I'm simplifying this theory of story, but not by much. It should be obvious that such an elementary approach has even less practical value than Aristotle. But what's worse is that it promotes a view of story that is mechanical. The idea of an act break comes from the conventions of traditional theater, where we close the curtain to signal the end of an act. We don't need to do that in movies, novels, and short stories or even, for that matter, in many contemporary plays. In short, act breaks are external to the story. Three-act structure is a mechanical device superimposed on the story and has nothing to do with its internal logic—where the story should or should not go. A mechanical view of story, like three-act theory, inevitably leads to episodic storytelling. An episodic story is a collection of pieces, like parts stored in a box. Events in the story stand out as discrete elements and don't connect or build steadily from beginning to end. The result is a story that moves the audience sporadically, if at all. Another obstacle to mastering storytelling has to do with the writing process. Just as many writers have a mechanical view of what a story is, they use a mechanical process for creating one. This is especially true of screenwriters whose mistaken notions of what makes a script salable lead them to write a script that is neither popular nor good. Screenwriters typically come up with a story idea that is a slight variation on a movie they saw six months previously. Then they apply a genre, like "detective," "love," or "action," and fill in the characters and plot beats (story events) that go with that form. The result: a hopelessly generic, formulaic story devoid of originality. In this book, I want to show you a better way. My goal is to explain how a great story works, along with the techniques needed to create one, so that you will have the best chance of writing a great story of your own. Some would argue that it's impossible to teach someone how to tell a great story. THERE WAS NOTHING simple or straightforward or predictable about racist ideas, and thus their history. Frankly speaking, for generations of Americans, racist ideas have been their common sense. The simple logic of racist ideas has manipulated millions over the years, muffling the more complex antiracist reality again and again. And so, this history could not be made for readers in an easy-to-predict narrative of absurd racists clashing with reasonable antiracists. This history could not be made for readers in an easy-to-predict, two-sided Hollywood battle of obvious good versus obvious evil, with good triumphing in the end. From the beginning, it has been a three-sided battle, a battle of antiracist ideas being pitted against two kinds of racist ideas at the same time, with evil and good failing and triumphing in the end. Both segregationist and assimilationist ideas have been wrapped up in attractive arguments to seem good, and both have made sure to re-wrap antiracist ideas as evil. And in wrapping their ideas in goodness, segregationists and assimilationists have rarely confessed to their racist public policies and ideas. But why would they? Racists confessing to their crimes is not in their self-interest. It has been smarter and more exonerating to identify what they did and said as not racist. Criminals hardly ever acknowledge their crimes against humanity. And the shrewdest and most powerful anti-Black criminals have legalized their criminal activities, have managed to define their crimes of slave trading and enslaving and discriminating and killing outside of the criminal code. Likewise, the shrewdest and most powerful racist ideologues have managed to define their ideas outside of racism. Actually, assimilationists first used and defined and popularized the term “racism” during the 1940s. All the while, they refused to define their own assimilationist ideas of Black *behavioral* inferiority as racist. These assimilationists defined only segregationist ideas of Black *biological* inferiority as racist. And segregationists, too, have always resisted the label of “racist.” They have claimed instead that they were merely articulating God’s word, nature’s design, science’s plan, or plain old common sense. Jefferson died on the eve of the nineteenth century’s movement for emancipation and civil rights, a movement partially spearheaded by the pulsating editor of *The Liberator*, William Lloyd Garrison (1805–1879), tour guide number three. Like his peers, Garrison’s most instrumentally passionate antislavery ideas drawing Americans to the cause of abolition and civil rights were usually not antiracist ideas. He popularized the assimilationist idea that slavery—or racial discrimination more broadly—had “imbruted” Black people; this oppression had made their cultures, psychologies, and behaviors inferior. It is one antiracist thing to say discriminators treated Black people like they were barbarians. It is yet another racist thing to say the discrimination actually transformed Black people into barbarians. The nation’s first great professionally trained Black scholar, W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963), our fourth tour guide, initially adopted Garrison’s racist idea. But he also stood at the forefront of antiracist ideas, challenging Jim Crow’s rise in the late nineteenth century. Over the course of his long and storied career into the twentieth century, Du Bois’s double-consciousness of racist and antiracist ideas amazingly transfigured into a single consciousness of antiracism. In the process, however, his influence waned. In the 1950s and 1960s, racist arguments once again became the most influential ideas drawing Americans to the cause of civil rights. Later, civil rights and Black power advances—and the sensationalized “crises” of Black single-parent households, welfare “queens,” affirmative action, and violent rebels and criminals—all fed a ravishing racist backlash to the racial progress of the 1960s, including the judicial persecution of antiracist activists, most famously a young philosopher from the University of California at Los Angeles. Exonerated of all capital charges in 1972, Angela Davis (1943–present) spent the next four decades opposing the racial discriminators who learned to hide their intent, denouncing those who promoted end-of-racism fairytales while advocating bipartisan tough-on-crime policies and a prison-industrial complex that engineered the mass incarceration, beatings, and killings of Black people by law enforcement. She will be our fifth and final tour guide. RICHARD MATHER AND John Cotton inherited from the English thinkers of their generation the *old* racist ideas that African slavery was natural and normal and holy. These racist ideas were nearly two centuries old when Puritans used them in the 1630s to legalize and codify New England slavery—and Virginians had done the same in the 1620s. Back in 1415, Prince Henry and his brothers had convinced their father, King John of Portugal, to capture the principal Muslim trading depot in the western Mediterranean: Ceuta, on the northeastern tip of Morocco. These brothers were envious of Muslim riches, and they sought to eliminate the Islamic middleman so that they could find the southern source of gold and Black captives. After the battle, Moorish prisoners left Prince Henry spellbound as they detailed trans-Saharan trade routes down into the disintegrating Mali Empire. Since Muslims still controlled these desert routes, Prince Henry decided to “seek the lands by the way of the sea.” He sought out those African lands until his death in 1460, using his position as the Grand Master of Portugal’s wealthy Military Order of Christ (successor of the Knights Templar) to draw venture capital and loyal men for his African expeditions. In 1452, Prince Henry’s nephew, King Afonso V, commissioned Gomes Eanes de Zurara to write a biography of the life and slave-trading work of his “beloved uncle.” Zurara was a learned and obedient commander in Prince Henry’s Military Order of Christ. In recording and celebrating Prince Henry’s life, Zurara was also implicitly obscuring his Grand Master’s monetary decision to exclusively trade in African slaves. In 1453, Zurara finished the inaugural defense of African slave-trading, the first European book on Africans in the modern era. *The Chronicle of the Discovery and Conquest of Guinea* begins the recorded history of anti-Black racist ideas. Zurara’s inaugural racist ideas, in other words, were a product of, not a producer of, Prince Henry’s racist policies concerning African slave-trading. The Portuguese made history as the first Europeans to sail along the Atlantic beyond the Western Sahara’s Cape Bojador in order to bring enslaved Africans back to Europe, as Zurara shared in his book. The six caravels, carrying 240 captives, arrived in Lagos, Portugal, on August 6, 1444. Prince Henry made the slave auction into a spectacle to show the Portuguese had joined the European league of serious slave-traders of African people. IN 1481, THE PORTUGUESE began building a large fort, São Jorge da Mina, known simply as Elmina, or “the mine,” as part of their plan to acquire Ghanaian gold. In due time, this European building, the first known to be erected south of the Sahara, became West Africa’s largest slave-trading post, the nucleus of Portugal’s operations in West Africa. A Genoese explorer barely three decades old may have witnessed the erection of Elmina Castle. Christopher Columbus, newly married to the daughter of a Genoese protégé of Prince Henry, desired to make his own story—but not in Africa. He looked instead to East Asia, the source of spices. After Portuguese royalty refused to sponsor his daring westward expedition, Queen Isabel of Spain, a great-niece of Prince Henry, consented. So 1492, after sixty-nine days at seas, Columbus’s three small ships touched the shores that Europeans did not know existed: first the glistening Bahamas, and the next. EXPLORERS WROTE ABOUT their adventures, and their tales fascinated Europeans. This new travel literature gave Europeans sitting by their firesides a window into faraway lands where different-looking people resided in cultures that seemed exotic and strange. But the literary glimpses that explorers provided of African lands were usually overshadowed by the self-interests of the backers of the expeditions, who aimed most of all to fulfill their colonizing and slave-trading desires. Even a lonely abolitionist, French philosopher Jean Bodin, found his thoughts bogged down by tales connecting two simultaneous discoveries: that of West Africans, and that of the dark, tailless apes walking around like humans in West Africa. Africa’s heat had produced hypersexual Africans, Bodin theorized in 1576, and “intimate relations between the men and beasts . . . still give birth to monsters in Africa.” The climate theory of Africa’s hot sun transforming the people into uncivil beasts of burden still held the court of racist opinion. But not much longer.For English travel writer George Best, climate theory fell apart when he saw on an Arctic voyage in 1577 that the Inuit people in northeastern Canada were darker than the people living in the hotter south. In a 1578 account of the expedition, Best shied away from climate theory in explaining “the Ethiopians blacknesse.” He found an alternative: “holy Scripture,” or the curse theory that had recently been articulated by a Dominican Friar in Peru and a handful of French intellectuals, a theory more enticing to slaveholders. In Best’s whimsical interpretation of Genesis, Noah orders his White and “Angelike” sons to abstain from sex with their wives on the Ark, and then tells them that the first child born after the flood would inherit the earth. When the evil, tyrannical, and hypersexual Ham has sex on the Ark, God wills that Ham’s descendants shall be “so blacke and loathsome,” in Best’s telling, “that it might remain a spectacle of disobedience to all the worlde.”The first major debate between racists had invaded the English discourse. This argument about the cause of inferior Blackness—curse or climate, nature or nurture—would rage for decades, and eventually influence settlers to America. Curse theorists were the first known segregationists. They believed that Black people were naturally and permanently inferior, and totally incapable of becoming White. Climate theorists were the first known assimilationists, believing Black people had been nurtured by the hot sun into a temporary inferiority, but were capable of becoming White if they moved to a cooler climate. George Best produced his curse theory in 1578, in the era between Henry VII and Oliver Cromwell, a time during which the English nation was experiencing the snowballing, conflicting passions of overseas adventure and domestic control, or, to use historian Winthrop Jordan’s words, of “voyages of discovery overseas” and “inward voyages of discovery.” The mercantile expansion abroad, the progressively commercialized economy at home, the fabulous profits, the exciting adventure stories, and the class warfare all destabilized the social order in Elizabethan England, a social order being intensely scrutinized by the rising congregation of morally strict, hyper-dictating, pious Puritans. George Best used Africans as “social mirrors,” to use Jordan’s phrase, for the hypersexuality, greed, and lack of discipline—the Devil’s machinations—that he “found first” in England “but could not speak of.” Normalizing negative behavior in faraway African people allowed writers to de-normalize negative behavior in White people, to de-normalize what they witnessed during intense appraisals of self and nation. PROBABLY NO ONE in England collected and read travel stories more eagerly than Richard Hakluyt. In 1589, he published his travel collection in *The Principall Navigations, Voyages, and Discoveries of the English Nation*. In issuing this monumental collection of nearly all the available documents describing British overseas adventures, Hakluyt urged explorers, traders, and missionaries to fulfill their superior destiny, to civilize, Christianize, capitalize, and command the world.The Puritans believed, too, in civilizing and Christianizing the world, but their approach to the project was slightly different from that of most explorers and expedition sponsors. For the others, it was about economic returns or political power. For Puritan preachers, it was about bringing social order to the world. Cambridge professor William Perkins rested at the cornerstone of British Puritanism in the late sixteenth century. “Though the servant in regard of faith and the inner man be equal to his master, in regard of the outward man . . . the master is above the servant,” he explained in *Ordering a Familie*, published in 1590. In paraphrasing St. Paul, Perkins became one of the first major English theorists—or assimilationist theologians, to be more precise—to mask the exploitative master/servant or master/slave relationship as a loving family relationship. He thus added to Zurara’s justifying theory of Portuguese enslavers nurturing African beasts. For generations to come, assimilationist slaveholders, from Richard Mather’s New England to Hispaniola, would shrewdly use this loving-family mask to cover up the exploitation and brutality of slavery. It was Perkins’s family ordering that Puritan leaders like John Cotton and Richard Mather used to sanction slavery in Massachusetts a generation later. And it was Perkins’s claim of equal souls and unequal bodies that led Puritan preachers like Cotton and Mather to minister to African souls and not challenge the enslavement of their bodies.Richard Mather was born in 1596 in northeastern England at the height of William Perkins’s influence. After Perkins died in 1602, Puritan Paul Baynes succeeded him at Cambridge. Richard Mather closely studied Baynes’s writings, and he probably could quote his most famous treatise, *Commentary on Ephesians*. In the commentary, Baynes said slavery was partly a curse for sins and partly a result of “civil condition,” or barbarism. “Blackmores” were “slavish,” he said, and he urged slaves to be cheerfully obedient. Masters were to show their superiority through kindness and through a display of “a white sincere heart.”AS RICHARD MATHER came of age, Richard Hakluyt was establishing himself as England’s greatest promoter of overseas colonization. Hakluyt surrounded himself with a legion of travel writers, translators, explorers, traders, investors, colonizers—everyone who might play a role in colonizing the world—and began mentoring them. In 1597, he urged mentee John Pory, a recent Cambridge graduate, to complete a translation that may have been on Hakluyt’s list for quite some time. Pory translated Leo Africanus’s *Geographical Histories of Africa* into English in 1600. English readers consumed it as quickly as other Europeans had for decades, and they were just as impressed. In a long introduction, Pory argued that climate theory could not explain the geographical distinctions in color. They must be “hereditary,” Pory suggested. Africans were “descended from Ham the cursed son of Noah.” Whether they chose to illuminate the stamp of Blackness through curse theory or climate theory, the travel writers and translators of the time had a larger common goal, and they accomplished it: they ushered in the British age of adventure. They were soon followed by another group: the playwrights. With the English literacy rate low, many more British imaginations were churned by playwrights than by travel writers. At the turn of the century, a respected London playwright from Stratford-upon-Avon was escorting English audiences back into the ancient world and around modern Europe, from Scotland (*Macbeth*), to Denmark (*Hamlet*), to inferior Blackness and superior Whiteness in Italy (*The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice*). The racial politics of William Shakespeare’s *Othello* did not surprise English audiences when it premiered in 1604. By the late 1500s, English dramatists were used to manufacturing Satan’s Black agents on earth. Shakespeare’s first Black character, the evil, oversexed Aaron in *Titus Andronicus*, first came to the stage in 1594. Down in Spain, dramatists frequently staged Black people as cruel idiots in the genre called *comedias de negros*.Shakespeare’s Othello is a Moorish Christian general in the Venetian military, a character inspired by the 1565 Italian tale *Gli Hecatommithi*, and possibly by Leo Africanus, the Christian Moor in Italy who despised his Blackness. Othello’s trusted ensign, Iago, resents Othello for marrying the Venetian Desdemona. “For that I do suspect the lusty Moor / Hath leaped into my seat,” Iago explains. To Desdemona’s father, Iago labels Othello “an old black ram / . . . tupping your white ewe.” Iago manipulates Othello to make him believe his wife betrayed him. “Her name that was as fresh / as Dian’s visage, is now begrim’d and black / As mine own face,” Othello says before strangling Desdemona. At the play’s climax, Othello realizes his dead wife’s innocence and confesses to Emilia, Desdemona’s maidservant. “O! the more angel she,” Emilia responds. “And you the blacker devil.” Othello commits suicide.The theater-loving Queen Elizabeth did not see *Othello*, as she did some of Shakespeare’s earlier plays. She died in 1603. When the deadly plague of 1604 subsided, her successor, King James I, arrived in London, and started making plans for his grand coronation. King James I and his wife, Queen Anne of Denmark, saw *Othello*. But King James I commissioned Shakespeare’s rival playwright, Ben Jonson, to produce an alluring international masque for his coronation, and to mark the end of Elizabethan self-isolation. Queen Anne proposed an African themes to reflect the new king’s international focus. Leo Africanus, travel stories, and Othello had sparked the queen’s.