

Imago Alba: The Genesis of a White Adam and the Ideologies of Racial Supremacy and Ecological Domination

Introduction: Deconstructing a Foundational Myth

In the vast repository of Western cultural symbols, few images possess the foundational power of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Rendered in countless paintings, sculptures, and illustrations, the primordial couple has come to represent not only the theological origin of humanity but also its idealized state of innocence. Yet, within this tradition, a specific and potent image has achieved near-universal dominance: that of a white Adam and Eve. This depiction, exemplified by the muscular, classical figures of Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling, is so pervasive that it is often mistaken for a biblical given rather than what it is: a cultural and theological construct.

This report advances a central thesis: the image of a white Adam and Eve, the *Imago Alba*, is not a benign artistic convention but a powerful cultural artifact with a profound and often destructive legacy. Its origins lie not in scripture, which is silent on the matter of race, but in a process of Eurocentric cultural projection that reached its zenith during the Renaissance. This specific racialized image became ideologically fused with a particular and contentious interpretation of the biblical mandate to exercise "dominion" over the Earth. This fusion has been instrumental in justifying two parallel and interconnected systems of domination: one over non-white peoples, whose perceived deviation from this white ideal was used to legitimize their subjugation, and another over the natural world, which was framed as a mere resource for human exploitation.

This analysis will proceed in three parts. Section I, "The Genesis of an Image," will deconstruct the symbol itself, tracing its art-historical evolution from the ethnically ambiguous figures of early Christianity to the codified white ideal of the Renaissance. It will demonstrate the critical disconnect between the biblical text and the dominant artistic tradition, arguing that the image reveals more about the cultures that produced it than about the story it purports to tell.

Section II, "From Symbol to System," will connect this artistic symbol to its real-world application as an ideological tool. It will show how the normalized image of a white progenitor provided a powerful, if often implicit, theological foundation for the construction of racial hierarchies that justified colonialism, slavery, and the marginalization of non-Western peoples. This section will culminate in a review of the modern scientific consensus on human origins, which definitively refutes the premise of a white ancestral couple and affirms a common African genesis for all humanity.

Section III, "Dominion, Domination, and the Ecological Crisis," will synthesize the preceding arguments. It will connect the ideology of racial domination to the ideology of environmental domination, arguing that both stem from a common worldview legitimized by a narrow interpretation of the Genesis narrative. By examining the historical and theological debate over the meaning of "dominion," this section will demonstrate how the same logic of hierarchical separation has been used to objectify and exploit both non-white bodies and the non-human world.

Ultimately, this report will argue that the authority of the *Imago Alba* is undermined by biblical scholarship, art history, and modern science. By tracing its origins and consequences, the analysis calls for a worldview rooted not in a myth of racial and ecological mastery, but in the realities of genetic unity and ecological interconnectedness.

Section I: The Genesis of an Image - Textual and Artistic Origins

This section deconstructs the visual symbol of a white Adam and Eve, demonstrating that its racial specificity is an invention, not a given. By establishing the critical disconnect between the biblical text and the dominant artistic tradition, it argues that the image is a product of cultural projection that reveals more about the societies that created it than about the foundational story it purports to illustrate. The whiteness of Adam and Eve is not an inherent quality but a historically contingent attribute applied to them, primarily during the European Renaissance, for reasons of cultural and intellectual assertion.

Chapter 1: The Silent Scripture and the Speaking Canvas

The enduring power of a white Adam and Eve in the Western imagination stands in stark contrast to the source text from which the figures originate. A rigorous examination of the Book of Genesis reveals a narrative landscape devoid of the physical and racial descriptors that later artistic traditions would so confidently supply. This textual void became a canvas onto which centuries of artists projected their own cultural norms, aesthetic ideals, and theological priorities, gradually transforming an ethnically unspecified "humankind" into a distinctly European couple.

The Textual Void

The creation accounts in Genesis 1-3 offer no information about the skin complexion or physical features of the first human beings. The Hebrew word for the first human, *adam* (אָדָם), is a generic term for "humankind" or "humanity". Its etymology is closely linked to the word *adamah* (אֲדָמָה), meaning "earth," "ground," or "soil," emphasizing the material from which the human was formed: "The Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground" (Genesis 2:7). While some interpretations have connected *adam* to the related word *Edom* ("red"), suggesting a creation from "red dirt," this does not specify a skin color but rather describes the creative medium. Similarly, the creation of Eve from Adam's side in Genesis 2:22 is described without any physical characterization.

The primary concern of the biblical narrative is theological, not anthropological. It focuses on God's special act of creation, the relationship between the Creator and humanity, and the origins of sin and mortality. From a theological perspective, Adam and Eve's role as progenitors of all nations—as stated in Acts 17:26, where God "made from one man every nation of mankind"—implies that they must have possessed the genetic potential to produce the full spectrum of human diversity we see today. Classifying them according to any single modern racial category, such as "white," is therefore a theological and biological anachronism, as the very concept of race is a modern phenomenon not found in the Bible, which categorizes people by ethnicity, language, and ancestry.

Early Christian Ambiguity

The earliest visual representations of Adam and Eve, found in the catacombs of Rome, reflect the textual silence on race. These 3rd and 4th-century frescoes, created by persecuted Christian communities, were rendered in the prevailing style of Roman funerary art. In the Cemetery of the Saints Peter and Marcellinus (c. late 3rd century), Adam and Eve are depicted as simple, brownish-toned figures whose skin color is ambiguous and secondary to the scene's theological content: the moment of the Fall. Similarly, an early depiction in the Catacombs of San Gennaro in Naples shows figures whose ethnicity is indeterminate. These early Christian artists borrowed directly from the naturalistic styles of Greco-Roman art, focusing on narrative clarity and symbolic meaning rather than ethnographic precision. Their primary goal was to communicate core tenets of the faith—such as the story of disobedience and its consequences—to a largely illiterate audience. Adam and Eve were symbolic figures representing all of humanity in its relationship with God, and their physical appearance was rendered in a generalized manner consistent with the artistic conventions of the late Roman Empire.

Byzantine Stylization and Medieval Whitening

As the Roman Empire transitioned into the Byzantine era, Christian art moved away from naturalism toward a more stylized, abstract, and overtly theological form of expression. Byzantine mosaics and ivory carvings, such as a 6th-century ivory pyxis or a floor mosaic from Northern Syria (c. 500 CE), depict Adam and Eve with a focus on pattern, symbolism, and spiritual significance rather than realistic human anatomy or ethnicity. Their role in salvation history remained paramount, particularly in the iconography of the *Anastasis* (the Harrowing of Hell), where the resurrected Christ is shown pulling a clothed Adam and Eve from their tombs, symbolizing their status as the first to be redeemed. In these contexts, their specific appearance was subordinate to their theological function. The gradual but decisive shift toward a white depiction of Adam and Eve occurred during the medieval period in Western Europe. As Christianity became the dominant cultural force, artists naturally began to depict biblical figures in their own image. Illuminated manuscripts from the 10th century and Gothic sculptures from the 12th and 13th centuries, such as the famous figures at the cathedrals of Notre-Dame de Paris and Autun, present Adam and Eve as idealized, fair-skinned Europeans. This process was less a conscious theological statement about race and more a reflection of cultural projection. Artists painted and sculpted what they knew, depicting biblical scenes with contemporary clothing, architecture, and people. However, this unintentional act of cultural familiarization had a profound and lasting consequence: it began to visually codify the foundational human beings as white, laying the groundwork for the more explicit and intellectually fortified racialization that would occur during the Renaissance.

Table 1: The Evolution of Adam and Eve Iconography in Western Art

Period/Movement	Key Artistic Examples (Artist, Work, Date)	Dominant Physical Depiction (Skin Tone, Features)	Prevailing Theological/Cultural Influence
Early Christian (3rd-4th C.)	Catacomb Frescoes, Rome (c. 280)	Ambiguous, brownish tones, simple Roman style	Focus on theological symbolism (The Fall), not ethnicity
Byzantine (c. 500-600	Syrian Floor Mosaic;	Stylized,	Expression of Christian

Period/Movement	Key Artistic Examples (Artist, Work, Date)	Dominant Physical Depiction (Skin Tone, Features)	Prevailing Theological/Cultural Influence
CE)	Ivory Pyxis, Constantinople	non-naturalistic; elongated forms	theology, adapting Greco-Roman forms
Gothic (12th-13th C.)	Sculptures at Autun Cathedral and Notre-Dame	Idealized, fair-skinned European features	Cultural projection; integration of biblical narrative into local context
High Renaissance (c. 1512)	Michelangelo, <i>The Creation of Adam</i>	Idealized white, muscular, based on classical ideals	Humanism, Neoplatonism; conflation of divine and European ideal
Northern Renaissance (1504)	Dürer, <i>Adam and Eve</i> (Engraving)	Idealized white, based on classical statuary	Showcase of Vitruvian proportions; technical mastery of engraving

This table provides a structured, data-driven visualization of the report's core art-historical argument. It allows the reader to see, at a glance, the historical trajectory from textual silence and artistic ambiguity to the confident assertion of a white, idealized norm. It transforms a complex historical process into a clear, evidentiary framework, demonstrating that the "white Adam and Eve" is a specific historical construct with a discernible origin point in the Renaissance, not an eternal or biblically-mandated truth.

Chapter 2: The Vitruvian Adam - Idealism, Race, and the Renaissance

The European Renaissance marks the definitive moment when the image of Adam and Eve was not only solidified as white but also intellectually codified as the universal human ideal. This transformation was not merely an extension of the cultural projection seen in the medieval period; it was a conscious and sophisticated artistic project. For leading Renaissance artists such as Albrecht Dürer, Lucas Cranach the Elder, and Michelangelo, the depiction of the primordial couple became a prime opportunity to demonstrate their mastery of humanist philosophy, their rediscovery of classical (Greco-Roman) principles of anatomy and proportion, and their technical prowess in new and influential media. In this process, the bodies of Adam and Eve were repurposed. They ceased to be simple characters in a theological narrative and became instead the ultimate canvas for asserting a new, European-centered vision of human perfection.

The Renaissance Ideal as a Technology of Power

The Renaissance depiction of Adam and Eve was more than an aesthetic choice; it was a demonstration of intellectual and technical prowess. By mastering classical proportions and new artistic media, European artists used the "ideal" white body as a canvas to assert cultural and intellectual superiority. This act of artistic domination over the "first" human form serves as a precursor and parallel to the colonial domination over other human bodies and the scientific domination over nature. The logic begins with the artist's mastery of form, a knowledge derived from classical sources representing the height of European humanist achievement. This mastery is then applied to the foundational human figures, Adam and Eve, effectively claiming

them for this specific intellectual tradition. The resulting image, which equates the "ideal" with the "European," is then mass-disseminated through new technologies like engraving, which allowed for the unprecedented circulation of this ideal. The image thus functions as an advertisement for a specific European worldview where whiteness is synonymous with the classical, rational, and technically advanced ideal, establishing a powerful visual baseline for Eurocentrism.

Case Study: Dürer's *Adam and Eve* (1504)

Albrecht Dürer's 1504 engraving *Adam and Eve* serves as a quintessential example of this intellectual project. The work is less a faithful illustration of the Genesis text and more a brilliant synthesis of Northern European naturalism with Italian Renaissance theory. The figures of Adam and Eve are not depicted with simple realism; instead, their bodies are constructed according to the strict mathematical principles of human proportion laid down by the Roman architect Vitruvius. Dürer sacrifices naturalism to showcase his mastery of these classical ideals, presenting the two figures in a formal *contrapposto* pose that directly references classical statuary like the *Apollo Belvedere* and the *Medici Venus*.

The result is a pair of perfectly proportioned, idealized white bodies. This is not an incidental feature but the central point of the work. The print is a demonstration of Dürer's claim that he, a German artist, could rival his Italian contemporaries in their command of classical theory. The inclusion of a small sign (*cartellino*) hanging from a branch, which proudly identifies the artist as a citizen of Nuremberg in Latin, underscores this ambition. The image effectively declares that the perfect human form—the original human form—is best understood and represented through the lens of European humanism. Set within a dark, dense forest filled with animals symbolic of the four humors of medieval medicine, the work fuses a distinctly German environment with a classical, pan-European ideal of the body, implicitly centering the European experience as universal.

Case Study: Michelangelo's *The Creation of Adam* (c. 1512)

If Dürer codified the ideal human form as white and classical, Michelangelo's fresco on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel elevated this vision to the level of the divine. In *The Creation of Adam*, God himself is depicted as a powerful, elderly, white-bearded man, visually akin to a classical deity like Zeus. He extends his finger to impart the spark of life to an equally idealized, muscular, and white Adam, whose languid pose mirrors God's own. The visual message is inescapable: man is created in God's image, and both God and the ideal man are European. This single image has had an incalculable impact on the Western imagination. Its position at the heart of the Vatican, its artistic genius, and its sheer dramatic power have made it the definitive visual representation of the creation story for hundreds of millions of people. The fresco visually cements a theology where the divine, the original, and the ideal are all conflated with a European phenotype. Interpretations of the other figures swirling in God's cloak suggest the pre-existence of Eve and the souls of all humanity, all of whom share this same European appearance. Michelangelo's work is the apotheosis of the Renaissance project, transforming a theological concept into a powerful and enduring racialized icon.

The Proliferation of the Image

The widespread adoption of this white, idealized image was accelerated by the changing

economics of art production. The workshop of Lucas Cranach the Elder in Wittenberg, for example, produced over 50 versions of the Adam and Eve theme, creating a recognizable brand that disseminated his particular vision of seductive, pale-skinned nudes throughout Germany and beyond. The rise of printmaking, particularly engraving as mastered by Dürer, was even more transformative. For the first time, a single, highly detailed image could be reproduced in the thousands and distributed across the continent, carrying this specific vision of a white Adam and Eve far beyond the confines of a single church or court. This mechanical reproduction helped to standardize the image, ensuring that the Renaissance ideal became the default representation, crowding out other possibilities and embedding itself deeply in the collective consciousness of the West.

Chapter 3: Contested Images - Alternative Visions from the Margins and the Academy

While the white, classicized Adam and Eve became the dominant icon in Western Europe, this representation was neither universal nor entirely uncontested. The same process of cultural projection that led European artists to depict the first couple in their own image also occurred in other cultures, resulting in a diverse global iconography. Furthermore, even within Europe, rare and fascinating exceptions emerged that challenged the normative depiction, reflecting moments of intense scientific and philosophical inquiry into the nature of human diversity. These alternative visions demonstrate that the *Imago Alba* was a regional and ideological choice, not an inevitability, and that other ways of imagining human origins have always coexisted with the dominant narrative.

Non-Western Iconography

Outside the sphere of European cultural hegemony, artists from various traditions depicted Adam and Eve according to their own ethnic and aesthetic norms. This serves as a crucial reminder that cultural projection in religious art is a widespread phenomenon, but the European version achieved global influence through the power of colonialism and empire. For example:

- **Persian Miniatures:** A 16th-century copy of the *Falnama* (Book of Omens) from the Safavid dynasty in Persia includes a depiction of Adam and Eve that reflects the artistic conventions of Islamic manuscript illumination, showing them with features and attire typical of that cultural context.
- **Ethiopian Church Murals:** Murals in ancient Ethiopian rock-hewn churches, such as the Abreha we Atsbeha Church, portray Adam and Eve as distinctly Black, with dark skin and African features, integrating them fully into the visual and theological world of Ethiopian Orthodoxy.
- **Modern Egyptian Art:** The 20th-century Egyptian painter Mahmoud Saïd created a version of Adam and Eve that rendered them as modern Egyptians, reinterpreting the biblical story through a national and post-colonial lens.

These examples are vital because they denaturalize the white image. They show that the representation of Adam and Eve is inherently interpretive and culturally situated. The dominance of the European version is therefore not a testament to its theological or historical accuracy, but to the historical dominance of the culture that produced it.

A Scientific Challenge from within Europe: The Calw Pharmacy Painting

Perhaps the most remarkable challenge to the white ideal came not from outside Europe, but from a small city in 18th-century Germany. A painting created around 1770 to decorate a door in the "Old Pharmacy" in Calw, Württemberg, depicts a paradisiacal scene with a white Adam and a Black Eve. This image is an "extreme rarity," with curators at the Smithsonian Institution and other experts confirming that they know of no other precedent for such a depiction in the history of European art.

The significance of the Calw painting lies in its specific context. It was not a random artistic whim but a visual representation of the most advanced scientific discourse of its time. The pharmacy in Calw was a hub for an internationally connected community of physicians and botanists who were deeply engaged in the burgeoning fields of heredity, variation, and human classification. The painting was created in the 1760s, a period when "all of educated Europe was vibrating with new theories concerning human divisions". This was shortly before Immanuel Kant would formally introduce the French term "race" into German scientific discourse, a moment of fundamental transition in the understanding of human diversity.

The painting can be interpreted as a visual hypothesis for the origin of different skin colors, reflecting debates around pangenetic heredity proposed by figures like Pierre Louis Maupertuis. It represents a fleeting historical moment when it was possible for European science to imagine a common human origin that was inherently diverse, without immediately imposing a rigid hierarchy based on skin color. This intellectual path, which appreciated human variety as a natural outcome of a shared but diverse ancestry, was soon to be abandoned in favor of the hierarchical racial concepts that would dominate the 19th century. The Calw painting thus stands as a powerful testament to a "path not taken," revealing that the development of a hierarchical racial ideology was not inevitable but was a deliberate ideological choice that closed off more egalitarian possibilities.

Alternative Theological Interpretations

Beyond the visual, different religious traditions offer theological interpretations of the creation story that diverge significantly from the mainstream Western Christian focus.

- **Islamic Tradition:** In Islam, Adam is revered as the first prophet, and he and his wife, Hawwā' (Eve), are seen as the progenitors of humanity. The Qur'anic account differs from the biblical one on several key points that have profound theological implications. Crucially, the blame for disobeying God by eating from the forbidden tree is shared equally between Adam and Eve; Eve is not singled out as the primary temptress. Both repent immediately and are forgiven by Allah, which negates the Christian doctrine of Original Sin. The story's focus is on themes of obedience, repentance, and humanity's role as God's representatives on Earth, with no emphasis on their physical appearance.
- **Jewish Tradition:** Jewish interpretations often engage deeply with the literary and historical context of the Genesis narrative. Rabbinic literature and modern scholarship frequently highlight the existence of two distinct creation accounts (Genesis 1 and Genesis 2-3), analyzing them as complementary narratives from different authorial traditions (the Priestly and Jahwist sources). Jewish thought emphasizes the influence of surrounding Ancient Near Eastern myths, such as the Mesopotamian *Enuma Elish*, arguing that the Genesis account is a polemic that adapts these myths to assert a radical monotheism. The central creative act is often seen not as creation *ex nihilo* (out of nothing), but as God bringing order to pre-existing chaotic waters, separating light from

darkness and sea from dry land. In this framework, the narrative's purpose is to critique polytheism and establish God's singular power as the organizer of the cosmos, making the physical race of the first humans a matter of little concern.

These alternative artistic and theological traditions collectively demonstrate that the *Imago Alba* is a culturally specific and highly contested interpretation of the creation story, not a universal or definitive truth.

Section II: From Symbol to System - The Weaponization of a White Progenitor

The normalization of a white Adam and Eve in Western art was not merely an aesthetic development; it had profound and devastating real-world consequences. This section connects the artistic symbol to its application as an ideological tool. It argues that the image of a white progenitor, once established as the cultural default, provided a powerful, if often implicit, theological foundation for the construction of racial hierarchies. This framework was then deployed to justify European colonialism, the transatlantic slave trade, and the systemic oppression of non-white peoples across the globe. The symbol and the system of racial domination evolved in a symbiotic relationship, each reinforcing the other's claims to legitimacy.

Chapter 4: The Architecture of a Eurocentric Christendom

The groundwork for the weaponization of a white origin myth was laid centuries before the Age of Exploration, in the historical fusion of Christianity with the power structures of the Roman Empire. This process created an ideological framework—a Eurocentric Christendom—that viewed Western civilization, its theology, and its people as normative and divinely favored.

From Persecuted Sect to Imperial Religion

The transformation of Christianity following Emperor Constantine's conversion in the 4th century was monumental. A once-persecuted minority faith became intertwined with the world's most powerful empire, gradually absorbing its cultural and political assumptions. A key element of this was the Greco-Roman worldview, which inherently saw itself as superior to the surrounding "barbarian" cultures. As Roman imperial culture became Christianized, Roman Christian identity began to adopt this sense of superiority. The emperor himself came to be seen not just as a political leader but as God's imperial representative on Earth, and the Roman Empire as the vehicle for God's divine plan.

Theological and Racial Othering

This imperial mindset led to the development of a theology that began to conflate cultural and ethnic identity with spiritual status. Early and influential church fathers, writing within this Roman context, began to associate whiteness with purity and blackness with sin. Jerome, a highly influential 4th-century theologian, provides a stark example. In a commentary, he wrote: "At one time we were Ethiopians in our vices and sins... our sins had blackened us. But afterwards we heard the words: 'Wash yourselves clean!' And we said: 'Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.' We are Ethiopians, therefore, who have been transformed from blackness into whiteness". This metaphorical language created a powerful and dangerous association,

embedding a racial color hierarchy into the very language of salvation and sanctification.

The Normativity of the West

The consequence of this fusion was the creation of a powerful Eurocentric framework that dominated the writing of Christian history for over a millennium. What was in fact the history of the Western (Latin and Greek) church was presented as the universal "church history". Theological councils held in the Roman Empire, articulating orthodoxy in Greco-Roman philosophical terms, established norms that marginalized other ancient Christian traditions. The vibrant and ancient churches of Africa (outside the Roman sphere) and Asia, many of which did not accept the decrees of councils like Chalcedon, were labeled heretical. Their contributions were diminished or erased from the dominant historical narrative, in part because they were not "white," did not write in Greek or Latin, and existed outside the imperial power structure. Within this deeply ingrained paradigm, the image of a white Adam and Eve was not a controversial proposition; it was the unspoken and "normal" assumption. It served as the natural origin point for a faith that had come to see itself, its culture, and its people as the primary expression of God's purpose in the world. This architecture of a Eurocentric Christendom provided the intellectual and theological scaffolding upon which the more explicit racial hierarchies of the colonial era would be built.

Chapter 5: An Ideology for Empire - Justifying Colonialism and Racial Hierarchy

During the Age of Exploration and the subsequent centuries of European colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade, the established image of a white Adam and Eve transitioned from a cultural default to a key component of an ideology of domination. While not always explicitly cited as a justification, it served as a foundational premise for a worldview that ranked the peoples of the world in a hierarchy with white Europeans at the apex. This symbol worked in a symbiotic relationship with other, more explicit biblical misinterpretations to create a theological framework that legitimized exploitation and enslavement.

The Theological Underpinnings of Exploitation

The logic of this racial hierarchy was straightforward: if the original, normative human created in God's image was white, then non-white peoples could be framed as a deviation from this ideal. Their differences in appearance, culture, and religion were interpreted not as simple human variation but as evidence of degeneration, a falling away from the original state of perfection. This worldview made it possible to see Indigenous Americans, Africans, and Asians as lesser peoples in need of colonization, "civilization," and Christianization, often through violent and coercive means.

This implicit assumption worked in tandem with more explicit theological justifications for slavery. The most notorious of these was the "Curse of Ham" theory, a gross misreading of the story in Genesis 9. In this interpretation, Noah's curse on his son Ham's descendant, Canaan, was twisted to apply to all of Ham's supposed descendants, who were falsely identified as all Black Africans. Pro-slavery pastors and writers in the 19th century argued that the subjugation of Black people was a fulfillment of biblical prophecy, with some even claiming the name "Ham" meant "black" or "burnt". The white Adam and Eve stood as the silent, unquestioned starting

point of this narrative—the pure origin from which the "cursed" race had fallen.

The Abolitionist Counter-Narrative: An Ideological Jujitsu

The power of this theological framework is best understood by examining the sophisticated counter-arguments developed by its opponents. Recognizing that they could not win the debate by simply dismissing the Bible, 19th-century abolitionists in the United States engaged in a form of ideological jujitsu. They seized the foundational creation narrative and reinterpreted it to radically undermine white supremacy.

Their central argument, widely circulated in publications like *The Slave's Friend*, was that Adam, having been formed by God from the *adamah* ("earth" or "clay"), was himself a person of color. By emphasizing the "red clay" of Adam's creation, they argued that the first man was not white, but red or brown. This brilliant move accomplished two things simultaneously. First, it upheld the core Christian doctrine of monogenesis—the single origin of all human beings—which was crucial for affirming universal human dignity. Second, it completely de-centered whiteness from the story of creation, recasting it as just one variation among many that descended from a non-white progenitor. This counternarrative reclaimed the biblical origin story as a tool for emancipation rather than oppression.

The Pro-Slavery Rebuttal and the Power of Interpretation

The effectiveness of the abolitionist argument is vividly demonstrated by the theological contortions of the pro-slavery response. Faced with a powerful, textually-grounded argument for a non-white Adam, pro-slavery apologists were forced to concede the point that Adam may have been "red" or "copper colored". However, to preserve the racial hierarchy essential to their ideology, they had to invent entirely new, extra-biblical narratives. Some, like Josiah Priest, argued that God had supernaturally intervened after the Flood, miraculously changing the skin color of Noah's sons to create the different races, making Japheth (the supposed ancestor of Europeans) white and Ham black.

This desperate move reveals the extent to which a pre-committed ideology drove biblical interpretation. When the foundational text of Genesis 2 could no longer be used to support a white origin, a new myth had to be created to re-inscribe the desired racial hierarchy. The battle was never truly about the text itself, but about the power to interpret it. The abolitionist re-reading of Adam's creation demonstrated the narrative's inherent flexibility and exposed the racist assumptions that had been projected onto it for centuries. The symbol of Adam and the system of slavery were so deeply intertwined that an attack on one required a defense of the other, even if it meant abandoning the text for pure invention.

Chapter 6: The Scientific Rebuttal - Genetic Unity and Our Common African Ancestry

While the 19th century saw theological and ideological battles over the interpretation of the Genesis narrative, the 20th and 21st centuries have provided a definitive, evidence-based resolution from the fields of paleoanthropology and genetics. The modern scientific consensus on human origins not only refutes any possibility of a primordial "white" couple but also provides a powerful affirmation of the deep, shared ancestry of all living humans, tracing our collective genesis to the continent of Africa. This scientific reality stands in stark and irreconcilable

opposition to the entire worldview supported by the *Imago Alba*.

The "Out of Africa" Consensus

The most widely accepted model for the origin of anatomically modern humans (*Homo sapiens*) is the "Recent African Origin" or "Out of Africa" theory. Fossil and genetic evidence converge to show that our species most likely developed in Africa between 200,000 and 300,000 years ago. The theory proposes that all modern non-African populations are substantially descended from one or more small groups of *Homo sapiens* that migrated out of Africa, with the most significant and successful dispersal occurring roughly 60,000 to 70,000 years ago.

The genetic evidence for this model is overwhelming. Human genetic diversity is highest in Africa. In fact, there is more genetic variation within African populations than in all non-African populations combined. As human populations moved out of Africa and across the globe, they went through a series of "genetic bottlenecks," where small founding groups carried only a subset of the original African genetic diversity with them. This "serial founder effect" means that genetic diversity steadily decreases the further one gets from Africa, a pattern that points unequivocally to an African origin for all modern humans.

Deconstructing "Mitochondrial Eve" and "Y-chromosomal Adam"

The scientific discovery of our most recent common ancestors for specific genetic lineages has been popularly, and somewhat misleadingly, named "Mitochondrial Eve" and "Y-chromosomal Adam". It is crucial to understand what these terms mean—and what they do not.

- **Mitochondrial Eve** refers to the most recent woman from whom all living humans descend in an unbroken female line through their mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA), which is passed down exclusively from mother to child. She is not the biblical Eve, nor was she the first or only woman alive at her time. Current estimates place her as having lived in Africa around 155,000 years ago. All other female lineages from her time have since died out.
- **Y-chromosomal Adam** is the most recent man from whom all living men are descended in an unbroken male line through their Y-chromosome, which is passed from father to son. Like "Eve," he was not the only man alive. Scientific estimates place him in Africa around 200,000 to 300,000 years ago.

Crucially, these two individuals were not a "couple." They lived tens of thousands of years apart and were simply members of a larger breeding population of early humans in Africa. Their names are convenient labels for tracing specific, non-recombining segments of our DNA back to a single ancestral point. They do not support the biblical narrative of a single founding pair but instead reinforce the African origin of all human genetic lineages.

The Verdict of Science: A Unified African Origin

Modern genetics delivers a clear and unambiguous verdict: the notion of a primordial "white" couple is a biological impossibility. The human story begins in Africa. Our species spent the vast majority of its evolutionary history on that continent, developing the rich genetic diversity that would later populate the entire planet. Physical traits such as skin color are recent, superficial adaptations to different environmental conditions, particularly levels of sun exposure. The genetic differences between human "races" are trivial, with all humans sharing 99.9% of their DNA.

This scientific reality fundamentally dismantles the biological premises of racism. It replaces the

myth of separate and unequal racial origins, symbolized by the *Imago Alba*, with the evidence-based truth of a single, recent, and unified African origin for the entire human family. The journey of humanity is not one of falling away from a white ideal, but of a remarkable expansion from an African homeland, diversifying in appearance while remaining one species, deeply and irrevocably interconnected.

Section III: Dominion, Domination, and the Ecological Crisis

This final section synthesizes the preceding analyses, connecting the ideology of racial domination to the ideology of environmental domination. It argues that both destructive systems stem from a common worldview, one legitimized by a narrow and instrumentalist interpretation of the Genesis creation narrative. This interpretation stands in opposition not only to modern science but also to a more holistic and faithful theological reading of the texts. The worldview that created and sustained the "white Adam" to justify racial hierarchy is the same one that interpreted biblical "dominion" as a license for domination to justify the exploitation of the natural world.

Chapter 7: Interpreting "Dominion" - A Mandate for Exploitation?

The debate over humanity's relationship with the natural world has often centered on a few key verses in the first chapter of Genesis. A particular interpretation of this passage has been identified by critics as a primary source of the modern ecological crisis, providing a theological sanction for the aggressive exploitation of nature.

The White Thesis

In 1967, the medieval historian Lynn White Jr. published a seminal and highly influential essay titled "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis". White's provocative thesis was that the modern environmental crisis, driven by science and technology, was ultimately a product of a specific worldview inherited from medieval Western Christianity. He argued that the Judeo-Christian tradition, and particularly the Latin West, introduced a new and destructive relationship between humanity and nature.

At the heart of his argument was the creation story in Genesis, specifically the divine mandate given to humanity in Genesis 1:26-28: "let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air... fill the earth and subdue it." In White's view, this passage fostered a powerful and dangerous anthropocentrism—a human-centeredness—that was unique among world religions. He claimed that Christianity "is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen," because it established a dualism between humanity, created in God's image, and the rest of nature, which was demystified and stripped of any inherent spiritual value.

Anthropocentrism and the Conquest of Nature

According to White, this theological framework effectively gave humanity a divine license to exploit the natural world for its own purposes without restraint. Nature was no longer a sacred grove to be revered but a collection of resources to be managed and used. This worldview, he argued, created the philosophical conditions necessary for the rise of modern science and

technology, which were pursued with the implicit goal of achieving human mastery over creation. This critical perspective is often referred to as "dominion theology," a term used to describe the belief that humanity has an absolute God-given right to rule over and utilize the natural world. Environmental critics contend that this interpretation, by emphasizing humanity's "rule," has led to unchecked industrial growth, resource depletion, and widespread environmental damage.

Critiques and Nuances

While enormously influential, White's thesis has also faced considerable scholarly critique. Some historians and theologians argue that he oversimplified a diverse and complex religious tradition, basing his sweeping conclusions on a narrow reading of a few biblical verses. Critics also note that White was working with a binary opposition between "human" and "nature" that was popular in mid-20th-century social science but may not accurately reflect the more integrated worldview of the biblical authors. Nevertheless, his essay irrevocably framed the debate, forcing a critical re-examination of the role of religious ideas in shaping environmental attitudes and behaviors. The scholarly and theological battle over the meaning of "dominion" is not merely an academic exercise; it functions as a proxy war for the soul of the Western relationship with the planet. The interpretation one chooses—domination or stewardship—has profound implications for policy, economics, and ethics. The fact that "dominion" can be interpreted so differently reveals that the biblical text can act as a mirror, reflecting the pre-existing values of the interpreter. A culture predicated on conquest and exploitation will tend to read "dominion" as a license to conquer and exploit.

Chapter 8: The Steward's Mandate - Eco-Theology and a "Good" Creation

In response to the critique articulated by Lynn White Jr. and others, a robust field of environmental theology, or "eco-theology," has emerged. This school of thought presents a powerful counter-argument, contending that a faithful and contextually aware reading of the Bible does not lead to an ethic of exploitation, but rather to one of responsible stewardship, care, and conservation.

Dominion as Stewardship

Eco-theologians argue that the Hebrew words at the center of the controversy—*radah* ("dominion") and *kabash* ("subdue")—must be understood within their broader biblical and cultural context. Rather than implying tyranny or violent subjugation, they suggest a model of kingship and governance. An ideal ancient Near Eastern king was a shepherd to his people, responsible for their well-being, justice, and flourishing. In this sense, humanity's "dominion" is a delegated authority to act as God's representatives, caring for creation as a wise and benevolent ruler would care for their kingdom.

This interpretation is strongly supported by the second creation account. In Genesis 2:15, God places Adam in the Garden of Eden with the explicit instructions "to work it and take care of it". The Hebrew words for "work" (*abad*) and "take care of" (*shamar*) can also be translated as "to serve" and "to preserve". This verse is often presented as the primary interpretive key to understanding dominion, reframing it not as a right to exploit but as a duty to serve and protect

the garden of creation.

The Intrinsic Value of a "Good" Creation

A central pillar of the eco-theological argument is the repeated refrain in Genesis 1. After each stage of creation, the text states, "And God saw that it was good". After the creation of humanity and the completion of the cosmos, the assessment is elevated: "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good" (Genesis 1:31).

This repeated divine affirmation is theologically crucial. It establishes that the natural world has intrinsic value in the eyes of its Creator, entirely independent of its usefulness to humanity. The goodness of creation is not contingent on human needs or desires. This perspective directly undermines the anthropocentrism that White identified as the core problem. If creation is "very good" in and of itself, then humanity's role cannot be to dominate it for purely selfish ends. Furthermore, the Bible asserts that "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it" (Psalm 24:1). This principle of divine ownership frames humanity not as absolute owners with unlimited rights, but as tenants or stewards who are accountable to the true owner for how they manage His property.

Biblical Environmentalism

Beyond the creation narratives, eco-theologians point to a wide range of other biblical principles that support a strong environmental ethic. These include:

- **Sabbath Rest:** The laws of ancient Israel mandated not only a weekly Sabbath for people and animals but also a Sabbath year, every seventh year, in which agricultural land was to lie fallow to rest and regenerate (Leviticus 25:4).
- **Animal Welfare:** The Mosaic Law contains numerous provisions for the humane treatment of animals, such as the prohibition against muzzling an ox while it is treading grain (Deuteronomy 25:4) and the command to not take a mother bird with her young (Deuteronomy 22:6).
- **Sustainable Harvest:** Laws mandated leaving the edges of fields unharvested for the poor and the gleanings of the vineyard for the needy, balancing productivity with compassion and ecological limits (Leviticus 19:9).

Taken together, this body of evidence is used to argue that a biblically-grounded worldview is fundamentally one of conservation, care, and sustainable use. This stands in direct contradiction to the narrative of unchecked exploitation and suggests that the environmental crisis is not a result of biblical principles, but a betrayal of them.

Chapter 9: The Ideological Nexus - Connecting Racial and Environmental Domination

The ultimate synthesis of this report lies in recognizing that the ideologies of racial supremacy and environmental exploitation are not separate phenomena but are two manifestations of the same underlying logic of domination. The worldview that produced and sustained the *Imago Alba* to justify a racial hierarchy is structurally identical to the one that interpreted "dominion" as a license to dominate and exploit the natural world. Both are predicated on a flawed and destructive logic of separation, hierarchy, and control, which objectifies the "other" and reduces

it to a mere resource.

A Shared Logic of Domination

The connection between racial and environmental domination is rooted in a shared intellectual and theological framework. This framework operates on a principle of hierarchical dualism, which systematically divides the world into superior and inferior categories:

- **Humanity over Nature:** As identified by Lynn White Jr., the first separation places humanity, created in God's image, outside and above the rest of the natural world. This exceptionalism creates a moral distance that allows nature to be viewed as an object for human use rather than a community of fellow subjects.
- **"Superior" Race over "Inferior" Races:** The second separation, as detailed in Section II, operates within humanity itself. The worldview of Eurocentric Christendom posited the white race as the normative and superior expression of humanity, relegating non-white peoples to a lower status.

This shared logic creates a powerful and self-reinforcing system. The "white Adam" in the Garden of Eden, given "dominion," becomes the perfect icon for this worldview, as it visually fuses these two hierarchies. He is the white man, master of both the non-white "races" (who are framed as his derivative or degenerate descendants) and the non-human world that surrounds him. This provides a unifying explanation for the phenomena described in the user's initial query, directly connecting the symbol of racial superiority to the justification for exploiting natural resources.

The Other as Resource

In both frameworks, the entity designated as "inferior"—whether a non-white person or a non-human part of creation—is systematically devalued and objectified. Its intrinsic worth is denied, and it is redefined in instrumental terms, its value measured only by its utility to the dominant group. The ideology that allowed a European colonist to view an indigenous person as a savage to be "civilized" or a resource to be exploited for labor is the same ideology that allows a corporation to view an ancient forest as mere board feet or a mountain as a repository of ore. Environmental racism, where polluting industries and waste sites are disproportionately located in communities of color, is the modern, tragic expression of this interconnected logic. The bodies of marginalized people and the environments they inhabit are treated as equally expendable.

Interconnectedness as the Alternative

The alternative to this destructive logic of domination is a worldview based on interconnectedness. This perspective is found in diverse philosophical and spiritual traditions, including ecological philosophies like deep ecology, which posits that the well-being of any part of an ecosystem is fundamentally dependent on the well-being of the whole. Deep ecology advocates for an eco-centric (Earth-centered) view rather than an anthropocentric one, recognizing that humans are not separate from or in charge of nature, but are an integral part of a complex web of relationships.

This eco-centric perspective finds strong resonance with both the scientific and theological counter-narratives explored in this report. It aligns with the scientific reality of a single, shared genetic origin for all humanity, which dissolves the biological basis for racial hierarchies. It also aligns with the theological principle of a unified creation, declared "very good" by its creator, in

which humanity's role is one of service and stewardship, not tyranny. Embracing a paradigm of interconnectedness—recognizing that justice for people and justice for the planet are inextricably linked—is the necessary antidote to the legacy of the *Imago Alba* and the dual dominations it has helped to sustain.

Conclusion: Toward a De-colonized and Ecologically-Conscious Worldview

This report has traced the genesis and consequences of a powerful cultural symbol: the white Adam and Eve. The analysis demonstrates that this image is not a biblical reality but an art-historical construct, born of cultural projection and codified during the European Renaissance as an emblem of humanist idealism. This *Imago Alba* became a foundational, often implicit, element within a broader Eurocentric worldview that provided theological cover for two parallel and deeply intertwined projects of domination: one over non-white peoples and another over the natural world.

The logic underpinning both projects is identical. It is a logic of hierarchical dualism that separates a "superior" subject (the white human) from an "inferior" object (the non-white human and the non-human world), thereby justifying the exploitation of both. The worldview that legitimized colonialism and slavery by framing non-white peoples as degenerate deviations from a white ideal is the same one that legitimized environmental destruction by interpreting the biblical mandate of "dominion" as a license for absolute control over a desacralized nature. This entire ideological edifice, however, is built on a foundation of myth and misinterpretation. It is challenged and ultimately dismantled by a convergence of evidence from multiple disciplines:

- **Biblical Scholarship** reveals a scriptural text that is silent on the race of the first humans and whose theological emphasis is on a universal human origin and a mandate for stewardship, not exploitation.
- **Art History** exposes the "white Adam and Eve" as a culturally and historically specific invention, demonstrating that alternative representations have always existed and that the dominance of the European version is a product of cultural power, not theological truth.
- **Modern Genetics** provides the definitive rebuttal, confirming a recent, common African origin for all humanity and revealing the biological superficiality of racial categories.

The enduring legacy of this worldview persists in the systemic racism and ecological crises that confront the contemporary world. The denial of climate change and the perpetuation of environmental injustice are not isolated issues; they are modern manifestations of an ideology that prioritizes short-term gain for a dominant group over the long-term well-being of the whole, interconnected community of life.

Therefore, moving forward requires a fundamental paradigm shift. It necessitates an active and intentional process of decolonizing our foundational myths, critically examining the symbols and stories that shape our understanding of ourselves and our place in the world. It calls for the cultivation of a worldview grounded not in a logic of domination, but in the principles of interconnectedness and humility. This means embracing the scientifically-affirmed reality of our shared human ancestry, the theological imperative of responsible stewardship for a "very good" creation, and the ecological wisdom that recognizes the profound and inescapable interdependence of all life on Earth. By replacing the *Imago Alba* with a more accurate and inclusive story of our origins, we can begin to build a more just, equitable, and sustainable future for all of humanity and for the planet we call home.

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