## Purpose of the Work

Allen states that his overarching purpose in writing these two volumes is to promote class solidarity among workers of all backgrounds by showing that race is not a natural category but rather is intentionally constructed by social elites for purposes of social control. It follows that the social practices and individual and group mindsets that we call "racism," "White Supremacy," or "white skin privilege" are not endemic to human beings as a whole nor to specific groups of people.

***Therefore, since racism was intentionally constructed by elites at some point in North America's historical past, then it can be intentionally dismantled, but this dismantling must be done as a grassroots social project.***

## Main theses of Invention of the White Race

1. The "white race" in North America was invented as a ruling class social control formation in response to labor solidarity as manifested in the latter (civil war) stages of Bacon's Rebellion (1676-77).
2. Anglo-American elites deliberately set up a system of racial privileges in the late 1600s and early 1700s in order to divide and control workers by establishing the "white race" and its accompanying system of racial oppression.
3. The consequence was not only "ruinous" to the interests of the African Americans, but "disastrous" to European-American workers. [The latter's] position vis-à-vis the rich and powerful was not improved, but weakened by the white-skin privilege system.

The key to the defeat of the forces of democracy, labor, and socialism in each of the three major crises of capital/labor confrontation in the US (Civil War/Reconstruction; the Populist movement of the 1890s; and the Great Depression) was achieved by ruling-class appeals to white supremacism, basically by fostering white-skin privileges of laboring-class European-Americans. (Allen doesn't extensively treat this last point in *The Invention of the White Race*, but talks about it elsewhere, as mentioned by Perry)

I lifted the above points from a 5-minute presentation by Jeffrey B. Perry at:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_KsUDNuvtTE
entitled "Theodore W. Allen -- Theses on 'The Invention of the White Race' and Lessons from Three Crises" (this youtube video is an excerpt of a longer presentation, also on youtube)

## Conceptual and Explanatory Framework

### Needs of elites practicing social control

The work focuses on how those who control society in various times and places have used different demographic and social situations to construct social control mechanisms that help them to maintain their wealth and power even though these elites are numerically inferior.

Most of the time, elites do not have these mechanisms consciously in mind at the beginning, rather they come to the mechanisms through a process of groping about. Once the respective societies' control mechanisms are successfully in place, elites do in fact become quite conscious of how they work and make a point to sharpen and perpetuate them. Most of what the people at the top are wanting to accomplish can be included under two rubrics:

- Maintaining and increasing wealth
- Minimizing resistance of the exploited mass of society and staying personally safe. Elites will forego a significant part of their wealth in order to maintain this control and safety.

## Social control buffer between elites and the oppressed

Elites who start as outsiders to a society of oppressed people must use an intermediate social group between themselves and the most oppressed in order to maintain control and wealth. The nature of this "social control buffer" depends on the elites' specific needs and the demographics and social structures of the oppressed.

Elites' need for a social control buffer is based on the fact that it is impractical and unprofitable to indefinitely maintain a military force that is large enough to control a numerous population. So elites have to find a group of people who are willing to do this for free.

The two main kinds of oppression, depending on specific circumstances of how the social control buffer is constituted, are

- **Racial Oppression** (example: US and Brazilian treatment of afro-descendants)
  o an entire group of oppressed people is kept as one inferior undifferentiated mass. The "buffer" group comes from outside that group.
- **National Oppression** (example: British in the Caribbean and India and Spanish in Peru and Mexico)
  o One or more "buffer" groups (e.g. free blacks in the Caribbean, Muslim rulers and high-caste Hindus in India, and members of the defeated Aztec, Maya, and Inca nobility in Spanish America) are drawn from the oppressed society to facilitate the elites' control.

## Characteristics of Racial Oppression

- The most exploited part of society is numerically not strong enough to overpower elites on their own, because the social control buffer is numerous enough.
- Elites use a social control buffer drawn from the lower classes of the elites' own society who are not identical with the most oppressed group.
- The most oppressed are considered to be a socially undifferentiated mass. Regardless of previous social arrangements, all are equally inferior to anyone in the rest of society.
- Oppressors consciously and systematically destroy the original social organization and culture of the most oppressed.
- The members of the lower-class social control buffer are given special token privileges to psychologically mark them off from the most oppressed.
- The nature of the social control buffer group adjusts over time to accommodate changing circumstances.

- The ruling class will forgo high profits in order to keep the social control buffer in place.

## Characteristics of National Oppression
- The most oppressed are so numerous that, if left to their own devices, they could overpower elites, and there is not a sufficient number of lower-class people from the same society as the elites' to serve as a social control buffer.
- Elites therefore rely on a social control buffer that is raised up out of the ranks of the most oppressed through some sort of differentiation.
- Sometimes this social control buffer has its own hierarchy of various sub-groups and relies on pre-existing structures present in the most oppressed group.

## When does Genocide Happen?
- When the social structure of the oppressed group is so alien to the elites' purposes that
  o The social structure cannot adapted for social control purposes.
  o Useful labor cannot be extracted from the oppressed group
- The oppressed group is made to "go away" through a combination of:
  o Forced removal
  o Individual and mass murder
  o Aggressive acculturation
  o Combined with acculturation, a redefinition of the group so that fewer and fewer people belong to it over time
    ▪ Interesting side note for the US:  the social control system is served here by opposite views of what makes someone Black vs. Indigenous (racial oppression vs genocide).  In the case of Black identity, we have the "one drop rule" so that the Black population is defined in a way that it will continue increasing, but in the case of US Indigenous populations, there is often a threshold of indigenous ancestry that one must meet in order to be considered a member of most tribes.  If this were to be continued indefinitely, then at some distant future point everyone in the US would be "black" and no one would be "indigenous."

## Main argument of the Work

### Volume I: Racial Oppression and Social Control (the case of Ireland)

One of Allen's main purposes in writing this volume was to show how all the elements of racial oppression can exist even with no difference of physical appearance between the oppressed and oppressors. He also wants to show how the exact type of oppression depends on economic and demographic factors.

This volume focuses on the example of how the English groped around for over 700 years in their attempts to control Ireland, trying out various combinations of national oppression, racial oppression, and outright genocide. One could argue that, at the end of the seven-century day, they were only truly successful in Ulster (Northern Ireland).

During periods of more overt "racial" oppression in Ireland (which was most of the time), the following are some of the norms and laws that existed to reinforce the system:
- Irish literacy was criminalized
- Irish did not have access to the English legal system
   o An Irish person could not testify or otherwise participate in legal proceedings
   o In English law, "hibernicus" (that is "Irish") was the official term for an unfree person
   o Rape or murder of Irish people by Englishmen was explicitly not considered a crime. Only property damages were due to the master of the Irish person.
- As in the Spanish colonies and the English Caribbean, Irish people could purchase certificates allowing them to have rights under the law of the conquerors, but this only happened a few dozen times throughout Irish history.
- Irish were considered a single undifferentiated social mass, all of them lower than the humblest English person.
- The English attempted to stamp out the Irish language and culture.

### Attempts at and failures of various English solutions for controlling the Irish: 1200-1900

I speak of "failure" here, because the English repeatedly had to send large armies into Ireland to keep the Irish under control – and one of the main purposes of elites' social control techniques is to avoid costly military options once initial control is established. Also, the incoherent use of various types of oppression and even genocide, sometimes all at the same time, indicates that nothing really was working long term.

- National Oppression
   o During the first period (1200s-1500s), Irish social organization and ideas of property rights were so different from those of the Anglo-Normans that repeated attempts to get Irish chieftains and kings to integrate into the English system as the social control buffer failed, due to lack of a single authority to negotiate with among the Irish and repeated English betrayals of agreements with Irish elites. The English attempted to use the growing Anglo-Irish population as a social control buffer, but they were too few, were concentrated

in a single area of Ireland ("the Pale" in the east centered on Dublin), and were undependable because over time they came to identify as fully Irish.
- Racial Oppression
  o During the second period (1500s-1900s) the English were now Protestants, so even though Irish political power had been broken, English cooperation with local Catholic elites became problematic and "catholic" functioned as a racial designation. The Irish now had powerful foreign advocates in the form of the Papacy and Catholic countries such as Spain and France. The English attempted to use Irish Protestants as a social control buffer, but they were too few to be effective.
- Genocide
  o The English used periodic mass physical slaughter and more-or-less intentional famines to try to keep the Irish in line (the potato famine of the 1840s was only the most well-known; there were several of equal severity in the 1700s). However, their labor was needed so badly that the English were never willing to finish the job.

## Ultimate success of the English in Ulster
- In the early 1600s, the English were able to use a combination of genocidal warfare and racial oppression to definitively control Ulster (the northeastern six counties of Ireland). They drove off or exterminated a large portion of the original Irish catholic inhabitants from the land and successfully implanted a settler colonial population in Ulster. The remaining Irish were disorganized and few enough in number that they could be controlled by the new social control buffer made up of poor lowland Scots and a few English. The Scots were Protestant, utterly destitute, and desperate (estimates of the number of vagrants in Scotland at the time range from 5 to 10 percent of the Scottish population).
- The Scots were described by English writers at the time as providing a "wall" between the native Irish and the English gentlemen farmers who came in behind the Scots as their landlords, taking the choicest lands for themselves.
  o US note: The "Scots-Irish" were soon brought from Ulster to Appalachia to provide a similar "wall" between uncontrolled Indigenous tribes to the west and the English planters and merchants of the eastern seaboard.

## How the Irish who came to the US became part of the White social control buffer over time
In several chapters of the first volume, Allen discusses how the Irish, whose oppression by the English was very similar to what was being done to Afro Americans, might have been expected to make common cause with them. However,

## Volume II:  (origins of the US system of racial oppression)

### Social control in the Virginia colony

Initial unsuccessful attempts to get a profitable, controllable labor force:
- Gentlemen adventurers
- Indigenous
- Convicted criminals
- Paupers
- Orphans
- Share croppers ("tenants at halves")

They finally hit on indentured servitude.

Although based on the traditional apprenticeship relationship, this was really a new type of legal arrangement for the relation between worker and employer, and it provided an embryonic form of what would become African slavery in the U.S.

### Lack of division between African and European laborers in early Virginia

At first, Africans who came to the Virginia colony were just another kind of bonded laborer or indentured servant, though their term of indenture might typically be longer.  There was no concept of a "white" or a "black" race.  Bonded laborers would have considered themselves as "African," "English," "Dutch (German)" and so forth.

All the indentured people worked under brutal conditions:  it was very common, perhaps even typical, to die before the term of the indenture ended.  During one five-year period in the early colony, 5,000 people immigrated into Virginia but the population only increased by 500.

Elites began to cut corners on the indenture contracts.  Most notably, they started buying and selling bond laborers for money or even bequeathing them in wills.  They also began a conscious effort to turn all share-cropping tenants into bond laborers, for instance, renting them out to others (which was against the tenant contract).

European and African bond servants often rebelled and/or ran away together (example of John Punch, an African ancestor of Barack Obama's white family).

Penalties for running away typically included a lengthening of the term of indenture, sometimes for as long as life.

Authorities in Virginia began treating African bond laborers worse (longer terms of indenture, harsher penalties for running away – more often life indenture).  Elites begin to realize that they needed to exercise a divide-and-conquer strategy and so they accentuated this differential treatment.  The record shows that at first English bond laborers resented and resisted these attempts to divide them from African bond laborers.

## Bacon's rebellion is a wakeup call for the ruling class

Virginia authorities got serious about separating African and European working classes after Bacon's Rebellion (1676), which turned into a unified uprising against the ruling class, and which almost succeeded in toppling the planter aristocracy.

The term "white" first appears in the documentary record in the law of 1691, which begins to codify some of the treatment of black people. The word had to be explained to the controlling corporation back in England, and in fact even up until the time of the American Revolution one finds records of locals needing to explain this term to those coming from outside the 13 colonies.

Between the 1680s and 1720s, perpetual servitude for Africans became the norm, as well as perpetual servitude inherited at birth from the mother (not the father, which would be normal English legal practice). In 1723 this was codified into law.

## White Supremacy becomes the true "Peculiar Institution"

The series of laws and new social practices over the 50 years following Bacon's Rebellion relegated even free blacks to a completely subordinate status (culminating in the deprivation of suffrage and legal status in the 1723 law). When the corporation in London questioned how it was possible to deprive a free person of his rights, "merely based on complexion," the Governor of Virginia replied that these measures were necessary in order to "fix a permanent brand upon their brows."

Together with these legal measures, the cultural practices of white privilege became widespread after the early 1700s and American White identity became thoroughly established.

It is worth noting, however, that even in 1723, European-descended laborers needed to be aggressively indoctrinated in the new system: all of the rules of race relations (including corporal punishment for poor whites associating with groups of black people) were read aloud twice a year in church and were posted at court by sheriffs.

Allen argues that the white working class has also suffered material harm from the system of White Supremacy and that US labor movements have been hamstrung by racism – thus providing a palpable benefit to US ruling elites.

## Summary of Jeffrey B. Perry's Summary of Volume II

This is Appendix G to Volume II of the 2012 edition.

- Elites of the colonizing powers in the Americas all needed
    - An adequate and appropriate supply of labor
    - A form of social control
        - In all cases, the different colonies used various forms of "social control buffer" or "buffer social-control stratum"
- Of the colonial powers, only the English imported lots of Europeans as laborers
- The distinguishing feature of the English system of labor in what would become the US was its form of social control as developed over the course of the 1600s and early 1700s:
    - Anyone of any discernible non-European ancestry was excluded from the buffer social-control stratum
    - The control stratum was made up the laboring class of European ancestry.
        - In England, the "yeomanry" (small proprietors) were the control stratum
        - In America, propertyless laborers formed most of this stratum.
- The standard form of labor in 17th-century Virginia and subsequent plantation colonies was chattel bond labor, regardless of the laborer's ancestry
    - This was not compatible with English laws and customs
    - It gave rise to the peculiarly American form of oppression of women
- At first, laborers were brought over as "tenants" with small land holdings and the prospect of one day owning their land free and clear.
- Elites explicitly discussed among themselves how to "reduce the tenants to servants" and by the early 1620s they had accomplished this.
- Laborers now came over as indentured servants, or bond laborers, with multi-year contracts and bound to specific masters.
- The Africans who came starting in 1619 became part of this system of bond laborers, and many of them would serve their terms and become free, sometimes becoming land holders and masters of both European and African bond laborers.
- Elites began abusing their side of indenture contracts by renting out their bond laborers and tenants and then finally by actually selling them to others.
    - At first, this was considered a corrupt practice, but was soon codified in law.
        - Bond laborers' contracts could be sold or even bequeathed
    - They also started extending the terms of indentures either by brute force or legally (as a penalty for attempted escape for example).
    - Children born to lifetime bond laborers could themselves be bound for life
    - At first, the traditional principle that the child's condition follows that of the father's prevailed in lawsuits around these matters, but laws were passed in Virginia to specify that a child's condition follows the mother's.
- Laborers and tenants rebelled against this situation in various ways.
    - From the 1620s to 1670s European and African bond laborers were unified in their resistance to the elites.

- Ruling elites began to distinguish (starting in 1630s) between African and European bond laborers, singling the former out for more onerous terms of bond labor - for instance, lifetime indentures for the crime of running away.
  o They felt that they could get away with this differential treatment because Africans had less recourse to support in England.
  o Per Allen, the European laboring class did not go along with this and continued resistance to elites alongside African laborers.
- By the last quarter of the 1600s, the elites were very nervous about the lack of control over the mass of poor laborers, and this came to a head in Bacon's Rebellion of 1676-77.
  o It began as a rebellion of minor elites over the accessibility of Indian lands.
  o It turned into a rebellion of the European-African laboring class, who almost succeeded in chasing the elites out of Virginia.
- Once elites regained control over the rebel forces with the help of an English army in 1677, they set out on a divide-and-conquer program to control the laboring class.
  o They began to aggressively and explicitly promote a "white" identity. The first documented use of the word "white" to refer to a group of people is from the law of 1691.
  o The "white" identity would be a form of "counterfeit social mobility" provided to landless European laborers.
    ▪ The mere presumption of liberty was now a badge of class superiority.
  o The 1691 law stuffed the newly-invented "white" category with symbolic privileges.
  o Subsequent laws culminating in 1723 proceeded to lay out the relationship between African bond laborers and free Europeans ("Christians").
    ▪ The 1723 law stripped free blacks of their civil rights (voting, participating in legal proceedings, etc.)
    ▪ The same law formalized the lifetime servitude of African bond laborers and the heritability of that condition
    ▪ The law also provided for the aggressive propagandizing of the relation between the "white" race and blacks.
      • Rules for relations between races were required to be read a couple of times a year in churches and posted at courthouse doors.
      • Whites were penalized from congregating with blacks (20 lashes)
    ▪ Poor whites were to be formed into slave patrols
- At this point, Allen refutes some other scholars' assertions about the genesis of White Supremacy, especially Edmund S. Morgan's idea that there were too few poor whites to matter in the control of the black population.
- "the system of racial privileges…has been the main historical guarantee of the rule of the 'Titans', damping down anti-capitalist pressures, by making 'race', and not class, the distinction in social life."
- As of 1997, Allen notes how it has even become unacceptable to discuss class struggle or talk of anti-capitalist class consciousness.

- He hopes that the echoes of the heroic civil rights struggles of the 1960s will make it so that "white skin privileges may come to be seen and rejected by laboring-class European-Americans as the incubus that for three centuries has paralyzed their will in defense of their class interests *vis-à-vis* those of the ruling class."

Allen has several long digressions. Two interesting ones are:
- Why the English did not incorporate the indigenous people in North America into their system of labor and social control:
    o Too sparse a population
    o Too much back country to retreat to
    o Social structures too different from the Europeans' to be readily exploitable
    o The need to keep up good relations with the indigenous tribes as a buffer with tribes further west and to return escaped bond laborers
    o In later phases of development, the need to exclude Indians as non-white
    o In a word, the indigenous were "non-enslavable" and "non-assimilable"
    o The other new world colony most resembling Virginia in this respect was Brazil
- Why the British Caribbean colonies did not set up a similar system of White Supremacy for social control:
    o This option was unavailable to them because of the small number of lower-class Europeans that existed in these colonies and the huge proportion of Africans.
    o Also, a large portion of the Europeans were Irish rebels who had been transported thither and were not trustworthy for the elites' purposes.
    o The social control buffer therefore had to be drawn from free Africans and so could not be racialized.

## Brief summaries of Allen's work

Noel Ignatiev discusses how Allen influenced him.  NB Date of Allen's death is wrong by 8 years:
https://blog.pmpress.org/2019/09/02/my-debt-and-obligation-to-ted-allen/

Jeffrey B. Perry gives a retrospective on the importance of Allen's work today.
https://www.blackagendareport.com/anniversary-his-death-theodore-w-allens-analysis-still-resonates

## Some writers who have done work similar to Allen's

### Jacqueline Battalora

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m6zO0qlEIG8
*Birth of a White Nation:  The Invention of the White Race and its Relevance Today*. 2013 and 2021

### Kathleen M. Brown

*Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs:  Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia*. 2012

### Gerald Horne

*The Counterrevolution of 1776*
A brief summary by Horne of the argument of his book is at:
*https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Kjpxsvt5dE*

### Noel Ignatiev

*How the Irish became White*. 1995
https://blog.pmpress.org/2019/09/16/the-point-is-not-to-interpret-whiteness-but-to-abolish-it/

### Nancy Isenberg

*White Trash*. 2016

### Edmund S. Morgan

*American Slavery, American Freedom*. 1975 and 2003

### Nell Irvin Painter

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tEGSiAZjUZU&t=2s
*The History of White People*. 2010

### Jeffrey B. Perry

The main living expositor of Allen's thinking, Allen's literary executor and editor.  He has done work on other anti-racist thinkers and on the history of White Supremacy.
https://www.jeffreybperry.net/
Perry's website has lots of discussions of Allen's thoughts, plus original work by Perry.

### Adolph Reed, Jr.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2kCEyCy4wOc

### Touré Reed

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FztmNrp08yY

## Timeline for the invention of the White race in Virginia 1607-1723

*"…dividing and breaking of all factions and combinations that are adverse to the state, and setting them at distance, or at least distrust among themselves."  -- Francis Bacon (referring to Machiavelli) in essay "Of Seditions and Troubles"*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **1607-1620** <br> **Unsuccessful experimentation with different forms of labor: gentlemen adventurers, indigenous people, English prisoners, and sharecroppers ("tenants at halves").   Beginnings of bond labor system ("indenture").** <br> *"…hands at so Cheape a rate as cannot yet possibly bee." – Colony Council, 1622* | | |
| | 1607 | London Company founds Virginia as a for-profit venture. |
| | 1619 | First boatload of Africans, who are received as bond laborers. <br> First contract in England for an indentured servant. <br> First attempt to rent out tenants (against their contracts). |
| **1620s** <br> **Intensification of bond labor system and the elimination of small landholders.** <br> *"Wee conceive that if you would be pleased to Chaunge the Conditione of Tenants into servants for future Supplies…your revenues might be greatly improved." – Virginia Company, 1622* <br> *"Sold…like a damned slave!" Letter of Thomas Best, 1623* | | |
| | 1622 | March 22: indigenous attack almost destroys the Virginia colony.  Small landholders are weakened against elites. |
| **1630s-1670s** <br> **Conflict intensifies between elites and united European and African laborers.** <br> *"Six parts of seaven at least, are Poore, Endebted, Discontented, and Armed." – Governor William Berkeley, 1676* | | |
| | 1656 | Following established English law, the child of a bonded mother is considered free because her father is free. |
| | 1662 | Virginia Assembly passes a law that a child's status will hereafter follow the mother's status. |
| | 1672 | Royal Africa Company: first British access to slave trade |
| | 1676 | Bacon's Rebellion almost drives existing elites from Virginia. |
| **1680s-1723** <br> **Elites gain social control by establishing black-only slavery and "white" identity.** <br> *"…to fix a perpetual Brand upon free Negroes & Mulattoes."  Gov Wm Gooch, 1736* <br> *"any white person…found in company with any [illegally congregated] slaves [may be fined or] receive, on his, or her, or their bare backs, for every such offense, twenty lashes, well laid on." – Virginia law of 1723* | | |
| | 1691 | First documented mention of "white" people, in a law regulating  relations between Europeans and Africans. |
| | 1705 | Law specifies privileges of "whites," further restricts blacks. |
| | 1723 | Law strips free blacks of civil rights, lays out full-blown conditions of hereditary chattel slavery for Africans, and provides for indoctrination of Europeans in White Supremacy. |