

Expectation and Exclusion

An Introduction to Whiteness, White Supremacy, and Resistance in Oregon History

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WHEN DR. DARRELL MILLNER AND I offered to be guest editors for this special issue of the *Oregon Historical Quarterly (OHQ)*, we did so understanding the immense importance of its main focus, the history of White supremacy and resistance in Oregon. As an African American woman, I have wondered since childhood why society has subjected Black people to centuries of enslavement, Jim Crow racism, and other inhumane treatment and why the American social order ranks Whites highest and Blacks lowest. Those questions have driven my scholarly work, culminating in my book in progress, *The Making of American Whiteness*. I would like to welcome you to this special issue of *OHQ* by introducing you to the concept of Whiteness.

Initially created by White people of privilege and advantage, Whiteness is an expectation (sometimes an unconscious expectation) that the government will maintain laws and policies generally benefiting White people.¹ That system, which has been effectuated through all institutions that govern American society, is White supremacy — the hierarchical ordering of human beings based on phenotypic, or physical, attributes that we call “race.”² But the ongoing, daily expectations of privilege are Whiteness. On a day-to-day level, the system of White supremacy repeatedly has provided advantages to White people, as demonstrated by the articles in this special issue. The system thereby encourages those of European ancestry to internalize their top-ranking — that is, to embody White supremacy — and that embodiment of expectation, conscious or otherwise, is Whiteness.

The system of White supremacy is prone to shifts in expression and intensity with demographic, economic, social, and political change across time and space. Oregon, a state with one of the Whitest cities in America, offers the perfect history through which to examine the structures of White supremacy.³ The articles in this special issue provide examples of White supremacy and resistance in the state’s past, beginning a conversation



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THIS 1901 SKETCH, originally published in *Harper's Weekly*, depicts the first enslaved Africans arriving in Virginia in 1619. European establishment of North American colonies established a system of White supremacy and an ideology of "American Whiteness."

about a complex and often contradictory history. As a collection, this special issue also helps make visible Whiteness, which I believe is the most vexing problem in the United States of America.

Scholars have explored the concept of Whiteness through the field of Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS), which is interdisciplinary and interracial at its core, is grounded in the disciplines of history and ethnic studies, and traverses a wide variety of traditional fields and subfields, from literature to landscape architecture.⁴ Since the later part of the twentieth century, students and faculty at college campuses around the world, as well as individuals, activists, and community groups interested in CWS, have used its methods to critique societies and systems of knowledge, investigating what it means and has meant to be White. Their work has explored, and critiqued, how and why some people came to adopt what W.E.B Dubois called "personal whiteness," and it has exposed a racialized system that,

overall, has been detrimental to the masses — what James Baldwin called “the lie of whiteness.”⁵ My work argues that European establishment of early North American colonies — processes that included conquest, genocide, land theft, enslavement, and forced cultural change — created the ideology I identify as “American Whiteness.”⁶ American Whiteness inextricably links the enslavement of African people to the European colonization of Indigenous lands in North America.

Whiteness originated outside North America, through European colonization efforts in West Africa during the fifteenth-century build-up to the transatlantic slave trade.⁷ At that time, there was no formal name for White supremacy, or even for race. Instead, European leaders defined their Whiteness by using oppositional terms.⁸ They employed *heathen* and *uncivilized*, when referring to Africans, as opposed to *Christian* and *civilized*, when referring to themselves.⁹ Thus, when European government leaders, church officials, and explorers expressed their reasoning for expansion to the Americas, they used terms such as *planting*, *possessing*, and *subduing*, all within the context of colonization and enslavement.¹⁰ These expressions, justifying Europeans’ expectation of rule over other people’s bodies and lands, can all be seen as early forms of Whiteness and, by extension, White supremacy.

The international system of slavery fueled colonists’ understanding of their own Whiteness, in opposition to both African and Native peoples, long before leaders began referring to themselves as *White*. A 1612 exchange between Virginia officials, for example, expressed their worry about European settlers marrying Native women but did not employ the term *White*, instead referring to those women as “savages” and to the men as “Englishmen.”¹¹ Similarly, the twenty-three West African people listed in Virginia’s 1624 census had the word “Negro” before or after their names, while a list of sixteen European servants documented in the same census were recorded simply using their full names, without any racial designation.¹²

The American form of Whiteness is historical and organic, deriving from English settlers’ knowledge and interpretation of the principles of colonialism and expansionism (the bedrock and drivers of the international system of slavery), which they used to justify the original acts of colonization that made way for the United States of America.¹³ The longstanding ubiquity of Whiteness makes it difficult to recognize and articulate, especially for White people in America, who live in a society that has connected social, economic, and political benefits to being White. Aiding in that perception, however, is the vast and complex scholarship on race, racism, and Whiteness — to which this special issue contributes.

EDMUND MORGAN'S 1975 text *American Slavery, American Freedom* argued that Whiteness, and related racism, slowly began to rise during the mid to late seventeenth century, within the dichotomy between free and enslaved labor that itself grew from the rapidly increased European participation in the transatlantic slave trade. Historical theories on racism and Whiteness have generally reflected Morgan's argument. Other historians have theorized that American racism originated outside North America. Historian George Fredrickson's *Racism: A Short History*, for example, dates the emergence of Whiteness and racism to the Age of Enlightenment, when European nations (soon to be followed by the United States) madly scrambled for control of Africa and parts of Asia.

Marxist scholars have understood Whiteness through the experiences of the White working class and its responses to labor exploitation in the British colonies. Theodore Allen's 1975 *Class Struggle and the Origin of Racial Slavery: Invention of the White Race*, for example, argued that the upper class of seventeenth-century Virginia deliberately constructed Whiteness to circumvent the uniting of poor Whites with free and enslaved Africans against ruling-class interests. Whiteness for Allen, then, was a social system designed to curb populism and placate the frustrations of property-less Whites by creating for them a class between propertied Whites and both free and enslaved Africans. By exploring American Whiteness only since European settlement in North America, I believe Allen misses that Whiteness actually predates the British Empire and originated with fifteenth-century European colonization efforts in West Africa.

Allen's influence is seen in Alexander Saxton's 1990 *Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in 19th Century America* and in David Roediger's 1991 *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, which both place the rise of Whiteness within European class tensions and strivings in North America during the nineteenth century. Both of these texts fail to recognize that it was not the frustrations among lower- and working-class European men that drove White workers to accept Whiteness but, rather, the expectation of privilege and advantage. To be clear, during the nineteenth century, those workers' frustrations were by products of the exploitation inherent in a then-centuries-old colonization system that enlisted desperate White males to be the poorly compensated shock-troops for European colonial projects.¹⁴ The expectation of advantage — that is, of the conferring of Whiteness and its attendant benefits, such as property ownership and political rights — was the reward for exploitation. It is in ignoring this standing *quid pro quo* that, I argue, Marxist analysis of Whiteness remains weak.

Scholars of the Black Radical Tradition have argued that racism predates European colonization of North America. This was the position Cedric Robinson took in his ground breaking 1983 book, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, in which he argues that capitalism emerged from the already racist culture of Europe. Black Marxism, then, locates the international system of slavery, which had existed since the fifteenth century, as not only central to the capitalist development of Western civilizations but also as part and parcel of the labor exploitation strategies that went into the colonization of the Americas.¹⁵ For Robinson, “capitalist world systems” of oppression such as the transatlantic slave trade have had a profound effect in the making of the western world, particularly the United States, and by extension, in the making of racism and Whiteness.¹⁶

Recent theories on American racism have tended to focus on explaining race rather than Whiteness. Ibram X. Kendi does this in his 2016 book *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America*. He superbly explains the history of race in America since colonization but fails to explain White supremacy and to explicitly name Whiteness as central to American racist ideas. Similarly, Crystal Fleming argues in her 2018 book, *How to be Less Stupid About Race: On Racism, White Supremacy, and the Racial Divide*, that White supremacy and Whiteness are new phenomena, thereby failing to acknowledge that White supremacist ideas were used to establish the colonies that became the United States and form the cornerstone to all conversations about American racism. In contrast, colonial Virginia scholar Ethan Schmidt, in his 2014 *The Divided Dominion: Social Conflict and Indian Hatred in Early Virginia*, argues that Whiteness embodied the settlement grammar of colonial churches and was embedded in the ideals of individual and collective freedoms and, later, notions of national sovereignty.

Whiteness, I maintain, is neither a construction that explains the economic self-interest of differing classes of White people over non-Whites nor a North American phenomenon, but instead has its genesis in each European nation’s initial decision to cross the Atlantic Ocean. Just as American Whiteness was born within a particular context, structures of White supremacy are prone to shifts in expression and intensity with demographic, economic, social, and political changes across time and space. White supremacy was systematized and expanded geographically in America and around the world — including in Oregon — in order to promote the maintenance of Whiteness, leading the way to centuries of enslavement, colonization, imperialism, globalization, wars, revolutions, and today’s racial inequalities and disparities. Its toll continues to be felt today. The articles in this special issue are dedicated to exploring the manifestation of this



THIS 1934 SCULPTURE, titled “Covered Wagon,” is located just outside the Oregon State Capitol’s main entrance. Designed by Leo Friedlander, the sculpture depicts a pioneer family in front of a covered wagon and is inscribed with the following: “Valiant Men Have Thrust Our Frontier to the Setting Sun.” That “thrust” implies claims to Native land and is an exemplar of Whiteness, as shown in the articles of this special issue.

reality in Oregon. They address subjects from the early nineteenth to the late twentieth centuries, emphasizing connections to national and global trends and events as well as identifying aspects of White supremacy and resistance that are particular to Oregon.

THESE WORKS connect two core characteristics of Whiteness that are present in Oregon’s White supremacist history — expectation and exclusion. Expectation and exclusion are shown in these articles to be a mix of White racial sensibilities about the right to land, citizenship, and jobs and the government’s protection of White people’s claims on these important areas of life. Katrine Barber and Kenneth Coleman use the concept of settler colonialism to illustrate how Euro-American migrants to Oregon adapted and adopted expectation and exclusion in their sense of entitlement to Native lands and other natural resources. Expectation and exclusion were manifest in the decisions of some 400,000 White people to migrate along the Oregon

Trail to claim “free” land, made possible through White people’s expert manipulation of legislative apparatus to dispossess Indigenous peoples and to exclude free and enslaved Black people from Oregon Country.

David Lewis and Thomas Connolly’s piece looks specifically at the violence inherent in settler colonialism, including the irony that the freedom of self-determination that White immigrants to the Oregon territory so desired was tied to the theft of the same freedoms from Native people. With their use of violence as an analytical framework for understanding Oregon Whiteness, Lewis and Connolly offer a cogent example of what Cheryl Harris calls the “entangled relationship between race and property.”¹⁷ Moreover, the framework of violence confirms what is exemplified in Barber’s and Coleman’s work — that there was both actualized and imagined White supremacy in settler colonialism and in the requisite justification for killing and removal of Native peoples from their sovereign lands. Together, all three of these works provide an excellent counter-narrative to the swashbuckling, pioneering caricature of the White settler while also demonstrating how a core characteristic of American Whiteness — the proprietary claim to other people’s land and resources — manifested itself as a White racial identity during the Euro-American settlement of the Oregon Country.

There is clear consensus among the authors that state, local, and federal governments and their supporting institutions were knowing and willing co-conspirators in the proliferation of White supremacy in Oregon, as they were in the nation at large. This is shown in the explanations of settler colonialism and also in Philip Thoennes and Jack Landau’s analysis of an 1857 letter Chief Justice of the Oregon Territorial Supreme Court George H. Williams penned to the editors of the *Oregon Statesman* days before he was to participate as a delegate in the Constitutional debate over slavery that ultimately would shape Oregon statehood. Thoennes and Landau’s introduction, and the primary source itself, link an Oregon leader’s beliefs about White supremacy to that of a national leader, both articulating an impermeable distinction between Blacks and Whites in particular and among other racialized groups more generally.

Yet, it would be a mistake to allow the slavery/anti-slavery rhetoric to distract our attention from a critical analysis of White supremacy in Oregon. As Jim Labbe explores in his article on abolitionists, the debate simply for or against slavery’s appropriateness for Oregon linked stances that were both mutually exclusive and interconnected to government legitimization of a “set of assumptions that accompan(ied) the status of being White.”¹⁸ As Williams’s letter demonstrates, being anti-slavery did not mean being pro-Black or having sympathy to the Black condition or Black people. The document illustrates the form and shape of Whiteness expressed through the racial hegemony

of Black enslavement and subjugation in Oregon and the nation, ideas that presage contemporary notions of White supremacy and White nationalism that are explored in Shane Burley and Alexander Ross's essay.

Burley and Ross locate the modernization of Whiteness in Oregon between the two world wars, when ideologies of White supremacy and anti-government rhetoric were formalized through the building of several small but influential political organizations, connected to Ku Klux Klan, militia, and paramilitary leaders, whose members spanned every strata of society, including police and government officials. The consequences of centuries of White supremacy that were and are so much a part of Oregon history and of the nation's also are explored in Elden Rosenthal's memoir of the civil trial of Tom Metzger, of the White Aryan Resistance, for instigating the 1988 murder of Mulugeta Seraw in Portland. For Rosenthal, acts of violence such as Seraw's murder and the 2017 senseless murders on the Portland MAX (which in many ways became the catalyst for this special issue) represent "a continuum of violence" in Oregon that began during Euro-American settlement and has been refined at various flashpoints ever since.

This collection shows the fault lines in the tenuous relationship between White citizens and government control. Johanna Ogden's essay on the 1910 St. John's riots, which were directed at Indian immigrant laborers, demonstrates those fault lines existed at places where White leaders advocated against vigilante violence and where the Indian laborers demanded first legal action in Oregon and, later, freedom from British colonizers in their homeland. Sandy Polishuk's and John Linder's essays show the fault lines also emerged where proprietary claims to union jobs met seismic shifts of social change, instigated by Black-led organizing. The social landscapes surrounding such fault lines provide remarkable spotlights onto Oregon Whiteness, which becomes visible through the backlash that is released when the region's scales of justice seemed to portend hope for racial equality.

Having observed White backlash at key moments of social change in American history — such as what occurred in the aftermath of the passage of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Constitutional amendments that resulted in increased Black power and with the Civil Rights activism and legislation of the 1960s, which each gave rise to the formation of the Ku Klux Klan and the modern radical-right movement — the authors in this issue astutely use resistance as a second, sometimes ironic, framework. It can be seen in White people's resistance to racial equality and in the ongoing resistance to White supremacy by people of color. Studying resistance helps tease out the entangled relationship between Oregon White peoples' expectations of advantage and the government's role in legitimating those expectations.¹⁹ Exemplary of resistance as an often-overlooked framework for revealing American

Whiteness are Polishuk's and Linder's articles on African Americans' long and intense campaigns for admittance into Portland labor unions from the 1940s into the 1960s, Lewis and Connolly's examples of Native people resisting the encroachment of White people on their lands, and Labbe's exploration of Black abolitionism at the time of Oregon statehood.

White supremacy continues to play an important role in the reproduction of racism. But the inequalities from racism can be combated with mutual cooperation, as in Labbe's essay documenting White abolitionists in Oregon, Polishuk's essay highlighting individual White people taking unpopular antiracist stances, and Odgen's showing government officials who were moved to indict and prosecute (although not convict) White city leaders for their roles in the 1910 St. Johns Riot.

Each article in this collection is introduced with a brief note by the guest editors, articulating how it sheds light on Oregon's history of White supremacy. Between each article are examples of daily expressions of Whiteness that have helped sustain White supremacy. Readers may find echoes of that imagery and language in what they encounter today.

It is our hope that this issue reflects a freshness of thought and spirit that will inspire all readers to find ways to end the adoption and proliferation of Whiteness and to bring the conversation of White supremacy out from under the sheets and robes and into the twenty-first century, using the study of Oregon's racial history as the catalyst for change.

NOTES

1. As argued in my book in progress, *The Making of American Whiteness*.

2. A. Smedley and Brian D. Smedley, *Race in North America Origin and Evolution of a Worldview*, 4th ed. (Boulder, Col.: Westview Press, 2011), 20.

3. Alana Semuels, "The Racist History of Portland, the Whitest City in American," *The Atlantic*, July 22, 2016.

4. Tim Engles, ed., *Towards a Bibliography of Critical Whiteness Studies* (Urbana: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2006). Important books in field that shape my analysis of Whiteness are: David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London:

Verso, 1991); George Yancy, ed., *What White Looks Like: African-American Philosophers on the Whiteness Question* (Great Britain: Routledge, 2004); and George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998).

5. W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Soul of White Folks," in *Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1920); James Baldwin, *The Price of the Ticket: Collected Nonfiction, 1948–1985* (New York: St. Martin's, 1985).

6. Carmen P. Thompson, "'20. And Odd Negroes': Virginia and the International System of Slavery, 1619–1660," (Ph.D. diss., University of

Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, 2012), 24. I coined the term "American Whiteness" to refer to this development and to its connections to the subsequent structures foundational to, in, and of what would become the United States of America. See my book in progress, *The Making of American Whiteness*, for a full exploration of the origins of Whiteness.

7. Thompson, "'20. And Odd Negroes,'" 7.

8. Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 9, 31–59. Morrison's reading of Whiteness indicates that it became defined by its opposite, Blackness. My analysis of seventeenth-century Virginia indicates that lower-class Whites defined themselves in opposition to Blacks because of impermanence of their (Whites') bondage, and in doing so, sought to align themselves with elite Whites by using enslavement as a means to justify their higher social position.

9. Report on Angola drawn from the letters of Father Gouveia and Paula Dias de Novais, BNL, FG, MS 8123, cited in Ruela Pombo, *Angola Menina* (Lisbon, 1944); and Gomes Eannes de Azurara, "Chronicle of the Discovery and Conquest of Guinea," (1453). The first English translation of this work was by Raymond Beazley and Edgar Prestage, printed for the Hakluyt Society in two volumes, the first in 1896. See also William Waller Hening, ed. *The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia, from the First Session of the Legislature in the Year 1619*, II: 283 (English translation at page 99).

10. Albert Bushnell Hart, ed. *Era of Colonization, 1492–1689* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1908), 1586.

11. Regarding the opposition language European leaders used to differentiate themselves from Native peoples, see Correspondence taken from James City records, V: 2589, folio 61.

12. Annie Lash Jester, ed., *Adventures of Purse and Person, 1607–1625* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956), 22, 27, 29, 34, 46, 49, 62. For an examination of the significance of the word *Negro* as a label of racial difference, see Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over*

Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550–1812 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1968), chapter 2; Richard B. Moore, *The Name "Negro": Its Origin and Evil Use* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1992), 33–55; and Cyril Bibby, "The Power of Words," *Unesco Courier* 8:11 (April 1956).

13. Thompson, "'20. And Odd Negroes,'" 7.

14. On European laborers and colonization projects in Africa and Virginia, see Samuel M. Bemiss, ed. *The Three Charters of the Virginia Company of London, with Seven Related Documents, 1606–1621* (Williamsburg, Va.: Virginia 350th Anniversary Celebration Corporation, 1957), 72; David Birmingham, *Trade and Conflict in Angola: The Mbundu and Their Neighbours under the Influence of the Portuguese 1483–1790* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), 25; and James Horn, *A Land as God Made It: Jamestown and the Birth of America* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 244–45.

15. Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492–1800* (New York: Verso, 1997), 10–18, 33. I define the international system of slavery as the technologies of oppression and enslavement used by Europeans in the transatlantic slave trade. Among them were six key elements that overlap in various ways with other systems of domination, such as colonialism and imperialism. The six key elements discussed in my dissertation as they relate to Virginia's growth and development include: religious intolerance and persecution, territorial expansion, colonial settlement, arrogant imposition on colonial and Indigenous peoples, theological justification for enslavement, and racial exclusion. An aspect of this analysis was informed by the work of Robin Blackburn.

16. Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1983; repr., 2000), 111–12.

17. Cheryl I. Harris, "Whiteness as Property," *Harvard Law Review*, 106:8 (June 1993): 1714.

18. *Ibid.*, 1713.

19. As argued in my book in progress, *The Making of American Whiteness*.