

White Men Challenging Racism

35 Personal Stories

Cooper Thompson, Emmett Schaefer, and Harry Brod

With a Foreword by James W. Loewen



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Duke University Press Durham & London 2003

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Printed in the United States of

America on acid-free paper ∞

Designed by Amy Ruth Buchanan

Typeset in Dante and Clarendon

by Keystone Typesetting, Inc.

Library of Congress Cataloging-
in-Publication Data appear on the
last printed page of this book.

A stage version of *Just Living*,

adapted and directed by Jana

Gymer-Koch and Lucas Messer, was

first performed on October 24,

2002 at the Interpreters Theatre

of the University of Northern

Iowa, under the directorship of

Dr. Karen Mitchell and with the

technical assistance of Dr. Paul

Siddens.

**This book is dedicated
to the many people of color
who have been the conscience,
catalyst, and inspiration for
white men challenging racism.
They have made this book
possible.**

As James Baldwin wrote, the
white man here is trapped by his
own history, a history that he
himself cannot comprehend
and therefore what can I do but
love him?

Carroll O'Connor (on his Archie Bunker
character from the tv show *All in the
Family*). Quoted in the *Chicago Tribune*,
June 22, 2001, after O'Connor's death.

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Loewen
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Movement Elders

- 17 Herbert Aptheker, 86, radical
historian; San Jose, CA
*You have to inform yourself of the realities
of history, of what slavery was, of what
Black people, especially Black women, went
through. And you have to learn about the
postservitude so-called freedom. . . . And
knowing that we white people are
responsible for the horror. Therefore, if we
have some conscience, we should be very
important in eliminating the horror. That's
my life.*
- 27 Stetson Kennedy, 85, journalist
and Klan infiltrator;
Jacksonville, FL
*In the 1940s . . . I was infiltrating the Klan
and feeding the minutes to both Drew
Pearson and to the producers of the radio
show Superman who were doing a series,
Superman versus the Grand Dragon.
As fast as the Klan would change its pass-
words for entrance to its meetings, I'd send
'em on up to the radio producers, and
kids all over the country would all*

*have them the following week. In the
minutes of the meetings I included the
names of the businessmen and the pol-
iticians and the judges and lawmen who
were in attendance. After their names were
broadcast, they never showed up again at
the meetings.*

- 37 Art Branscombe, 81, fought
for a racially integrated
neighborhood; Denver, CO
*We had to make it possible for Blacks to live
wherever they wanted to live, for Christ's
sake. This was just a matter of ordinary
humanity and justice and whatnot. That's
what did it for me. That's what changed me
from just another middle-class white guy
trying to preserve property values into an
increasingly militant housing
integrationist.*
- 44 Horace Seldon, 77, coalition
builder; Boston, MA
*The Sunday after Dr. King's assassina-
tion in 1968 . . . when I walked into the
kitchen, Grandma Lushbough was ironing.
I said to her, "I know what I must do with
my life. I must work on the white prob-
lem." . . . You don't rush in, eager to help,
eager to find the role—that wanting to rush
in with the answer is sort of built into the
psyche of a lot of us white men. You have
to just let the relationship develop; you
listen, and there comes a chance to*

say, "I can do that task." And you do it well, and eventually they'll begin to ask and trust you.

- 51 Pat Cusick, 70, community organizer; Boston, MA

The other two kids picked up rocks, threw them at the kid on the bicycle, and called him "nigger." . . . But this kid on the bike, who was smaller than us, he had guts. He stopped, got off his bike, and gave us a tongue lashing. . . . The actions of that Black kid certainly affected my life, piercing through my white privilege and the whole historical consciousness of growing up white in Alabama. . . . When I was sent to the chain gang in prison . . . I told the captain of the chain gang, using my best university manner, "Segregation is evil, and I can't participate in it. You have a segregated camp. I just want to inform you of this. I'm not going to work and I'm not going to eat while I'm here."

- 60 Nat Yalowitz, 70, social worker and organizer; New York, NY

Growing up meant living in hard poverty, being a witness to racial segregation, war, and social conflict. Fighting racial injustice and social class conflict became an essential part of my living. Being a left wing Jewish man meant participation in the movement to free oppressed people. Picket lines, marches on Washington—they were as essential as playing stickball as a kid.

Grassroots Organizing

- 73 Jesse Wimberley, 43, organizes working-class white men; West End, NC

What fool would go up to a white male and say, "You ought to quit your good-paying job and try to do social change and ruin your family"? . . . Where are white men going to get support for change?

- 82 Jim Hansen, 42, executive director, United Vision for Idaho; Boise, ID

I joined the Chamber of Commerce in Boise. I have access to people in power because of my privilege. I wanted to exercise that privilege in a way that opens up greater opportunities for both learning and power for people of color and white women. . . . I'm in a rotary club, too. The question is whether and how you raise issues. . . . My role is to back up people of color and white women as they stick their necks out.

- 90 Chip Berlet, 52, researches right wing groups; Cambridge, MA

I learned two things from this experience. One, hate groups victimize communities that are in crisis and turn them toward white supremacy by building an identity among the young men. . . . Two, you can organize essentially prejudiced people to fight this hate, and that's a victory, even if on a very tiny level. You can't go in and eradicate white privilege overnight. If it means ten years to take a neighborhood from violence to peace, leaving unresolved lots of issues of prejudice, that's still worth it.

99 Joe Fahey, 44, union official and labor organizer; Watsonville, CA
I know that there are times when I act racist and am perceived as racist. But it doesn't work for me to second-guess myself. It paralyzes me. So I just throw myself at things, sometimes without thinking about it much, sometimes without much planning. Sometimes it works; sometimes it's a mistake. I guess I've always trusted that if my mistakes are big enough, then somebody will see them and stop me, or I'll realize it myself. And I try not to blame myself too much for my own racism. I try just noticing it more.

109 Mike McMahon, 60, community organizer with Central American immigrants; Houston, TX
Probably people think that I have some affinity for Hispanics or immigrants. I definitely have developed that, but it wasn't something that motivated me to get involved. It was just that this was my community. . . . A couple of years ago, I decided that I had to make a commitment to turning power over to the community. It's not going to happen by itself. If you just say, "Well, we invited them, but they didn't show up," it will never happen. . . . I've learned to respect the leadership abilities of the people in the community.

Art and Politics

121 David Attyah, 34, graphic artist and founder of THINK AGAIN; San Francisco, CA
Being a queer man has really helped me understand the "near to our bodies"

effects of oppression and to imagine how people of color or women feel oppression rub against their skin. . . . It's about who's following you through grocery stores, how you look at yourself in the mirror in the morning, and whether you believe there's any hope for your surviving in your life. . . . I'm an Arab American. Culturally and ethnically and personally, I feel very alienated from white culture. Arab Americans are simultaneously raced and not raced.

132 Si Kahn, 57, singer / songwriter and executive director of Grassroots Leadership; Charlotte, NC
Being Jewish centers me in history. I claim a white identity because, functionally, I enjoy white privilege. But in conversations with white men who do not have an ethnic self-identification, I find a difference in being Jewish. . . . It includes a responsibility to stand with people who are being pushed around, to speak up, to try to be useful. . . . Every religion teaches those values. But my container is Jewishness.

143 Steve Bailey, 43, executive director of Jump-Start Performance Company; San Antonio, TX
Sometimes people of color see me as one of the few "good white men," even though I do things that are racist. And even though I want to be accepted as a good white man, I don't like the dichotomy that gets set up about who is the better white person. . . . Sometimes I think to myself, "There are a few good white people I happen to know in this town, and the rest are bad." Even though I know that is really dangerous thinking, I do it. . . . I hate demonizing straight white men, and I still do it!

152 Tim Wise, 33, writer, lecturer,
social critic, and activist;
Nashville, TN
*I'm not fighting racism for Black and
Brown folks: they can and will, as
always, save themselves. My role is in the
white community. . . . I am beginning to
think that whites are so dependent on
people of color that we wouldn't know
what to do without them. . . . If there
were no Black and Brown folks around,
then whites would have no one to blame
but themselves for the crime that
occurred; no one to blame but themselves
when they didn't get the job they wanted;
no one to blame but themselves when
their lives turned out to be less than they
expected.*

164 Billy Yalowitz, 42, community-
based performance director
and choreographer;
Philadelphia, PA
*We know very little about humility, the
loss of community, and how isolated we
are from each other. That's a cost of
whiteness and of being middle class, as
we construct it—that you're special, that
your knowledge separates you. You think
you're smarter than other people. What a
disability, to think that you're smarter.*

Challenging the System from Within

175 John Allocca, 39, bilingual
Spanish teacher; Boston, MA
*I say very honestly [to my students], "You
have every right to have doubts about me
and a lot of other white folks because we,
as a people in general, have done you and
your people wrong." . . . But there have
been important allies.*

*Schools don't teach about John Brown to
white kids or kids of color. . . . I tell my
students that I grew up in a racist society
and that I've changed because of my
experiences living and working with
people from different communities. When
I was their age, I was a scared, confused
young white boy who would never want
to hang out with any of them.*

185 Bill Johnston, 60, former
Boston police officer; Emerald
Island, NC
*I have a vision that when we arrive at the
Pearly Gates, we're going to find out that
God is everything that we're not. If God
made us all, then he is all of us. At my
moment of death, the God who comes to
judge me will be young, gay, Jewish,
African American. And she is going to
say, "How the hell did you treat me?"*

194 A. T. Miller, 43, teacher and
director of multiculturalism at
University of Michigan; Ann
Arbor, MI
*When I was director of Africana Studies
at Union, I took it as my responsibility to
teach and lead in an African-centered
style. . . . There is no ebony tower; this
will always be community linked, always
accessible; knowledge and research will
always be shared. . . . I'm very
uncomfortable in an all-white
environment. . . . It makes me wonder if
this is a hostile environment. Why would
this be all white?*

203 Ken Kimerling, 56, lawyer
for Puerto Rican and Asian
American civil rights; New
York, NY
*I do see myself as supportive; I'm more
involved in supporting things that are*

happening than leading them. I've just sort of figured out what I can do and do well, and I'm not interested in leading something. I know what my strengths are, and that's not necessarily one of them. I feel I'm a better team player than the captain of the team. . . . I certainly live my job. Most of my waking hours, like everyone else's, are spent working. But this work is not something that I woke up one day and said, "I've got to go out and change the conditions of garment workers in Chinatown."

- 212 Monte Piliawsky, 57, teacher and historian; Detroit, MI
When I explain racism to a class and they begin to see for the first time that they have been victimized and how race is used to divide whites and Blacks for the benefit of capitalism and for their disadvantage, I feel alive. . . . I . . . think that whites want to be challenged. Deep down, many of us don't think we're very good people. But we want to be better. We want some redemption. So we like someone to confront us, and maybe in this way we will find a way to work through our insecurities.

- 222 Lonnie Lusardo, 56, consultant and community organizer; Seattle, WA
I don't go around singing "We are the world"; I get pissed off at people; I'm human. But I often think, "Wouldn't it be great if everybody at an organization felt as though they owned the company, truly owned the company, and enjoyed it?" If everybody who worked at an organization truly loved their job, what would the productivity be like? What would the profit be like?

- 228 Lee Formwalt, 51, historian and dean at a historically black college; Albany, GA

At that time I wasn't yet aware of my own racism and missed the obvious irony of changing my position because of what a young white Englishman said when I had been discounting the same thing when local Black people had been telling it to me. . . . As [my] kids got older . . . , I began to hear more about the fact that they were unhappy with my lack of sensitivity to their needs. They thought that I was more concerned with racial sensitivity than their particular concerns. That was a tough issue for me to deal with and still is today.

- 237 Nibs Stroupe, 55, minister of a multiracial congregation; Decatur, GA

This work is a calling for me on a theological level. . . . The people who taught me about God were strong, racist people. But they also taught me that God is the power of love. . . . My calling is to share that kind of love.

Challenging the System from the Margins

- 249 John Cole Vodicka, 53, founder of the Prison and Jail Project; Americus, GA

Victories are few and far between, but sometimes we have a victory in the sense that something changes. A sheriff is run out of office, and for an instant, something is better for those who are in that jailhouse. . . . Even if those folks aren't run out of town or office, we can shake things up and get people asking questions. . . . This is a big part of what keeps me going.

- 258 Richard Lapchick, 56, advocate
for racial and gender justice
in sports and society;
Orlando, FL

[My dad] had brought Nat "Sweetwater" Clifton onto the New York Knicks basketball team—that's what the hanging and picketing and calls were all about. Twenty-eight years later, in 1978, my own son, who was five years old and named after my dad, came to me one day. He asked me, "Daddy, are you a nigger lover?" I stepped back, paused for a few seconds, and asked him, "Joey, what do you think that is?" "I don't know, but some mean man just called me on the phone and told me you were one." . . . They attacked me and caused liver damage, kidney damage, a hernia, and concussion. And they carved the word "nigger" on my stomach with a pair of office scissors.

- 265 Chris Shuey, 46, environmental
health specialist; Albuquerque,
NM

As a middle-aged guy looking back on my life, I often wonder if it was a good decision to leave Ohio as a young man. . . . Whether it was good or not, it's the choice I made and have lived with. But sometimes I feel like maybe there's part of my life that's now missing because I'm not connected to the land where I was raised. . . . As a result of living here and being with the Navajo, I've been able to understand and appreciate what it means to be a land-based people.

- 272 Terry Kupers, 58, psychiatrist,
prison activist, and author;
Oakland, CA

Black people were saying, "You know, we're not saying we don't want you.

We're just saying that we want you to go organize white folks. We need you to do that, and you need to listen to us." I thought that was perfectly reasonable. . . . The Panthers asked me to set up and work at their medical clinic. . . . I taught a class to Movement activists on health and how to handle any emergency.

- 280 Rick Whaley, 51, Native
American treaty rights
advocate; Milwaukee, WI

I think about the skills I have from raising a family and how that's connected to building a political organization. Or skills I learned in building a marriage that are helpful when I'm facilitating a meeting. . . . Being an interracial family is connected to my getting involved up north with the Witness for Nonviolence for Treaty and Rural Rights in Northern Wisconsin. It was a way to pay back what I owed to the southern Civil Rights Movement for making it possible for interracial families like ours to live in relative safety.

- 289 Jim Murphy, 54, firefighter and
advocate for children's rights in
Southeast Asia; Boston, MA

A firefighter presumed that I might be gay. . . . It evolved into harassment. My gear was sabotaged. . . . "One of the reasons I'm sitting down with you [Congressman Joe Moakley told East Timor Action Network activists] is because that firefighter over there has been writing me and contacting my office for several years about East Timor." I'm very concerned about the tentacles of the child sex trade. On my trips to East Timor, I speak with religious activists, NGO's, women activists, community leaders.

The Next Generation

- 299 Sean Cahill, 38, researcher with the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force; New York, NY
The most important mission I have is challenging racism within the gay community. . . . I believe that race is a part of everything. It's part of the way we talk about "safety": is this a "good" neighborhood or a "bad" neighborhood? There's all sorts of code language. Race really permeates so much of the way we live, but it's this eight-hundred-pound gorilla that never gets addressed head on.
- 305 Tobin Miller Shearer, 36, director of a Mennonite anti-racism initiative; Akron, PA
I can't talk about doing this work without talking about my spirituality. I don't know how other folks do this work without having a spiritual core. . . . My own journey in taking deliberate, proactive, public stances on antiracism in my own community has only been made possible out of my spiritual journey.
- 314 Jason Wallach, 32, grassroots coordinator for the Mexico Solidarity Network; Chicago, IL
When I was seventeen, we were doing punk percussion protests against apartheid at the South African Embassy in Washington, D.C. It was a concrete way for those of us doing antiracism work to get in the streets and manifest how we felt. . . . The Zapatistas have always said, "Before you help me, go back to your own community, organize there, and do the work of liberation in your own community." If my liberation has been linked to my ability to "get
- real," my function with other white people is to help them achieve that, to "get real."*
- 322 Bill Vandenberg, 31, co-executive director of the Colorado Progressive Coalition; Denver, CO
I'm proud about being a codirector who is always asking, "What are we doing about the racism in our own institution? What are we doing to challenge white privilege in this supposedly progressive organization?" . . . I don't like the way that whiteness has manifested itself in our society. I am profoundly displeased with what my culture has perpetuated in the United States. . . . And so I see my role as especially important in being what someone on a right wing talk show called me: a race traitor. . . . In some ways, I wear that as a badge of honor, that he thinks of me as a race traitor.
- 330 Matt Reese, 26, community activist; Louisville, KY
I'd never been face-to-face with Klan members like that. . . . They see themselves as fighting for the white race, but they don't speak for me, and I'm part of the white race. You carry everybody that you know with you when you're there. I speak for all these people when I go there—my mom, my dad, my family, my friends and their beliefs; I'm speaking for every organization I represent. . . . There's a rush to that because I know I have them behind me in spirit.
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Foreword

Challenging Racism, Challenging History

James W. Loewen

Racist acts by white men in the Americas began on October 14, 1492, two days after the arrival of Christopher Columbus.¹ In his journal, Columbus tells about his actions that day: “These people are very unskilled in arms, as Your Highnesses will see from the seven whom I caused to be taken in order to carry them off.”² Indeed he brought the seven Tainos back to Spain to show to his patrons, along with parrots and produce. Ferdinand and Isabella then provided Columbus with 1,200–1,500 men, 17 ships, cannons, crossbows, guns, cavalry, and attack dogs for his return. This second voyage marks the real significance of Christopher Columbus, for in 1493 he undertook an enterprise altogether new in human history: the conquering of one land (Haiti, first) by another (Spain) an ocean away. At the same time he started the subjugation of one people (“Indians,” as renamed by Columbus) by another (“Europeans,” as they later came to be called, or “whites”), concomitantly introducing the ideology of racism. Soon enough a Catholic bishop in Spain was denying the basic humanity of Native Americans to rationalize enslaving them. We live with the consequences to this day.

Antiracist acts by white men in the Americas likely began shortly thereafter, but the first such are lost to history. Perhaps some sailors on the first voyage argued against capturing the seven Tainos. As the Spanish conquered first Haiti, then Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Mexico, they started the practice of *encomiendas*—“commending” a whole village to one Spanish conquistador for his private governance, use, and enrichment. We do know that by 1511, some Spaniards were speaking out against the resulting enslavement and maltreatment of Native Americans. On Christmas Day of that year a Dominican friar, Antonio de Montesinos, thundered from a pulpit in Haiti: “Tell me, by what right or justice do you keep these Indians in such a cruel and horrible servitude? On what authority have you waged a detestable war against these people who dwelt quietly and peaceably on their own land? . . . With the excessive work you demand of them they fall ill or die, or

rather you kill with your desire to extract and acquire gold every day. And what care do you take that they should be instructed in religion? Are these not men? Have they not rational souls?"³

And we know that his words had some effect: they fell on the ears of a young conquistador, Bartolomé de Las Casas, and convinced him he was wrong. Las Casas renounced "his" village, refusing to make money off the unrequited labor of others. He experimented with alternative ways to organize economic enterprises in the Americas, and eventually he got the king of Spain to appoint him "Defender of the Indians." He then spent most of his long life in the Caribbean, working for their better treatment.

Las Casas came to be the first great historian of the Americas (the Spanish having destroyed any works by Mayan historians). He was a fan of Columbus, and his excerpts and paraphrases of Columbus's journals are the best record we have of his first and third voyages, the originals having been lost. Nevertheless, Las Casas attacked the treatment of the Indians by Columbus and his successors. When other historians overlooked or defended the Indian slave trade, begun by Columbus, Las Casas said starkly: "What we committed in the Indies stands out among the most unpardonable offenses ever committed against God and mankind, and this trade as one of the most unjust, evil, and cruel among them."⁴ Las Casas wrote of the *encomiendas* practice: "In this time, the greatest outrages and slaughterings of people were perpetrated, whole villages being depopulated. . . . The Indians saw that without any offence on their part they were despoiled of their kingdoms, their lands and liberties, and of their lives, their wives, and homes."⁵

At one point Las Casas suggested importing enslaved Africans, rather than continuing to enslave the Indians, who perished under the harsh regimen. But he recanted almost immediately and writing about himself in the third person, judged himself harshly for his lapse: "This advice to give a license for the bringing of Black slaves to those lands was first given by the priest Casas, who was unaware of the injustice with which the Portuguese take them and make slaves of them. Later, after falling into this snare, he regretted it, and would not have given that advice for all the world, for he always believed they were enslaved unjustly and tyrannically, because they have the same right to freedom as the Indians." Las Casas went on to write that he prayed to God to have mercy upon his soul for this error, "but he does not know if God will do so."⁶

Perhaps the high point of Las Casas's long life (1474–1566) came in 1542, when he took part in one of the most important trials ever to take place on the planet Earth. Held at Valladolid, Spain, the issue was: Are Indians human beings, or are they some subordinate species, appropriate for slavery? Las

Casas held for the affirmative, against Bishop Sepulveda and historians Oviedo, Cuneo, Gómara, and Garcilaso de la Vega, among others. “Indians are born lazy, idle, melancholy and cowardly, vile and ill-natured, liars, with a short memory and no perseverance,” claimed Oviedo. Las Casas countered by emphasizing their many positive human attributes: “They used their leisure—which was considerable since their souls did not burn with greed for wealth and estates—in honest recreation such as certain strenuous ball games, dances, and songs that were recitations of their historical past. They also made very beautiful objects with their hands when they were not occupied with agricultural, fishing, or domestic chores.” They were not conquered justly, he avowed, nor were they cowards: “Seeing themselves tyrannized and oppressed, dying every day from unjust labor and open war with Spaniards who disemboweled them with swords, trampled them with horses, and speared them from horseback, they fought back courageously.”⁷ Most important, Las Casas pointed out that Indians were thinking beings, like anyone else: “All the peoples of the world are men, and there is only one definition of each and every man, and that is that he is rational.”⁸

Amazingly, Las Casas won, at least temporarily. For several years, Spain renounced slavery and published humane regulations, which almost led to colonial revolt. At length the regulations were forgotten, and Spain wound up among the last European powers to give up slavery. Nevertheless, centuries after his death Las Casas was still influencing history: Simón Bolívar used his writings to justify the revolutions between 1810 and 1830 that freed Latin America from Spanish domination. Even today, Las Casas lives. The ideological spark for the ongoing Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas was struck in the provincial capital, San Cristóbal, during a three-day indigenous Congress held in 1974 in conjunction with the dedication of a new monument to Las Casas at the entrance to the city, whose full name is San Cristóbal de Las Casas. “Brother Bartolomé is no longer alive,” said one delegate. “Therefore, who will defend us? I believe that all of us organized together can have liberty and can work better. All of us together can be Bartolomé.”⁹

Las Casas’s life teaches at least four lessons. First, he exemplifies those courageous souls who in every age have stood for justice across racial lines. When Native Americans (and their allies) pointed out in 1992 that the Columbus Quincentenary honored their enslaver, opponents charged “anachronism.” “You are judging Columbus by the standards of 1992, not by those of his own time.” Bartolomé de Las Casas’s words and deeds belie this assessment. Some white men in Columbus’s time, even some who knew him personally, nevertheless condemned him and his associates for their racism.

Second, Las Casas teaches that among our tasks, as we work to eliminate

white supremacy from our nation and our world, is to recover some of the white men who have preceded us in this struggle. Three centuries after he wrote, Las Casas's words helped mobilize a continent, but they do so no longer. The U.S. Capitol displays his portrait, but today not one citizen in one hundred knows his name. All know Columbus, whose name graces the district in which the Capitol stands. American history is full of antiracist white men who have been forgotten or whose antiracist words and deeds have been suppressed. Americans of all races and both sexes need to know about them.

Third, like most antiracists, Las Casas was imperfect. He began as a conquistador and at one important moment argued for the slave trade, only with a different racial group as victim. Other antiracist white men, including myself and many you will meet in this book, have their moments of weakness. At times, like Las Casas, they (we) did not see their bias toward one group—perhaps Chinese Americans, gays and lesbians, or women—while remaining splendidly broad-minded toward another. Some simply succumbed to the cultural racism around them as time passed. But their shortcomings do not give us license to dismiss the totality of their lives, even if on some occasions they slipped into racism. Examined closely, all past heroes have surely erred at one time or another. We must forgive their human failings, and our own, so we can learn from them—and from those episodes when they did the right thing. Unlike hero worship, such thoughtful assessment results in enduring role models.

Finally, the example of Las Casas, or rather Antonio de Montesinos, teaches us that we cannot know the value of our work. Probably de Montesinos never learned that his Christmas homily unleashed the tremendous force of Las Casas upon the world. We may feel it is not worthwhile to counter every little racist comment we encounter. But one white high school student did so in a small town in east Mississippi in 1955, and the incident was still remembered by novelist Lewis Nordan and still made its impact forty years later:

I remember very clearly the day that I first heard the name of Emmett Till. I was in a football locker room. We were getting dressed out, and the body had just been found. There were terrible jokes being made, and . . . I was . . . sitting there in that locker room listening to this, probably smiling, I don't know, and some old boy, he said words I had never imagined a white boy saying before. He said, "It's not right to talk this way. He was just a kid who was killed, just like us. It don't matter what color he was." And that moment I measure as the moment that changed my life.¹⁰

Sometimes a tiny gesture makes an unknown difference.

High school textbooks in American history mystify the role of racism in our past, starting with Columbus. They therefore have no alternative but to mystify the role of *antiracism* in our past, starting with Las Casas. As a result, few Americans realize that throughout our past some whites have always worked for justice for all, without regard to race (or sex or social class). The history of American antiracism has been suppressed because antiracism has typically been on the losing side. Columbus set in motion global processes that continue to define our world today, including the seizure of land from native peoples and the Atlantic slave trade, first from west to east, and then from Africa, begun on Haiti by his son Ferdinand. Thousands of white men (and women, of course) grew rich off these processes; those who favored the just treatment of Native Americans and African Americans usually lost out. So it was that among the founders of the United States were huge slaveowners like George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison. Indeed, eleven of our first fifteen presidents (before Lincoln) owned slaves or were members of the proslavery wing of the Democratic Party.

But again, there were dissenters. Among the most important and least known was Edward Coles, a Virginia planter who knew Thomas Jefferson and tried to enlist him in the antislavery cause. You have “great credibility,” Coles wrote to Jefferson in 1814, asking his help “to eradicate this most degrading feature of British Colonial policy.” In his own life Jefferson mirrored the dilemma on race that has afflicted our nation since its inception. “I have sworn upon the altar of God, eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man,” he wrote, meanwhile practicing tyranny over two hundred human beings, including their minds.¹¹ His reply to Coles shows him unwilling to risk his imported wines, ever-changing mansion, and ever-expanding library, all of which rested on the labor he wrested from the men, women, and children he forced to work his two large plantations. He advised Coles to leave slavery alone: “I hope, my dear sir, you will reconcile yourself to your country and its unfortunate condition.”

Coles went it alone. He could not simply free his slaves, owing to a Virginia statute Thomas Jefferson had helped to pass requiring that they be sent out of state upon pain of reenslavement. So in 1819 he moved to southern Illinois with his slaves, freed them, and gave each family a quarter section of land.¹²

It is now that he played the key role for which he is forgotten in U.S. history. Although southern Illinois was originally part of the Northwest Territory, whose Northwest Ordinance forbade slavery, white residents there had made use of loopholes to hold hundreds of African Americans in bond-

age. In 1818 Illinois became a state and was no longer bound by the Northwest Ordinance. In 1822 Coles ran for governor against Joseph Phillips, chief justice of Illinois. Phillips was for slavery, Coles against, and after an exciting campaign Coles was elected by a margin of just forty-six votes. Meanwhile, proslavery candidates won a majority of the legislature. In his inaugural address, December 5, 1822, Coles spoke for the repeal of Illinois's "Black Codes" and sought new legislation to prevent the kidnapping of free Negroes, who were being abducted from Illinois and sold into slavery in Kentucky. Instead, the legislature passed a call for a convention, the main purpose of which, it gradually became clear, would be to legalize slavery.

Imagine the United States that would have resulted! Slavery would have ruled from the Gulf of Mexico to Lake Michigan, hemming freedom into the Northeast and changing the fate of our nation. Illinois would have achieved in 1825 what Chief Justice Roger Taney tried to accomplish in 1857 in *Dred Scott*: to make slavery national, freedom local. "Believing slavery to be both injurious and impolitic," Coles wrote, "I believe myself bound, both as a citizen and an officer, to do all in my power to prevent its introduction into the state," and he did. Two events turned the tide. Four days after his inaugural speech, a mob burned Coles in effigy at the State House in Vandalia, also setting the capitol on fire, which caused an antislavery backlash. And the next spring, the chief proslavery newspaper went bankrupt; Coles quickly bought it and turned it into the only antislavery organ in Illinois, deliberately sending it to all the old subscribers, even when they refused to pay for it. On August 2, 1824, by 4,972 to 6,640, the convention went down to defeat, and Illinois was saved from slavery.¹³

During the next decades, national policies went more and more proslavery, culminating in *Dred Scott*. Today our landscape is beset by statues celebrating even people like Taney, Buchanan, and Franklin W. Pierce, tools of the slavocracy. But some antislavery warriors do get attention on the landscape. Leaders of the Underground Railroad like Rowland Robinson, John Rankin, and Levi Coffin get remembered at their homes in Vermont, Ohio, and Indiana respectively. John Brown's home near Lake Placid, New York, tells his story, as does the National Park Service at Harpers Ferry. Charles Sumner, the senator from Massachusetts who was nearly beaten to death on the Senate floor in 1856 by Preston Brooks from South Carolina, gets remembered in Massachusetts and the District of Columbia.

During the Civil War, of course, antislavery finally became popular. The landscape of Washington, D.C., is replete with Union generals whose military ability and opposition to racism both grew as the war went on. Logan Circle, for instance, routes traffic around a statue of John A. Logan, who also

gets impressive memorials in Chicago and Philadelphia, a statue at Vicksburg, and a peak named for him in the Rockies. Today, however, people remember Logan, if at all, not as an antiracist or even as the best volunteer general in the Union Army, but only as the person who established Memorial Day as a national holiday. Actually, John Logan made an extraordinary moral and intellectual journey during his lifetime, one that might be a role model for millions of white Americans—if they but knew of it. He grew up in southern Illinois, Democrat country, and the Democratic Party throughout the nineteenth century was the overt party of white supremacy, even calling itself “The White Man’s Party.”¹⁴ In 1853, Logan was instrumental in pushing the “Exclusion Bill” through the Illinois legislature, making it a crime to bring African Americans into the state and subjecting violators to arrest and a fine. In 1860, when southern states broke with the Union, many whites in southern Illinois proposed to let them go or even to secede with them. Logan gave a famous speech from a farm wagon on the town square of Marion, arguing so eloquently for the Union that 110 men enlisted in the U.S. Army on the spot “and Southern Illinois was saved to the Union,” in the words of his widow later. By then a U.S. Congressman, Logan resigned his seat to become colonel of the Thirty-First Illinois Infantry, participated in Sherman’s March to the Sea, and rose gradually to the rank of general. In the process, events forcibly reeducated him and many other white Union soldiers in the area of race relations.¹⁵

The key year was 1864. In July, Logan used blatant racism to argue for equal treatment of Blacks in the military, shouting he “had rather six niggers . . . be killed than one of his brave [white] boys.” For the rest of the year and into the next, marching through Georgia and South Carolina, Sherman’s army encountered no one but African Americans for days on end. Soldiers saw firsthand the conditions under which slaves lived, touched the scars on their backs, and beheld and often burned the whipping posts standing in front of “the big house.” Sometimes they met Union POWs who had escaped and been sheltered by the African American infrastructure. Everywhere Sherman’s troops received the hurrahs of a newly liberated people, upon whom they relied for food, labor, and information as to nearby Confederates.

It was all heady stuff. Like many of his men, Logan grew convinced that Black people were just that—people—and deserved all the rights of other people, even of white people. As the war wound down and Lincoln was shot and President Andrew Johnson opposed every civil rights initiative coming from Congress or Lincoln’s cabinet members, Logan played an important role in establishing what is now known as Congressional Reconstruction. When Johnson threatened to remove Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, the

last hope of the freedmen, Logan told Johnson that he would mobilize the Grand Army of the Republic, an organization of veterans Logan had helped establish, to protect Stanton. This forestalled Johnson from forcibly removing Stanton, but Stanton and Logan slept in Stanton's office to make sure. Logan then campaigned for the Fifteenth Amendment, then the major controversy before the nation. Speaking in Ohio, he argued: "Now I want some Democrat to give a reason why the Negro should not vote. I have read their speeches, and all they say is, 'We don't want the nigger to vote,' and turn up their noses as they say it. A gentleman in Congress from your state says the Negro does not belong to the human species. But they are made the same as you and I; but they are Black—that is all the difference. If they were not made by the hand of God, I would like to know by whom they were made."

As Reconstruction lost favor, Logan remained in the "Stalwart" wing of the Republican Party, committed to Black rights. In 1884 the party nominated him for vice-president, with James G. Blaine for president, but Grover Cleveland, white supremacist Democrat, prevailed in a cliffhanger.

Emboldened by the Democratic resurgence and by Republicans' ideological retreat after failing to pass a voting rights bill in 1890, white Mississippi responded by passing its constitution of 1890, which used various mechanisms to disenfranchise African Americans "legally." During the next seventeen years, all other southern and border states copied Mississippi. This led to the notorious "Nadir of Race Relations," the period 1890–1925, when lynchings rose to their all-time high and segregation swept public accommodations even in the North.

Some white Mississippians were not racist in 1890, but their voices had already been stilled. John Prentiss Matthews, who made an intellectual journey much like Logan's but on the southern side, provides a heartbreaking example. Matthews was born in Copiah County in 1840. Although his family was wealthy and owned thirty-five slaves, John Prentiss—"Print" to his friends—was a Unionist during the Civil War. After the war, he ran a general store in Hazlehurst, the county seat. The interracial Republican coalition that governed Mississippi during Reconstruction elected him sheriff of the county.

White Democrats used violence and threats of violence to end Reconstruction in Mississippi in November 1875. Although the Democrats took over the state government, they did not capture every county, partly because of men like Print Matthews. Matthews organized a "Fusion" or "Independent Party" coalition of Black and white farmers in Copiah County. He maintained that African Americans were "entitled to all the rights, privileges, and immunities of American citizens." As a result, according to historian

William Ivy Hair, African Americans “were said to rank him alongside Abraham Lincoln.”¹⁶ He also won the loyalty of 600–700 small-scale white farmers. As a result, his interracial coalition could outpoll the Democrats by at least three hundred votes in any honest contest. Democrats responded with cannon shots at Independent Party rallies and threats before every election. Finally, as the 1883 elections loomed, Democrats resolved to do away with black political influence in Covich County. They began night-riding—entering sharecroppers’ cabins and threatening African Americans with death if they voted Independent. Many Blacks and some white Matthews supporters spent the last few days and nights before the election hiding in the woods.

The day before the election, the intimidation campaign reached Print Matthews personally. White leaders of Hazlehurst delivered a written ultimatum to him at his home, ordering him to “absent himself from the polls on election.” Matthews knew his party could not win because many of his supporters were too terrified to come to the polls. “I have as much right to vote as any of you,” he replied regardless. “I have never done any of you any harm. I have tried to be useful to society in every way that I could. You have got it in your power to murder me, I admit. But I am going to vote tomorrow, unless you kill me.”

The next morning, he walked across the street to his polling place. Several Democrats carrying shotguns stood outside the door. Inside was Ras Wheeler, the precinct captain, a white farmer who had an account at Matthews’s store. Hair tells what happened next: “Matthews looked around, saw Wheeler, and went over to sit beside him. The two men talked in low tones for a minute or so. Wheeler finally said, ‘Print, I would not vote today if I were you.’ Matthews then got up, walked over to an election official, and presented his ballot. He was asked to fold it. He was doing so when Ras Wheeler reached inside the wood box, lifted out a double-barreled shotgun, and taking quick aim, fired first one and then the other charge of buckshot. Print Matthews died instantly.”

The day after the murder, white Democrats held a mass meeting in Hazlehurst and resolved “it is necessary to the safety of society and the welfare of all races and classes in the county that hereafter the Matthews family shall keep out of politics in Covich county.” According to the local newspaper, “The niggers met one mile South of here last Tuesday and passed resolutions of sorrow.” A white-dominated jury found Wheeler innocent, whereupon Democrats appointed him city marshal of Hazlehurst. There was talk of running him for governor.

During the Nadir of Race Relations, historians derided men like Matthews as “scalawags,” a term meaning “rascals,” reserved for southern

whites who believed in equal rights. Stalwarts like Logan were likewise besmirched as scandal-ridden and self-interested because historians between 1890 and 1925 could not believe that white men might be motivated by the sincere belief that Blacks should have all the rights of citizenship reserved to whites. Thus Logan and Matthews not only lost the struggle, and Matthews his life, but also ultimately their honor. But as John Logan's biographer has pointed out, "there was no political profit to be made from his advocacy of Black rights." And as Logan put it, at his best, "I don't care whether a man is black, red, blue, or white."

During the Nadir, some antiracist white men lost their idealism, or perhaps their nerve. General O. O. Howard, for example, had served alongside Logan during Sherman's march and was such a spokesperson for African Americans that he was called "the conscience of the army." During Reconstruction he headed the Freedman's Bureau and spoke so eloquently on behalf of the Fourteenth Amendment that some pundits labeled it "the Howard Amendment." But later in life Howard joined the "Mugwumps," the wing of the Republican Party that proposed giving up on "Negro rights." That faction came to dominate the Union League Club, an organization that was virtually synonymous with the leadership of the Republican Party in New York City and to a degree nationally.

The Union League Club had been founded during the Civil War to combat the prosecession sentiment that dominated New York City. The club raised and equipped a regiment of Negro troops and also forced streetcar companies to serve African Americans without segregation. During Reconstruction, the club helped found interracial Union League chapters across the South that helped African Americans to organize politically. By the 1880s, however, the ideas of the Stalwarts began to sound shopworn, particularly to new members of the Union League Club who had not fought in the Civil War. In 1894, Democrats repealed the remaining federal voting rights statutes. Union Leagues disintegrated across the South. In New York City, the Union League Club now began to stand for ideas antithetical to its founding ideals. Now members refused to admit upwardly mobile Jews, Italians, Catholics, and others of "incorrect background." Joseph Seligman had been a founder of the club; his son Jesse joined in 1868. In 1893, Jesse Seligman had to resign because members blackballed his own son Theodore because he was a Jew.

The management committee of the Union League Club went a step further: it proposed firing the club's Black servants and replacing them with an all-white staff. At this point, another long-time member, ex-Union General Wager Swayne, intervened. During Reconstruction, Swayne had headed

the Freedman's Bureau in Alabama, helped found Talladega College, and was appointed military governor of Alabama. Now, just before his death, he fought one last battle "for his youthful principles," in the words of historian Michael W. Fitzgerald.¹⁷ He got up a petition to bring the matter to a vote, spoke in favor of retaining the African Americans, and eventually got the membership to reverse the decision of its management committee.¹⁸

O. O. Howard teaches that the most committed antiracist white man can abandon the cause of racial justice.¹⁹ But Wager Swayne shows that even in the worst of times, there have been those who *never* lost the faith. The larger panorama of the Nadir teaches more profound lessons. To this day, the biased history promulgated during the Nadir still distorts high school history textbooks and Civil War monuments across the nation. That there *was* a Nadir, or even that racism has played a continuing role in American life, North as well as South, goes unremarked in most American history textbooks. Thus we learn that when history was written and who did the writing make a profound difference. The most telling date on a granite memorial may not be on its face, telling of the event it celebrates, but around back—the date it went up.

During the first third of the twentieth century, white males elaborated their "blame the victim" ideology to justify keeping nonwhites in positions of inferiority with new "scientific" rationales. After all, slavery had been over for a generation and more. Therefore the continuing position of Blacks at the bottom of the social hierarchy could no longer be attributed to slavery. So biologists justified the Nadir with their eugenics, psychologists with their IQ tests, and sociologists with their Social Darwinism.

At the same time, a few white men developed understandings of the social world that helped people see how racism, rather than some presumed incapacity, explained racial stratification. Outstanding among them was Franz Boas, an immigrant from Germany who came to New York City in 1887. Partly owing to his Jewish background, which gave him firsthand experience with racism in Germany, Boas grew upset at the Nadir. Every culture had some merit, he held. In 1894 he told the American Association for the Advancement of Science that race did not determine intelligence. In 1906 he specifically attacked eugenic thinking, holding that slavery, not biology, had oppressed Blacks. The next year he blamed white racism for the lack of Black progress in the United States.

Boas never accomplished his dream of getting an African museum built in Washington, D.C., to prove to the nation that Blacks had produced culture and art. His testimony before Congress also failed to derail the 1924 Immigration Restriction Act, openly based on eugenics. But he did provide the

basic anti-ethnocentric thinking that social science craved when Hitler's Germany finally succeeded in giving eugenics a bad name. His biographer tells how at his last public event in 1942, hosting a luncheon at the Columbia University Faculty Club honoring an anthropologist who had fled France after opposing Nazism, Boas "concluded by instructing the gathering to be vigilant and to fight race prejudice wherever it existed. He then fell back into his chair and died."²⁰

Boas's students fanned out across the United States, seeding college campuses with professors who had evidence to support their belief that people of color were "rational," to return to Las Casas's phrase. Like those Jewish Americans who helped found the NAACP in 1909, Boas epitomizes the many "hyphenated Americans"—the term Woodrow Wilson used to disparage recent immigrants—who worked for justice for African, Asian, Mexican, and Native Americans in their new homeland. He also offers a lesson to ivory-towered professors everywhere: he acted in public and wrote for the public, not just in academic journals read only by scholars, because he knew that the issue was of paramount importance to the nation.

In most cities during the Nadir, in the North as well as in the South, white labor unions and management excluded Black workers. Not only were African Americans kept from practicing the skilled trades, they also could not be assembly line workers or even, in some plants, janitors. In Detroit, Ford and Dodge were exceptional; Ford even hired some Black foremen.²¹ Except for the United Mine Workers, racially integrated labor unions were rare until about 1935. In that year, Detroit workers organized the United Auto Workers (UAW). Its president, R. J. Thomas, elected in 1939, acted to make the UAW an antiracist trailblazer.

During World War II, UAW locals protested promoting Black workers to assembly line and skilled jobs. Some whites fomented what came to be called "hate strikes"—wildcat walkouts to force management to reassign Black workers to janitorial and other menial jobs. At the Curtiss-Wright aircraft plant in Columbus, Ohio, the local UAW organizer led such a strike in 1941. Thomas responded by firing him and negotiating an agreement with Curtiss-Wright opening *all* departments to Black workers. In 1943, Packard Motor Company in Detroit faced similar strikes, sparked initially by the transfer of two Black workers to metal-polishing jobs. Ku Klux Klansmen dominated Packard's UAW local. The Packard manager was racist as well, insisting that metal polishing "was a white man's job"; he declared he would not make the transfers if white workers objected. When Thomas could not get either side to budge, he tried to get federal authorities to step in, but the

feds equivocated. Historians August Meier and Elliott Rudwick tell how Packard employees then staged strike after strike when handfuls of African Americans were upgraded to drill press operators, aircraft assembly, and the like.²² When Thomas faced Packard workers on May 30, 1943, he refused to back down: "This problem must be settled or it will wreck our union." Hundreds of white workers booed and marched out. Four days later, twenty-five thousand whites went out on strike, shutting down the plant. Thomas then secretly flew to Washington to seek intervention from the War Labor Board (WLB) and the Fair Employment Practices Commission—always a risky step for a labor leader. The WLB did send a strong telegram. Thomas vowed to end racial discrimination "even if it requires that large numbers of white workers out there lose their jobs." He threatened to expel any worker who stayed out on strike. Most whites returned to work, and an uneasy peace reigned at Packard.

Throughout the war, Thomas led the UAW to integrate workforces at Hudson, Dodge Truck, and other industrial plants. He also led the CIO to take a stand favoring integrated housing in Detroit. Today the alliance between unions and African Americans, symbolized by the role both play within the Democratic Party, is a fact of our political landscape, but it took work by steadfast pioneers like R. J. Thomas to get Blacks to see unions as an ally and white workers to accept Blacks as equal members.

Many of the men whom you will meet in the pages to come were spurred to work for racial justice by the Civil Rights Movement. But the struggle for civil rights is over. We are entering a "postracist" era. In times to come, it may grow harder to keep faith with Las Casas and Coles, with Print Matthews and R. J. Thomas. Few white Americans now announce, as did so many before World War II, "I am a white supremacist." Few admit to choosing where they live or where their children go to school on the basis of race. Yet we know that overwhelmingly white neighborhoods, even whole towns, not only still exist but are even regarded prestigious places to raise a family. We know that history as taught in grades 1–12 is largely a justification of our national past, which thus subtly reinforces white supremacy. And we know that without effort by white men, race will remain a problem even as our country grows more racially diverse.

In a way, the problem we face is similar to the ideological difficulty in the Nadir that so dispirited the Republicans. Around 1890, as we have seen, whites came to view the less-than-equal position of African Americans as their own fault; slavery had ended, after all. Today's continuing racial inequality can no longer be blamed on segregation, even though segregation

endures in many places. Neo-eugenicists like the authors of *The Bell Curve* have again arisen to tell us that racial inequality derives from intellectual inferiority, whether innate or located deep within the cultures of the oppressed. Precisely because the causes of racial inequality are now less visible, those who combat them may appear less reasonable.

In this intellectual climate, there will be those like O. O. Howard who do not stay the course. No one wants to be marginalized. But examples like Wager Swayne and Franz Boas—and the thirty-five men in this volume—still exist to inspire us. Here is another reason why this book is so valuable. Its many mini-biographies persuade the reader that he is not alone and that other white men find the cause of antiracism worthwhile, even energizing.

One of the men whom you will meet in the pages that follow, John Allocca, wishes he “had activist ancestors.” Probably he means “in my own family.” But in a larger sense, *he does*. We all do. From Las Casas to Thomas, however, the history of antiracist white men has been lost or even suppressed. So we in the present have lost them as potential role models for our continuing struggle for equal rights across racial lines. Charles Pinckney Sumner, father of Charles Sumner, taught his children about Edward Coles as an example of a white man who opposed slavery. Years later Senator Sumner remembered Coles as a role model. In the same way, the men in this book will become activist ancestors for generations to follow. For unless our victory is swift and complete—which the past suggests is unlikely—those who come after us will need these stories, just as we need to know of Montesinos, Boas, and all the rest.

History is usually the tale of the winners and is usually told by the winners. Andrew Jackson is on our \$20 bill, while the Whigs who opposed his forced removal of the Indians from the southeast lie forgotten. History is a process of deliberate omission, not just of the unimportant but also of the embarrassing, including those white men who have pointed out our failures to live up to our principles. History as handed down to us is part of the problem rather than our ally. One way to recover white men like Logan, Matthews, Howard, and Swayne is by enacting rituals at sites important to their memory.²³ We—and I include those who come after us—cannot rest until every American who knows of Columbus also knows of Las Casas. Until everyone who knows of Thomas Jefferson also knows of Edward Coles. Until Ross Barnett Reservoir in Mississippi, named for the governor who tried to keep Blacks out of Ole Miss, has been renamed for John Prentiss Matthews or someone like him. Until, in short, the library of volumes celebrating white men who became prominent partly through their skill at

subordinating people of color is balanced by a collection of books celebrating, as this one does, white men who chose a different path, who worked for equal justice for all races.

Like my partial list from the past, what follows is only a beginning.

Preface

A Personal Preface from Cooper Thompson

I used to think that this was “my book,” but I can no longer do that. Since my first inklings of this project about twenty years ago, I’ve changed the way I think about this book. I came to realize that I didn’t own this book, but that it was the work of many people and that ownership resided somewhere else, if at all.

The first step in that process was my making the decision that I didn’t want to do this project by myself. As a traditional white man, I had had lots of practice working and living in isolation from other people. Although I had been a member of two families (one by birth and one by choice) and many organizations and teams, I still thought of myself as an individual rather than a member of communities. I didn’t think I needed support. I thought I could “go it alone.” I came to realize that that path was lonely and led to less effective outcomes. And so I asked for, and found, another white man to join me in this project. Estelle Disch, a professor at the University of Massachusetts at Boston, introduced me to Emmett Schaefer. In 1998, we began to meet weekly in a coffee shop to explore if we wanted to work together. Then, in 1999, on a trip to Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia to interview several white men, Emmett and I asked an old friend of mine, Harry Brod, to join us. We are now three.

Although I continued to do most of the interviewing and development of the narratives and coordinated all the pieces leading to the completion of a manuscript, the three of us shared equally in all major decisions about content and style. Most important, we lifted each other’s spirits when we were overwhelmed by the project or something else going on in our lives. I am so grateful to the support that Harry and Emmett gave me; without them, I doubt that this project would have been finished.

The second step in this process was the persistent voice of Gerald Jackson. Gerald is an African American friend and colleague of mine in VISIONS, Inc., an organization that provides training and consultation on multiculturalism.

It took a couple of years for me to hear what Gerald was telling me about the importance of sharing this material with other people. Initially, I thought of these interviews only as material that I was collecting for my own learning. Gerald repeatedly told me that I should publish the interviews, that other white men needed to hear what I was saying. Eventually, I also understood that he was telling me, in his Afrocentric way of being in the world, that I was obligated to share this material because it didn't belong to me. I was simply a vehicle for the voices of other white men.

A third step was the realization that there were literally hundreds of people who directly contributed in some way to this project. Although there are thirty-five white men profiled in this book, there are at least another fifty with whom I talked or interviewed and who have had an impact on how I think about this project. I have the names of at least one hundred other white men whom I didn't interview; the fact that they are out there inspired me to continue this project when I would lose the motivation to plug away. There are at least twenty-five people who gave me names of white men to interview. There are at least twenty people who gave me feedback on some aspect of the project. Colleagues supported my taking time to work on this project; many friends and acquaintances encouraged me and inspired me. Sometimes their voices came to me quite spontaneously. When I was transcribing Ken Kimerling's interview, I suddenly heard in my questions to Ken the voice of an old friend and colleague, Althea Smith. It was something about the way I was phrasing the question and pausing between my thoughts, and I knew that I had learned that from her. She would have asked the same questions in the same way. It was as if she were speaking through me.

Finally, a fourth step came late in the process from my friend Renae Gray. As she read some of the narratives of the white men we had interviewed, she saw that there were almost always people of color standing in front and behind and among and alongside these white men. Renae talked about this in both a literal and figurative way, as if it were impossible to bring these white men into a room without these people of color coming with them. She asked me, "How are you going to bring those people of color to the forefront?" Her question—and challenge—made me see that I had stepped one more time into the morass of white male arrogance in the ways that I was failing to recognize how people of color were the catalyst for white men challenging racism. And so this book is dedicated to the people of color who have been the conscience, catalyst, and inspiration for white men challenging racism. (In the introduction are examples of the people of color, and white people, who have been mentors, teachers, partners, and supporters of the white men profiled in the book.)

And so I have come to believe that this book belongs to a huge circle of friends, fellow travelers, writers, thinkers, beings, and doers, many of whom I've never met. It is our book, inspired by the voices and experiences of many. Consequently, from this point on in the book, whenever you are reading "our" comments, including the book's introduction, notes at the beginning of each narrative, occasional questions in the narratives, and the epilogue, you will see the pronoun "we," even though one of us probably put those particular words on the page.

Authors' Preface

This has been a labor of love. When we began this project six years ago, our primary interest was meeting other white men like ourselves. We wanted to reduce our own feelings of isolation and separation by being in the company of other antiracist white men and learning from them. But as we continued to conduct interviews and talked about the project to other white men and to people of color and white women, we were encouraged to publish the material. We were told again and again that the material we were collecting was unique and important. We came to realize that what we had learned could impact others' lives and have significant political impact.

We wrote this book for both personal and political reasons. We wanted to break the isolation we sometimes feel when we speak up and act against racism and inspire others to speak up and challenge racism. We wanted to find white men who could be mentors and teachers and supporters in our journey and others' journeys. We wanted to learn how other white men conceptualize and go about the task of challenging racism and then share that information so that others can benefit. There were so many questions we had: Where do other white men find the sustenance to continue challenging racism over the long haul? What's the role of spirituality in their lives and work? How do they manage their relationships with other white men? How do they build trust with people of color and navigate through the inevitable mistakes they make in those relationships? How do they make choices about what to do in the face of feeling overwhelmed by all that needs to be done?

We wanted to honor the white men who have come before us, the white men who are our peers, and the white men in the generations following us. Although some of the white men we interviewed had parents and grandparents and aunts and uncles to inspire them to challenge racism, the three of us have for the most part not had the benefit of growing up in families where there were models for resisting racism. Nor have we, for the most

part, known about the history of white men who have challenged racism in the United States. We saw this project as a way to address that void in our lives. We had a need to know that there were and are and will be white men challenging racism. James Loewen's foreword does a wonderful job of teaching us a little bit about the rich history of white male resistance to racism in the United States. A few of the white men whose narratives appear in the book are old enough to be our fathers; some are our contemporaries and even friends; some are young enough to be our sons.

Although we have had, and continue to have, women and men of color and white women in our lives who willingly and enthusiastically serve as mentors and teachers and supporters, we have realized that we need the support and mentorship of white men. So, in many ways, this book is for white men. But many people of color and white women have told us that they found value in these narratives. Our wish is that all readers use these stories for self-reflection, dialogue, and action.

We are pleased to be able to share this work with you.

Harry Brod, Emmett Schaefer, and Cooper Thompson

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All authors' royalties from this book go directly to fund antiracist work through RESIST, which has been funding social change since 1967. RESIST helped us find several of the white men interviewed for this book and has provided funding to some of the organizations they represent. For further information contact RESIST at 259 Elm Street, Suite 201, Somerville, MA 02144 or www.resistinc.org.

Acknowledgments

This project stands on the shoulders of many people. With apologies to those we have forgotten to mention, we'd like to thank the following people for helping to create this book.

Estelle Disch, Renae Gray, Rita Hardiman, Curdina Hill, Gerald Jackson, Jackson Katz, Jim Kilpatrick, Joycelyn Landrum-Brown, Jo Lewis, Afiya Madzimoyo, Wekesa Ojatunji Madzimoyo, Gordon Murray, Pam Newman, Michael Omi, and Michael Thornton, who encouraged us and inspired us.

Timothy Beneke (*Men on Rape*), Bob Blauner (*Black Lives, White Lives*), and Studs Terkel (*Race and Working*), who gave us book-length models of first-person narratives.

Valerie Batts, Christina Davis-McCoy, Patti DeRosa, Angela Giudice, Ted Glick, Renae Gray, Bob Hall, Lance Hill, Derrick Jackson, Stetson Kennedy, Tom Louie, Paul Marcus, James Mejia, Al Minor, Gloria Norlin-Wells, Joan Parker, Jennifer Phillips, Susan Rabinowitz, Mark Scanlon-Greene, Carol Schachet, Mab Segrest, Joe Steele, Becky Thompson, Jennifer Wexler, and Loretta Williams, who gave us names of potential interviewees.

Bob Allen and Ian Maher, who used high- and low-tech methods to find antiracist white men for us to interview.

Glenda Russell, who gave us a model for a cooperative consent form.

Catherine Lugar, who lent us her professional portable cassette recorder so that we could get high-quality audiotapes.

Don Snider, who encouraged us to share our questions with the interviewee prior to the interview, thereby making the process more cooperative.

Anne Bowie, Vendela Carlson, Sandra Knight, and Colette Perreault, who did literal transcriptions of some of the first interviews we did.

Elly Bulkin, who edited some of the first literal transcriptions into narratives and gave us invaluable feedback on the content of the interviews.

Angela Giudice, Renae Gray, Curdina Hill, Jo Lewis, and Raoul Ybarra, who read drafts of the narratives and gave us supportive and critical feedback.

David Attyah and Steve Bailey, who helped us see that developing the narratives was a creative endeavor in which the interviewees had shared their thoughts and then respected our process of shaping their words to fit our needs.

Inge Spiegel, who helped with the tedious process of typing handwritten edits.

Paul Kivel and Chip Berlet, for support and suggestions on finding a publisher.

Reynolds Smith, Executive Editor at Duke University Press, who believed in this project and encouraged us to give him a proposal so that Duke might consider publishing the book.

Sharon Parks Torian, Senior Editorial Assistant at Duke University Press, who answered our many questions about navigating the publishing process at Duke, always doing so with a smile.

Two anonymous reviewers who gave us very helpful feedback on drafts of the manuscript.

Rick Whaley, who gave us pages of insightful recommendations for editing the preface and introduction.

Bob Blauner, Doug Brugge, John Capitman, Matt Case, Mark Chesler, Jim Crowfoot, Tom Cummins, Peter Dougherty, Chuck Esser, Pat Farren, Todd Fry, Ted Glick, Paul Gorski, Bob Hall, Ralph Hergert, Jim Hussey, Joe Harvard, Nathan Henderson-James, Michael Jacobson-Hardy, Greg Jobin-Leeds, Jackson Katz, Paul Kivel, Arnold Langberg, Lester Langley, Ian Maher, Jerome Miller, Michael Novick, Tom O'Mara, Bob Paret, Ed Peebles, Dennis Poplin, Hyim Jacob Ross, Chuck Ruehle, Rob Sand, Joe Sexton, Barry Shapiro, Chris Smith, David Snider, Jim Wallis, Marc Weinblatt, and Larry Yates, who allowed us to interview them but whose narratives, unfortunately, we were not able to include in the book.

And last, the thirty-five white men in this book who have so willingly shared themselves with us, without whom this project would not exist.

Introduction: Just Living

This is a book about the personal experiences of thirty-five white men who are trying to live a just life, sometimes successfully, sometimes not. To varying degrees, the white men in this book all think of what they do as simply what they must do, as if it is no longer a choice; they are just living their lives. And the task of challenging racism and other forms of oppression is integrated into their day-to-day existence in such a way that their lives are permeated with questions of justice, personally and politically. Challenging racism is, for these men, just living. This book is an attempt to provide some space for the reflections of a group of white men who we believe are living just lives in many different ways.

The narratives include incidents from and comments about complex and rich lives and reflections on antiracist activity. Some of the narratives speak about critical events that led to a life of activism; some of them speak about blind spots when it comes to racism or another form of oppression; some of them speak about offenses in relationships and mistakes in strategy; some of them speak about regrets of actions not taken. And there are expressions of pride in describing accomplishments and victories.

These narratives are like photographs. It is as if each of these white men were momentarily presenting himself to us and you. These narratives are not comprehensive life histories. The white men profiled in this book made decisions about what they wanted to reveal about themselves and what they didn't want to reveal. We encouraged them and sometimes challenged them to reveal more about their most favorite and least favorite sides of themselves.

Why Another Book about White Men?

Given the critical role that people of color have played in the lives of white men who challenge racism and given the fact that it is largely people of color (and to a lesser extent white women) who have given their lives to fight racism, you may wonder why we are writing a book exclusively about white men. In fact, we were occasionally asked, "Why are you focusing on white

men? Aren't people of color the true heroes? Why are you ignoring them? Don't white men already get more attention than they deserve? And what about the work of white women in challenging racism?"

We spent many hours talking about these questions with people of color and other white people. Afiya Madzimoyo, a friend and colleague who lives in Atlanta, Georgia, and other women of color consistently told us that there is a desperate need at this point in history for white men to love themselves as white men; Wekesa Madzimoyo, her husband and another friend and colleague, supported us in our learning to love our white male brothers. Afiya and Wekesa emphasized the importance of our being with other white men, praising them for their accomplishments, and challenging them when they didn't "get it."

Wekesa is also emphatic that people of color need to break the centuries-old pattern of taking care of white people; we know from experience that we and other white men have fallen into patterns of looking to people of color—and white women—for encouragement and affirmation as we take on the task of challenging racism. In our worst moments, we have depended on people of color to acknowledge our good efforts, and if they didn't thank us profusely, we decided that they weren't grateful. Or we have avoided contact with other white men, believing that there is little chance of getting support from them. We believe that it is our responsibility as white men to give ourselves the "strokes" we want and need.

We are certainly not the first white people to decide that our work is with other white people. This is what Malcolm X and many other people of color said when asked by white people what their role might be in securing civil rights for African Americans. After reading many of these narratives and giving us feedback, Curdina Hill told us, "White people aren't really doing antiracism work unless they're working with other white people." In a variation on this theme, Winona LaDuke told Rick Whaley, one of the white men interviewed for this book, "You need to know prayers in your own people's language."

We believe that the narratives in this book do what Afiya and Wekesa and other people of color have encouraged us to do. By holding up these white men who challenge racism, we are celebrating their lives. By asking them to be vulnerable about their mistakes and shortcomings and by asking questions that push their understanding of themselves and oppression, we are challenging them. By supporting them and getting support from them, we are encouraging white men to use their white male privilege fully. It does nothing for racial justice if we are meek and shrink into a corner, abandoning

people of color and white women to fight racism on their own. The struggle for racial justice needs all of us in the center of the room.

Just as we hoped our questions were challenging to the men we were interviewing, so we also hope that their answers prove challenging to our readers. In particular, we hope what they say challenges the images that usually arise when people begin to speak of men in connection with the issue of racism. All too often, in our view, introducing the topic “men and racism” into a conversation quickly narrows it down to a discussion solely of the problem of “angry white men.” But there are other men, other white men, other than these “angry white men.” These other white men have anger and many other feelings, as their words show, not toward people of color or women (against whom the anger of the “angry white men” is said to be directed), but against racism and sexism and injustice generally. And they act on those feelings not in hostile acts of rage against other, marginalized people, but in acts of solidarity with those other people and acts of compassionate confrontation toward other white men.

Why, then, yet another book on white men—and this time, irony of ironies, one that even claims to be in opposition to racism and sexism? Because the widely held gendered image of racism—it’s “angry white *men*,” not “angry white *people*”—needs an equally gendered counterimage of antiracism—antiracist white *men*, not antiracist white *people*. Because groups of people, even dominant groups of people, are not monolithic. And it’s important to know this. To really know it, not just in the abstract, but in the concrete details of these people’s lives, as they themselves speak about them. We need to have some personal knowledge of men who have crossed racial lines in pursuit of racial justice, against the dominant stand of their own dominant group. Such knowledge empowers all, whether dominant or subordinate, because it opens the horizon and raises the bar of the possible in pursuit of justice and may even help to empower and inspire others to do likewise.

It is not that we believe that white women don’t have much to teach us. They have taught us much, and we hope to keep learning from them. In fact, our personal experience tells us that there are many more white women than white men who actively challenge racism, and we suspect that there is more contemporary antiracism literature written by white women than by white men. Given that, it seems particularly important to focus on white men, to fill in this gap.

Some of the white men we interviewed also had concerns about being part of this project. A few of them were surprised that we wanted to talk to