

# THE COLOR OF CITIZENSHIP

Race, Modernity and Latin American / Hispanic Political Thought

6. De Español y Negra. Mulato.



DIEGO A. VON VACANO

THE COLOR OF CITIZENSHIP

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# The Color of Citizenship

RACE, MODERNITY AND LATIN AMERICAN/HISPANIC  
POLITICAL THOUGHT

By Diego A. von Vacano

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*To Kazuko Suzuki*

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## Preface

A RECENT BOLIVIAN film by the director Juan Carlos Valdivia, *Zona Sur*, encapsulates the complex politics of race in some parts of Latin America. In it, a wealthy, “white” family is entangled psychologically with its indigenous domestic servants. Growing up in La Paz, Bolivia, I always felt this kind of racial politics very close. While my family was lower-middle class, I attended a private French school in Achumani, in “la Zona Sur,” one of the wealthier suburbs of the capital. Most of my classmates were “white,” and the few who were not were sometimes treated as outcasts. Racial jokes about *indios* and *cholos* were not uncommon, and we—like most middle- and upper-class Bolivians—had *empleadas*, indigenous live-in maids who worked long, hard hours. The color line that separated Bolivians along racial lines was trenchant and deep. It created a *de facto* apartheid system that enshrined white privilege.

We eventually emigrated to the United States as political refugees owing to political turmoil in Bolivia in the 1980s. We left behind the racial politics of la Zona Sur, but I found a different kind of racial politics as a young Latino immigrant living in Queens, New York. The better classrooms and teachers were reserved for the white students, while mostly Latino and Asian immigrants were left to their own devices in what were supposed to be English as Second Language classes. I eventually realized that one’s color, appearance, and way of speaking matter a lot in defining the meaning of being a “citizen,” whether in Bolivia, the United States, or elsewhere.

These experiences led me to think about ways that we can theorize the intricate relationship of race to citizenship. This book is the product, and it argues that the Latin American experience—while it does indeed have many negative aspects when it comes

to racial politics (as was and is the case in la Zona Sur)—can teach us a lot about the way in which race has been used to delineate a citizenry. We can trace the political uses of race in Latin American intellectual history, but we can also derive a normatively useful account of racial admixture that will serve us well as we proceed into the new century. This is because the rest of the world, including the United States, is slowly discovering what Latin America has known for centuries: miscegenation is not only not immoral, but it is inevitable and perhaps even necessary. Debates in the United States about multiracial identity, the possibility of a postracial world in the aftermath of Barack Obama, and demographic changes owed to the age of mass migration will ineluctably have to confront the intellectual tradition related to racial admixture that comes to us from Latin America.

This tradition's complexities are evident in *casta* paintings, such as the one that is this book's cover. *Casta* paintings, characteristic of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in parts of Latin America, were depictions by artists such as Miguel Cabrera and Andrés de Islas of the various *castas* or categories of mixed-race peoples that emerged out of the confluence of Amerindian, African, and Iberian groups. They are emblematic of the Spanish Enlightenment's use of aesthetic forms to enact social control, exercise power, and classify subaltern groups. Yet their inherent absurdity is evident from the bizarre names given to mixed-race individuals: for example, *Lobo*, *salta atrás*, *tente en el aire*, *torna atrás*, *Albarazado*, *Calpamulato*, *Chamizo*, *Coyote*, *Zambuigua*, *Cambujo*, and *Barcino*. Perhaps the most apt *casta* name was “No te entiendo” (“I do not understand you”), for it shows us that the attempt to delimit and classify discrete mixed-race identities leads to a *reductio ad absurdum*.

This book argues implicitly against the thinking behind *casta* paintings. It developed through roughly five stages. The initial concept came from teaching Latin American political thought at various institutions. For this reason, I have to thank my undergraduate students at Williams, Vassar, and Hunter colleges for helping me see the leitmotif of race throughout the history of Ibero-American ideas. I also thank the political science faculties of those colleges for providing a fecund environment for the growth of the project.

The second stage coincided with my first years as an assistant professor of political science at Texas A&M University. First and foremost, I have to thank Cary Nederman for having faith in me by asking me to apply for the position. Throughout my first three years there, I benefited from the immense support of the Department of Political Science as well as the university in general. In particular, Lisa Ellis provided me with encouragement and intellectual engagement. I benefited greatly from the suggestions of Judy Baer and Ed Portis. I also thank the graduate students in my Latin American political philosophy seminar at A&M. I am grateful to the Melbern G. Glasscock Center for Humanities Research for their generous support, as well as to the Mexican American / Latino Research Center.

While at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton and the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford, I carried out the principal research for

this book. I spent the two most productive (and idyllic) academic years of my life at these two incomparable institutions. The Woods and the Hill allowed me to wander the world of ideas to try to make sense of a seemingly endless stream of books and pages. In particular, I appreciate the intellectual and friendly support of Danielle Allen and Michael Walzer. Their suggestions were very useful in my attempt to build a structure out of books instead of bricks. I thank the faculty of the School of Social Science, including Eric Maskin and Joan Scott, as well as fellow Members, especially Aurelian Craiutu, Darrel Moellendorf, and Zouhair Ghazzal. I also thank Steve Macedo, George Kateb, Maurizio Viroli, Edward Telles, Miguel Centeno, Anthony Grafton, Deborah Yashar, Jeremy Adelman, Jonathan Israel, and Regina Graf for their advice and Yuval Jobani for our hours of conversation on Nietzsche, race, and politics. I must admit that I felt tempted to dedicate this book to the chef of the IAS, for his culinary masterpieces.

At Stanford, all the staff and fellows of the class of 2010 at CASBS were invaluable as I reached the midpoint of my intellectual explorations during the fourth stage. Iris Litt and Linda Jack were especially able in fostering intellectual engagement and fun lunchtime conversations. I am especially grateful to the participants of the Identity Table. I also thank the political theory community at Stanford, including Josh Ober, Josh Cohen, Rob Reich, and Debra Satz, as well as Tamar Herzog and Herbert Klein. I thank Larry Rosen, Konstantin Pollok, Saba Mahmood, Peter Struck, Lawrence Cohen, Barbara Fried, Sander Koole, Peggy Somers, Kanchan Chandra, and Dingxin Zhao for specific comments on my work.

The final stage of this project took place back in Texas. Again, I benefited from the extensive institutional support of Texas A&M University and the Department of Political Science. I must thank Pat Hurley and Jim Rogers as well as Ken Meier for their constant encouragement. My colleagues in all the subfields of political science provided a welcoming milieu for my return to A&M. I must also thank Jim Rosenheim, Charlie Johnson, Larry Oliver, and the Office of Latin American Programs. Christie Maloyed and Brad Goodine provided excellent research assistance. Jason Maloy's expertise in political theory and English football helped me as the project drew to a close. I benefited greatly from the BCS Soccer League and the Benson Latin American Collection of the University of Texas, Austin. I also thank the staff of the Archivo de Indias in Seville, the Vallenilla Archive held by Nikita Harwich in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, and the librarians at UNAM in Mexico City.

I am grateful to the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation and the Mellon Foundation for funding. Outside of Princeton and Stanford, I must thank Will Kymlicka, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo Posada-Carbó, Iván Jaksic, Ofelia Schutte, Robert Gooding-Williams, Mark Bevir, Sarah Song, Paulina Ochoa, Michael Frazer, John McCormick, Lawrie Balfour, Mark Sawyer, José Antonio Aguilar, Joe Feagin, Lawrence Hamilton, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and especially Jorge Gracia for years of support.

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Finally, I must thank Angela Chnapko for her superlative work as the editor of this book. She guided the process with consummate efficiency and professionalism. It was a pleasure to work with the entire Oxford University Press team involved in this project.

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This astounding transformation of the moral and ideological scene erupts quite suddenly, and the historical and psychological reasons for it are still not wholly understood.

—ALBERT O. HIRSCHMAN, *The Passions and the Interests*<sup>1</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

WHILE REFERRING TO the emergence of pecuniary activity as morally acceptable in the West, Hirschman's statement could very well be used to comment on the modern appearance of race on the political and social landscape around the time of the discovery of the Americas. Just as the profit motive is a complex passion, the rise of race and racial thinking in the human imaginary is something that, to this day, remains difficult to decipher. Having origins in the premodern world, "race" grew quickly once its seeds were scattered in the New World.

Why is race a persistent social problem when it is merely a superficial human characteristic, if it exists at all?<sup>2</sup> If we are all morally equal in spite of epiphenomenal differences, why has race been used to such great effect in politics? These questions have perdured, but few answers have been given to them until recently in the field of political philosophy. In this book, I address these questions with a narrative. It is a story that emerges from the history of ideas. I posit that these questions cannot be fully addressed with our current intellectual repertoires, which we have inherited from the Old World. I seek to show that when race does appear, it takes different forms in different places. One of the least studied of such places is Latin America.

I argue for a new framework for understanding race in light of Latin American intellectual history. Rather than discard or reject the idea of race, we should reconceptualize it, because it is a powerful social reality in the lives of most, if not all, modern people in some way or another. I show how, through a particular intellectual tradition, we can come to see the notion of race as essentially mixed, fluid, and dynamic, rather than static, fixed, or rigid. As such, admixture is inherent to the phenomenon of race. I proffer that



this reconceptualization of race is both analytically and normatively useful for understanding the political role of race.

The view that races are essentially pure has had a strong hold on many minds throughout modernity. Perhaps the most emblematic of the stances against racial mixing is that of Arthur de Gobineau, who published his *Essay on the Inequality of Human Races* between 1853 and 1855. Gobineau argued that there are three races (white, black, and yellow), whose characteristics and interactions dictate history, including the rise and fall of civilizations. For him, any mixing of races was anathema, for it produced “degenerate” types and degraded the white race when it came into contact with other races.

Alexis de Tocqueville, who was—surprisingly—a close friend of Gobineau, commented on this book in his personal letters to him. On October 11, 1853, he wrote to tell Gobineau that he disapproved of what he considered to be the fatalism or determinism of Gobineau’s racial theory.<sup>3</sup> He would go on to say that he was on the “opposite side of such doctrines.” He did, however, offer some praise for the book, telling Gobineau that it was his best work “by far, the most remarkable of your writings, a work of great erudition . . . [and] rare perspicacity.” The author of *Democracy in America* would write further that it was a book that was “well constructed,” and could be read “with great pleasure owing to its intelligence.” Lest we think that the commendation was not honest, he closes the missive by saying, “I have proven my sincerity through my criticisms; please believe also in my sincere praise.”<sup>4</sup> Given that Tocqueville was highly critical of the thesis of Gobineau’s work, it is quite remarkable that he would praise it in any manner.<sup>5</sup> And in a way, he did agree with Gobineau. For Tocqueville, “Those who hope that the Negroes [in the United States] will one day blend in with the Europeans are nursing a chimera. Reason does not persuade me that this will ever come to pass, and I see no evidence for it in the facts.”<sup>6</sup>

Ten years after the letter written by Tocqueville to his friend Gobineau, in 1863, the term “miscegenation” was coined in the United States, in a falsified pamphlet entitled *Miscegenation: The Theory of the Blending of the Races, Applied to the American White Man and Negro*. This text purported to support racial intermarriage, claiming that this was the objective of the Republican Party. In reality, the pamphlet was written by a man called David Goodman Croly to sway popular opinion toward the Democrats. It was intended to inflame the sentiments of most white people, even those who supported the abolition of slavery, by drawing on their fears of racial mixing. Opposition to intermarriage between blacks and whites in the United States was widespread, and it was expressed in this incendiary pamphlet.<sup>7</sup>

Some decades later, however, the Cuban patriot José Martí wrote one of his major essays entitled “The Truth about the United States.” Writing in 1894 for *Patria*, a New York publication, he would state—in terms that sharply contrast with those of Gobineau and Croly—that “there are no races.”<sup>8</sup> For him, there is an essential likeness among all so-called racial groups, as he wrote in his essay “Our America” in 1895. These statements are representative of what I call in this book the synthetic paradigm of race

that can be found in Latin American intellectual history. It is a paradigm that stands in clear contradistinction to prevalent discourses of race in European and American intellectual history which promoted fixed and rigid boundaries and opposed intermixing in matters of race.

These sharp contrasts in intellectual history highlight the need to examine more closely the place of race in the course of political thought. In the field of contemporary political theory, important contributions to the construction of new frameworks have appeared in recent years.<sup>9</sup> Within a longer purview in the field of the history of political thought, however, the issue of race has not been adequately addressed. Canonical perspectives on this issue in European thought, while varied, have been hampered by a set of problems. Moreover, while the American tradition in political thought is a vast step forward in grasping the centrality of race in political life, it also has important limits that we need to transcend. For these reasons, I describe one particular paradigm of race found in Latin American political thought that can be useful not only to ascertain with greater clarity the nature of the idea of race but also to provide a normative framework that will allow us to retain the use of the term but with a newly reconceptualized formulation. This is because the idea of race, as much as many would like to jettison or ignore it so as not to give it validity, is a central social category of the modern period, and as such it is part and parcel of daily life and personal identity.<sup>10</sup>

We must look beyond Western paradigms if we are to understand race properly. In this book, I examine racial identity in relation to citizenship in the arc of the development of a particular paradigm of race outside the traditional occidental canon. By tracing the gestation, growth, and maturation of what I call the synthetic paradigm of race, we can recognize how race is a modern problem and what generated its appearance. For this, an approach by means of comparative political theory is necessary, since canonical political thought rooted in the European tradition does not tell us much about this issue.

This work is in the discipline of political theory, even though it has dimensions that touch on other fields.<sup>11</sup> The reason this work is grounded in political theory is that this discipline bridges the philosophical and the actual, political realms, in a way that I believe can help to elucidate the meaning of race. In this manner we can address its normative dimension as well, for race cannot be treated merely as a logical or abstract problem. It is rooted in practices and dynamics of power—sometimes political, sometimes intersubjective. But I want to argue that the discipline should confront more directly the problem of race rather than treat it as something ancillary or marginal to politics. Race is indeed a central political category in the manufacturing of political identity and the regulation of political membership.<sup>12</sup> Importantly, it is a dynamic political category; in other words, it changes over time and in particular historical contexts. In order to observe these changes, we must look back in time. For this reason, this book is an exercise in the history of political thought.

Canonical political theory (that is to say, the group of central Western texts dealing with matters of politics and justice from Plato to Nietzsche) has largely neglected race, even as it has gone through periods of great upheaval and creativity in dealing with other major social categories, such as class and gender. The Marxist schools of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries placed class at the center of their intellectual enterprise. Feminist perspectives have illuminated the problem of sexual oppression by placing sex and gender under the microscope at least as far back as the nineteenth century. Slowly, these two traditions became part of the political theory canon. It is now inconceivable to teach political theory without due attention to class or gender.

Only recently has there been a “third wave” questioning the canon, one in which race has emerged as theoretically salient.<sup>13</sup> To be sure, race remains an issue for serious (and sometimes not so serious) discussion in academic and scholarly circles.<sup>14</sup> But only after World War II did it emerge as an object of analysis in political theory. Still, a few names within mainstream political theory have addressed this issue, such as Hannah Arendt and Frantz Fanon (who is generally not treated as a major figure in the field).<sup>15</sup> But the discipline of history of political thought has generally not had much to say about it.<sup>16</sup> Even recent major figures in political thought are not known for engaging with race, say, John Rawls or Jürgen Habermas. There is reason to be concerned about this, since intellectual history informs contemporary normative political theory. This lacuna is all the more disturbing since it is something that can be traced back to the founding figures of Western political thought. From Aristotle to Rousseau and even to progressive thinkers such as Mill and Marx, the issues around race are either left unattended or addressed in a problematic manner. Discussions of foreigners, strangers, barbarians, and empires are there, but none gives full attention to what we understand by “race.” Only in recent times has the problem of race been confronted directly by academics, but this is mostly in disciplines outside of political theory. Sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, history, comparative literature, and philosophy have paid more attention to the issue of race than political theory in recent years. There is a small but growing number of works dealing with race in political theory, yet they tend to be rooted in Western paradigms of race that can lead to limited conclusions.<sup>17</sup>

Yet at the same time, for the average person race is an important social reality. The commonsense view of race is that it is defined by the color of skin and the physiological characteristics of a person, which can be used to distinguish people among various groups within the human species. But, as with some other issues, political theory has been stunningly detached from the average-person perspective on race.<sup>18</sup> Since it is so fundamental to the lives of most people, it should be addressed more pointedly by political theorizing. In sum, historically, race has not been deemed worthy of much attention. A reconsideration of this history that looks outside traditional canons is necessary at the present moment. It is not that the idea of the canon is unjustified. Far from it. The canon of political philosophy is an important record of political wisdom and must be safeguarded. However, when a new and important political category emerges as central to political life

and we find that it is inadequately treated in canonical texts, we must seek to expand our purview.

To properly understand the role of race in politics, we must locate it in its proper framework: that of modernity. In this project, we will see that race is integral to the making of the modern. It is not a vestige of premodern times, nor merely a reflection of modern phenomena. In the story of race in Latin American thought, we can trace this dynamic dimension over three principal periods of the modern era. In this way we find that race appears and becomes transformed *pari passu* with the rise of intricate processes in modern societies. We will observe how the makings of race appear quite suddenly—as Hirschman envisions the appearance of the profit motive—when the Americas are unveiled to the European imaginary. This early-modern period of discovery is followed by the height of modernity, which coincides with the construction of the nation-state. Disillusionment with the workings of the state as well as with the idea of rationality rises in the late-modern era. A focus remains on the future, but with a concomitant cosmopolitan utopianism. In all three phases, we examine how the ideas that help construct the concept of race arise and congeal with great political efficacy and utility. We find that the modern, seen in this light, is not something that appears solely in the European mind as a result of epistemological transformations originating in the thought of those such as Descartes and Bacon. It is the result of a confrontation between the West and the New World, which produces an entirely new universe of social and political realities and ideas.<sup>19</sup> The problem of race, generally lurking in the shadows of traditional political theory, comes to the fore when we focus our gaze on this confrontation between the past and the present. Modernity is the offspring of the encounter between the Old and the New Worlds.

## Empire, Race, and European Political Thought: The Domination Paradigm

A brief overview of the development of the notion of race in some of the key figures in the history of modern political thought is necessary to think about how the canon has viewed this idea. Both the European and the American traditions are important, and both manifest diverse, multifarious accounts of how race functions in the political sphere.

European political thought's perspective on race was built on the platform of religion and putative science. Before the eighteenth century, European thought evinced a strong association between blackness and evil and sin. Yet there was no conception of race as a physical category within European thinking before the 1700s. We do not find anything similar to our conception of the term in either ancient Greek or Roman political thought. There are, nonetheless, ideas that feed into the later burgeoning of the term in Europe.<sup>20</sup> It is possible to find proto-racial ideas in Plato's *Republic*.<sup>21</sup> Breeding a master race, or a eugenic project, is a topic of chapter 5 of this capital text in the history of

political philosophy. For Aristotle, philosophy is a practice that characterizes the Greek world, and thus excludes those outside it.<sup>22</sup> The complicated term “barbarian” gains prominence in the disciple of Plato. Standing outside the realm of the polis, the barbarian is ruled by necessity, not reason. The lack of verbal ability and political participation makes some human beings inferior to those of the Greek polis. Hence, some are slaves by nature and can be legitimately held under bondage. The doctrines of the barbarian and natural slavery in the Philosopher’s writings can be interpreted as contributing to a racist tradition.<sup>23</sup> As Hannah Arendt tells us, the Greeks saw themselves as a group superior to all others owing to their excellence (*aretē*). In Roman political thought, we find an iteration of the civilized-uncivilized distinction in Polybius’s understanding of brutal men, who “can no longer be called human beings.”<sup>24</sup> Cicero, however, believed that virtue could be reached by any person of any race or people (*gens*); yet this achievement by necessity would have to take place in the *civitas*, or the Roman community.<sup>25</sup>

The term “race” has an opaque etymology, but is often thought to originate in the Romance languages of the Middle Ages, where it referred to the breeding of animals.<sup>26</sup> When it was eventually applied to humans, there was a strong religious foundation to its conceptualization. The Bible was used to explain human variation, and two basic schools of thought appeared: monogenesis and polygenesis.<sup>27</sup> The former asserted that there was a single source of creation of all humans, and the latter posited that human groups were created separately.

Polygenesis was propounded by important figures in European thought during the Renaissance. Paracelsus, a Swiss physician and chemist, proposed in 1520 that the children of Adam were located in only a small part of the earth, while black and other nonwhite people had origins of a different nature.<sup>28</sup> He used biblical reasons for this argument. In 1591 Giordano Bruno, the Italian philosopher, claimed that it was not possible to conceive that the Ethiopians (black Africans) descended from the same roots as Jews. Indeed, Jews were often seen as the first “Others” in early-modern racial discourse in Europe.<sup>29</sup> Bruno concluded that God must have created various Adams, or that Africans came from so-called pre-Adamite groups. It is important to note that he wrote during a time when African slaves were common in his hometown of Naples.<sup>30</sup>

Early-modern political thought in the canonical European tradition for the most part contains a lacuna on race and its tributaries, much like the silence on the topic in medieval thought. Niccolò Machiavelli’s seminal work *The Prince* does not deal with matters of purity of blood, which were beginning to appear both in the Spanish peninsula and northern Europe.<sup>31</sup> He ignores the racial dimensions of the discovery of the Americas, which were nonetheless the buttress of one of his favored princes, King Ferdinand of Aragon.<sup>32</sup> In Thomas Hobbes we find very few references to the New World as well. As Quentin Skinner has recently argued, however, Hobbes depicted the North American natives as representing fear, insecurity, and complete freedom in the iconography of the frontispiece of some of his works.<sup>33</sup> Thus, he associates the natives’ liberty with lack of authority and security.<sup>34</sup> When we arrive at John Locke we encounter a more direct

confrontation with the New World. In his oeuvre we find a tension between his espousal of liberty and toleration on the one hand, and a possible justification for the displacement of Native Americans.<sup>35</sup> Locke's regard of Native Americans on the other is encapsulated by his description of their land as "the vacant place of America."<sup>36</sup>

It is only when we come to the Enlightenment that we find a truly rich period in European intellectual history in terms of Western assessments of non-European peoples.<sup>37</sup> By the mid-eighteenth century, science took the stage in the effort to understand human variation. Carolus Linnaeus, a Swedish botanist, published *Natural System* in 1735. In it, he devised a system of human classification.<sup>38</sup> But it described Europeans as gentle and inventive, while Africans were crafty, indolent, and ruled by whim. In *Natural History*, written in 1749 by Georges de Buffon, the white race was presented as the touchstone.<sup>39</sup> Whiteness, in his view, was the original color of humanity. Johann Blumenbach wrote *On the Natural Varieties of Mankind* in 1775, advancing a theory of five human races.<sup>40</sup> He ranked them in terms of distance from the civilized European group. He employed the term "Caucasian," using aesthetic criteria to argue that the women of the Caucasus region were the most beautiful.

The most important characteristic of the Enlightenment for race is the initial skepticism about empire shown by some leading thinkers, which, in the course of about fifty years, was supplanted by a largely uncritical defense of colonial policies by the European intelligentsia.<sup>41</sup> We find an idealization of the character of indigenous peoples in Rousseau's doctrine of the "noble savage," for which he found purported evidence among the Caribs of northern Venezuela, and in Montaigne's discussion of cannibals.<sup>42</sup> While benevolent in spirit, the idea also betrays a certain condescension toward native American peoples. This tension is found in many other prominent thinkers of this era. Some railed against imperial policies, yet still held racist or racist views. Such is the case of Kant. While he decried the injustice of imperialism and promoted a strong view of monogenesis, Kant had a severely myopic view of non-European peoples. For instance, he claimed, in his *Of the Different Human Races* (1775), that "the Negro . . . is indolent, lazy, and dawdling" and, using false science, that "the evaporation of phosphoric acid . . . explains why all Negroes stink."<sup>43</sup> Thus, while some of the anti-imperial writings of thinkers of this period are commendable in promoting principles of equality, explicitly racist statements such as Kant's tarnish this particular tradition. Similarly, Hume would write, "I am apt to suspect the Negroes, and in general all the other species of men (for there are four or five different kinds) to be naturally inferior to whites."<sup>44</sup> It is a position that contrasts profoundly with the intercultural egalitarianism of some other European Enlightenment thinkers, such as Montesquieu,<sup>45</sup> Adam Smith, Edmund Burke,<sup>46</sup> and also Herder.<sup>47</sup>

The domination paradigm, which sees a significant gulf between Europeans and non-Europeans, is also evident when we address British utilitarianism. John Stuart Mill, a principal founder of modern liberal political theory, also possessed along with Kant a similar tension in his thought, albeit reversed.<sup>48</sup> On the one hand he denounced racism



as irrational and unjust, but he defended imperial policies on the grounds that non-European areas of the world needed them in order to progress.<sup>49</sup> Mill would state that despotism “is a legitimate mode of government in dealing with barbarians.”<sup>50</sup> Thus, we find the obverse problem present in Kant: a critical view of racial thinking, but with a well-thought-out justification for colonialism, unaware that this creates a deep friction that in fact promotes a paradigm of domination toward non-Western groups.<sup>51</sup>

The last major component of modern canonical European thought with regard to race is found in German intellectual history. In it we find the long legacy of Hegel. This pre-eminent philosopher of modernity shared with Kant a disdain for most non-European cultures. He finds that, unlike Asian traditions, those of Africa and of the natives of America provided no contribution to world history. “Negroes are to be regarded as a race of children” and “the natives of America are . . . not in a position to maintain themselves in the face of the Europeans. The latter will begin a new culture over there on the soil they have conquered from the natives,” he would write in *Anthropology* in 1830.<sup>52</sup> The first statement is simplistic and racist, while the second is patently false. What took shape in areas formerly dominated by the Inca, Maya, and Aztec, for instance, created a mixed, rich culture that was by no means a simple reproduction of European ways of life. A similar problem is found in that quintessentially radical thinker, Karl Marx. Implicit in his understanding of world history is the notion that a global proletariat should be created out of similar capitalist labor conditions throughout the world. This expectation carries with it the notion that a European-style dynamic of class conflict should be repeated throughout the world.<sup>53</sup> Marx is unaware of or uninterested in the fact that this would mean a displacement not only of oppressive economic conditions but also of indigenous forms of culture. As he states, “England has to fulfill a double mission in India: one destructive, the other regenerating—the annihilation of old Asiatic society, and the laying of the material foundations of Western society in Asia.”<sup>54</sup> Finally, we arrive at who is perhaps the most complicated European author when it comes to race, Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche was one of the few European thinkers of the late-modern period who did discuss race explicitly. Notwithstanding the illegitimate Nazi appropriation of phrases related to race in Nietzsche’s writings, it must be said that there is no clear coherence in the totality of Nietzsche’s use of the term. Still, much of what he said lent itself to either association with German nationalism<sup>55</sup> or was so complicated that its use and abuse by racists was no surprise. This is especially the case since his stance on Jewish people was also ambiguous, for sometimes he praised them and sometimes he deprecated them.<sup>56</sup> It is only late in the twentieth century that European thought began to engage seriously with matters of race, and we find this in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* by Hannah Arendt, published in 1951, where she proffers a critique of the racist ideas immanent in imperialism.<sup>57</sup>

Thus, in the course of European thinking about issues related to race, we find a common motif. While there are some thinkers who rejected racism, and others who were critical of racial thinking, the general tendency was to view the issues around race

within the context of empire. Universalist Enlightenment ideals clashed with colonialist projects. In other words, this paradigm was fraught with internal contradictions. As European powers encountered nonwhite groups through colonial expansion and imperial administration, they tended to view the indigenous peoples as generally inferior to Western peoples. In some cases, such as that of Hegel, this was expressed in virulent, crass racism at odds with the spirit of equality inherent in the Enlightenment. In others, there is a deep contradiction between a commitment to this spirit and simple, hierarchical views of race, such as those of Kant. In what I call a domination paradigm of race, most European thinkers who dealt with the issues around race or with the term proper saw the inhabitants outside of western Europe, and especially those in far-off colonies, as either inferior *simpliciter* or as underdeveloped and thus fit for tutelage. In this paradigm, it is difficult to think of race in a cogent manner, for rigid, fixed ideas of racial hierarchy are entrenched in the political imaginary.

### The Color Line and American Political Thought: The Dualistic Paradigm

The figure that perhaps most clearly acts as a bridge between European and American political thought on matters of race is Alexis de Tocqueville. A Frenchman, his contributions can be considered part of the canon of American political thought owing to their profound meditations on U.S. democracy. In his best-known work, *Democracy in America*, he does indeed depart from most of his fellow European thinkers by writing explicitly about the problematic issue of race in the country he visited.<sup>58</sup> He is, however, the transitional figure from a domination paradigm to one that is dualistic.<sup>59</sup> He advocated imperialism as some of his fellow European thinkers did, and he also pointed the way toward North America, where he found that racial issues were among the most important in society. Throughout the text of this cardinal work, he uses the terms “Anglo Americans” or the “English race in America” to define Americanness. He regards African Americans and Native Americans as distinct from the “American race,” and believes there is a deep incompatibility between them and the “English race” in the United States. This coexistence of three major racial groups, far from being a source of strength (or perhaps of a subsequent rich and valuable miscegenation), represents the “dangers that threaten the confederation.”<sup>60</sup> Thus, Tocqueville retains a condescending approach to non-European races, but at the same time affirms a categorical distinction between the three racial classifications. It is this rigid categorization that develops further in American political thought.<sup>61</sup> From Tocqueville’s racial triad, there is a rapid move toward a dyadic understanding of race.

In this tradition of American thought, however, we find a much richer-hued understanding of the political problems associated with race relative to European intellectual history.<sup>62</sup> The arrival of Europeans to the Americas, both North and South, started the most significant process of the construction of race. As Omi and Winant aver in their