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Amma Terrece Sims
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Reconstructing the Narrative of Slavery in the United States:

Acknowledging the Complex Exploitation of Forced, Free, and Semi-Free Labor Beyond
Race and Ethnicity and the Several Communities Who Endured Systemic Labor
Exploitation and Injustice in the United States

THESIS

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Master of Arts Degree in the Graduate School
of Texas Southern University

By

Amma Terrece Sims, B.A. History

Texas Southern University

2024

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Exploitation and Injustice in the United States

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Texas Southern University, 2024

Dr. Cary Wintz, Advisor

This thesis explores the deconstruction and modernization of the narrative surrounding slavery in the United States by recognizing the multifaceted exploitation of labor beyond racial limitations. Through an assessment of representations and historical instances of forced, free, and semi-free labor in the United States, this study explores various forms of systemic subjugation and discrimination endured by diverse communities of immigrants. Specific consideration is given to examples such as indentured servitude of the colonial era and the experiences of “new immigrants” of the industrial period in challenging the established racial paradigm correlated with slavery. The experiences of specific European ethnic sub- groups, such as the Irish, are explored and juxtaposed with chattel slavery to compare the severity of each experience. By incorporating these narratives, the research aims to provide a more wide-ranging and nuanced understanding of the complex accounts of forced, free, and semi-free labor exploitation among various ethnic communities in the United States; to ascertain the basis for its current representation as entirely an African American experience, along with its consistencies and contradictions; and to contribute to a broader discussion on the various

dimensions and implications of systemic injustice in the Western world, primarily within the United States of America.

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Educationally Yours,

Amma T. Sims

04/07/2024

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Every February for Black History Month, a few African American contributions to the vitality of the United States are highlighted, along with a glimpse of the plight of the slaves. More recently, tales of the horrors and inhumane acts toward African slaves have become more prevalent, though the overall catalogue of atrocities could likely not ever be amassed. For background and context on the topic of labor exploitation, *Webster's* definition of a slave is “someone captured, sold, or born into chattel slavery.”¹ The same dictionary offers its definition of slavery as “the practice or institution of holding people as chattel involuntarily and under threat of violence.”² Lastly, *Webster's* definitions of servitude include “1. a condition in which one lacks liberty especially to determine one's course of action or way of life; and 2. a right by which something (such as a piece of land) owned by one person is subject to a specified use or enjoyment by another.”³ Although race or ethnicity is not mentioned in either of the definitions above, the photo representations corresponding with these definitions in *Webster's* dictionary were of Africans in chains. It is well documented that Native Americans were also used as slave labor, as were Asian immigrants and Mexican Americans as migrant workers in the Southwest region of the United States. So, exactly to who do the definitions apply if the visual representation provided is of African chattel? According to Ignatiev, “Slavery as existed for thousands of years without prejudice of color, language, or tribe.”⁴ How

¹ Meriam Websters Dictionary. s. v. “slave”. www. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/>. Accessed 01/22/2024.

² Ibid. s. v. “slavery”

³ Ibid. s. v. “servant”

⁴ Noel Ignatiev. *How the Irish Became White*. New York: Routledge, 2009. Page 2079.

has slavery evolved to be represented by African chattel and their descendants when labor exploitation began in the U.S. with British vagrants who were forced to immigrate and labor in the Virginia Colony? “In every part of the United States, there is a broad and impassible sic line of demarcation between every man who has one drop of African blood in his veins and every other class in the community.”⁵ The practice of slavery in the United States has perpetually been viewed through a constricted lens, structured to a narrative embedded solely in racial exploitation and colored in African ancestry.

Responsively, this study seeks to contest and expand that narrative by analyzing the multifaceted imposition of forced, free, and semi-free labor beyond race. By acknowledging the systemic exploitation and injustice faced by various immigrant communities, the research endeavors to reform the customary misconceptions of slavery in American history. The obvious problem with the current representation of slavery is its distortion and ambiguity without the recognition of other ethnic groups who performed forced, free, and semi-free labor in the United States; “Throughout the eighteenth century, the range of dependent labor relations had blurred the distinction between freedom and slavery. The Revolution led to the decline of apprenticeship, indenture, and imprisonment for debt. These changes, together with the growth of slavery as the basis of Southern society, reinforced the tendency to equate freedom with whiteness and slavery with blackness.”⁶ Existing narratives surrounding labor exploitation do not include the turmoil and marginalization imposed on other racial groups that were experienced by those not known to represent slavery as it was/is by African chattel. Consequently, this study particularly centers on the inclusion of models such as indentured servitude, along

⁵ Ibid. Page 2022

⁶ Ibid. Page 2012.

with the experiences of immigrant industrial laborers, as it aspires to illustrate the varied dynamics of labor exploitation that have shaped this nation's past. The typical narrative surrounding slavery has been centered on the inhumane racialized bondage of African Americans while ignoring the experiences of other marginalized groups whose labor played a vital role in the fiscal foundation and expansion of the United States of America and the intersectionality of the exploitation of both groups. To address limitations in the representation of slavery in the U.S., this body of research is intended to probe into the experiences of persons who immigrated to America utilizing the practice of indentured servitude, as well as the constraints faced by “new immigrants” of the 18th and 19th century who sought a better life in the land of opportunity as industrial laborers.

The purpose and impact of this study focuses on deconstructing the present narrative of labor exploitation in the United States as an attempt to dispel notions that remain attached to African Americans and their ongoing legacy in the present day; it focuses on reconstructing the narrative of labor exploitation in the United States in an effort to introduce the notion that other ethnic groups have been relegated to ownership, exploitation, marginalization, inhumane work and living conditions, religious and cultural persecution, violent attacks, and political nullification and exclusion from American society for the purposes of financial gain and social importance; and in commanding a recognition of the subsequent social exclusion of representing one ethnic group as the only worthy of being exploited via a construction of systemic racism, the impression of white privilege, and the vehement acts of white supremacy that we witness within our borders more than any other country in world.

In reconstructing the narrative of slavery in the United States, this thesis asserts the obligation of acknowledging the many aspects and layers of this practice of manipulation of human labor beyond race by incorporating examples such as indentured servitude and the experiences of “new immigrants” of the Industrial Era. While integrating accounts of indentured servitude and the struggles of “new immigrants,” this research endeavors to challenge the conservative racial paradigm associated with slavery and to foster a more comprehensive understanding of the intricate history of labor exploitation in the United States. Lastly, this research hopes to magnify the various ethnic groups which entered the United States lowly on the socio-economic landscape that were considered different from the original settlers ethnically, religiously, and linguistically, who worked the tobacco planters’ lands in tandem, intermarried, and amalgamated until a fear of unity among the poor laborers threatened to destroy the power of “Whiteness”; a fear which ultimately led to the end of indentured servitude or European bondservants as plantation labor, to the beginning of racialized slavery in the U.S., to the representation of bondage as black, and to the implementation of systematic oppression and racism that is still palpable in today’s society.

Through a comprehensive examination of relative historical instances, this thesis aims to define the various modes of systemic exploitation and injustice that transcended racial boundaries in the United States. By adopting a more inclusive approach to the study of slavery, this exposition strives to shed light on the complex, interconnected, and multi-faceted histories of various European immigrant groups who were forced and coerced into free and semi-free labor and how they are represented in social casting. Additionally, this research also seeks to raise a nuanced insight into the ways in which

systemic injustices assisted in the creation of a British empire and eventually in shaping the socio-economic landscape of the United States. As this examination discovers the narratives or stories of indentured servants and new immigrants, it proposes to contribute to a contemporary representation and more extensive discourse on the multifaceted dimensions of forced, free, and semi-free labor and its prevailing impact on American history and society. In reconstructing the narrative of slavery in the United States, it is necessary to deconstruct the profoundness of the exploitation of labor beyond race and to encompass examples of concepts such as indentured servitude and “new immigrant” experiences from the Colonial and Gilded eras, respectively. Through incorporating narratives of “white slaves” bonded in indentured servitude and the struggles of industrial laborers considered “new immigrants” and often referred to as “colored whites,” this project seeks to challenge the conventional racial paradigm associated with slavery and encourage a more inclusive comprehension of the complex history of labor exploitation and a clarified representation of labor exploitation in the United States.

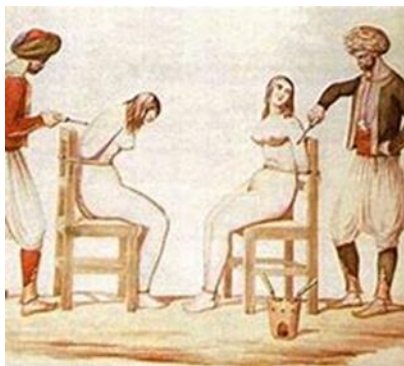


Figure 1: Photo of “white slaves”



Figure 2: Photo of black slaves

CHAPTER 2

Literary Review

The works that provided the foundation for this project are steeped in historical research and archives of labor exploitation in the United States. In *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America*, the author Ibram X. Kendi shares his conclusions on the origin of the term slave. He explains, “In Ibn Khaldun’s day, most of the captives sold in Western Europe were Eastern Europeans who had been seized by Turkish raiders from areas around the Black Sea. So many of the seized captives were ‘Slavs’ that the ethnic term became the root word for ‘slave’ in most Western European languages.”⁷ His articulation of the term infers that the concept’s origins accompanied the hearth of its definition in Eastern Europe. Kendi’s mention of “Slavs” is a reference to the Mediterranean Slave trade, conceived by Muslim Iberians predating western colonization. The correlation between slavery and race had not yet become customary because the concept of race was still under construction. Another historical work, entitled “The Iberian Roots of American Racist Thought” by James Sweet, provides some historical perspective on the correlation between race and slavery. Sweet proposes, “The issue of which came first, racism or slavery, is central to this debate: some historians accept Eric Williams’s assertion that ‘slavery was not born of racism: rather, racism was the consequence of slavery.’ Though the origins debate may seem artificial or analytically unimportant, it can reveal fundamental truths about the trajectory of racist ideology in Western culture.”⁸ The Slavic people began to resist

⁷ Ibram X. Kendi. *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America*. Bold Type Books, 2017. Page 23.

⁸ James Sweet. “The Iberian Roots of American Racist Thought”. *The William and Mary Quarterly. Third Series. Vol. 54, No.1*, Jan.1997. p.p. 143-166. Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture.

enslavement and to protect their territories from Islamic capturers in the 15th century, spurring the initial definition in the representation of the word slavery. According to Kendi, “By the mid-1400s, Slavic communities had built forts against slave raiders, causing the supply of Slavs in Western Europe’s slave market to plunge at around the same time that the supply of Africans was increasing.”⁹ It is clear that slavery’s definition in the western world became slight to only include those of African descent during a period in the establishment of the British colonies as the demand for production could not be met by European indentured servants or native labor. Though the Spanish managed to impose slavery on many of the native tribes in Latin America, the British did not have similar success with the native tribes occupying the land claimed by their colonists. Kendi also points out the broad classification of two marginalized ethnic groups in his statement, “Thanks to this malleable concept in Western Europe, the British were free to lump the multiethnic Native Americans and the multiethnic Africans into the same racial groups.”¹⁰ During this period, humans from both ethnic groups were enslaved in the United States.

Consequently, the way slavery has been propagated since the advent and culmination of the Transatlantic Slave Trade is inauthentic without the byline of the European immigrants who came to the colonies as indentured servants, without dialogue surrounding immigrant industrial laborers, millers, and miners during the Gilded Era; or without the inclusion of the many Native tribes who were “employed” as migrant workers in the Southwest and within the plantation system of North America as both

⁹ Ibrahim X. Kendi. *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America*. Bold Type Books, 2017. Page 23.

¹⁰ Ibid. Page 36.

slave labor and slave owners. The Spanish had a long history of enslaving Natives on their plantations and in their settler colonies as an extension of the Mediterranean Slave trade operating before the inception of the Transatlantic Slave trade by the Portuguese, which initially transported African populaces to the Caribbean Islands and Latin America. Kendi describes another stage of the alteration in the representation of slavery when he writes, “In one of his first written pleas in 1516, Las Casas suggested importing enslaved Africans to replace the rapidly declining Native American laborers, a plea he made again two years later. Alonso de Zuazo, a University of Salamanca–trained lawyer, had made a similar recommendation back in 1510. ‘General license should be given to bring negroes, a [people] strong for work, the opposite of the natives, so weak who can work only in undemanding tasks,’ Zuazo wrote.”¹¹ His research reveals particulars of the colonial plantation system as it evolved into a brutal form of racialized chattel slavery, of which there are still unspoken details. There were many faces and phases in the evolution of forced, free, and semi-free labor in the United States, which saw a quick development in the original British colonies. Kendi’s perception of this multilayered practice and definition states, “When John Cotton drafted New England’s first constitution in 1636..., he legalized the enslavement of captives taken in just wars as well as ‘such strangers as willingly sell themselves or are sold to us.’”¹² This is an example of the scope of the definition of slavery in the 17th century. The term did not yet solely apply to African agricultural or domestic servants in bondage. Yet, how common is the knowledge of free blacks who acquired their own manumission before the civil war? And how well known

¹¹ Ibrahim X. Kendi. *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America*. Bold Type Books, 2017. Page 20.

¹² Ibid. Page 18.

is the origin of the chain gang and its connection to the concept of Tramp-ology during the 19th century, or more specifically, the way white homeless migrant men were imprisoned and forced to labor in early Los Angeles, as Kelly Hernandez illustrates in *City of Inmates?* The book by Kelly Hernandez, entitled *City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles, 1771–1965 (Justice, Power, and Politics)*, highlights her extensive research on the origins of the penile system in Los Angeles, California. There is a notion of imprisonment being used as a tool of elimination recurring throughout this text, which suggests that colonial settlers used incarceration to inflict free labor on the people indigenous to Southern California, along with white males migrating to the state for work. Hernandez also chronicles a practice of seizing these homeless white men on the streets of Los Angeles, California, and forcing them to become free laborers. This practice evolved into a “chain gang” operation, in which the city used these “tramps” in chains for constructing and repairing roads and buildings. However, “tramps” were not exterminated by colonial settlers, as were the Natives, who were kept imprisoned under inhumane conditions and without sustenance.¹³ This concept of imprisonment was developed before European settlers landed in North America. In *American Slavery, American Freedom*, the author suggests that imprisonment was the British brand of enslavement before the idea of colonization was brought forth; vagabonds were incarcerated and made to labor.¹⁴ Through historical research on this topic, it becomes obvious that slavery developed from some amalgamation of imprisonment and feudalism as a function of classism and has mutated into a race-based

¹³ Kelly Lytle Hernandez. *City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles, 1771–1965*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017. Page 40.

¹⁴ Edmund S Morgan. *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2003. Page 114.

practice that consistently increased profits from agriculture, industrial labor, or mining during the colonial and industrialization periods, and has also served as a basis for caste maintenance within the United States of America.

In *How the Irish Became White*, the author Noel Ignatiev illustrates the struggle of Irish immigrants to the United States after escaping religious-based political strife and the economic downturn in their home country. Ignatiev includes instances of Irishmen who were initially of the anti-slavery stance before realizing the financial implications of exclusion from “white” society in America. Any association with African chattel in the U.S. was a threat of sharing their caste. He reports, “The Irish who emigrated to America in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were fleeing caste oppression and a system of landlordism that made the material conditions of the Irish peasant comparable to those of an American slave.”¹⁵ Would they want to emigrate to another country to experience the same treatment they fled because of empathy for a different ethnic group who would never be citizens? Would the Irish trade assimilation for association with a group who could never escape the position and representation of a slave? To further illustrate how the Irish abandoned their position of the “repeal” of African slavery the author adds, “So it came to pass that event transpired contrary to the way Garrison had hoped; instead of the Irish love of liberty warming America, the winds of republican slavery blew back to Ireland. The Irish had faded from Green to white, bleached by, as O’Connell put it, something in the ‘atmosphere’ of America.”¹⁶ The works included in this section, along with numerous important historical writings, provide the foundation for this thesis and

¹⁵ Noel Ignatiev. *How the Irish Became White*. New York: Routledge, 2009. Page 38.

¹⁶ Ibid. Page 677.

the idiosyncrasies that led to the conceptualization of slavery and the practice of forced, free, or semi-free labor as a black experience. As aforementioned, in *American Slavery, American Freedom*, the author constructs the history of British servitude, beginning with the vagrant problem in England that intensified Protestant fear of the Spanish Crown, along with the imperial desires of the British monarchy. He describes a pre-colonial Britain already subjugating the Irish and the poorest of their citizenry, the several failed attempts of the British at creating the Virginia colony before Jamestown, and how the colonists were disenchanted with the indenture's lack of work ethic. Additionally, the colonists were unable to enslave the Natives and were extremely challenged by tobacco crops until African slavery began to take hold in the U.S. In *Greenwich Village 1913*, Treacy insists, “in the earlier epochs of history, we find almost everywhere a complicated arrangement of society into various orders, a manifold gradation of social rank.”¹⁷ She also suggests that the modern caste system has “sprouted from the ruins of feudal society and has not done away with class antagonism.”¹⁸ These and other historical works provided a foundation for this research, offering a glimpse into the colonial experiences of indentured servants and the gilded age experiences of “new immigrants,” and the comparability of these concepts to the trappings of chattel slavery and the experiences those in bondage collected through forced immigration.

¹⁷ Mary Jane Treacy. *Greenwich Village, 1913: Suffrage, Labor, and the New Woman. Reacting to the Past*. New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 2015. Page 153.

¹⁸ Ibid.

On Monday, July 24th, 1789
TO BE SOLD,
 On Tuesday the 25th Day
 of August 1789
A CARGO
 OF
NINETY-FOUR
PRIME, HEALTHY
NEGROES,
 CONSISTING OF
 Thirty-nine MEN, Fifteen BOYS,
 Twenty-four WOMEN, and
 Sixteen GIRLS.
 JUST ARRIVED
 In the Brigantine *DEMBIA*, *Francis Barr*, Master, from SIERRA-
 LEON, by
DAVID & JOHN DEAS.

In 1789 the firm of David and John Deas advertised the sale of 94 African captives in Philadelphia. 60

Figure 3: Ad for the sale of newly arrived Chattel slave

CHAPTER 3

Theoretical Framework

There are many people who are not aware of the range of ethnic groups that have been subjugated to slavery in the United States. Little is known of European slaves or “white slavery.” Its origin and all that it encompasses is little spoken of because in the society created on exploits of chattel, “slavery” has come to be synonymous with being Black. In a similar respect, being “colored” in America has also connoted black, or so I previously thought. The term “colored whites” which is an oxymoron of sorts, was one that I have recently become informed of. Even with the awareness that millions of European immigrants strolled off a ship at Ellis Island who were not categorized as W.A.S.P., it did not occur to me that some may have been contrastingly considered “colored.” Additionally, Natives who were retained as “slaves” in Virginia were eventually categorized as “colored.” Lastly, how have these two phenomena and their evolution juxtaposed to the socio-economic progression of the United States, related to white privilege and white supremacy? Are the last-mentioned byproducts of the aforementioned? Or are they accompaniments? And how have they contributed to the chameleon-like definition of “white”? How do they shape the current image and experiences of people of color, primarily African American? In a recent survey created on SurveyMonkey, I inquired with twenty-five people on how slavery is represented to them. Of the twenty-five participants, 35% of respondents were unfamiliar with the term “white slavery,” and another 26% had not heard of “colored whites.” A total of 70% of respondents agreed that a racial caste system exists in the United States, 26% answered maybe, while 4% felt there is no caste system. Slavery is a word that can automatically

recall Black Americans working on plantations, picking cotton, tobacco, or sugarcane, maybe indigo or rice. Another representation of African American slavery is domestic labor. These representations have even been used to sell grocery products, such as Aunt Jemima pancake syrup and Uncle Ben's rice. Nonetheless, the many aspects of the practice of slavery and the origin of the institution are not truly well known. Although some consider slavery to be an African American experience, it has permeated the lives and lineage of people in every ethnic group, and in the land of America, the land of colonization and the privileged, European immigrants have experienced the conditions of slavery and the same maltreatment as those considered to be "colored", therefore proving that privilege to be fleeting and unsalvable for some "whites." Also, it demonstrates in veracity that slavery is not synonymous with people descending from the African continent. Although slavery did not begin in the United States as a chattel practice with a racial component, it has been characterized as such by stories of the Civil War and the Antebellum south in movies such as *Birth of a Nation* and *Gone With the Wind* and also in literature like the novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe.

The motion picture entitled *Roots*, an adaptation of a novel written by Alex Haley, which became an annual primetime ritual for 1970's and 80's tv programming during Black History month in February, was my first glimpse into American slavery. Near the beginning of the story, a captive named Kunta is whipped by his new British master until he agrees to represent himself as Toby.¹⁹ Although its depiction of chattel slavery included some accuracies surrounding the African American experience of forced labor exploitation, it omitted numerous other aspects of slavery that have yet to become

¹⁹ Alex Haley. *Roots: The Saga of An American Family*. Garden City, N.Y., Doubleday, 1976. Page 100.

common knowledge. One of those aspects is the use of the word “slavery” regarding European Americans, a correlation previously unconsidered. And there were no European indentured servants spoken of or pictured in *Roots*. There were obstacles for all ethnicities who provided free, semi-free, and scarcely compensated labor in colonial America. “With different languages and religions, and cultures, they shared little other than surprise that America did not offer them the prosperity that had been the stuff of their dreams.”²⁰ The institution of slavery did not emerge to marginalize only African captives but instead to maintain a labor class that would help create continued prosperity for the upper-class descendants of “old immigrants” for generations. It evolved into racialized slavery in the British colonies after the provision of productive European indentured servants arriving to perform agricultural labor began to dwindle, and once the pursuit of controlling native tribes proved to be impossible. According to Sweet, “Though the concept of race was not unknown in the fifteenth century, the words Razza in Italian, Raza in Castilian, Rafa in Portuguese, and Race in French referred to a group of plants, animals, or humans that shared traits through a shared genealogy. Not until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries did ‘scientists’ begin using ‘race’ to legitimize claims of human biological superiority and inferiority.”²¹

Regarding female servants and slaves in the colonies/states, one distinction was that African slave women were made to perform domestic duties on the plantation as well as the field labor they were expected to execute alongside their male counterparts. These

²⁰ Mary Jane Treacy. *Greenwich Village, 1913: Suffrage, Labor, and the New Woman. Reacting to the Past*. New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 2015. Page 33.

²¹ James Sweet. “The Iberian Roots of American Racist Thought”. *The William and Mary Quarterly. Third Series*. Vol. 54, No.1, Jan.1997. Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture. Page 144.

women were also steadily sexually violated and bred by many slave masters, some of them giving birth to babies while working in the fields. According to Kendi, “White enslavers could now reap financial reward from relations ‘upon a negro woman.’ But they wanted to prevent the limited number of White women from engaging in similar interracial relations (as their biracial babies would become free).”²² Mulatto children born to white mothers would be categorized as free by authority no matter the father’s ethnicity, whereas children born to an enslaved “colored” mother would automatically be born a slave. In comparison, European women who chose the path of chain migration to America often found themselves laboring in factories without wage laws or protection of child laborers, sometimes becoming victims of unsafe working conditions and sexual abuse by superiors. Although European women working as industrial laborers were not represented as “slaves,” gender suppression and exploitation of women were a problem for all in the Americas during that period; these practices imply that this phenomenon was present in every ethnic group outside of the original settlers. However, the implications of being labeled bottom caste or “slave” justified the horrific treatment African chattel received from “old immigrants” and others considered “white;” a lack of concern for the well-being of African Americans, free or not, was justified by their representation of a less than human, uncivilized, inferior slave. “Of the nearly one hundred reports of rape or attempted rape in twenty-one newspapers in nine American colonies between 1728 and 1776, none reported the rape of a Black woman. Rapes of Black women, by men of all races, were not considered newsworthy.”²³ Nothing regarding the well-being of African

²² Ibrahim X. Kendi. *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America*. Bold Type Books, 2017. Page 41.

²³ Ibid. Page 42

Americans was newsworthy to American society, though viewings of lynchings and other types of Black race degrading entertainment were popular attractions. “Nearly everywhere in contemporary society, ‘white’ is presumed to be a meaningful index of identity that, like age and gender, is important enough to get mentioned in news accounts, tallied in political polls, and recorded in government databases. Yet what that identity is supposed to tell us is still substantially in dispute.”²⁴ To the benefit of female laborers arriving from Europe during the Progressive era, Social Settlement Houses were instrumental in socializing “new immigrant” women from Eastern and Southern European Countries, who came to the United States in the late 19th and early 20th century. These immigrant women who faced religious prejudice, language barriers, inhumane work conditions, and unfair pay, among many other challenges, found relief in social programs offered to them by Social Settlement Houses during the Progressive Era. Most of them migrating followed their families or husbands to the New World. According to *Settling Into Our Memories: Three Immigrant Women’s Autobiographies*, Social Settlement houses provided many uplifting services in the early 1900s for women emigrating from Eastern and Southern European countries.²⁵ Although personal recollections, like *Settling Into Our Memories*, have offered details about the experiences of women performing free and semi-free labor during this era, research from this time period helps us to understand how this phenomenon contributed to the eventual inclusion of “new immigrants” who were considered “colored whites” into the upper castes of U.S. culture, eventually leading European immigrant women and their families away from the

²⁴ Robert P. Baird. “The Invention of Whiteness: The Long History of a Dangerous Idea.” *The Guardian*, April 20, 2021. Page 1.

²⁵ Victoria Bissell Brown. “Settling into Our Memories: Three Immigrant Women’s Autobiographies”, Chapter 4. *The Bedford Reader in American History*. Page 160.

representation of slavery and all of its pitfalls. These institutions provided a social parachute that helped to assimilate all European subgroups, forming an evolved “white society” in the U.S. “Just as racial slavery was the distinctive feature of American growth, the distinctive feature of American labor history is that these two conspiracies of labor, instead of coming to form part of a single movement, profoundly diverged.”²⁶

While free Blacks engaging in the Great Migration were able to find employment opportunities that “old immigrants” rejected, the number of freed African Americans relocating to New York and other northern industrial cities steadily increased through the early 20th century. “These immigrants found that American factories and the smaller ‘shops’ were unlike anything that they had experienced in their home countries: even those who had suffered great poverty were not prepared for the disruption of everyday life and values wrought by industrialization.”²⁷ For former enslaved African Americans, the emergence of the Black church functioned on the social level in aiding all people living in Black communities, filling a void for institutions that helped “new immigrants” like Social Settlement Houses. Though the Black Church could not be a conduit to assimilation or a portal into “white privilege,” it bridged the gaps between Black Americans of every status and provided refuge for those in need. Also, the focus on the Biblical teachings, which fueled African American perseverance, differed from the Protestant idealism practiced by their former masters because Black churches offered a message geared toward determination and liberty from racial slavery and its branches, citing biblical stories such as how Moses delivered his people from Pharaoh in Egypt.

²⁶ Noel Ignatiev. *How the Irish Became White*. New York: Routledge, 2009. Page 2144.

²⁷ Mary Jane Treacy. *Greenwich Village, 1913: Suffrage, Labor, and the New Woman. Reacting to the Past*. New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 2015. Page 33.

The syncretic culture of the African American church experience, with high-energy preaching and music, maintained a sliver of African culture through the call and response elements brought by their ancestors to America;²⁸ call and response is still present in the delivery of the sermons and the music performed by African American church choirs, in participation with the parishioners. Black churches also educated people in their communities who were formerly forbidden from becoming literate; people in these communities could garner assistance in gaining employment, housing, and the ability to read via literacy programs. Social services were provided to people of African descent that were unavailable to them in any other setting in the U.S. This factor made the African American Church, along with culturally relevant education and political protest, a necessity to the improvement in conditions for Blacks and defy the societal position thrust upon them by the desire of the privileged group to keep them subjugated with simple tactics such as being perpetually represented as an oppressed group, as the face of labor exploitation in the United States.

²⁸ Nell Irvin Painter. *Creating Black Americans: African-American History and Its Meanings 1619 to the Present*. New York: Oxford University Press. 2007. Page 73.

Shade of Slavery

SUBTITLE



Figure 4: Results of the Survey regarding associations of color/ethnicity and slave

Methodology

This thesis seeks to critically examine the historical practice of indentured servitude and the experiences of "white slaves" by tracing its evolution, contextualizing its usage in different historical periods and regions, and engaging with ongoing discourse surrounding the imposition of forced free and semi-free U.S. labor. It also aims to discover the nuanced experiences of individuals who migrated to the United States as industrial workers, those who counted within European subgroups often referred to as "colored whites," by evaluating the intersectionality of race, ethnicity, and identity. Through a multidisciplinary approach encompassing historical analysis of selected writings, comparative studies of immigration and labor-related data, and discourse analysis presented in journals, articles, and recorded interviews, this research aims to contest monolithic representations of forced, free, and semi-free labor as it dispels misconceptions, and contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the diverse experiences within the historical context of enslavement and labor exploitation; to contribute to an understanding of the complex relationships between race and identity within the socio-economic class related implications of "whiteness" in the United States and how it manifests itself in today's race relations and systematic oppressions; to foster an informed and compassionate dialogue on the complexities of human exploitation throughout history, showing its inclusivity and the current misrepresentations of it.

Through the analysis of historical documents, data collections, recorded interviews, and memoirs, this study intends to provide a nuanced and comprehensive analysis of two extinct historical concepts: "white slavery" and "colored whites" and their

relation to the experiences of European indentured servants and immigrant industrial laborers, respectively. Historically, these terms have been utilized in various contexts, often in ways that may perpetuate misconceptions about the experiences of certain groups, particularly in the United States. This study seeks to contextualize and redefine the notions of "white slavery" and "colored whites" by delving into historical accounts of indentured servants and immigrant industrial laborers, examining primary sources relevant to the respective eras and experiences, and critically assessing video or audio interviews of contemporary discourse surrounding indentured servants and industrial laborers or "new immigrants." It will trace the evolution of these terms and their corresponding communities, investigating instances where each has been applied and the implications of these constructs on distinctive populations in the United States.

By surveying the experiences of individuals who were indentured servants and historically labeled as "white slaves" alongside "new immigrants" also branded "colored whites" of the mills, coal mines, and factories further north, the thesis seeks to contest traditional stereotypes currently projected regarding the institution of slavery and offer a more precise understanding of the struggles of all peoples who have been egregiously exploited for labor in the establishment of the United States, through a comparative analysis of chattel slavery and the other inhumane labor practices that existed during the Industrial Era, this study will highlight the diversity of human labor exploitation throughout colonialism, industrialization, and the development of capitalism in the west, as well as the social insinuations of the burden of racial demarcation. In addition to the historical analysis, the thesis will engage with existing discussions surrounding the lives of indentured servants and industrial laborers and how their representations of free and

semi-free labor as “white slaves” or “colored whites” became lost as labor exploitation in the United States transformed into a symbol of the tragedy of the African American chattel experience. This argument includes an examination of how both concepts are nullified by portrayals in modern media, the effects of the current representation on social perceptions, and their intersections with broader discussions on race and exploitation, such as white nationalism. Additionally, it surveys perceptions of iconic cultural representations in the media and how they have assisted in shaping the current representation of slavery in America. By critically assessing the social climate of these eras and the language utilized in relevant conversations, the research aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the complexities surrounding this historical phenomenon. The priority goal of this analysis is to induce a more updated and inclusive dialogue concerning the historical exploitation of humans, to challenge distorted narratives of these persons and experiences, and to contribute to a broader conversation on the intricacies of human history. Through an extensive approach that integrates historical research, social analysis, and philological examination, this study aims to reframe the discourse surrounding the history of labor exploitation across ethnic lines and how they became racial constructions and to inspire a more accurate, sensitive and inclusive understanding of the diverse experiences within the historical context of the exploitation of human labor in the United States.

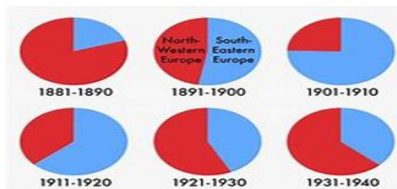
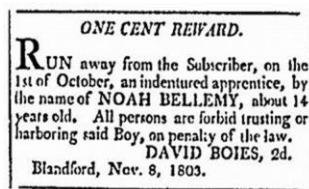


Figure 5: Ad for runaway servant Figure 6: Tables of immigration of servants

Historical Overview

Slavery was not race-based before its evolution on the shores of North America, especially not in Britain or its colonies. Long before Roanoke, the Iberian merchants became well-versed in the practice of human trafficking and slavery prior to the Spanish Conquest. The Arab Slave Trade, also known as the Mediterranean Slave Trade, created a system for the trade of human laborers that was not based upon color, although the value placed on the slave was connected to ethnicity in some cases. The author James Sweet contends, “the racism that came to characterize American slavery was well established in cultural and religious attitudes in Spain and Portugal by the fifteenth century. Such attitudes were reinforced by European political turbulence and the decline of the Mediterranean slave trade. The racist beliefs that Iberians and others would later refine to a ‘science’ were firmly entrenched before Christopher Columbus made landfall in the Americas. This racial idiom became more rigid as capitalist imperatives gained strength.”²⁹ During this period, the Iberians conquered and exploited natives of every territory they discovered and forced them to become laborers for the Spanish monarchy. Though many of the indigenous expired while enduring the Spanish conquest and viruses, the conquistadors brought with them, those who persisted had their land and labor seized for the colonial interests of the monarchy. According to Edmund Morgan, “The story of the Spanish conquest had been widely told, and even in the Spaniards’ own accounts, it was a horror story.”³⁰ Initially, the Spanish obliged the native labor to mine

²⁹ James Sweet. “The Iberian Roots of American Racist Thought”. *The William and Mary Quarterly. Third Series*. Vol. 54, No.1, Jan.1997. pp. 143-166. Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture. Page 144.

³⁰ Edmund S Morgan. *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2003. Page 78.

silver and precious minerals for their imperialist ideas. Eventually, groups of indigenous people, like the Aztecs, became forced to engage in agrarian labor for the monarchy. Native labor generated excess agricultural commodities, which the conquistadors, the Catholic church, and the monarchy enjoyed the benefits of by consumption and trade. As South America transitioned from a continent of indigenous tribes into a New Spain, this scenario was repeated in every region of the Meso-American landscape, relegating “Indians” to the bottom of the caste as a “slave” class. During this segment of the colonial period, the Native population represented slavery in Latin America. Incarceration was one of the tactics used by colonial settlers to impose free labor on the indigenous, along with religious conversion. Initially, it was an effort by the Spanish to subjugate Natives into servitude, which eventually transformed into a way to exterminate the uncooperative or the “undesirable” Indos. Later, it was used to reduce and flout other ethnic groups as the number of Anglo settlers increased in Spanish settlement areas. After recognizing the success of the Spaniards, other European nations with imperialistic interests and notions attempted to duplicate the accomplishments of the Spanish empire in South America and the Caribbean. The Virginia Colony was the British rendition of a Spanish New World conquest. An example Kendi provides reads, “In 1636, Barbados officials announced that ‘Negroes and Indians that come here to be sold, should serve for life unless a contract was before made to the contrary.’ Captain William Pierce forced some indigenous war captives onto the *Desire*, the first slaver to leave British North America. The ship sailed to the Isla de Providencia off Nicaragua, where ‘Negroes’ were reportedly ‘being... kept as perpetual servants.’”³¹ This would become the structural

³¹ Ibrahim X. Kendi. *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America*. Bold Type Books, 2017. Page 18.

foundation of the Virginia colony and the future of the United States. The British Immigrants who arrived on the North American continent in the 17th century would persistently attempt to exploit the Natives for agricultural labor in pursuit of prosperity through land ownership. However, the British immigrants did not arrive with the means necessary to conquer and overtake the aboriginal tribes they encountered. Kendi writes, “King James chartered the London Company in 1606 with his eyes on North America—one eye on Virginia, another on New England. Although misfortune plagued the New England undertakings, Virginia fared better. Captain John Smith, a mentee of Richard Hakluyt, helped command the expedition of roughly 150 volunteers on the three boats that entered Chesapeake Bay on April 26, 1607. Against all odds—and thanks to the assistance of the indigenous Powhatan Americans—North America’s first permanent English settlement survived.”³² The colonists could not have imagined the circumstances in which they would be forced to adapt when they departed the shores of England, such as needing assistance from the natural inhabitants to acquire enough sustenance to endure. The earliest immigrants from Britain, unprepared for the conquest of or skirmishes with the indigenous, were forced to live among the Native people upon entrance to the colony. Aside from some later arriving settlers who were wealthy enough to construct a plantation operation upon arrival in the settlement, British immigrants also worked alongside Native Americans as agrarian indentured servants in the colony. Nevertheless, the indigenous tribes who were friendly and did not resist colonization were decimated by their lack of immunity to the viruses that accompanied the British to North America. Those Natives who were able to survive the elements of colonization that

³² Ibid. Page 35.

affected the Native population, including classification as “colored” for some, were either exterminated or collected on reservations as the British settlements continued to expand on their lands. Events such as the Trail of Tears are briefly discussed regarding U.S. history, but the enslavement of people Native to North America is a topic that is not. Kendi’s account states, “Thanks to this malleable concept in Western Europe, the British were free to lump the multiethnic Native Americans and the multiethnic Africans into the same racial groups.”³³ Due to this school of thought, some have suggested that there are Indigenous tribes who were reclassified as “colored” for the sole purpose of relegating them to chattel slavery.

Countless Europeans from Britain decidedly emigrated to the Virginia colony, utilizing indentured servitude as their financial means for travel since many could not afford to purchase a ticket and board a boat to the New World. Others were chosen as charter laborers of the new settler society based on their lack of self-motivation or economic opportunity in England. “Virginia’s conversion to slave labor and the use of slaves in other American colonies must be viewed in the context of contemporary English attitudes toward the poor and schemes for putting them to work.” According to the men who wrestled with the problem of England’s poor, half the English population consisted of wage earners, and all of them would rather drink than eat and rather starve than work. Worse than the wage earners were those who had never learned any trade but begging and stealing.³⁴ The desire for land ownership and free enterprise enticed British immigrants to relocate to Jamestown with a dream of seeking prosperity in the tobacco crops of

³³ Ibid. Page 36.

³⁴ Edmund S Morgan. *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2003. Page 320.

Virginia, but they were not equipped with the willpower or the proficiency to cultivate the agricultural dream they envisioned. “The Virginia Company had sent the idle to teach the idle. And they had sent, as it turned out, a quarrelsome band of gentlemen and servants to bring freedom to the free. It was a formula for disaster.”³⁵ Furthermore, upon arrival immigrants would find the life expectancy of those who migrated to the Virginia colony to be significantly lower than those persons who remained in Britain and the ability to grow a successful planter operation to be exceedingly difficult. Various other types of crops were planted unsuccessfully before tobacco planters found stability in Virginia. Tobacco had not yet become a rewarding crop for the colonists in the early to mid-1600s, but it was being cultivated and exported by Latin American nations, and the seeds from the South American crops grew without difficulty in the Virginia Colony. It was said not to have been of the same quality as the crops grown in Latin America, but it was more plentiful and less expensive, which helped to increase the demand for Virginia tobacco. Eventually, this tobacco crop became the colony’s economic staple, and British colonists emigrating to Virginia hoped to cash in on it. The only issue for planters was that producing enough tobacco to return a profit could not be done without labor assistance. Consequently, indentured servants were brought to the Virginia colony for decades to fulfill such purposes. “At the end of ten years, in spite of the military discipline of work gangs, the colonists were still not growing enough to feed themselves and were still begging, bullying, and buying corn from the Indians whose lands they scorched so deliberately.”³⁶ The English settlers would sometimes destroy the indigenous peoples and their corn once the Natives grew weary of sharing and decided to stop accommodating

³⁵ Ibid. Page 70.

³⁶ Ibid. Page 81.

the colonists.³⁷ As the settlers persevered and the Virginia colony's population stabilized, so did the increase in tobacco crop profits. Though many immigrants from Britain utilized colonial serfdom as payment for their immigration travel, such periods of indentured servitude were short-lived and did not generate “apprentices” who wanted to continue working for their bondspeople after their arrangements ended. English indentured servants were aware that the only thing distinguishing them from the status of their masters once they arrived in the colony was the possession of land. This practice of labor exploitation would eventually translate to the proprietorship of human beings in bondage, too. At least one cohort of European immigrants found this to their advantage. “To Irish laborers, to become white meant at first that they could sell themselves piecemeal instead of being sold for life, and later that they could compete for jobs in all spheres instead of being confined to certain work; to Irish entrepreneurs, it meant that they could function outside of a segregated market.”³⁸ Contrastingly, one writer suggested that the benefits from “white slavery” were superior to the profits made by plantation owners from free labor and encouraged planters to invest in indentured servants rather than chattel. George Fitzhugh points out in “Cannibals All! Or Slaves Without Masters” that plantation keepers did not have the physical or economic responsibility of overseeing “white slaves,” and that “white slavery” was more beneficial for plantation owners than chattel. He asserts, “But we not only boast that the White Slave Trade is more exacting and fraudulent (in fact, though not in intention) than Black Slavery, but we also boast that it is more cruel, in leaving the laborer to take care of himself and family out of the pittance which skill or capital have allowed him to retain.

³⁷ Ibid. Page 74.

³⁸ Noel Ignatiev. *How the Irish Became White*. New York: Routledge, 2009. Page 57.

When the day's labor is ended, he is free but overburdened with the cares of family and household, which makes his freedom an empty and delusive mockery. But his employer is really free and may enjoy the profits made by others' labor without a care or trouble as to their well-being."³⁹ He claimed that the "white slaves" were afforded fewer allowances and required less investment than forced laborers. Fitzhugh also passionately believed competition in enterprise to be a "moral duty" and that free labor functioned to eradicate the basis of competition between those who owned slaves and those who did not; he believed that plantation owners who owned slaves for the purpose of financial freedom were holding themselves in bondage by purchasing African chattel. Fitzhugh insisted that exploiting laborers was the only "respectable way" to make a living and that "white slave holding" was a much more frugal and free experience for a bond person.⁴⁰

As the abolition of slavery in the United States appeared on the horizon, it became imperative to demarcate the proletariats by skin color rather than encourage division based on ethnic and cultural differences among European immigrants. "But whiteness quickly proved itself a powerful weapon that allowed transatlantic capitalism to secure the labor – 'white' and African – it needed."⁴¹ This objective was necessary to create the social hierarchy that would protect the model of privilege the British envisioned for themselves when engineering their utopia. "The abolition of slavery called into question the existence of the white race as a social formation, for if the main underpinning of the distinction between the 'white' worker and the black worker were erased, what could

³⁹ George Fitzhugh. "Cannibals all! or, Slaves without masters". Richmond, Va., A. Morris, 1857. Pdf. <https://www.loc.gov/item/11008735/>. Page 1.

⁴⁰ Ibid. Page 1-2.

⁴¹ Robert P. Baird. "The Invention of Whiteness: The Long History of a Dangerous Idea." *The Guardian*, April 20, 2021. Page 1.

remain to motivate poor ‘whites’ to hug to their breasts a class of landowners who had led them into one of the most terrible wars in history? And if class interest replaced ‘race’ interest in their hearts, who could say where it might end?”⁴² It seemed as if the Irish and other poor European immigrants could exhale knowing that none of their group in the United States would be relegated to “slavery” or what it represented. But the opposite attitude was employed, one in which the Irish and other European immigrants previously considered “colored whites” would become foot soldiers in the quest to maintain a racial hierarchy by rejecting the humanity of African Americans and their presence in American society. Additionally, many of these newly included ethnic European immigrants were still experiencing bottom caste treatment aligned with the handling of chattel slaves. In spite of their novel racial status just as many immigrants indentured servants had run away from their masters as did African chattel. “Both employed black and white agents, both had a network of ‘safe houses,’ and both made liberal use of forged documents—in one case free papers and in the other fraudulent bills of sale.”⁴³ Since labor exploitation happened in every segment of U. S. economy during its formation, the manipulation of forced, free and semi-free labor continued to feed the American budget in spite of abolition.

In a comparative inquiry of labor exploitation practices, there is research that suggests the European immigrants from the colonial era did boast personal freedom as their only asset and that their living conditions closely mirrored that of chattel. Tactically, spokespeople for white laborers utilized dramatic speeches to audiences of these

⁴² Noel Ignatiev. *How the Irish Became White*. New York: Routledge, 2009. Page 3455

⁴³ Ibid. Page 2975

immigrants about slavery to rhetorically parallel the provision of the slave as fortunate compared to that of a lesser degree for the free wage laborer.⁴⁴ “Even in the free North, the initial turnover from black to Irish labor does not imply racial discrimination; many of the newly arrived Irish, hungry and desperate, were willing to work for less than free persons of color, and it was no more than good capitalist sense to hire them”.⁴⁵ The Irishmen in America were economically and socially marginalized but narrowly gained some sense of inclusion, which was a contrast to developments from those captured in chattel slavery. And they still faced collective and financial marginalization despite their proximity to whiteness. “In some cases, Irish immigrants were preferred to slaves for reasons having nothing to do with race. Frederick Law Olmsted cited an official of an Alabama stevedoring company who explained why Irish workers were employed on the docks: ‘The niggers are worth too much to be risked here; if the Paddies are knocked overboard, or get their backs broke, nobody loses anything.’”⁴⁶

With regard to the role that European immigrants played in the United States as the nation attempted to shift from a plantation economy to an industrial economy, those who migrated to the New World found themselves inundated with different forms of unexpected labor exploitation. The factories of the Northern United States labored their employees much in the tradition of the Southern agriculturalists who initially settled in the British colonies. Although the work was indoors and mechanized, the hours that immigrants were forced to labor, the conditions under which they were forced to labor, and the pay or lack thereof by the capitalists who owned the factories were reminiscent of

⁴⁴ Ibid. Page 2256

⁴⁵ Ibid. Page 2329

⁴⁶ Ibid. Page 2314

plantation antics. Because many of the Northern states abolished slavery before those in the plantation south, there were cohorts of self-manumitted slaves and freed African Americans present in the workforce prior to the influx of “new immigrants” to the U.S. Ignatiev contends, “the influx of unskilled laborers, emigrants from Ireland, England, and other countries, within the last few years, into New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and other large towns in the eastern States, who press into these menial employments (because they can find no other), offering to labor for any wages they can obtain; that it has reduced the wages of the blacks, and deprived great numbers of them of employment, hence there is a deadly hatred engendered between them, and quarrels and fights among them are daily occurring.”⁴⁷ The depravity that awaited these immigrants fleeing economic scarcity in Southern and Eastern European countries was not a stone’s throw from the callous forced labor exploitation experienced by African slaves.



Figure 7: Photo of African slaves on a plantation

⁴⁷ Ibid. Page 2329.

HOMES

IN VIRGINIA.

COMFORTABLE HOUSES, Lands partly Cleared and Fenced.

On arrival at Norfolk, the Settler will find an organized society whose object is to encourage immigration and protect settlers in their rights by advice and deeds.

NO FEES ARE CHARGED FOR SERVICES RENDERED.

The Board of Directors and Officers of this Society are gentlemen of high character and standing, many holding positions of honor and trust in the State. By means of this Society, persons coming to the State will find reliable information, if they go into the interior.

CHEAP RAILWAY TRANSPORTATION

Is obtained, and their baggage is forwarded to any point they may select.

These societies in agricultural, educational, and religious are established; have excellent air-transport, and the prices for all kinds of produce are remunerative.

The following statement, of each route to the farms, will show the distance between the North-West (to which thousands are directed annually) and Virginia:

EXTRACT FROM THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE, NOV. 24, 1858.

Cost of passage from 100 miles from Chicago to New York	\$1.00	per bushel
Price of corn per bushel in New York	\$0.25	
Net balance due farmer	\$0.75	
Cost of passage from 100 miles from Chicago to New York	\$1.00	per bushel
Price of corn per bushel in New York	\$0.25	
Net balance due farmer	\$0.75	
Cost of passage from 100 miles from Norfolk to New York	\$1.00	per bushel
Price of corn per bushel in New York	\$0.25	
Net balance due farmer	\$0.75	
Cost of passage from 100 miles from Norfolk to New York	\$1.00	per bushel
Price of corn per bushel in New York	\$0.25	
Net balance due farmer	\$0.75	
Cost of passage from 100 miles from Norfolk to New York	\$1.00	per bushel
Price of corn per bushel in New York	\$0.25	
Net balance due farmer	\$0.75	

These results show that the farmer who grows corn in the North-West, and who has a good market for his produce, will find it almost impossible to compete with the farmer in Virginia, who has a good market for his produce, and who has a good market for his produce, and who has a good market for his produce.

It is not surprising to find that the price of the produce of the North-West is almost everywhere lower than in the States. In the North-West, in winter, the price of the produce is low, and the cost of hauling it to a heavy load. In Virginia, it is not the case; there is more than a week or two during the whole winter in which the produce is sent to the North for shipping, and cost of hauling it is comparatively light.

Do not you see the result of the Government and State, which will profit the individual and by the authority of the United States.

Figure 8: Ad for sale of homes in Virginia settlement

CHAPTER 4 Indentured Servitude

Preceding any slave ship's arrival in the British colonies, slavery was evolving within Mediterranean trade routes in the eastern hemisphere. The Arab caliphates were constantly conquering ethnic groups in Asia, Eastern Europe, and Northern Africa, claiming lands, adding prisoners of war to their populaces, and espousing the captives into their families as spoils of warfare. During this period, Europeans were among the ethnic groups that were enslaved by Muslims in Northern Africa and on the Iberian Peninsula.⁴⁸ Arab and Iberian writers from this period theorized and began to propagate Eugenics through their exchanges, a “science” which suggested that melanin was equated with Braun and non-humanity. Eugenics concluded that Europeans were human, and that Africans and Indigenous people were less than or not at all. Along with Climate Theory and the “curse of Ham,” this idea was circulated among Europeans and colonial settlers, as chattel slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade became the modus operandi for acquiring agricultural profits in the Americas through the 20th century of social construction. Consideration was given to these theories by the Anglos in North America when demarcating their position from every other ethnic group present in the United States from the colonial era through the Civil Rights Era. Even Mexican Americans positioned on the white side of the Black/White binary in the Southwestern United States were subjugated by Eugenics and privy to Jim Crow practices such as segregation and nullified political power. In *Raza Schools: The Fight for Latino Educational Autonomy in a West Texas Borderlands Town*, Dr Esparza explains, “the Mexican Problem was

⁴⁸ Ibrahim X. Kendi. *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America*. Bold Type Books, 2017. Page 79.

scientific racism constructed by white supremacists and endorsed by groups like the American Eugenics Society to vilify ethnic Mexicans and convince the nation of their supposed biological inferiority.”⁴⁹ This exclusionary method was demonstrated against and proven to be problematic for African captives as well, as it became the basis and justification for human trafficking and forced labor exploitation. The Spanish and Portuguese traffickers formulated the modern slave trade practice, utilizing men from African nations to accompany conquistadors as translators and assistants on their trips to claim the lands of the western world, demanding land from Mexico to the tip of South America.

Resultant papal authorization of the exploitation of Africans discouraged the further exploitation of indigenous peoples during the colonization of Central and South America for the Spaniards, and this nuanced scheme became an economic blueprint to fortune for British colonists in North America. Upon being challenged with the reality of a lack of skills and resources required to become an agricultural phenom in the New World, British colonists found the undertaking unmaintainable without assistance for planting and picking in the tobacco fields. Then after a chance encounter with a pirated ship in Barbados that contained African slaves, the British colonists gained a taste of profits from kidnapped labor and a heightened sense of superiority in the Virginia colony; they perpetuated a slave class like the feudal/landlord system they fled in Britain. Contrastingly, African slaves were of neither the same economic situation nor desire in their homelands as were their captors. They were not fleeing feudalism or threats of

⁴⁹ Jesus Jesse Esparza. *Raza Schools: The Fight for Latino Educational Autonomy in a West Texas Borderlands Town, New Directions in Tejano History*, Book 4. University of Oklahoma Press, 2023. Page 125.

imprisonment in their native countries. West African captives were taken from their birthplaces against their will consistently for centuries, brazenly kidnapped, chained, trafficked, and forced to forget native languages, spiritual practices or religions, cultures, and loved ones.⁵⁰ Nonetheless, it has been argued in some 18th-century reflections that chattel slaves were well cared for and given provisions and facilities, making African slaves better off than European indentured servants. Another social difference between the life of a “white slave” and African chattel that has been highlighted is the capacity of those in bondage to mate and procreate with other enslaved Africans, the chance to form families and connect with others from their homelands sharing in their experience and maintaining whatever semblance of homeland culture they could muster. “True, it could be broken any time at the whim of his master. But the slave, like the servant, despite his legal impotence, was not entirely without the means of magnifying a part of his life that he could call his own.”⁵¹

To bring additional historical context to this project, the evolution of indentured servitude has been explored from the earliest form of sharecropping, in which landlords practiced feudalism in Britain, in conjunction with the agenda of the British penile system which was utilized to gather vagrants and force them to labor. During the feudal era, “The aristocracy in Britain chose to clean the streets of the homeless and of the underemployed and unemployed.”⁵² These bonded men contracted to labor in the Virginia Colony were not Britain’s crème of the crop and yet they were explicitly chosen to emigrate as

⁵⁰ Edmund S Morgan. *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2003. Page 227.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid. Page 21.

agricultural laborers in the new British colony, even though it had not proven to be a prosperous practice for the Medieval landlords in England. “Rather than hire such help, men with capital preferred to invest in enterprises that required a minimum of labor. Large landowners, including the nobility, avoided the labor problem by renting out their land in small parcels instead of hiring men to work it for them. Or they turned their arable land into pasture and enclosed it with fences where sheep could graze unattended.”⁵³ In this way, landowners could retrieve a profit from nominal toil expressly if they could outsource the most laborious part of the production or convince another human to expend their energy for no reward in order to sustain another person. It is probable that the lack of incentives gained in servitude met the indentured laborer’s lack of motivation. “Laborers who learned to work under these conditions learned to work not very hard. On top of everything else, they were underpaid and underfed, caught in the vicious circle frequently found in underdeveloped countries, whereby low wages beget low productivity, which in turn justifies low wages.”⁵⁴ As talk of a British colony in the New World gained traction, financial investors who were assured “princely domains” sequentially made promises to British citizens, hoping to encourage the emigration of convicts and beggars to this economic and social experiment.⁵⁵ It was believed by the British aristocracy that the lowest of their society might be redressed if compelled to pursue the economic opportunities awaiting in the new land while enriching the initial investors with the agricultural labor provided.⁵⁶

⁵³ Edmund S Morgan. *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2003. Page 68.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* Page 67.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* Page 21.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

In *American Slavery, American Freedom*, the author gives a factual historical account of the conditions the initial settlers lived under, along with their indentures, and their responses to finding themselves in impossible situations forming the Roanoke settlement. The colonial settlers expected the Native people to overextend themselves willfully and assume human inferiority for the benefit of an unfamiliar group of squatters. According to the author, “What went wrong at Roanoke was that the Indians did not show the nobility or the English the divinity that was expected of them. English technical superiority - together with the vulnerability of Indians to English diseases - encouraged the settlers at Roanoke to assume something of the stature that the Indians were all too ready at first to assign them.”⁵⁷ He detailed a time in British history when the gentry wanted to purge society of the many unemployed and underemployed residents who were wandering the streets in English cities, being drunken nuisances to other citizens; this notion predicated the idea of a British colony. This bunch of Englishmen was looked upon as the bottom of British society and sparked much debate by leaders on how to either employ them or remove them from the public eye. For the English nobility, a colony in the New World would become the ideal solution to the problem of drunkards. “Indeed, if we turn to Utopia itself, we find that Sir Thomas More had envisaged nothing better in his ideal state when he described the Utopian manner of colonization: they enroll citizens out of every city in Utopia and, on the mainland nearest them, wherever the natives have much unoccupied and uncultivated land, they found a colony under their own laws.”⁵⁸ This was the Utopian fantasy of the British and their “business plan” for

⁵⁷ Edmund S Morgan. *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2003. Page 23.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

creating a settlement society. An earlier solution to hiding the homeless in Britain was imprisonment; to support the creation of Jamestown, the intention was to use those imprisoned vagrants as agricultural labor in the Virginia Colony. Though these men were considered lazy and witless before poised for emigration, they were somehow expected to become efficient and productive laborers in the New World. “A man who came to Virginia with nothing but the shirt on his back expected several years of servitude, but after that, he expected something more of life in the New World. When he got to Virginia, however, he found that he might never make it out of the ranks of servants.”⁵⁹ A confession of an English resident fed up with low-class British citizens in *American Slavery, American Freedom*, suggested, “If such paupers were shipped to North America, they would surely have more to do and a better life than in the army. Similarly, the Indians, who now eked out a savage existence without proper clothing or housing, would be transformed by the material comforts of civilization and the spiritual comforts of Christianity.”⁶⁰ Although British explorers experienced delusions of grandeur in the Americas by supposing the “savage” natives would relish in being religiously converted and overseen by newly acquainted strangers, there was no early intention to subjugate the native population to servitude before the realization of the native tribes’ hostility towards the unwelcome English settlers. There were indigenous tribes who attempted to coexist with the Europeans and some who attempted to assist them in their transition and acclimation to the American land. However the native inhabitants found themselves swiftly overrun with the demands of the British colonizers, and many lost their lives from

⁵⁹ Edmund S Morgan. *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2003. Page 68.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

the viruses the Europeans shared with them in return. “The plan was to send settlers who would pool their labors to produce whatever proved feasible. After the cargoes of riches, whatever they might be, began pouring into England, the company would pay out dividends to all members in proportion to the number of shares they owned.”⁶¹ The said plan made no mention of compensating the native inhabitants for their land or assistance. The British crown hoped to avoid warring with the indigenous populations, even though English colonists fully intended to continue claiming and squatting on their native lands. With the aboriginal population declining due to death from viruses and diseases of which they lacked immunity, settlers grew weary of disenchanting North American native tribes as they continued to migrate from across the pond. The author contends that colonists were given orders to allow no “Indians” in the area between them and the seacoast, “for you cannot carry yourselves so towards them, but they will grow discontented with your habitation and be ready to guide and assist any nation that shall come to invade you.”⁶² However, the indigenous people were growing exhausted of the British intruders. “By the time spring came, Wingina had had enough of his grasshopper guests.”⁶³ The author adds a description of the scene where one tribal chief refused to share rations with the squatters and chose to exit “the island for the purpose of starving the English. Wingina’s people refused to trade any more supplies. And Wingina himself retired to the mainland, partly, Lane believed, to evade Lane’s daily demand for provisions and partly to prepare another conspiracy to wipe out the English. Lane learned of the plot through the hostage

⁶¹ Ibid. Page 68.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

Sakiko and proceeded to nip it in the bud. Surprising Wingina at his headquarters on the mainland, he killed him and his principal advisers.”⁶⁴

Living conditions among the European newcomers were not superior to that of the Africans who were eventually brought to be exploited as chattel in the New World. As time progressed, concentrations of discontented indentured servants whose contracts were expired or disregarded would amass in the Virginia counties that attracted the newest indentured freedmen, regions that did not tend to be the most rapidly growing areas in the colony. However, in some sections, the immigrant population continued to expand rapidly during most of the latter part of the seventeenth century due to the swelling numbers of servants that continued to be imported, who typically migrated to different areas of the colony when unfettered. Manumitted indentured servants could piece meal labor opportunities with different landowners for short periods of time to gain funds and set themselves up for their own operations.⁶⁵ Beyond their laboring, indentured servants were afforded their individual freedom within the colony. This also meant laborers were forced to find their own living accommodations. With regards to work ethic, they were not considered to be reliable laborers, known for loafing and sleeping on the job, for spending their low pay on alcohol, and for failing to show up for work regularly.⁶⁶ Contrastingly, it was not an easy feat even for disciplined laborers to elevate themselves to planter status in the settlement or to obtain their own servants. There was no simple pathway to wealth in the Virginia colony for anyone. In fact, “What all these instances add up to is that the daily life of a slave differed from that of a servant less drastically

⁶⁴ Noel Ignatiev. *How the Irish Became White*. New York: Routledge, 2009. Page 53.

⁶⁵ Edmund S Morgan. *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2003. Page 68.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* Page 319.

than at first sight, it appears to have. Slaves were the labor force of a plantation much as servants had been, and what is more important for an understanding of the role of race, masters, initially at least, perceived slaves in much the same way they had always perceived servants.”⁶⁷

As guinea pigs for initial attempts at agricultural enterprise in the new world, laborers from Britain who emigrated to engage in agriculture began to rise in numbers quickly. Along with those indentured servants freed from their obligations, their bondspeople and the “fruitful” operations of the same occupation had previously been considered the lowest of English society. “With the decline in mortality and rise in population the numbers of poor freemen grew too large, and the scruff and scum of England became the rabble of Virginia. But as Indians and Africans began to take control of the large plantations and the annual increment of freedmen fell off, the economic prospects of the paleface poor began to improve.”⁶⁸ Once a move to inclusion began to integrate European immigrant servants, their need to maintain that status created tension towards African chattel and indigenous occupants. Although these ethnic European settlers were handed a free pass out of systematic subjugation by simply choosing to integrate into the United States culture, they were still routinely marginalized, excluded, and categorized as “new immigrants.” Other areas of labor in which poor Europeans were employed were timber, mining, and fur trapping. All of which were of a dangerous work nature and paid famishment wages. “Old immigrants” who landed a century or so before the arrival of this group managed to establish themselves and obtain adequate living

⁶⁷ Ibid. Page 68.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

accommodations, which allowed them to separate themselves socio-economically from the newly arrived Southern and Eastern Europeans. While European immigrants such as the Irish were not captured and cuffed in chains, they were socially restrained by starvation wages and severely destitute circumstances. Among the threat of social associations of indentured servants working alongside African captives was the possibility of both marginalized groups trading empathies and taking up the fight against their economic struggle together. Provisions were taken to prevent such an occurrence, though rebellions did take place against colonial landowners, such as Bacon's rebellion and Nat Turner's rebellion, further stimulating white fears and heightening the need to delineate the working poor by race and produce a sense of loyalty in "new immigrants." Witnessing the profits made by plantation owners during Virginia's tobacco boom helped to influence other American colonies to employ the same tactics with regards to labor exploitation and the management of plantations, no matter the type of crop being grown. It even became a principal issue during the American revolution and in the creation of the *Declaration of Independence*. Many colonists felt that the slaves were not even worthy of joining the military to fight for our country's independence, although the British crown was offering a chance at freedom for chattel slaves willing to join their ranks in the Revolutionary War. Their categorization as "slaves" denied them the right to defend the land they were sustaining with free labor, the society they were supporting foundationally from the bottom of the caste.

Allegedly, the British were afraid of the possibility of being occupied and having their territory claimed by the Spanish Empire near the end of the Feudal era due to the vast number of wanderers and unemployed residents in their country. Such an occurrence

would bring about religious persecution, as well as a definite caste, to the bottom of European society in the same way the British previously reduced the Irish in their own land. British resentment for Catholicism was long apparent in the treatment of the Irish prior to their colonization in America. Ironically, the Irish would continue to be subjugated by the British in the colonies, as were immigrants from other European countries, along with Asians, First Nation peoples, and eventually kidnapped Africans who alone would become a visual representation of the term “slave” in the United States of America. ““Often without capital or skills, unaccustomed to work practices in their adopted country, the Famine Irish usually entered the American work force at the very bottom, competing only with free Negroes or - in the South - with slave labor for the dirty, backbreaking, poorly paid jobs that white native Americans and emigrants from elsewhere disdained to perform.””⁶⁹ In spite of the fact that the worst of English society was impressed to become laborers in the colonies, this cohort has ever been a graphic representation of the term “slave” or the practice of slavery. Neither has any of the other European immigrants who labored in the Americas. Even though the Irish were called the “niggers of Europe” and persecuted for their practice of Catholicism for decades after their initial arrival in the Americas, they have not been reduced in importance to a representation of “slaves.” This concept reinforces the idea that “slavery in the United States was part of a bipolar system of color caste, in which even the lowliest of ‘whites’ enjoyed a status superior in crucial respects to that of the most exalted of ‘blacks.’ As members of the privileged group, white workers organized to defend their caste status, even while striving to improve their condition as workers.”⁷⁰ With the immigrant journey

⁶⁹ Noel Ignatiev. *How the Irish Became White*. New York: Routledge, 2009. Page 2514.

⁷⁰ Ibid. Page 2085.

of the Irish, it is clear to witness the societal transition of European immigrants in the history of the United States, where even those who were initially excluded from the offshoot of British society transition from nationalists of their home countries and empathizers to the plight of chattel in the U.S., to upholding and radically enforcing the black and white paradigm as if their lives and American dreams depended upon it. And they did. The conviction of whiteness was hugely successful at shaping social reality for immigrants from European subgroups due to its flexibility. “Thanks to its role in facilitating slavery, whiteness in the US was often defined in opposition to blackness, but between those two extremes was room for tactical accommodations.”⁷¹

Our framers crafted the *Declaration of Independence* with the intent of asserting their liberties and freedoms on the British Crown. However, the autonomy they referred to in this document only pertained to the European colonists and imposed the opposite on the slaves they owned. Implicitly, they deemed it essential to protect the institution of slavery in these documents, knowing that the states’ economies would not enjoy the same productivity and profitability without free labor despite the social perils that the practice may have had on the future of the United States. Framer and former President Thomas Jefferson was aware of the moral implications of slavery and how they could stain the history and the foundation of the United States, even though he did not advocate for the cessation of the practice. Jefferson knew that a social hierarchy could not exist in Virginia without a subjugated labor class or slavery to provide sustainable labor on the tobacco plantations. Efforts such as his solidified Virginia’s position as the model for the other

⁷¹ Robert P. Baird. “The Invention of Whiteness: The Long History of a Dangerous Idea.” *The Guardian*, April 20, 2021. Page 1.

British colonies and later other regions of the United States as some northern states flirted with gradual manumission which enticed newly freed African Americans to settle in cities with opportunities for employment. Black codes required African Americans seeking work in these cities to sign yearly employment contracts and to pay tariffs to fill occupations outside of agriculture and domestic service. "In New York and other eastern cities, the influx of white laborers has expelled the Negro almost en masse from the exercise of the ordinary branches of labor. You no longer see him working on buildings, and rarely is he allowed to drive a cart of public conveyance. 'White men will not work with him' - the magic formula of American trade unionism! Before it could do the Irish any good, however, it was necessary to establish that they were white."⁷² Segregation practices were instituted and reinforced as a reaction to the ending of the Civil War and "slavery" as it was fashioned at the time. Although white Americans in the plantation states were bitter about losing the war, the residents of cities in the industrial Northern region were just as resentful of the African American presence accruing in their areas. "In 1853 Frederick Douglass noted, 'Every hour sees us elbowed out of some employment to make room for some newly arrived emigrant from the Emerald Isle, whose hunger and color entitle him to special favor. These white men are becoming house servants, cooks, stewards, waiters, and flunkies.'"⁷³ In effect, "white Privilege" was a superficial ticket to economic superiority, financial and social exclusivity, and a placebo used to keep those underemployed and underearning immigrants pacified with their status in spite of their struggle.

Many male laborers from Europe arrived on the coast of America with labor skills

⁷² Noel Ignatiev. *How the Irish Became White*. New York: Routledge, 2009. Page 2371.

⁷³ Ibid.

as domestics and planters before their emigration. Others had been artisans and practiced skilled trades. They maintained one-person households until they could find or send travel money to a wife, which contributed to the vagrancy of this group in the colonies. European immigrants who were from countries that were different from the heart of the original colonists were not automatically included in the American white population. Irish, German, and Italian identities were not synonymous with White Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture and Victorian values. Language, culture, and religion were factors that were used to differentiate those groups from the WASPs who founded the Jamestown Settlement and, therefore, did not fit the description of “white.” “Outside the structure entirely were the remaining tributary Indians, segregated in what amounted to reservations, beyond the limits of settlement but rightly uneasy about their future. Inside the structure at the bottom were several slaves, perhaps more than a thousand, but still a minor component of society. A little above them was a much more numerous bodies of servants, working out the terms assigned to them or agreed upon by indenture to repay the cost of their transportation. At the other end, at the top of the scale, stood the elite group of men who had inherited, amassed, or arrived in the colony with estates large enough to assure them a continuing supply of servants and to win them lucrative government offices.”⁷⁴ Ironically, none of the former descriptions of labor exploitation included a racial component. Many of the Irish immigrants who knew of the ills of indentured servitude in the colonies decided to take on other types of work after emigrating to the U.S., although a great number of them had formerly been agrarian

⁷⁴ Edmund S Morgan. *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2003. Page 226.

workers in their homeland.⁷⁵ Conversely, as the numbers of chattel slaves, or rather the numbers of darker-skinned immigrants, began to increase in the plantation states, those European immigrants previously observed on the fray began to be included in the white population. Industrialization was a major pull factor for ethnic Europeans and some Asians, and many filed into the factories and warehouses of the Northern States, operating for low wages in unsafe conditions with no labor laws or rights. These people were not chattel. They were not owned by masters or restrained in chains. But they were slaves to the factories and the owners of the factories which employed them. Like their indentured rural predecessors, they were slaves to starvation pay, to the demands of extremely long workdays, and to unsafe working conditions. They were also slaves to the tenement slums of the North; they were forced to dwell on minimal wages. And they were slaves to the assimilation forced upon them and had to relinquish any pre-existing cultural idioms if they were ever to be considered “white” and included in the race-based “utopia.” In time, the fear of a class war by the upper class prompted a hard separation of poor laborers by race, both physically and mentally. This phenomenon was true on the plantations of the agricultural South as well as in the factories of the industrial North. One more interpretation of this concept similarly affected Mexican American migrant workers in the Southwest during this time, who themselves were to be counted as “white” in spite of indigenous ancestry, linguistic differences, and the religious practice of Catholicism, unlike those of native ancestry on the Eastern seaboard who were labeled as “colored” and relegated to bondage. The author of *American Slavery, American Freedom* illustrated the notion when he wrote, “As Virginians nourished an increasing contempt for

⁷⁵ Noel Ignatiev. *How the Irish Became White*. New York: Routledge, 2009. Page 1845.

blacks and Indians, they began to raise the status of lower-class whites. The two movements were complementary. The status of poor whites rose not merely in relation to blacks but also in relation to their white superiors.”⁷⁶ Acceptance of “new immigrants” by “old immigrants” could strategically quell the desire for economic prominence by the proletariats and offset a rebellion of a unified laboring class, especially in the industrial North with a smaller population of African Americans than the plantation South. “The comparison between free and slave labor in favor of the latter was more than a rhetorical flourish; it was a guide to action for the movement of white laborers.”⁷⁷ As the economy of the industrial north began to rival the profits of the plantation south, it became imperative to establish a color line that would discourage even the lowest class of European immigrants from empathizing with the inhumanity of the practice of chattel slavery and the captives who were subjugated to it. Indentured servants were eventually freed from obligation of servitude upon the fear and anticipation of a class war, freed by superiors intending to drive a wedge between poor European immigrants and African and Indigenous slaves.⁷⁸ It is obvious that “whiteness quickly proved itself a powerful weapon that allowed transatlantic capitalism to secure the labor - ‘white - and African - it needed.”⁷⁹ Rather than a skin color, whiteness was a “philosophical” place in society and an opportunity to become a naturalized citizen of the “Utopia”, a privilege that would not every be offered to African chattel. “Segregation as well as racial preferences are produced through social processes and that is the delusion/illusion component of this

⁷⁶ Edmund S Morgan. *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2003. Page 338.

⁷⁷ Noel Ignatiev. *How the Irish Became White*. New York: Routledge, 2009. Location 1697.

⁷⁸ Morgan. Page 23.

⁷⁹ Robert P. Baird. “The Invention of Whiteness: The Long History of a Dangerous Idea.” *The Guardian*, April 20, 2021. Page 1.

frame.”⁸⁰ “White society” had to universalize segregation as a national custom and utilize it to justify preferences for other whites versus non-whites in American society, to uphold the representation of African Americans as slaves on the bottom of the U.S. society and their own feelings of superiority.



Figure 9: Ad for sale of African Slaves

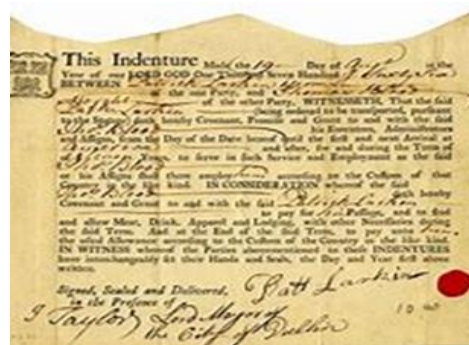


Figure 10: Indentured servant contract

⁸⁰ Eduardo Bonilla-Silva. *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States*. Rowman and Littlefield. 2003. Page 64.

New Immigrants

In contrast to indentured servitude, hundreds upon thousands of European immigrants entered the United States' Ellis Island following the initial descendants who arrived in the American colonies. During the late 18th and early 19th century, people who migrated from Europe were referred to as “new immigrants”. The majority of these immigrants were from different parts of Europe from the earliest settlers, who hail from Britain. As industrialization exploded, ads began to appear in European countries for laborers in the US. Over this period, millions of European immigrants traveled by ship to Ellis Island in New York. They were generally Southern and Eastern Europeans who usually settled in Northern U.S. cities and performed industrial labor, sometimes forced to toil for minuscule compensation. During this influx of fresh immigrants, the Europeans who had come during the century prior distinguished themselves as “old immigrants” as a means of social grading. As “old immigrants” became upwardly mobile, they caste the Europeans arriving in America from Eastern and Southern regions as inferior. Typically, the newcomers did not speak English; groups such as German, Italian, and Greek laborers each spoke different tongues. The Irish, although they could communicate in English, were still considered inferior because of their religious beliefs as an extension of their past subjugation by the British in their homeland. British Protestants arrived on the shores in the 17th century of what was to become the new colonies with prejudice and resentment towards Catholic Europeans, viewing the Spanish from a place of fear and the Irish from a place of detest. Before their emigration to the New World, European immigrants who identified as Catholic could not purchase, inherit, or accept land gifts from the British Protestants in English territory. Additionally, they could not rent land

that cost less than thirty shillings a year, or for longer than thirty-one years. Catholics were also restricted from profiting more than one-third of the rent paid and from retaining land estates.” By converting to Protestantism, a Catholic son could dispossess his father and disinherit all his brothers. A Protestant landowner lost his civil rights if he married a Catholic, a Protestant heiress her inheritance. All bishops of the Catholic Church were ordered to leave the country under penalty of death if they remained or returned; no priest might enter the country from anywhere, and only one priest was permitted per parish, forbidden to set foot outside it without special permission.”⁸¹ Many of the Irish immigrants were practicing indentured servitude in the colonies before the Gilded era appeared on the horizon, but countless more were trailed to perform industrial labor in the factories of the U.S. “In America, where domestic manufacture had grown as a result of the Napoleonic Wars, there was a shortage of wage laborers. The country scooped up the displaced Irish and made them its unskilled labor force.”⁸² Men, women, and sometimes children were working in the coal mines, the mills, and the workshops of the Northern cities. And purportedly, “the women who labored their lives away in the mills ‘have not even the assurance of the most wretched cornfield negro in Virginia, who, when his stiffened limbs can no longer bend to the lash, must be supported by his owner.’ And he noted that ‘the slaves in the South enjoy privileges which are not enjoyed in some of our cotton mills.’”⁸³ A depiction of the mining industry in Upton Sinclair’s *King Coal* tells the story of a young college student who was working on a social science project to find out what life was like in the coal mines. Upon arriving at a mine, after traveling to the

⁸¹ Noel Ignatiev. *How the Irish Became White*. New York: Routledge, 2009. Page 690.

⁸² Ibid. Page 769.

⁸³ Ibid. Page 1733.

camp from his university, Hal is denied access to the mine and the information he was seeking. Sinclair writes, “He marched past a double lane of company houses and shanties, where slattern women in doorways and dirty children digging in the dust of the roadside paused and grinned at him—for he limped as he walked, and it was evident enough what had happened to him. Hal had come with love and curiosity.”⁸⁴ The fictional depiction in this historically based novel lent sight to the practice of labor exploitation within the U.S. mining industry. *King Coal* is a fictitious portrayal but an accurately relevant illustration of the experiences of European immigrants seeking the American Dream in mining camps, immigrants who were exploited for free and semi-free labor during the formation of the United States, immigrants who do not reflect the visual representation of a slave but whose experiences are difficult to differentiate with regards to the disparity.

From the start of the Jamestown colony to the inception of the Industrial period, European immigrants were employed as indentured servants, miners, domestics, and industrial laborers; in each of these capacities, they often worked in dangerous conditions and were paid starvation wages. In the case of indentured servants, the cost of emigrating to America was their benefit, and they were expected to labor for years to reimburse their travel fare. Enticements from the U.S., like “free soil,” would reach thousands of Irish, alongside other Ethnic Europeans longing for the ownership of land and planter status in the States. Past economic traumas, such as the potato famine, would cement the desire of the Irish to acquire a sense of freedom that had not been extended to them by the British, even prior to emigration. “1815 to the Famine, between 800,000 and one million Irish --

⁸⁴ Upton Sinclair. *King Coal*. 1917. Page 5.

about twice the total for the previous two centuries sailed for North America.”⁸⁵

However, what was anticipated by this group of immigrants was not what was discovered upon the arrival of the Irish in America during the colonial period and the formation of the original states. The conditions, the rations, the compensation, and the categorizations initially experienced by this group mirrored their lives prior to immigrating. “Free Soil did not imply free soil. Taking into account the costs of land purchase, clearing and fencing, implements, seed, and livestock, as well as travel costs and the cash needed to survive until the first crop was brought in and sold, a minimum of \$1,000 was required to equip a family farm in the West—a sum so far beyond the reach of the savings possible on a laborer’s wage that the available land for settlement might as well have been located on the moon.”⁸⁶ Stories of these difficulties likely discouraged the Irish and other ethnic European immigrants from seeking opportunities as agriculturalist during the Gilded Era. Although “new immigrants” were expected to assimilate, their original independent languages were not forbidden as they had been with African chattel on plantations. However, their native dialects were useless for earning in the U.S. unless combined with English in a lingua franca fit for the coal mine, the mill, the factory, or any other place they may have labored. Sinclair painted a disparaging picture of the landscape of an impoverished mining village in his tale: “As one walked through this village, the first impression was of desolation. The mountains towered, barren and lonely, scarred with the wounds of geologic ages. In these canyons, the sun set early in the afternoon, the snow came early in the fall; everywhere, Nature's hand seemed against man, and man had succumbed to her power. Inside the camps, one felt a still more cruel desolation -- that of

⁸⁵ Noel Ignatiev. *How the Irish Became White*. New York: Routledge, 2009. Page 771.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* Page 1862.

sordidness and animalism.”⁸⁷ There is also a description of a ‘shantytown,’ in which new immigrants would build themselves shacks out of old boards, tar paper, tin, and sheets.⁸⁸ The aforementioned depictions lightly scratch the surface of free and semi-free labor performed by European immigrants in America. Ethnic European factions fleeing famine and economic instability in Europe did not immediately find welcome and solace in the United States. Nor did they immediately find financial fluency; it often took all members of a family’s earnings to facilitate living expenses in tenements in some cases. “The Irish who emigrated to America in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were fleeing caste oppression and a system of landlordism that made the material conditions of the Irish peasant comparable to those of an American slave.”⁸⁹ As plantation labor, Irish men and women toiled alongside Africans in the fields and associated themselves with chattel in other aspects of life during the 17th century, and this phenomenon persisted in the north at the start of the industrial era. According to Ignatiev in *How the Irish Became White*, the Irishmen and African Americans were both exploited for labor, fought each other, and fought the police in tandem. The two ethnic groups socialized, intermittently married, and procreated, as they shared economic and social disparity and were both considered at the bottom of the caste system.⁹⁰ This was a continuation of prejudice and persecution for the Irish people, which began in the United Kingdom long before colonization in Virginia was imagined. Once again, the British rejected everything Catholic and looked upon the Irish nationals as the “niggers of Europe,” and this classification traveled with them to the New World. The Irish initially looked upon their “African brethren” with sadness and pity

⁸⁷ Upton Sinclair. *King Coal*. 1917. Page 11.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Noel Ignatiev. *How the Irish Became White*. New York: Routledge, 2009. Page 38.

⁹⁰ Ibid. Page 47.

because of their own experiences with the British. There were leaders of the Irish community who originally repelled slavery and protested bondage for Africans in literature and in real-time, both in the United States and in Ireland. However, not all Irishmen maintained the same sense of humanity, and as time progressed, their attitudes toward African Americans became unified. Ignatiev suggests, “In the early years Irish were frequently referred to as ‘niggers turned inside out;’ the Negroes, for their part, were sometimes called ‘smoked Irish,’ an appellation they must have found no more flattering than it was intended to be. As late as 1864, a forged piece of Democratic campaign propaganda declared, ‘There is the strongest reason for believing that the first movement toward amalgamation in this country will take place between Irish and negroes.’”⁹¹ If the Irish were to become upwardly mobile and recognize the American dream, they would have to distance themselves from the empathy for the African slaves and realize themselves as “white” even though they were not being treated as such. They had to reimagine themselves as Americans and reject opportunities that held them in the lowest proletariats. In order to do such a thing, it was necessary to refuse correlations with those of the lowermost caste; first to distance themselves and their struggle, then to join the ranks of the oppressors, in spite of the oppression they suffered, and then to become torchbearer lighting the way with racial uprising and riots. *How the Irish Became White* contends, “As we know, the Irish in America chose not to go the whole hog but opted instead for the privileges and burdens of whiteness. The outcome was not a foregone conclusion.”⁹² Finding a tighter proximity to whiteness was the only chance at obtaining that American Dream for the Irish immigrant, lest they become perpetual “slaves” and

⁹¹ Ibid. Page 857.

⁹² Ibid. Page 1272.

succumb to bondage like the African chattel. Vying for whiteness developed into the strategy of the Irish and other “new immigrants” for acceptance and inclusion, therefore negating the possibility of being grouped with the bottom cohort and minimizing their degree of exploitation.⁹³ Although the Irish were considered the lowest of European immigrants, there were parts of their lives as laborers that were distinctly different from the life of an African slave, regardless of their ethnic consideration. Though the differences were not many, they were factors in each group’s placement in society. The text in *How the Irish Became White* suggests, “While before the Negro, mastered and sold without his concurrence, they boasted it the highest prerogative of the white-skinned laborer to sell himself and choose his own master; they were unable to attain the true freedom of labor or to support their European brethren in the struggle for emancipation, but this barrier to progress has been swept off by the red sea of civil war. In a certain sense, this study may be understood as a meditation on how the Irish, an important contingent of ‘the true political power of the North,’ came to boast the white skin as their highest prerogative.”⁹⁴ In doing so, the Irish were able to change their direction from the damnation of being viewed as low caste and equal to chattel to a process of projecting their fear of lack as racism upon the African slaves they used to work amongst and to shift their position from subjugation to assimilation. Because the economy in northern states evolved as industrial rather than agricultural, the Irish were able to avoid working alongside African Americans in these settings. Empathy the Irish once felt for their “African Brethren” began to morph into resentment from a possibility of losing new economic opportunities to free Blacks or former chattel. “To become white, they had to

⁹³ Ibid. Page 53.

⁹⁴ Ibid. Page 1435.

learn to subordinate county, religious, or national animosities, not to mention any natural sympathies they may have felt for their fellow creatures, to a new solidarity based on color—a bond which, it must be remembered, was contradicted by their experience in Ireland.”⁹⁵

As the presence of the Irish began to grow in the Northern states and the types of labor they performed began to shift, it did not correlate with an immediate improvement in their economic or social status. Cities such as Philadelphia housed many Irish immigrants, who were mostly economically marginalized and perpetuating animosity toward freed Blacks living in the cities of the North. “In the period under consideration, the most intense and desperate labor competition was not between Irish and free Negroes, but within each of the two groups, and no one has ever suggested that it presented an insurmountable obstacle to the cohesion of either.”⁹⁶ The two groups were in constant competition for low-paying jobs and unsuitable living arrangements, as were the few laborers who remained on Southern farms as sharecroppers after the Civil War, which intensified the level of animosity they shared towards one another. Features of servitude and slavery were regularly compared, contrasted, and pointed out by influential Euro-Americans, although the only representation of slavery was that of chattel, as if indentured servitude never existed. These ideals were used to justify the intention to sharpen the lines of racial demarcation, and they were propagated to the poor Irish immigrants, encouraging them to be the foot soldiers for this project. Indeed, the Irish were up to the challenge. Many riots and dissensions occurred as a result of Irish fear of

⁹⁵ Ibid. Page 2001.

⁹⁶ Ibid. Page 2062.

African American economic momentum and of the possibility of African Americans gaining the fiscal power the Irish were working equally as hard to obtain. These uprisings played out on city streets, in jails, at voting polls, and on job sites as the Irish fought aggressively to gain the privilege of white Americans and to uphold their own path to whiteness. The ferocity at which the Irish immigrants sustained this distinction is a direct correlation to how they were previously considered in British society and within American society and to the magnitude at which they wished to deliver themselves from that notion. It was as much a political debate and economic necessity as it was a social issue for the Irish immigrants and their descendants. One marked advantage the Irish indentured laborers enjoyed during the practice of Southern plantation slavery was that no one was chasing them with dogs or chopping off their limbs for running away, selling them away from family members, or sexually assaulting their wives. However, they were forced to forgo social differences from other Europeans and preferred shared cultural consistencies in favor of U.S. nationalism and a place in a “white” hierarchical society.⁹⁷ It proved to be a hefty but worthy price to pay for the “new immigrants” who had before compared to African slaves, who had been called “niggers of Europe” and had initially thought to protect their freedoms by rejecting the enslavement of Africans whom they referred to a “brethren” at the time. At the turn of the 20th century, the Irish were adapting from ethnic Europeans into American whites, were extremely passionate about their chances of inclusion, and were anticipating a hard demarcation from the experience of slavery or the representation of it. Even though this reclassification did not equate with financial increase and upward mobility, it did function to divide laborers among racial

⁹⁷ Ibid. Page 2973.

lines and influence societal attitudes surrounding African Americans. In some instances, the Irish were convinced that African Americans were treated preferentially by proprietors, which also fueled animosity between the two ethnic groups. “The free laborer, with greater toil, cannot secure to himself and children the necessaries of life. The black slave is secured from want and a necessity to crime, in lieu of which the free laborer sometimes has a choice of employers. Although the Southern master can use only the lash, the other has a more powerful means of enforcing servitude.”⁹⁸ The same group of European immigrants, who had been one of those affected by the Alien Sedition Acts of 1798, previously restricted from naturalization and voting rights, were now the main actors in the quest for racial demarcation in the United States.⁹⁹ They began to form labor unions to advocate for the causes of the immigrant industrial laborer, holding conferences and delivering speeches that compared their societal position to that of the African slave while excluding African Americans from joining and their “all white workspaces”. Of one of such speakers it was reported, “In 1832 he made his Address to the Working Men of New England, which he delivered on numerous occasions, and which was printed the following year in a New York edition on George Evans’s presses and went through several editions afterward. In that address, Luther angrily denounced the factory system at length for its cruelties. He repeatedly compared its victims to Southern slaves, usually to the disadvantage of the free laborer.”¹⁰⁰ The group who once looked upon African chattel with compassion and concern emanating from their own experiences with exploitation were now hand in hand with their own abusers working against another

⁹⁸ Ibid. Page 2259.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. Page 1727.

downgraded group of humans. The rise of industrialization intensified the effort to separate the races during the Progressive Era;” the growth of market culture in the North, together with the rise of cotton in the South, produced new strains. The crisis of 1819–1820 over whether to admit Missouri as a slave state revealed a regional split in the governing coalition and led to the collapse of Jefferson’s Party.”¹⁰¹ Even the discourse around the abolition of slavery could not reshape the way the Irish were viewed by “old immigrants’, nor did it soften the way they regarded African Americans during the Gilded Era in the United States, though they still were not distinguished as slaves. “It would be untrue to say that slavery extended the privileges of citizenship to the Irish, by standing on the backs of African Americans, but contrarily, that the assimilation of the Irish into white race made slavery a viable practice.”¹⁰² Democratic party politicians of the era fought to gain the loyalty and votes of the Irish by rejecting American nativist principles, which negated the idea of Irish inclusion, and additionally by reinforcing the benefits of a color line with vitriol.¹⁰³ “Just as racial slavery was the distinctive feature of American growth, the distinctive feature of American labor history is that these two conspiracies of labor, instead of coming to form part of a single movement, profoundly diverged.”¹⁰⁴ Insurrections and attempts to enforce prejudices on freed Blacks in the North continued throughout the industrial period of the United States, which were along the lines of Black codes in the South. While Blacks were reprimanded and punished for defending themselves in these attacks, the Irish immigrants disseminating them were beginning to exercise their privilege fortified with the dirty work they were performing, thereby

¹⁰¹ Ibid. Page 1400.

¹⁰² Ibid. Page 1452.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. Page 2144.

promoting a unified “white” society and preserving their place in it. “In 1834, following a riot in which a mob, largely composed of Irish laborers, destroyed homes throughout the section of Philadelphia they shared with black people, the mayor appointed an investigating commission. The commission’s report identified as a principal cause of the riot the belief that some employers were hiring black people over whites and that, as a result, many white laborers were out of work.”¹⁰⁵ Moreover, as an integral part of the proletariats, one out of every twelve Irishmen was imprisoned and forced into labor just as they were during British feudalism and just as free African Americans who were detained in the Northern states. But these immigrants were still not referred to as “slaves” and their toil was not referred to as slavery.¹⁰⁶ Whether racial demarcation among colonists or American residents was a Jeffersonian or a Jacksonian initiative was irrelevant to the representation of labor exploitation as a Black experience; the representation was an initiative that has evolved along with the economy, the ethnic breakdown, and the virility of the United States. As racialized slavery continued to propel the growth of the American economy, industrialism driven by European immigrant laborers became a viable rival, which led to two different parts moving in different directions socially, forming two different cultures in one nation.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. Page 1578.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. Page 1012.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. Page 2144.



Figure 11: Photo of docked ship carrying “new immigrants” to America



Figure 12: Photo of European immigrants arriving in the United States

Compared Systematic Exploitation and Injustice

Our framers crafted the *Declaration of Independence* with the intent of asserting their liberties and freedom on the British Crown. However, the freedom they referred to in this document only pertained to the British colonists and not to the indentured servants who were bonded to labor or to the African slaves they owned, even with the awareness of how the consequences of slavery could tinge the history of the foundation of the United States. As American society was becoming more inclusive of ethnic European immigrants, it was becoming more exclusionary towards African Americans. “In the ensuing years and decades, as the colony’s tobacco economy expanded, requiring more and more labor, legislators would pass new laws restricting black freedom and increasingly defining black people as slaves.”¹⁰⁸ A series of new rulings passed in the late seventeenth and eighteenth century in Virginia and Maryland would slowly but surely chip away at the freedom and autonomy some African slaves received from masters before the implementation of a chattel practice: men such as freedman Anthony Johnson and his wife, Mary of North Carolina who retained land and servants.¹⁰⁹ Colonial presidents like Thomas Jefferson also knew that southern plantation owners would not have any interest in joining a union of states, which could potentially end the practice of chattel slavery in the British colonies and dwindle their financial profits from agriculture.

¹⁰⁸ Edmund S Morgan. *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2003. Page 136.

¹⁰⁹ Ibrahim X. Kendi. *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America*. Bold Type Books, 2017. Page 77.

As noted in earlier chapters, slavery was birthed in the eastern hemisphere during the Muslim rule of the Iberian Peninsula. As Arab empires claimed lands in Asia and Eastern Europe, they enslaved Europeans they encountered and captured. Iberian writers from this period propagated a pseudo-science labeled Eugenics, and the British gave faith to these baseless claims as validation to exploit kidnapped Africans for labor. It was this idea that eventually became a fundamental notion for the British plantation owners who colonized North America. Lacking the skills and resources required to create agricultural revenues in the New World, the settlers found it an impossible goal to achieve without labor assistance. In contrast, thousands of European immigrants entered the United States from countries different than the original colonists' and were not automatically included in the "white" population. Language, culture, and religion were factors that differentiated those groups from the WASPs who founded the Jamestown Settlement, and therefore, newer immigrants did not fit the description of "white." Nevertheless, as the numbers of slaves or of darker-skinned immigrants began to increase, it became imperative to include the ethnic European immigrants in American society in order to solidify their loyalties to "white" society and separation from representation as "slaves." "In 1751, Benjamin Franklin could claim that only the English and Saxons 'make the principal Body of White People on the Face of the Earth,' and nearly 80 years later, Ralph Waldo Emerson would insist that the Irish, like the Chinese and the Native American, were not Caucasian. Over time, however, the definition of who counted as culturally white expanded to include Catholics from southern Europe, the Irish, and even Jews, who for centuries had been seen as quintessential outsiders."¹¹⁰ Another example of this practice in action is the

¹¹⁰ Robert P. Baird. "The Invention of Whiteness: The Long History of a Dangerous Idea." *The Guardian*, April 20, 2021. Page 1.

plight of Mexican Americans migrant workers in the Southwest who had been categorized as “white” within the black/white binary while still being confronted with Black code policies, creating a false sense of inclusion in white society for Mexican Americans although many inhabited the land before the settlers arrived in the region. For Eastern and Southern European immigrants, American industrialization was a major pull factor during the Gilded Era, and many flocked into the factories and warehouses of the Northern States, working in unsafe conditions for scarce wages, with no labor laws or rights. They were marginalized, excluded, and categorized as “new immigrants” versus the “old immigrants” that preceded them a century earlier. “Along with slaves, apprentices, and child laborers, as well as the wage-laborers traditionally thought to comprise the working class, they made up part of the capital–labor relation of the time.”¹¹¹ Some “new immigrants” were also branded “colored whites” before their inclusion as citizens. Other areas of labor in which poor European immigrants were employed were timber, mining, and fur trappers. All were of a hazardous work nature. “Old immigrants” who had disembarked an epoch or so before the arrival of this group was able to establish themselves as artisans and skill laborers by this time, enabling them to obtain adequate living accommodations which separated them from the new arrivals.

In *American Slavery, American Freedom*, the author provides findings from research on the tobacco boom on what made the colonists seek freedom from monarchy in the New World, what ignited their desires to become landowners and to protect themselves from religious persecution, and how this period helped to shape the practice of slavery. After some additional research, I discovered that “after the settlers landed on

¹¹¹Noel Ignatiev. *How the Irish Became White*. New York: Routledge, 2009. Page 912.

Jamestown Island in the spring of 1607, they quickly began searching for ways to make a fortune both for themselves and the Company. The gold and jewels they had hoped to find were nonexistent. Harvesting raw materials like fish, lumber, and fur was difficult. Industries such as glassblowing, pitch and tar production, silk cultivation, and mining required skilled labor and too much start-up time.”¹¹² This was not the outcome the British expected, but they were not willing to give up on their colonial utopia. The structures and systems of racial classism, which are still identifiable today, were fabricated during the tobacco boom of the Virginia Colony. The ambition of acquiring freedoms and the dream of prosperity existed on a personal level for those British colonists, most certainly by the Framers, but it was also projected onto the Jamestown colony as a way to secure the possibility of a prosperous and free association of Virginia on a grand scale, and eventually employed by other plantation colonies. “In the early seventeenth century, race-based slavery for life did not exist in the Anglo-American world. Instead, where it existed, slavery was linked to the cultural and religious background of the enslaved person: non-Christian captives taken in a war, for example, might be enslaved, but not Christians, regardless of their racial or ethnic background.”¹¹³ If racism were to be a financial tool used to maintain a socio-economic paradigm of classes, it would be necessary to represent the lowest caste in said society as one that retains no autonomy or personal sovereignty and lacks the intellectual or spiritual capacity to represent humanity; the lowest caste, or rather who is intended to be that are incessantly categorized as slaves. Morgan’s writing suggests, “Racism became an

¹¹² Edmund S Morgan. *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2003. Page 79.

¹¹³ Ibid. Page 82.

essential if acknowledged, ingredient of the Republican ideology that enabled Virginians to lead the nation.”¹¹⁴

Indentured servitude’s gradual progression into racialized slavery was stimulated by a belief of these British colonists that they would become wealthy planters in the Virginia colony and would enjoy less taxation from the monarchy while enjoying the promise of land ownership. It was intended for an immigrant indentured laborer to work off the cost of their passage within five years. Planters could receive fifty acres for every laborer bonded for emigration to Virginia, thanks to the Headright Policy of 1618. Obviously, indentured servitude was a catalyst for attracting British immigrants to Jamestown, but it also became counterproductive for the planter class by creating more competition and less demand once the servants worked off the costs of their voyage and their labor contract. In the colonies, former servants sought landownership once their terms of servitude were completed, which left their bondspersons without labor and a possibility of less profit from their crops. A race-based caste system was developed to maintain a social order with laborers and proletariats at the bottom, most importantly African Americans, and to avoid a labor shortage. The Africans brought to the colony as chattel slaves were purchased as perpetual property and were legally forbidden from the ownership of property. “In the 1660s, less than 25% of Maryland’s bound laborers were enslaved Africans. By 1680, the number had increased to 33%, and by the early 1700s, three-quarters of laborers were enslaved Africans. About three hundred arrived each year between 1695 and 1708.”¹¹⁵ Few of the Africans in captivity were manumitted by their

¹¹⁴ Ibid. Page 33.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. Page 268.

slave owners prior to codified slavery in perpetuity. Slavery became a generational and permanent occurrence for African chattel, and their descendants inevitably became a perpetual representation of Blacks as underserving of liberty in the United States.

According to Morgan, “In Virginia, neither badges nor philosophers were needed. It was not necessary to pretend or to prove that the enslaved were a different race because they were. Anyone could tell black from white, even if black was actually brown or red. And as the number of their poor white Virginians diminished, the vicious traits of character attributed by Englishmen to their poor could in Virginia increasingly appear to be the exclusive heritage of Blacks.”¹¹⁶ The evident physical differences between the African slaves and the British settlers and servants were used as a rationalization for the enslavement of those in bondage and were justified by uncredible teachings like Eugenics, Climate theory, and the curse of Ham. The African slaves were also derided for their language(s), which the British did not care to comprehend; for their traditions with which the British were unfamiliar and intolerable; for their spiritual practices, which were considered paganistic by Europeans; and with complete hypocrisy, for religious beliefs that were not Protestant Christian. In comparison, “The English had come to view their poor almost as an alien race, with inbred traits of character that justified plans for their enslavement or incarceration in workhouses. Almost, but not quite. It required continual denunciations from a battery of philosophers and reformers; it even required special badges to proclaim the differentness of the poor to the undiscerning, who might otherwise mistake them for ordinary men.”¹¹⁷ This was not just true for the poor Englishmen but everyone the British regarded beneath them with respect to language, religion, culture, or

¹¹⁶ Ibid. Page 65.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. Page 67.

physical appearance. The English poor were at least deemed human. African slaves were not considered human and therefore required to be civilized and guided, but not Christianized, which would remiss them from bondage and forced labor exploitation. Furthermore, both groups were at one time denounced by the citizenry of the United States, but that ideal shifted for immigrants like the Irish. Morgan wrote, “Racism made it possible for white Virginians 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, mulattos, 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.”¹¹⁸ From these readings, we can concur that “American Freedom” was originally consequential of and predicated by “American Slavery” or racialized slavery and what it became. It is also evident that racism was not an act but a plan with a system of acts, customs, and laws orchestrated to isolate an ethnic group of involuntary migrants enduringly; a plan that included “slave” as an identifier of African descendants long after “slavery” was refashioned and renamed again.

The *United States Constitution*, which was ratified eleven years after the *Declaration of Independence*, included language that called for the freedom of citizens of the former British colonies, as well as verbiage that protected the slave owners and their right to keep humans in bondage who were classified as property. Without “slave” labor, planters could not harvest enough tobacco to turn profits, which supported the Virginia colony. “Tobacco changed everything. It saved Virginia from ruin, incentivized further colonization, and laid the groundwork for what would become the United States. With a

¹¹⁸ Ibid. Page 89.

new market open, Virginia drew not only merchants and traders but also settlers. Colonists came in droves. They were mostly young, mostly male, and mostly indentured servants who signed contracts called indentures that bonded them to employers for a period of years in return for passage across the ocean.”¹¹⁹ The three-fifths compromise in Article One of the *Constitution* is an example of how the law makers attempted to provide protections for southern plantation owners by counting those slaves in bondage as 3/5 of a human being and reducing the humanity of African slaves for national election purposes. Another example is in Article One of the *U.S. Constitution*, where the slave trade to the States was given an expiration date by Congress of not to cede before 1808 as if there was no sense of urgency for cessation of the practice.¹²⁰ Likewise, Article Four Section Two of the *United States Constitution* contains oxymoronic phrasing which refers to slaves as those “persons held to service or labor,” adding that those “persons” were not protected by laws in states in which slavery did not exist, and that they were to be returned to whomever the person(s) owe labor to.¹²¹ The irony here is that African slaves were referred to as “persons” in a document that also forbids a ban on the sale of said “persons” while proclaiming them as 3/5 of a human being, in effect placating plantation owners with “equal” representation in the United States Congress.¹²² It also kept plantation owners relishing in increasing gains and the plantation economy roaring. “Virginia’s economy flourished. By 1630, the annual import of Virginia tobacco in England was not less than half a million pounds. By 1640, London was receiving nearly a

¹¹⁹ Ibid. Page 136.

¹²⁰ US Constitution. Article One.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid. Article Four. Section Two.

million and a half pounds a year.”¹²³ A century and a half later, the occurrence of the Haitian Revolution provoked dread in the “slave” owners in the United States with a demonstration of how chattel on a plantation colony can prevail over their owners to obtain their liberation. Haiti was the first plantation colony in which the chattel fought to gain their independence. The upheaval made tangible for colonial settlers in British North America the prospect that slaves could collectively coup their masters and become free. This occurrence, along with the idea of slave owners losing their “property,” frightened British colonizers. In *An African American and Latinx History of the United States*, Paul Ortiz writes, “The slave plantation was the engine of early economic growth in the Americas, and the force behind the rise of global markets in tobacco, sugar, molasses, dyestuffs, cotton, and other commodities.”¹²⁴ The author refers to this period as the “age of revolution” and credits revolutionaries like Simon Bolivar and L’Overture for the momentum behind the movement. Ortiz pens, “Threats of insurgencies from slaves and poor colonists also convinced these leaders that a break with Great Britain was necessary.”¹²⁵ Haiti, on the Island of Hispaniola, colonized by both the Spanish and the French, consisted of plantation colonies rather than settler colonies of planters. In contrast, not every European colonist in the British Virginia colony was a slave owner or landowner. Although many of the British immigrants were poor agrarian workers and could not afford to purchase land or labor, those landowners who could afford to bond additional servants or purchase slave labor to manage their tobacco crops experienced

¹²³ Edmund S Morgan. *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2003. Page 158.

¹²⁴ Paul Ortiz. *An African American and Latin X History of the United States*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2018. Page 12.

¹²⁵ Ibid. Page 14.

huge profits. As knowledge of the revolutionary events in Haiti reached the European settlers in Virginia, the unsettling news triggered laws pertaining to slave ownership and the protection of property to be enacted and simultaneously activated a more inclusive proximity to “whiteness” for those European immigrants who had previously been considered “colored whites” or were lowly caste as agrarian retainers upon their arrival in America. “The result was a new definition of citizenship, what Alexander Saxton has labeled the ‘White Republic.’ Blackness was the badge of the slave, and in a perfect inversion of cause and effect, the status of the Afro-Americans was seen as a function of their color rather than of their servile condition.”¹²⁶ Here we behold the origin of the representation of slaves by African Americans in the United States and of slavery or the practice of forced and free labor as a Black experience, first in the Americas and subsequently on a global level. This practice may have evolved in Virginia, but it became the way of the plantation South until the Civil War and transitioned into subcategories of discriminatory practices shortly thereafter, such as Jim Crow, black codes, race riots, poll taxes, and all-around prejudiced marginalization. Given a more modern filter, these practices would resemble racial profiling by police, employers, creditors, and educational institutions. Another expression would be the disparity of resources in minority schools and neighborhoods, gentrification, and redlining, along with the digital divide and the homeownership gap. A further semblance, possibly the most relative, would be the race wage gap and the inflation of prices on purchases made by African Americans obtaining homes and vehicles. The societal practices that emanate from the exploitation of labor in the United States have grown to insinuate a visual representation that resounds from the

¹²⁶ Noel Ignatiev. *How the Irish Became White*. New York: Routledge, 2009. Page 2017.

most extreme case of human labor exploitation, or what was originally thought to be the most extreme, while omitting the initial intention to exploit Europeans and natives for labor in the first U. S. colony. The most widespread practice of this phenomenon utilized in America actually brought the bulk of ethnic European settlers who became “white” citizens upon assimilation into the United States. “As members of the privileged group, white workers organized to defend their caste status, even while striving to improve their condition as workers. They prohibited free Afro-Americans from competing with them for jobs, in effect curtailing their right to choose among masters, a right which contemporary labor activists declared the only essential distinction between the free worker and the slave.”¹²⁷ Since poor immigrant laborers had the “option” to choose their masters, their distinction would indicate a difference in the social station by representation but not by economic advancement.

As the Great Migration funneled newly freed African Americans to cities in the industrial North, many “new immigrants” maintained an attitude of resentment and persisted in distancing themselves from the possibility of being associated with the bottom cast or “slave” class. There was competition for industrial positions and an initiative to conserve manufacturing work as “white only.” With regards to job opportunities “Black workers, already being driven out of artisanal trades by prejudice, and squeezed out of service trades and common labor by competition, could find no refuge in the manufacturing area, and hence were pushed down below the waged proletariat, into the ranks of the destitute self-employed: ragpickers, bootblacks, chimneysweeps, sawyers, fish and oyster mongers, washerwomen, and hucksters of

¹²⁷ Ibid. Page 2085.

various kinds.”¹²⁸ Likely because their ethnicity was representative of slavery. The Reconstruction Era fueled flames of racist resentment over the Civil War, which continued to linger through the 20th century, and actually left poor European immigrants closer economically in propinquity to former “slaves” than “old immigrants” if it were not only for the notion of “whiteness” and the Irish desire to uphold it. This perception played out in situations where African Americans were faced with social subjugation from newly assimilated European immigrants who identified their inclusion as power. Law enforcement was one of the avenues used to exert this new authority over free African Americans by “new immigrants.” “The Irish police officer is more than a quaint symbol. His appearance on the city police marked a turning point in Philadelphia in the struggle of the Irish to gain the rights of white men. It meant that thereafter, the Irish would be officially empowered (armed) to defend themselves from the nativist mobs and, at the same time, to conduct their own agenda against black people. The Protestant Ascendancy had given way to the White Republic.”¹²⁹ This point in history marks the emergence of organized hate towards people of color, primarily former African slaves and their descendants' seeking opportunities for survival in the United States. Groups like the Ku Klux Klan reinforced these racist ideals in the suffering plantation south, and immigrant groups eager to be seen as their opposites fought for the possibility of African American equality among them in the industrial North. “If the abolition of slavery had called into question the meaning of whiteness, the overthrow of Reconstruction marked the restoration of the color line on a new basis.”¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Ibid. Page 2469.

¹²⁹ Ibid. Page 3438.

¹³⁰ Ibid. Page 3645.

These principles, which are grounded in the separation of classes, first by language and religion, and lastly by the social construct of race, both individually and collectively foster racial tension and distribute misconceptions used to defend the exercise of racial hierarchy. In Philadelphia, as in New York, “Irish gangs not only drove Blacks out of jobs, but they also served as surrogate unions.”¹³¹ There, the race riot of 1849 and the longshore strike of 1851 were simply different tactical phases of the same struggle. As one historian, apparently unaware of the irony, has remarked, “Ethnic identity was a shaping force for labor solidarity.”¹³² Among the effects of these practices on the social and economic development of African Americans in the U.S. were justifications for acts of racial animosity, which influenced systemic constructions based on race, ethnicity, or culture. Free African Americans who were victims of racial violence were not regarded as victims because they were not considered human and definitely not welcomed citizens of the United States, just as it was when they were enslaved. “Suffice it to say that the Irish in this city seem to have imbibed the idea that the blacks, not being citizens, have no right to stay in the city and that if they can drive them out of the city, they will have their places, and have work enough to do...”¹³³ Any African American family appearing to have gained some level of economic stability was in danger of being targeted by “new immigrant” groups like the Irish in Northern cities. Living among African Americans regarded as “slaves” was an insult to the Irish and other poor immigrants seeking the American dream. “There’s a house,” said an Irish woman to the mob in Gaskill street, ‘that I want to have mobbed—there’s some negroes living there,

¹³¹ Ibid. Page 2596.

¹³² Ibid. Page 1272.

¹³³ Ibid. Page 2894.

who are living just like white folks.”¹³⁴ It was as if the African American relegation of “slave” produced an expectation of perpetual lack and suffering for them by other ethnic groups present in society, acutely by the Irish. African American celebrations of freedom invited violent responses from the ethnic Europeans witnessing them. In one occurrence, an observer reports, “It was provoked by a black temperance parade on the anniversary of the emancipation of the slaves in the British West Indies. The combination of temperance and praise for Britain undoubtedly inflamed the Irish, but there were other factors present as well.”¹³⁵ In these instances, it is made apparent the validated maltreatment of descendants who represent the station of “slave” (blacks), but not of other ethnic groups who were initially lowly caste in the conception of America.

Some of the violent racial attacks began to take place in the Northern cities before the Civil war, indicating resentment of African American freedom. “In August 1862, a largely Irish mob in Brooklyn attacked the black employees, chiefly women and children, who were working in a tobacco factory.”¹³⁶ Riots between the Irish and African Americans in Northern cities were commonplace during this period. Uprisings happened at workplaces, functioned to destroy the homes and churches of African Americans, and were used as tools of intimidation in public places such as city parks. Ignatiev wrote of a disturbance in which the Irish “wrecked the African Presbyterian Church on Seventh Street and a place several blocks away called the ‘Diving Bell,’ operated by ‘a white man, and used as a grog shop and lodging house for all colors, at the rate of three cents a

¹³⁴ Ibid. Page 2886.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid. Page 2558.

head.”¹³⁷ It was reported that after insurgents reduced their initial marks to wrecks, they commenced smashing windows, doors, and furniture in the homes of African American residents, sending them running in the streets, beating any they caught. One witness recounted that the mob even threw the remains of a deceased infant out of a coffin from an African American church. “Some arrangement, it appears, existed between the mob and the white inhabitants, as the dwelling houses of the latter, contiguous to the residences of blacks, were illuminated and left undisturbed, while the huts of the negroes were signaled out with unerring certainty.”¹³⁸ The organization of this unrest was thought to have been catalyzed by free Blacks being hired in lieu of “whites” leaving many of them unemployed and financially burdened. The responses of the Irish toward the African Americans present in their shared areas were aggressive and unforgettable. “The hallmark of racial oppression is the reduction of all members of the oppressed group to one undifferentiated social status, a status beneath that of any member of any social class within the dominant group. It follows, therefore, that the white race consists of those who partake of the privileges of the white skin in this society.”¹³⁹ Hence, it is necessary to represent low caste, labor exploitation, and economic struggle as Black to maintain a social order that promotes privilege for those who are not long after slavery ends. This representation has not only functioned to maintain the marginalization of a particular segment of society for centuries but also to maintain hatred and difference towards African Americans by other ethnic groups, and not exclusively by white Americans.

¹³⁷ Ibid. Page 1272.

¹³⁸ Ibid. Page 2650.

¹³⁹ Ibid. Page 30.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

The symbolic representation of “slaves” and the practice of “slavery” as an African American experience exists well into the 21st century as an extension of the rejection suffered by this community in their involuntary migration and forced labor without compensation from 1619 until the Civil War of the United States, and longer in cases like former slaves of Texas who celebrated Juneteenth or in states like Kentucky which were not a part of the Confederacy and were not forced to emancipate “slaves” alongside the Southern states. This is an intended outcome of a cultivated representation of slavery in America that has had and continues to have many social implications with regard to attitudes towards African Americans in spite of the fact that they were not the only ethnic group exploited for forced, free, or semi-free labor in the New World. African Americans were not the first option or second choice for labor exploitation in the original British colony. The Jamestown settlement of the Virginia colony became the richest of the British American colonies because of the tobacco, which was made possible initially by the practice of indentured servitude, followed by the practice of chattel slavery. “Slavery” did not begin in the United States as a practice of African bondage but rather as a way for British aristocracy to remove vagabonds who were rapt to migrate to the Virginia colony. It took the British three endeavors to colonize Virginia, partially because the settlers could not oversee the physical labor of tobacco crops. The lack of desire for work did not leave the British hobos as they reached the colony, and undoubtedly, the lack of sustenance compounded their physical inability and willingness to labor the tobacco fields of Virginia. The British colonists struggled and were helpless when it came to living off the land. Overall, the colonists were slow learners and lacked the disposition

for agriculture, the seed, the competence, or the willpower, and produced nothing for themselves. Their failure to supply themselves with any sustenance from the land is a staggering notion, with the understanding of their sponsors' interest in making their British colony profitable.¹⁴⁰ Native occupants were sought for labor by the British but were not ever totally enslaved as a population. They were dying from European viruses, and their knowledge of the land made escaping the British easy. After struggling for prosperity with the labor of European immigrant servants, African captives on a ship pirated and brought to the Virginia colony stirred a new way for settlers to flourish. The concept led to generational ownership of Africans and their descendants, which, with time, became codified in order to keep the caste structure with whites on top and cast Blacks to the bottom. Ethnic European immigrants previously seen as inferior were inevitably welcomed into "white" society and contributed to a deeper demarcation between the proletariat class by color codes. "To the extent race consciousness existed among newly arrived immigrants from Ireland, it was one among several ways they had of identifying themselves."¹⁴¹ Upon realizing that indentured servitude would not provide the long-term labor needed to manage the tobacco crops, Virginians began to intensify and enlarge the practice of chattel slavery. "In 1619, the Virginia Company established the House of Burgesses, a limited representative body composed of white landowners that first met in Jamestown. That same year, a Dutch slave ship sold 20 Africans to the Virginia colonists. Southern slavery was born."¹⁴² Once chattel slavery began to take hold and produce large profits for the owners of tobacco plantations, the

¹⁴⁰ Edmund S Morgan. *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2003. Page 39.

¹⁴¹ Noel Ignatiev. *How the Irish Became White*. New York: Routledge, 2009. Page 2016.

¹⁴² Morgan. Page 154.

European settlers deemed it necessary to keep these laborers in bondage for life, using the difference in their skin color as a way to free themselves from the snares of forced labor exploitation and to keep those who are recognizably different physically, in chains for generations. “Still, with only slightly exaggerated precision, we can say that one of the most crucial developments in ‘the discovery of personal whiteness’ took place during the second half of the 17th century, on the peripheries of the still-young British empire.”¹⁴³

Ironically, the foundational aspects of structured racial classism, which is still recognizable today, were constructed during the tobacco boom of the Virginia Colony. The representation of “slavery” that we are aware of today originated from the need to obtain free and semi-free labor to construct the “utopia” envisaged by the British gentry who were plotting to remove the scum of their society, and it was influenced by the inability to make that “utopia” a possibility with the British hobo corps handpicked to plant and harvest tobacco in the Virginia colony. The manifestation of this vision was made a reality with captives trafficked and purchased from West African nations, who would become the face of free labor and bottom caste in the United States, although there were European immigrants and Native Americans working alongside them who suffered similar fates and had similar experiences. The determination to acquire freedoms and the dream of prosperity existed on a personal level for those British colonists, especially the Framers, but it was also projected from the Jamestown colony as a way to secure the possibility of a prosperous and free colony of British settlers in Virginia on a grand scale and was ultimately employed by other plantation colonies which later combined to

¹⁴³ Robert P. Baird. “The Invention of Whiteness: The Long History of a Dangerous Idea.” *The Guardian*, April 20, 2021. Page 1.

become the United States. “At the beginning of the colonial period, records indicate that the most significant difference between slavery and indentured servitude lay in the expectation that, in the latter case, the individual would receive the sort of training and tools necessary to eventually take their place as a free person.”¹⁴⁴ Whereas indentured servitude was meant to be used as a ladder to economic stability for European immigrants, “slavery” was meant to be a lowering into an inescapable space in society for involuntary migrants of African ethnicity. This clarifies the need for the creation of laws against teaching “slaves” to read or to train them with skills reserved for European servants and settlers. Morgan’s writing suggests, “Racism became an essential if acknowledged, ingredient of the Republican ideology that enabled Virginians to lead the nation.”¹⁴⁵ The more the experience of the Irish seemed to resemble that of African slaves, the harder they worked to distinguish themselves as “white” and to create distance from the experience of “white slavery” or categorizations as “colored whites.” Religiously, the Irish sought refuge in “whiteness” and as immigrants became staunch racists to push the needle and widen the racial divide. These practices have contributed to the social and political culture of the United States, keeping African Americans perpetually seen and placed at the bottom of the social hierarchy in the United States, justifying all racist notions and aggressions of prejudice relevant to these particular citizens of the U.S., regardless of the vastness of their positive contributions to this society, in addition to 250 years of unpaid labor and generational bondage.¹⁴⁶ “The African in this country belongs by birth to the lowest station in society; and from that

¹⁴⁴ Edmund S Morgan. *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2003. Page 358.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. Page 39.

¹⁴⁶ Noel Ignatiev. *How the Irish Became White*. New York: Routledge, 2009. Page 2025.

station, he can never rise, be his talents, his enterprise, his virtues what they may.’”¹⁴⁷

And even in 2024, four hundred and five years after the first African slave stepped upon the seaboard of what was to become the United States, the laws are continuously reorganized to abandon the contestation of ethnocentric hate and any discourse surrounding it rather than to correlate with a more current social order. In the midst of the current racial, nationalistic, and political climate, it is important to understand the foundation of the ideals that contribute to polarization and arguments, and which support divisive applications and prejudicial practices that have matured along with this country. “The distinction between those who did and those who did not have access to the most dynamic area of the economy became a principal element defining ‘race’ in the North.”¹⁴⁸ By design, the representation of slavery as African American is systemic with negative intentions to give those who once held only proximity to “whiteness” a false sense of security, which evolves through cultural expressions signifying “black” worthlessness and its alternative, “white” superiority. “The denial to black people of the most elementary right of citizenship to say nothing of humanity, the right of self-defense, was long enshrined in law.”¹⁴⁹ “Whiteness” with regards to skin color, remains at the top of the hierarchal class structure and is the pinnacle position of society in the United States. It was the primary requirement for freedom in the Virginia Colony; it became the requirement for viable opportunity and inclusion in the Progressive Era and has been the only marked path to economic opportunity and social supremacy in the United States of America. ” The idea of whiteness, in other words, was identical to the idea of white

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. Page 2016.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. Page 247.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. Page 3011.

supremacy. For the three centuries that preceded the civil rights movement, this presumption was accepted at the most refined levels of culture by people who, in other contexts, were among the most vocal advocates of human liberty and equality.”¹⁵⁰ Every human who has resided in the United States of America since its inception has either subscribed to or succumbed to its implications, whether directly or indirectly. In addition, citizenship and privilege have been an expectation of some immigrants seeking the American Dream, either by feigned acceptance or designated social class. Depending on their ethnicity or shade of brown, they may have been greeted with unwelcoming attitudes from today’s nativists. Also, depending on their shade of Brown, is their ability or inability to assimilate and find acceptance in U.S. society. Racialism permeates every aspect of society in the United States. It is reflected in the education system, health care, housing, credit availability and interest rates for minorities, job opportunities, criminal justice policies, political residential zoning, redlining and gentrification, minority business ownership and investment, etc. These practices touch all people of color in today’s society. Whether it is acknowledged or not, there are other ethnic groups in the United States who were categorized as “white” yet continuously met with Jim Crow style handling, such as Native American tribes and the Mexican American community in Texas and other parts of the Southwest during Westward expansion. *Raza Schools* illustrates this phenomenon in the development of an educational system in a small Texas town on the basis of the Jim Crow era policies, racist tactics, and systematic injustices that excluded Mexican Americans from white society in Del Rio, Texas, and threatened to diminish their ability to provide a rigorous and culturally relative curriculum to Latino students;

¹⁵⁰ Robert P. Baird. “The Invention of Whiteness: The Long History of a Dangerous Idea.” *The Guardian*, April 20, 2021. Page 1.

students who were classified as white by census, just as the Irish and other immigrants from Southern and Eastern European countries came to be after the Gilded Age.¹⁵¹ However, these systemic practices constructed along with the colonies that developed into this nation and are subliminally present in today's society are often dismissed by those who are not grossly affected in negative ways by the implications. Meanwhile, African Americans who shed light on their racist experiences and prejudicial treatment are repeatedly dismissed as angry or too sensitive. "Where the religion of whiteness was not able to win converts with persuasion or fear, it deployed cruder measures to secure its power, conscripting laws, institutions, customs, and churches to enforce its prerogatives."¹⁵² There is not one sector of life in which a person whose hue is perpetually bottom caste, regardless of their character, accomplishments, or socioeconomic level, does not have to navigate through America's murky racial muck and struggle to maintain through a scuffle for humane and inclusive treatment and to bear the battle for equity and equality in the land they labored to fashion without acknowledgment or compensation. Representations such as "slave" make it incessantly necessary for African Americans to defend their humanity and presence. If inclusivity in the United States was applied to all of those who were subjected to forced, free, or semi-free labor, "slavery" would not then be represented by a specific skin color or ethnicity or defined as an African American experience.

¹⁵¹ Jesus Jesse. Esparza. *Raza Schools: The Fight for Latino Educational Autonomy in a West Texas Borderlands Town. New Directions in Tejano History*, Book 4. University of Oklahoma Press, 09/19/2023, Page 125.

¹⁵² Robert P. Baird. "The Invention of Whiteness: The Long History of a Dangerous Idea." *The Guardian*, April 20, 2021. Page 1.

The history of forced, free, or semi-free labor in the United States is not exclusive to African American descendants of chattel slavery. Reconstructing the narrative on slavery illuminates the fact that African descendants, primarily Black people in the U.S., were not the only ethnic group to be exploited for labor or to be treated with disregard, and therefore, should not be the lone ethnic representation of this abusive practice which started as a way to for the British to sanitize their society and force drifters to be productive. “Under the system of racial oppression, elite rule rests on the support of the laboring classes of the oppressor group.”¹⁵³ In addition to the research done by the historians, which provided this project with illustrations of forced, free, and semi-free labor in the United States, it would be helpful to explore further the intersectionality of this topic with other ethnic groups and their labor experiences. It would also prove purposeful to analyze whether these groups, such as the Mexican American community and other Latino subgroups in the U.S., were fused into “white” society over the last century to identify ways in which this notion of codifying free labor and using African Americans as a representative for such a practice has contributed to the social climate and relations between minority ethnic groups, to anti-blackness, and to the ideal of “white supremacy” in the United States. “Even the phrase ‘white supremacy’ which predates the word ‘racism’ in English by 80 years and once described a system of interlocking racial privileges that touched every aspect of life, was redefined to mean something rare and extreme.”¹⁵⁴ Understanding that all ethnic groups who immigrated to America, whether voluntary or involuntary, were subjected to labor exploitation and suffered through living

¹⁵³ Noel Ignatiev. *How the Irish Became White*. New York: Routledge, 2009. Page 712.

¹⁵⁴ Robert P. Baird. “The Invention of Whiteness: The Long History of a Dangerous Idea.” *The Guardian*, April 20, 2021. Page 1.

under conditions possibly worse than what they fled is a prerequisite to the acknowledgment of other ethnic groups exploited for labor and the extension of this plight of purposeful exclusion that appears to be perpetual for African Americans. “As the historian Theodore Allen put it, ‘The plantation bourgeoisie deliberately extended a privileged status to the white poor of all categories as a means of turning to African slavery as the basis of its system of production.’ The economic utility of the idea of whiteness helped spread it rapidly around the world.”¹⁵⁵ The notion of “slavery” being Black and its representation by African Americans acutely underwrites these practices and rationalizes the concept that it is normal and justifiable for those in the African American community to be all but spiritually depleted and their humanity ignored for the sake of financial profits and world dominance. “Across three-and-a-half centuries, whiteness has been wielded as a weapon on a global scale; Blackness, by contrast, has often been used as a shield.”¹⁵⁶ The global anti-blackness campaign has been supported and maintained by the representation of African ethnicity being equated with slavery, has normalized the acceptance of inhumane treatment by colonial and imperial interests, and was nurtured by remnant attitudes lingering from the practice of chattel slavery in the United States. “By the middle of the 20th century, the presumption that a race of people called white was superior to all others had supplied the central justification not just for the transatlantic slave trade but also for the near-total extinction of Indians in North America; for Belgian atrocities in Congo; for the bloody colonization of India, East Africa and Australia by Britain; for the equally bloody colonization of North and West Africa and South-east Asia by France; for the deployment of the Final Solution in Nazi

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

Germany; and for the apartheid state in South Africa. And those are merely the most extreme examples. Alongside those murdered, raped, and enslaved in the name of whiteness, the total number of whom runs at least nine figures, are an almost unthinkable number of people whose lives were shortened, constrained, antagonized, and insulted on a daily basis.¹⁵⁷ The treatment of African captives and their resented free descendants has, through imperialistic greed, traveled to other continents and affected other communities of color, though none of them are a symbolized representation of “slavery” as is the African American community. Nevertheless, despite knowledge of the vastness of forced, free, and semi-free labor performed by numerous ethnic groups in the formation of America and the consistencies within these experiences minus regard to skin color, Blackness is still considered the “badge of the slave” in 21st century United States of America.

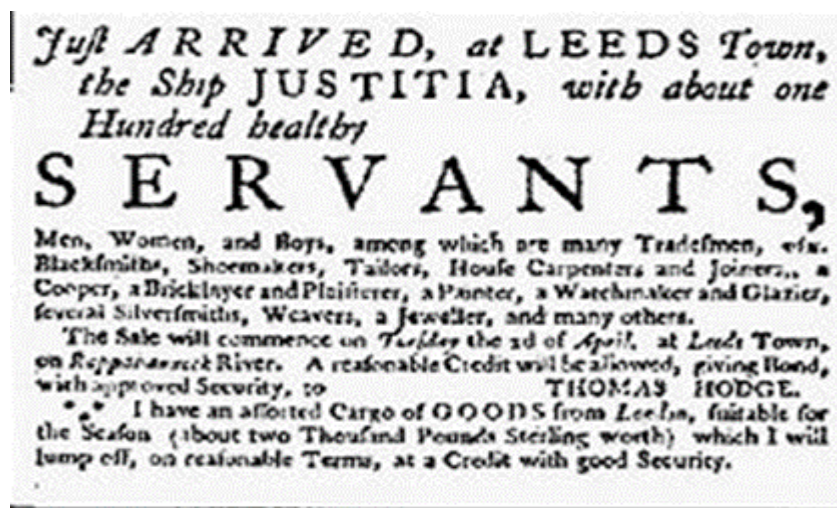


Figure 13: Ad for indentured servants

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

To be SOLD at Farley's ordinary, in
 Amelia county, near the court-house, on
 Friday the 23^d of March,
 ONE HUNDRED *dues* *English* born
S L A V E S.
 AS I have already made three sales out
 of my slaves, and these are the whole of the re-
 main, I am confident that there never was before a par-
 cel of slaves offered for sale at any one time. Credit
 will be given till the 1st day of *May*, 1771, with interest
 from the date if not paid punctually. The bonds are to
 be made payable to my trustees, and the sale conducted
 by *J. H. H. H.*
 THOMAS MOORE.
N. B. Five per cent. will be discounted for ready
 cash, and good merchants notes, payable at the *April*
 court, taken as such.

Figure 14: Ad for the sale of Chattel Slaves

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