

# The Developing Conjuncture and Some Insights from Hubert Harrison and Theodore W. Allen on the Centrality of the Fight against White Supremacy

Jeffrey B. Perry

## Epigraph

(In 22 parts)

“The King James version of the Bible . . . does not contain the word ‘race’ in our modern sense . . . as late as 1611 our modern idea of race had not yet arisen.”

– Hubert Harrison  
“World Problems of Race,” 1926

“When the first Africans arrived in Virginia in 1619, there were no ‘white’ people there; nor, according to the colonial records, would there be for another sixty years.”

– Theodore W. Allen  
*The Invention of the White Race*, Vol. 1, 1994  
(Written after searching through 885 county-years of Virginia’s colonial records)

“In the latter half of the seventeenth century, [in] Virginia and Maryland, the tobacco colonies . . . Afro-American and European-American proletarians made common cause in this struggle to an extent never duplicated in the three hundred years since.”

– Theodore W. Allen  
*Class Struggle and the Origin of Racial Slavery:  
The Invention of the White Race*, 1975

“. . . the plantation bourgeoisie established a system of social control by the institutionalization of the ‘white’ race whereby the mass of poor whites was alienated from the black proletariat and enlisted as enforcers of bourgeois power.”

– Theodore W. Allen  
*Class Struggle and the Origin of Racial Slavery:  
The Invention of the White Race*, 1975

“ . . . the record indicates that laboring-class European-Americans in the continental plantation colonies showed little interest in ‘white identity’ before the institution of the system of ‘race’ privileges at the end of the seventeenth century.”

– Theodore W. Allen  
*The Invention of the White Race*, Vol. 1, 1994

“ . . . their (the poor “whites”) own position, vis-a-vis the rich and powerful . . . was not improved, but weakened, by the white-skin privilege system.”

– Theodore W. Allen  
*Class Struggle and the Origin of Racial Slavery:  
The Invention of the White Race*, 1975

“The ten million Negroes of America form a group that is more essentially proletarian than any other American group . . . and the Negro was . . . [under slavery] the most thoroughly exploited of the American proletariat, . . . the most thoroughly despised.”

– Hubert Harrison  
“Socialism and the Negro,” *International Socialist Review*, 1912

“The South, after the [Civil] war, presented the greatest opportunity for a real national labor movement which the nation ever saw or is likely to see for many decades. Yet the [white] labor movement, with but few exceptions, never realized the situation. It never had the intelligence or knowledge, as a whole, to see in black slavery and Reconstruction, the kernel and the meaning of the labor movement in the United States.”

– W.E.B. Du Bois  
*Black Reconstruction*, 1935

“Given this understanding of slavery in Anglo-America as capitalism, and of the slaveholders as capitalists, it follows that the chattel bond-laborers were proletarians. Accordingly, the study of class consciousness as a sense the American workers have of their own class interests, must start with recognition of that fact.”

– Theodore W. Allen  
“On Roediger’s *The Wages of Whiteness*,” 2001

“Politically, the Negro is the touchstone of the modern democratic idea. The presence of the Negro puts our democracy to the test and reveals the falsity of it . . . [True democracy and equality implies] a revolution . . . startling to even think of.”

– Hubert Harrison  
 “The Negro and Socialism,” 1911

“The most vulnerable point at which a decisive blow can be struck against bourgeois rule in the United States is white supremacy. White supremacy is both the keystone and the Achilles heel of U.S. bourgeois democracy, the historic font of bourgeois rule in the United States.”

– Theodore W. Allen  
 “The Most Vulnerable Point,” 1972

“. . . the mission of the Socialist Party is to free the working class from exploitation, and . . . the duty of the party to champion . . . [the Negro’s] cause is as clear as day. This is the crucial test of Socialism’s sincerity.”

– Hubert Harrison  
 “Socialism and the Negro,” *International Socialist Review*, 1912

“The Negro problem, then, is the great test of the American socialists.”

– W.E.B. Du Bois  
 “Socialism and the Negro Problem,” *The New Review*, 1913

“. . . your official documents [show] that the white men of your [Socialist] party officially put [the white] ‘race first’ rather than ‘class first.’”

– Hubert Harrison  
 “An Open Letter to the Socialist Party of New York City,”  
*Negro World*, 1920

“. . . among the masses of white workers, the bourgeoisie established the dominance of race consciousness as against proletarian class consciousness.”

– Theodore W. Allen  
 “Presentation for a Panel Discussion,” 1972

“As long as the Color Line exists, . . . The cant of ‘Democracy’ is intended as dust in the eyes of white voters . . . It furnishes bait for the clever statesmen.”

– Hubert Harrison  
*New Negro*, 1919

“It is only the Blindspot in the eyes of America, and its historians, that can overlook and misread so clean and encouraging a chapter of human struggle and human uplift [as Black Reconstruction].”

– W.E.B. Du Bois  
*Black Reconstruction*, 1935

“All the while their white blindspot prevents them from seeing what we are talking about is . . . the ‘white question,’ the white question of questions – the *centrality* of the problem of white supremacy and the white-skin privilege which have historically frustrated the struggle for democracy, progress and socialism in the US.”

– Theodore W. Allen  
“White Blindspot,” 1967

“(In) three periods of national crisis [Civil War and Reconstruction, Populist Revolt of 1890s, and the Great Depression of the 1930s] characterized by general confrontations between capital and urban and rural laboring classes . . . The key to the defeat of the forces of democracy, labor and socialism was in each case achieved by ruling-class appeals to white supremacism, basically by fostering white-skin privileges of laboring-class European-Americans.”

– Theodore W. Allen  
“Introduction” to “The Kernel and the Meaning:  
A Contribution to a Proletarian Critique of United States History,” 2003

“[This ‘white race’] . . . this all-class association of European-Americans held together by ‘racial’ privileges conferred on laboring class European-Americans relative to African-Americans – [has functioned] as the principal historic guarantor of ruling-class domination of national life”

– Theodore W. Allen  
“Summary of the Argument of *The Invention of the White Race*,” 1998

“The ‘white race’ is the historically most general form of ‘class collaboration.’”

– Theodore W. Allen

Taped Interview with Chad Pearson, SUNY-Albany, May 13, 2004

“ . . . the ‘white race’ must be understood, not simply as a social construct, but as a *ruling class social control formation*.”

– Theodore W. Allen

“Summary of the Argument of *The Invention of the White Race*,” 1998

## Introduction

In recent years the gap between rich and poor in the United States has grown to record proportions while stark racial disparities have persisted and in many instances increased. Millions of poor and working people are suffering and conditions are getting worse, particularly for Black and Latino people.<sup>1</sup> This is happening at a time when the U.S. Census Bureau is predicting that “minorities” will comprise more than half of all children by 2023 and the majority of the population by 2042<sup>2</sup> and at a time when poor and working people domestically and internationally are showing an increased willingness to protest against exploitation and oppression.

While there are many factors affecting the current situation it is instructive to review some class and racial aspects of the developing conjuncture in the United States and to do so in the context of insights drawn from the lives and work of Hubert H.

---

<sup>1</sup> Hope Yen, “Recession Pushes Income Gap Between Rich, Poor to Record,” *USA Today*, September 29, 2009, at <[http://www.usatoday.com/money/economy/2009-09-29-income-gap-census\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/money/economy/2009-09-29-income-gap-census_N.htm)>, and Valerie Rawlston Wilson, “Introduction to the 2009 Equality Index,” in National Urban League, *The State of Black America 2009* (Washington, DC: 2010), 15-41. Similar disparities are found in National Council of La Raza, “The State of Latino Children and Youth in the United States,” factsheet (2010) at <<http://www.nclr.org/content/publications/detail/60188/>>. See also the more recent National Urban League, *Executive Summary: The State of Black America 2011 Jobs Rebuild America: Putting Urban America Back to Work*, March 31, 2011, p. 2, where its “Equity Index” ranking “blacks and Latinos against white Americans on issues such as income, homeownership, health insurance, and education” shows Black America at 71.5% and Latino America at 76.6% of “white” America.

<sup>2</sup> United States Census Bureau, Public Information Office, “An Older and More Diverse Nation by Midcentury,” August 14, 2008, at <<http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/population/cb08-123.html>>.

Harrison (1883-1927) and Theodore W. Allen (1919-2005). Harrison and Allen were working-class intellectual/activists who focused on the centrality of the fight against white supremacy and they are two of the twentieth-century's most important writers on race and class. In the belief that their work has much to offer scholars, activists, and readers today, this essay presents an introduction to Harrison and Allen followed by a brief look at the developing conjuncture and a lengthier discussion of some insights from their lives and work.<sup>3</sup>

### Hubert Harrison

The St. Croix, Virgin Islands-born, Harlem-based Hubert Harrison was a brilliant writer, orator, editor, educator, critic, and political activist. Historian Joel A. Rogers in *World's Great Men of Color* described him as “the foremost Afro-American intellect of his time” and the one with the sanest program. This extraordinary praise came amid chapters on Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, William Monroe Trotter, and Marcus Garvey. A. Philip Randolph, referring to a time when Harlem was recognized as

---

<sup>3</sup> I have preserved and inventoried both the Hubert H. Harrison Papers, which are now at Columbia University's Rare Book and Manuscript Library (see the 101-page Finding Aid at [http://www.columbia.edu/cu/libraries/inside/projects/findingaids/scans/pdfs/Harrison\\_Hubert\\_H.pdf](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/libraries/inside/projects/findingaids/scans/pdfs/Harrison_Hubert_H.pdf)), and the Theodore W. Allen Papers (which are in my possession).

Please note that in the text and in the title the word “some” is used in reference to insights from Harrison and Allen. They were both quite prolific and this article does not attempt to discuss all their important insights. Previously, I have written much on Harrison and less on Allen. See for example *A Hubert Harrison Reader*, ed. and intro by Jeffrey B. Perry (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2001); Jeffrey B. Perry, *Hubert Harrison: The Voice of Harlem Radicalism, 1883-1918* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), which is the first volume of a projected two-volume biography; Jeffrey B. Perry, “In Memoriam: Theodore W. Allen,” *Cultural Logic*, Vol. 8 (2005), at <http://clogic.eserver.org/2005/perry.html>; and Jeffrey B. Perry, “Introduction,” in Theodore W. Allen, *Class Struggle and the Origin of Racial Slavery: The Invention of the White Race* (The Center for the Study of Working Class Life, SUNY, Stony Brook, 2006) in *Cultural Logic*, Vol. 9 (2006) at <http://clogic.eserver.org/2006/allen.html>. This is one reason that more of the much less accessible Allen information is included in this article. In addition, the second volume of my Harrison biography will discuss many subjects of interest to readers including Harrison's concentrated work in the Black community, the Bolshevik Revolution, the year 1919, the *New Negro Magazine* (1919), the *Negro World* (1920-1922), Harrison and Garvey, Harrison and the Communists, Harrison's internationalism, Harrison's literary and oratorical contributions, Harrison as an educator, the International Colored Unity League, the Harlem Renaissance, etc. After publication of that second volume, I plan to again write on insights from Hubert Harrison and to include some of that material.

the “international Negro Mecca” and “the center of radical black thought,” called him “the father of Harlem radicalism.”<sup>4</sup>

Harrison was the major radical influence on both the class-conscious Randolph and the race-conscious Garvey as well as on a generation of “New Negro” activists and “common people.” He is the only person in United States history to play signal, leading roles in the largest class radical movement (socialism) and the largest race radical movement (the “New Negro”/Garvey movement) of his era. He is also a key link in the ideological unity of the two great trends of the Civil Rights/Black Liberation Struggle – the labor/civil rights trend associated with Randolph and Martin Luther King, Jr. and the race/nationalist trend associated with Garvey and Malcolm X.<sup>5</sup>

Harrison’s intellectual achievements were similarly extraordinary. He authored two books, *The Negro and the Nation* (1917) and *When Africa Awakes: The Inside Story of the Stirrings and Strivings of the New Negro in the Western World* (1920), and edited important publications including *The Voice: A Newspaper for the New Negro* (1917-1918), the *New Negro* (“intended as an organ of the international consciousness of the darker races – especially of the Negro race” in 1919), the *Negro World* (newspaper of Marcus Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association in 1920), and *The Voice of the Negro* (the organ of the International Colored Unity League in 1927). He also delivered hundreds of indoor and outdoor talks and wrote hundreds of articles including 138 that appear in *A Hubert Harrison Reader*.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Perry, *Hubert Harrison: The Voice of Harlem Radicalism, 1883-1918*, 1-18, 1. For much additional information on Harrison see <[http://www.jeffreybperry.net/center\\_3\\_hubert\\_harrison\\_br\\_life\\_legacy\\_some\\_writings\\_center\\_font\\_fon\\_86150.htm](http://www.jeffreybperry.net/center_3_hubert_harrison_br_life_legacy_some_writings_center_font_fon_86150.htm)>.

<sup>5</sup> Perry, *Hubert Harrison: The Voice of Harlem Radicalism, 1883-1918*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>6</sup> Hubert H. Harrison *The Negro and the Nation* (New York: Cosmo-Advocate Publishing Co., 1917) and Hubert H. Harrison, *When Africa Awakes: The Inside Story of the Stirrings and Strivings of the New Negro in the Western World* (New York: Porro Press, 1920). Many of his writings are available at <[http://books.google.com/books?id=BgNxbchLvpgC&printsec=frontcover&dq=hubert+harrison&hl=en&ei=rxx1TZCpNtSIteahYi-CA&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=book-thumbnail&resnum=2&ved=0CDgO6wEwAQ](http://books.google.com/books?id=BgNxbchLvpgC&printsec=frontcover&dq=hubert+harrison&hl=en&ei=rxx1TZCpNtSIteahYi-CA&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=book-thumbnail&resnum=2&ved=0CDgO6wEwAQ)> and at <[http://www.jeffreybperry.net/center\\_3\\_hubert\\_harrison\\_br\\_life\\_legacy\\_some\\_writings\\_center\\_font\\_fon\\_86150.htm](http://www.jeffreybperry.net/center_3_hubert_harrison_br_life_legacy_some_writings_center_font_fon_86150.htm)>; and Perry, *Hubert Harrison*, pp. 6-11. It should be noted that Harrison’s *The Voice: A Newspaper for the New Negro* (1917-1918) and the *New Negro* (1919) were rooted in social and political activism and extremely literary (they contained “Poetry for the People” and book review sections) and they were published eight and six years, respectively, before the publication of Alain Locke’s well-known, more middle-class, arts-based, and apolitical *New Negro* (1925). See Perry, ed., *A Hubert Harrison Reader*, p. 5 and p. 416 n. 26.

Harrison’s approximately 700 writings are available at Columbia University’s Rare Book and Manuscript Library (RBML) along with the 101-page Finding Aid. Both *A Hubert Harrison Reader* and *Hubert Harrison: The Voice of Harlem Radicalism* have in-depth introductions that provide useful

### Theodore W. Allen

Theodore W. “Ted” Allen was born in Indiana and “proletarianized by the Great Depression” in Huntington, West Virginia. At age 17 he joined the Communist Party and Local 362 of the American Federation of Musicians. He served as a delegate to the Huntington Central Labor Union, AFL, worked as a coal miner in West Virginia, and was a member of three different United Mine Workers locals including Local 6206 (Gary) where he was an organizer and Local President and where he co-organized a trade union organizing program for the Marion County West Virginia Industrial Union Council, CIO. After moving to New York in the late 1940s Allen did industrial economic research at the Labor Research Association, taught economics at the Communist Party’s Jefferson School (in the 1940s and 50s), and taught math at the Crown Heights Yeshiva in Brooklyn and the Grace Church School in New York. He left the Communist Party in the late 1950s and was an important theoretician in the short-lived Provisional Organizing Committee to Re-Constitute a Marxist-Leninist Communist Party in the U.S.A (POC) and later, in the similarly short-lived, Harper’s Ferry Organization. Over his last forty years, while living at the edge of poverty in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn, he worked as a factory worker, retail clerk, mechanical design draftsman, undergraduate instructor at Essex County College, postal mail handler (and member of Local 300 of the National Postal Mail Handlers Union), librarian (at the Brooklyn Public Library), and independent scholar.<sup>7</sup>

Allen pioneered his “white skin privilege” analysis in 1965,<sup>8</sup> co-authored *White Blindspot* in 1967 and authored the accompanying “Can White Workers Radicals Be

---

overviews of Harrison’s life. The “Introduction” from Vol. 1 of the Harrison biography can be found (sans notes) at <<http://cup.columbia.edu/book/978-0-231-13910-6/hubert-harrison/excerpt>>.

<sup>7</sup> Jeffrey B. Perry, “Introduction,” in Allen, *Class Struggle and the Origin of Racial Slavery*: for additional information on Allen see <[http://www.jeffreybperry.net/center\\_font\\_size\\_3\\_b\\_4\\_theodore\\_w\\_allen\\_br\\_with\\_audio\\_and\\_video\\_links\\_f\\_86151.htm](http://www.jeffreybperry.net/center_font_size_3_b_4_theodore_w_allen_br_with_audio_and_video_links_f_86151.htm)>. See also Perry, “In Memoriam: Theodore W. Allen.” A 2001 Gallup-Healthways Poll ranked Huntington, West Virginia (where Allen grew up and graduated from high school) lowest of 188 metropolitan areas in the “Well-Being Index.” The Well-Being Index is “an average of six sub-indexes, which individually examine life evaluation, emotional health, work environment, physical health, healthy behaviors, and access to basic necessities.” See Dan Wither, “Boulder, Colo., Leads U.S. Metro Areas in Wellbeing” (Washington, DC, March 15, 2011), available at <<http://www.gallup.com/poll/146645/boulder-colo-leads-metro-areas-wellbeing.aspx?version=print>>.

<sup>8</sup> Ted [Theodore W.] Allen, “A Call . . . John Brown Memorial Pilgrimage . . . December 4, 1965,” John Brown Commemoration Committee, 1965.



Radicalized?” (1969),<sup>9</sup> wrote the ground-breaking *Class Struggle and the Origin of Racial Slavery: The Invention of the White Race* in 1974/1975,<sup>10</sup> authored the seminal two-volume *The Invention of the White Race* in 1994 and 1997,<sup>11</sup> and wrote a number of extremely important published and unpublished pieces including “The Kernel and the

---

<sup>9</sup> J. H. Kagin (pseud. for Noel Ignatin [Ignatiev] and Ted [Theodore W.] Allen), “White Blindspot” (1967) and M. [reference to “Molly Pitcher” pseudo. for Theodore W. Allen] to Dear J. H. (Kagin), “A Letter of Support” in J. H. Kagin (pseud. for Theodore W. Allen and Noel Ignatiev) *White Blindspot* (Osawatomic Associates, 1967) rpt. along with Ted (Theodore W.) Allen, “Can White ~~Workers~~ Radicals Be Radicalized?” (c. 1968-69) as Noel Ignatin (Ignatiev) and Ted (Theodore W.) Allen, *White Blindspot & Can White ~~Workers~~ Radicals Be Radicalized?* (Detroit: The Radical Education Project and New York: NYC Revolutionary Youth Movement, 1969. John Henry Kagi (1835-1859) was an abolitionist and attorney who fought alongside John Brown at Harper’s Ferry and was killed there. He was also “Secretary of War” in Brown’s “provisional government.”

*White Blindspot*, as the printed versions were known, was based on Allen’s research and co-authored with Noel Ignatin (Ignatiev). It contained two parts at first, and then a third. Part 1 was an article entitled “White Blindspot” developed in 1966 and 1967 by both authors in conversations after Allen had introduced Ignatiev to what Ignatiev describes as “the notion that would become central to” the “White Blindspot.” That first article, which opened with two quotes from Du Bois as part of a letter to the Progressive Labor Party, appeared at first under the pseudonym J. H. Kagin, and then later under the name Ignatin, and was entitled “White Blindspot.” Although both Ignatiev and Allen worked on “White Blindspot,” based on correspondence in the Theodore W. Allen Papers and correspondence with Ignatiev it is clear that Ignatiev took the initiative and had final say on, and Allen had major input on, the contents of that article. Part 2 of *White Blindspot* was “A Letter of Support” that was written by Allen in 1967 and appeared at first under the pseudonym “M.” for “Molly Pitcher,” an Allen pseudonym, and then under the names of Allen and Esther Kusic. Part 3 was Allen’s “Can White ~~Workers~~ Radicals Be Radicalized?” (c. 1968-69). See Noel Ignatiev correspondence with Theodore W. Allen in Theodore W. Allen Papers, in possession of author and Noel Ignatiev to Jeffrey B. Perry, June 22 and 26, 2011, in possession of author.

Noel Ignatin (Ignatiev), “Author’s Note,” October 5, 1969, in Ignatiev and Allen, “*White Blindspot*” & “*Can White ~~Workers~~ Radicals Be Radicalized?*” writes: “In the fall of 1966, after some conversations with Ted Allen and Esther Kusic (who has just died and whose loss is felt deeply by those who knew her) I became convinced of the correctness of their position that the white-ski privilege has been the achille’ heel of the labor movement in the US, and that the fight against white supremacy (beginning among white workers, with the repudiation of the white-skin privilege) is the key to strategy for revolution in this country.”

Ignatiev further explains: “My first act in 1966 on finding myself outside the group [POC] was to get back in touch with Molly [Theodore W. Allen]. It was then he introduced me to his thinking on white-skin privilege, which he had developed after he left the POC [in 1962] . . . not to be too grandiose about it, if Ted was Darwin, I was his Huxley.” See Noel Ignatiev to author, June 17, 2005, possession of author.

<sup>10</sup> Allen’s thesis on the invention of the “white race” was first articulated in a February 23, 1974 talk he delivered at Yale University at a Union of Radical Political Economists meeting in New Haven. Versions of that talk include: Theodore William Allen, “Toward an Integral Theory of Early Colonial History (Ten Theses),” (n.p., 1974), Theodore W. Allen Papers, in possession of author; Theodore (W.) Allen, “ . . . They would have destroyed me’: Slavery and the Origins of Racism,” *Radical America* Vol. 9, no. 3 (May-June 1975), pp. 40-63 republished in *White Supremacy a Collection* (Chicago: Sojourner Truth Organization, 1976) online at <<http://www.sojournertruth.net/destroyedme.html>>; and Theodore W. Allen, *Class Struggle and the Origin of Racial Slavery: The Invention of the White Race* (Hoboken: Hoboken Education Project, 1975), republished in 2006 with an “Introduction” by Jeffrey B. Perry for The Center for the Study of Working Class Life, SUNY, Stony Brook, at <<http://clogic.eserver.org/2006/allen.html>>.

<sup>11</sup> Theodore W. Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*, Vol. I: *Racial Oppression and Social Control* (New York: Verso, 1994) and Vol. II: *The Origin of Racial Oppression in Anglo-America* (New York: Verso, 1997).

Meaning” (1972), “White Supremacy in U.S. History” (1973), “In Defense of Affirmative Action in Employment Policy” (1998), “‘Race’ and ‘Ethnicity’: History and the 2000 Census” (1999); “Toward a Revolution in Labor History” (2004), and critical reviews on Edmund S. Morgan’s *American Slavery, American Freedom* in 1978 and David Roediger’s *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* in 2001.<sup>12</sup>

Allen’s work influenced the Students for a Democratic Society and sectors of the “new left” and it paved the way for the “white privilege,” “race as social construct,” and “whiteness studies” academic fields. Though he appreciated much of the work that followed, he also offered criticisms of developments in those areas.<sup>13</sup> In addition, he pointed out that many who referenced his work mischaracterized it; in one case he felt his work was plagiarized; and, in a number of other cases, where his work was used, it was omitted from sources or not properly cited. Such practices did not encourage, and at times discouraged, the reading of his original writings and the sources that he so meticulously cited.<sup>14</sup>

In his work Allen focused on racial oppression and social control (the two volumes of his magnum opus are sub-titled *Racial Oppression and Social Control* and *The Origin of Racial Oppression in Anglo-America*) and he emphasized the centrality of

---

<sup>12</sup> Theodore W. Allen, “‘The Kernel and the Meaning’ . . . : A Contribution to a Proletarian Critique of United States History,” Part One – Civil War and Reconstruction: Crisis and Resolution (1972 [first draft version 1967]), 3, Theodore W. Allen Papers, in possession of author; Ted (Theodore W.) Allen, “White Supremacy in U.S. History,” A Speech Delivered at a *Guardian* Forum on the National Question, 28 April 1973, rpt. in *White Supremacy a Collection* (Chicago: Sojourner Truth Organization, 1976) online at <<http://www.sojournertruth.net/uafws.pdf>>; Theodore W. Allen, “Introduction to ‘The Kernel and the Meaning’ A Critique of Labor Historiography,” May 8, 2003, in possession of author; Theodore W. Allen, “In Defense of Affirmative Action in Employment Policy,” *Cultural Logic*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Spring 1998) at <<http://clogic.eserver.org/1-2/affirmative.html>>; Theodore W. Allen, “‘Race’ and ‘Ethnicity’: History and the 2000 Census,” *Cultural Logic*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Fall 1999) available at <<http://clogic.eserver.org/3-1&2/allen.html>>; Theodore W. Allen, “Toward a Revolution in Labor History: Outline of a book to be written by Theodore W. Allen,” January 5, 2004, in possession of author; Theodore W. Allen, “Slavery, Racism, and Democracy,” *Monthly Review*, Vol. 29, no. 10 (March 1978), pp. 57-63; and Theodore W. Allen, “On Roediger’s *Wages of Whiteness*” (Revised Edition),” *Cultural Logic*, IV, No. 2 (Spring 2001), at <<http://clogic.eserver.org/4-2/allen.html>>.

<sup>13</sup> See Perry, “Introduction,” in Allen, *Class Struggle*, i-xii; Theodore W. Allen, “Summary of the Argument of *The Invention of the White Race*,” Part 1, #8, *Cultural Logic*, I, No. 2 (Spring 1998), at <<http://clogic.eserver.org/1-2/allen.html>>; Allen, “On Roediger’s *Wages of Whiteness*” (Revised Edition), #66; and Theodore W. Allen, interview by Chad Pearson (in two parts) May 13 and 20, 2004, esp. Part 1, min. 28, at <<http://www.albany.edu/talkinghistory/arch2004jan-june.html>>.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Theodore W. Allen, “Memorandum to Cornell University Press Regarding Apparent Plagiarism,” 25 March 1989, Theodore W. Allen Papers, possession of author.

the fight against white supremacy to struggles for “democracy, progress and socialism” in the U.S.<sup>15</sup> He called for efforts to “dismantle the ‘white race’”<sup>16</sup> and he urged European-American workers to challenge white supremacy, to struggle in ongoing efforts to repudiate the system of white privileges, to break from “the incubus of white identity,” and to “resign from the white race,” which he understood to be a “ruling class social control formation” and a principal form of “class collaboration.”<sup>17</sup>

### **Harrison and Allen and the Centrality of the Struggle Against White Supremacy**

Harrison and Allen were both autodidactic, anti-white supremacist, working-class intellectuals. Though influential in their day (Harrison was extremely influential), their work has not received the wide-scale attention it merits for a host of reasons including that they lived and worked in poverty among the oppressed and exploited; they held no academic positions; they were critics of powerful forces and people; they were forthright and principled (though not mean-spirited) critics of positions that they did not agree with – including positions put forth by prominent academics, individuals, and organizations; and they had no major organizational ties in later life. In addition, Harrison faced white supremacist, anti-immigrant, anti-Caribbean, and color discriminations.

The most important reasons that Harrison and Allen are not better known, however, are that their analyses were so penetrating and so radical (particularly on race and class), they encouraged putting their ideas into practice, and they functioned in the most powerful country in the world – where numerous ways are found to marginalize, minimize, trivialize, ignore, or silence, such views and social practices.<sup>18</sup> While Harrison was mostly ignored and neglected for many years after his death, Allen’s writings were often mischaracterized, misunderstood, or misapplied by those who either dismissed them or drew from them for their own work. This article seeks to counter those past practices

---

<sup>15</sup> *White Blindspot*, 7.

<sup>16</sup> Allen, “On Roediger’s *Wages of Whiteness*” (Revised Edition), #61.

<sup>17</sup> Allen, “Toward a Revolution in Labor History,” January 5, 2004, p. 1; Theodore W. Allen, Taped Interview with Chad Pearson, SUNY-Albany, May 13, 2004, minute 12:10; and Theodore W. Allen to Lenny Zeskind, March 1979, 6-7, possession of author.

Allen preferred “repudiate” because he felt it was “more all inclusive than reject.” He also challenged the notion of “‘repudiation’ as a [single] complete act” and emphasized that repudiation was an “ongoing” struggle. See Theodore W. Allen, hand-written comments in his personal copy of *A House Divided: Labor and White Supremacy*, p. 113, in Theodore W. Allen Papers, in possession of author.

<sup>18</sup> At the same time numerous ways were found to publish and promote far less important analyses.

and to encourage meaningful engagement with some of their insights that are related to the struggle against white supremacy.

Hubert Harrison and Theodore W. Allen pointed to white supremacy as the historic principal retardant to social change efforts in the U.S. They emphasized that struggle against white supremacy was central to efforts at social change. Given the unfolding conjuncture and the directness and clarity with which they addressed issues of race and class, their insights deserve considerable attention, particularly from those interested in efforts to end white supremacist bourgeois domination in the United States.

Before looking further into Harrison and Allen's insights, it is instructive to review some aspects of the current conjuncture.<sup>19</sup>

### **Some Class and Racial Aspects of the Conjuncture**

#### **Deepening Economic Crisis**

On June 25, 2010, the Congressional Budget Office reported that the after-tax income gaps between the richest one percent and the middle and poorest fifths in the United States had more than tripled between 1979 and 2007. The concentration at the top of the income scale was the greatest at any time since 1928, immediately prior to the Great Depression.<sup>20</sup> With the gap between rich and poor so vast, and with poor and working people increasingly limited in their spending, it came as little surprise when the Nobel Prize-winning economist Paul Krugman wrote in his June 27, 2010 *New York Times* column what millions of Americans already knew – the United States was in a depression. He called it “The Third Depression,” after those of the 1870s and 1930s, and

---

<sup>19</sup> Most of the statistics in this section were obtained through August 9, 2010. In general, the conditions that they describe have worsened since that time.

<sup>20</sup> Arloc Sherman and Chad Stone, “Income Gaps Between Very Rich and Everyone Else More than Triples in Last Three Decades, New Data Show,” Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, June 25, 2010, <<http://www.cbpp.org/cms/index.cfm?fa=view&id=3220>>. In the May 2011 issue of *Vanity Fair* Joseph E. Stiglitz elaborated further. He pointed out that “1 percent of the people take nearly a quarter of the nation’s income” and “in terms of wealth rather than income, the top 1 percent control 40 percent.” See also Joseph E. Stiglitz, “Of the 1%, by the 1%, for the 1%,” *Vanity Fair* (May 2011) online at <<http://www.vanityfair.com/society/features/2011/05/top-one-percent-201105>>.

he predicted that “tens of millions” of American workers would suffer, “many of whom will go jobless for years” including some who “will never work again.”<sup>21</sup>

Facts supported Krugman’s contentions. On July 1, 2010, the Bureau of Labor Statistics announced that 14.6 million Americans were unemployed, 45.5% of these were long-term unemployed (27 weeks or more), and the official unemployment rate was 9.5 percent. Another 8.6 million were listed as involuntarily working part-time and 2.6 million more were marginally attached to the economy (they hadn’t looked for work in the four weeks preceding the survey). Included in this group were 1.2 million “discouraged workers” who had given up looking for work “because they believe no jobs are available for them.” Overall, the BLS counted 25.8 million workers unemployed/underemployed, some 17 percent of the workforce.<sup>22</sup> Other workers were turning to the Social Security Administration’s disability program for help and the SSA’s chief actuary predicted “roughly a million more disability applications from 2009 through 2011 than it would have without the recession.”<sup>23</sup> Approximately 40 million Americans, 13.2% of the population, were living in poverty,<sup>24</sup> fifty percent of children would need food stamps while growing up,<sup>25</sup> over 46 million Americans were without healthcare,<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> Paul Krugman, “The Third Depression,” *New York Times*, June 27, 2010, A 19, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/28/opinion/28krugman.html>>. Theodore W. Allen described such a crisis as “a capitalist crisis of overproduction.” He explained, “The crisis of overproduction means . . . you can get anything you want if you have the money. But you ain’t . . . [the crisis is] not of underproduction, but of over-production of Kapital.” See Theodore W. Allen, “A Transcript of Ted Allen’s Talk on the Domestic Economic Situation,” March 2, 1974 – Chicago, p. 6, copy in possession of author.

<sup>22</sup> United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Employment Situation Summary,” July 2, 2010, <[http://www.bls.gov/news.release/archives/empst\\_07022010.htm](http://www.bls.gov/news.release/archives/empst_07022010.htm)>. In addition, on July 2 the *New York Times* reported that 652,000 Americans stopped searching for work in June. See Michael Powell, “Recovery Slows with Weak Job Creation in Private Sector,” *New York Times*, July 2, 2010, at <[http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/03/business/economy/03jobs.html?\\_r=1&scp=1&sq=michael%20powell%20recovery%20slows&st=cse](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/03/business/economy/03jobs.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=michael%20powell%20recovery%20slows&st=cse)>.

<sup>23</sup> Conor Dougherty, “Beyond the Bubble: The Long Slog: Out of Work, Out of Hope,” *Wall Street Journal* (Eastern Edition), September 25, 2010, p. A 1.

<sup>24</sup> Carmen DeNavas-Walt, Bernadette D. Proctor, and Jessica C. Smith, U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, P60-236, *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2008* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2009), p. 13, <<http://www.docstoc.com/docs/11087842/Income-Poverty-and-Health-Insurance-Coverage-in-the-United-States-2008>>.

<sup>25</sup> Susan Lang, “Half of U.S. Children – and Most Black Children – Will Use Food Stamps,” Cornell University, *Chronicleonline*, November 3, 2009, <<http://www.news.cornell.edu/stories/Nov09/KidsFoodStamps.html>>, citing Mark R. Rank and Thomas A. Hirschl, “Estimating the Risk of Food Stamp Use and Impoverishment During Childhood,” *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, No. 163 (11) (November, 2009), pp. 994-99.

home foreclosures hit a record high of 937,840 in the third quarter of 2009,<sup>27</sup> and a newly developed Economic Security Index found that 20 percent of Americans without a financial cushion experienced a 25 percent or greater loss of household income in 2009 (and conditions were expected to worsen).<sup>28</sup>

### **U.S. Workers Faring Badly**

Joseph E. Stiglitz, another Nobel Prize-winning economist, emphasized in *Freefall: America, Free Markets, and the Shrinking of the World Economy* (2010) that this “‘Made in the U.S.A.’ crisis” has “‘quickly spread round the world” and since 2008 “‘tens of millions lost their jobs worldwide – 20 million in China alone – and tens of millions fell into poverty.’”<sup>29</sup> In addition to recognizing the devastating consequences worldwide, it is especially important to emphasize that poor and working people in the United States are not faring well either. The World Health Organization reported that “‘the U.S. health system spends a higher portion of its gross domestic product than any other country,” but it ranked 37<sup>th</sup> in performance.<sup>30</sup> The Social Security Administration found that “‘50 percent of wage earners had net compensation [wages, tips, and the like] less than or equal to . . . \$26,261.29 [\$505 per week/\$12.63 per hour pre-tax] for 2009.”<sup>31</sup> America, according to Michelle Alexander in *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in*

---

<sup>26</sup> DeNavas-Walt, et al., *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage*, 66. A Harvard Medical School study indicated that this resulted in 45,000 preventable deaths per year. See “Harvard Medical Study Links Lack of Insurance to 45,000 U.S. Deaths a Year,” *New York Times*, September 17, 2009, at <<http://prescriptions.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/09/17/harvard-medical-study-links-lack-of-insurance-to-45000-us-deaths-a-year/?emc=eta1>>.

<sup>27</sup> Les Christie, “Foreclosures: ‘Worst Three Months of All Time,’” CNNMoney.com, October 15, 2009, <[http://money.cnn.com/2009/10/15/real\\_estate/foreclosure\\_crisis\\_deepens/?postversion=2009101507](http://money.cnn.com/2009/10/15/real_estate/foreclosure_crisis_deepens/?postversion=2009101507)>.

<sup>28</sup> Jacob S. Hacker, et al., “Economic Security at Risk: Findings from the Economic Security Index,” July 2010, available at <[http://nw-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/pdf/ESI\\_report\\_embargoed\\_until\\_7-22\\_low-res.pdf](http://nw-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/pdf/ESI_report_embargoed_until_7-22_low-res.pdf)> and at the bottom of <<http://www.stateoftheusa.org/content/report-economic-security-slidi.php>>. Conditions did, in fact, worsen for millions. By the end of March 2011 former Secretary of Labor Robert Reich pointed out “‘consumers are 70 percent of the American economy,” their “‘confidence is plummeting,” and is “‘weaker today on average than at the lowest point of the Great Recession.” See Robert Reich, “The Economic Truth That Nobody Will Admit: We’re Heading Back Toward a Double Dip,” March 31, 2011, *Huffpost Business*, April 7, 2011, at <[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/robert-reich/the-truth-about-the-econo\\_b\\_842998.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/robert-reich/the-truth-about-the-econo_b_842998.html)>.

<sup>29</sup> Joseph E. Stiglitz, *Freefall: America, Free Markets, and the Shrinking of the World Economy* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2010), p. 1.

<sup>30</sup> “World Health Organization Assesses the World’s Health Systems,” June 21, 2000, <[http://www.who.int/whr/2000/media\\_centre/press\\_release/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/whr/2000/media_centre/press_release/en/index.html)>.

<sup>31</sup> Social Security Online, “Wage Statistics for 2009,” at <<http://www.ssa.gov/cgi-bin/netcomp.cgi?year=2009>>.

*the Age of Colorblindness* (2010), has “the highest rate of incarceration in the world.”<sup>32</sup> At a June 2010 Congressional Summit it was reported that “incarceration rates have increased 800 percent in the last 30 years” and that “90 percent of all criminal defendants fall below the poverty line.”<sup>33</sup> The Economic Policy Institute compared the U.S. to 19 other industrialized countries and found that it had “weaker unions, lower minimum wages, [and] less generous social benefits” than the other countries. Not only do U.S. workers work more hours than those in these other countries, they do so without statutorily paid public holidays and they are alone amongst this group in not receiving statutorily paid vacation time. Most significantly, on the two major measures of household income inequality (the Gini coefficient and the ratio of 90<sup>th</sup>-to-10<sup>th</sup> percentile), the U.S. showed the greatest inequality.<sup>34</sup>

### **White Supremacist Shaping**

In the United States the suffering and hardship reflected in these and other areas are intensified by racial oppression. In July 2010 Black unemployment was reported at 15.6%, white unemployment was 8.6%; in 2008 Black poverty was reported at 24.7%, “non-Hispanic White” poverty was 8.6%.<sup>35</sup> Ninety percent of Black children will be on food stamps at some point while growing up.<sup>36</sup> Stark racial disparities exist, and in general have increased, in jobs, housing, health care, education, incarceration and every major social and economic indicator measured in the Urban League’s *State of Black America 2009*. That report describes “persistent inequalities” in American society and utilizes an “Equality Index” that considers five areas – economics, health, education, social justice, and civic engagement in order to compare Black to “white” equality (with equality being 100% and an index of less than 100% indicating that Black people are

---

<sup>32</sup> Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2010), p. 6.

<sup>33</sup> American Civil Liberties Union, Blog of Rights, June 24, 2010, “Innocent Until Proven Indigent,” <<http://www.aclu.org/blog/racial-justice/innocent-until-proven-indigent>>.

<sup>34</sup> Lawrence Mishel, Jared Bernstein, and Heidi Shierholtz, *The State of Working America 2008/2009* (Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute, 2009), Chapter 8, “International Comparisons,” pp. 357, 365, 367, 380. The nineteen other industrialized countries include France, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Canada, Belgium, Denmark, Sweden, New Zealand, Iceland, Norway, Italy, Australia, United Kingdom, Spain, Finland, Japan, Greece, and Ireland.

<sup>35</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Employment Situation Summary,” July 2, 2010 and DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, and Smith, *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2008*,” p. 15.

<sup>36</sup> Lang, “Half of U.S. Children – and Most Black Children – Will Use Food Stamps.”

doing worse relative to “whites”). The overall Equality Index is 71.1%. The index for economics is 57.4%, social justice 60.4%, health 74.4%, education 78.5%, and civic engagement 96.3%.<sup>37</sup>

Incarceration figures are staggering. Black males are incarcerated “at a rate more than six times higher than white males” and Black females at a rate over 3.6 times that of white females.<sup>38</sup> Alexander, in *The New Jim Crow*, emphasizes that “no other country in the world imprisons so many of its racial or ethnic minorities” and she describes how America has “a set of structured arrangements that locks . . . [African Americans] into a subordinate political, social, and economic position, effectively creating a second class citizenship.”<sup>39</sup> Jan M. Chaiken, Director of the Bureau of Justice Statistics, found “approximately 30 percent of black men ages 20 to 29 were under correctional supervision” and “a young black man age 18 . . . had a 28.5 percent chance of spending time in prison during his life.”<sup>40</sup>

Alexander’s work focuses on the criminal justice system and the “racialized social control” system that she wishes to “dismantle” and it describes “mass incarceration,” much of it rooted in the white supremacist “War on Drugs,” as “the most damaging manifestation of the backlash against the Civil Rights Movement.” In her book she explains that the “current system of social control permanently locks a large percentage of the African American community out of the mainstream society and economy” through a “system of laws, policies, customs, and institutions, that operate collectively to

---

<sup>37</sup> Wilson, “Introduction to the 2009 Equality Index,” in *The State of Black America 2009*, 15-41, esp. pp. 15-17. All of these numbers with the exception of health declined from the previous year and in that area some 19.5% of African Americans had no health insurance. Thomas M. Shapiro, Tatjana Meschede, and Laura Sullivan, “The Racial Wealth Gap Increases, Fourfold,” May 2010, Institute on Assets and Social Policy, Heller School, Brandeis University, <<http://iasp.brandeis.edu/whatsnew/index.html>>. At the end of March 2011 the Urban League reported that its 2011 Equality Index stood at 71.5% and that “Since the publication of the 2010 index, we have observed growing gaps in the relative status of blacks and whites in the areas of loan access, wealth, and children’s health.” See National Urban League, *Executive Summary: The State of Black America 2011 Jobs Rebuild America: Putting Urban America Back to Work*, March 31, 2011, pp. 2-3.

<sup>38</sup> U.S. Office of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, “Number of State Prisoners Declined by Almost 3,000 During 2009; Federal Prison Population Increased by 6,800,” June 23, 2010, <<http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/pub/press/pim09stpy09acpr.cfm>>.

<sup>39</sup> Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, pp. 59, 180.

<sup>40</sup> Jan M. Chaiken, “Crunching Numbers: Crime and Incarceration at the End of the Millennium,” *National Institute of Justice Journal*, January 2000, pp. 10-17, esp. p. 14, <<http://www.ncjrs.gov/App/publications/Abstract.aspx?id=180078>>. Chaiken explained that “in prison” reflected “actual prison sentences, which ordinarily are for at least a year and follow a conviction for a felony.”



ensure the subordinate status of a group defined largely by race.” She also details how “mass incarceration marginalizes large sections of the African American community, segregates them physically (in prisons, jails, and ghettos)” and then “authorizes discrimination against them in voting, employment, housing, education, public benefits, and jury service.” Alexander also advises: “Whites should prove their commitment to dismantling not only mass incarceration, but all the structures of racial inequality that guarantee for whites the resilience of white privilege.”<sup>41</sup>

### **Wisconsin**

In early 2011 much of the nation’s attention focused on attacks on working people and public sector unions, centering on struggles in Madison, Wisconsin. A few related race and class aspects of that situation merit attention.

First, the public sector, nationally, according to Steven Pitts, of the University of California Berkeley Center for Labor Research and Education, “is the single most important source of employment for African Americans.”<sup>42</sup> Both in terms of membership in those unions and in terms of the constituencies they serve, African Americans are hit hard by such attacks.

Second, other attacks on working people, along the lines that Alexander describes, have been occurring throughout the state. Though much less discussed, these attacks and their interconnection with the more publicly visible events in Madison are important. Wisconsin, which has less than a six percent Black population (and a history that includes nine “all-white” “sundown towns”), has the second highest rate of Black incarceration of any state in the country. Milwaukee, 80 miles from Madison, is the state’s largest city with the largest Black population and has been ranked the nation’s most segregated metropolitan area and the nation’s first or second most segregated city. According to Marc V. Levine of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, in 2009, the most recent year for which data were available, “a staggering 53.3 percent of metro Milwaukee’s working age African American males were not employed: either unemployed, or, for various

---

<sup>41</sup> Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, pp. 10-11, 13, 17, 19, 59, 94, and 244.

<sup>42</sup> Steven Pitts, “Research Brief: Black Workers and the Public Sector,” University of California Berkeley, Center for Labor Research and Education, April 4, 2011, p. 1. Pitts also points out (p. 2) that “Prior to the [current] recession the wage differential between Black and white workers was less in the public sector than in the overall economy.”

reasons (including incarceration), not even in the labor force.” Levine points out that “*This is the highest jobless rate among working age black males ever recorded in Milwaukee,*” which, he notes, also has “the widest racial disparity in jobless rates among forty of the nation’s largest metropolitan areas.” Milwaukee, though extreme, is not alone, however, and the “jobless” figures for adult Black males in other cities are similar: Detroit – 59.5%, Cleveland – 52.3%, Buffalo – 52.3%, Chicago 50.3%, Pittsburgh 50.3%, and so on.<sup>43</sup>

A direct connection between the attack on labor rights and the incarceration, segregation, and lack of job opportunities for African Americans is found in the story of how Governor Scott Walker, the outspoken opponent of labor rights in Wisconsin, rose in Republican Party ranks as a state representative from a small city outside Milwaukee (Wauwatosa – “white” population approx. 94%, Black population approx. 2%). As a county executive from Milwaukee County, he was a leading opponent of a public transit bill that sought to connect the city to the suburbs, a bill that would have increased access to jobs for Black workers from inner city Milwaukee, and thus would have posed a potential challenge to white supremacist housing segregation and employment patterns.

### **Millions Are Suffering and Conditions Are Worsening**

Overall, the facts of the current conjuncture indicate that millions of poor and working people are suffering under U.S. capitalism, that millions are suffering under the white supremacist shaping of this system, that these conditions are inter-related, and that these conditions are worsening.<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup> Marc V. Levine, “Research Update: The Crisis Deepens: Black Male Joblessness in Milwaukee 2009,” Working Paper, October 2010 (University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Center for Economic Development,” pp. 2, 3, 11, available online at <[http://www4.uwm.edu/ced/publications/blackjoblessness\\_2010.pdf](http://www4.uwm.edu/ced/publications/blackjoblessness_2010.pdf)>; Daniel Denvir, “The Ten Most Segregated Urban Areas in America,” *Salon*, March 31, 2011, available at <[http://www.salon.com/news/politics/war\\_room/2011/03/29/most\\_segregated\\_cities/slideshow.html](http://www.salon.com/news/politics/war_room/2011/03/29/most_segregated_cities/slideshow.html)>; Harry Bradford, “America’s Ten Most Segregated Cities,” Huffpost, April 7, 2011 online at <[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/04/07/americas-10-most-segregated-cities\\_n\\_845092.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/04/07/americas-10-most-segregated-cities_n_845092.html)>; and The Sentencing Project, *Uneven Justice: State Rates of Incarceration by Race and Ethnicity* (Washington, DC, July 1907), p. 8 available online at <[http://www.sentencingproject.org/doc/publications/rd\\_stateratesofinbyraceandethnicity.pdf](http://www.sentencingproject.org/doc/publications/rd_stateratesofinbyraceandethnicity.pdf)>. James W. Loewen, *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism* (New York: The New Press, 2005), pp. 2, 5, defines a sundown town as “any organized jurisdiction that for decades kept African Americans or other groups from living in it and was thus ‘all-white’ on purpose.” He found nine sundown towns in Wisconsin.

<sup>44</sup> See for example Heidi Shierholz and Kathryn Anne Edwards, “The Class of 2011: Young Workers Face a Dire Labor Market Without a Safety Net,” Economic Policy Institute, April 20, 2011, at

The lives and work of Hubert Harrison and Theodore W. Allen offer important insights for understanding and challenging such conditions. It is to some of these insights that we now turn.<sup>45</sup>

### **Insights from Hubert Harrison**

#### **Arrival in America, Contrast with St. Croix**

Hubert Harrison emigrated from St. Croix, Danish West Indies to the United States in 1900 as an impoverished seventeen-year-old orphan. His arrival in New York came shortly after that city's fourth major "race riot" and coincided with the period of intense racial oppression of African Americans marked by lynching, segregation, disfranchisement, and peonage that historian Rayford Logan described as "the nadir" in post-Emancipation "race relations."<sup>46</sup>

On arrival, Harrison encountered a vicious white supremacy that was quite unlike anything he knew previously. The key was that "the color line" was drawn differently in the U.S. than in St. Croix (a fact that exemplified what he later referred to as "the shifting reality of race"). In St. Croix, where 80% of the population was Black, 5% European, and 15% "colored" (of mixed African and European ancestry), the greatly outnumbered European ruling elite had, *for social control reasons*, implemented a policy of promotion of a significant sector of the African-descended population. During slavery, "free coloreds" served in the militia, the principal instrument of social control, and in 1834 they were extended an "Edict of Full Equality." In contrast, in the U.S., slave patrols

---

<<http://www.epi.org/publications/entry/bp306-class-of-2011/>>, which says that "In 2010, the unemployment rate for workers age 16-24 was 18.4% – the worst on record in the 60 years that this data has been tracked." See also Ruth Helman, Mathew Greenwald & Associates, and Craig Copeland and Jack VanDerhei, "The 2011 Retirement Confidence Survey: Confidence Drops to Record Lows, Reflecting 'the New Normal,'" *Issue Brief*, No. 355 (Employee Benefit Research Institute, March 2011) at <[http://www.ebri.org/pdf/surveys/rcs/2011/EBRI\\_03-2011\\_No355\\_RCS-11.pdf](http://www.ebri.org/pdf/surveys/rcs/2011/EBRI_03-2011_No355_RCS-11.pdf)>.

<sup>45</sup> Much information on the wide-ranging Harrison, in addition to his work on the centrality of the fight against white supremacy, has recently been made available through *A Hubert Harrison Reader, Hubert Harrison: The Voice of Harlem Radicalism, 1883-1918*, and through access to the Hubert H. Harrison Papers at Columbia University. Allen's Papers are not yet publicly available, however, and that fact prompted a decision to include more from his writings in the extended section on his work.

<sup>46</sup> Perry, *Hubert Harrison: The Voice of Harlem Radicalism, 1883-1918*, p. 4 and Rayford W. Logan, *The Betrayal of the Negro: From Rutherford B. Hayes to Woodrow Wilson*, new enlarged ed., originally published as *The Negro in American Thought and Life: The Nadir, 1877-1901* (1954: New York, The Macmillan Company), pp. 11, 62.

were “lily white,” Black people, as codified in the Dred Scott decision of 1856-57, “had no rights that a white was bound to respect,” and the general policy was one of severe racial proscription for African Americans.<sup>47</sup>

The contrasting promotion vs. proscription policies led to markedly different social practices. In St. Croix there was no history of lynch terror and no formal segregation; class promotion among people of African descent was fostered, and white supremacy was not as virulent or as organized as in the United States. Harrison and other early twentieth-century Afro-Caribbean immigrants coming from countries with similar tripartite social structures often commented on the difference between the U.S. and their homelands. When Harrison, at age twenty, first started writing letters in the *New York Times* he was prompted by the racial oppression he encountered in the United States. He expressed “shock” at the horror of, and support for, lynching in America and explained that he was “a Negro who feels the injustice and veiled oppression under which his race struggles” in the U.S. His friend, Jamaica-born Claude McKay, explained that when he came to the U.S. it marked “the first time” he “had ever come face to face with such manifest, implacable hatred of my race,” and though he had heard of prejudice in America he “never dreamed of it being so intensely bitter.”<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> Perry, *Hubert Harrison*, 30-34, 414-18 and Jeffrey B. Perry, ed. and intro, *A Hubert Harrison Reader* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 317. Neville A. T. Hall, *Slave Society in the Danish West Indies: St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix*, ed. B. W. Higman, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), p. 160, describes the “incipient class formation” through systematic promotion of “coloreds” into intermediate positions.

<sup>48</sup> Perry, *Hubert Harrison*, 63-64 and Hubert Harrison, “A Negro on Lynching,” *New York Times*, June 28, 1903. Consistent with Harrison’s use of the word “shock,” Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*, p. 1: 113, writes that early twentieth-century Caribbean immigrants to the U.S. “experienced the ‘cultural shock’ of the transition from the class-based ‘tri-partite social order’ with its African-Caribbean ‘colored’ intermediate stratum, to the white-supremacist social order in the United States.” See also Claude McKay, “A Negro Poet and His Poems,” *Pearson’s Magazine*, September 1918, p. 275, cited in Perry, *Hubert Harrison*, 32. Harrison and McKay, like many other Caribbean immigrants coming from the “tri-partite social order” at home, would lead quite active and radical lives after encountering the virulent white supremacy in the U.S. Historian Winston James emphasizes “the prominence and often pre-eminence of Caribbean immigrants” in American radicalism. See Perry, *Hubert Harrison*, p. 51, p. 427 n. 84 and Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America*, (New York: Verso, 1998), p. 1. Allen, “‘Race’ and ‘Ethnicity’: History and the 2000 Census,” writes that “whereas European-American radicalism and trade unionism was fundamentally accommodationist with regard to white supremacy, the Caribbean-American radicalism . . . was predicated on a rejection of and struggle against white supremacy.”

### **Socialist Party Writings**

In the 1911-1914 period Harrison was an extremely popular indoor and outdoor socialist speaker and writer. He agitated about how “the revolution is not coming from above, but from below, working its way up from the depths” and he emphasized that the capitalist “creates and keeps alive race prejudice” because “it pays the capitalist to keep the workers divided.” The *New York Times* vividly described how he once spoke for *three hours* on socialism to a rapt audience in front of the New York Stock Exchange at Broad and Wall Streets in Manhattan. Overall, he was unrivalled as the Socialist Party’s foremost Black speaker.<sup>49</sup>

From his earliest socialist writings, Harrison was an ardent opponent of class exploitation and racial oppression. When he became fully active with the Socialist Party around 1911 it was the self-proclaimed “party of the working class,” yet it had few Black members, paid little attention to “the Negro Question,” and took positions ranging from outright support for white supremacy to the “color blind” stance of Eugene V. Debs. Harrison quickly made major theoretical contributions when he wrote articles on the socio-historical development of “The Negro Problem” in the U.S. He made the struggle against white supremacy central to his efforts; criticized “racism is innate” arguments; considered enslaved African Americans as proletarians; and emphasized that “race prejudice” and “the inferior economic status of the colored race” were “in the interests of the capitalists of America,” not in the class interest of workers. As a socialist theoretician he argued that “the Negro” as “a group is more essentially proletarian than any other group” and he advocated that the Socialists champion the cause of African Americans as a revolutionary doctrine and affirm the duty of all Socialists to oppose race prejudice. Harrison’s treatment of the “Negro Question” as a socio-historically developed and “revolutionary” question and his emphasis on the duty of “whites” to oppose white supremacy foreshadowed theoretical positions taken by the Communist Party and the Communist International in the 1928-30 period. Drawing from the efforts of autonomous women’s clubs and foreign language federations, he urged that special appeals be made to and for African Americans and he initiated a Colored Socialist Club to do that

---

<sup>49</sup> Perry, *A Hubert Harrison Reader*, pp. 173, 191, 193, 210 and “Enlightening Wall Street,” *New York Times*, September 14, 1912.

outreach. His proposal that “the crucial test of Socialism’s sincerity” was the duty to champion the cause of African Americans anticipated by more than a year Du Bois’ dictum that the “Negro Problem . . . [is] the great test of the American Socialists.”<sup>50</sup>

### **“Southernism or Socialism – which?”**

Harrison’s experience with the Socialists is instructive. In a major theoretical article prior to the 1912 Socialist Party convention, he cited instances of white supremacy within the Party including “dirty diatribes against the Negro” in a Socialist paper in Texas and segregation at a meeting in Tennessee. He then pointedly raised the challenge: “Southernism or Socialism – which?” When Harrison boldly placed his “Southernism or Socialism” challenge before the national Socialist Party leadership he also suggested what the response should be. He addressed the two large factions in the Party, the political (evolutionary) and the industrial (revolutionary) Socialists, on their own terms. In each case, using the logic of their theoretical positions, he called for special emphasis on African Americans in the interests of the working class.<sup>51</sup>

First he addressed the political socialists. Harrison agreed that the power of the working class could be expressed through the ballot and that with good political organization the workers could “secure control of the powers of government by electing members of the working class to office.” Then, they could “secure legislation in the interests of the working class until such time as the workers may be able, by being in overwhelming control of the government, to ‘alter or abolish it, and to institute a new government.’” He stressed, however, that in this work for “the abolition of capitalism, by legislation,” the “Negro, who feels most fiercely the deep damnation of the capitalist system[,] can help.”<sup>52</sup>

While recognizing the need for political work in electoral politics, Harrison also sought to reach the revolutionary socialists. He recognized that there were serious problems to be faced – the majority of African Americans, particularly in the South, were

---

<sup>50</sup> Perry, *A Hubert Harrison Reader*, pp. 4 and 73, quotes pp. 99, 307 and Perry, *Hubert Harrison*, pp. 7, 141-45. See for example the 1928 and 1930 Communist International Resolutions on the Negro Question in the United States. The 1928 Resolution appeared in *The Daily Worker*, the newspaper of the Workers (Communist) Party of America, on 12 February 1929. The 1930 Resolution was published in *The Communist International*, VIII: 2 (1 February 1931).

<sup>51</sup> Perry, *Hubert Harrison*, pp. 183-84.

<sup>52</sup> Perry, *Hubert Harrison*, pp. 183-84.

disfranchised. This fact led him to argue for the importance of workplace organizing and he agitated for an Industrial Workers of the World (IWW)-type, point-of-production economic organizing, even in the South. He emphasized that “even the voteless proletarian can in a measure help toward the final abolition of the capitalist system.” These workers, though absent the ballot, possess “labor power – which they can be taught to withhold” and they can organize themselves “at the point of production” and “work to shorten the hours of labor, to raise wages . . . [and] to enforce laws for the protection of labor.” He noted that the Western Federation of Miners, an IWW union, had done this and had successfully won the eight-hour workday “without the aid of the legislatures or the courts.”<sup>53</sup> This approach required “a progressive control of the tools of production and a progressive expropriation of the capitalist class.” Harrison had clearly put forth his strategic contribution, his new “crucial test,” for U.S. Socialists – “to champion” the cause of the “Negro.”

### **The Socialist Party Put [the “White”] Race First and Class After**

The Socialist Party responded at its 1912 Convention by ignoring “the Negro Question” and, in its discussion on Asian immigration, it took some of the most white supremacist positions in its history, replete with calls for “restricting the invasion of the white man’s domain by other races” and with a majority resolution in opposition to Asian Immigration that maintained that “class consciousness must be learned, but race-consciousness is inborn and cannot be wholly unlearned.”<sup>54</sup> This, of course, was the “racism is innate” position that Harrison saw at the core of so-much white supremacist thought. As Harrison, who had previously challenged such positions, was leaving the Party, he criticized the Southern Socialists for being “southerners’ first and ‘Socialists’ after” and he offered what is arguably the most profound, but least heeded criticism, in U.S. left history. He stated simply that the Socialist Party [like the labor movement] has

---

<sup>53</sup> Perry, *Hubert Harrison*, p. 184.

<sup>54</sup> Perry, *Hubert Harrison*, pp. 75, 109, 115, 183, 186-187 and Socialist Party, *National Convention of the Socialist Party Held at Indianapolis, IN, May 12 to 18, 1912* (Chicago, 1912), p. 210.

“insisted on [white] Race First and class after”; that it put “[the white] race first, before class.”<sup>55</sup>

At the 1912 National Convention the Socialist Party not only took its “white race” first position on the immigration question; it also, as historian Sally M. Miller has explained, “abruptly terminated” activities of its woman’s sector. After years of intensive work, the Woman’s National Committee “was phased out by the National Executive Committee” of the Party. In the period after the convention woman’s work was increasingly denied financial assistance and “meetings were discouraged while further propaganda or organizational work were simply suspended.” The demise of the Woman’s Clubs had been preceded by, and was in some ways similar to, the demise of the Harrison-initiated Colored Socialist Club, the Party’s effort at special work among African Americans.<sup>56</sup>

### **Class Consciousness, White Supremacy, and the Duty to Champion the Cause of the Negro**

Harrison’s writings while a member of the Socialist Party put forth an important understanding of class consciousness based on an explicit challenge to white supremacy, to white supremacist exclusion of Asian immigrants, and to the exclusion of Black workers from unions. This understanding included an innovative call for socialists to make special efforts at reaching the African American masses (who were overwhelmingly working class). For Harrison, the key issue for socialist activists was not political action versus direct action, or whether or not to work within the American Federation of Labor, but, rather, the “duty to champion” the cause of “the Negro.” Harrison viewed “the Negro [as] the touchstone of the modern democratic idea” and he considered the struggle against white supremacy as central to efforts for socialism.<sup>57</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> Perry, *A Hubert Harrison Reader*, pp. 109, 115, 183, 215. Harrison’s comments take on much added significance in light of the work of Theodore W. Allen on the “white race,” class consciousness, and social control.

<sup>56</sup> Jeffrey B. Perry, “Hubert Harrison (1883-1927): Race Consciousness and the Struggle for Socialism,” *Socialism and Democracy*, Vol. 2, no. 17 (No. 34, Summer-Fall, 2003), pp. 103-129, esp. p. 114 and Sally M. Miller, “Other Socialists: Native Born and Immigrant Women in the Socialist Party of America, 1900-1917,” *Labor History*, 24, No. 1 (Winter 1983), pp. 84-102, esp. 101.

<sup>57</sup> Perry, *A Hubert Harrison Reader*, pp. 54 and 73.



An investigation into the relation between white supremacy and class consciousness in the United States, offers insights into one of the most important questions in U.S. left history – what German scholar Werner Sombart asked in 1906, and what many have asked since – “Why is there no socialism in the United States?” The answer that Harrison repeatedly suggested was that there was no socialism because “whites,” particularly “white” socialists and “white” workers, put the “white race” first, before class. Over time Harrison would stress that race consciousness among Black people was necessary, not only as a measure of self-defense, but also as a means of challenging white supremacy (which was the principle roadblock to class consciousness among European Americans) and that this was especially needed when “white” socialists and “white” workers would not pose those challenges.<sup>58</sup>

### **On “The Touchstone” and the Two-Fold Character of “Democracy” in America**

Harrison’s class consciousness and anti-white-supremacist race consciousness led him to offer profound insights on the two-fold character of “democracy” in America – that is, when it is a “whites only” (or a white supremacist-shaped) “democracy” it is a retardant to social progress; when it is thoroughgoing and genuine, it is a catalyst for progressive social change.<sup>59</sup>

In 1911 in the Socialist Party of New York’s *Call* he wrote: “Politically, the Negro is the touchstone of the modern democratic idea. The presence of the Negro puts our democracy to the proof and reveals the falsity of it.” A touchstone is a black stone used to test the purity of gold. As such it is also a metaphor that can be applied widely to test the degree of equality – socially, politically, and economically – in America. Every area where political work is undertaken – housing, employment, education, healthcare,

---

<sup>58</sup> Perry, “Hubert Harrison (1883-1927): Race Consciousness and the Struggle for Socialism,” p. 114 and Werner Sombart, *Why Is There No Socialism in the United States?* [1906] Ed. and with an introductory essay by C. T. Husbands, foreword by Michael Harrington (White Plains, N.Y., 1976), esp. pp. xix-xxiii.

<sup>59</sup> The dialectical “two-fold character” concept is taken from a letter Karl Marx sent to Frederick Engels on August 24, 1867 concerning the forthcoming volume 1 of *Capital*. Marx explained, “The best points in my book are: 1. (this is fundamental to all understanding of the facts) the *two-fold character* of labour according to whether it is expressed in use-value or exchange-value, which is brought out in the very *First Chapter*. . . .” *Marx/Engels Collected Works*, Volume 42, p. 407 in *Der Briefwechsel zwischen F. Engels und K. Marx*, Stuttgart, (1913) at <[http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867/letters/67\\_08\\_24.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867/letters/67_08_24.htm)>.

incarceration, etc. – can be put to the test and the questions can be asked “How are Black people faring?” and “What is to be done about it?”<sup>60</sup>

In that same “touchstone” passage Harrison added that true democracy and equality for “the Negro” implies “a revolution startling to even think of.” This compelling insight foreshadowed the civil rights/Black liberation struggles of the 1960s, which posed such an important challenge to the existing social order and gave impetus to the anti-war, student, women’s, Latino, Asian, labor, gay, and other movements for progressive social change. Harrison also described the dehumanizing and anti-working class effects of the betrayal of democracy noting that “the broad denial of justice to colored” people “as exemplified in lynchings, segregation, public proscription and disfranchisement, results in the vitiation of democratic faith” and provides “the supplying power” for other deceitful practices.<sup>61</sup>

After Woodrow Wilson became president in 1913 he proceeded to oversee segregation in federal workplaces; to bring the white-supremacist film “The Birth of a Nation” into the White House for a special showing; to invade Mexico, Haiti and the Dominican Republic; and to lead the U.S. into World War I in order, he said, to “Make the World Safe for Democracy.” In a telling retort to such “Wilsonian democracy,” and while lynching, segregation, disfranchisement, and peonage marred the land, Harrison described how, when white supremacy reigns, “the cant of ‘Democracy’ is intended as dust in the eyes of the white voter.” This “dust in the eyes” of “whites” concept foreshadowed two extremely important similar concepts – W. E. B. Du Bois’ “Blindspot in the eyes of America” (1935) and Theodore W. Allen and Noel Ignatiev’s “White Blindspot” (1967). In yet another challenge to the misuse of “democracy” – in this case as a call to war – Harrison explained, “During the war the idea of democracy was widely advertised, especially in the English-speaking world, mainly as a convenient camouflage behind which competing imperialists masked their sordid aims.” In words that resonate

---

<sup>60</sup> Perry, *A Hubert Harrison Reader*, 54 and Hubert Harrison, “The Negro and Socialism: I – The Negro Problem Stated, *New York Call*, November 28, 1911, p. 6, rpt. in Perry, *A Hubert Harrison Reader*, pp. 52-55. See also “Hubert Harrison Addresses Bronx Rotary Club on ‘New Americanism,’” *Amsterdam News*, July 28, 1926, p. 9.

<sup>61</sup> Harrison, “The Negro and Socialism,” *A Hubert Harrison Reader*, pp. 54-55.

today he added “those who so loudly proclaimed . . . the new democratic demands never had the slightest intention of extending . . . ‘democracy.’”<sup>62</sup>

### **Concentrated Race-Conscious Work in the Black Community**

After leaving the Socialist Party because he found that “white” socialists put the “white race” race first, before class, Harrison functioned independently and then turned to concentrated, race conscious, “Race First” work in the Black community. By 1916-17 he was the founder and intellectual guiding light of the “New Negro Movement” – the race-conscious, internationalist, mass-based, autonomous, militantly assertive movement for “political equality, social justice, civic opportunity, and economic power,” which laid the basis for the Garvey movement. In 1917, as the “Great War” raged abroad, along with race riots, lynching, segregation, discrimination, and white-supremacist ideology at home, Harrison founded the Liberty League and *The Voice*, the first organization and the first newspaper of the “New Negro Movement.” The Liberty League was called into being, Harrison explained, by “the need for a more radical policy” than that of existing civil rights organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. He felt that the NAACP too often limited itself to paper protests and repeatedly stumbled over the problem of what to do “if these [‘white’] minds at which you are aiming remain unaffected” and refuse “to grant guarantees of life and liberty.” In contrast to the NAACP, the Liberty League was not dependent on “white” supporters, and it aimed beyond the “Talented Tenth” at “the common people” of the “Negro race.” Its program emphasized internationalism, political independence, and class and race consciousness. In response to “white supremacy” it called for a “race first” approach, full equality, federal anti-lynching legislation, enforcement of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, labor organizing, support of socialist and anti-imperialist causes, political

---

<sup>62</sup> Perry, *A Hubert Harrison Reader*, pp. 54-55, 282, 446 n. 10; Harrison, “The Negro and Socialism: I – The Negro Problem Stated,” *New York Call*, November 28, 1911, p. 6; Harrison, *When Africa Awakes*, pp. 6-10; W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction, An Essay Toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880* (1935; New York: Atheneum, 1971), p. 577; and Ignatin [Ignatiev] and Allen, *White Blindspot & “Can White Workers Radicals Be Radicalized?”*

independence, and armed self-defense in the face of white-supremacist attacks. It stressed that new Black leadership would emerge from the masses.<sup>63</sup>

### **Capitalist Imperialism and the Need to Break Down Exclusion Walls of White Workers**

During 1915 talks and in a 1918 article on “The White War and the Colored Races” Harrison developed ideas that pre-dated T. Lothrop Stoddard’s *The Rising Tide of Color: Against White World Supremacy* (1920). Harrison described how “even though the white capitalists knew” that “the white race . . . was busy burning up, depleting . . . resources on which its primacy depended,” “mad greed was still their master.” Stoddard’s book, which played on post-war “white” fears of the end of white supremacy, became a nationwide sensation. Harrison viewed matters differently than Stoddard and received no similar attention. In a letter to Stoddard he wrote, “my sympathies are not at all with you: that which you fear, I naturally hope for.”<sup>64</sup>

In the *Negro World* of 1921 Harrison called on peoples of “the darker races” who have suffered from “the degrading dogma” of the color line,” which functions in the interest of “capitalist imperialism,” to “come together . . . and to issue a call for a congress of the darker races, which should be frankly anti-imperialistic and should serve as an international center of co-operation” and be “made up of those who realize that capitalist imperialism which mercilessly exploits the darker races for its own financial purposes is the enemy which we must combine to fight.” Concerned about the “white” labor movement and the “white” left putting the “white race” first, before class, he stressed that “the temporary revolutionists of today should show their sincerity by first breaking down the exclusion walls of white workingmen before they ask us to demolish our own defensive structures of racial self-protection.” He explained that “The latter arose as a consequence of the former and the cause should be removed before the consequence can fairly be expected to disappear.” Harrison made clear, however, that

---

<sup>63</sup> Perry, *Hubert Harrison*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>64</sup> Perry, *A Hubert Harrison Reader*, pp. 305-10, quotes 306, 308, 310 and Hubert Harrison to T. Lothrop Stoddard June 24, 1920 in Hubert H. Harrison Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Butler Library, Columbia University.

“those who will meet us on our own ground will find that we recognize a common enemy in the present world order and are willing to advance to attack it in our joint behalf.”<sup>65</sup>

### **The International Colored Unity League**

Harrison’s final organization, The International Colored Unity League, was established in 1924 and maintained until his death. It was his most broadly unitary effort among Black people. The ICUL emphasized work among the “common people” and sought to develop and encourage “unity of purpose and aim.” It worked “to stop Negroes . . . from attacking each other,” “to mobilize . . . against lynching, disfranchisement and Jim Crow,” to use the ballot in the North to secure the ballot in the South, to develop cooperative action, and to “cooperate with the Negro church, lodge, and other organizations.”<sup>66</sup>

The ICUL program sought to have the “New Negroes” shape their own future in order to obtain “political equality, social justice, civic opportunity and economic power.” It aimed “to serve the interests of the great masses of our people” and to fight “those evil conditions created by race-prejudice.” In response to “the graver aspects of the American race-problem,” it called for the “setting up of a state, or states, in the Union as a homeland for the American Negro, where we can work out the ultimate economic and racial salvation as a part of the American people” and where “the Negro’s aspiration . . . can flower and bear fruit.” The League’s Magazine, *The Voice of the Negro*, sought to provide “information about what is taking place in every quarter of the colored world.”<sup>67</sup>

### **Struggle Against White Supremacy is Central**

A self-defined “radical internationalist” and a true educator, Harrison approached the Black masses with a call for self and group awareness and bottom-up unity while also

---

<sup>65</sup> Hubert Harrison, “Wanted: A Colored International,” *Negro World*, May 28, 1921 rpt. in Perry, ed., *A Hubert Harrison Reader*, pp. 223–28, quotes pp. 224, 226, 228.

<sup>66</sup> Hubert H. Harrison, “Seeking a Way Out,” “The Trend of the Times” column, *Boston Chronicle*, May 31, 1924, copy in Hubert H. Harrison Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Butler Library, Columbia University; Hubert H. Harrison, “The Common People,” *Boston Chronicle*, May 17, 1924, rpt. in Perry, *A Hubert Harrison Reader*, pp. 404-05; and Hubert H. Harrison, “The Right Way to Unity,” *Boston Chronicle*, May 10, 1924, rpt. in Perry, *A Hubert Harrison Reader*, pp. 402-04.

<sup>67</sup> [Hubert Harrison], “The I.C.U. L. [International Colored Unity League],” *The Embryo of the Voice of the Negro* 1 (February 1927), 2, rpt. in Perry, ed., *A Hubert Harrison Reader*, pp. 399-402.

urging “white” workers to fight against white supremacy. Quite simply, he had concluded, after much practical experience and intellectual analysis that, as long as the United States remained a white supremacist capitalist society, a necessary corrective, in the interest of the vast majority, was for African Americans to develop race consciousness and “international colored unity” and for workers and socialists to actively oppose white supremacy. Harrison, the former leading Black socialist, had concluded that in the United States, in the face of racial oppression, the struggle against white supremacy would have to be placed front and center.<sup>68</sup>

Among African-American leaders of his era, St. Croix-born, Harlem-based Hubert Harrison was the most class conscious of the race radicals, and the most race conscious of the class radicals. This seeming incongruity was made possible by the political-economic system of the United States in which a system of racial oppression was central to capitalist rule. Then, as now, the demands for economic justice premised on true racial equality struck at the very heart of the existing social order and were inherently radical.<sup>69</sup>

### **Insights From Theodore W. Allen**

#### **Early Research and Writings and Pioneering Use of “White Skin Privilege” Concept**

Theodore W. Allen was a self-avowed Marxist, a historical materialist who believed that class struggle was the driving force of history. Starting in the 1960’s, Allen began an important 40-years-long study and reflection on white supremacy, racial oppression, and the class struggle in American history. In this he was informed by the civil rights, anti-colonial, and national liberation struggles; by his prior experience as a communist, a labor activist, and a student of history; and by close readings of Du Bois’

---

<sup>68</sup> Jeffrey B. Perry, “An Introduction to Hubert Harrison: The Father of Harlem Radicalism,” *Souls*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Winter 2000), pp. 38-54 and 50-51, and Hubert Harrison, “Race First Versus Class First,” *Negro World*, March 27, 1920, rpt. in Perry, *A Hubert Harrison Reader*, pp. 107-09. See also Perry, ed., *A Hubert Harrison Reader*, p. 4.

<sup>69</sup> Perry, “An Introduction to Hubert Harrison: The Father of Harlem Radicalism,” p. 48 and Perry, “Hubert Harrison (1883-1927): Race Consciousness and the Struggle for Socialism,” p. 124. Ted (Theodore W.) Allen, “The Most Vulnerable Point,” (n.p., 1972), p. 4, elaborates the position that “The principal aspect of United States capitalist society is not merely bourgeois domination, but bourgeois white-supremacist domination.”

*Black Reconstruction* and Marxian political economics. An organizationally independent working-class intellectual, Allen combined the drive to end oppression and exploitation with the thirst for understanding and awareness based on historical evidence and analysis.<sup>70</sup>

An early manifestation of his new thinking occurred in 1965 with his pioneering use of the “white skin privilege” concept while he was a member of the “John Brown Commemoration Committee.” Allen wrote the Committee’s “Call,” which put forth that “White Americans who want government of the people, by the people, must begin by first repudiating their white skin privileges and the white ‘gentleman’s agreement’ against the Negro. John Brown . . . wrote from the very shadow of the gallows to his own family: ‘Remember them that are in bonds as bound with them.’” The “Call” added, “The false belief that equality can somehow be achieved without disturbing ‘traditional’ white skinned privileges has provided a sanctuary” for “‘liberal’ white supremacist” thinking. He saw this “repudiation of white-skin privileges” struggle as an ongoing struggle.<sup>71</sup>

This idea that equality could not be achieved without ongoing challenges to white racial privileges is crucial to Allen’s developing work. He would often say, “‘Solidarity forever!’ means ‘Privileges never!’”<sup>72</sup> Interestingly, Richard B. Moore (1893-1978), Hubert Harrison’s close friend and co-activist, had reached a somewhat similar

---

<sup>70</sup> See Perry, “In Memoriam: Theodore W. Allen.” In Ted (Theodore William) Allen to Paul Costello, March 3, 1979, in Theodore W. Allen Papers, in possession of this author, Allen discussed the Provisional Organizing Committee (POC), the organization for which he had been a theoretical leader in the late 1950s. His critical assessment was that “as an organization, it, like so many others, could not break out of the old habit of authority-worship.” Its “anti-white chauvinism was never turned in an organized way to the service of the civil rights struggle (in either of its main aspects), because the forms of that struggle did not conform to a theory of ‘the national question’ which was accepted first of all on authority from ‘the international movement.’” Among Allen’s writing in this POC period are: Molly Pitcher (pseud. for Theodore W. Allen), “*The Main Thing . . .*” (New York, 1957); Milton Palmer (pseud. for Theodore W. Allen), “Two Roads for American Communists” (New York, 1958) available online at <<http://www.marxists.org/history/erol/1956-1960/tworoads.htm>>; Milton Palmer (pseud. for Theodore W. Allen), “Economic Situation USA: A Marxist Analysis” nine parts, *Vanguard* (February-October 1959); and “Milton Palmer” (pseud. for Theodore W. Allen), 11-part series with different titles on Latin America, Cuba, and Political Economy, *Vanguard*, 1959-1960. Mixed drafts and copies of both series and a compiled printed version of Allen’s *Economic Situation U.S.A.* are found in the Theodore W. Allen Papers in possession of the author.

<sup>71</sup> [Theodore W. Allen for] John Brown Commemoration Committee, 100 West 82nd St., New York, 24, New York, “A Call to join with sponsors of this Call in a John Brown Memorial Pilgrimage to Harper’s Ferry West Virginia on Saturday, December 4, 1965 to mark the one-hundred-and-sixth anniversary of the execution of John Brown by the slaveholders’ government, and to confer there together on a new policy of SELF-DEFENSE SELF-RELIANCE and INTERNATIONALISM in the struggle for equal rights through ACTIVE RESISTANCE against the vile racist theory and practice of white supremacy,” p. 2. See also Allen, hand-written comments in his personal copy of *A House Divided*, p. 113.

<sup>72</sup> See Allen. “Can White Workers Radicals Be Radicalized?” p. 16.

understanding years earlier. During his lifetime Moore was active with the Socialist Party, African Blood Brotherhood, Communist Party, Scottsboro Defense Campaign, Caribbean causes, and the Frederick Douglass Book Center in Harlem. In the 1930s Moore, according to his daughter, the historian Joyce Moore Turner, supported “campaigns designed to secure employment of Afro-Americans in the completely white-dominated businesses in Harlem” while the Communist Party, of which he was a member, “took the position that the employment of blacks was not intended to effect white workers.” Moore argued “that the unemployed in Harlem would neither understand nor rally to campaigns that promoted the protection of [such privileged status for] white workers.” He was expelled from the Communist Party in 1942, after he (foreshadowing Allen) pointed out “if you are fighting for jobs for Negroes, you can’t stop short of a white worker being fired.” Moore was essentially arguing that job struggles, like civil rights struggles, like workers’ strikes, can offer no “guarantees” and should not be undermined by the maintenance of privileged status for “white” workers. Abner W. Berry, an organizer for the Harlem section of the Communist Party and prosecutor in Moore’s internal charge, explained that before the trial the Communist “Party had decided that we would fight for the right of Negroes for jobs, but would guarantee that white workers would not be fired.” Berry later acknowledged being “remorseful” over Moore’s firing because Moore’s was “a consistent approach” and “was not incorrect.”<sup>73</sup>

In 1966, during what he described as “the changed ambience of the African American Civil Rights struggle . . . [and] the peace movement,” Allen began his historical research in earnest. He was specifically inspired by Du Bois’ insights that the South after the Civil War “presented the greatest opportunity for a real national labor movement which the nation ever saw” and that the organized labor movement failed to recognize that “in black slavery and Reconstruction” could be found “the kernel and meaning of the labor movement in the United States.”<sup>74</sup> At that time Allen conceived of the idea of writing a historical study of three crises in United States history in which, as he would later explain, there were general confrontations “between capital and urban and

---

<sup>73</sup> W. Burghardt Turner and Joyce Turner Moore, eds., *Richard B. Moore, Caribbean Militant in Harlem: Collected Writings 1920-1972* (Bloomington, 1988), pp. 62, 67-68.

<sup>74</sup> Allen, “Can White Workers Radicals Be Radicalized?” p. 12.



rural laboring classes.” The crises were those of the Civil War and Reconstruction, the Populist Revolt of the 1890s, and the Great Depression of the 1930s. In analyzing those confrontations Allen would find that “the key to the defeat of the forces of democracy, labor and socialism[,] was in each case achieved by ruling-class appeals to white supremacism, basically by fostering white-skin privileges of laboring-class European-Americans.” Drawing again on Du Bois and his notion of the “Blindspot in the eyes of America,” which Allen paraphrased as “the white blindspot,” he would go on to describe the role of the theory and practice of white supremacy in shaping the outcomes of those three great crises. This assessment by Allen of the important lessons from past crises takes on added significance during the current conjuncture as poor and laboring people seek to wage and influence struggle today.<sup>75</sup>

In a 1969 letter to Noel Ignatin [Ignatiev] and Hilda Vazquez that accompanied a 35-page draft of his book in progress, Allen explained that his work, like Lenin’s, emphasized “The decisive subjective factor.”<sup>76</sup> That draft would grow into one of his major, unpublished works, “‘The Kernel and the Meaning’ . . . A Contribution to a Proletarian Critique of United States Historiography” (1972). While working on his draft and the longer study Allen started writing assorted articles, pamphlets, and reviews that were spinoffs from his research.<sup>77</sup>

### ***White Blindspot***

One early spinoff, *White Blindspot* (1967), was based on Allen’s research and co-authored with Noel Ignatin (Ignatiev). By 1969 it contained three parts. Part one was entitled “White Blindspot.” Allen had major input while Ignatiev took the initiative and had final say on the contents of that article. Part two was “A Letter of Support” (1967) by Allen, which appeared at first under the pseudonym “M.” for “Molly Pitcher,” an Allen

---

<sup>75</sup> Ted (Theodore W.) Allen and Esther Kusic, to “Dear Noel,” “A Letter of Support,” March 23, 1967, in Noel Ignatin (Ignatiev) and Ted (Theodore W.) Allen, *White Blindspot* (n.p.: Osawatomie Associates, 1967) rpt. as Noel Ignatin (Ignatiev) and Ted (Theodore W.) Allen, “*White Blindspot*” & “*Can White Workers Radicals Be Radicalized?*” (1969), p. 10. See also Allen, “Introduction to ‘The Kernel and the Meaning,’” May 8, 2003 and Theodore W. Allen, to Louis M. Rabinowitz Foundation, February 15, 1976, p. 3, copy in possession of author.

<sup>76</sup> Allen and Kusic, “A Letter of Support,” p. 11 and [Theodore W. Allen] to “Dear Hilda and Noel,” May 22, 1969, Theodore W. Allen Papers, in possession of author.

<sup>77</sup> Theodore W. Allen, “Application for Admission to Goddard College Graduate Program,” October 20, 1974, p. 4, Theodore W. Allen Papers, possession of author.

pseudonym, and then under the names of Allen and Esther Kusic. Part three was Allen's "Can White ~~Workers~~ Radicals Be Radicalized?" (c. 1968-1969). These pieces, printed together as *White Blindspot & Can White ~~Workers~~ Radicals Be Radicalized?*, were published in 1969 by both the SDS-affiliated Radical Education Project and the Revolutionary Youth Movement and developed the arguments that: (1) white supremacy, reinforced among European Americans by the "white skin privilege," was the main retardant of working-class consciousness in the United States; (2) struggle for radical social change should direct principal efforts at challenging the system of white supremacy; and (3) this challenge to white supremacy required ongoing struggle for "repudiation of white skin privilege" by European American workers. Allen thought the concept repudiation, or throwing-off, was more "all-encompassing" than rejection and that it indicated the ongoing nature of the struggle. The pamphlet sharply addressed the issues of fighting white supremacy and whether, or not, that fight was in the interest of "white" workers. Allen and Ignatiev argued that for European-American workers the "white skin privileges" were not "benefits," but that they were "poison," "ruinous," a baited hook, to the class interests of working people. The *White Blindspot* pamphlet sparked considerable discussion and debate for many activists within SDS (whose National Office called for an all-out fight against "white skin privileges") and the emerging new left including many who used Allen's "white skin privilege" or "white race privilege" phrases (but not the analysis that went with it). Some who were influenced by Allen's work subsequently played major roles in anti-white supremacist activism and scholarship. By the 1990s such scholarship was attracting considerable attention.<sup>78</sup>

---

<sup>78</sup> Ignatin (Ignatiev) and Allen, "'White Blindspot' and 'Can White ~~Workers~~ Radicals Be Radicalized?'" esp. p. 4. See *supra* notes 9 and 17.

Thomas R. Brooks, "The New Left is Showing Its Age," *New York Times*, June 15, 1969, p. 20, described how the SDS National Office "called for an all-out fight against 'white skin privileges.'" Noel Ignatin (Ignatiev), "Author's Note," October 5, 1969, in Ignatiev and Allen, "*White Blindspot*" & "*Can White ~~Workers~~ Radicals Be Radicalized?*" writes: "The impact of the concept 'white-skin privilege' (to my knowledge, the term was first used in 1965 in a piece written by Ted on the anniversary of Harper's Ferry) may be noted in the fact that in just two years from publication of the *White Blindspot*, 'repudiation of the white-skin-privilege' has become a central ingredient in the language of both major groupings within SDS – 'Weatherman' and 'RYM II' – and the focus of widespread debate among white revolutionaries."

Allen's use of the "Molly Pitcher" pseudonym stemmed from the end of the McCarthy era and his work in the late 1950s with the Provisional Organizing Committee (see note 70). Noel Ignatiev, who was

## **Why No Socialism? . . . and the Main Retardant to Working-Class Consciousness**

In his historical research Allen was addressing the question of “Why No Socialism in the United States?” His historical findings led him to challenge what he described as the prevailing consensus among left and labor historians, a consensus that attributed the low level of class consciousness among American workers to such factors as the early development of civil liberties, the heterogeneity of the work force, the safety valve of homesteading opportunities in the west, the ease of social mobility, the relative shortage of labor, and the early development of “pure and simple trade unionism.” He argued that the “classical consensus on the subject” was the product of the efforts of such writers as Frederick Engels, “co-founder with Karl Marx of the very theory of proletarian revolution”; Frederick A. Sorge, “main correspondent of Marx and Engels in the United States” and a socialist and labor activist for almost sixty years; Frederick Jackson Turner, giant of U.S. history; Richard T. Ely, Christian Socialist and author of “the first attempt at a labor history in the United States”; Morris Hillquit, founder and leading figure of the Socialist Party for almost two decades; John R. Commons, who, with his associates authored the first comprehensive history of the U.S. labor movement; Selig Perlman, a Commons associate who later authored *A Theory of the Labor Movement*; Mary Beard and Charles A. Beard, labor and general historians; and William Z. Foster, major figure in the history of U.S. communism with “his analyses of ‘American exceptionalism.’” Allen challenged this “old consensus” as being “seriously flawed . . . by erroneous assumptions, one-sidedness, exaggeration, and above all, by white-blindness.” He also

---

active with Allen in the POC days, offers background on Allen’s choice of the “Molly Pitcher” pseudonym. Ignatiev writes:

His choice of a nom de guerre was a tribute to the American Revolutionary War hero who had “seen her duty and done it”; it was also intended to mislead the agents of repression: “Let the bourgeoisie pay for their male supremacy,” he explained. The choice was fitting: one of the first things that struck me about Ted was his manner, so tender as to seem feminine, or else homosexual. (I grew up with the standards and prejudices of the 1950s.) I learned later that his manner was part of a conscious effort to shed the male habits of dominance: he used to quote Bernard Shaw, “the perfect man is a woman.” At internal meetings of the POC he was always referred to as Molly, and for many years that seemed the most natural thing to call him.

See Noel Ignatiev to author, June 17, 2005, possession of author. On the use of pseudonyms by Allen, by Hubert Harrison, and by many other left activists see Jeffrey B. Perry, “Pseudonyms: A Reference Aid for Studying American Communist History,” *American Communist History*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (June 2004), pp. 55-126.

countered with his own theory that white supremacism, reinforced among European-Americans by “white skin privilege,” was the main retardant of working-class consciousness in the U.S. and that efforts at radical social change should direct principal efforts at challenging the system of white supremacy and “white skin privilege.”<sup>79</sup> As he further developed his analysis Allen would later add and emphasize that the “white race,” by its all-class form, conceals the operation of the ruling class social control system by providing it with a majoritarian “democratic” facade and that “the main barrier to class consciousness” was “the incubus of ‘white’ identity of the European-American.”<sup>80</sup>

Allen discussed reasons that the six-point rationale had lost much of its force and focused on historical analyses. He noted that the free land safety valve theory had been “thoroughly discredited” for many reasons including that the bulk of the best lands were taken by railroads, mining companies, land companies, and speculators and that the costs of homesteading were prohibitive for eastern wage earners. He similarly pointed out that heterogeneity “may well . . . have brought . . . more strength than weakness to the United States labor and radical movement”; that the “rise of mass, ‘non aristocratic,’ industrial unions has not broken the basic pattern of opposition to a workers party, on the part of the leaders”; and that the “‘language problem’ in labor agitating and organizing never really posed any insurmountable obstacle.”<sup>81</sup>

He then focused on what he described as “two basic and irrefutable themes.” First, whatever the state of class consciousness may have been most of the time, “there have been occasional periods of widespread and violent eruption of radical thought and action on the part of the workers and poor farmers, white and black.” He cited Black labor's valiant Reconstruction struggle; the Exodus of 1879; the “year of violence” in 1877 marked by “fiery revolts at every major terminal point across the country”; the period from “bloody Haymarket” in 1886 to the Pullman strike of 1894 during which “the U.S. army was called upon no less than 328 times to suppress labor's struggles”; the

---

<sup>79</sup> Allen, “The Kernel and the Meaning,” pp. 1, 41 and Allen, “Can White Workers Radicals Be Radicalized?” pp. 12-14.

<sup>80</sup> Theodore W. Allen, “The Historical Roots of ‘American Exceptionalism’: The ‘Race-not-class’ Principle,” p. 40, Draft for a Presentation on Radio Station WBAI in New York, February 15, 1996, Theodore W. Allen Papers, in possession of author and Theodore W. Allen, “Toward a Revolution in Labor History,” January 5, 2004, p. 1.

<sup>81</sup> Allen, “Can White Workers Radicals Be Radicalized?” 12-13 and Allen, “The Kernel and the Meaning,” p. 20.

Populists of the same period when Black and white poor farmers “joined hands for an instant in the South” and when Middle Western farmers decided to “raise less corn and more hell!”; and the labor struggles of the 1930's marked by sit down strikes and the establishment of industrial unionism. Allen emphasized that in such times “any proposal to discuss the relative backwardness of the United States workers and poor farmers would have had a ring of unreality.” He reasoned, “if, in such crises, the cause of labor was consistently defeated by force and cooptation; if no permanent advance of class consciousness in the form of a third, anti capitalist, party was achieved . . . there must have been reasons more relevant than ‘free land’ that you couldn't get; ‘free votes’ that you couldn't cast, or couldn't get counted; or ‘high wages’ for jobs you couldn't find or . . . the rest of the standard rationale.”<sup>82</sup>

His second, “irrefutable” theme was that each of the facts of life in the classical consensus had to be “decisively altered when examined in the light of the centrality of the question of white supremacy and of the white skin privileges of the white workers.” He again reasoned, “‘Free land,’ ‘constitutional liberties,’ ‘immigration,’ ‘high wages,’ ‘social mobility,’ ‘aristocracy of labor’” are “all, white skin privileges” and “whatever their effect upon the thinking of white workers may be said to be, the same cannot be claimed in the case of the Negro.”<sup>83</sup>

### **The Role of White Supremacy in Three Previous Crises**

Allen also offered important historical analyses of the three previous crises and how, in each case, the ruling class moved to maintain power by turns to white supremacy and by reinforcing “white race” privileges. He discussed the defeat of Reconstruction “by armed lynch-terror against the Negro which redefined the white-skin privilege of white labor as the right to vote, to serve on juries, to become landowners in the South or West” and how it was “sealed with the establishment of the [lily-white] cotton textile industry in the South.”<sup>84</sup> In addition, he paid particular attention to the ways in which “the

<sup>82</sup> Allen, “Can White Workers Radicals Be Radicalized?” pp. 12-13.

<sup>83</sup> Allen, “Can White Workers Radicals Be Radicalized?” p. 16.

<sup>84</sup> Allen, “Can White Workers Radicals Be Radicalized?” p. 16.

proletariat's opportunity" was "nullified by the re-establishment of the system of racist privileges of white labor" in immigration and industrial employment policies.<sup>85</sup>

In his longer study, "The Kernel and the Meaning," Allen drew from Du Bois' effort to set right the record on Black Reconstruction and to identify the interests of "the laboring class, black and white, North and South."<sup>86</sup> He highlighted Du Bois' seminal conclusion:

The South, after the [Civil] war, presented the greatest opportunity for a real national labor movement which the nation ever saw or is likely to see for many decades. Yet the [white] labor movement, with but few exceptions, never realized the situation. It never had the intelligence or knowledge, as a whole, *to see in black slavery and Reconstruction, the kernel and the meaning of the labor movement in the United States.*<sup>87</sup>

Allen went on to describe how, after the defeat of Reconstruction in the South, the nationally consolidated power of capital confronted the workers of the North and "crushed them in a series of sharp, often armed, struggles in the next ten years." He discussed how voting, jury service and homestead rights "were of no help to the [railroad] strikers of 1877, or to . . . Greenbackers and Single Taxers, or the Molly Maguires, or the Haymarket defendants in those fierce battles with the Robber Barons." In "Can White Workers Radicals Be Radicalized?" he called special attention to the fact "that the very federal troops withdrawn from Reconstruction duty in the South were mobilized against the great railroad strike of that year."<sup>88</sup> Allen was fully aware of how the ruling class directed these attacks, but he also pointed out that it was "the betrayal – not by the bourgeoisie," but by the "white workers [who] voiced opposition to

---

<sup>85</sup> Theodore W. Allen, "The Kernel and the Meaning," p. 3.

<sup>86</sup> Allen, "Introduction to 'The Kernel and the Meaning,'" May 8, 2003, quotes Du Bois that "The only power to curtail the rising empire of finance in the United States was industrial democracy – votes and intelligence in the hands of the laboring class, black and white, North and South." (*Black Reconstruction*, p. 377.)

<sup>87</sup> Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, p. 353, emphasis added by Allen. For what Allen describes as Harrison's "anticipation of Du Bois' study of Reconstruction" see Theodore W. Allen, "The Kernel and the Meaning": A Critique of Labor Historiography," Proposed introduction, letter to Jeffrey B. Perry, May 9, 2003, in possession of author and Perry, ed., *A Hubert Harrison Reader*, pp. 33-35. See also Perry, *Hubert Harrison: The Voice of Harlem Radicalism, 1883-1918*, pp. 100, 179-81.

<sup>88</sup> Allen, "Can White Workers Radicals Be Radicalized?" pp. 13, 16.

Reconstruction and called for its end” – that was “critical in sealing the fate of the freedmen and freedwomen.” This betrayal was “followed by The Hayes-Tilden Deal and the suppression of the railroad strike of 1877.” In *The Invention of the White Race* Allen emphasizes the extremely important point that “the bourgeoisie as a whole, drawing upon practices that had ante-bellum roots, opted for ‘White Reconstruction,’ i.e., the reestablishment of the social control system of racial oppression, based on racial privileges for laboring-class ‘whites’ with regard to ‘free’ land, immigration, and industrial employment” and “in that process, the Negro Exodus of 1879 and the Cotton Mill Campaign, dated from the following year, were to be defining moments.” He further explains, “the subsequent white-supremacist system in the South was established not by civil means, but by nightrider terror and one-sided ‘riots’ in order to deprive African-Americans of their constitutional rights, reducing them again, by debt peonage and prisoner-leasing, to a status that was slavery in all but name.”<sup>89</sup>

Regarding the Populist Revolt, Allen described how the promise of “free land” proved to be an illusion and was followed by “a flood of mortgage foreclosures.” In general, farmers were confronted with debt and high feed, seed, and bagging costs while the price of cotton dropped to a nickel a pound. In the South, where most Black farmers lived, “whites and Blacks join[ed] for an instant in common cause.” Allen cited, however, how gains made in North Carolina and elsewhere were “cancelled by . . . white supremacist appeal to the poor whites, sweetened with poisonous white-skin privileges in a series of new state constitutions disfranchising African Americans.” These appeals were reinforced by the white supremacist forcing out of elected government officials and by attacks on the African American community such as occurred in Wilmington, North Carolina in 1898.<sup>90</sup>

In his treatment of the Populist revolt Allen quoted from the Georgia Populist leader Tom Watson that “the argument against the independent movement in the South may be boiled down into one word – nigger.” He also cited American Federation of

---

<sup>89</sup> Theodore W. Allen, “Strategy for the Struggle of the ‘Common People’ Against the ‘Titans’ of Capital in the Impending Crisis,” Data for URPE Presentation, August 28, 1997, Theodore W. Allen Papers, copy in possession of author, where Allen comments that by 1865 real wages were down a third from 1860. Then, the promise of “forty acres and a mule” was “imperiled by white terrorism and the gestation period of the eventual 1876 Hayes-Tilden Deal.” Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*, I: p. 144.

<sup>90</sup> Allen, “Strategy for the Struggle of the ‘Common People’ Against the ‘Titans’ of Capital in the Impending Crisis.”

Labor leader Will Winn that “if a body of [white] workmen generate sufficient temerity to ask for less hours or an advance in wages,” then “the Goliath in command has only to utter the magic word ‘Negroes’ to drive them back into the rut in fear and trembling.” In addition Allen detailed how the Populist Revolt was “dissipated and destroyed by the redefinition, ‘constitutional and legal’” regarding “the white skin privilege to vote, to free public education, and to segregation of Negroes into the worst conditions in all public accommodations” and how this was accompanied by “the driving of Negroes out of their traditional position in industrial crafts.”<sup>91</sup>

### **The Great Depression . . . and the White Supremacist Response**

Millions of African Americans migrated to the North during the next quarter of a century and, according to Allen, they were assimilated into industry “on the basis of the white skin privilege system imposed by the industry owners and the political and social order prevailing.” When masses of workers were radicalized during the Great Depression sharp and bloody class struggle ensued. The “bright brave crusade of American labor ground to a halt on the Southern approaches” and both “the AFL and the CIO encountered special difficulties in this effort.” Allen quotes historian F. Ray Marshall that, instead of being glad Black workers “were more easily organized than whites,” the organizers backed away, since “to organize the Negro workers first, was to risk alienating the whites.” When the dust had cleared, explained Allen, “any threat to the power of the capitalist class had passed by harmlessly and things were under control again.” In the South “the open appeal to white racism had stopped the labor movement” and in the North “the white skin privilege was institutionalized in the very form of trade union collective bargaining contracts.” Instead of showing solidarity with the Black worker as the Black worker had solidarized with the European American worker, “the unions gave contractual force to the white skin privilege pattern which the employers had previously developed.” Thus, “the employers were able to adapt standard trade union demands for seniority, promotion lists, job classification, closed and/or union shop, etc., to their larger

---

<sup>91</sup> Allen, “Can White Workers Be Radicalized?” pp. 13, 14, and 16.



purpose, just as the labor reform legislation served to seal a bargain with the white supremacists in the Democratic Party.”<sup>92</sup>

The Great Depression and World War II witnessed the rise of industrial unionism in which African Americans were included to an unprecedented degree. However, writes Allen, the CIO abandoned attempts to organize the South, and “went into alliance with the Democratic machines and the Dixiecrats that formed Roosevelt’s ‘troika.’” The “white-skin privilege employment policy that had already existed was given the seal of approval by the incorporation of the seniority principle in almost all labor agreements.” The Southern Jim Crow system continued to oppress Blacks and the armed forces continued to be Jim Crow operations. Very importantly the “relative unemployment rate of Blacks to whites in 1929 had been about 1 to 1,” but by 1947 it was established at “a rate of Black unemployment of double that of white unemployment.” This was followed by the Taft-Hartley Act, which was passed in June 1947 and paved the way for a series of anti-union laws that contributed to the decline of the trade union movement.<sup>93</sup>

Allen, writing in the 1970s, explained that the “one great problem facing the workers in the 1930’s was unemployment” and the “gap between the unemployment rate of Black and white in the North was 75% in 1930, 115% in 1937 and 133% in 1940” while in the South where 80% of the Black people lived, “the gap had increased from zero to about 15%.” In 1940 “the national Black unemployment rate was 20% higher than the white rate” and by 1952 “the national Black unemployment rate had become double that of the white rate and has averaged even higher in the years since.”<sup>94</sup>

As a former coal miner, Allen used the soft coal industry as a concrete example and, writing at a time when a thirty-year boom was drawing to a close, he called attention to “the enervating effect of the complicity of white workers in defending their white skin privileges under conditions of downward economic indices.” He described how at one time the coal miners were considered the backbone of the labor movement, had the largest union, had the largest number and proportion of Black members in a solidly organized industry, had “won the biggest mass wage increases of any union on the basis

---

<sup>92</sup> Allen, “Can White Workers Radicals Be Radicalized?” pp. 14, 16-17. See also F. Ray Marshall, *The Negro and Organized Labor* (New York: Wiley, 1965), p. 44.

<sup>93</sup> Allen, “Strategy for the Struggle of the ‘Common People’ Against the ‘Titans’ of Capital in the Impending Crisis.”

<sup>94</sup> Theodore W. Allen, “White Supremacy in U.S. History,” p. 9.

of equal pay rates for Negroes,” had “abolished the North/South wage differential in coal” by winning an immediate 25% increase in the basic daily wage in Southern mines in 1941, and “had much authority in the selection of local, state and national officers” in political cooperation “with the Negro people's organizations” in mining regions.<sup>95</sup>

On the other hand, however, the coal miners “made no attack upon the white skin privileges” in the union, the mines, or the mining communities. Further, “with rare local exceptions,” African Americans “were excluded from top union positions;” housing in mining towns was segregated, and “white supremacist ‘local customs’ were ruling doctrine in the Southern mining areas.” Allen insightfully describes how the absence of seniority rights in the United Mine Workers’ contracts was “a special disability for the Negro miners, in contrast to . . . many other industries, because they were by no means ‘newcomers’ to that industry.” In that situation, the coal operators struck back at the miners' union gains with the Joy loader and other mechanical loading devices and, in the post-war years, as hand-loaded coal became a thing of the past, two out of every three jobs were abolished. Instead of “rallying black/white unity in the face of this murderous economic onslaught” by the coal operators, the union “united with the coal companies in the name of ‘competitive efficiency with other fuel and energy sources’ and the way was smoothed by throwing the jobs of the Negro miners first before the steamroller.” The layoff rate of Black miners in the industry was “one third higher than that of the white miners.” In West Virginia, where over half of all the Black miners in the country were employed, the layoff rate was “one and a half times that of the white miners.” In Alabama, the state with the largest proportion of Black miners, their layoff rate “was more than three times that for whites.”<sup>96</sup> Allen emphasized, “The New Deal response to the Great Depression, catered to the South” and “the concessions offered . . . were cast in the mold of white-skin privileges.”<sup>97</sup>

While Allen detailed how, in the aftermath of the Great Depression, white-skin privileges were re-instituted in a specific industry (coal) and how the overall New Deal

---

<sup>95</sup> Allen, “Can White Workers Radicals Be Radicalized?” p. 17.

<sup>96</sup> Allen, “Can White Workers Radicals Be Radicalized?” p. 17.

<sup>97</sup> Ted [Theodore W.] Allen, “White Supremacy in U.S. History,” Speech Delivered at the Guardian Forum on the National Question, (Chicago: *Insurgent Worker*, April, 1973), p. 8. Allen also mentions the repeal of the Southern Homestead Act and opposition to the Black Exodus of 1879 in Allen, “Summary of the Argument of *The Invention of the White Race*,” Part 2, #142.

response catered to the South, the political scientist Ira Katznelson has offered research that broadens that analysis. In his book, *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America*, Katznelson explains how the national policies enacted from the 1930s through the 1950s – initiatives such as Social Security, the National Labor Relations Act, emergency relief, the Fair Labor Standards Act, and the G.I. Bill – “constituted a massive transfer of quite specific privileges to white Americans” and “widened the gap between white and black Americans.”<sup>98</sup>

Katznelson describes how the South’s representatives in both Houses of Congress “built ramparts within the policy initiatives of the New Deal and the Fair Deal to safeguard their region’s social organization” and he cites three particular mechanisms that they used. First, “they sought to leave out as many African Americans as they could . . . not by inscribing race into law but by writing provisions that . . . were racially laden.” The “most important instances concerned categories of work in which blacks were heavily overrepresented, notably farmworkers and maids.” These groups, which constituted over 60% percent of the Black labor force in the 1930s and nearly 75% of those employed in the South, “were excluded from the legislation that created modern unions, from laws that set minimum wages and regulated the hours of work, and from Social Security until the 1950s.” Second, “they successfully insisted that the administration of these and other laws, including assistance to the poor and support for veterans, be placed in the hands of local officials who were deeply hostile to black aspirations.” Third, “they prevented Congress from attaching any sort of anti-discrimination provisions to a wide array of social welfare programs such as community health services, school lunches, and hospital construction grants, indeed all the programs that distributed monies to their region.” In this way “a wide array of public policies” gave preference to whites and “most black Americans were left behind or left out.”<sup>99</sup> One of the most glaring examples cited by Katznelson concerns the impediments to African Americans getting GI Bill home loans that had features such as low interest and zero down payments. The many impediments to African Americans were not limited to the

---

<sup>98</sup> Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), p. 23.

<sup>99</sup> Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White*, pp. 22-23.

South, and in New York and the northern New Jersey suburbs “fewer than 100 of the 67,000 mortgages insured by the GI Bill supported home purchases by non-whites.”<sup>100</sup>

To Allen, the “post war degeneration of the trade union and political aspects of the U.S. working class movement was not caused by the ‘betrayal of the New Deal’ by Cold War Democrats; rather it was the inevitable consequence” of the white supremacist “opportunism dominant in the days of ‘labor’s’ apparent greatest advances.” White labor’s indifference to the oppression of Black labor in the depression-and-war period “foreshadowed the general support given by the U.S. trade union movement to the efforts of U.S. imperialism to repress national liberation struggles in the Philippines, Korea, Malaya, Guatemala, Iraq, Bolivia, Venezuela, Indo-China, the Congo, Palestine, Columbia, Cuba and elsewhere.”<sup>101</sup>

This post war period was also marked by “glorious resurgence of the liberation struggles of the Black people . . . as well as of similar struggles of the Puerto Rican, Chicano, Indian and other oppressed non-white peoples in the state territory of the U.S.,” by “great national liberation struggles of the oppressed nations and peoples of the colonial and semi-colonial world, headed by the Chinese and Cuban revolutions,” and by the “Black liberation struggle” inspired “movement among whites, particularly the youth,” which most importantly was resurrected “on the basis of racial solidarity as principle number one.” The “ruling class understood the seriousness of this situation,” explained Allen, and it “reacted with a combination of concessions and repression.” The trouble with the concessions “was even more serious because they could not be continued without loosening the keystone of bourgeois power,” since these concessions “by their very nature had to chip away at the white-skin privileges of white labor in employment, housing education, etc.” In this situation the bourgeoisie “found a way to choke off the concessions and reverse the trend,” but “this could only be done by an overt appeal to white racism on the part of the white workers.” This, Allen argues, “was the function of the [George] Wallace movement and its eventual effective merger with Nixonism.” Whether it was “changing the color of the corpses in Vietnam” or “‘defense’ of the white

---

<sup>100</sup> Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White*, pp. 140, 216 n. 10, citing Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), p. 171.

<sup>101</sup> Theodore W. Allen, “White Supremacy in U.S. History,” pp. 9-10.

neighborhood, this appeal was specifically aimed at the white youth and the white workers on the basis of their racially privileged situation.” What is “essential to understand,” writes Allen, “is that [Richard] Nixon’s ‘southern strategy’ is basically FDR’s ‘Southern vote’ brought up to date and applied in a tactically different situation.” He considered this fact to be “of key importance because the wheel is bound to turn again.” Allen also went on to foreshadow important aspects of the current conjuncture describing a situation in which the “boom is running down” the “bankruptcy of the U.S. dollar reveals that . . . the world market is overfilled with commodities” the “capitalists are trying to get by with a program of austerity,” and the “payments on the house and car and school taxes must be made.” A “deterioration of the conditions of the white workers lives and some degree of radicalization of them is sure to come,” he writes, and the question is, how will they respond?<sup>102</sup>

### **Responses to Four Arguments Against and to Five “Artful Dodges”**

In his “A Letter of Support” in the *White Blindspot* pamphlet, Allen supplemented his historical and political analysis with discussion of alternate positions. As he would later do in his major work, *The Invention of the White Race*, Allen put forth arguments that might be raised by those who challenged what he said, and then sought to address those positions in an informed and principled way. He specifically countered the arguments that: (1) he “exaggerate[d] the importance of the Negro question”; (2) that “the fight against white supremacy . . . cannot be regarded as THE key; there are others, equally important, such as the struggle against the Viet Nam war and imperialist war in general, or solidarity with the nationally oppressed peoples of the world struggling against the yoke of imperialism”; (3) “that the struggle against white supremacy and the corrupting effects of the white-skin privilege *cannot* be the key for the simple reason that it is not possible to ‘sell’ the idea to the white workers, who have those privileges and who are saturated with the white supremacist ideology of the Bourgeoisie” (or, as some argue, “That *it is not really in the white workers’ interests*” to oppose white supremacy);

---

<sup>102</sup> Theodore W. Allen, “White Supremacy in U.S. History,” p. 10.

and (4) that what he proposed amounted “merely [to] whites reacting subjectively out of feelings of guilt.”<sup>103</sup>

To the first argument he responded, these “old hands,” these “experts,” have a “‘white blindspot’ [that] prevents them from seeing that what we are talking about is NOT the Negro question, . . . but . . . the ‘white question,’ the white question of questions – the *centrality* of the problem of white supremacy and the white-skin privilege which have historically frustrated the struggle for democracy, progress and socialism in the US.”<sup>104</sup>

To the second, he responded, “that a moment of careful reflection should suffice to bring one to the realization that the *greatest political, social, and ideological bulwark* of the imperialist warmakers and colonial oppressors is precisely *white supremacy in America*. Even more than ‘anti-Communism.’” He points out that “the great glaring lack of the peace movement in the United States” is “the poor grasp on the part of whites in it of the connection between the war question and the struggle against white supremacy, their failure to see the war in Viet Nam as a white supremacist war and to boldly challenge it on these grounds.” He adds, “what is the greatest strength of solidarity of Americans with oppressed people of the world? It is the sentiment of the Negro people. And what is the greatest weakness of that solidarity? It is the habit of white supremacist thinking conditioned by three-and-a-half centuries of oppression of the Negro and extermination of the Indian in America. Again, the fight against white supremacy and the white-skin privileges *is* the key.”<sup>105</sup>

Allen responded to the third argument, which he considered “the nub of the task before us,” by pointing out “that those who make this argument have openly or tacitly ‘given up on’ the US workers (the white section at least) as a potentially revolutionary factor.” He suggested that those “‘vanguard’ elements who worry about the difficulty of ‘selling’ the rank-and-file on the idea of repudiation of the white-skin privileges should begin their charity at home: they should first ‘search their hearts’ and ask if they, themselves, are sold on the idea of repudiating the white-skin privileges, and if they maintain a 24-hour-a-day vigilance in that effort.” He pointed out the “implicit

<sup>103</sup> Allen and Kusic, “A Letter of Support,” pp. 10-11.

<sup>104</sup> Allen and Kusic, “A Letter of Support,” p. 10.

<sup>105</sup> Allen and Kusic, “A Letter of Support,” p. 10.

contradiction” in the position of those who say that the fight against white supremacy is “one of the most important things,” while “at the same time saying that the white workers cannot be won to it.” He noted that what was implied was “the abandonment of one, or both, indeed, of both.” He then added, “on the basis of reading and participating and observing history that socialism cannot be built successfully in any country where the workers oppose it – and *workers who want to preserve their white-skin privileges do not want socialism.*” Here, again, he emphasized, “in America, the fight against white supremacy and the white skin privilege is the key.”<sup>106</sup>

Though Allen’s position on the centrality of the struggle against white supremacy was extremely well thought-out, he responded to the fourth argument by indicating that there was certainly room for subjectivism in that struggle. He noted that it was “precisely the subjective factor, the fatal flaw of the labor and democratic movement in the United States, the influence of the bourgeois racist doctrine of white supremacy, upon which we *must* concentrate our attention. That this should have its concomitants in the subjective feelings of individuals is only normal.” He pointed out that John Brown was “subjective” when he said, “Remember them that are in bonds as bound with them” and Karl Marx was subjective when he commented to Engels, “The bourgeoisie will remember my carbuncles!” He then re-affirmed the position that there were “two paths open to the white workers: with the boss, or with the Negro workers.”<sup>107</sup>

In “Can White ~~Workers~~ Radicals Be Radicalized?” Allen similarly sought to “cut the ground out from all the artful-dodging” of “white” “radicals” on the issue of the centrality of the fight against white supremacy. (Hence, the crossing out of the word “Workers” and insertion of the word “Radicals” in the title “Can White ~~Workers~~ Radicals Be Radicalized?”) The five artful dodges that he addressed and countered were:

- 1) “level *up*; don’t level *down*! . . . don’t ‘take anything away from the whites’”;
- 2) “the new working class – the technical specialists and educators – will be able to deal with the white-skin privilege . . . because they are almost completely insulated from the effects of Negro competition, they are not affected by the white supremacy that the lower orders of whites have taken on”;

<sup>106</sup> Allen and Kusic, “A Letter of Support,” p. 10.

<sup>107</sup> Allen and Kusic, “A Letter of Support,” p. 11.

- 3) “the immediate interests of the white workers are in conflict with those of the Negro, . . . But their long-range interests in ‘the revolution’ are in common. Therefore, we need a strategy of ‘parallel struggles’ with each group fighting for ‘its own interest’ against the Establishment. Eventually our efforts will join when the long-range tasks are at hand. In the meantime, however, racism cannot be the main issue among the white workers; at the same time it must be the main issue among the black workers.”;
- 4) “Eventually, when the depression and/or austerity times roll around, the corporations will move to cut their losses by reducing the privileges that they have extended to the white workers. When that time comes, the white workers will sing ‘Solidarity, forever!’ again and join the black workers in the struggle against capital”;
- 5) “Don’t waste time on the United States white workers . . . The privileges of these workers are paid for by the super-profits wrung out of the super-exploited black, yellow and brown labor . . . The victorious national liberation struggles of these peoples will, sooner, or later, chop off these sources of white-skin privilege funds. Then, not before, the white workers will ‘get the message.’ Meantime, the role of white radicals is simply to ‘support’ the colonial liberation struggles.”<sup>108</sup>

Allen responded to the first “artful dodge” by pointing out that this was “one sure way of perpetuating the white-skin privileges.” He used the example of the “Fair-employment-through-full-employment” approach. “Since nothing is to be ‘taken away’ from the white worker, including his privilege of being first hired and last fired, this policy simply means the preservation of the Negroes’ status of last hired and first fired, for as long as there is any hiring or firing to be done, and there are any white workers left to be hired or any black workers left to be fired.”<sup>109</sup> Especially instructive on this issue are Allen’s comment in a 1974 “Talk on the Domestic Economic Situation” that “If you follow the proportion of white to black unemployment you will find that in the years when the depression reaches a crisis, that the differential is narrowed, that in time of prosperity it is greatest between Black and white unemployment.” This finding goes

<sup>108</sup> Allen, “Can White Workers Radicals Be Radicalized?” pp. 14-16. The artful dodge concept is derived from the Charles Dickens character Jack Dawkins, who was known as the Artful Dodger, in *Oliver Twist*.

<sup>109</sup> Allen, “Can White Workers Radicals Be Radicalized?” p. 14.



contrary to the logic of the “level up” argument, but it is consistent with Allen’s contention that as the economy picks up white racial privilege, in the form of “first hired” for “whites,” is implemented.<sup>110</sup>

He responded to the second “artful dodge” by pointing out “It is not the competition that white workers have with Negro workers that explains their infection with the poisonous ideology of white supremacy.” Under capitalism, “all workers compete with all other workers” (this is one reason why workers respond by combining, forming unions, etc.) For Allen, the “reason for the white supremacist infection is the white skin privilege which the power structure confers on the white workers” – “The competition is an economic law; the racist form of it is a social and political contrivance.”<sup>111</sup>

Regarding the third “dodge,” what he and “Ignatin” (Ignatiev) referred to as “The ‘Parallel Struggles’ Fallacy,” Allen responded: “as far as the fatal poison of white skin privileges is concerned, these dodgers do not have in mind ‘parallel’ struggles, but opposite ones. We shall never get to ‘the day’ except day by day, never to the ‘leaps’ except by steps; and we can never come to either by going in opposite directions on the ground that separates us.” He emphasized that “The day to day real interests of the white workers is not the white skin privileges, but in the development of an ever expanding union of class conscious workers, white and black” and for that reason “racism must be made the central issue day by day if the white workers are ever to have anything at all to say about their “‘long range’ interests.” Both Allen and Ignatin (Ignatiev), emphasized that “the ending of white supremacy is not solely a demand of the Negro people . . . In fact, considering the role that this vile practice has historically played in holding back the

---

<sup>110</sup> Allen, “A Transcript of Ted Allen’s Talk on the Domestic Economic Situation,” pp. 6-7. Support for Allen’s contention appeared in 1974 when Curtis L. Gilroy, “Black and White Unemployment: The Dynamics of the Differential,” *Monthly Labor Review*, Vol. 97, No 2 (February 1974), p. 38, pointed out: “The widely accepted view in the economic literature is that the unemployment situation of black workers improves relative to whites when the demand for labor is strong and deteriorates vis-à-vis whites when the demand for labor slackens. Yet, observed changes in the ratio of black-to-white unemployment rates – roughly 2-to-1 throughout most of the post World War II period – suggest that the unemployment situation of blacks improves compared with that of whites when the demand for labor slackens and deteriorates when the demand for labor is strong.”

<sup>111</sup> Allen, “Can White Workers Be Radicalized?” pp. 14-15 and Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*, I: p. 192.

struggle of the American working class, the fight against white supremacy becomes *the central immediate task of the entire working class.*”<sup>112</sup>

In response to the fourth dodge, Allen asked, “If it was ‘forever,’ why does it have to be ‘again’? He added, “that sort of ‘automatic’ solidarity always seems to have a white top and a black bottom, and that’s how we got to where we are today.” Further, since “the next depression will not be the first one,” he advised that those making this argument “First, explain what went wrong in 1837, 1873, 1892, and 1929, just to mention the initial years of some famous depressions, none of them distinguished for the elimination of the divisive line of white skin privilege.” Then, paraphrasing Marx, Allen added that “the power-elite in this country would . . . give up 24 of the 25 Amendments, and the Democratic and Republican Parties, to boot, before they’d voluntarily withdraw one-twenty-fifth of the white workers’ race privilege,” which was “the keystone and mortar of their over-arching power.” He stressed, the white skin privilege “will not ‘go away’, it will not be taken away,” it had to be struggled against and that ongoing struggle would require “repudiation” of race privilege “by those on whom the rulers confer it.”<sup>113</sup>

Allen considered the fifth “artful dodge” to be “1) wrong; 2) dishonest; 3) cowardly.” He thought it was “Wrong, because it confuses the white skin privilege in general, which is the prerogative of every white person living in the United States, with the special form of that privilege, the payment (direct or indirect) to the ‘aristocracy’ of labor . . . which enables those few workers to escape in all but a formal sense from the proletarian to the petit bourgeois life.” He emphasized, “It is not that the ordinary white worker gets more than he must have to support himself and his family, but that the black worker gets less than the white worker.” The result, “is that by thus inducing, reinforcing and perpetuating racist attitudes on the part of the white workers, the present day power masters get the political support of the rank and file of the white workers in critical situations, and without having to share with them their super profits in the slightest measure, as contrasted to the case of the ‘aristocracy of labor.’”<sup>114</sup>

---

<sup>112</sup> Allen, “Can White Workers Radicals Be Radicalized?” p. 15 and Ignatin (Ignatiev) and Allen, “White Blindspot,” p. 3.

<sup>113</sup> Allen, “Can White Workers Radicals Be Radicalized?” p. 15.

<sup>114</sup> Allen, “Can White Workers Radicals Be Radicalized?” p. 15. Allen later writes:

Our white workers are a peculiar institution. Their privileged status vis-à-vis the not-white population, and their identification as “whites”, have caused[d] a large portion

Allen considered the fifth “artful dodge” to be “Dishonest, because it promises to ‘support’ the black struggle, but refuses to give the most meaningful ‘support’ of all, i.e., to challenge the ideology and practice of white supremacy among the white workers.” He considered it “Cowardly, because it chooses the role of ‘supply troops’ rather than that of ‘frontline fighters’ against the vile racist theory and practice of white supremacy.” He emphasized “In order to face this issue squarely, then, we must understand that the initiator and ultimate guarantor of the white skin privileges of the white worker is not the white worker, but the white worker’s masters” and these privileges have been “an indispensable necessity for their continued rule.”<sup>115</sup>

Allen’s critiques of the “artful dodges” as well as his responses to the challenges to his position are important readings for those interested in the fight against white supremacy. In concluding his comments he emphasized how “history has shown that the white-skin privilege does *not* serve the interests of the white workers” and “the concomitant racist ideology has blinded them to that fact.”<sup>116</sup>

### Early 1970s Writings and Strategy

As the *White Blindspot* was spreading and growing in influence, Allen wrote a 1969 article in the *Guardian* (N.Y.) on “Nixon’s Southern Strategy” in which he foreshadowed the late 20<sup>th</sup>-early 21<sup>st</sup> century Republican Party’s approach to the South. He described how the ruling class “has plans to guard its interests against any serious [‘white’] disaffection . . . the so-called ‘Southern strategy’” and how they had “decided to nationalize George Wallace’s platform.”<sup>117</sup>

Allen advocated the need for an alternate strategy in a number of early 1970s writings. He maintained that since ruling-class ideology in the U.S. was so dominant, the

---

of them, perhaps a majority, to pass as a petit bourgeoisie, a part of “the white middle class”, as the phrase has it, largely on the basis of debt-financed home ownership and wages withheld and presented in the form of pension fund equity.

. . . the white workers are not a petit bourgeoisie; their equities do not relieve them from their dependence on the sale of their labor power in order to live.

See Ted [Theodore William Allen] to Noel [Ignatiev], July 11, 1978, pp. 8-9, in Theodore W. Allen Papers, possession of author.

<sup>115</sup> Allen, “Can White Workers Radicals Be Radicalized?” pp. 15-16.

<sup>116</sup> Allen, “Can White Workers Radicals Be Radicalized?” p. 18.

<sup>117</sup> Ted [Theodore W.] Allen, “Nixon’s Southern Strategy,” *Guardian*, November 22, 1969, p. 9. The *Guardian* was an “Independent Radical Newsweekly.”

ruling class was “able to dispense with the services of a ‘Labor Party’ of the Social-Democratic type.” The reason for this was, similar to what Hubert Harrison found in the early part of the twentieth century, that “among the masses of white workers, the bourgeoisie established the dominance of race consciousness as against proletarian class consciousness.” Based on that assessment, Allen argued that the strategic main blow for progressive social change must be aimed “at the most vulnerable point at which a decisive blow can be struck against bourgeois rule in the United States” – “white supremacy.”<sup>118</sup> In terms of the movement for women’s liberation he similarly argued, “the main blow of the revolutionary women’s liberation struggle should be directed at the link between male supremacy and white supremacy.”<sup>119</sup>

In a “Preface” to a 1972 reprint of the *White Blindspot* pamphlet, co-author Noel Ignatiev explained that the “white skin privilege” analysis offered “an approach toward strategy which is manifested in the choice of slogans and issues, the character of alliances, methods of organization.” Ignatiev emphasized that “repudiation of the white skin privilege . . . refers to a policy of struggle, of which mass action is the decisive aspect, against the ruling class policy of favoritism for whites – a struggle which . . . is in the class interests of the proletariat as a whole.” Since the white privilege system permeates society and since, as Harrison pointed out, “the Negro is the touchstone,” issues around which to wage struggle abound. The list includes policies and practices related to hiring, firing, promotions, discipline, hours and conditions of work, incarceration, healthcare, education, housing, voting rights, immigration, etc. – and it goes on and on. In his writings Allen discussed historical examples of “white race” privilege and struggles against those race privileges in matters involving slavery, Reconstruction, “free land,” “constitutional liberties,” “immigration,” social mobility, all-white craft unions, election primaries, the southern “Cotton Mill Campaign,” etc. He discussed more contemporary examples of struggles against race privileges involving

---

<sup>118</sup> Theodore W. Allen, “Background material for Ted Allen’s Contribution to Panel Discussion on ‘National Differences within the Class’” [Conference of Eastern and Midwestern shop and community organizers – some 500 in attendance – held at Loveland, Ohio (near Cincinnati) weekend of 20 October 1972], (n.p., 1972), p. 1, copy in possession of author.

<sup>119</sup> Theodore W. Allen, “Background material for Ted Allen’s Contribution to Panel Discussion on ‘National Differences within the Class,’” (n.p., 1972), p. 1, copy in possession of author, and Allen, “Most Vulnerable Point,” p. 1.

European Americans including: students “fighting . . . white privileged . . . urban removal”; toolmakers challenging the “white skin privileges” of their craft union; workers support for affirmative action by challenging racially privileged seniority systems; postal workers challenging racially privileged access to overtime opportunities with egalitarian rotations; teachers challenging “white race” privileged employment patterns resulting in the “whitening” of the teacher workforce – and he emphasized that “repudiation of the white skin privilege” was an ongoing struggle. He also pointed out that the slogans “repudiate white race privilege” and “‘Solidarity forever!’ means ‘Privileges never!’” have meaning for contemporary struggles as do such slogans as “Workers of the world unite,” “Abolish the wage system,” and “An injury to one is an injury to all!”<sup>120</sup>

In 1973 Allen offered a two-part review/critique of the Communist Party economist Victor Perlo’s *The Unstable Economy: Booms and Recessions in the U.S. Since 1945*. In his review Allen pointed out that the U.S. economic crises of 1873-77, 1893-94, and 1929-32 “did produce at least the elements of a revolutionary situation.” He then added, in words that bear on contemporary struggles, “That they did not develop further into revolutions is not due to the lack of an appropriate objective situation but mainly to the failure of the white section of the proletarian movement to maintain solidarity with black labor.”<sup>121</sup> As he had written earlier, “It is *precisely* the subjective factor, the fatal flaw of the labor and democratic movements in the United States, the influence of the bourgeois racist doctrine of white supremacy, upon which we *must* concentrate our attention.”<sup>122</sup>

---

<sup>120</sup> Noel Ignatin (Ignatiev), “Preface to the 1972 Publication of *White Blindspot*,” (n.p., 1971); Allen, “Can White Workers Radicals Be Radicalized?” 16; Allen, “In Defense of Affirmative Action in Employment Policy”; and Allen, Comments in his personal copy of *A House Divided*, p. 113. Under a policy of mass struggle, such as that described by Ignatiev and Allen, European-American opponents of racial slavery did not “ask to be enslaved” – they took part, with African Americans and others, in the abolition movement and the underground railroad, they opposed the Fugitive Slave Act, and they took up arms – knowing full well the consequences they might have to face.

<sup>121</sup> Ted (Theodore W.) Allen, “Contradictions in Keynesian Economics: *The Unstable Economy: Booms and Recessions in the U.S. Since 1945*” (review of book by Victor Perlo, part 1), *Guardian* (NY), April 11, 1973, p. 17 and Ted (Theodore W.) Allen, “The Contradictions of Keynes and Perlo: *The Unstable Economy: Booms and Recessions in the U.S. Since 1945*” (review of book by Victor Perlo, part 2), *Guardian* (NY), April 18, 1973, p. 18.

<sup>122</sup> Allen and Kusic, “A Letter of Support,” p. 11.

Allen offered additional insights relevant to the currently developing American conjuncture in an instructive 1974 talk on the economic situation and in a 1997 update that he presented before the Union of Radical Political Economists. He suggested that the history of class struggle in the U.S. could be interpreted as a five-stage cycle in which:

- 1) The normal course of capitalist events brings on a deterioration of the conditions of the laboring classes.
- 2) The substance of the white-skin privileges becomes somewhat drained away by increased insecurity and exploitation.
- 3) The laboring-class “whites” manifest, to a greater or lesser extent, a tendency to make common cause with laboring-class Blacks against capital.
- 4) The ruling class moves to re-substantiate the racial privileges of the white workers vis-à-vis the Blacks.
- 5) The white workers take the bait, repudiate solidarity with Black laboring people and submit themselves without radical protest to exploitation by the privilege-givers.<sup>123</sup>

In describing these stages Allen again used unemployment figures as an example. He explained that “one important aspect of white supremacist capitalist rule in this country” is that “the unemployment rate for white workers is *supposed* to be only half as much as that for black workers.” He wryly noted, though “they don’t exactly believe in quotas . . . they manage that one.” But, there is “a limit on how much unemployment can be put on the back of black workers.” Thus, if you follow the proportion of white to Black unemployment “you will find that in the years when the depression reaches a crisis, that the differential is narrowed, that in times of prosperity it is the greatest.” In the first phase conditions get bad then, in the second, “some substance of white skin privilege begins to be drained away, . . . the preference is there but the differential of the substance narrows.” Regarding stage four, Allen showed that “the differential between black and

---

<sup>123</sup> Allen, “Strategy for the Struggle of the ‘Common People’ Against the ‘Titans’ of Capital in the Impending Crisis” and Allen, “A Transcript of Ted Allen’s Talk on the Domestic Economic Situation,” pp. 6-7.

white unemployment went up” between 1929 and 1941. All of this followed the “first hired, last fired” pattern of racial privileges for “whites.”<sup>124</sup>

Allen emphasized the crucial importance of anti-white supremacist, working-class struggle at all stages, but particularly between phases 3 and 5. For Allen, this was an especially key period to challenge the re-substantiation of “white race” privileges and to heighten anti-white supremacist struggle. To counter the past pattern of an “upsurge of mass struggle” that gets “swept into . . . white supremacist errors,” Allen urged keeping two principles in mind. “One, anything that cuts profit is good” and two, maintain “*anti-white supremacist, proletarian hegemony*” in mass struggles. He warned, “any other kind than anti-white supremacist proletarian hegemony . . . is not going to avoid phase 4 of the cycle.”<sup>125</sup>

### “The Invention of the White Race”

In the course of his late 1960s-early 1970s writings on the three great social crises and on white supremacy as “the Achilles heel of the labor, democratic, and socialist movement in this country,” and after publication of Winthrop D. Jordan’s National Book Award-winning *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (in 1968), Allen decided that the problems of white supremacy couldn’t be resolved without a history of the plantation colonies of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. His reasoning was clear:

---

<sup>124</sup> Allen, “A Transcript of Ted Allen’s Talk on the Domestic Economic Situation,” p. 6.

Allen, “White Supremacy in U.S. History,” pp., 1, 3, 4, compares unemployment rates between North and South between 1930 and 1940 and points out that “Where ‘labor’s greatest victories’ were won [in the North], the white skin privileges of white labor were increased the most.” To Allen, “The accent on the white-skin privileges of white labor continued in the post war period” and “the national Black unemployment rate . . . [became] double that of the white rate” and then grew even higher. See also Gilroy, “Black and White Unemployment: The Dynamics of the Differential,” p. 38.

Regarding the political importance to the ruling class of maintaining of such differentials, Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*, p. 198, points out: “It was in the interest of the slave-labor system to maintain the white-skin privilege differential in favor of the European-American workers. At the same time, however, it was equally in the interest of the employers of wage-labor, as well as of bond-labor, that the differential be kept to no more than the minimum necessary for the purpose of keeping the European-American workers in the ‘white race’ corral. To increase the differential beyond that degree would entail an unnecessary deduction from capitalist profits, which would be distributed by the workings of the average rate over the employers of bond-labor as well as employers of wage-labor.”

In Allen, “From the War of Independence to the Civil War,” draft for “Toward a Revolution in Labor History,” December 10, 2003, he adds, “While it was to the political interest of the capitalists to maintain a sufficient differential in the compensation of ‘white’ workers, it was at the same time in the employers’ interest to limit the money cost of that differential to the minimum necessary to keep the European-American workers in the ‘white race’ corral politically.”

<sup>125</sup> Allen, “A Transcript of Ted Allen’s Talk on the Domestic Economic Situation,” pp. 6, 7.

white supremacy still ruled in the United States more than a century after the abolition of slavery and the reasons for that had to be explained. The “racism-is-natural” argument associated with Jordan would not do. As Allen explained, “What Jordan, in effect, said was: ‘Suppose your thesis is correct, it doesn't matter, because that would only serve to underscore the fact that white supremacy is just naturally the way white people are.’” Allen felt “there was no way of getting around the challenge posed by Jordan's book” and he set out to investigate what Jordan was “presenting as the result of his study of his subject.” He understood that Jordan’s work “had fundamental implications for the struggle against racial oppression” – quite simply, if white supremacy was natural, as Jordan suggested, then the prospects for successful struggle against it were not encouraging. It was at that point that Allen “joined the ranks of historians searching for the origin of racial slavery” and turned “to the seventeenth-century Chesapeake and to the study of Bacon's Rebellion.” He proceeded to search for a structural principle that was essential to the social order based on enslaved labor in the continental plantation colonies and was still essential to late twentieth-century America’s social order based on wage labor.<sup>126</sup>

The first products of Allen’s colonial research included a February 24, 1974 talk he delivered at a Union of Radical Political Economists (URPE) Conference at Yale, an unpublished paper entitled “The Peculiar Seed: The Plantation of Bondage” (1974) that grew into a lengthy manuscript of the same name by 1976, and an outline entitled “Toward an Integral Theory of Early Colonial History (Ten Theses)” that he used for a course he taught at Essex County Community College in the fall of 1974. In 1975 he published “. . . They would have destroyed me’: Slavery and the Origins of Racism,” in *Radical America* and he published *Class Struggle and the Origin of Racial Slavery: The Invention of the White Race* for the Hoboken Education Project. In 1976 Allen completed a lengthy, 266-page unpublished version of “The Peculiar Seed: The Plantation of Bondage.” It would be almost twenty years before his magnum opus, *The Invention of the*

---

<sup>126</sup> Theodore W. Allen, “History of My Book,” 3 July 2001, Theodore W. Allen Papers, possession of author; Theodore W. Allen, “Development of the Labor Movement,” (Part 1: 1607-1750) Outline of the Course (Fall 1974), p. 1, Theodore W. Allen papers, possession of the author; and Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), Chapter 2, “Unthinking Decision: Enslavement of Negroes in America to 1700,” pp. 44-98, esp. p. 80.



*White Race*, was published by Verso. Volume one, subtitled *Racial Oppression and Social Control*, was published in 1994 and volume two, subtitled *The Origin of Racial Oppression in Anglo-America*, was published in 1997.<sup>127</sup>

When Allen wrote in 1994 on the back cover of the first volume of *The Invention of the White Race*, that “there were no white people” in Virginia in 1619 he based his statement on the fact that, after twenty-plus years of meticulous research and examination of 885 county-years of pattern-setting Virginia’s colonial records, he found “no instance of the official use of the word ‘white’ as a token of social status” prior to 1691.<sup>128</sup> This was not merely a matter of semantics; he also found that the “white race” as we know it was not, and “could not have been,” functioning in early Virginia. These findings were important components for the groundbreaking theses that he first articulated in 1974 and published most pointedly in the 1975 pamphlet *Class Struggle and the Origin of Racial Slavery: The Invention of the White Race*. Those groundbreaking theses that he put forth can be described as follows:

---

<sup>127</sup> Ted (Theodore W.) Allen, “Prospectus of the Presentation to be made by Ted Allen at the URPE Conference in New Haven on February 23-24, 1974; Ted (Theodore W.) Allen, “The Peculiar Seed: The Plantation of Bondage” (n.p.: 1974); Ted (Theodore W.) Allen, “Toward an Integral Theory of Early Colonial History (Ten Theses)” (n.p.: 1974); Ted (Theodore W.) Allen, “. . . They would have destroyed me’: Slavery and the Origins of Racism,” *Radical America* Vol. 9, no. 3 (May-June 1975), pp. 40-63; Allen, *Class Struggle and the Origin of Racial Slavery: The Invention of the White Race*; and Theodore W. Allen, “The Peculiar Seed: The Plantation of Bondage,” (n.p.: 1976). Allen claimed that Volume 2 of *The Invention* “contains the best of me.” He also preferred the word “Origin” (in the article title) to “Origins” (which inadvertently appeared in the published version of the *Radical America* article). Of the shorter 1974-75 pieces *Class Struggle and the Origin of Racial Slavery: The Invention of the White Race* had the most thorough set of notes.

<sup>128</sup> Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*, I: back cover and, for his mention of his records search, *The Invention of the White Race*, II: 326 n. 36. Allen writes, “During my own study of page after page of Virginia county records, reel after reel of microfilm prepared by the Virginia Colonial Records Project, and other seventeenth-century sources, I have found no instance of the official use of the word ‘white’ as a token of social status before its appearance in a Virginia law passed in 1691, referring to ‘English or other white women.’” See Allen, “Summary of the Argument of *The Invention of the White Race*,” Part 1, #35 at <<http://clogic.eserver.org/1-2/allen.html>> and see Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*, II: pp. 161-162. Theodore W. Allen, “Notes for an Interview on the Tom Pope Show, September 8, 2000,” explains: “When the first Africans arrived in Virginia in 1619, there were no ‘white’ people there. Others living in the colony at that time were English; they had been English when they left England, and naturally they and their Virginia-born children were English, they were not ‘white.’” He then adds, “White identity had to be carefully taught, and it would be only after the passage of some six crucial decades” that the word “would appear as a synonym for European-American.” Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812*, p. 95, writes that “After about 1680, taking the colonies as a whole, a new term appeared – white.”

1. The “white race” was invented as a ruling class social control formation and a system of “racial slavery” was implemented in response to labor solidarity as manifested in the latter (civil war) stages of Bacon's Rebellion (1676-77).
2. A system of racial privileges was deliberately instituted as a conscious ruling-class policy in order to define and establish the “white race.”
3. The consequence was not only ruinous to the interests of the African American workers, but was also “disastrous” for “white” workers.<sup>129</sup>

### Other Important Contributions in Writings on the Colonial Period

In his writings on the colonial period, Allen offers many important contributions. He discusses some of the “howling absurdities” of “race” as it is defined in the North-American plantation colonies and elsewhere in the Americas and argues that white supremacy is not an inherited attribute of the European-American personality, that “racism” is not innate, and that racial oppression is “not dependent upon” phenotype or skin color. In the first volume of *The Invention of the White Race* he devotes several chapters to racial oppression and religio-racial oppression of the Irish in Ireland and discusses “‘white-over-white’ slavery in Scottish mines and salt works” in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; in the second volume he discusses the English Parliament’s enactment of I Edw. VI 3 (1547), which imposed “slavery” and branding on English vagabonds. Very importantly, Allen argues that racial oppression is a product of ruling class social control needs – that it is “*one* form of ruling class response to the problem of social control.”<sup>130</sup>

<sup>129</sup> Allen, *Class Struggle*, 19 n. 63. See also Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*, II: 27-28; Allen, “Summary of the Argument of *The Invention of the White Race*,” Part 1, #s8 and 13; Theodore W. Allen, “Summary of the Argument of *The Invention of the White Race*,” Part 2, *Cultural Logic*, Vol. 1, no. 2 (Spring 1998), #113 at <<http://eserver.org/clogic/1-2/allen2.html>>; and Allen, to Rabinowitz Foundation, 1.

<sup>130</sup> Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*, I: pp. 27-28, 72-73 and II: 20-22; Allen, “Course Materials” for Essex County College, p. 14; Allen, *Class Struggle*, viii-ix, pp. 3-5, 19 n. 63 (which pays particular attention to the contributions of Lerone Bennett, Jr., *The Shaping of Black America* (Chicago, 1975), esp. chapter 3; and Allen, “Summary of the Argument of *The Invention of the White Race*,” Part 1, #14. The law pertaining to vagabonds was repealed in 1550. By “examining racial oppression as a particular system of oppression – like gender oppression, or class oppression, or national oppression” Allen found “firmer footing” for confronting the theory that racial oppression can be explained in terms of ‘phenotype.’” He defined “racial oppression” in terms of “the substantive, the operative element, namely ‘oppression’” and described “*the hallmark, the informing principle, of racial oppression in its colonial origins and as it has*

In challenging phenotypical understandings of race, Allen took “a long look into an Irish mirror” and offered important comparisons from Irish history, where, he maintains, a racial oppression existed from c. 1217 to 1315 and religio/racial oppression existed under Protestant Ascendancy (especially in the period 1704-1829). He also drew from the Caribbean, where a different social control formation was developed based on promotion of “Mulattos” to petit-bourgeois status. He concluded that the codifications of the Penal Laws of the Protestant Ascendancy in Ireland and the slave codes of white supremacy in continental Anglo-America presented four common defining characteristics of racial oppression: a) declassing legislation, directed at property-holding members of the oppressed group; b) the deprivation of civil rights; c) the illegalization of literacy; and d) displacement of family rights and authorities. This understanding of racial oppression led him to conclude that “a comparative study of Anglo-Norman rule and ‘Protestant Ascendancy’ in Ireland, and ‘white supremacy’ in continental Anglo-America (in both its colonial and regenerate United States forms) demonstrates that racial oppression is not dependent upon differences of ‘phenotype,’ i.e., of physical appearance of the oppressor and the oppressed.”<sup>131</sup>

---

*persisted in subsequent historical contexts” as “the reduction of all members of the oppressed group to one undifferentiated social status, beneath that of any member of the oppressor group.” See Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*, I: 28, 32 and Allen, “Summary of the Argument of *The Invention of the White Race*,” Part 1, #14. In his 1998 article “In Defense of Affirmative Action in Employment Policy,” Allen explained, regarding the “white race,” that “The hallmark, the informing principle of this ‘peculiar institution’ is not the social preference of ‘whites’ in a given socio-economic quintile over African-Americans in a lower quintile, but over African-Americans of the same or higher socio-economic quintile.”*

<sup>131</sup> Allen, “Summary of the Argument of *The Invention of the White Race*,” Part 1, #s15 and 31.

Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*, I: p. 22, writes “Irish history presents a case of racial oppression without reference to alleged skin color or, as the jargon goes, ‘phenotype.’” On I: p. 128 he adds “The history of English rule in Ireland, and of the Irish in America, presents instructive parallels and divergences for the understanding of ‘race’ as a sociogenic rather than a phylogenetic category.”

On I: p. 159 Allen offers more on the “mirror” metaphor. He explains:

We have been looking into an Irish mirror for insights into the nature of racial oppression and its implication for ruling-class social control in the United States. We conclude this volume with a look at an absolutely unique historical phenomenon associated with the massive Irish immigration into the arena of the ante-bellum struggle between racial slavery and freedom in the United States. The image passes through the looking-glass to become American reality; but as if governed by the mirror metaphor, it reappears as the opposite of its original self. Subjects of a history of racial oppression as Irish Catholics, are sea-changed into “white Americans,” and opponents of abolition of racial slavery, and of equal rights of African-Americans in general.

See Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*, I: pp. 22-23, 34-35, 128, 159, and 231-32. Allen, “Summary of the Argument of *The Invention of the White Race*,” Part 2, #92, briefly mentions the “social control adaptation in Ireland from racial oppression to national oppression” and in *The Invention of the*

Allen was in the forefront in calling attention to the crucial role and make-up of the buffer social control group and to the policy of proscription rather than promotion in racial (as distinct from national) oppression, in documenting and analyzing the invention of the “white race” in the latter part of the seventeenth century/early part of the eighteenth century, and in clarifying how “this all-class association of European-Americans held together by ‘racial’ privileges conferred on laboring class European-Americans relative to African-Americans – [has functioned] as the principal historic guarantor of ruling-class domination of national life” in the United States. Allen repeatedly emphasized that “the white race must be understood . . . as a ruling-class social control formation”<sup>132</sup> and his focus was “primarily not on why the bourgeoisie in continental Anglo-America” chose the course it did, “but rather on ‘how’ they could establish and maintain for such a long period of time that degree of *social control*.”<sup>133</sup>

Allen is also instructive in framing the seventeenth-century Anglo-American plantation bourgeoisie’s “two dimensional problem: 1) how to secure an adequate supply of labor, and 2) how to establish and maintain the degree of social control necessary to the rapid continuous expansion of their capital by the exploitation of labor.”<sup>134</sup>

Of major importance in this respect is his detailed treatment of the reduction of European laborers and tenants to chattel bond-servants in Virginia in the 1620s. He explains how that reduction was not a feudal carryover, how it was a qualitative break from English law as codified in the Statute of Artificers of 1563, how it was imposed under capitalism, how it involved “conscious decision-making on the part of the London and Virginia capitalist ‘adventurers,’” and how it was an essential step on the way to racial slavery. Allen also points out that, into the 1670s, three-fourths of Virginia’s chattel bond-servants were European-Americans [the numbers were roughly 6,000 to 2,000]; there was a similarity of conditions for laboring-class and bond-servant European Americans and African Americans in those early years; and, in the period from “the 1663

---

*White Race*, I: pp. 91-114, he discusses it in detail. On I: p. 23, Allen points out that “in the Irish case, racial oppression may be replaced by national oppression under the same ruling class.”

<sup>132</sup> Allen, “Summary of the Argument of *The Invention of the White Race*,” Part 1, #s1, 9, 15.

<sup>133</sup> Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*, I: 1 and Jonathan Scott and Gregory Meyerson, “An Interview with Theodore W. Allen,” by Jonathan Scott and Gregory Meyerson, *Cultural Logic* (Spring, 1998), <<http://clogic.eserver.org/1-2/allen%20interview.html>>.

<sup>134</sup>Theodore W. Allen, “Course Materials” for Essex County College, September 1974, p. 1, in Theodore W. Allen Papers, possession of author.

Servants' Plot for an insurrectionary march to freedom, to the tobacco riots of 1682, there were no fewer than ten popular and servile revolts and revolt plots in Virginia." Very significantly, Allen documents how solidarity among the laboring classes reached a peak during the second, civil war, stage of Bacon's Rebellion when the capital (Jamestown) was burned; two thousand rebels forced the governor to flee across the Chesapeake Bay and (in the latter stages of the struggle) "four hundred English and Negroes in Arms" demanded their freedom from bondage.<sup>135</sup>

Allen stresses that chattel bond-servitude in Anglo-America, "that relationship which was to constitute the economic base of racial slavery, originated in the reduction of tenants, wage-laborers, and apprentices . . . to long-term, unpaid, chattel bond laborers in the early 1620s." He emphasizes that this reduction "was not, therefore, a function of, nor essentially related to, the presence of non-European laborers in the first Anglo-American colony." He also discusses "the fallacy of the quid pro quo of servitude-for-transportation rationale" that is often associated with the concept of "indentured servitude."<sup>136</sup>

In discussing the Indian attack of 22 March 1622, Allen details how it "resulted in the abandonment of outlying plantations," which created a "shortage of food" and "a brief oversupply of laborers." In that situation the colony elite was able to "exploit the situation to monopolize corn supplies and force laborers to work, unpaid, just for their

---

<sup>135</sup> Allen, *Class Struggle*, pp. viii-ix, 3-5, 19 nn. 12, 63, quotes pp. 3-4; Allen, to Rabinowitz Foundation, 1-3; Allen, "Summary of the Argument of *The Invention of the White Race*," Part 1, #s17, and 73; and Theodore W. Allen, "the 'White Race' as 'The Peculiar Institution': Ten Theses," 25 September 1997, Theodore W. Allen Papers, in possession of the author. Allen points out that chattel-bond-servitude was often referred to in the colonial records as "the custom of the country" and that the majority of European-American bond-servants had not signed indentures in their home country.

In Theodore W. Allen, letter to the editor, *Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 66, No. 1 (Feb., 2000), pp. 196-200, on p. 197, Allen writes that in October 1622 the Virginia Colony Council requested the Company in London "to Change the Conditione of Tenants into servants for future Supplies [of labor]," in order that the Company's "revenues might be greatly enhanced." He also cites Alderman Johnson who, in the following spring, maintained that the Virginia "planters" were mostly tenants at halves, but that the colony officers all desired "to have their Tenants changed into pencons" [servants]. Allen adds that by the mid-1630s it was officially reported that of the newcomers to Virginia, "scarce any [arrive] but are brought in as merchandize." See Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*, II: pp. 74 and 108.

On Saturday afternoon October 8, 2005, a commemorative ceremony, hosted by Edward Harden Peeples, was held for the late Theodore William Allen at West Point, King William County, Virginia. At the ceremony Allen's ashes, per his request, were scattered by friends in the York River near where it converges with the Pamunkey and Mattaponi Rivers. This is the location where the final armed holdouts, "Eighty Negroes and Twenty English," refused to surrender in the last stages of Bacon's Rebellion (1676-77). See Jeffrey B. Perry, "Theodore William Allen: Expert on Bacon's Rebellion," *History News Network*, October 11, 2005, online at <<http://hnn.us/roundup/entries/16951.html>>.

<sup>136</sup> Allen, "Course Materials" for Essex County College, pp. 13, 17.

corn diet.” Then, once that arrangement was in place, “the elite was able to use its control of supplies to deny the restoration of laborers to their former statuses.” In describing this chattelization process Allen makes the extremely important point that while there was a “two-way bondage under feudalism” and a “two way freedom under capitalism,” this “new Virginia arrangement” was a “one-way bondage” under capitalism in which “the employer could rid himself of the laborer but the laborer could not rid himself of the employer.”<sup>137</sup>

### **Inventing the “White Race” and Fixing “a perpetual Brand upon Free Negroes & Mulattos”**

In discussing the post Bacon’s Rebellion period, Allen describes how the plantation elite contrived a new social status, a “‘white’ identity,” designed to set European-Americans at a distance from African Americans and “to enlist European-Americans of every class as . . . supporters of capitalist agriculture based on chattel bond-labor.” The distinguishing characteristic of this “white race” was the participation of the laboring classes<sup>138</sup> and the key to this “counterfeit of social mobility” was “to reissue long-established common law rights, ‘incident to every free man,’ but in the form of ‘white’ privileges: the presumption of liberty, the right to get married, the right to carry a gun, the right to read and write, the right to testify in legal proceedings, the right of self-directed physical mobility, and the enjoyment of male prerogatives over women.” Allen stressed, “the record indicates that laboring-class European-Americans in the continental plantation colonies showed little interest in ‘white identity’ before the institution of the system of ‘race’ privileges at the end of the seventeenth century.”<sup>139</sup>

As he explains:

---

<sup>137</sup> Allen, “Course Materials” for Essex County College, pp. 17-18.

<sup>138</sup> Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*, I: p. 251. Allen maintains “It is only the adherence of the white workers that converts what would otherwise be a simple front of European-American bourgeois classes, into the white race, a monolith of all rich and poor European-Americans. As a ‘race’, however, it must remain a monolith, or it ceases to exist. The breakaway of a third of the European-American workers from the white race to the cause of the revolutionary proletariat, would, therefore, mean the end of the white race.” See Allen to Ignatiev, July 11, 1978, p. 6.

<sup>139</sup> Allen, “Summary of the Argument of *The Invention of the White Race*,” Part 2, #107.

The invention of the white race at the beginning of the eighteenth century was the solution to the problem of the participation of the bond-laborers and the poor free in Bacon's Rebellion, namely, how to maintain social control while continuing to base the economy on chattel bond-labor. Since the great majority of the free men could not become employers or even secure long-term leaseholders, they were to be enlisted in the system of social control, not by a class interests, but by being “promoted” to the “white race.” This arrangement was implemented by conferring on the poor European-Americans a set of white-skin privileges; privileges that did not require their promotion to the class of property owners. Such were the civil rights to possess arms, to plead and testify in legal proceedings, and to move about freely with the presumption of liberty. Thus, *rights* that were the birthright of every man in England, were passed off as *privileges* in America, but privileges that, by the principle of racial oppression, necessarily excluded any person, free or bond, of any perceptible degree of African ancestry (the “one-drop” rule).<sup>140</sup>

Allen emphasizes, “in response to heightened class struggle in the colonies, a conscious system of race privileges was established which led to the development of the white race as a social control formation.” His analysis, while focusing on class struggle and social control, treats other related factors as well. In the context of capitalists desire for profit, he pays special attention to such factors as the surplus of English laborers in the continental colonies, the relatively “undifferentiated social structure” of nearby Indian tribes, and the difficulty of maintaining social control in “continental colonies” as opposed to “insular” ones.<sup>141</sup>

He also makes the extremely important points that the successful function of this new “white” status required that all African Americans “be excluded from it” and that this decision, too, was conscious ruling-class policy.<sup>142</sup> He writes, “when African-

---

<sup>140</sup> Scott and Meyerson, “An Interview with Theodore W. Allen.”

<sup>141</sup> Allen to Rabinowitz Foundation, 2. Allen emphasizes the fact that “the undifferentiated social structure typical of the Indian tribes in North America did not present a serviceable indigenous ruling class that could be co-opted as supplier and controller of a labor force” and that, as a “general principle of social control in European colonies in the Americas,” “dominance was less easily established and maintained over continental colonies than over insular colonies.” See Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*, I: pp. 136 and 2: 11-12, 32-33.

<sup>142</sup> Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*, I: 14 and Allen, “On Roediger’s *Wages of Whiteness*,” #25.

Americans were deprived of their long-held right to vote in Virginia and Governor William Gooch explained in 1735 that the Virginia Assembly had decided upon this curtailment of the franchise in order ‘to fix a perpetual Brand upon Free Negroes & Mulattos,’ this was clearly not an ‘unthinking decision’! Rather, it was a deliberate act by the plantation bourgeoisie” that repealed “an electoral principle that had existed in Virginia for more than a century.”<sup>143</sup>

### **Political Economic Aspects of the Invention of the “White Race”**

Allen’s background as a working-class intellectual well-versed in historical materialism and Marxist political economics greatly influenced his class-struggle approach to history. A decade after publication of the first volume of *The Invention of the White Race* he offered a brief, and very instructive, overview of political/economic aspects of the invention of the “white race.” That overview was based on the years of primary research and analysis that went into the second volume of *Invention*, which focused on seventeenth-century Virginia:

Rule of the Virginia tobacco colony by the land-engrossing elite barely weathered an extreme challenge mounted by the English and Negro bond-laborers, and land-starved poor free men in Bacon’s Rebellion in 1676. Nevertheless, the rebellion had demonstrated the lack of that degree of ruling-class social control needed to maintain the profitability of the exploitation of plantation bond-labor, especially as that class was, by the 1690s, being rapidly increased by the importation of kidnapped African laborers bound to lifetime hereditary bond-servitude.

Reliance on English military occupation for that purpose on a distant continent was prohibitively expensive. Yet the monopoly of the good and easily reachable land by the ruling elite made impossible the emergence of a normal petit bourgeois buffer social control stratum typical of the capitalist social order to stand between the ruling class [and] the turbulent laboring classes. Therefore,

---

<sup>143</sup> The Gooch quote is from Great Britain Public Record Office, *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial*, vol. 42, pp. 140, 207-208, 304. The “not an ‘unthinking decision’” phrase is a direct rebuttal to historian Winthrop D. Jordan’s “unthinking decision” explanation for the development of racial slavery. See Jordan, *White Over Black*, Chapter 2, “Unthinking Decision: Enslavement of Negroes in America to 1700,” pp. 44-98, esp. p. 80.



as a way to assure the unimpeded most rapid rate of . . . capital accumulation by the exploitation of bond-labor, the continental Anglo-American plantation bourgeoisie contrived an anomalous social control stratum mainly drawn from the European-American propertyless or nearly propertyless laboring class population by promoting them to the “white race,” and, as such, to be endowed with privileges with respect [to] any African Americans, free or bond.<sup>144</sup>

He further explained, “Since there were too many of the former to be promoted to the bourgeoisie, they were ‘promoted’ to the ‘white race.’”<sup>145</sup>

### **Racial Oppression and National Oppression**

Allen describes the system of social oppression instituted in Virginia as racial and in the Caribbean as national and it is in his analysis of racial oppression that he makes seminal contributions to both historiography and to Marxist theory (which has offered much on national oppression and little on racial oppression). He explains that under racial oppression there is both the creation of an exclusionary social control buffer and a “reduction of all members of the oppressed group to one undifferentiated social status, beneath that of any member of the oppressor group.”<sup>146</sup> With racial oppression, recruitment to the “intermediate buffer – social control stratum” begins with “racial” privileges extended to those of the oppressor group and a “concomitant disallowance of any class distinctions” among the racially oppressed. Thus, while the British plantation bourgeoisie in the Anglo-Caribbean considered the middle-class status of the free persons of color as “indispensable” to social control, “in continental Anglo-America the same basic motives of social control required the exclusion of free persons of any degree of African ancestry from any distinction of social status.”<sup>147</sup> Under racial oppression, even a

---

<sup>144</sup> Allen, “Toward a Revolution in Labor History,” pp. 147-48.

<sup>145</sup> Allen, “Course Materials” for Essex County College, p. 24.

<sup>146</sup> Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*, II: p. 177.

<sup>147</sup> Allen, “Summary of the Argument of The Invention of the White Race,” Part 1, #14 and Jeffrey B. Perry, “Notes for a Talk on ‘The Legacy of Theodore W. (Ted) Allen And the Questions and Materials He Left for Us,’” SUNY Stony Brook, Manhattan Campus 401 Park Ave. South, NYC, 2 May 2005, p. 6.

“free,” property-owning Black person “had no rights which the white man was bound to respect.” This would be made clear in the Dred Scott decision.<sup>148</sup>

Focusing on social control Allen further explains that “the essential difference between racial and national oppression” is that “in the system of racial oppression social control depends upon the denial of the legitimacy of social distinction within the oppressed group” while in the system of national oppression “social control depends upon the acceptance and fostering of social distinctions within the oppressed group.”<sup>149</sup> In Virginia, after Bacon’s Rebellion, persons of discernible non-European ancestry were denied a role in the social control buffer group, the bulk of which was made up of working-class “whites.” By contrast, in the Caribbean, “Mulattos” were included in the social control group and were promoted into middle-class status. For Allen, “the difference in the social status of persons of mixed Afro-Euro ancestry in the British West Indies, on the one hand, and in continental Anglo-America, on the other, is not explained by the need for the English to know they were “white” [a critical reference to Winthrop D. Jordan’s *White Over Black* – JP], but by the variations in the social control systems required to preserve the economic interests of the ruling class in securing the surplus labor of the bond laborers in each situation.” That difference “was rooted in the objective fact that in the West Indies there were *too few* laboring-class Europeans to embody an adequate petit bourgeoisie, while in the continental colonies there were *too many* to be accommodated in the ranks of that class.”<sup>150</sup>

Allen also explains that “racial oppression, gender oppression, and national oppression, all present basic lines of social distinction other than economic ones” and that, though “inherently contradictory to class distinctions, these forms of social oppression, nevertheless, under normal conditions, serve to reinforce the ascendancy of the ruling class.” He emphasizes that “students of political science, and ‘world changers,’ need to understand both the unique nature of each of these forms as well as the ways in which they differ, and the ways in which they interrelate with each other and with class

<sup>148</sup> See documents related to Dred Scott v. Sandford, March 6, 1857 decision at <<http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/DredScott.html>>.

<sup>149</sup> Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*, I: pp. 23, 241 n. 11.

<sup>150</sup> Allen, “Summary of the Argument of *The Invention of the White Race*,” Part 2, #102; Theodore W. Allen, “Commentary on Istvan Meszaros’s *Beyond Capital*,” *Cultural Logic*, 2005, n. 19 at <<http://clogic.eserver.org/2005/allen.html>>; and Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*, I: pp. 35-36.

oppression.” With this understanding he describes how a colonizing power can “deny, disregard, and delegitimize the hierarchical . . . distinctions previously existing among the people brought under colonial rule” with the object being “social death for the subjected group as a whole” and how “the social death of the subjected people is followed by social resurrection in new forms which take up the task of overthrowing racial oppression.” He also notes how, “in some cases, the ruling power is able to maintain its dominance only by co-opting a stratum of the subject population into the system of social control.” Thus, by “officially establishing a social distinction among the oppressed, the colonial power” can transform “its system of social control from racial oppression to national oppression.” In the nineteenth century, “the Haitian Revolution represented the failure of this colonial policy of co-optation” while “British policy in the West Indies, and the policy of British Union and Catholic Emancipation in Ireland, represented its success.” On the other hand, “the colonial power in continental Anglo-America and in the Union of South Africa succeeded in stabilizing its rule on the foundation of racial oppression.”<sup>151</sup>

In his writings on the class struggle, oppression, and social control in the Americas, Allen paid special attention “to the resistance and rebellion practiced by the African bond-laborers and their descendants.” He highlighted the insurrection efforts of “Denmark Vesey (1822) and Nat Turner (1831), ‘workmen . . . distinctly of a laboring class.’” He also considered the Haitian Revolution as the historically “most significant of all” such struggles, described it as both “an abolition and a national liberation rolled into one,” and emphasized that it “ushered in an era of emancipation” that in eighty-five years “broke forever the chains of chattel bondage in the Western Hemisphere - from the British West Indies (1833-48), to the United States (1865), to Cuba (1868-78), to Brazil (1871-78).”<sup>152</sup>

### **“Racial Slavery” and “Slavery”**

Allen describes “racial slavery” as a “system of social control” and stresses that it is a particular form of “racial oppression.” He uses the term “racial slavery,” rather than

---

<sup>151</sup> Allen, “Summary of the Argument of *The Invention of the White Race*,” Part 1, #13 and Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*, I: pp. 35-36.

<sup>152</sup> Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*, II: pp. 9-10 and See Theodore W. Allen, “Outline of a Proposed Book, “Toward a Revolution in Labor History,” December 2, 2003, p. 29, copy in possession of author.

“slavery,” to describe “the particular form of labor supply and control, as it was established in the Anglo-American continental plantation colonies (and attempted in the Anglo-Caribbean), by the end of the first century after the landing at Jamestown.” The term refers “not to the African ancestry of the bond laborers, but to the ‘white race’ system of social control of the society based on Afro-American bond-labor.” Allen emphasizes that “the system’s peculiarity did not inhere in its labor-supply aspect” since “laborers everywhere in the plantation Americas were reduced to chattels” and supplies of labor were provided “through the market system needs” of the Anglo-American plantation elite and “came in the chattel-labor form.” It also did not “inhere in the fact that the supply of lifetime, hereditary, bond-laborers was made up of non-Europeans exclusively” since this was common throughout the plantation Americas.<sup>153</sup> The “uniqueness” of racial slavery – as developed in the Anglo-American plantation colonies was “tied to basic economic factors” and “rooted in the nature and precocity of English capitalist development and the existence there of a surplus labor force.”<sup>154</sup> These factors set the stage for the ruling-class political decisions.

In *Invention* Allen explained “that ruling-class social control over the anti-capital elements has been made effective primarily by the system of ‘racial’ privileges conferred on laboring-class ‘whites.’” He emphasized that the “exclusion of *free* African-Americans from the intermediate stratum was a corollary of the establishment of ‘white’ identity as a mark of social status.” Thus, “[if] the presumption of liberty was to serve as a mark of social status for masses of European-Americans without real prospects of upward social mobility, and yet induce them to abandon their opposition to the plantocracy and enlist them actively, or at least passively, in keeping down the Negro bond-laborer . . . the presumption of liberty had to be denied to *free* African-Americans.”<sup>155</sup>

Though times had changed, Allen argued that “the principle of bourgeois rule in this country” has remained “the same as it was first formulated in the aftermath of Bacon's Rebellion.” He cited sociologists Melvin L. Oliver and Thomas M. Shapiro on

<sup>153</sup> Theodore W. Allen to Glenn Cowley, Memo #1, January 18, 1978, pp. 1-2, in possession of author. See also Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*, I: pp. 28, 295 n. 58.

<sup>154</sup> Allen to Rabinowitz Foundation, 2.

<sup>155</sup> Scott and Meyerson, “An Interview with Theodore W. Allen.” See also Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*, II: p. 249, emphasis in the quote added by Allen.

the continuation of that “racialization of state policy, [that] has impaired the ability of many black Americans to accumulate wealth and discouraged them from doing so.”<sup>156</sup> Commenting in the late 1990s Allen maintained that from the 1960s through the 90s while there may have been some “*individual* promotions of African-Americans,” even those who had “moved into some higher socio-economic quintile” were “under unrelenting pressure to dissociate themselves from their ‘black’ identity, and, above all, the anti-discrimination struggle of their people.”<sup>157</sup>

Allen then offered an explanatory generalization. In class societies “there is the ruling class, which is able to perpetuate its hegemony over society.” It is economically non-productive, and it is “optimally a small numerical proportion of the society.” In general, reliance on force alone is ill advised since the military is “economically unproductive” and potentially destabilizing and since “reliance on military force” can lead to military coups. For these reasons the ruling class, “in effect, commissions an intermediate buffer social control stratum, classically composed of self-employed small land-owners or leaseholders, self-employed artisans, and members of the professions, who live in relative economic security, and in social subordination to the ruling class and normally in day-to-day contact with their social inferiors.” This is “a far less expensive bulwark of ruling-class power than mere military force.” Then, at the bottom of the social pyramid are “those devoid of productive wealth (except their ability to work), who constitute the majority of the population, and whose general condition of extreme dependency and insecurity is essential for the purposes of the ruling class.”<sup>158</sup>

How then, “can the social structure characteristic of racial oppression be explained in terms consistent with this theory of class rule?” To Allen, the answer to that “simple question” was the key to “a consistent theory of United States history.”<sup>159</sup>

The “essence” of his analysis is as follows: “Where the particular pattern of the establishment and conduct of a colonial economy resulted in a critical attenuation and

---

<sup>156</sup> Scott and Meyerson, “An Interview with Theodore W. Allen,” which cites Melvin L. Oliver and Thomas M. Shapiro, *Black Wealth, White Wealth* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 4.

<sup>157</sup> Scott and Meyerson, “An Interview with Theodore W. Allen” For instance, a 1991 poll of Black executives, mainly high officials in the *Fortune* 500 companies, showed that “African-American executives might have to make difficult value decisions between their ‘black identity’ and orientation and corporate acculturation” (Allen cites Ellis Cose, *The Rage of a Privileged Class*, [New York, 1993], pp. 81-82).

<sup>158</sup> Scott and Meyerson, “An Interview with Theodore W. Allen.”

<sup>159</sup> Scott and Meyerson, “An Interview with Theodore W. Allen.”

weakening of the presumptive intermediate social stratum; or, as in the Anglo-American continental plantation colonies, where the colonial economy created a mass of non-essential labor that could not be absorbed into the ranks of a normal middle stratum, the ruling class resorted to *racial oppression*.” Under racial oppression “capitalist exploitation of labor is intensified, while the potential social control problem that might arise from the combined resistance of the propertyless classes is addressed: 1) by recruiting a strictly defined portion of the laboring classes into the intermediate social control stratum by a conferring on them a system of anomalous privileges vis-a-vis all members of the excluded group; and, concomitantly, 2) by denying to all members of the excluded group, propertyless or otherwise, the normal social distinctions characteristic of class systems.” In this way, in continental Anglo-America, “was created an anomalous all-class social control formation, . . . the “white race.”<sup>160</sup>

### **Male Supremacy, Gender Oppression, and Laws Affecting the Family**

Of special interest are Allen’s comments on changes in laws affecting family life and their relation to racial oppression. He pays particular attention to the Elizabeth Key case, which presented “a direct confrontation . . . between the desire among plantation owners to raise their rate of profit by imposing lifetime hereditary servitude on African-Americans, and an African-American’s right to freedom on the basis of Christian principles and English common law.” Elizabeth was born c. 1630, the child of a European-American father and African-American mother. She had been baptized and was scheduled to complete her term of servitude, when the estate to which she was bonded “sought to defend their effort to impose lifetime bond-servitude status on her” on the grounds that this “was the condition of her mother.” This argument contradicted the English common law principle *partus sequitur patrem* – the condition of the child follows the condition of the father. A jury of twelve men found Elizabeth Key to be entitled to her freedom in January 1656 and both that jury and the General Assembly that reviewed the case later that year, acted on traditional English principle in finding that Elizabeth Key’s Christian baptism and rearing barred her from being held as a lifetime

---

<sup>160</sup> Scott and Meyerson, “An Interview with Theodore W. Allen.”

bond-laborer. They also based their decisions on the common-law principle that the social status of the child followed that of the father.<sup>161</sup>

Allen points out “if those principles affirmed in the findings of the Northumberland County jury and the special committee of the General Assembly had prevailed, the establishment of racial slavery would have been prevented.” However, if African-Americans were to be reduced to lifetime hereditary bond-servitude and kept in that status, “it was essential for the exploiters of bond-labor to establish the principle of descent through the mother.” This was made clear a century later in the statement of an owner who, when another woman sued for her freedom, argued “If, in a case of a dispute about the property of negroes, it is not sufficient to prove the mother to be a slave, there will soon be an end to that kind of property.”<sup>162</sup>

In 1662 the Virginia General Assembly took a different course than in the Elizabeth Key case and resolved “doubts that [had] arisen” about the status of children of English fathers and African-American women, by enacting that “all children borne in this country shal be held bond or free according to the condition of the mother.” This established the principle of *partus sequitur ventrem* (descent through the mother), which was directly contrary to the English common law principle of *partus sequitur patrem*. In 1667, eleven years after Elizabeth Key had won her fight for freedom as a Christian, the Assembly again resolved “doubts that [had] arisen” by decreeing that “the conferring of baptisme doth not alter the condition of the person as to his bondage.”<sup>163</sup>

In addition to the Key case, Allen also reviewed a number of laws that worked to deny African Americans the basic right of self-defense. He cited specific laws barring “any Negro” from being witness in any case against a “white” person; “making any free Negro” subject to thirty lashes at the public whipping post for “lift[ing] his or her hand” against any European-American; and forbidding free African-Americans from possessing “any gun, powder, shot, or any club, or any other weapon whatsoever, offensive or defensive.” Allen explained that the “denial of the right of self-defense would become a factor in the development of the peculiar American form of male supremacy, white-male supremacy,” which was informed by the concepts “that any European-American male

<sup>161</sup> Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*, II: p. 196.

<sup>162</sup> Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*, II: pp. 196-97.

<sup>163</sup> Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*, II: p. 197.

could assume familiarity with any African-American woman,” that the enslaved had “no recourse against the violator,” and that even “Free African-American” women had practically no legal protection since they were excluded from giving testimony in court against “whites.”<sup>164</sup>

Allen paid particular attention to “the special oppression of women bond-laborers” and offered insights on male supremacy and gender oppression. He explained that patriarchy and male supremacism were ascendant and in 17<sup>th</sup> century England a woman was not a legal person (except for purposes of public punishment). Peasants and laborers were brought up learning “Every *man*’s home was *his* castle,” and on that basis males were “enlisted in the role of buffer between the ruling class and the women.” By this means, “the mass of men, who were themselves impoverished by the rampaging effects of nascent English capitalism, were made partners of the very ruling class that had authored their catastrophic social degradation.”<sup>165</sup>

In the pattern-setting colonies of Virginia and Maryland for most of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, writes Allen, the great majority of the people arrived as chattel bond-laborers. As chattels, they were “alienable by sale or gift” and they “were denied the right to marry,” which, he notes, was “a regular part of the course of passage to adulthood in England or in the realms of Asante or Dahomey.” This denial of the right to marry prior to the invention of the “white race” had two important consequences – it served to “directly sharpen the class antagonism of proletariat and bourgeoisie” and it “made impossible the development of a buffer social control stratum normal to English society.”<sup>166</sup>

Allen describes how “the invention of the white race at the beginning of the eighteenth century was the solution to the problem of the participation of the bond-laborers and the poor free in Bacon’s Rebellion” and of “how to maintain social control while continuing to base the economy on chattel bond-labor.” The “great majority of the free men could not become employers or even secure long-term leaseholders,” so they were “enlisted in the system of social control, not by a class interests, but by being ‘promoted’ to the ‘white race.’ This was accomplished “by conferring on the poor

<sup>164</sup> Allen, “Summary of the Argument of *The Invention of the White Race*,” Part 2: #s110-111.

<sup>165</sup> Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*, II: 146-47 and Scott and Meyerson, “An Interview with Theodore W. Allen.”

<sup>166</sup> Scott and Meyerson, “An Interview with Theodore W. Allen,” and Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*, II: pp. 146-47.



European-Americans a set of white-skin privileges; privileges that did not require their promotion to the class of property owners.” Many of these privileges “were the civil rights to possess arms, to plead and testify in legal proceedings, and to move about freely with the presumption of liberty.” In this way “*rights* that were the birthright of every man in England, were passed off as *privileges* in America, but privileges that, by the principle of racial oppression, necessarily excluded any person, free or bond, of any perceptible degree of African ancestry (the “one-drop” rule).”<sup>167</sup>

One very important “white race” privilege was “the right to marry” (European-American bond-laborers would have marriage as a prospective “right”). This “right” “was denied to the African-American hereditary bond-laborers who, in the eighteenth century, became the main labor force in the plantation colonies.” The “denial of ‘coverture’ to African-American females, contributed to the creation of the *absolutely unique American form of male supremacy*, the white-male privilege of any European-American male to assume familiarity with any African-American woman or girl.” As Allen observed, “Men of the employing classes have customarily always exercised this privilege with regard to women of the laboring classes.” What the “white race” uniquely did, however, “was to confer that privilege on an entire set of laboring-class men over the women of another set of laboring people.” It also reinforced the privilege “by making it a capital offense for any African-American man to raise his hand against any white man” and this privilege “was exercised not only with regard to African-American bond-laborers, but to free African-Americans, who lived under . . . racial oppression.”<sup>168</sup>

### **Slavery as Capitalism, Slaveholders as Capitalists, Enslaved Laborers as Proletarians**

In his writings Allen sought to lay the basis for a class-conscious, anti-white-supremacist, counter narrative of American history. He offered “the groundwork for a total re-interpretation of U.S. history” that he felt was “unfettered by white labor apology which consistently locates Afro-Americans outside the working class.” This “new and consistent interpretation of colonial history and the origin of racial slavery” would, he

---

<sup>167</sup> Scott and Meyerson, “An Interview with Theodore W. Allen.”

<sup>168</sup> Scott and Meyerson, “An Interview with Theodore W. Allen.”

believed, have significant implications “for interpreting all subsequent periods” of United States history.<sup>169</sup>

Of major importance in this counter-narrative is Allen’s analysis of slavery as capitalism, slaveholders as capitalists, and enslaved laborers as proletarians. In describing “the capitalist development which motored the Anglo-American racial slavery system,” Allen’s historical work shows “that the means of production on the plantations were monopolized by one class,” that “non-owners were reduced to absolute dependence upon the owners and could live only by the alienation of their own labor power to the service of the owning class,” that “the products of the plantation took the form of commodities,” and “that the aim of production was the accumulation and expansion of capital.” He emphasizes that “slaveholders were capitalists – a plantation bourgeoisie – and the slaves were proletarians.”<sup>170</sup> He also points out that the “proposition that the United States plantation system based on chattel bond-labor was a capitalist operation is a widely recognized principle of political economy,” he cites a disparate group of writers including W. E. B. Du Bois, Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, Lewis C. Gray, Roger W. Shugg, Hubert Harrison, David Roediger, and Winthrop D. Jordan who have taken this position, and he adds that Eric Williams and C. L. R. James “view Caribbean slavery in this light, as well.”<sup>171</sup>

Allen calls special attention to the fact that Karl Marx invariably treated the American plantation economy as capitalist enterprise and quotes Marx that “The production of surplus-value is the absolute law of this [capitalist – TWA] mode of production.” He similarly quotes Marx that “The overworking of the Negro [bond-laborer – TWA] . . . was no longer a question of obtaining from him a certain quantity of useful products [as in ancient classical slavery – TWA]. It was now a question of the

---

<sup>169</sup> Allen, to Rabinowitz Foundation, 1, 3. In Theodore W. Allen, “The Historical Roots of ‘American Exceptionalism’: The ‘Race-not-class’ Principle,” Presentation for WBAI Radio, 99.5 FM, New York, NY, February 15, 1996, p. 3, Allen explains “we must do more than expose the inconsistencies and misrepresentations of the ‘natural racism’ theory; we must confront it with a positive theory that is consistent with the historical record, and points a way out of . . . the ‘American Dilemma’ of race.”

<sup>170</sup> Allen, to Rabinowitz Foundation, p. 1.

<sup>171</sup> Allen, “On Roediger’s *Wages of Whiteness*,” #15. See also Perry, *A Hubert Harrison Reader*, p. 72; and David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* [2nd edition, New York, 1999], p. 188.

production of surplus-value itself.”<sup>172</sup> Referring to circumstances where both rent and profit go to the owner-employer Marx explained, “Where capitalist conceptions predominate, as they did upon the American plantations, this entire surplus-value is regarded as profit.”<sup>173</sup> Finally, Allen quotes Marx before the Civil War discussing the nature of differential rent and commenting that while free wage-labor is the normal basis of capitalist production, still “the capitalist mode of production exists” in the Anglo-American plantation colonies based on “the slavery of Negroes.”<sup>174</sup>

In the course of his work Allen addresses a question that might be raised – How can slavery be capitalist, since it is not based on wage labor? He responds, “What is historically significant about the wages system is that it is based on the general transformation of labor-power into a commodity, and that in turn is due to the fact that the producers have lost ownership of the means production, and therefore can live only by the sale of their labor power.” He cites Marx’s letter to Lincoln, that the African-American bond-laborer was “sold without his concurrence, while the European-American worker could ‘sell himself,’”<sup>175</sup> and Marx’s statement that “‘the business in which slaves are used [in the United States] is conducted by *capitalists*,’<sup>176</sup> and for the same purpose, the accumulation of capital by the extraction of surplus value from the exploitation of commodity-producing labor.”<sup>177</sup> He notes, “the bond-labor form was a contradiction of the basic requisites of general capitalist development<sup>178</sup> – a contradiction that was purged

---

<sup>172</sup> Allen, “On Roediger’s *Wages of Whiteness*,” #15 and n. 27, which quote Karl Marx, *Capital*, 1: pp. 260, 678.

<sup>173</sup> *Capital, A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume III, *The Process of Capitalist Production as a Whole* [Chicago, 1909], p. 934 and Allen, “Introduction to ‘The Kernel and the Meaning,’” May 8, 2003.

<sup>174</sup> Karl Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value* Volume IV of *Capital*, 3 vols. [Moscow, 1968]; 2:303 and Allen, “Introduction to ‘The Kernel and the Meaning,’” May 8, 2003.

<sup>175</sup> Theodore W. Allen, “Comments on Roediger” (n.p., July 3, 1997), Theodore W. Allen Papers, possession of author, pp. 10-11 and [Karl Marx,] “To Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States of America,” *Documents of the First International*, 4 Vols. (Moscow, 1964) 1: p. 53. This document was approved at the meeting of the Council of the International Workingmen’s Association on 29 November 1864 and published in the *Beehive* newspaper, 7 January 1865. It was also reprinted in James S. Allen, *Reconstruction: The Battle for Democracy (1865-1876)* (New York, 1937), pp. 246-48.

<sup>176</sup> Allen, “Comments on Roediger,” 12 and Karl Marx, *Theories of Surplus-Value*, 2: p. 303. The emphasis is in the original.

<sup>177</sup> Allen, “Comments on Roediger,” p. 12. He quotes Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, *Life and Labor in the Old South* (1929; Republished with an introduction by C. Vann Woodward, [Boston, 1963]), p. 186, “to buy more slaves to make more cotton for the continued purpose of buying more slaves to make more cotton” (p. 178). Allen, “Comments on Roediger,” p. 13. Allen cites (Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, section 1, “The bourgeoisie cannot continue to exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production . . .” and adds, “The bond-labor relation of production is

away in the Civil War,” but emphasizes that “[for] a time that form of labor was not a barrier to rapid capitalist accumulation, but its main engine.”<sup>179</sup>

On the topic of slaveholders as capitalists and the enslaved laborers as proletarians Allen also draws from Harrison. He quotes Harrison in the 1912 *International Socialist Review* that “The . . . Negroes of America form a group that is more essentially proletarian than any other American group.” Allen adds that in “a presumed reference to African American bond-laborers” Harrison wrote, “the Negro was at one period the most thoroughly exploited of the American proletariat.” After quoting Harrison’s statements that “the duty of the party to champion his [the African American’s] cause is as clear as day” and “this is the crucial test of Socialism’s sincerity,”<sup>180</sup> Allen concludes: “the study of class consciousness, ‘the working people’s consciousness of their interests and of their predicament as a class,’ should start with the recognition of that fact.”<sup>181</sup>

Allen draws a similar conclusion from Du Bois’ discussion of the interests of “the laboring class, black and white, North and South.” Over his last forty years he would often cite, and add emphasis to, Du Bois’ seminal words that “the [white] labor movement, with but few exceptions, . . . never had the intelligence or knowledge, as a whole, to see in black slavery and Reconstruction, the kernel and the meaning of the labor movement in the United States.”<sup>182</sup>

---

inimical to such changes, due to the lack of labor incentives, and to the capitalists’ lack of a reserve army of labor.”

<sup>179</sup> Allen, “Comments on Roediger,” p. 13.

<sup>180</sup> Harrison, “Socialism and the Negro,” *International Socialist Review*; Perry, *A Hubert Harrison Reader*, pp. 71-73; and Allen, “Introduction to ‘The Kernel and the Meaning,’” May 8, 2003.

Understanding enslaved Black laborers as proletarians both provides heroic examples of struggles in labor history and helps to tear the covers from historic betrayals by “white” labor. Allen writes “It is absolutely necessary to teach the European-American workers that historically the Afro-American worker, bond and free, has been the quintessential American proletarian, as contrasted with the racially-privileged, divided-self, white worker. But the operative significance of this lesson for the European-American workers to whom it is taught, depends upon focusing on the concept of the white workers’ ‘whiteness’, which keeps him a proletarian-manque, not by nature, but by self-defeating – yet reversible – choice.” Allen explains, “the reason that Afro-American workers are more consistent in the class struggle than European-Americans is . . . because they are not white” and he adds, “there is nothing but a shortage of class consciousness and courage which prevent any European-American worker from disaffiliating from the white race, becoming thereby not-white.” See Allen to Ignatiev, July 11, 1978, p. 6.

<sup>181</sup> Allen, “Introduction to ‘The Kernel and the Meaning,’” May 8, 2003, borrows this phraseology from E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York, 1963), p. 711.

<sup>182</sup> Allen, “Introduction to ‘The Kernel and the Meaning,’” May 8, 2003 and Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, p. 353.

For Allen, this insight expressed by Du Bois was “a basis . . . for understanding and applying the general Marxist principles in assessing the interests of American labor and the state of American labor’s consciousness of those interests.”<sup>183</sup> As he explained:

Given this understanding of slavery in Anglo-America as capitalism, and of the slaveholders as capitalists, it follows that the chattel bond-laborers were proletarians. Accordingly, the study of class consciousness as a sense the American workers have of their own class interests, must start with recognition of that fact. But historians guided by the white blindspot have, in effect, defined the United States working class as an essentially European-American grouping. In doing so they have ignored or, at best, marginalized the propertyless African-American plantation workers, the exploitation of whose surplus value-producing labor was also the basis of capital accumulation for the employers of those workers.<sup>184</sup>

### **Class-Conscious, Anti-White Supremacist Counter Narrative – Comments on Jordan and Morgan**

Though Allen’s writings, like Harrison’s, played a major, though often unacknowledged, role in influencing the work of others, much of this work was not quite along the lines he desired. Thus, in 1997, when the Stanford University professor George M. Fredrickson asserted in the *New York Review of Books* that “the proposition that race is ‘a social and cultural construction,’ has become an academic cliché,”<sup>185</sup> Allen was not comfortable with the proposition that Fredrickson described. He reasoned that “Just as it is unhelpful . . . to euphemize racial slavery in continental Anglo-America as ‘the Peculiar Institution,’ instead of identifying the ‘white race,’ itself, as the truly peculiar institution governing the life of the country after emancipation as it did in slavery times; just as it is not ‘race’ in general, that must be understood, but the ‘white race,’ in

---

<sup>183</sup> Allen, “Introduction to ‘The Kernel and the Meaning,’” May 8, 2003.

<sup>184</sup> Allen, “On Roediger’s *Wages of Whiteness*,” #18.

<sup>185</sup> George M. Fredrickson, “America’s Caste System: Will it Change?” *New York Review of Books* (23 October 1997), pp. 68-75, quote p. 68.

particular; so the ‘white race’ must be understood, not simply as a social construct (rather than an genetic phenomenon), but as a *ruling class social control formation*.”<sup>186</sup>

According to Allen, viewing “race as a social and cultural construction” has value in “objectifying ‘whiteness,’ as a historical rather than a biological category,” but it is “an insufficient basis for refutation of white-supremacist apologetics.”<sup>187</sup> Allen repeatedly emphasized, as he did in his “Summary of the Argument of *The Invention of the White Race*,” that “the logic of ‘race as a social construct’ must be tightened and the focus sharpened” and “the ‘white race’ must be understood, . . . as a *ruling class social control formation*.”<sup>188</sup>

This position is consistent with Allen's repeated efforts to challenge what he considered to be the two main arguments that undermine and disarm the struggle against white supremacy in the working class: (1) the argument that white supremacy is innate, and (2) the argument that European American workers “benefit” from “white race” privileges and white supremacy, that the privileges are in their class interest. It is also consistent, particularly with its emphasis on the role of the ruling class, with Allen’s efforts to counter a third group of arguments associated with the work of David Roediger and others. Allen felt this last group of arguments tended to veer back toward the positions of Jordan and Morgan.

The two main arguments opposed by Allen are related to two master historical narratives rooted in writings on the colonial period. The first argument is associated with

<sup>186</sup> Allen, “Summary of the Argument of *The Invention of the White Race*,” Part 1, #s7 and 8.

<sup>187</sup> Allen, “Summary of the Argument of *The Invention of the White Race*,” Part 1, #7.

Allen puts “whiteness” in quotes because he shied away from the term. As he explained, “it’s an abstract noun, it’s an abstraction, it’s an attribute of some people, it’s not the role they play. And the white race is an actual objective thing. It’s not anthropologic, it’s a historically developed identity of European Americans and Anglo-Americans and so it has to be dealt with. It functions . . . in this history of ours and it has to be recognized as such . . . to slough it off under the heading of ‘whiteness,’ to me seems to get away from the basic white race identity trauma.” See Theodore W. Allen, Taped interview with Chad Pearson, May 13, 2004, near minute 30.

In later years Allen similarly shied away from use of “the self-standing word ‘racism.’” As he explained in a letter in response to a review of *The Invention of the White Race*: “First, my book is not about, and does not pretend to be about ‘racism.’ It is about the white race, — the true ‘peculiar institution’ — its origin and its modus operandi, as the more general form of class collaboration in continental Anglo-America during both its colonial and its regenerate United States form. (Indeed, I generally avoid the use of the self-standing word, ‘racism,’ on account of the ruinous ambiguity[,] which white supremacists have managed to give it. However I think it can be appropriate in the defining form, ‘white racism.’)” Theodore W. Allen, “Ted Allen’s reply to Judith Levine’s *VLS* [*Voice Literary Supplement*] (September 1994) review of *The Invention of the White Race*, Volume One, 6 September 1994, in possession of author.

<sup>188</sup> Allen, “Summary of the Argument of *The Invention of the White Race*,” Part 1, #8.

the “unthinking decision” explanation for the development of racial slavery offered by historian Winthrop Jordan in his influential, National Book Award-winning, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812*. The second argument is associated with historian Edmund S. Morgan’s similarly influential, *American Slavery, American Freedom*, which maintains that, as racial slavery developed, “there were too few free poor [European-Americans] on hand to matter.” Allen directly challenged both the “unthinking decision” contention of Jordan and the “too few free poor” contention of Morgan.<sup>189</sup>

Morgan went even further in *American Slavery, American Freedom* and in his 1972 article “Slavery and Freedom: The American Paradox.” In those writings Morgan offered a master narrative, which Allen described as “an assessment of white supremacy . . . in a positive light.” To Allen, the “essence” of Morgan’s thesis is “that democracy and equality as represented in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of 1789, were, . . . made possible by racial oppression”; or, as Morgan stated it, “the slavery of Afro-Americans made possible, indeed was essential for, the emergence of the notion of equality as the fundamental constitutional principle of the United States.” Allen considered Morgan’s thesis to be both inaccurate and a hindrance to the struggle against white supremacy. He directly countered it with his own conclusion that, given the solidarity shown during Bacon’s Rebellion, the non-enslavement of “white” laborers was the necessary pre-condition for the development of racial slavery. As he explains, under such circumstances, to attempt to solve the “labor problem” by increasing the number of African bond-servants, reducing them to hereditary lifetime servitude, and making them the main productive labor base of the society would have been like trying to put out the Jamestown fire with kerosene. Thus, rather than slavery being a positive that made possible our nation’s “democratic liberties,” Allen argued that the extension of “liberties” in the form of “white race privileges” was a negative, which

---

<sup>189</sup> Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*, I: pp. 4-21; Allen, “Summary of the Argument of *The Invention of the White Race*,” Part 1, #s7-8 and Part 2,” #s125 and 129 and n. 197; Allen, “Slavery, Racism, and Democracy,” *Monthly Review*, pp. 57-63; Jordan, *White Over Black*, Chapter 2, “Unthinking Decision: Enslavement of Negroes in America to 1700,” 44-98, esp. p. 80; Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1975), 380, 386; and Allen, to Rabinowitz Foundation, p. 3.

made possible the racial enslavement of African Americans.<sup>190</sup> For Allen, the invention of the “white race” with its concomitant denial of freedom to African Americans enlisted the propertyless and poor European Americans into a racial solidarity inimical to their social class interests which, contrary to Morgan’s thesis, were not altered in an objective sense by their designation as “whites.”

### **Not Simply a Social Construct, but a Ruling Class Social Control Formation . . . and Comments on Roediger**

The third group of arguments regarding “race as a social and cultural construction” that Allen sought to challenge were those positions that did not recognize the ruling class’s central role in the development and maintenance of white supremacy. He felt that those positions ultimately veered back towards the “racism is innate” or the “white” workers “benefit” positions.

Allen pointed out, for instance, that the “race as a social and cultural construction” view had no answer to the socio-biologist and historian Carl N. Degler who argued that, “blacks will be discriminated against whenever non-blacks have the power and incentive to do so . . . [because] it is human to have prejudice against those who are different.” Degler had gone so far as to argue that racial “slavery in the English colonies [was] the institutionalization of a [pre-existing] folk prejudice.” The “race as a social and cultural construction” view, also had no answer, according to Allen, to the socio-biologist who might say, “Fine, we can agree that racial ideology is a social construct, but what is your ‘social construct’ but an expression of genetic determinants?” This, Allen maintained, was simply “another version of Winthrop Jordan’s ‘unthinking decision.’”<sup>191</sup>

Allen thought that the “race as a social construct” approach left the door open for the “born-again apology for white supremacy put forward by the . . . [Daniel Patrick]

---

<sup>190</sup> Allen, to Rabinowitz Foundation, 3; Allen, “Slavery, Racism, and Democracy,” p. 58; Allen, *Class Struggle*, pp. 5, 7, quote 23-24 n. 63; Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom*, pp. 386, 387; Edmund S. Morgan, “Slavery and Freedom: The American Paradox,” *Journal of American History*, Vol. 59, no. 1 (Jan., 1972), 5-29, esp. p. 5; Allen “Summary of the Argument of *The Invention of the White Race*,” Part 2, #125.

<sup>191</sup> Allen, “Summary of the Argument of *The Invention of the White Race*,” Part 1, #7 citing Carl N. Degler, *Neither Black Nor White: Slavery and Race Relations in Brazil and the United States* (New York, 1971), pp. 38, 287, 290-92; Carl N. Degler, *Out of Our Past: The Forces that Shaped Modern America*, (New York, 1959), p. 38; and Jordan, *White Over Black*, Chapter 2, esp. p. 80.



Moynihan-[Dinesh] D'Souza contingent" who might at any time "adapt their thesis to 'race-as-a-social-construct' by describing racial prejudice as proceeding from 'white' Americans' reaction to the 'crisis of the Negro family,' and a vast train of 'social pathology' that Moynihan ascribes to it; or, to the historical 'cultural dysfunctionality' of which D'Souza accuses African-Americans." Moynihan, wrote Allen, was creator of the theory that the misfortunes of African-Americans derive from the Black family while D'Souza widened Moynihan's focus by stressing a general "cultural dysfunctionality" of African-Americans.<sup>192</sup>

The work of historian David Roediger in *The Wages of Whiteness* and other writings also drew Allen's criticism and, although he thought Roediger had "contributed to the objectivation of whiteness" and the struggle against white supremacy, he saw "flaws, errors, and distortions of historical interpretation" in his work. He thought that it offered "an insufficient basis for refutation of white-supremacist apologetics, and for advancing 'the abolition of whiteness.'" <sup>193</sup> Allen emphasized there was "a fundamental difference between Roediger's analysis of the etiology of the historical curse of white supremacy among laboring-class European-Americans" and his own view and he felt the difference was important because "understanding the cause [of white supremacy] is essential for knowing the cure."<sup>194</sup>

He then explained: "The main difference, as I see it, is this: I fix responsibility on the bourgeoisie for the invention and nurture of the 'white race,' *as a social control formation*, as the most general form of class collaboration in Anglo-America in its colonial and its regenerated United States form, whereby the 'white' workers are incorporated in the intermediate buffer social control stratum." Roediger, on the other

---

<sup>192</sup> Allen, "Comments on Roediger," pp. 3-4. Allen says "Moynihan gives much leeway for the socio-biologist thesis by insisting as a basic principle that equality of opportunity does not mean equality of 'results.'" Allen cites Daniel P. Moynihan, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (Washington, D. C., 1966), reprinted in *The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy*, Lee Rainwater and William L. Yancey, eds. (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1967), pp. 41-124, quote p. 49. Allen writes that Dinesh D'Souza says he doesn't "suspect" that African-Americans are not genetically inferior, but finds that he cannot refute the Herrnstein-Murray thesis. Allen cites Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray, *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* (New York, The Free Press, 1994) and D'Souza's long interview published as Nicholas Lemann, "The End of Racism?" *American Heritage*, Vol. 1, no. 47 (February-March, 1964).

<sup>193</sup> Allen, "On Roediger's *Wages of Whiteness*" (Revised Edition) #66 and Theodore W. Allen, to David Siar and Gregory Meyerson, cc to Jeffrey B. Perry, "Roediger essay," February 2, 2002, Theodore W. Allen Papers, possession of author.

<sup>194</sup> Allen, "Comments on Roediger," p. 6.

hand, “claiming to be influenced [by] the writings of those whom he calls ‘neo-Marxists’ Herbert Gutman and E. P. Thompson . . . denies that ‘racism simply trickles down the class structure’” and “goes on to disparage [what he describes as] the ‘conspiratorial views’ of those who believe that the bourgeoisie invented the white race, and guarantees its preservation as a means of social control.”<sup>195</sup>

Allen commented, “No serious student of history nor any critical observer of the workaday world, thinks that ruling-class intentions and preferences regarding social control ‘simply trickle down’ to mindless proles programmed to comply with prescribed rules and roles of social behavior.” He thought that Roediger had created “a polemical straw man.” Allen then looked more closely at what Roediger actually said, writing that it was “not reassuring to find Roediger flattering Winthrop D. Jordan, author of *White Over Black*, for the ‘full and eloquent’ way Jordan ‘trace[d] the roots of racism.’”<sup>196</sup>

Allen emphasized that “it was Jordan, along with Carl N. Degler, who played the role of ‘point man’ in the historiographical ‘white backlash’ against the revival of equalitarianism that accompanied the rise of the African-American civil rights movement in the post-World War II period.” According to Jordan, wrote Allen, “European-Americans were indeed pre-programmed by their gene-pool for white supremacism, that ordained the ‘need of transplanted Englishmen [or other Europeans – TWA] to know . . . they were . . . white.’”<sup>197</sup> To Allen, Jordan was saying that white supremacism among European-American workers “was merely an expression of the natural affinity of European-Americans in general, an ingrained characteristic older and more deeply rooted than even the division of society into labor and capital.” Allen wondered “why Roediger, after dispatching the ‘trickle-down’ straw man so handily” could “ignore the very real and fundamental challenge posed by Jordan, namely, the belief that the white supremacism is natural in European-Americans and that therefore ‘there [is] little one [can] do to wipe it out.’”<sup>198</sup>

Jordan’s argument had to be addressed. Allen explained, “Unless we are ready to face the Jordan challenge, how can we persuade others of the possibility of moving this

<sup>195</sup> Allen, “Comments on Roediger,” p. 6 and Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>196</sup> Allen, “Comments on Roediger,” 6 and Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*, p. 23.

<sup>197</sup> Allen, “Comments on Roediger,” 7 and Jordan, *White Over Black*, p. xiv.

<sup>198</sup> Allen, “Comments on Roediger” p. 6 and Winthrop Jordan, “Modern Tensions and the Origins of American Slavery,” *Journal of Southern History*, 28:19-30 (1962), p. 21.

country, in Roediger's phrase, 'towards the abolition of whiteness'? Simply ignoring Jordan's argument will not do, there needs to be a counter to Jordan's simple genetic 'need to know they were white.'"<sup>199</sup>

Allen then pointed to the crux of the matter. "If racial oppression . . . is a bad thing and there are people who are determined to do something about it, then 'two basic strategic questions must be weighed and decided.'" First, "Is white supremacy, . . . a natural, genetically determined characteristic (or . . . a trait ineradicably ingrained in them by an immemorial heritage) of European-Americans; or is it a learned behavior that can be unlearned?" Second, "Does . . . white supremacy . . . correspond to and express the interests of European-Americans?" Allen reasoned, "If white supremacy is a *natural* attribute of European-Americans – then there are two alternatives: either to resort to moral appeals to human decency, which in the nature of the case, would be directed primarily to the wealthy and socially powerful elements of the European-American population; *or*, rebellion by the oppressed." Regarding laboring-class European-Americans, Allen makes the very important point that "if white supremacy is an inborn characteristic, there is no need for the ruling-class to divert what would otherwise add to capitalist profits in order to grant them special 'racial' privileges to guarantee their support in keeping the African-Americans down and out." If, however, "white supremacy is a *learned* behavior, there must be a possibility that it can be unlearned by sufficient sectors of the European-American population to render the 'white race' defunct, and bring an end to the system of racial oppression in the United States."<sup>200</sup>

That led Allen to the second strategic question: "Does . . . white supremacy . . . correspond to and express the interests of European-Americans?" The answer was clearly yes "for the European-American ruling class" who "have consistently . . . confirmed the system of racial oppression as representing their best class interests." In contrast, "the rank-and-file European-Americans have no part in the basic policy decisions regarding the economic and political course of national affairs, provided that their racial privileges vis-a-vis the African-Americans do not appear to be threatened." To Allen, this was "the essence of the historic American class-collaboration compact, the true Peculiar

<sup>199</sup> Allen, "Comments on Roediger," p. 7. See David Roediger, *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness: Essays on Race, Politics, and Working Class History* (New York: Verso, 1994).

<sup>200</sup> Allen, "Comments on Roediger," pp. 7 and 8.

Institution, the ‘white race.’” Allen then asked, “Does this policy correspond to the interests of the European-American dependent classes that live by their wage and salary income?” If so, he answered, “there is basically no hope for a successful laboring-class ‘black-and-white-unite-and-fight’ policy; and the racially oppressed are forced to face the prospect . . . of either appealing to the rich and powerful, or rebellion (with whatever support others may give them out of equalitarian principles).” On the other hand, he asks, “if white supremacy does not correspond to the interests of the laboring-class European-Americans, what induces them to give it their active or passive support?”<sup>201</sup>

Utilizing his argument that slavery was capitalism, slaveholders were capitalists, and enslaved laborers were proletarians, Allen challenged what he described as Roediger’s contention “that the history of the American working class began only in about the 1820’s”; that everything prior to that was, in Roediger’s own phrase, “the prehistory of the white worker.” To Allen, such a position “serves to marginalize the African-American worker, and thereby, makes it impossible to unearth the origin of the ‘white’ worker phenomenon, which occurred around 1700, and its function as an indispensable instrument of bourgeois social control.” Allen commented, “It is unfortunate that by arguing from this assumption, Roediger has hobbled his own intention of confronting the white blindspot that has characterized the work of generations of white-labor apologists, who take for granted that the ‘whiteness’ of the European-American worker is a natural phenomenon and therefore politically irrelevant.”<sup>202</sup>

---

<sup>201</sup> Allen, “Comments on Roediger,” p. 9.

<sup>202</sup> Allen, “Comments on Roediger,” pp. 14-15. See Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*, Chapter 2, “The Prehistory of the White Workers: Settler Colonialism, Race and Republicanism before 1800,” pp. 19-40.

In a talk entitled “A Critique of the ‘Race-as-a-Social Construct’ Thesis,” Allen adds: What if the curriculum for the study of labor history were to be based on the assumption that informs the work of Herbert Gutman and David Roediger, that the United States working class only began about 1820, and that all before that was labor’s prehistory? Such a concept not only marginalizes the Black bond-labor proletarians whose career in labor history began two centuries before 1820, as Roediger does in saying that Blacks did not constitute “a key strategic sector of the working class” in Marx’s time. It also ignores the origin of “white” identity. Instead, it presents the story of the communities of nineteenth century European immigrants, all baptized “white” upon their arrival as the basic history of the working class. This approach to U.S. labor history presents an insuperable obstacle to rejection of white identity, as when Roediger says that becoming “white” was a way in which white worker responded to a fear of dependency on wage labor and to the necessities of capitalist work discipline.” To invoke what

Allen also noted that Roediger appeared to distance himself from the term “white skin privilege” by putting it in ironic quotation marks and that he (Roediger) preferred Du Bois’s phrase “public and psychological wage.” Allen pointed out, however, that he did so “without showing any reason that it would not be comprehended in the term ‘white skin privilege.’” Still, for Allen, the question for Roediger remained, “where did the systematic and pervasive discrimination in favor of ‘whites’ originate?”<sup>203</sup>

To Allen, Roediger “saw ‘whiteness’ and white supremacy as creations, in part, of the white working class itself.” He writes, for Roediger, it “was a way in which white workers responded to a fear of dependency on wage labor and to the necessities of capitalist work discipline.” But, asks Allen, “*why* did these workers ‘respond’ to capitalist expropriation, exploitation and regimentation *in that particular way*, and not by

---

are perfectly understandable and appropriate proletarian fears and necessities to account for the “white-identity” response, appears to be more of a justification than an analysis of the phenomenon of white identity.

See Ted Allen [Theodore W. Allen], “Critique of the Race-as-a-Social-Construct Thesis,” at the Conference sponsored by the Humanitarian Institute SUNY, “Seeds of Liberation: Sowing Radical Ideas in Conservative Times,” October 5-7, 2000, Stony Brook, NY, Theodore W. Allen Papers, copy in possession of author, pp. 4 and 7 nn. 16, 17, and 18, which cites Herbert Gutman, *Power and Culture: Essays on the American Working Class, 1788-1850*, Ira Berlin, ed., (New York, 1987) p. 8 (“Gutman had little interest in the field of early American history.”); David Roediger, *Toward the Abolition of Whiteness* (New York and London, 1994), p. 66; and Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*, p. 13.

<sup>203</sup> Allen, “Comments on Roediger,” 15 citing Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*, p. 10 and p. 12, citing Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, p. 700.

On Allen’s point about Roediger not “showing any reason that it would not be comprehended in the term ‘white skin privilege’” see Du Bois’ comments on pp. 700-01 of *Black Reconstruction* where he writes of:

. . . a carefully planned and slowly evolved method, which drove such a wedge between the white and black workers that there are probably not today in the world two groups of workers with practically identical interests who hate and fear each other so deeply and persistently and who are kept so far apart that neither sees anything of common interest.

It must be remembered that the white group of laborers, while they received a low wage, were compensated in part by a sort of public and psychological wage. They were given public deference and titles of courtesy because they were white. They were admitted freely with all classes of white people to public functions, public parks, and the best schools. The police were drawn from their ranks, and the courts, dependent upon their votes, treated them with such leniency as to encourage lawlessness. Their vote selected public officials, and while this had small effect upon the economic situation, it had a great effect upon their personal treatment and the deference shown them . . .

On the other hand, in the same way, the Negro was subject to public insult; was afraid of mobs; was liable to the jibes of children and the unreasoning fears of white women; and was compelled almost continuously to submit to various badges of inferiority. The result of this was that the wage of both classes could be kept low. . . .

supporting Abolition, as did Frederick Douglass, Solomon Northrup, and conventions of African-Americans in New England, Ohio, and Connecticut?”<sup>204</sup>

Roediger’s saying that the white workers were only “in part” the creators of white supremacy, to Allen, “leaves the inference that others elements in the society made up the other part.” But “he does not tell his readers who these others were, nor why they favored white supremacy and how they created it,” though, as Allen, drawing from Marx, points out, “the ruling ideas of any society are the ideas of the ruling class.” Allen offers examples as he maintains that, “In the period between the American Revolution and the Civil War the ruling ideas were those of the bourgeoisie.” These ideas included: “the defeat of the proposal to stop the slave trade in the beginning of the new country, and the establishment of a quota system that gave a bonus such that two ‘white’ persons in the main slaveholding states counted as much as three ‘whites’ in other states in the allotment of electoral votes for President and Vice President and for members of the House of Representatives”; “the nullification of the slavery-limitation of the Northwest Ordinance and in a succession of ‘compromises,’ and ever harsher fugitive slave laws, capped by the Dred Scott decision.” In each of these cases, points out Allen, “it was the plantation bourgeoisie who ruled.”<sup>205</sup>

---

<sup>204</sup> Allen, “Comments on Roediger,” p. 15 and Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*, pp. 9, 13. Allen cites Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1892); New York, 1962, with an Introduction by Rayford W. Logan, pp. 179-80. For handy references to Northrup and the Conventions Allen refers to Herbert Aptheker, *Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States* (New York, 1951), pp. 246-50, 253-54, 278-79, 291-92.

<sup>205</sup> Allen, “Comments on Roediger,” p. 16, which cites Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology* (1846), part 1, where Marx and Engels write, “The ideas of the ruling class, are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force.” Allen also cites Richard B. Morris, *Encyclopedia of American History*, 6th ed. (New York, 1982), pp. 442, 513 and Alexander Johnston, *History of American Politics* (New York, 1902), pp. 404-05. Allen quotes Senator Daniel Webster of Massachusetts in 1850 that, “the general lead in the politics of the country, for three-fourths of the period that has elapsed since the adoption of the Constitution, has been a southern lead” and cites James E. Scherer, *Cotton as a World Power* (New York, 1916). Allen notes that Webster’s comment was made in the course of his famous March 7 Oration, pleading for approval of the infamous “Compromise of 1850.” Allen also observes that “Webster’s solemn observation was Alexander Stephens’ boast” and in January 1861 the future Vice President of the Confederacy exulted: “We [the southern slaveholder states] have always had control of it [the Federal government] . . . we have had a majority of the Presidents chosen from the South, as well as the control and management of most of those chosen from the north. We have had sixty years of southern presidents, to their 24, thus controlling the executive department. So of the judges of the Supreme Court, we have had 18 from the south, and but 11 from the north; although nearly four-fifths of the judicial business has arisen from the free states, yet a majority of this court have always been from the south. *This we have required, so as to guard against any interpretation of the Constitution unfavorable to us.* In like manner, we have been equally watchful to guard our interests in the legislative branch of government. In choosing the presiding

### The “White Race” and “White Race” Privilege

To Allen there was nothing positive in the “white race” ruling class social control formation or in identifying as “white,” and in his personal and political life he tried not to think or act “white.” He explained that “the white race is now, and always has been nothing other than a bourgeois social control formation in this country” and he considered it “the special obligation of the European-American worker” to act by “resigning from the white race, joining the human race as, if you will, a born-again proletarian free of the incubus of the ‘white’ identity.” He added that ‘resigning . . . does not entail . . . entering some other ‘racial’ or nationality category; such a European-American remains a European-American.’<sup>206</sup>

As he developed the “white race” privilege concept, Allen emphasized that these privileges were a “poison bait” and explained that they “do not permit” the masses of European American workers nor their children “to escape” from that class. “It is not that the ordinary white worker gets *more* than he must have to support himself,” but “the black worker gets *less* than the white worker.” By, thus “inducing, reinforcing and perpetuating racist attitudes on the part of the white workers, the present-day power masters get the political support of the rank-and-file of the white workers in critical situations, and without having to share with them their super profits in the slightest measure.”<sup>207</sup> As one example, to support his position Allen would provide statistics showing that in the South where race privilege “has always been most emphasized . . . the white workers have fared worse than the white workers in the rest of the country.”<sup>208</sup>

Probing more deeply, Allen offered an additional important insight into why these race privileges are conferred by the ruling class. He pointed out that “the ideology of white racism” is “not appropriate to the white workers” because it is “contrary to their class interests.” Because of this “the bourgeoisie could not long have maintained this ideological influence over the *white* proletarians by mere racist ideology.” Under these

---

presidents (pro tempore of the Senate) we have had 24 to their 11. Speaker of the House, we have had 23 and they 12. While the majority of the Representatives, from their greater population, have always been from the North, yet we have so generally secured the Speaker because he, to a great extent, shapes and controls the legislation of the country . . . Nor have we had less control of every other department of the general government.” See also Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*, p. 9.

<sup>206</sup> Allen to Zeskind, March 1979, pp. 6-7.

<sup>207</sup> Allen, “Can White Workers Radicals Be Radicalized?” p. 15.

<sup>208</sup> Allen, “Most Vulnerable Point,” p. 4.

circumstances white supremacist thought is “given a material basis in the form of the deliberately contrived system of race privileges for white workers.”<sup>209</sup>

Allen added, “the white supremacist system that had originally been designed in around 1700 by the plantation bourgeoisie to protect the base, the chattel bond labor relation of production” also served “as a part of the ‘legal and political’ superstructure of the United States government that, until the Civil War, was dominated by the slaveholders with the complicity of the majority of the European-American workers.” Then, after emancipation, “the industrial and financial bourgeoisie found that it could be serviceable to their program of social control, anachronistic as it was, and incorporated it into their own ‘legal and political’ superstructure.”<sup>210</sup>

Allen felt that two essential points must be kept in mind.” First, “the race-privilege policy is deliberate bourgeois class policy.” Second, “the race-privilege policy is, contrary to surface appearance, contrary to the interests, short range as well as long range interests of not only the Black workers but of the white workers as well.”<sup>211</sup> He repeatedly emphasized that “*the day-to-day real interests*” of the European American worker “*is not the white skin privileges, but in the development of an ever-expanding union of class conscious workers.*”<sup>212</sup>

Allen made clear what he understood as the “interests of the working class” and referred to Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto*: “1. In the national struggles of the proletarians of the different countries they point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality. 2. In the various stages of development which the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie has to pass through, they always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole.” He elsewhere pointed out, “The Wobblies caught the essence of it in their slogan: ‘An injury to one is an injury to all.’”<sup>213</sup>

---

<sup>209</sup> Allen, “Most Vulnerable Point,” p. 2.

<sup>210</sup> Allen, “Commentary on Istvan Meszaros’s *Beyond Capital*,” *Cultural Logic*, 2005, n. 19.

<sup>211</sup> Allen, “Background material for Ted Allen’s contribution to panel discussion on ‘National Differences within the Class,’” p. 3.

<sup>212</sup> Allen, “Can White Workers Be Radicalized?” p. 15.

<sup>213</sup> Allen, “Comments on Roediger,” 9-10 citing Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, Section II.

Allen adds that “adapting and applying the coordinate system prescribed by Marx and Engels,” European American activists can make significant contributions by: “1) fighting uncompromisingly to broaden the struggle against white supremacy by encompassing within it every particular struggle against



Throughout his work Allen emphasizes, “that the initiator and the ultimate guarantor of the white skin privileges of the white worker is not the white worker, but the white worker’s masters” and the masters do this because it is “an indispensable necessity for their continued class rule.”<sup>214</sup> He describes how “an all-pervasive system of racial privileges was conferred on laboring-class European-Americans, rural and urban, *exploited and insecure though they themselves were*” and how “its threads, woven into the fabric of every aspect of daily life, of family, church, and state, have constituted the main historical guarantee of the rule of the ‘Titans,’ damping down anti-capitalist pressures, by making ‘race, and not class, the distinction in social life.’” That, “more than any other factor,” he argues, “has shaped the contours of American history – from the Constitutional Convention of 1787 to the Civil War, to the overthrow of Reconstruction, to the Populist Revolt of the 1890s, to the Great Depression, to the civil rights struggle and ‘white backlash’ of our own day.”<sup>215</sup>

Based on his research Allen wrote, “history has shown that the white-skin privilege does not serve the real interests of the white workers, it also shows that the concomitant racist ideology has blinded them to that fact.” He emphasized, “‘Solidarity forever!’ means ‘Privileges never!’”<sup>216</sup>

### **On the Bifurcation of “Labor” History and “Black” History and on the “National Question”**

In his last years, Allen surveyed labor-related historical works “published over a period of more than a century” and focused special attention on problems related to the tendency to “‘bifurcate’ ‘labor’ history and ‘Black’ history.” In his research he found that

---

capitalist exploitation and oppression; and 2) by pointing out the implications of anti-racism for the white race social control formation, the white-skin privilege system, the divided self of the white workers, and the path to proletarian self-realization through repudiation of racial privileges.” See Allen to Ignatiev, July 11, 1978, p. 15.

<sup>214</sup> Allen, “Can White Workers Radicals Be Radicalized?” p. 12.

<sup>215</sup> Allen, “Summary of the Argument of *The Invention of the White Race*,” Part 2, #142. See also Allen, “A Letter of Support” and “Can White Workers Radicals Be Radicalized?” in *White Blindspot*, pp.12-14, for examples of privileges such as “Free land,” “constitutional liberties,” “immigration,” “high wages,” “social mobility,” “aristocracy of labor,” and the “privilege of being first hired and last fired.”

<sup>216</sup> Allen, “Summary of the Argument of *The Invention of the White Race*,” Part 2, #142. See also Allen, “Can White Workers Radicals Be Radicalized?” in *White Blindspot*, p. 18. Allen felt that socialist revolution was not possible where the majority of the workers do not want it and he reasoned “workers who want to preserve their white-skin privileges do not want socialism.” See Allen and Kusic, “A Letter of Support.”

“historians, almost without exception, have depicted ‘American labor history’ as that of trade union, electoral and anarchist activities of European-Americans.” This assessment even included “‘new labor historians,’ who learned from, were inspired by, and responded to the winds of change loosed by the civil rights struggles of the 1960s and 1970s.” Allen felt that though they had “undertaken to criticizing examples of ‘racism’ in labor history,” they still “ignored, or at best, marginalized the propertyless African-American bond-laborers.” Allen’s criticisms were “intended to call attention to ways in which the ‘white blind-spot’ of these labor historians has allowed them, not only to ignore or marginalize the Black laboring class as a proletarian component in the history of the American working class; but even more important,” to show that “in so doing, they have disregarded the origin and nature of ‘white’ identity, the paradox that has historically paralyzed the will of the European-American segment of the working class.”<sup>217</sup>

Related to this assessment, there was one problem in U.S. labor historiography regarding the period from 1776-1863 whose answer Allen considered central for those

---

<sup>217</sup> Theodore W. Allen, “Toward a Revolution in Labor History,” Proposal for a Presentation by Theodore W. Allen at the Conference on “How Class Works,” to be held under the sponsorship of Group for the Study of Working Class Life, of the Department of Economics, State University of New York, Stony Brook, June 5-6, 2002, prepared 17 May, 2002, p. 7 and Allen, “Outline of Proposed Book, “Toward a Revolution in Labor History,” December 2, 2003, pp. 1 and 7.

Among the “labor history” works that Allen surveyed were: Richard T. Ely, *The Labor Movement in America* (New York, 1886); Frederick Sorge, *Neue Zeit* (organ of the German Social Democratic Party) 1891-92; John R. Commons and associates, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, 4 volumes (New York, 1918-1935; Hermann Schlueter, *Lincoln, Labor and Slavery: A Chapter from the Social History of America* (New York, 1913); Mary Ritter Beard, *A Short History of the American Labor Movement* (New York, 1920); James Oneal, *The Workers in American History* fourth edition (New York, 1921); Norman Ware, *The Industrial Worker, 1840-1860* (Boston, 1924); W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction* (New York, 1935); Anthony Bimba, *The History of the American Working Class* (New York, 1927; 3d edition, 1936); James S. Allen (Sol Auerbach), *Reconstruction: The Battle for Democracy* (New York, 1937); William Z. Foster, *History of the Communist Party of the United States* (New York, 1952); Richard O. Boyer and Herbert M. Morais, *Labor’s Untold Story* (New York, 1955); Philip Taft, *Organized Labor in American History* (New York, 1964); Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, 10 vols. (New York, 1947-1994); and Eric Foner, *Politics and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War* (New York, 1980).

Among the works “on aspects of African American history” that he surveyed were: William Z. Foster, *The Negro People in American History* (New York, 1954); Philip Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker, 1619-1973* (New York, 1974) and *American Socialism and Black Americans, from the Age of Jackson to World War II* (Westport, Connecticut, 1977); Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (New York, 1977) and *Power and Culture: Essays on the American Working Class*, ed. Ira Berlin (New York, 1987); and Eric Foner, *Reconstruction, America’s Unfinished Revolution* (New York, 1988). Allen treated the Du Bois work as an exception to his statement about ignoring or marginalizing propertyless African-American bond-laborers.

who would seek to understand “the issues confronting the nation in the twenty-first century.” That question was “Why did the ‘white’ section of the working class on the whole not support the struggle of African Americans for the abolition of bond-servitude?” The importance of this question grows in light of the fact that African American laborers and the Chartists in England did support Abolition.<sup>218</sup> In reviewing the labor historiography on that period Allen points out, for instance, that Norman Ware’s *The Industrial Worker, 1840-1860*, does not address the question and “did not even consider the African American bond laborers as workers, or their liberation struggle as class struggle.”<sup>219</sup>

Allen found that, in general, “labor historians have conceived of the history of the American working class in the post-Civil War and Reconstruction periods in the same ‘white’-labor-first pattern that they present with respect to labor in the ante-bellum period.” By so doing they failed “to take an objective look at the peculiar ‘white’ identity of the European-American workers.” The “root of this erroneous tendency,” he emphasized, was “the persistent denial of the proletarian character of Black labor, whether as chattel bond-laborers [or] as freedmen and freedwomen.”<sup>220</sup>

It was not only the work of labor historians that was problematic, however. Allen found that even historians “of a socialist persuasion,” who have customarily acknowledged white supremacy to be a problem for “the labor movement,” have “continued to hash and rehash a combination of two vitiating concepts.” First, “they accept the ‘white’ identity of European-Americans as naturally determined, rather than as a social construct, while proceeding to treat the history of the ‘labor movement’ as basically that of a European-American phenomenon.” Second, “while they see the ruling class as a manipulator of white supremacy, they fail to suggest what is to be done “to dispose of the ‘white’-identity problem within the working class, which is the

---

<sup>218</sup> Allen, “Toward a Revolution in Labor History,” Part Two, December 18, 2003, p. 36.

<sup>219</sup> Theodore W. Allen, “From the War of Independence to the Civil War,” draft for “Toward a Revolution in Labor History,” December 10, 2003, pp. 23-24, 28-30 and Allen, “Toward a Revolution in Labor History,” Part Two, December 18, 2003, pp. 37-38.

<sup>220</sup> Allen, “Toward a Revolution in Labor History,” 17 May 2002, p. 7 and Allen, “Toward A Revolution in Labor History,” filename “fixtwo,” November 13, 2003, pp. 30-31.

indispensable condition in this country for achieving socialism (whatever form it may take).”<sup>221</sup>

In reviewing socialist labor historiography Allen points out, for example, that the German-American socialist labor historian Herman Schlueter, in *Lincoln, Labor and Slavery*, “does consider the Africans as qualifying as workers” and does recognize “that the liberation of Black bond-laborers was a necessary condition for the advancement of the European-American workers.” Schlueter, however, “excuses the reluctance of ‘white’ workers to enlist in the Abolitionist campaign as a reflection of the ‘natural suspicion’ of the workers toward ‘middle-class reform.’” Allen finds that Schlueter then “resort[s] to a Marxist-sounding class analysis” by maintaining that the Abolitionists “did not penetrate to the kernel of the matter,” the “awakening class-consciousness” of the “white” workers, who, he believes, had a better understanding of “the labor question” and understood that “their own emancipation was a matter of more vital importance to them than that of Southern blacks.” Allen contrasted Schlueter’s position with Karl Marx’s insightful comment in an 1865 letter to Abraham Lincoln:

While the working men, the true political power of the North, allowed slavery to defile their own republic, 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.

Allen concluded that Schlueter “is incapable of questioning the ‘white’ identity as a conveyance of social status for European-American workers, even though that is at the very heart of the failure of the ‘white’ of the North to become Abolitionist.” Instead, “He glosses over the ‘white’ workers rejection of Abolitionism as a manifestation of class consciousness.” Schlueter “failed to understand that it was the ‘white identity . . . that lay at the root of the failure of the European-American workers to give the same class-

---

<sup>221</sup> Allen, “Toward a Revolution in Labor History,” January 5, 2004, p. 30 and Theodore W. Allen, “Toward a Revolution in Labor History” Draft manuscript c. 2004, p. 23.

conscious support to Abolitionism as that shown by African Americans and by the workers' movement in England."<sup>222</sup>

Moving next to Communist Party-related historiography Allen discussed how the work of Philip S. Foner, William Z. Foster and "James S. Allen" (pseudonym of Sol Auerbach) drew from Schlueter's treatment of "'labor history' in the antebellum period" and, despite "all of their imitation of Schlueter's thesis," they also managed to put forth "a new variation in 'white' labor apologetics." This "new variation" was tied to their treatment of "'The Negro Question' as a 'National Question'" and was "traceable to the theory adopted by the Communist Party in 1930, describing the 'Negro question as a national question,' in the Leninist sense, and the Black-majority region, the 'Black Belt,' in the South, as constituting an oppressed nation."<sup>223</sup> Allen pointed out that while Schlueter could leave "out of consideration the racial oppression of African Americans regardless of economic class," "simplify the 'Negro question' as merely a 'labor question,'" "unhesitatingly speak of the bond-laborers as 'black class comrades' of the 'white' wage-workers without taking into account the system of racial oppression," and "avoid criticizing the anti-Negro practices of 'the white class comrades,' and indeed make justification for them," Foster, "armed with the Leninist concept of 'national' oppression," was "able to address [the special] white supremacist oppression of African Americans" of "every social class."<sup>224</sup> Allen's important criticism, however, was that this new approach "used the 'national question' theory to deny the history of bond-laborers as proletarian history" and "to obscure the white question." In particular, it never stopped "to question, from a proletarian point of view, the legitimacy of the 'white' identity of working class European-Americans." Thus, for Allen, the Communist Party's "'decisive turn' in the theory of the 'Negro question' was to bring no improvement over traditional 'white' labor historiography, because, like 'labor' historians before them, Foner, Foster and Auerbach never stopped to question, from a proletarian point of view, the legitimacy of the 'white' identity of working class European-Americans."<sup>225</sup>

---

<sup>222</sup> Allen, "From the War of Independence to the Civil War," draft for "Toward a Revolution in Labor History," December 10, 2003, pp. 23-30; Allen, "Toward a Revolution in Labor History," Part Two, December 18, 2003, pp. 38, 46-47, and Schlueter, *Lincoln Labor and Slavery*, pp. 45-47.

<sup>223</sup> Allen, "Toward a Revolution in Labor History," Part Two, December 22, 2003, 47.

<sup>224</sup> Allen, "Toward a Revolution in Labor History," December 22, 2003, pp. 57-58.

<sup>225</sup> Theodore W. Allen, "From the War of Independence to the Civil War," draft for "Toward a Revolution

Allen also discussed the practice related to the theory. He explained, that in the early 1930s when the Communist Party propounded the thesis of the “Negro nation in the Black Belt,” “The ‘Negro question,’” as it was termed, “was given a rational historical basis for challenging the theory and practice of white supremacy.” He emphasized that “an absolutely key corollary of this theory was the assignment of a particular responsibility to ‘white’ radicals to combat white supremacist practices within the working class,” what Harrison, almost two decades earlier, had argued was the duty of the Socialists. The Communists “subsequently gained a wide degree of acceptance and indeed cooptation within a New Deal coalition, Roosevelt’s famous ‘troika,’ – big city political machines, the labor movement, and the avowedly white-supremacist ‘Solid South.’” “The price paid,” however, “was the abandonment of the centrality of the struggle against white supremacy within the working class.” “Under this circumstance,” explains Allen, “the Black Belt nation theory was made to serve the very opposite of its originally declared intent, by making Black liberation contingent primarily upon the eventual victory of the racially privileged working-class ‘whites.’”<sup>226</sup>

A particularly troubling issue for Allen was that under this “national question” theoretical framework “the mass of African Americans [except for the industrial wage workers at the margins] in the South were to be re-categorized from non-proletarian ‘slaves,’ into various non-proletarian characterizations, such as ‘rural petty-bourgeoisie,’ or as ‘semi-slaves’ or ‘serfs’ [by “James S. Allen”/ (Auerbach)] or ‘as share-croppers,’ or ‘the great mass of Negro peasantry’ [by Harry Haywood] – but not as proletarian bearers of the historical role intended by Marx.” William Z. Foster, in his *History of the Communist Party of the United States*, “staunchly champions the Negro nation theory” and, in criticizing Daniel De Leon (the Socialist Labor Party leader) argues that De Leon “had no conception of the Negro people as natural allies of the working class.” To Allen, Foster’s criticism of De Leon presents an example of this denial of the proletarian character of the mass of African American laboring people. In addition, Foster, in his *The*

---

in *Labor History*,” December 10, 2003, p. 31 and Allen, “Toward a Revolution in Labor History,” Part Two, December 18, 2003, pp. 47, 57-61.

<sup>226</sup> Ted Allen [Theodore W. Allen], “Critique of the Race-as-a-Social-Construct Thesis,” at the Conference sponsored by the Humanitarian Institute SUNY, “Seeds of Liberation: Sowing Radical Ideas in Conservative Times,” p. 3, October 5-7, 2000, Stony Brook, NY, Theodore W. Allen Papers, copy in possession of author. Like Harrison, the Communists also treated the “Negro Question” as a socio-historically developed and revolutionary question.

*Negro People in American History*, states “The Negro people of the Black Belt of the South comprise . . . an oppressed nation” and optimistically suggests that, “It is one of the specific American conditions that, because of the geographical location of the Negro people and their deep integration into American life, they have very powerful white working class allies at hand.” By this ideological device, argues Allen, “the propertyless African American laboring people who have been proletarians, bond and free, in the South for centuries, can be excluded from ‘the American working class.’” Their struggles against racial oppression, which could serve as models for the working class to follow, need not be recognized as labor history. The point is made clear to Allen by Foster’s writing of “the increasing development of a [Negro] proletariat as a phenomenon of the late nineteenth century,” a concept which to Allen “suggests that there had never been an ‘old’ Negro proletariat.”<sup>227</sup>

Allen’s position that slavery was capitalism and enslaved Black labor was proletarian was also a marked contrast to the position of the Communist Party that was articulated by “James S. Allen” [Sol Auerbach] in *Negro Liberation*. Auerbach maintained that the South was a “semi-feudal agrarian” region. Allen points out that Auerbach, “bound by the Communist Party’s dogmatic misconception that the plantation economy was not capitalism,” maintained that the South was, in Auerbach’s words, “pre-capitalist” and that (again in Auerbach’s words) “there was no proletariat to speak of, for the reason that no industrial bourgeoisie existed in the South.”<sup>228</sup>

Allen thought that the “bifurcation” syndrome in the presentation of “labor” history and “Negro” history was also on marked display in the contrasting treatment presented in *Organized Labor and the Black Worker, 1619-1973* by Philip S. Foner and

---

<sup>227</sup> Allen, “From the War of Independence to the Civil War,” draft for “Toward a Revolution in Labor History” 17 May 2002, p. 31; Theodore W. Allen to Jeffrey B. Perry, 17 May 2002, with Preliminary Draft of Presentation on “Toward a Revolution in Labor History,” for “How Class Works Conference” Presentation scheduled for 6 June 2002; William Z. Foster, *History of the Communist Party of the United States* (New York: International Publishers, 1952), pp. 81, 266-67; William Z. Foster, *The Negro People in American History* (New York: International Publishers, 1954), pp. 342, 463-64, 556-57; James S. Allen [Sol Auerbach], *The Negro Question in the United States* (New York: International Publishers, 1936), pp. 63, 85-86; and Harry Haywood, *Negro Liberation* (New York: International Publishers, 1948), p. 207.

<sup>228</sup> Theodore W. Allen, “From the War of Independence to the Civil War,” draft for “Toward a Revolution in Labor History,” December 10, 2003; James S. Allen (Sol Auerbach), *Negro Liberation* (International Publishers, 1938), p. 14; and James S. Allen (Sol Auerbach), *Reconstruction: The Battle for Democracy (1865-1876)* (New York: International Publishers, 1937), pp. 19, 30. Similar to Auerbach, Harry Haywood, *Negro Liberation*, refers to “plantation feudalism” (p. 65), “the semi-feudal plantation system (p. 137), “the feudal plantation owners” (p. 207), and “the plantation and its semi-feudal labor force” (p. 107).

in *American Communism and Black Americans* co-authored by Foner and Auerbach. In the first work, writes Allen, Foner “makes only the merest mention of the ‘oppressed nation’ theory” when he writes, “This idea never met with much response from blacks and was short-lived.” The Auerbach and Foner work, however, credits the adoption of the “oppressed nation” theory as representing “a decisive turn away from the Socialist [Party] position” by overcoming “the dualism of class vs. race by encompassing both the concept of the oppressed nation striving for liberation, and as such the potential ally of the working class in the struggle for Socialism.”<sup>229</sup>

Allen treats the tendency to “‘bifurcate’ ‘labor’ history and ‘Black’ history” as “an accommodation of the application of the Leninist theory of the ‘national question’ to the ‘Negro question.’” In another of his important insights he stresses that “the ‘national question’ approach failed to face the central problem of ‘white’ labor’s passive or active role regarding the racial oppression of the African American people.”<sup>230</sup> This was “most apparent in ‘white’ labor’s partnership, with the Southern white-supremacist Congressional leadership, and the corrupt big city Democratic machines, during the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration. Thus, explains Allen, “Foster’s ‘labor’ history, describes the role of the Communist Party, in the New Deal period as ‘one of objective, but not official support for Roosevelt.’” In this context, Allen points out that, writing in 1952, “Foster calls ‘the building of the CIO . . . the greatest stride forward by the America labor movement,’ but the Negro ‘alliance’ is not mentioned.”<sup>231</sup>

With his historical research and past activism informing his analysis, Allen addressed the “national question” theory in a lengthy 1979 letter. He was intimately familiar with the theory through his involvement in both the Communist Party and the Provisional Organizing Committee and had used terminology from that analysis such as

---

<sup>229</sup> Allen, “From the War of Independence to the Civil War,” draft for “Toward a Revolution in Labor History,” December 10, 2003, which cites Philip S. Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker, 1619-1973*, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974), 193; and Philip S. Foner and Herbert S. Shapiro, eds., *American Communism and Black Americans: A Documentary History, 1930-1934* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), p. xii. The first volume, Philip S. Foner and James S. Allen (Sol Auerbach), eds., *American Communism and Black Americans, 1919-1929* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), p. xii, asserts that, the theoretical insights that opened the way to the new interpretation came from the Russian leader, Lenin, in an article first published in 1913.

<sup>230</sup> Allen, “Toward a Revolution in Labor History” Draft manuscript c. 2004, p. 23.

<sup>231</sup> Allen, “From the War of Independence to the Civil War,” draft for “Toward a Revolution in Labor History,” December 10, 2003 and Foster, *History of the Communist Party of the United States*, p. 340.



“white chauvinism” up till around 1973 when his research in early colonial history led him to a deeper analysis of racial oppression. Regarding the “national question” theory Allen offered the following in 1979:

If Afro-Americans ask my opinion in the matter of the national question theory and Afro-American people’s struggle for liberation from white oppression [and I do not expect to be asked], I will express my opinion, if I have one which I think *worth* expressing; but not otherwise. This attitude seems to me to proceed logically from adherence to the principle of self-determination for oppressed peoples. Furthermore, I believe it helps to keep the focus of my attention directed to problems more appropriate to me as a European-American, i.e., those of analysis and exposure of the race-privilege system and the fights against its paralyzing effect on the proletarian will in this country.

On the other hand, if I am asked to participate in a discussion around the question: “Do the ‘white’ people in the United States constitute a nation?” I will do so; and begin, at least, by arguing the negative.<sup>232</sup>

Allen added, “It has frequently been noted that the ‘Black Belt Nation’ theory was regularly repudiated in the full-flowering phases of the [Communist] Party’s class collaboration. But a close inspection reveals that the abandonment of the struggle against white opportunism preceded and caused the abandonment of the Black Nation thesis – *not* the other way around . . . the ground had been prepared for that final position by the accommodation made with the Democratic Party and the CIO leadership which allowed white opportunism to go unchecked, in disregard of the rights, interests and demands of the Afro-Americans.”<sup>233</sup>

Allen does point out that “the 1930’s opened with a ringing call to struggle against white chauvinism” and he cites the 1930 Communist Party resolution that “The struggle for equal rights for Negroes must certainly take the form of common struggle by the white-and black workers,” that “it’s the duty of the *white* workers to . . . make a

<sup>232</sup> Allen to Zeskind, March 1979, pp. 9-10. Foster, *History of the Communist Party*, p. 267, approvingly cites Haywood’s position in *Negro Liberation*, p. 140, on the existence of a “white nation” in the United States.

<sup>233</sup> Allen to Zeskind, March 1979, p. 11.

breach in the walls of segregation and ‘Jim Crowism,’ which have been set up by the bourgeois slave-market morality,” and that “the white workers, must boldly jump at the throat of the 100 per cent bandits who strike a Negro in the face.” The resolution also emphasized, “This struggle will be the test of real international solidarity of the American white workers.” To Allen, this was “an American working class party” taking up “as its aim the principle” that Harrison had articulated in 1912 and that Du Bois so eloquently set forth in 1913 in the oft quoted words: “The Negro problem is the great test of the American Socialist.” Allen stresses that in the early thirties the Communist Party “held to this resolve in its mass work in the South and in the North,” but “in the name of anti-fascist unity it converted itself into an auxiliary of the New Deal and strengthened the tendency which did the same for the rapidly expanding industrial union movement.” The Communist Party and the working-class movement “didn't have to ‘hold the Southern vote;’ that was Roosevelt's problem, not theirs.” But, “they made it theirs, for to do otherwise would mean to risk the concessions offered by the New Deal – all of which were cast in the mold of white-skin privileges.” He noted that “beginning in 1936 there is little said about white chauvinism in the official statements” of the Party and, in the South, “instead of being glad that black workers ‘were more easily organized than whites,’ the AFL and CIO organizers backed away, since, ‘to organize Negro workers first was to risk alienating the whites.’”<sup>234</sup>

Allen recognized that “The Black Belt Nation theory – however correct or incorrect it may be found to be by Afro-Americans – by its very existence, represents a glaring rejection of the doctrine of ‘peaceful transition,’ ‘mainstreamism,’ etc.” and it had to be “jettisoned as an embarrassment to the collaborationist policy [of the revisionist Party leadership].” But, as he put it, he was “trying to reach a more subtle matter”:

Both in the acceptance phase and the rejection phase, the fact of holding or having held, the Black Belt Nation theory served to give a gloss of sophistication to the essential process of the Party’s abandonment of a

---

<sup>234</sup> Theodore W. Allen, “White Supremacy in U.S. History,” p. 3, which cites George C. Squier, “The Negro in the United States as Viewed by the Socialist and Communist Parties, 1930-1966,” M.A. Thesis, Columbia University, 1966, p. 64, in possession of author and “The 1930 Comintern Resolution on the Negro Question in the United States” (Final Text, confirmed by the Political Secretariat of the E.C.C.I., October 26, 1930, *The Communist International*, VIII: 2 (1 February 1931).

revolutionary stand against white opportunism – a sophistication far in advance of the simple-minded “race” notions of the earlier generations.

In short, although the nation theory of the oppression of Afro-Americans has been shown to be incompatible with the fullest and most general triumph of class collaborationism, it is equally well demonstrated that the holding of the theory by white radicals does not constitute the slightest obstacle to the betrayal of their special obligations in the struggle against white supremacy, in general, and white opportunism among white workers in particular – the betrayal which, if unchecked, is the guarantee of the full and general triumph of class collaborationism.<sup>235</sup>

### **Later Writings . . . “Toward a Revolution in Labor History”**

In 1996, on the listener-sponsored radio station WBAI in New York, Allen discussed the subject of so-called “American Exceptionalism” and “the much-vaunted ‘immunity’ of the United States to proletarian class-consciousness and its effects.” His explanation for the relatively low level of class consciousness was that “ruling-class social control is guaranteed, not primarily by the class privileges of a petit bourgeoisie, but by the white-skin privileges of non-owning laboring class European Americans”; that the ruling class “co-opts the European-American workers into the buffer social control system against the working class as a whole, to which they themselves belong”; and that “the ‘white race’ by its all-class form, conceals the operation of the ruling class social control system by providing it with a majoritarian ‘democratic’ facade.”<sup>236</sup>

In his 1998 article “In Defense of Affirmative Action in Employment Policy” Allen explained “those in the United States to whom it has been given historically to decide such matters have found it expedient to have class preference” modified by “white-race preference.” They have “established and maintained a form of oppression distinct from class oppression, namely, racial oppression” and the “informing principle

<sup>235</sup> Allen to Zeskind, March 1979, pp. 12-13.

<sup>236</sup> Theodore W. Allen, “The Historical Roots of ‘American Exceptionalism’: The ‘Race-not-class’ Principle,” Draft for a Presentation on Radio Station WBAI in New York, 15 February 1996.

Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*, I, p. 134, discusses “four essential operative principles of social control in a stable civil society constituted on the basis of racial oppression” and points out that “the oppressor group must be in the majority” and this “may incidentally serve to give racial oppression a ‘democratic’ gloss.” He adds, “the majority of the oppressor group is necessarily composed, not of members of the exploiting classes, but of . . . laboring classes, non-capitalist tenants, and wage-laborers.”

... is not the social preference of ‘whites’ in a given socio-economic quintile over African-Americans in a lower quintile, but over African-Americans of the same or higher socio-economic quintile.” Allen also cited a number of officially government-sanctioned, white supremacist-shaped “quotas,” and then argued that, “As a matter of American public policy broadly considered, affirmative action – obstructing racial discrimination against African-Americans and other ‘not-whites,’ and gender discrimination against women – is not a barrier to assuring that the best qualified person will be employed, but rather a necessary condition for achieving that result.” He concluded, “It [affirmative action] should not be discouraged, but made ever more effective.”<sup>237</sup>

In his very detailed article on “‘Race’ and ‘Ethnicity’: History and the 2000 Census,” Allen argued that rapid increases in the non-European proportion of the population “do not *automatically* change anything.” He discussed “the dissonance between the tri-partite, essentially class form historically taken by the social structure in nations in Latin America, the Caribbean, and in Asia and in parts of Africa” and the social structure in the U.S. In these countries “the middle class – the essential intermediate social control stratum – has historically been composed of persons of one

---

<sup>237</sup> Allen, “In Defense of Affirmative Action in Employment Policy.”

Among the quotas that Allen cites are the quotas in the United States Constitution: (a) “prior to the Civil War, the slaveholding States had a quota of additional representation in Congress, proportioned to three-fifths of the number of African-Americans they held in bondage” and that quota “made it possible for the slaveholding states to dominate the United States government from the 1789 to 1860”; (b) after the Civil War, by virtue of a provision of Amendment 14 that was in effect nullified by the Hayes-Tilden Deal of 1876 “those same states were to have their Congressional quota reduced in proportion to the number of disfranchised African-Americans, thus diminishing the weight of the franchise of whites in those states”; and (c) the quotas “that absolutely disregard the question of merit for office, or deliberately negate the principle of one person one vote” such as the barring of “any two persons from the same state from serving together as President and Vice-President even if those two are the best qualified for those positions” and the quota “of two Senators per state,” under which “Wyoming, with a voting population of less than 200,000, gets two Senators, equal in national governing authority to the quota-limited two Senators from California, a state with a voting population more than 50 times that of Wyoming, thus diminishing the political voice of the California voter to a mere fraction of that of the Wyoming voter in this aspect of governmental affairs.”

Allen also raises the question of “the secret quota by virtue of which for nearly half a century, even by official government estimates, the chance of avoiding unemployment has been maintained at twice as great for ‘whites’ as for ‘not-whites.’” He adds, “When a numerical ratio remains constant for nearly five decades, it is a quota; the failure of the opponents of affirmative action to acknowledge this instance of it shows the one-sidedness of their pretended concern with ‘doing away with quotas to avoid racial preference.’” He also describes how when “Tens of thousands of workers are to be employed by contractors in privatized service operations in large municipalities, and the contractors are bound to abide by principles of affirmative action, to assure African-Americans and Latinos a share of the jobs proportional to their presence in the labor pool” the rule is “denounced [by opponents] as a ‘quota’ principle, by its very nature unfair to ‘whites,’ and a violation of the merit principle of employment.”

degree or another of non-European ancestry” and immigrants from these countries are not accustomed to the “white race” system in the U.S. that historically “blocks the path of social mobility of non-Europeans.” He also speculated about concerns of ruling-class policy makers that “the preponderance of non-European immigration could foster an anti-white-supremacist radicalization, similar to that of the Caribbean immigrants of the early twentieth century [Harrison and his cohorts],” and on “a much larger scale.” Of special note are his discussions of the statuses of Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans, his assessment that it was “a political decision when the United States government, through OMB [Office of Management and Budget] Order 15, “contrived” and “imposed” the Census category “Hispanic,” and his suggestion that the “fundamental” purpose of the “Hispanic” category was “maintaining ruling-class social control . . . by manipulation of ‘race/ethnicity,’ in the face of this latest non-European immigrant wave” (in “a country transformed by the African-American civil rights struggle of the 1960s”).<sup>238</sup>

Allen underscored that America “bears the indelible stamp of the African-American civil rights struggle of the 1960s” and recognized that the increasing non-European population “enhances the possibility of the development of a ‘not-white’ popular movement, which laboring-class European-Americans may join unreservedly” by casting off the race privileges that for three centuries have “paralyzed their will.”<sup>239</sup> He saw the “white” worker’s race privilege, however, as “the keystone and mortar of their [the bourgeoisie’s] over-arching power” and emphasized “It will not ‘go away,’ it will

---

<sup>238</sup> Theodore W. Allen, “‘Race’ and ‘Ethnicity’: History and the 2000 Census,” *Cultural Logic*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Fall 1999), #s15, 16, 19, 20, 22-24, <<http://clogic.eserver.org/3-1&2/allen.html>>. Allen clearly saw what was coming with the “Hispanic” category. In 1998 he wrote:

For over twenty years now, the ruling class has appeared to be preparing a strategy to cope with this potential threat to the “white-race” social control system. The Federal Office of Management [and] Budget, shortly after its establishment on 1 July 1997, issued its Order No. 15 to establish a new set of Race and Ethnic Standards for Federal Statistics and Administrative Reporting, and ordered that “not later than January 1 [2003 -- JP], all reports involving ‘racial and/or ethnic information’” conform to this new system of classification. (See OMB Directive 15 and revisions to it as printed in the *Federal Register*, 62:58781-58790 [30 October 1997.]) Let it be noted, . . . that the new system provides for five official “races” but only two “ethnic” categories, namely, “Hispanic or Latino” and “Not Hispanic or Latino” (Ibid., pp. 58787, and 59789). Since the implementation of this new system, mountains of bar charts and statistical tables have insisted that “Hispanics can be of any race.”

See Allen, “Summary of the Argument of *The Invention of the White Race*,” Part 2, n. 242.

<sup>239</sup> Allen, “Summary of the Argument of *The Invention of the White Race*,” Part 2, #46.

not be taken away;” it “has to be struggled against.”<sup>240</sup> He also warned of “white” reaction, most importantly from the ruling class, who “can be expected to use all their power and influence, . . . to try to take measures to discourage proletarian class consciousness by, once again, reinforcing white supremacy through the divisiveness of ‘ethnic politics,’ and by myriad ‘wedge’ issues – abortion, religion in the public schools, pistol-carrying, etc. – hammered at constantly by their auxiliaries.”<sup>241</sup>

In the article “Base and Superstructure and the Socialist Perspective,” based on his notes for a presentation at a 2004 “How Class Works” Conference, Allen argues for “the centrality of the struggle against white supremacy, the historic Achilles heel of democratic and socialist movements in the United States.” He also encourages “collectives, including political parties,” involved in anti-capitalist struggle to “take courage in knowing that the realization of the collective as a dialectical unity of opposites – of individual and collective – is the building of the base of a socialist society.”<sup>242</sup>

In his last years Allen began a final major work, a book length manuscript entitled “Toward a Revolution in Labor History.” That work concerns the labor, democratic and socialist movements and in it he explains that what is needed is “not merely a revision, but indeed a revolution in the research, teaching, and writing of United States labor history.” Allen specifically challenges “the prevalent assumptions of American labor historiography,” namely the notion that only “free labor” can be “proletarian,” that the African American workers’ two centuries of struggle against chattel slavery isn’t “labor” history, and that “American labor history” is essentially the story of European-American workers, with African Americans playing a marginal, auxiliary role in “the class struggle.” “Toward a Revolution in Labor History” calls attention to the ways in which

---

<sup>240</sup> Allen, “Can White Workers Radicals Be Radicalized?” 15.

<sup>241</sup> Allen, “On Roediger’s *Wages of Whiteness*,” #s61, 62. Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*, I, p. 135, explains how under a system of racial oppression “laboring-class members of the oppressor group are to be shielded against the competition of the members of the oppressed group, by the establishment of economically artificial, ‘anomalous,’ privileges – artificial because they subordinate short-term private individual profits to considerations of social control” and “just as the system of capitalist production presents cyclical crises and regeneration, so the system of racial privileges of the laboring classes of the oppressor group are adapted and preserved, come what may of economic crisis, . . . in order to maintain the function of the intermediate buffer-social control stratum.”

<sup>242</sup> Theodore W. Allen, “Base and Superstructure and the Socialist Perspective,” based on Notes for a presentation at the Conference on “How Class Works,” held at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, June 10-12, 2004, *Socialism and Democracy*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (March, 2007), online at <<http://sdonline.org/43/base-and-superstructure-and-the-socialist-perspective/>>.

the “white blindspot” has led to ignoring or marginalizing the Black laboring class as a proletarian component in the history of the American working class and to disregarding the origin and nature of “white” identity. It forcefully argues that the main barrier to class consciousness in the U.S. is “the incubus of ‘white’ identity of the European-American workers.”<sup>243</sup>

Allen felt that for most labor and left historians there has been “an unbroken continuum of Euro-American centrism, of ‘white’ as a norm, with respect to which African-American labor is only a relative, secondary concern.” Based on this, it followed “that organized popular challenge to the socially ruinous policies of the ruling capitalist class necessarily requires the adherence of a ‘white’-majority working class.” He referred to this as “the White Assumption” and he argued, for “the true reflection” of U. S. history, “the beginning of wisdom for labor historians must be the recognition that from 1619 on the history of African American bond-laborers is a history of proletarians. From this all else follows.”<sup>244</sup>

But “the Great White Assumption - the unquestioning, indeed unthinking, acceptance of the ‘white’ identity of European-Americans of all classes as a natural attribute, rather than a social construct” was, to Allen, “the root of harmful omissions and distortions of the historical record, which need to be criticized and corrected if the study of labor history is to contribute to the development of class consciousness of the American working class, and a viable alternative to the ruinous policies of the ruling class.” Along those lines he suggested “major areas” that were “in special need of such criticism and correction” because they were “major ways in which white-blind omissions and distortions in American labor historiography arise from the Great White Assumption.” His primary purpose in offering these criticisms was “not merely to criticize such faults,” but “to give an impetus to a revolution in American labor history.” Among the areas that he cited are:

---

<sup>243</sup> Allen, “Toward a Revolution in Labor History,” p. 2, and Allen, “Introduction to ‘The Kernel and the Meaning,’” May 8, 2003, p. 1.

<sup>244</sup> Theodore W. Allen, “‘The Kernel and the Meaning’: A Critique of Labor Historiography,” Proposed Introduction, letter to Jeffrey B. Perry, May 9, 2003.

1. Omission of signal facts of the Anglo-American colonial period relating to the origin of white supremacy.
2. Distortion of the meaning of “proletariat” in such a way as to exclude African American bond-laborers from it for more than two-thirds of Anglo-American history, and the marginalization of the Black proletarians in subsequent periods, as a sort of social auxiliary in the “white”-majority working class.
3. The omission of the struggles of bond-laborers before 1865, and of the great mass of African Americans after Emancipation in the writing of “labor history,” which is regarded as mainly accounts of the activities of “white” workers.
4. Distortion of the record by palliating, or even justifying, the failure of antebellum organizations and publications of European-American “white” labor and Reform groups.
5. Distortion by an uncritical representation of the record of the National Labor Union (1866-1872), and especially of its foremost leader, William H. Sylvis, with regard to the program of Radical Reconstruction in the South after the Civil War.
6. Obfuscation in attributing the decline of the National Labor Union to its involvement in monetary reform, “Greenbackism,” while ignoring the fatal effect of the NLU’s opposition to Radical Reconstruction.
7. Although note may be taken of the North-to-South redeployment of Federal troops to cope with the great railroad strike of 1877, there is a general failure to relate the defeat of this and other heroic struggles of European-American workers in that decade, to the concurrent defeat of the Black proletarians’ struggle for the land in the South.
8. The almost complete neglect of the Negro Exodus of 1879 and of its significance as a proletarian struggle against capital.
9. Failure to investigate the politically organic connection between the heroic, but defeated, workers’ struggles in steel, mining and railroading in the 1890s on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the “Mississippi Plan,” that was widely imitated in other southern states to disfranchise and segregate the largely proletarian black citizenry, followed by the



terroristic white-supremacist overthrow of African American and European-American poor farmers and farm laborers in North Carolina.

10. Failure to explain why the European-American workers have clung to the delusionary ideas and practices of white supremacy, except by reference to “competition” in one sphere or another, an argument that is no more than a mask for the Jordan and Degler thesis of “natural racism.”<sup>245</sup>

Allen hoped that his historical work and probing would contribute towards the class-conscious, anti-white supremacist understanding of United States history that he sought to help develop.

### Strategy

Regarding strategy, Allen suggested, “the first main strategic blow must be aimed at the most vulnerable point at which a decisive blow can be struck, namely, white supremacy.” This, he argued, was “the ineluctable conclusion to be drawn from a study of the great social crises – the Civil War and Reconstruction, the Populist Revolt of the 1890s, and the Great Depression of the 1930s.” In each case “the prospects for a stable broad front against capital has foundered on the shoals of white supremacy, most specifically on the corruption of the European-American workers by racial privilege.” These workers, he argued, were “encapsulated in the incubus of ‘white’ identity” and “the historical significance of their class identity has been unrealized.” In discussing strategy he further explained that “the attack upon white supremacy must necessarily at the same time be an attack on white-male supremacy.” This would enable the “necessary maximum mobilization of women for the overthrow of male supremacy” and it was needed since for “European-American workers to participate in their own class liberation” they would have to “repudiate the system of white-skin privilege, including sexual privileges with regard to ‘not-white’ women.”<sup>246</sup>

<sup>245</sup> Allen, “Toward a Revolution in Labor History,” 17 May 2002.

<sup>246</sup> Scott and Meyerson, “An Interview with Theodore W. Allen.” Allen thought it important, when working with “white workers,” to work to separate the workers from the “white” and to seek to dismantle the “white race.” In answer to the question “What makes a worker a ‘white worker?’” he answered – “racial class collaboration.” See Allen, Comments in his personal copy of *A House Divided*, p. 114,

In terms of class, Allen called for “*anti-white supremacist, proletarian hegemony*” in mass struggles<sup>247</sup> and for aligning the three bottom economic quintiles and neutralizing the second quintile, “Seize the initiative,” and “Stop worshipping the market.” He advocated, “Make the market the servant, not the master, in the distribution of income and wealth” and he recommended in public policy that priority be put “on the common necessities, food, clothing, shelter, fuel, and transportation.” He also urged “Production for use, not for profit.”<sup>248</sup>

Allen considered it “absolutely necessary to champion in principle and support in practice the autonomous organization of Afro-American workers” because “only in this way can Afro-Americans fight free of the trammels that the traditional white labor, socialist, and communist movements have generally succeeded in imposing on Afro-American workers and political activists.” But, he added, “white radicals” while supporting those efforts, should not lose sight of their responsibility to directly “attack white supremacy among white workers.” He emphasized that “the white workers have never been neutral in the struggle against white supremacy and they will never be neutral, precisely because they are worker, and not petit bourgeois. Those who will not be for the anti-white-supremacist revolution out of their own proletarian identity of interests, will be against it; either against the white race or for it.” He also suggested, however, that a “healthy minority of the white workers,” perhaps “one-third,” would “provide that level of defection of European Americans from the white race at which the white race is rendered defunct in its historical role as an instrument of social control for the United States bourgeoisie.”<sup>249</sup>

In his work Allen consistently advocated “repudiating and attacking the white-skin privilege system: ‘Equal rights for all mean privileges for none – Equality of rights is not a privilege, but a democratic necessity.’” He argued “The history of this country has shown white-supremacism to be the Achilles heel of the struggle against capital; and

---

<sup>247</sup> Allen, “A Transcript of Ted Allen’s Talk on the Domestic Economic Situation,” p. 6.

<sup>248</sup> Theodore W. Allen, “Globalization and the White-Skin Privilege: Strategy for the Struggle of the ‘Common People’ Against the ‘Titans’ of Capital in the Impending Crisis,” Data for URPE Presentation, Mt. Tom State Park, CT, scheduled for August 25, 1997, Theodore W. Allen Papers, copy in possession of author.

<sup>249</sup> Allen to Ignatiev, July 11, 1978, pp. 9, 10, 11, and 13. On p. 12, Allen comments, “autonomous organization of Afro-American workers” are “important for showing what the proletariat looks like in its purest form, especially as an example to white worker of what *they* could do in the class struggle.”

has established the role of African-Americans as the central factor in the struggle against the white supremacy.” During a crisis there is “a historic opportunity to break the cycle at the old phase 4, “especially if “new party forces and especially the trade union movement champions the principle of affirmative action, and takes the lead in making it work.”<sup>250</sup>

Allen emphasized, “Bourgeois rule in this country can NOT be brought to an end without a direct attack [by] workers, including European-American workers, on the white-skin privilege system . . . Let us take that as our premise.” Then, the argument comes down to “whether the struggle against white supremacy is served by European-American radicals suspending for a longer or shorter period the direct, systematic, and continual challenge to the white workers’ racial privileges.” He firmly opposed suspending that struggle<sup>251</sup> and he emphasized that European American activists can make significant contributions by:

1) fighting uncompromisingly to broaden the struggle against white supremacy by encompassing within it every particular struggle against capitalist exploitation and oppression; and 2) by pointing out the implications of anti-racism for the white race social control formation, the white-skin privilege system, the divided self of the white workers, and the path to proletarian self-realization through repudiation of racial privileges.

In all such efforts Allen was fully aware that “before a struggle becomes massive, it must pass through a stage of being ‘non-massive.’”<sup>252</sup>

In a July 1978 letter to Noel Ignatiev, Allen wrote that “for white radicals to limit their main efforts to support of national liberation organizations rather than also directly attacking white supremacy among white workers, is to neglect the most important support that can be given by whites to the national liberation struggles.” He understood that “the *greatest political, social, and ideological bulwark* of the imperialist warmakers and colonial oppressors is precisely *white supremacy in America*” and sought to struggle against that white supremacy. He pointed out that “There should seem to be no shortage

---

<sup>250</sup> Allen, “Globalization and the White-Skin Privilege: Strategy for the Struggle of the ‘Common People’ Against the ‘Titans’ of Capital in the Impending Crisis.”

<sup>251</sup> Allen to Zeskind, March 1979, p. 14.

<sup>252</sup> Allen to Zeskind, March 1979, p. 8 and Allen to Ignatiev, July 11, 1978, p. 15.

of programmatic issues – South Africa and southern Africa in general, which, as a tactical concern strikes as close to home as almost any issue; affirmative action, police brutality, frame-up and harassment; housing discrimination; the great school fraud; the white supremacist aspects of the ‘tax revolt,’ etc.” He also again emphasized that “unless the centrality of the fight against white supremacy is established, the women’s liberation movement cannot be revolutionary and successful in this country.”<sup>253</sup>

In words relevant to struggle today he added, “Whether this impending crisis and resulting radicalization of the masses produces a mass proletarian class conscious movement suited to its historic tasks, will depend first of all on how well the vanguard elements take to heart the lessons of the thirties and of previous crises.” We are better situated to “understand the lesson” stated by C.L.R. James, in *Negroes and American Democracy* (1956): “Every white worker, whether he knows it or not, is being challenged by every Negro to take the steps which will enable the working peoples to fulfill their historic destiny of building a society free of domination of one class or of one race over another.” In “every struggle against racism the moment of truth must come.”<sup>254</sup>

Allen felt it was important to emphasize “that a vigorous, effective independent working-class movement could not develop in the United States unless black liberation was an integral part of its struggles at all stages.” He argued that the need for this component “should have demanded continuous and special attention” and American Marxists should have conducted a consistent “struggle against racism in white working-class circles.” He judged that for many reasons, one being that so many were “not entirely free of racism, they failed to do so.”<sup>255</sup>

Allen noted that some observers “profess an optimism for the future of the cause of labor, not in expectation of the repudiation of the white-skin privileges by European-American workers, but on demographic grounds of the prospective increasingly not-white and not-male composition of the United States working class, and specifically because such a transformation, will serve to remind white males that they are not the

---

<sup>253</sup> Allen to Ignatiev, July 11, 1978, pp. 13, 17, 26 and Allen and Kusic, “A Letter of Support,” 10.

<sup>254</sup> Allen, “White Supremacy in U.S. History,” pp. 10-11.

<sup>255</sup> Theodore W. Allen, “Critical notes on: Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, 10 vols. (1947-1994),” filename “whapabpn,” August 31, 2002, unpublished manuscript in Theodore W. Allen Papers, possession of author, p. 41.

center of the labor movement, but only a segment of it.”<sup>256</sup> With the projected demographic shift, Allen describes historian David Roediger as writing that “white” males will play a better role in the labor movement, that there will be “a possible displacement of ‘black-white’ issues by ‘black-immigrant relations,’” and that he believes “white workers [will move] in a progressive direction.”<sup>257</sup>

Despite the potential positive implication of these demographic changes, Allen argues that “reliance on such objective developments to raise the level of working class consciousness is an indulgence in false optimism.” These objective factors must be considered in the context of the overall class struggle and the subjective aspect. Allen emphasizes “History has shown how the ruling class has succeeded in adapting white supremacy to unanticipated demographic transformations” and, therefore, the “centrality of the struggle against white supremacy . . . remains the key to proletarian class consciousness today, as it was in the [Reconstruction] period” about which Du Bois wrote. Allen maintained up to his death that in the United States “The centrality of the struggle against white supremacy” was “the key to proletarian class consciousness.”<sup>258</sup>

### **The Struggle Ahead**

Hubert Harrison and Theodore W. Allen offer invaluable insights for the struggle against white supremacy in the current conjuncture.

They understood that racial oppression was central to capitalist class rule in the United States.

They understood, in Harrison’s words, that “Politically, the Negro is the touchstone” and should serve as a guide for evaluating work in any area – employment, education, housing, health care, incarceration, voting rights, etc. (How are Black people faring/how is white supremacy affecting work – in any area – and what is to be done about it?)

---

<sup>256</sup> Allen, “On Roediger’s *Wages of Whiteness*,” #59. For example, see Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*, “Afterword,” p. 189.

<sup>257</sup> Allen, “Toward a Revolution in Labor History,” citing “The End of Whiteness? Reflections on a Demographic Landmark,” Guest Editor, David Roediger, *New Labor Forum*, Spring/Summer, 2001, pp. 49-62; Editor’s Introduction, p. 51.

<sup>258</sup> Allen, “Toward a Revolution in Labor History.”

They understood that there is a two-fold character to “democracy” in America: white supremacist “democracy” is a retardant to social progress, while thoroughgoing democracy, based on equality, is a catalyst for social change.

They understood that white supremacy is the principal retardant to class consciousness among working people in the U.S., that struggle against white supremacy is central to social change (what Allen referred to as the key to strategy, the strategic direction of the main blow), and that successful anti-white supremacist struggles for equality in the United States imply, in Harrison’s words, “a revolution startling to even think of.”

Harrison wrote that as late as 1611 “our modern idea of race had not yet arisen” and he commented on “the shifting reality of race.” Allen discussed the “howling absurdities” of race and he offered important historical analysis depicting the “white race” as a late-seventeenth/early-eighteenth century “political” invention – as *a ruling class social control formation* created and maintained by “white race” privileges, which are not in the class interest of workers.

Allen also offered extremely instructive historical analysis of three previous crises in U.S. history and of how ruling-class forces conferred “white race” privileges and utilized appeals to white supremacy to undermine and beat back the struggles from below.

Both Harrison and Allen understood slavery as capitalism and enslaved laborers as proletarians and Allen emphasized the tremendous importance of this to our understanding of U.S. history, labor history, and class consciousness.

Both Harrison and Allen focused on socio-economic explanations for “racism” and argued against “racism” being innate.

Harrison argued that race prejudice was not in “white workers” interest and Allen argued that neither white supremacy, nor “white race” privileges were in the class interests of European American workers.

Harrison and Allen both pointed to the need to challenge the practice among European-American workers of putting, in Harrison’s words, the “white race” first, before class.

Allen emphasized the need to dismantle the “white race” (which he understood as a ruling class social control formation) and to challenge “white” identity and the “white assumption” both in practice and ideologically with a powerful counter narrative (for which he offered a groundwork).

Both Harrison and Allen stressed the need to develop new, anti-white supremacist, cooperative social relations.

After working tirelessly for socialism, Harrison delivered his criticism of “white” labor and “white” socialists for putting the “white race” first, before class and while he continued to urge socialist activists and workers to oppose white supremacy he focused his own energies on pro-active, concentrated work in the Black community.

Both Harrison and Allen were “radical internationalists” and, while supporting anti-imperialist struggles, constantly emphasized the importance to such struggles of anti-white supremacist struggles in the U.S.

Harrison worked for the end of “white world supremacy” and sought to organize domestically and internationally for that end, particularly in his years with the *Negro World* and with his final organization, the International Colored Unity League.

Writing less than two years before his death an 83-years-old Allen urged that “those of us who hope to learn from history in order to prepare for future confrontations, large and small, between capital and anti-capital, between ‘the people and the Titans,’” must “take up – behaviorally and forensically” four challenges on the ideological front in order to refute “white supremacist apologetics”:

- First, to show that white supremacy is not an inherited attribute of the European-American personality.
- Second, to demonstrate that white supremacy has not served the interests of the laboring-class European-Americans.
- Third, to account for the prevalence of white supremacy within the ranks of laboring-class European-Americans.

- Fourth, by the light of history, to consider ways whereby European-American laboring people may cast off the stifling incubus of “white” identity.<sup>259</sup>

Allen felt that these challenges concerned “the labor, democratic and socialist movements in all their aspects” and implicitly demand “a revolution in the research, teaching, and writing of United States labor history.”<sup>260</sup>

Allen also felt that for most labor and left historians there has been “an unbroken continuum of Euro-American centrism, of ‘white’ as a norm, with respect to which African-American labor is only a relative, secondary concern.” He referred to this as “the White Assumption” and he argued, for “the true reflection” of U. S. history, “the beginning of wisdom for labor historians must be the recognition that from 1619 on the history of African American bond-laborers is a history of proletarians. From this all else follows.”<sup>261</sup>

As the economic situation continues to deteriorate, as racial oppression continues unabated and intensifies, and as the non-”white” population grows in absolute and relative numbers, an increase in political and social struggles that challenge current patterns of white-supremacist class rule can be expected, as can instances of, and overtures toward, class unity. Ruling-class forces can be expected to move, as they have in past crises, to reinforce and defend their historic base of social control, the “white race,” however that “white race” is defined (or re-defined) and constituted (or re-constituted).

Harrison and Allen spoke emphatically about the need to oppose white supremacy and Allen stressed both the importance of encompassing that fight within every particular struggle against capitalist exploitation and oppression and the special importance of struggle in stage 4 of the 5-stage cycle of class struggle that he delineated. That period

---

<sup>259</sup> Theodore W. Allen, “Introduction to ‘The Kernel and the Meaning,’” Alternate “Introduction,” May 8, 2003, pp. 1-2. The following day he re-worded the second point as “to demonstrate that swallowing the white-supremacist bait has not been good for the interests of laboring-class European-Americans.” See Theodore W. Allen, “‘The Kernel and the Meaning’: A Critique of Labor Historiography,” Proposed Introduction, letter to Jeffrey B. Perry, May 9, 2003.

<sup>260</sup> Theodore W. Allen, “Introduction to ‘The Kernel and the Meaning,’” Alternate “Introduction,” May 8, 2003, p. 2.

<sup>261</sup> Theodore W. Allen, “‘The Kernel and the Meaning’: A Critique of Labor Historiography,” Proposed Introduction, letter to Jeffrey B. Perry, May 9, 2003.



comes after manifestations of common cause are expressed and when these struggles are faced with determined ruling-class efforts to re-substantiate “white race” privileges to counter struggle from below.

It has been one hundred years since Hubert Harrison emphasized that in the United States “the Negro” was “the touchstone” and that “the crucial test of Socialism’s sincerity” was “the duty . . . to champion . . . [the Negro’s] cause.” It has been almost one hundred years since he foreshadowed that the struggle for true democracy and equality implied “a revolution startling to even think of” and it has been almost one hundred years since he explained that the principal reason for the failure of efforts toward socialism was because the “white” socialists and the “white” workers put the “white race” first, before class.

In the past half century the work of Theodore W. Allen has deepened our historical understanding of the “white race” as a socio-historic and political (not biological) ruling class social control formation created and maintained by racial privileges that are ruinous to both the direct victims of white supremacy and to the class interests of working people. Like Harrison, he has emphasized how “. . . among the masses of white workers, the bourgeoisie established the dominance of race consciousness as against proletarian class consciousness.” His historical analysis has shown that the principal retardant to class consciousness in the United States has been white supremacy and that in times of crisis, such as in the currently developing conjuncture, the ruling class has turned to white supremacy to thwart the efforts of those struggling from below.

The road ahead is difficult. For those who desire “democracy, progress, and socialism” the struggle against white supremacy is central. Insights from the work of Hubert Harrison and Theodore W. Allen can advance that struggle. Please share them!

**Addendum:****Background to the Article “The Developing Conjuncture and Some Insights from Hubert Harrison and Theodore W. Allen on the Centrality of the Fight against White Supremacy”****Jeffrey B. Perry**

Some of the work for this article was undertaken in late 2009 and early 2010 for an essay I was preparing in response to a request from *Daedalus*, the Cambridge, Massachusetts-based quarterly journal of the American Academy of the Arts and Sciences. The Academy, founded in 1780, describes itself as “an independent policy research center” that conducts multidisciplinary studies of complex and emerging problems and is comprised of elected members (4,000 American Fellows and 600 Foreign Honorary Members) who are “leaders in the academic disciplines, the arts, business, and public affairs” and include “more than 200 Nobel Prize laureates and 50 Pulitzer Prize winners” and many of “the nation's most prominent thinkers.” Each issue of *Daedalus* addresses a theme “with authoritative essays.”

On May 12, 2009, Professor Gerald L. Early of Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri had emailed me asking if I would be interested in writing an essay of 2,500 words for a forthcoming issue of *Daedalus* “on the general theme of race.” He indicated that *Daedalus* would be doing two issues on the topic and he would guest edit one issue and Professor Lawrence Bobo of Harvard would guest edit the other. I emailed back my acceptance.

On August 28, 2009, Professor Early emailed me to request “an essay of 2500 words (it can be longer, if you wish).” He explained, “The theme of the issue is the End of White America” and stated that I would be free to approach the theme in whatever way I liked. The email was sent to me and to a list of prominent professors and we were referred to as “contributors.” I was the only “independent scholar” on the list. I spent considerable time preparing my 2,500-word essay for *Daedalus* and submitted my

contribution via email.

In June 2010, after reading my submission, Professor Early emailed me, saying, “I like the essay very much and think it can be an important contribution to our issue.” He added that “the essay can be made a bit longer” and *Daedalus* “can probably accommodate up to 5 thousand words, so do not worry about length.”

Again, I spent considerable time working on and expanding the article. I met all deadlines and emailed my expanded article, “The Invention of the ‘White Race’ and the End of White America: Insights from Hubert Harrison and Theodore W. Allen,” on August 9, 2010.

I was notified by email that the requested expanded version that I emailed was received. On the back covers of the Spring, Summer, and Fall 2010 issues of *Daedalus* I was listed as having an article in the forthcoming (Professor Early-edited) issue.

On March 1, 2011, I saw a list of the contents of the Professor Early-edited *Daedalus* issue online and noticed that my article was not included. Late that evening I emailed Professor Early and Phyllis Bendell, Managing Editor of *Daedalus*, asking if the journal planned on publishing my article.

The following day (March 2), in an apparently coordinated response, I received an 11:58 a.m. email from Gerald Early and then five minutes later an email from Phyllis Bendell.

Professor Early wrote, “I am sorry not to have been in touch with you before this about the piece. I know Phyllis sent you a note about it but I, as guest editor, should have been in touch as well.” He then added, “we decided” not to publish the essay (that I had submitted) because it was “not a good fit with the other pieces we were running” and because there “was also a problem with space.”

I had never received any such note from Phyllis Bendell, so I questioned how Dr. Early could “know” that she had sent me one.

I found the “problem with space” rationale that Professor Early offered puzzling since in the issue that was published *Daedalus* found “space” to RE-PUBLISH an old article that it had previously published, since *Daedalus* also found “space” to publish essays from other authors not listed in the original email list of contributors, and since I had been encouraged to make my article longer and “not worry about length.”

I also found the not “a good fit” rationale intensely puzzling since Professor Early’s previously mentioned August 28 email to me had emphasized, “You are free to approach the theme in whatever way you like.” My essay had addressed the stated theme “The End of White America,” tied white supremacy and the “white race” to capitalism, addressed the current conjuncture, and suggested that social struggle would be needed to end “white America.”

Managing Editor Phyllis Bendell’s email which arrived five minutes after Professor Early’s simply read: “Attached please find a copy of my letter to you, dated November 11, 2010. Unfortunately, we were not able to publish your essay in *Daedalus*.”

Her attachment was a pdf of a letter addressed to me “dated” November 11, 2010, on *Daedalus* stationery with her signature. In that letter Ms. Bendell wrote that the decision not to publish my article was made “in consultation with the editorial committee of *Daedalus*.”

Apparently, although I was “free to approach the theme in whatever way” I liked, at some point, decision-makers associated with *Daedalus* decided that my content “did not fit” and my essay would not be published.

Since I had never received this “letter” from Ms. Bendell, since all my correspondence with both Ms. Bendell and Dr. Early was via email, since land mail in such matters is not likely in this era of email, and since Ms. Bendell’s email read that the “letter” was “dated” November 11 (and specifically did not state that it was “written” or “sent” to me on, or near, that date), I doubted that Ms. Bendell had actually mailed me that letter. I wondered whether she wrote it that morning (March 2, 2011), scanned it, and then attached it to the email she sent me.

I wrote back to Ms. Bendell and asked her specifically, “Are you saying that you sent that letter to me on, or about, November 11, 2010?” She has never responded in any way.

Hubert Harrison and Theodore W. Allen were two of the most important twentieth-century thinkers on race and class in America. They lived in poverty, far outside “the academy,” and their intellectual work was marked by great insight, forthrightness, integrity, and concern for the lives and conditions faced by those they referred to affectionately as “the common people.” Over the years I have come to

appreciate those qualities about their intellectual work.

My essay tied white supremacy and the “white race” to capitalism, addressed oppressive aspects of the current conjuncture, and suggested that social struggle was needed. It was written to make available important insights from both Harrison and Allen. Regrettably, *Daedalus* readers were not afforded this opportunity to draw from their insights.

The manner in which my article was deleted may serve to illuminate how dissent is controlled in “the academy.” As explicated in a letter to me from a former senior editor at a leading university press, writing in the language of the academy,

[The essay] crosses the line laid down by liberal scholarship in which it is permissible to describe and treat biographically the radical thought of historically located individual thinkers but it is not OK to treat that thought’s value as inseparable from active application of its principles and insights to present circumstances of continuing inequality and oppression. “Tragedy” and “realist stoicism” and “pragmatic realism” are all acceptable liberal *narrative forms* for the “content” of American history within the profession. Prophetic frames urgently demanding social justice in the present *as the result of ongoing historical crimes inherited from the past* as the condition of the fulfillment of American values are not. [The] essay, in other words, pushes past the acceptable rhetorical frames of professional academic American history . . . and academic etiquette . . . [and it was met with] liberal discipline (which someone at *Daedalus* . . . imposed on your writing by refusing to publish it).

After I was notified that *Daedalus* was not going to not publish my essay I decided that I would take some of the research from that piece and develop it into a larger essay, which ended up becoming this article for *Cultural Logic*.