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## INTRODUCTION

### *Freedom and Its Dark Sides*

We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

—AMERICAN DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE, 1776

Men are born and remain free and equal in rights.

—DECLARATION OF THE RIGHTS OF MAN AND THE  
CITIZEN, PARIS, 1789

Free, white, and twenty-one.

—TRADITIONAL AMERICAN SAYING

At the dawn of the twenty-first century the American Congress appointed a task force to investigate the veracity of a persistent rumor that the US Capitol Building, among other official structures in Washington, DC, had been built by the labor of Black slaves. Rumors to this effect had existed for some time, but recent revelations of receipts for payments for slaves found in the Treasury Department had lent them new credence. Accordingly, Congress created the Slave Labor Task Force, in order to investigate the rumors and decide what, if anything, the federal government should do in response to them. In 2005 the task

force released its report, entitled “History of Slave Laborers in the Construction of the United States Capitol,” concluding that the rumors were true:

Soon after it was finished in the 1820s, the Capitol began to be called the “Temple of Liberty” because it was dedicated to the cherished ideas of freedom, equality, and self determination. How, then, can a building steeped in those noble principles have been constructed with the help of slave labor? The first step in the Capitol’s evolution was taken in the last decade of the eighteenth century and was, in fact, assisted by the toil of bondsmen—mainly slaves rented from local owners to help build the Capitol and the city of Washington. . . .

The irony of slaves helping to build America’s “Temple of Liberty” is potent. It is instructive, however, to recall that other landmarks of American freedom were also built with a similar labor force or in other ways intertwined with the institution of slavery. Faneuil Hall, for instance—Boston’s celebrated “Cradle of Liberty”—was given to the city by a slave owner whose fortune was founded on the slave trade. America’s oldest lending library, the Redwood Library in Newport, Rhode Island, was founded in 1747 with the help of New England’s largest slaveholder, Abraham Redwood. Two well-known Massachusetts leaders, Cotton Mather and John Winthrop, were also slave owners. Independence Hall was built at a time when slavery was widespread in Pennsylvania. Indeed, the colony’s Quaker founder, William Penn, was also a slave owner.<sup>1</sup>

The report’s conclusions led Congress to take several actions to rectify the historical record and acknowledge the role played by African slaves in building the Capitol. Unlike most congressional activities at the time, they represented a bipartisan effort, reaffirming the accord of both Democrats and Republicans. In 2007 Congress agreed to rename the Great Hall of the Capitol Visitor’s Center “Emancipation Hall,” in honor of the slaves who helped build it. As Congressman Jesse Jackson Jr. argued, “Emancipation is the great, enduring theme of our nation’s still unfolding story. Without emancipation, our house divided



FIGURE 1. “Emancipation Hall.” Scott J. Ferrell/Congressional Quarterly/Getty Images.

would not have stood. We would not be a beacon of freedom and democracy around the world. We would never have had, in the words of Abraham Lincoln, ‘a new birth of freedom.’”<sup>2</sup> Both the House and the Senate overwhelmingly approved the measure in November 2007, and President George W. Bush signed it into law the following January. Two years later, on June 16, 2010, congressional leaders from both parties unveiled two plaques in Emancipation Hall that honored the work of enslaved African Americans in building the Capitol.<sup>3</sup>

The story of Emancipation Hall in many ways tells an inspiring and moving story of a nation’s willingness to come to terms, across party lines, with its slave heritage. But it also raises some interesting and ultimately rather unsettling questions. Why would one name a building constructed by slaves Emancipation Hall as a way of honoring their legacy and history? They certainly weren’t emancipated when they worked there. Freedom undoubtedly represented the aspiration of those whose forced labor built the Capitol, and so much of America, but it was definitely not their reality and did not express the nature of their lives. Probably very few of them lived to see the end of slavery.

How could naming the structure they built Emancipation illustrate the nature of lives lived without freedom? If one really wanted to acknowledge them, why not call the building Slave Hall? Why would it be impossible to imagine an official government building in a country that claimed freedom as its greatest value with that name? Did the name Emancipation Hall, far from honoring the slaves who helped build it, instead represent yet another denial of their own history? If so, why did all of official Washington, including African American legislators descended from slaves, rush to embrace it?

Questions like these inspired and lay at the heart of this book, *White Freedom*. This study considers two seminal values in the modern world, freedom and race, and the relationship between them.

The relationship between freedom and race has been one of the key themes of modern society and politics in the Western world. Scholars and social commentators have long noted that the era of the Enlightenment, which emphasized the importance of freedom and in many ways codified our modern understandings of the idea, also witnessed the height of the transatlantic slave trade.<sup>4</sup> The enduring presence of racism in the history of America, a nation built simultaneously upon ideas of liberty and upon African slavery, Indian genocide, and systematic racial discrimination, has provided one of the most dramatic (but certainly not the only) example of this complex relationship.<sup>5</sup> To take one specific example, historians of the American Revolution have struggled for generations to conceptualize a war for liberty that preserved and reinforced slavery, and the debate has by no means come to an end.<sup>6</sup>

Commentators have often portrayed the relationship between freedom and race in paradoxical terms, as the quotation from the 2005 Congressional report cited above makes clear. If liberty represents the acme of Western civilization, racism—embodied above all by horrible histories like the slave trade and the Holocaust—is its nadir. The two classic statements of freedom that open this introduction illustrate this contradiction: the first was written by a man, Thomas Jefferson, who owned slaves;<sup>7</sup> the second was written by representatives of a nation that owned one of the greatest slave colonies, Saint-Domingue, the world had ever seen.<sup>8</sup> Some argue that one represents the essence of modern societies

while the other is more peripheral;<sup>9</sup> others (for example, Black nationalist Malcolm X) contend the reverse, that racism is the true inescapable reality of Western culture and society.<sup>10</sup> In general, however, perspectives on freedom and race tend to posit them as opposites, and the relationship between them as paradoxical and ironic, one due more to human inconsistencies and frailties than to any underlying logics.

*White Freedom* takes issue with this consensus, suggesting instead that the relationship between liberty and racism is not necessarily contradictory but rather has its own internal consistency. In short, I reject the idea of a paradoxical relationship between the two; to my mind there is no contradiction. The central theme of this study is that to an important extent, although certainly not always, ideas of freedom in the modern world have been racialized. In particular, many have considered whiteness and white racial identity intrinsic to modern liberty. Models of autonomy and self-empowerment have often come with a racial dimension, as reflected in the popular saying, “free, white, and twenty-one.” To be free is to be white, and to be white is to be free. In this reading, therefore, freedom and race are not just enemies but also allies, *frères ennemis* whose histories cannot be understood separately. Put baldly, at its most extreme freedom can be and historically has been a racist ideology.

The example with which I began this book, Emancipation Hall, illustrates this point nicely. As I will discuss later in this introduction, scholars of various persuasions have long argued that slavery and the treatment of nonwhites in general fundamentally contradicted Western ideas of freedom, and as a case in point would point to the use of slave labor to build the US Capitol building. The dedication of part of the building as Emancipation Hall in memory of the slaves who built it shows, however, that one cannot simply extend the narrative of freedom to those who were not free without making a mockery of their own history. This approach in effect seeks to preserve traditions of liberty grounded in whiteness, rather than to unpack the role played by race in creating and maintaining those traditions. It tries to integrate African American ideas of freedom into a building constructed in violation of them as a way of embracing a multicultural vision of liberty, but can do

so only by ignoring the dominant narrative that saw freedom as embodied in whiteness.

*White Freedom* thus challenges the idea that freedom and race are necessarily opposites, arguing instead that both historically and in the present day they have worked together to construct white identity. The pages that follow will show the many different ways in which freedom has functioned as an essential part of white identity, and by contrast the ways lack of freedom and the lack of white racial identity have gone together. Rather than see this relationship as paradoxical, it argues that in many cases it has been absolutely essential to what it means to be white (and therefore to be nonwhite). The book will therefore consider not just different examples of white freedom but more generally its evolution as concept and practice over the two hundred-plus years from the Enlightenment to the present day.

One can easily anticipate objections that many might make to such a thesis. Two in particular stand out in my mind. First, how can one condemn as racist, or even racialized, a broad human goal that has stood for the best in mankind, that has motivated millions and millions of people throughout history to fight and die for the rights of all? Let me state from the outset that this study does not aim to condemn the desire for freedom, to sully it by labeling it racist. Rather, I wish to consider the ways in which the ideal of freedom, like many other aspects of modern human politics and society, has had a racial dimension. Notably, the notion that whites in particular should be (and have been) free, and that freedom foregrounded the interests and goals of white populations, is one this study will explore.

The second objection also bears a lot of weight. Given that so many movements *against* racism have embraced an identity as freedom struggles (decolonization and the civil rights movement are perhaps the most prominent examples of these), how can one refer to freedom as a racist ideology? How can one characterize as white an ideal that inspired so many people of color to sacrifice everything for it? My answer to that is that freedom has never just been white; there are many political variants of human liberty. In particular many great popular struggles have been waged in the modern era to bring freedom to all men and



women. But in many ways that is my point: peoples of color have had to fight for inclusion into the idea of freedom, in fact not just struggling to be part of white freedom but to overthrow it as a concept and as a social and political reality. Those struggles have had their victories but also their defeats, and have never succeeded in completely destroying the relationship between freedom and race in the modern world.

To a certain extent both these objections rest upon a foundational belief that freedom is a positive human value, whereas racism is its evil antithesis. I certainly believe in human liberty and reject racial discrimination, as do probably most people in the contemporary world. But also, as an historian I understand that such convictions are not only not universal, but have also changed over time. As I will discuss more extensively in chapter 1, people have not always viewed freedom as a positive value, and there are important ways in which that is still true. One need only substitute *anarchy* for freedom, for instance, to understand that the idea of liberty can have serious negative connotations. Similarly, the idea of the *libertine* represents a person whose freedom is immoral, destructive, and ultimately self-destructive. The contrast between ideas of a political activist understood as a *freedom fighter* versus a *terrorist* shows how warriors for liberty can be seen in both positive and negative terms.<sup>11</sup> A central theme of the history of freedom, one which this book will consider, is how as a social and political value it was in effect domesticated, embedded in governmental systems that limited the autonomy of the individual for the effective functionality of the collectivity.

If freedom has not always been good, equally race and racial discrimination have not always been seen as bad. Obviously, this was true in fundamentally racist societies like Nazi Germany and the antebellum American South, but the idea of racial differentiation as a positive value—one that emphasized the biological differences between peoples—also existed in cultures that did not embrace overt racism. A belief in racial difference did not have to necessitate racial oppression, for example, but could be seen instead as a way of maximizing the inherent and distinct qualities of each race. Ideas of race were intimately intertwined with the rise of nationalism in nineteenth-century Europe,

for example, to the extent that the modern nation was seen as a political formation that could affirm and advance the racial interests of a people. Romantic literature also embraced a frequently positive vision of race, as one can see in novels like Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* or James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*.<sup>12</sup> Finally, the rise of racial pride movements such as Black nationalism often served to mobilize and empower members of ethnic minority groups.<sup>13</sup> The response to racial discrimination has been as much racial pride as antiracism, and the two have at times gone together.

Very few people willingly embrace what they perceive to be evil. The construction of white freedom rested on the idea that both liberty and white racial identity were not only positive values but also in many ways inseparable. This history will explore the rise of this phenomenon across the modern period, considering how a belief in freedom developed in the context of increasing racial differentiation. This study will explore, for example, how the first represented a reaction to the second, and also how the two phenomena interacted and even mutually reinforced each other.

The chronological scope of this study is the modern era, from roughly the eighteenth century to the end of the twentieth, in particular the two hundred years from 1789 to 1989. Although freedom and racial difference have existed for a long time, they came together in the modern era, and together they have played a major role in shaping the world we know today.

In terms of geography, it lies somewhere between comparative and world history. As a generation of transnational historians has argued, the story of mankind is not limited by the boundaries of the nation-state, and so we must consider the ways in which those boundaries are transgressed or even ignored as much as created and maintained.<sup>14</sup> In fact, one type of freedom, freedom to migrate elsewhere in search of a better life, directly speaks to the global nature of liberty. At times, therefore, this study will look at the relationship between freedom and race in different parts of the world, considering how particular issues played out in a variety of geographical settings.

At the same time, however, this is not a world history per se. It does not systematically pursue the history of freedom and race on a global scale. Rather, I generally focus on two areas: Europe, and within Europe

France in particular; and the United States. An American born and bred, I trained professionally as an historian of France and have during the course of my career written books and articles that consider the intersections of both national histories. For me, a comparative approach to history is a fruitful way to consider transnationalism, one that considers not the absence of nation-states but their interactions.

There are other justifications for focusing a transnational history of freedom and race on France and the United States. There now exists a significant historical literature comparing the world's two great republics, one that has made important contributions to comparative and world history.<sup>15</sup> In particular, France and America are both countries for whom the ideal of freedom is absolutely central to their national identities. For the French, liberty is intimately associated with their national history. The Germanic tribes who settled post-Roman France called themselves Franks, which meant free in their language, and gave the name to their nation. Modern France is of course grounded in the experience of the French Revolution, whose classic slogan, *Liberté, égalité, fraternité*, gives freedom pride of place.<sup>16</sup>

Equally, most Americans would argue that the United States stands for freedom more than anything else, and perhaps more than any other nation. As historian Eric Foner states in the preface to his seminal study *Give Me Liberty! An American History*: “No idea is more fundamental to Americans’ sense of themselves as individuals and as a nation than freedom. The central term in our political language, freedom . . . is deeply embedded in the record of our history and the language of everyday life.”<sup>17</sup> Moreover, in both countries the idea of freedom has generally had a universal character: all peoples should be free, not just their own, a belief that at times has guided imperial expansion, foreign policy, and participation in the great wars of the modern era.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, as this study will explore, the histories of both France and the United States have been shaped by racial difference, highlighting the perceived contradictions between freedom and racism in the modern world as a whole. In both cases these two concepts and practices often represent the best and the worst of their national histories.

The modern histories of France and the United States, and the comparisons between them, thus form the meat of this book. However, they

are not its exclusive focus. One could hardly write a study of freedom and race in the modern era without considering the history of imperialism, for example, and that means attention to other imperial formations, especially Britain and the British Empire.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, twentieth-century fascism also speaks to this complex history in a variety of ways, so one must take into consideration the history of fascist Italy and especially Nazi Germany.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, in the twentieth century conflicts between capitalism and communism helped shape debates about both freedom and race, especially (but not only) in the era of decolonization and the cold war, so that one must also explore that history. Ultimately, of course, there are few aspects of modern world history that do not touch upon the themes of race and/or freedom to some degree, so as this project grew I found myself frequently venturing into unfamiliar territory. It is a measure of the importance of this topic that I nonetheless managed for the most part to keep it at the center of my narrative.

Finally, I should note that my thinking about the relationship between freedom and race has been strongly influenced by ideas of whiteness, and the scholarly literature on whiteness studies.<sup>21</sup> Whiteness scholars have shown how racial identity belongs just as much to socially dominant strata as to the oppressed, and it makes sense to consider the history of an ideology that generally symbolizes empowerment in this light. Consequently, this book's analysis of freedom links it not so much with racial categories of all sorts, but more specifically with racial superiority, i.e., whiteness. One could easily imagine a negative image of freedom as savagery, and that idea of freedom being associated with blackness; I will in fact consider aspects of this possibility in chapter 1. But for the most part this study will consider the ways that positive ideas about freedom interacted with, both drawing upon and promoting, ideas of white racial identity as an elite social and political status.

*White Freedom*, then, explores the modern history of two seminal concepts, freedom and race, and the relationship between them. In particular it considers how our ideas about freedom have been shaped by racial thinking, arguing that for much of the modern era liberty and white privilege have frequently been strange bedfellows at worst, soul mates at best. It certainly does not argue that white freedom is the only

kind of freedom, that all modern visions of liberty are racist. It does suggest, however, that belief in freedom, specifically in one's entitlement to freedom, was a key component of white supremacy. In societies governed by racial hierarchy, the whiter one was, the more free one was. Conversely, those who could not claim white identity were in many cases those who lacked freedom. The contrasts between white citizens, nonwhite colonial subjects, and Black slaves provide the most obvious examples of this, but they are not the only ones. As this study will show, the nature of white privilege and freedom certainly changed over time, but the link between the two remained tight enough to accentuate its continued existence as an historical phenomenon.

Ultimately to chronicle the history of white freedom is also to chronicle the history of struggles against it, struggles for a more conclusive idea of liberty that would free all women and men. This study focuses more on the former than the latter, primarily because I feel this story is less familiar, but both are of crucial importance. To explore the history and power of white freedom is hopefully to give a better sense of what those who fought against it were up against, a better understanding and appreciation of their heroic efforts. If whiteness and freedom are frequently allied in modern history, so are struggles against both racism and the lack of freedom, and not necessarily just for peoples of color. In exploring how freedom was limited and shaped by racial difference, one must also consider the history of those who insisted on freedom for all. This too, in the end, is part of the history of white freedom.

## Defining White Freedom

So far I have discussed white freedom as the relationship between two seminal concepts, but the time has come for a more organic, concise statement of definition. What is white freedom? How can one define a concept born of such different and contrasting ideas?

For the purposes of this study, I therefore define white freedom as the belief (and practice) that freedom is central to white racial identity, and that only white people can or should be free. Such a definition can

lend itself to several different interpretations. At one level, white freedom seems merely another version of white supremacy, the belief that whites are superior to other peoples on racial grounds. From this perspective, freedom seems the ultimate symbol of white racial superiority and privilege. Whites are free because they are smarter, more powerful, or more morally deserving than other peoples. Such an argument can easily slip into a kind of circular logic: whites are freer than other races because they are better, and they are better than others because they are more free. White supremacy did not in modern history necessarily imply racial hostility; one can portray whites as better than others without attacking those others (as we shall see, much writing about race during the Enlightenment did exactly that). In practice, however, the idea that one must subjugate other races in order to preserve the freedom of whites has played a central role in the development of white freedom, just as the example of such subjugation has served to affirm the association of freedom with whiteness.

Ultimately, however, the meaning of white freedom transcended racism and white supremacy, emphasizing instead how ideas of liberty in general were grounded in whiteness. The classic exploration of this is Edmund Morgan's *American Slavery, American Freedom*. In this seminal study Morgan considers how African slavery contributed to the development of the idea of freedom in colonial Virginia, a key aspect of what he terms "the central paradox of American history."<sup>22</sup> He shows not only how slavery lay at the root of the prosperity that made visions of freedom and independence in colonial America possible, but also how the creation of a massive slave population (forty percent of the residents of colonial Virginia by the eighteenth century) enabled the unity of elite and working-class whites around ideas of freedom. According to Morgan, whites in colonial Virginia prized freedom so much precisely because they could see every day what it meant to live without it.<sup>23</sup> As he argued in his conclusion:

Racism thus absorbed in Virginia the fear and contempt that men in England, whether Whig or Tory, monarchist or republican, felt for the inarticulate lower classes. Racism made it possible for white Vir-

ginians to develop a devotion to the equality that English republicans had declared to be the soul of liberty. There were too few free poor on hand to matter. And by lumping Indians, mulattoes, and Negroes in a single pariah class, Virginians had paved the way for a similar lumping of small and large planters in a single master class.<sup>24</sup>

Although grounded in the racist belief that slaveholding America was a land of free people because African slaves were not people, this idea of white freedom emphasized the identity of whites rather than the oppression of Blacks. In fact, for it to function as a hegemonic creed of what it meant to be American, the position of African Americans and other peoples of color had to be reduced to inconvenient exceptions in a grand narrative of freedom, or preferably ignored altogether. In this sense, therefore, white freedom transcended, or at least sought to transcend, white supremacy and racism by casting freedom as a universal value. As scholars of whiteness have shown, portraying white identity as universal served to mask the very real relations of power that made it possible. I argue that in fact the juxtaposition of white freedom and Black slavery was not a paradox, precisely because it arose out of the immutable facts of race. As this book will show, celebrations of liberty in the modern world often had a racial dimension, and the refusal to recognize this dimension played a key role in the development of white freedom.

White freedom thus lay at the heart of the constitution of whiteness as a social and ultimately political identity. As an ideology it argued that to be white meant having control of one's own destiny, of being free from domination by others. The myth of the freeborn Englishman or the ideal of the yeoman American farmer rested above all on not being a slave, and in the modern era that increasingly meant not being a Black slave. And it also meant a sense of natural rights that by the nineteenth century more and more people viewed as universal. Analyzing the history of white freedom thus means uncovering the racial dimensions of a concept usually defined as belonging to all members of the human race. It means remembering that to be human itself has often been defined in racial terms.

## Freedom and Race in Historiography and Theory

As Eric Foner has pointed out in his sweeping history of freedom in America, the idea of liberty is so popular that virtually every significant political movement in American history has embraced it as an identification and a goal.<sup>25</sup> Freedom seems universally valued and sought after, not just in the United States but throughout much of the modern world, yet it is at times difficult to define. What, after all, does it mean to be free, and how have the meanings changed according to time and place?<sup>26</sup>

In one sense, of course, women and men have been writing about freedom as long as they have been free to write. Many eras of human history, notably ancient Greece and Rome, the Renaissance and Reformation, and the Enlightenment, have produced major texts about liberty.<sup>27</sup> In this book, however, both for reasons of economy and because of my particular topic, I will discuss modern historical and theoretical writers about freedom. This modern historiography really begins with John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* (1859), followed by the essays of Lord Acton in the late nineteenth century, and then is carried on by a number of writers in the mid-twentieth century, notably Isaiah Berlin.<sup>28</sup> The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of Soviet communism spurred a new interest in the history of liberty.<sup>29</sup>

A number of scholars have written general histories of human freedom, seeking to reveal the basic outlines of this idea across historical time. A few basic themes and traits characterize much of this historiography. Much of it has a teleological orientation, charting the evolution of humanity from oppression to freedom. Often this goes along with the story of the rise of the West, starting with the ancient Greeks and Romans and culminating with contemporary liberal democracy. In the preface to the first volume of his massive study *Freedom*, sociologist Orlando Patterson observes, "No one would deny that today freedom stands unchallenged as the supreme value of the Western world. . . . There is now hardly a country whose leaders, however dubiously, do not claim that they are pursuing the ideal. The very hypocrisy and absurdity of many of these claims attest to the enormous power of this ideal. People may sin against freedom, but no one dares deny its virtue."<sup>30</sup>



Closely aligned with this emphasis on freedom as a key factor in the making of the modern world is a strong emphasis on the politics of freedom, and of liberalism in particular. For many writers on the topic, freedom and classic liberal philosophy are virtually indistinguishable, and the basic principles of liberalism largely define modern ideas of freedom. This is especially true of the many books about freedom written during or after the collapse of Soviet communism and the resurgence of neo-liberal politics at the end of the twentieth century.<sup>31</sup> In *Freedom: A History* (1990), Donald W. Treadgold sees freedom as characterized by a few essential traits: political pluralism; social pluralism and diversity; property rights; the rule of law; individualism.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, in a book publishing the results of a conference comparing liberty in France and the US, editors Joseph Klaitz and Michael H. Haltzel make the evolution of liberalism in both countries key to the history of freedom.<sup>33</sup> Some writers see not just liberalism but also democracy, especially in the form of liberal democracy, as integral to the history of freedom.<sup>34</sup>

Another important approach to the history of freedom is the story of freedom struggles. Historians of minority and oppressed groups have also frequently crafted those histories as narratives of overcoming discrimination and achieving freedom. A classic example of this is one of the first major studies of African American history, John Hope Franklin's *From Slavery to Freedom*, which cast the long fight against racism and for racial equality as a freedom struggle.<sup>35</sup> Both the civil rights movement and anticolonial struggles for national independence during the decades after World War II adopted the idea of freedom as a key way of defining their movements, and this vision has characterized much of the historiography of these movements as well.<sup>36</sup> Other movements against discrimination and for equality in the postwar era adopted the banner of liberty: both feminist and gay struggles frequently used the term *liberation* to characterize their goals.<sup>37</sup>

Some scholars have written about freedom as essentially the opposite of slavery and have seen the history of the two as deeply intertwined. No one has embraced this perspective more thoroughly than Orlando Patterson, whose earlier works on slavery led him to explore its relationship

to the idea of liberty from the ancient Greeks to the modern era in his massive history of freedom. Another major study, David Brion Davis's *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (1966), explored at length the paradox of slavery and freedom in human history, noting that John Locke and other advocates of liberty at times supported the institution of human bondage.<sup>38</sup> Other historians have noted the extent to which the call for freedom often assumed the form of a rejection of servitude, even among slaveholders themselves.<sup>39</sup>

The historical discussion of the relationship between slavery and liberty brings us close to my own reading of the rise of white freedom. Before exploring this in more depth I now wish to turn to the other relevant historiography, that of race and racial thinking, in the modern world. Like liberty, race has been explored and analyzed from many different perspectives, resulting in a rich and complex body of scholarly literature. As I will argue below, the two intellectual traditions at times parallel and intersect with one another, exhibiting important differences as well as a good deal in common.

Like that of freedom, the historiography of race has taken different forms over the years, and also like freedom, race as a concept has proved notoriously difficult to define. Discussions of physical, biological, and cultural distinctions between peoples go back to the ancient world, notably Aristotle's differentiation between the superior northern races (Greeks) and the barbaric "Eastern" races.<sup>40</sup> But, much more so than is the case with the historiography of liberty, most historians of racial thinking see it as the product of the modern era. In his pathbreaking synthetic study *Race: The History of an Idea in the West*, Ivan Hannaford argues that the word *race* did not enter into general use in northern Europe until the sixteenth century, and was not fully conceptualized until the eighteenth.<sup>41</sup> In general, contemporary historians of race have been at pains to reject the idea that racial thinking is a universal part of the human experience, instead linking it to the specific history of modernity.<sup>42</sup>

Intellectual history has often taken the lead in the historiography of race, again similar to the history of freedom. Hannaford's seminal study starts with the ancient world and proceeds through the Middle Ages

considering texts by Aristotle, Socrates, Cicero, Saint Augustine, Maimonides, and Shakespeare before arriving at the birth of modern racism in the seventeenth century. Other authors have adopted a similar trajectory, looking at the roots of racial thinking in early recorded history but arguing that racism itself begins with the European discovery and conquest of the Americas. The Enlightenment has been a major focus of intellectual historians of race; some have argued that the great thinkers of the eighteenth century rejected both slavery and racism, while others see the era as a seminal one in promoting the idea of classifying humankind along racial lines.<sup>43</sup> Scholars of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust have also made major contributions to the historiography of race. George Mosse's *Toward the Final Solution* and Leon Poliakov's *The Aryan Myth*, for example, ground modern anti-Semitism in the evolution of racial thinking since the Enlightenment, arguing that it differed fundamentally from the religiously based hatred of Jews in the past.<sup>44</sup>

Such studies on the intellectual history of race have produced what is by now a standard historical chronology, which sees racial thinking as originating in early modern Europe, being developed by the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century and the rise of scientific racism in the nineteenth century, combining with the rise of the nation-state and nationalist culture to produce virulent forms of racism, and culminating with the Holocaust, the example par excellence of racial genocide and the racial state. Like the historiography of freedom, therefore, it tends to adopt a teleological narrative of racial thinking.

Similarly, just as many studies of liberty have concentrated on freedom struggles, so too has a considerable body of scholarship on race focused on the condition of nonwhites and those racially Othered. Virtually all of the history of African Americans, and to a large extent that of peoples of African descent in general, takes questions of race as a central issue.<sup>45</sup> The scholarly disciplines collectively known as ethnic studies take as their subject racialized communities and population groups.<sup>46</sup> The tremendous expansion of this scholarship since the 1960s has made studies of race far more central to the intellectual life of American universities than before, and increasingly has established a presence far beyond the boundaries of the United States. These fields of

study are usually interdisciplinary, combining perspectives from various fields in the social sciences and humanities, and interdisciplinarity in general has often stimulated new approaches to the academic study of race.<sup>47</sup>

A central paradox of the historiography of race is the fact that while racial thinking, especially scientific racism, was overwhelmingly repudiated after the Holocaust, the scholarly study of race has become more prominent than ever. From the heated battles over affirmative action in the United States<sup>48</sup> to questions of universalism versus difference in France<sup>49</sup> and controversies over race relations in Britain,<sup>50</sup> politicians, public intellectuals, and activists have wrestled with how to deal with a phenomenon that almost all agree has no objective or scientific reality.<sup>51</sup> As we shall see below, the histories of both race and freedom are replete with paradoxes, a topic I will take up in chapter 1.

\* \* \*

I have organized *White Freedom* in three sections, of two chapters each. Part 1 deals with both broad theories and specific practices of white freedom, organized thematically rather than chronologically. Chapter 1 considers alternate ideas of freedom, notably those related to piracy and childhood, and how they were increasingly suppressed and relegated to the margins of modern bourgeois society in Europe and America. Both children and pirates represented a kind of racialized “savage” freedom, attractive and easily romanticized yet nonetheless at odds with white freedom in the modern era. Chapter 2 takes as its subject a specific case study, the Statue of Liberty. Probably the most famous symbolic image of freedom in the world, the Statue of Liberty also represents ideas of freedom in both France and the United States. This chapter explores the racial history of the great statue, from its forgotten and suppressed links to antislavery to its changing relationship to immigration. Together, the two chapters give an overview of the main outlines of the book.

Parts 2 and 3 proceed chronologically. Part 2 looks at the relationship between freedom and race in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, from the Enlightenment to the outbreak of the Great War. Chap-

ter 3 considers the Age of Democratic Revolution and how it brought together liberty and whiteness. It examines the Enlightenment, the American Revolution, the French Revolution, and the Saint-Domingue Revolution, to show the many ways in which struggles around both white freedom and Black slavery intersected. This chapter concludes by arguing that the crusade for freedom at the beginning of the modern era ended up by emphasizing the links between liberty and race. Chapter 4 deals with the rise of modern industrial and bourgeois society and the rise of liberal democracy in Europe and America. In Europe it explores the link between the rise of mass democracy at home and the growth of massive empires in Africa and Asia, producing polities organized around white citizenship and nonwhite subjecthood. In America the chapter considers the rise of mass democracy, the Civil War, and Reconstruction, showing how the struggle against Black slavery ended up reaffirming white freedom. It also investigates the history of immigration and whiteness at the turn of the century.

Part 3 of *White Freedom* focuses on the twentieth century. Chapter 5 discusses the history of the two world wars and the interwar years. It explores the ways in which World War I brought the planet together into one global social and political unit, and how that unit was segmented along racial lines. The chapter considers the history of fascism and how it interacted with racialized ideas of freedom, and then analyzes the great antifascist crusade for freedom and the racial dimensions of that crusade. It ends by looking at how the struggle against fascist racism undermined the idea of white freedom. This leads into Chapter 6, which considers the fall and rise of white freedom in the latter half of the twentieth century. Beginning with decolonization and the civil rights movement in America, it notes the triumph of struggles against white freedom up to 1965, then the return of that ideological practice in the 1970s and 1980s. It concludes with the fall of European communism in 1989, a date justly celebrated as a banner year for freedom but one that had its own racial implications.

Such is the story of *White Freedom*. It intends not to condemn the idea of liberty but rather to explore a rarely considered dimension of that ideology, its relationship to ideas of race and racial difference in the

modern world. I hope this book will inspire other studies on the complex nature of liberty in our history and ultimately help us to understand how we can make all the world's peoples more free. If it can do that, or even if it simply inspires and provokes debates about race and freedom in our time, I feel it will have served its purpose.

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