of reducing it to the sort of rational 'economic' resentment that in America has often been directed against recent European immigrants, or against strikebreakers, or both. It tends to exonerate members of the excluding group from charges of bias or bigotry, since the existence of job competition is clearly not their fault and they can hardly be blamed for protecting their economic interests. For these reasons it is likely to be invoked by representatives of organized labor, as well as by their liberal or radical sympathizers. The argument of course may be applied to either ethnocultural or racial minorities, its major weakness being the inability to distinguish between the two. Thus, while satisfactorily explaining differential treatment of minorities as such in reference to a dominant majority, it cannot explain how a Chinese minority, for example, might be treated differently from an Irish minority.12

The simple model summarized above has generated complex variations. One of these is split labor market theory, which provides a conceptual framework for examining and comparing racial, ethnic and gender separations in the labor force in industrializing or postindustrial societies.13 Labor markets in the United States have generally been split into more than two segments. Most European immigrants worked their way out of disadvantaged split labor market situations within two or three generations, a time span sufficient to equalize their cultural and economic 'resources' with those of the dominant group. The experience of non-white workers, by contrast – whether native-born or immigrant – has been distinctly different because racial hostility precluded any such equaliza-

tion. Split labor market theory, no better equipped to offer an autonomous explanation for this racial differentiation than the original job competition model, must necessarily begin with some particular market, and usually begins by assuming a certain level of racism as one of the historically given conditions of that market.14

Another variation on the job competition argument has gained some celebrity through the work of free market economists like Thomas Sowell.15 Job competition here becomes, not the source of discriminatory treatment, but the arena through which disadvantaged minorities win redress. African Americans are indeed heavily disadvantaged, in Sowell's presentation – less, however, because of white hostility than because their rural and slave past impoverished their cultural and economic resources. Yet in this respect they differ little if at all from European immigrants of rural background, some of whom, especially Irish and southern Italians, had suffered comparable deprivations.16 All racial and ethnic minorities (generally lumped together under ethnic) have experienced some upward mobility in America and in so doing have encountered ethnocentric resistance from the dominant society. Such resistance seems to be conceptualized in this argument as a set of fixed obstacles like mountain ranges that all newcomers must somehow find their way across. Varying rates of success at surmounting these obstacles are partly dependent on the cultural and economic resources of the several minorities; primarily, however, they depend upon the workings of the free market in an expanding economy.17

Not only did that market in times past offer openings of some sort to all comers, but it served also to cancel out the competitive disadvantages of minorities. Thus nineteenth-century European immigrants of rural origin, only marginally employable because they lacked industrial skills and work disciplines, might nonetheless find jobs at substandard wages and overstandard hours while their children supplemented the family income by working in factories. Any who found themselves marginalized by irrational prejudice could follow the same route. High though the individual cost might be, upward mobility for the group as a whole was achieved. That, in Thomas Sowell's view at least, is how the labor market once worked. Alas, it no longer remains as free as it was then. Impediments such as wage and hour laws, social security, unnecessarily long years of education – together with standardized criteria for hiring and promotion imposed by social reformers or by corporate, union and government bureaucrats – have bogged the market down. For African Americans, most of whom entered urban areas and commenced industrial employment only in the mid-twentieth century, the door to upward mobility that once stood open for their European predecessors has been slammed shut. Presumably, the prospects for disadvantaged minorities would be as bright as ever should the market ever be liberated from its welfare fetters.18
The thrust of the sequence just summarized is to attribute differential treatment of African Americans to departures from free market principles (chattel slavery, followed by enslavement to the welfare state), and to minimize white racism as a causal factor by stressing the similar situations of African Americans and pre-industrial European immigrants. Yet that similarity of situation rests upon an assertion that African Americans entered urban labor markets only in the mid-twentieth century. While for a majority this may in fact be true, it is also true that some African Americans reached urban industrial areas as early as the 1840s. Encountering ferocious white resistance, they were generally excluded from industrial labor because of that resistance in conjunction with the abundant availability of European immigrants. Had their reception been more favorable, it seems likely that more black Americans would have moved into industrial labor much sooner than they actually did. The circumstances foreclosing such a move (white resistance, employer preference for European immigrants, selective federal migration policies) were themselves involved in white racism—which, having been expelled from the visible equation, reasserts itself in the necessary historical context.

The free market version of economic explanation, then, although doubtless serving political sympathies opposite to those of the liberal, or even radical, job competition and split labor market versions, nonetheless shares with them an incapacity to effectively exclude white racism as a causal factor, or to explain it autonomously, without recourse to non-economic linkages. Subsuming racial within ethnic, such arguments direct their inquiry solely to the differentiation of minorities from the general population, neglecting the differentiation of racial minorities both from the general population and from ethnic minorities. If this simplification corresponded to reality, one would anticipate that non-white Americans after two or three generations would have found their way into the skilled trades, supervisory positions, union leadership, small business and local politics, as European immigrants generally have done. Since this was by no means the pattern, at least before the Second World War, economic explanations per se cannot account for the differential treatment of racial minorities. They can of course serve as auxiliaries to larger explanatory constructions. In that case they posit the pre-existence of racism as part of the environment within which immediate economic factors operate.

Psychological Strategy

Of the several strategies for explaining the differential treatment of racial minorities, the psychological is the most prolific and multifaceted. Psychological explanations, which usually stand at a distance from ques-


tions of class or socio-economic power, can fit harmoniously into either the consensus or progressive variety of American national consciousness, and this doubtless is a reason for their popularity. Two distinct types of psychological strategy have appeared. One seeks its answers in the presumed psychic and cultural deficiencies of racial minorities. The other seeks them in hypothetical tensions within the collective and individual psyches of the white majority.

The first type, well represented by the work of Nathan Glazer at Harvard, begins with the historical delineation of an American character reminiscent of Myrdal’s ‘American Creed’. Thus the ‘American orientation’ is said to be toward openness and liberalism, and against bigotry and prejudice. For this reason, the Anglo-American melting pot never totally succeeded in reducing the long succession of newcomers in America. What resulted was neither ethnic homogeneity nor cultural pluralism, but something in between. Minorities shared a common experience through willing acceptance of certain basic ingredients in the culture: language, interest group politics, upward mobility. Americanized but not homogenized, each group emerged ‘beyond the melting pot’, transfigured from what it had been, yet retaining unique characteristics that comprised a continuing matrix for group identification. Ethnicity could then replace class as the dynamic of an intergroup politics combining the realism of self-interest with the more generous, value-oriented ties of cultural affinity. Even the old conflict between minorities and Anglo-American dominance would eventually fade away as WASPs became one more minority in the multi-ethnic society of the future.

Thus far no distinction has been made between ethnic and racial minorities. It quickly becomes apparent, however, that racial minorities have fared less well in America than European immigrant minorities, and the familiar question confronts us: why? The argument turns at this point to a second historical proposition, specifically that American slavery inflicted psychocultural damage on African Americans that extended far beyond those generations actually exposed to slavery. The historical wounds are then said to reappear in the incapacity of adult black males to function as heads of families, thus leading to a self-perpetuating downward spiral of social pathology:

The experience of slavery left as its most serious heritage a steady weakness in the Negro family. There was no marriage in the slave family ... no possibility of taking responsibility for one’s children. ... What slavery began, prejudice and discrimination, affecting jobs, housing, self-respect, have continued to keep alive. ... This is the situation in the Negro community; it will be the situation for a long time to come.

For a long time to come, also (if we extend Glazer’s premise to its
apparent corollary), African Americans will be treated differentially relative both to the population as a whole and to ethnic minorities because of the negative characteristics presumably implanted long ago by slavery and transmitted culturally from generation to generation. The ultimate blame of course is placed on slavery. But nothing can be done about that now; nor can much be done to alter differential treatment of black Americans if such treatment is believed to result from pathological deficiencies seen as self-perpetuating in African-American culture.

Obviously, it would not be difficult to construct parallel sequences for other racial minorities using similar models. The conclusions suggested by such beginnings seem not very different from the standard conclusions of old-fashioned racism. Ironically, they enter scholarly discourse as the purported findings of an interdisciplinary analysis that rejects racism and expresses keen sympathy for its victims. Leaving aside these conclusions, however, the entire construction remains flawed by the failure of historical evidence to sustain it.

America's supposed openness to newcomers throughout most of its history has been racially selective. By the time of Jefferson and Jackson the nation had already assumed the form of a racially exclusive democracy – democratic in the sense that it sought to provide equal opportunities for the pursuit of happiness by its white citizens through the enslavement of African Americans, extermination of Indians, and territorial expansion at the expense of Indians and Mexicans. If there was an 'American orientation' to newcomers it was not toward giving equal opportunity to all but toward inviting entry by white Europeans and excluding others. It is true that the United States absorbed a variety of cultural patterns among European immigrants at the same time that it was erecting a white supremacist social structure. Moderately tolerant of European ethnic diversity, the nation remained adamantly intolerant of racial diversity. It is this crucial difference that has been permitted to drop from sight.21

A shortage of historical evidence similarly undermines the concept of a psychocultural deficit imposed by slavery. Since its original formulation in 1959 this proposition has been examined and re-examined. A phalanx of distinguished scholars, who agree perhaps on little else, has demonstrated beyond much possibility of doubt that African Americans, under slavery and afterward, created a distinct, partially autonomous culture including a viable and enduring family structure. That critique has reduced the credibility of the psychocultural deficit argument to a vanishing point.22

The second main tendency of psychological explanation has sought to avoid the neo-racist implications of the first by focusing on psychological aspects of the dominant culture. The trend goes back to Gordon Allport's *Prejudice* and especially to Theodor Adorno's classic study, *The Authoritarian Personality*. It goes far beyond these earlier works, however, in its reliance on Freudian theory to explain not merely why certain personality types might be receptive to prejudice, but why hatreds directed specifically against African Americans and American Indians have found mass acceptance among the white population of the United States. The pioneering work of this tendency was certainly Winthrop Jordan's *White Over Black*.23

Jordan, like Myrdal and Montagu, has made racism the keystone in his account of the differential treatment of African Americans. His task is to find the originating and continuing causes of white racism. Jordan shows that in Elizabethan England blackness and darkness were widely used as symbols of evil, whiteness and light as symbols of virtue and wisdom. 'Treason, betrayal, murder, were black deeds. The carnal instincts, particularly sensuality, were dark. So were things repulsive such as excrement; and Jordan here hints at the Freudian concept of anality. He then develops a complex argument in which these associations, operating metaphorically, serve to explain the enslavement of black Africans on one hand and the extermination of red American Indians on the other. His argument runs as follows: the English, when they colonized America, began to enslave Indians because they were dark-skinned, savage – and available; but they did not go far in this direction because, since Indians were not black, they did not meet the needs of the English psyche for the symbol of blackness.

Yet Indians did meet another symbolic need that required a different role for them: by being driven off the land, they demonstrated the English dedication to civilization and rational progress. Africans, by contrast, symbolized the carnal instincts – those internal enemies of civilization whose domain included sexuality, the womb, excrement – having always to be hugged close yet kept under rigid control. '...Indians and Africans rapidly came to serve as two fixed points from which English settlers could triangulate their own position in America; the separate meanings of Indian and Negro helped define the meaning of living in America'. Indian extermination and African enslavement are thus derived from subjective needs of the English psyche.24

Jordan's psychological and intellectual interpretations are sometimes brilliant and always interesting. The basic problem with his presentation is not a paucity of information or shortage of historical evidence, but rather a priori assumptions that govern his evaluation of causes. Fully aware of the military, economic and political factors favoring African over Indian enslavement, and which eventually favored African slavery over European indenture, Jordan dismisses such factors as insufficient. Only subjective factors are brought forward as the decisive ones. Masters refrained from enslaving their European indentured servants, Jordan
writes, not because they lacked the power to do so, but because they 'did not believe themselves so empowered'. And of the original decision to enslave Indians and Africans rather than Europeans, he comments that 'to ask such questions is to inquire into the content of English attitudes'.

Certainly this is not the place for a critique of Freudian theory, but it is worth noting that Jordan and other psychohistorians dealing with white racism rely on segments of that theory — analiy, for example, or infant deprivation — as if they were bedrock. Some of us, on the other hand, may feel that formulations that invoke presumed instinctual drives are vulnerable to criticism and that a willingness to take them as universals of human behavior tends to subvert historical thinking. Yet the major difficulty presented by Freudian theory for historical explanation is at a simpler level. It is, to put it bluntly, that of credibility.

Doubtless one of the special conditions confronting all psychohistorians is that so much of their material is metaphorical — as illustrated in Jordan's treatment of white-black symbolism. Every external action then becomes a metaphor for internal processes that are alone the real causes of historical events. These internal processes, however, can only be known by decoding the external actions metaphorically. Since metaphor is indefinitely expansible in its range of meanings, the psychohistorian remains at liberty to tap in at any level that suits the needs of the argument.

Another difficulty inherent in the notion of symbolic acting out of inner tensions is the gap between the psyche allegedly experiencing the tensions and the human beings who presumably act them out in history. Jordan attempts to bridge this gap by assuming a collective psyche to which the techniques of psychoanalytic theory can be applied. Since that collective psyche does not yet exist, it has to be constructed by the historian. There is then no great difficulty in achieving symmetry between the collective psyche-as-constructed and the resultant historical actions; but the construction itself lacks much in the way of evidential validation. Like a work of fiction, it must depend upon its power to induce the willing suspension of disbelief on the part of the reader.

Most other psychohistorians have avoided this particular dilemma by using the form of the biographical study. Given a prolific public figure such as the young Luther, or Andrew Jackson, abundant evidence is likely to be available upon which to base an interpretation of the individual psyche.27 But how to get from the tensions of that psyche to the actions of people in history? There appear to be two possible routes. One posits the subject of study as a representative figure whose inner dynamics typified those of his contemporaries. The other places him as a creator, a kind of culture hero, who publicly acted out symbolic resolutions that masses of fellow citizens could then internalize as their own. Not only are these routes conceptually contradictory, but it is difficult to demonstrate the actuality of either, let alone distinguish between them. Again, the reader is left to accept, or reject, the psychohistorian's creative intuition.

It is true of course that epistemological questions may be raised with respect to any mode of historical explanation. But the difficulties seem exceptionally severe for psychohistory because of its assumption that real causes are psychic ones that can be approached only through metaphorical interpretation of external actions.

I ideological strategy

In constructing explanations for the differential treatment of racial minorities, Myrdal and Montagu began with an ideological formulation, then shifted ground to economics and psychology. Direct economic explanation, however, turned out to be incapable of standing by itself; while the two main trends of the psychological approach have either retrogressed to neo-racist polemics or become locked into the metaphors of psychohistory. Ideological strategy remains; but ideological explanation has suffered from so bad a name in the not very distant past that scholars often felt obliged to repudiate its influence, as did Winthrop Jordan when he wrote that to describe racism as 'merely the rationalizing ideology of the oppressor' was 'to advance a grievous error'.28 There are, of course, ideological reasons why ideological interpretation stood in disrepute. Most basic among them is simply the obverse of the reason suggested earlier as to why the psychological approach has been so widely accepted: ideological interpretation does not fit harmoniously into either the consensus or progressive varieties of American national consciousness because it stems from a class analysis of historical change. The Cold War intensified that lack of harmony to the point of driving ideological interpretation underground in American academic and intellectual circles.

As the Cold War itself went underground, ideology gradually found its way to the surface again. Its return to visibility was heralded by the widely influential work of the historian Bernard Bailyn and the anthropologist Clifford Geertz. Both gave central billing to ideology, yet these scholars in different ways stripped the ideological concept of most of its class linkages. The actual reuniting (in America, at least) of ideology with class analysis, resulted from — or coincided with — publication of the prison writings of the Italian Communist Antonio Gramsci, and their extraordinary impact in Europe and the United States. Post-Gramscian ideology, however, differs from the ideology of many earlier Marxists or even from that of the Frankfurt scholar Karl Mannheim. The concept has become at once broader and less optimistic.

It is less optimistic because it has abandoned the Enlightenment belief
in self-evident social truths that need only the ripping away of obscurantist ideology to be revealed to universal perception. At the same time, the older, limited notion of ideology as willful distortion of reality has yielded to a broader concept of 'principles, programs and goals' through which a particular class strives, in Gramsci's phrase, to achieve hegemony— to impose 'its values and attitudes', its sense of direction, on the society it dominates or hopes to dominate. Since literature and art as well as socialization, education and political debate furnish the substance of ideological construction as so conceived, studies of that construction must cope with a vast terrain. As applied to the differential treatment of non-white peoples in American history, it is not surprising therefore that ideological explanations remain scattered and fragmentary. So far there has been no single study of the problem as a whole. Nonetheless it is not difficult to piece together a summary of what presently exists by way of definition and explanation.

1. Racism is the pivotal concept for the ideological argument. It is defined as a system of beliefs and attitudes that ascribe central importance to real or presumed racial differences. Physical differences between groups may be easily visible and are certainly real, but racism reaches beyond them to assert that moral, intellectual and psychological qualities are also racially characteristic; that they are transmitted, along with physical traits, by heredity; and that these together constitute a major chain of historical causation. Racism is thus fundamentally a theory of history. Like other theories or systems of beliefs and attitudes, such as liberalism or nationalism, it exists as a phenomenon in history, capable of explication in terms of historical causation.

2. Racism entered history as a product of that complex sequence of events, which about the middle of the fifteenth century impelled peoples of Western Europe to an outward surge of exploration, conquest and exploitation. Since these events accelerated the accumulation of capital, they set the stage for the capitalist industrial revolution in Europe.

3. Thus the same sequence that led to expansion gave to western Europeans long-sustained advantages in social and economic organization and in industrial and military technology. By the end of the nineteenth century, European empires controlled most of the earth.

4. Since Europeans are generally white-skinned, while the peoples they encountered are generally dark, for three and a half centuries basic human relationships centered on the domination of whites over people of color.

5. Racism has stemmed from the appearance of social reality. It expanded into a rationalization and a means of justifying and perpetuating that reality. Rationalization began with speculative accounts of the divine origins of white Christian civilization. As European thought shifted from a religious to a scientific orientation, racism assumed the form of a scientific doctrine.

6. Linked to the beginnings of the social sciences, racism became part of that massive synthesis of physical, biological and historical explanation that nineteenth-century science bequeathed to humanity. It then confronted every informed person, white or non-white, in the dual guise of existing social reality and established scientific knowledge. Each individual, although perhaps rejecting certain moral or political implications of racism, remained powerless to dispute its standing as social reality and scientific truth.

7. Racism retained its prominence until the early twentieth century, when the combined effects of scientific criticism and of historical changes that it was incapable of explaining began to undermine its foundations. Even then it continued a vigorous existence within the cultures and institutions of predominantly white societies. The institutional embodiment, as a kind of residual class base, has generated continuing endeavors to reestablish its earlier claims to scientific credibility.

There are obvious gaps in this sequence. One is the already familiar proclivity to circular argument. Thus it might appear in Point 5 that racism is simultaneously cause and result of the differential treatment of non-whites. Ideological explanation understands social behavior as ultimately moved by consciousness of class or group interests. Morality then centers on definitions and interrelationships attributed to self (as the necessary locus of consciousness); to class (as trustee of rational — if not always perceived — self interest); and to group (as the assignee of dedications and purposes). Hegemony, in this reading, becomes simply the establishment or preservation by a ruling class of identifications between class and group. But why should it be supposed that seventeenth-and eighteenth-century Europeans experienced spontaneous convictions of self-interest and group dedication that required them to burn up their lives on plantations and slave ships in order to accumulate capital for entrepreneurs back home?

What is needed to resolve the dilemma of circularity is an ideological explanation for the initial act of differential treatment that does not invoke racism or any variant under some other name as a causal factor. Edmund Morgan in a study of the origins of slavery in Virginia offers an example
of precisely such an explanatory process. Morgan reverses Jordan. Instead of insisting on the primacy of subjective factors in the English psyche, Morgan shows how Virginians established African slavery through a series of rational responses to real situations, each step illuminated for them by concepts of labor, class and wealth that they had brought from England. Racism is not a necessary cause in Morgan's account of the origin of slavery in Virginia. Rather it results from that origin and becomes a necessary cause for what follows.13

More formidable than the problem of circularity is that of continuity. How has racism reproduced patterns of racially differential behavior for more than three centuries through shifts of ruling class power and across a spectrum of labor systems from slavery to wage labor? As would be expected, the most successful ideological explanations of continuity have dealt with slavery. There is no great difficulty, for example, in understanding the planters' defense of slavery, or that, although racism need not have caused any particular act of racial exploitation, it must have become a central factor in justifying a class that achieved wealth and power through such systematic exploitation. 'Wherever racial subordination exists', as Eugene Genovese put it, 'racism exists. ...'14

But how can such an understanding of planters explain why non-slaveholding whites acquiesced either in planter dominance or in its ideological justifications? And what of the North and West? Slavery was only one segment of time and space occupied by racism in American history. The 'world the slaves made' existed for at least half a century within an egalitarian white society described by the sociologist Pierre van den Berghe as 'terrefluid democracy'.15 The same democracy eventually destroyed slavery, yet retained the doctrine of white supremacy as keystone in its new legitimizing synthesis. Upon that democracy rose an industrial capitalist order. As labor power assumed its characteristically capitalist form of commodity, economic theory might have predicted that racial characteristics would lose their relevance in the labor market. On the contrary, they dominated the labor market. From what socioeconomic nutriment, in the era of modernization, did the ideological component, racism, draw its sustenance?

The question is crucial. It cannot yet be answered adequately, since no systematic explanation for the differential treatment of racial minorities has been developed for Jacksonian, or Gilded Age, or Populist America – let alone for America of the progressive or New Deal or Cold War periods. Nor has ideological analysis been applied to such historically baffling phenomena as the shift of federal policy with respect to race and racism after the Second World War, or the cult of ethnicity and beginnings of neo-racism in the 1960s and 1970s. In default of such projects, the ideological strategy will remain tentative, more broadly based on expectations than on achievement.

Nonetheless, it seems fair to say that of the several approaches surveyed the ideological appears the most promising. It promises, in the first place, a conceptual frame for more limited explanatory sequences such as that of the split labor market examined above, or theories of labor market segmentation in advanced capitalism, which begin by assuming racism as a factor of the environment under study. At longer range, it promises to meet a pressing need by providing a historical explanation for the differential treatment of racial minorities in the United States that could command general acceptance simply because it works. The purpose of this book is to offer a modest contribution in that direction.

The book is divided in three parts. Part One begins by posing class and racial hierarchy as the basis of Whig politics, taking American whiggism not in the once-standard mode of a reaction to Jacksonian initiatives, but as the established order against which those initiatives were directed. The focus then shifts to the Jacksonian side with examinations of the press and theater selected to exemplify the reworking of racist ingredients in mass culture to justify white egalitarianism. Part One ends with an interpretation of the Jacksonian Democratic party.

Part Two brings forward three transitional sequences: the first involving the popularization of regional vernacular heroes; the second and third stemming from urban artisan radicalism on one hand and New England National Republicanism on the other. All three pursued separate routes (by way of the Free Soil alliance) into the Republican coalition. Part Three begins with the Republican party and the new Republican West. In the context of western working-class experience, it explores the problem of class consciousness in a racially segmented labor force. The last chapter but one – continuing earlier discussions of vernacular characterizations in drama and fiction – traces the class and racial components of western heroes from Leatherstocking to Owen Wister's Virginian. The book ends with an inquiry into the failure of late nineteenth-century challenges to industrial capitalism, and the degree to which white racist ideas and institutions tended to inhibit effective opposition to ruling-class legitimacy.

My effort throughout this work is to get at the actual processes of ideological revision. Whether animated by deliberate intent of leadership or through individual compulsions of 'ideological innovators', those processes reaffirmed the credibility of the racist component. They added necessary adjustments of conceptualization and tone to conform, first, to shifts in the class structure of the ruling coalitions; and, second, to changes in the scientific, religious and attitudinal mix of world-reality as perceived.

I have worked from a conviction that consciousness mandates an effort to impart meaning and coherence, including some system of purposeful-
ness or moral commitment, to experience. Not all experience is social but the consciousness of it is framed in social experience. The starting point, therefore, is the collective inheritance, differentiated by class or social group background — the received wisdom each individual copes with, repertively for the most part, sometimes innovatively. What results is an ongoing 'social construction of reality' in Conflicting ideological components, such as a defense of racial exploitation on one hand or an assertion of racial equality on the other, must depend in part for their effectiveness upon a degree of correspondence with that ongoing construction. It is within this rather narrow perimeter of correspondence, seemingly, that anticipations of creative input to historical change must find their place, if they are to have a place.

Notes


3. Myrdal, pp. 85, 97; Rose, pp. 31, 35.

4. Myrdal, pp. 8–9, 17–18, 21. See Rose’s summation, p. 320, presumably concurred in by Myrdal; Rose, p. xii.


6. Myrdal, pp. 88, 96; Rose, pp. 33, 35.


12. See Rose’s summation, p. 320, presumably concurred in by Myrdal; Rose, p. xii.


The Rise and Fall of the White Republic


31. The definition of racism corresponds to a fairly widely held view (for example, van den Berghe, p. 11) with a historian’s twist at the end. Points two through seven are a composite drawn from many sources, most of which I cannot individually identify. The book review by George Fredrickson referred to in note 30 above, and an essay by the same author, cited in note 32 below, have been helpful; likewise Davis, Slavery and Human Progress, pp. 51–82. I should also refer to Caste, Class and Race: A Study in Social Dynamics, by Oliver Cox, Garden City, N.Y. 1948, as a work with which I have both deep agreements and strong disagreements. Barbara Fields, ‘Ideology and Race in American History’ in J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson, eds, Region, Race and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward, New York 1982, pp. 143–47, generally parallels the argument I have set out. Field’s essay becomes, I think, unnecessarily confusing because of a failure to distinguish between race as an objectively visible fact and racism as an ideological construct.

32. Historically oriented scholars have generally rejected ethnocentric explications of racism because they invoke instinctual drives or ‘universals’ of human nature. Frederickson, ‘Toward a Social Interpretation of the Development of American Racism’, in Nathan Huggins, Martin Kilson and Daniel Fox, eds, Key Issues in the Afro-American Experience, New York 1971, 1-246. Frederickson distinguishes between an ‘implicit’ or ‘societal’ racism, which he says characterized the white society of North America until the early nineteenth century, and ‘ideological’ racism, said to have come into existence in the 1830s as a conscious defense of slavery against attack. Neither appears to be equal to, or directly caused by, ethnocentrism. Van den Berghe, pp. 11–13, accepts ethnocentrism as a nearly universal human trait, but separates it decisively from racism.


34. Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, pp. 4, 7–49.

35. Van den Berghe, p. 77.