Introduction

Ever since the 1991 publication of David Roediger's *Wages of Whiteness*, the analytical concept of whiteness has inspired both groundbreaking analytical work and fierce controversy. In a harsh critique of whiteness studies, Eric Arnesen has charged that "whiteness" has been used to mean too many different things in different situations, and has been used sloppily by scholars of whiteness. Ignoring many of the more recent developments within the field, Arnesen took as his primary target *Wages of Whiteness*, the founding text of whiteness studies within U.S. history. It is thus not surprising that Arnesen came to the conclusion that, in just over a decade, whiteness studies had overextended itself and come to obscure issues of race and class in the United States more than to illuminate them.[1]

This paper will examine seven books engaged in the whiteness debate (some more explicitly than others), primarily from the perspective of working-class studies. Beginning with *Wages of Whiteness*, I will delineate three approaches to the study of whiteness in the United States: the exploration of a black/white dichotomy in U.S. race relations, the elaboration of a spectrum of whiteness, and a move beyond skin color and class to include such things as religion, gender and region in analyses of whiteness. These approaches did not develop chronologically; rather, their co-existence over the past 15 years demonstrates the diversity and vitality of whiteness studies.

Race in Black and White

While Roediger's *Wages of Whiteness* is now positioned as the progenitor of whiteness studies within U.S. history, it was not originally meant to be so. Rather, Roediger intended his book to be a contribution to the age-old debate over the question, "Why is there no socialism in America?" Roediger's answer is, quite simply, that race had blinded white workers from their shared economic interests with black workers, thus preventing the formation of a unified working-class. Far from assuming racism to have been something imposed on workers from above in a sinister plot by elites to prevent the unification of the working-class, however, Roediger argues that the "psychological wage"

[1] Eric Arnesen, "Whiteness and the Historians' Imagination," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 60 (2001), 3-32. Arnesen also criticized two other books that will be discussed in this essay, by Noel Ignatiev and Matthew Frye Jacobson, although not to the same extent that he focused on Roediger.

of white skin privilege (a concept borrowed from W.E.B. DuBois) lead white workers to devise their own forms of racism and exclusionary politics. In typical "new labor history" fashion, Roediger strives to illustrate the agency of working-class people in constructing whiteness and white privilege, and how "white workers have come to look at the world" through the lens of whiteness.[2]

Roediger begins his argument by tracing the history of conceptions of the "white" and "black" races from early colonialism to 1800. He connects the gradual development of racialized freedom and unfreedom with the development of Republican ideology in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The political rhetoric of slavery used by American revolutionaries, he claims, while nevertheless having deep roots in "virtually slaveless" Europe, gained "special force in the American colonies . . . in large part from proximity to chattel slavery." Thus, states of dependence and servility became inextricably tied to racial notions of blackness, and vice-versa.[3] But why should white workers, then, fear and loathe black slaves (or even free black workers)? Roediger notes that "republicanism itself carried a strong suspicion of the powerless, not just of the powerful, and a fear that the top and bottom in society would unite against the 'producing classes' in the middle."[4] Thus, the emergence of white wage labor in the North as the counterpart to black chattel slavery in the South lead to a situation in which African-Americans were not only seen as *not producers*, but also as anti-citizens within the republic. Roediger argues that the prevalence of the racially loaded, self-descriptive term "freeman" among white artisans attempting to cope with their descent into wage work during the first half of the 19th century is evidence for an ideology of "*herrenvolk* republicanism," in which the benefits of republican citizenship apply only to those who are defined as free producers.[5] This ideology, then, prevented white workers from developing a socialist critique of capitalism, even as they joined the ranks of the economically exploited.

The rest of Roediger's book explores the cultural mechanisms by which "whiteness" was constructed in opposition to "blackness," such as anti-black riots by black-faced mobs and minstrelsy. Perhaps the most famous part of his argument,

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[2] David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1991), 9-10.
[3] Ibid., 28-36.
[4] Ibid., 44.
[5] Ibid., 55-60.

however, is that Irish immigrants, who were initially considered to be "black" by Anglo-Americans, were able to stake a claim to their own whiteness both through their electoral power and through demonstrations of their own hatred of African-Americans. Much of the argument in these three chapters rests on a psychoanalytic interpretation of the actions of Anglo and Irish workers. According to Roediger, black-faced mobs, minstrels and Irish immigrants projected both their nostalgic longings for and fears of a pre-industrial, feminized sexuality, primitiveness and freedom (the opposite of a masculine, republican producer ethic) onto African-Americans.

Roediger's cultural history of whiteness has been roundly criticized by many scholars for a number of shortcomings, not the least of which is the perceived lack of evidence on which he bases his cultural, linguistic and psychoanalytic interpretations of race relations.[6] Two more recent books, however, while also using linguistic evidence, take a more solidly social history approach to the question of whiteness and its implications, an approach that is supported by extremely detailed archival work in both cases. Focusing on the salience of whiteness in 20th-century white working-class politics, Michelle Brattain and Kenneth Durr come to differing conclusions about the fate of working-class whiteness at the end of the 20th century.

Brattain's *The Politics of Whiteness* explores the role that white supremacy played in the development of industrial unionism in the Southern textile industry from the 1930s through the late 1960s. Focusing specifically on Rome, Georgia, Brattain argues against the position of "Southern Exceptionalism," the idea that members of the Southern industrial working class were duped by their social superiors into accepting "plantation social relations [transferred] to the company town" in return for certain social privileges based on their white skin. Rather, Brattain maintains that "whiteness in the South became something that largely determined the ability to become part of the industrial working class."[7] Like Roediger's workers, Brattain's millhands fashioned and utilized whiteness as a tool for their own purposes, rather than receiving it as a debilitating weakness from above. Combining the history of union organization among Southern textile workers with their political activity at the polls, Brattain traces a trajectory of

[6] See Arnesen, "Whiteness," 21-23.
[7] Michelle Brattain, *The Politics of Whiteness: Race, Workers, and Culture in the Modern South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 3-5.

whiteness among textile workers from outright racial supremacy to a rhetoric of white rights and opposition to federal interference in local affairs.

Brattain argues that the crusade for a New South after Reconstruction "transformed the economic shift from agriculture to industry into a civic crusade and a source of white unity . . . that would influence generations of industrial wage workers and managers." As textile operations fled South during the early 20th century to escape the militant unionism and (relatively) high wages that had come to dominate in the North, they were able to offer Southern white workers lower wages that were nevertheless much better than could be earned by sharecroppers and tenant farmers. Rather than providing industrial job opportunities for all Southern workers, however, the new economic advantages of factory work "differentiate[d] . . . black and white workers by institutionalizing racial difference in occupation"—black workers were hired for dirty, menial and dangerous jobs that whites would not take, while they were simultaneously excluded from any positions in the factories that required even the smallest amount of skill.[8]

Early attempts to organize Southern textile mills by CIO unions were often thwarted by fears that the unions' ultimate goal was to integrate the factories. Thus, local and state political leaders were able to use the rhetoric of white supremacy to claim the mantle of "labor's best friend."[9] Nevertheless, the model of paternalism that dominated social life in mill villages was inadequate to cope with the economic dislocations of the Great Depression, and many workers responded to the New Deal's focus on workers' rights by joining the United Textile Workers. By the late 1940s, however, federal attempts to support civil rights, such as the Fair Employment Practices Commission, butted right up against old-fashioned Southern white supremacy. While local union leaders acquiesced to racism among the rank and file in order to solidify their foothold in the South, the national Democratic Party, to whom many white workers had long been devoted, pushed full speed ahead with civil rights reform. Picking up on the language of civil rights as outright racism became less acceptable nationally, Brattain argues, Southern white workers began to express themselves in a language of rights that

[8] Ibid., 19, 35.
[9] Ibid., chapter 2.

substituted seemingly race-neutral terms for racist ones. For instance, whereas previously workers would have insisted that only whites be hired for certain positions, they began to appeal to "qualification" as the criterion for appointment, conveniently ignoring the fact that workplace segregation had previously barred any African-American from gaining the kind of job experience that would count as "qualification." Resentful of the federal government's push to get whites to actively participate in the establishment of civil rights (by, for instance, busing white children across town to other schools), unionized white textile workers in the South defiantly split with their national leadership and began the process of working-class Republicanization that culminated in the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980.[10]

In his examination of white working-class Baltimore from the 1940s to the 1980s, Kenneth Durr outlines a similar story but comes to a different conclusion. Durr's work is explicitly located within the literature on the post-World War II "white backlash," but his analysis has important implications for whiteness studies. Through an examination of the politics of white workers, Durr aims to save white workers from the condescension of posterity. In "taking seriously what white people had to say," Durr rejects the linguistic analyses of scholars such as Roediger and Brattain. In the shift from a language of racial prejudice to one of workers' rights, Durr locates not a disguised rhetoric of privilege based on whiteness, as did Brattain; rather, Durr takes his subjects at their words, arguing that this linguistic shift mirrored the shift in the source of the threat to white working-class communities—from the local scene to the national.[11]

Following the stories of war-related in-migration during World War II, when many white workers from the South poured into Baltimore, and the second Red Scare, Durr constructs a picture of white working-class Baltimore in which "[t]he meaning of citizenship . . . revolved around community as an arena where family, ethnic, religious, and sometimes workplace-related endeavors could be carried out." Maintaining the boundaries of community, according to Durr, was the paramount concern of the white

[10] Ibid., chapter 7.
[11] Kenneth D. Durr, *Behind the Backlash: White Working-Class Politics in Baltimore, 1940-1980* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 1-5.

working class, and the most important boundaries in this regard were racial and geographic; thus, family, ethnic and religious institutions were the front line of defense.[12]

The first threat to these boundaries came in the form of blockbusting in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Even as white Baltimoreans in working-class neighborhoods responded by forming neighborhood improvement associations and vocally defending the purity of white neighborhoods, Durr argues that they didn't see their new African-American neighbors as the problem—rather, realtors (and the city government that claimed to be helpless to stop them) were seen as the real problem. The language of white rights was merely the most convenient tool that working-class whites had to use to express their anger and frustration. When the Civil Rights movement and desegregation hit Baltimore, white workers and their families adopted a rhetoric of civil rights, "a populist argument also based on rights, but rights of common or working people rather than white people."[13] Like the workers described by Brattain, white Baltimore workers were primarily concerned with federal intrusion into their communities in the form of desegregation. Unlike Brattain, however, Durr places the emphasis on white workers' fear of "outside" interference, rather than the fear of the specific form that this interference took, arguing that these "weakest players in the economic game . . . would be forced to cede the most in the name of [social] remediation," and thus should not be vilified for their sometimes unfortunate responses.[14] (Why Durr claims that white workers, rather than African-American workers, were the "weakest players in the economic game" is unclear.) In dismissing the "code-word" theory utilized by Brattain and others to interpret white working-class rhetoric as non-racially motivated, however, Durr ignores the role of whiteness in constructing the very working-class, community-oriented identity that white workers were defending.

While Brattain's linguistic analysis is more convincing than Durr's, both illustrate that there is plenty of evidence in the archives for whiteness scholars. Both Brattain and Durr argue that despite the constructedness of race, "whiteness was . . . not irrational or unfounded. [It] was, and continues to be, a very real determinant of social relationships

[12] Ibid., 53.
[13] Ibid., 5, 110.
[14] Ibid., 204-206.

and material benefits."[15] While Roediger argued that whiteness conveyed a psychological wage at the expense of any material benefit, he would agree with Brattain and Durr that whiteness is not a simple matter of white skin privilege or fear and hatred of difference, but rather encompasses all sorts of concerns, including those of community and fear of outside (usually top-down) intervention. The question remains, however, what does "whiteness" (as an analytical concept) do that "racism" doesn't? A partial answer to this question lies in examining the variations within white identity.

The Spectrum of Whiteness

In *How the Irish Became White*, Noel Ignatiev expands on Roediger's analysis of antebellum Irish workers and the process by which they came to be considered white by Anglo-Americans. Beginning with the claim that Irish Catholics were victims of racial oppression in their native land, Ignatiev launches his argument from the question of why Irish Catholic immigrants in the U.S. not only failed to join the abolitionist movement, but actively repudiated it. Examining topics such as Irish violence against African-Americans, the cultivation of the Irish voting block by the Democratic Party, Irish struggles to come out on top of African-Americans in the labor market, and the Irish immigrant response to Protestant Anglo nativism, Ignatiev argues that "while the white skin made the Irish eligible for membership in the white race, it did not guarantee their admission; they had to earn it."[16] And earn it they did.

Where Ignatiev differs from Roediger's model is in his initial placement of Irish immigrants on the racial spectrum. Roediger went to great lengths to use linguistic evidence to show that Irish Catholics were placed on a par with African-Americans in antebellum America.[17] As the comment about Irish white skin above demonstrates, however, Ignatiev recognizes that despite nativist prejudice, there were still some important differences between Irish Catholics and African-Americans from the start. According to Ignatiev, "In Britain, the Irish constituted a subject race. Because blackness was the badge of the slave in America, people from Ireland who went there entered the free labor system, which made them part of the dominant race. [However, a]s unskilled

[15] Brattain, *Politics of Whiteness*, 4.
[16] Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 59.
[17] Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*, 133, 144-150.

workers, they occupied the lowest place within it," "an intermediate race located socially between black and white." Thus, he makes the argument that "as a portion of the Irish Diaspora became known as 'the Irish,' a racial (but not ethnic) line invented in Ireland was recreated as an ethnic (but not racial) line in America."[18] Irish Catholic immigrants began as an in-between people: they were not black, but they were not quite white, either. Or, to be more precise, "In becoming white the Irish ceased to be Green."[19]

Like Roediger, Brattain and Durr, Ignatiev "seeks to make [Irish Catholic immigrants] the actors in their own history"[20] by illustrating the ways in which actively made certain choices that would encourage their acceptance into white society by Anglo-Americans. Despite the possibilities for cooperation between Irish immigrants and African-Americans in resisting institutional authority, Irish Catholics consistently undertook actions that would prove their allegiance to the nativist ideology of racial difference. Arguing that "the assimilation of the Irish into the white race made it possible to maintain slavery"[21] and that the actions of Irish immigrants on the job, in city streets, and on the political scene, Ignatiev concludes that Irish efforts were integral to the process of creating a unified segment of the population defined by whiteness in opposition to that part of the population defined by blackness. And yet, this interpretation seems to contradict his (less emphasized) position that Irish immigrants were never black, but instead were not white. For instance, the point about Irish free labor making it possible to maintain slavery ignores the fact that *unfree* Irish labor (in the specific form of chattel slavery) was never a real possibility in the U.S. Indeed, Ignatiev never provides any evidence that Irish immigrants were ever in any danger of being legally reduced to the same social status as African-Americans; rather, he merely illustrates that they had to work harder than Protestant Anglo immigrants did for acceptance by the Protestant nativist crowd in the U.S.

Matthew Frye Jacobson makes this argument more explicitly in his book *Whiteness of a Different Color*. Arguing that 19th and 20th century conceptions of race were different from contemporaneous conceptions of color, he asserts that "we must

[18] Ignatiev, *Irish*, 186, 76, 39.
[19] Ibid., 3.
[20] Ibid., 3.
[21] Ibid., 69.

admit of a system of 'difference' by which one might be both white *and* racially distinct from other whites."[22] Beginning with the adoption of the Constitution in 1790, Jacobson traces three "regime[s] of racial understanding": The first, lasting from 1790 to 1840, was shaped by a black-white binary and was based on an understanding of responsible republican citizenship (much like in Roediger's argument); during the second, from 1840 to 1924, understandings of whiteness underwent a great deal of flux as the black-white binary was unsettled by massive migration from Europe and Anglo-Americans had to interrogate their preconceptions of racial fitness for self-government; and finally, from 1924 to 1965, European immigrants who had previously been "provisional" whites were able to consolidate their whiteness through new public identities as ethnic Caucasians.[23]

Arguing that scientific theories of race played a large role in shaping popular perceptions of racial difference, Jacobson asserts that popular understandings of race imply "a tacit theory of history by which physical facts presumably reflect underlying principles and grand historical forces."[24] While the basis of this theory may have remained unchanged for much of the 19th and 20th centuries, this does not mean that perceptions of racial difference were static as well; rather, as "scientific" discoveries changed the particular form of the "grand historical forces" presumed to be at work, "contending racial schemes" "[mapped] the terrain of ascription, perception and subjectivity" for immigrants and Anglo-Americans alike.[25] According to Jacobson, this occurred through two primary avenues: the creation of a "pan-white supremacy" during the early stages of global U.S. imperialism, and the extension of the coverage of the "free white persons" citizenship clause of the Constitution to a number of western and southern Asian immigrants based on their status as "Caucasians." Furthermore, beginning around World War II, the pressures of the Civil Rights movement resulted in the consolidation of white ethnics with Anglo-Saxon Americans into a broad racial category, as both groups reacted to African-American rights claims.

Ironically, while Jacobson stresses the fluidity and spectrum of whiteness in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, his conclusion returns to a somewhat rigid conception of

[22] Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 6; emphasis in original.
[23] Ibid., chapters 1-3.
[24] Ibid., 144.
[25] Ibid., 170.

race, at least as it is played out in broader social relations. Following the consolidation of whiteness from 1924 to 1965, the late 1960s and early 1970s saw what Jacobson terms an "ethnic revival," in which a variety of white ethnics (Jews, Italians, Poles, etc.) absolved themselves of blame for the oppression of African Americans based on their very own experiences of prejudicial treatment at the hands of Anglo-Saxon Americans. Deriding "the new ethnicity" for its failure to recognize the important "purchase . . . upon American politics and culture" held by Caucasian identity, Jacobson unequivocally argues that white ethnics have been every bit as complicit in producing the effects of racial prejudice against non-Caucasian Americans as have Anglo-Saxons. In discounting the "notion that Jews, Letts, Finns, Greeks, Italians, Slovaks, Poles, or Russians are not *really* white," Jacobson is essentially retreating from his original relativist premise: No matter how much room for diversity there might really be within whiteness, there is still an irreducible divide between "whites" and "non-whites."[26]

Thus, both Ignatiev and Jacobson fall short of escaping the black/white binary. Indeed, Ignatiev's definition of racial oppression, which he takes from Theodore Allen, allows for only two sides: "Under the system of racial oppression, elite rule rests on the support of the laboring classes of the oppressor group."[27] One can be an oppressor or the oppressed, but there is no racial middle ground (even if there might be economic middle ground). And as we have seen, Jacobson makes the same argument in his critique of "the new ethnicity"—no matter how many non-Anglo-Saxon races there may be, it all comes back down to white versus non-white. Whiteness scholars such as Ignatiev and Jacobson openly pine for the dawning of "that political realm beyond racism"[28] wherein the advantages of interracial, class-based cooperation are recognized to be greater than the advantages of cross-class, race-based cooperation. Yet, while they recognize the material benefits of whiteness, they refuse to acknowledge the rationality (or at least the ethicality) of non-Anglo whites who choose to be white, rather than working-class (a position that also fails to recognize, as Brattain does, that whiteness can come to circumscribe the very possibility of being a member of the working class).

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[26] Ibid., 279-280.
[27] Ignatiev, *Irish*, 35.
[28] Jacobson, *Whiteness*, 280.

In his book *White on Arrival*, Thomas Guglielmo offers an alternative to the white/non-white binary. Recognizing that this problem remains unsolved by scholars such as Ignatiev and Jacobson, Guglielmo argues that by reconceptualizing whiteness we can understand why race seems to be at once both incredibly complex and so easily simplifiable into dichotomous terms. Specifically, Guglielmo argues that scholars must understand the differences between *race* and *color*. Arguing against "unhelpful conceptual distinctions" between race and ethnicity, he notes that during the period of greatest European immigration to the United States, race was often used to refer to ethnicity or national origin, whereas color was a constructed social category. His evidence for this distinction is seemingly the most obvious source—immigration and naturalization documents—that other scholars such as Jacobson have apparently ignored. European immigrants had any number of options they could choose for race (even within particular nationalities), but were always categorized by color as white.[29]

This theoretical framing allows Guglielmo to challenge one of the critical assumptions of the whiteness canon (particularly Roediger, Ignatiev and Jacobson), namely that "European immigrants arrived in the United States as 'in-between peoples' and only became fully white over time and after a great deal of struggle." Rather, he asserts that certain groups could be considered to be both racially undesirable but also indisputably white at the same time.[30] Focusing his study on the Italian immigrant community in Chicago from the end of the 19th century through the end of World War II, Guglielmo illustrates how this pre-categorization of Italians as "white" provided Italian immigrants with a number of advantages over other less fortunate minority groups in the workplace, in politics, in criminal justice, and in housing, among other social spaces. This did not mean, of course, that Italian immigrants (or other white ethnics) were free from the effects of prejudice, nor even that they conceived of themselves as being white. In fact, Guglielmo argues, Italian immigrants and their children did not begin to assert their rights and privileges as "white" citizens until the 1940s, coinciding with a general "collapse of race and color categories" in which ethnicity and nationalism ceased to carry much salience at the same time that the definition of "Americanness" was being expanded

[29] Thomas Guglielmo, *White on Arrival*: *Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 9.
[30] Ibid., 10.

(but still largely confined to "whites") as one of the cultural side effects of the war effort.[31]

While Guglielmo's distinction between race and color is more convincing than Jacobson's concept of "provisional whiteness," Guglielmo tells a tale of largely top-down color ascription. For many newly arrived Italian immigrants in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Italy itself was not much more than an abstract concept, and so individuals and families maintained much stronger and more important ties to regions or specific communities than to the Italian nation. It was only with the rise of Mussolini and Italian imperialism in the 1920s and 1930s that Italian Americans paid heed to campaigns among their own community leaders to solidify *Italianita'*, their identity as members of *la razza Italiana*. Throughout this period, according to Guglielmo, Italian Americans were largely unaffected by the scientific, political and judicial controversies surrounding racial classification in the U.S. Even as second-generation Italian Americans did begin to claim the mantle of whiteness during the 1940s, this process was facilitated by government decisions to simplify the racial classification schemes utilized in immigration processing procedures, as well as the propaganda campaign to expand Americanness mentioned above. Thus, while Italian immigrants could demonstrate their awareness of the color line in urban American through their participation in anti-black riots in 1919, they still refrained from overtly laying claim to their privileges as white citizens.[32]

Given most other whiteness scholars' insistence on ascribing agency to their not-quite-white subjects in fashioning (or at least claiming) their own racial identity, Guglielmo's approach suggests that what George Lipsitz has termed "the possessive investment in whiteness"[33] and the maintenance of racial boundaries matter more to Anglo-Americans than to other groups. This provides an unsatisfactory answer to the question of what "whiteness" accomplishes as an analytical concept that "racism" does not.

Shifting the Frame: Beyond Race, Color and Class

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[31] Ibid., 173-174.
[32] Ibid., 14-15, 39, 59, 113-128.
[33] George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998).

While Eric Arnesen argues that whiteness is not useful as a category of analysis precisely because it encompasses so much, it is precisely this that makes whiteness such a potentially valuable tool, especially over other possibilities like simple racism. Thus, while most scholars of whiteness have been reluctant to step beyond the boundaries of race, ethnicity, color and class, Linda Gordon provides an excellent example of how whiteness can be complicated even further and thereby made more valuable. *The Great Arizona Orphan Abduction* narrates a stunning series of events in southern Arizona in the early 20th century that places whiteness in an altogether new perspective.

In 1904, a Catholic orphanage in New York City delivered a group of orphans to adoptive families in the mining town of Clifton-Morenci, Arizona. Neither the nuns who delivered the children nor the Catholic families who agreed to receive the children had any idea what was in store for them. The problem was that the orphans were Irish, whereas their new families were Mexican-American. As a mining boomtown near the Mexican border, Clifton-Morenci had a population split between Mexican immigrant workers and their families and (mostly Protestant) Anglo workers, managers, and businessmen and their families. When the orphans were delivered to Mexican-American women, the "white" women of the town were so outraged that "white" children had been handed over to non-white families that they convinced their husbands to form a posse to "rescue" the children from the Mexican-American families who had taken them in. A series of court battles ensued, but eventually even the Supreme Court of the United States sided with the Anglo kidnappers.[34]

In the telling of this story, Gordon illustrates the fluidity of race (or color, if one prefers) based on specific contexts. The Catholic charity that arranged the adoptions (in fact, had been arranging adoptions for some time) was in many ways attempting to counteract Protestant-run charities that were rather shameless about taking children away from poor Irish (Catholic) mothers, often on flimsy pretexts, and giving them to Protestant families elsewhere in the country. Thus, the only concern of the Catholic charity before this debacle had been to ensure that the orphans would be adopted by good, observant Catholic families. In delivering the children so far away, the orphanage naturally ran afoul of a local racial order of which it had had no prior knowledge. In New

[34] Linda Gordon, *The Great Arizona Orphan Abduction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

York, as Gordon explains, the orphans were not white, or at least not in any way that would have offered them any social advantages. Compared to a place like Clifton-Morenci, where the racial order was aligned along a relatively simple Anglo/Mexican binary, New York's racial order was hopelessly complex. Thus, when the orphans were transported out of New York, they underwent "a racial transformation unique to the American Southwest . . . [the trip] transformed them from Irish to white."[35]

Two issues not usually found in the whiteness literature, however, were crucial to this racial transformation, according to Gordon. One, of course, was religion. While other whiteness scholars such as Ignatiev and Jacobson have acknowledged the importance of religion (usually in the form of nativist Protestant antipathy for Irish Catholic or European Jewish immigrants), Gordon notes that the relationship between whiteness and religion does not always work the same way everywhere. In New York, the overriding concern for the nuns who managed the orphanage had been "preserving the young souls for the faith," since their religion was under attack from Protestants. Thus, the nuns "did not feel bound to the [Anglo women] by race." For the Clifton-Morenci Anglo women, however, religion was only a secondary issue—many of them were only nominally Protestant, and some were even Catholic and Jewish. For them, the whole episode was a matter of race. Despite the fact that only the most stable and respectable Mexican Catholic families had been chosen by the French priest who had been recently assigned to the Morenci parish, the Anglo women could not see past the racial identities that they were so invested in enforcing. One Anglo woman testified in court of the Mexican mothers, "'They were all dirty faces, and wore black shawls over them and they had ragged clothes on.'" In part, perceptions of this sort were undoubtedly reinforced by racial discrimination in the workplace, where Phelps-Dodge, the company that controlled virtually all of Clifton-Morenci, practiced strict segregation in job and promotional opportunities.[36]

The second issue was family, or more specifically mothering, and naturally the Arizonan Anglo women had different ideas about this than the Mexican-American women. Gordon describes a racial order in Mexico in which shades of skin color were

[35] Ibid., 3-19.
[36] Ibid., 71-72, 315-318.

important. People from northern Mexico, or *norteños*, considered themselves to be both more masculine and, in connection, more white, than southern Mexican *chilangos*. Whiteness was prized over brownness, and upward mobility was associated with a process of becoming lighter: "Hispanicized *mestizos* and mulattoes were said to *blanquearse*, bleach themselves. [However, t]his bleaching was a social, not a skin-tone process: high status made a family white no matter what the individual skin colors." Furthermore, there was a gendered aspect to this whiteness. Lightness played an important part in definitions of fashion and beauty, and sexual modesty was associated with lightness and "civilization."[37]

The importation of this racial order to southern Arizona (most of Clifton-Morenci's Mexican residents were from northern Mexico) leads Gordon to perhaps her weakest point of interpretation: that the Mexican women, in addition to trying to be better Catholics through the good work of providing homes to orphans, were also engaging in a process of racial uplift. According to Gordon, "[T]aking in the orphans represented a public matter for the Mexicans of Clifton-Morenci, a community building strategy, applying Mexican principles of upward mobility through lighter skin color to a new American context." Thus, mothering itself was intimately bound up with racial concerns. Of course, this analysis relies on the assumption that the Mexican-American mothers were thinking far enough ahead to hope that their new light-skinned Irish children, who were mostly under the age of 5 at the time, would marry within the Mexican-American community. Nevertheless, such aspirations on the part of the Mexican-American mothers, if they did indeed have them, would be dashed, for the Anglo women of Clifton-Morenci perceived a much more rigid racial order. To them, one was either white or not white (usually Mexican, but perhaps Indian), and for those who were not white, there was no hope of moving up the racial hierarchy no matter how much money one earned, what one's occupation was, or how respectable a household one kept. (It was, however, perfectly possible for an Anglo to "go Mexican" by taking a Mexican spouse.) Thus, the idea of interracial parenting was just as infuriating to the Clifton-Morenci Anglos as was the idea of miscegenation, and it spurred them to police the boundaries of whiteness all

[37] Ibid., 53-54.

the more vigilantly through the abduction of the children. As Gordon poetically notes, "one of the sites most fertile for the bloom of racism seems to be family."[38]

Conclusion

It is unclear where the field of whiteness studies is going, but Arnesen's call for its abolition seems premature. The works discussed in this paper represent tangible advances over *Wages of Whiteness*. I will conclude by pointing out some of the most promising directions in whiteness studies, as well as some areas that are still problematic.

To begin, it should be clear that whiteness is not just about race (or color or ethnicity) and class. Geography (both spatial and moral), religion, and gender all can play a role in the constitution of whiteness. Linda Gordon is the only author discussed here to go into any epistemological depth on these issues and their relation to whiteness, although geography clearly plays an important role in the stories told by Brattain, Durr, and Guglielmo; religion, in Ignatiev; and gender, in Brattain and Durr, again. It is this facet of whiteness, this broad encompassment of socially constituted aces of identity, that makes it a more powerful analytical tool than racism, which has traditionally been definitionally restricted to prejudice based on skin color (perceived to be a theory of history, and thus also of the present).

An emphasis on geography leads to another important trend in whiteness studies: the turn to examining the texture of whiteness on a local scale, in many different contexts. Whiteness is not a monolithic structure of society on a national or international scale. Rather, like most social structures, the meanings, definitions, and material advantages ascribed to whiteness are highly variable dependent on context. While Brattain, Durr, Guglielmo and Gordon all make broader claims based on their respective case studies, they also make it clear that context is king. The events of *The Great Arizona Orphan Abduction*, for instance, could never have taken place in a region like the Deep South, where a binary racial system would have been obvious even to Irish nuns from New York before the delivery of "white" orphans to "non-white" foster families. Similarly, Durr's white ethnic working-class Baltimoreans would have reacted differently to desegregation and civil rights if not for their long experience living in a city with an

[38] Ibid., 308-309.

unusually high African-American population, even before the Great Migration. In 1991, David Roediger laid out a theory of whiteness that has since been questioned on the basis of problematic evidence; while Jacobson provided an important contribution to whiteness theory in another sweeping narrative, the collection of solid evidence about whiteness based on local case studies can help to construct a more stable and convincing theory.

Linda Gordon has opened up a third avenue of investigation that desperately needs to be explored by others, namely, the ways in which those who are considered to be non-white by the dominant "white" majority have contested whiteness, its definitions, boundaries, and privileges. Whiteness may be socially constructed and unstable, and there may be a spectrum of categories within whiteness, but there are still certain groups (most conspicuously African-Americans) that seem to be permanently barred from even the hope of achieving whiteness. Again, however, local case studies will undoubtedly show that in any number of contexts (such as Clifton-Morenci, Arizona in 1904), definitive "non-whites" actively contested white privilege and the restriction of access thereto. In a sense, Ignatiev, Brattain, Durr and Jacobson are only willing to ascribe agency to non-Anglo whites in fashioning their own racial identities to a certain extent; the possibility of acceptance by Anglos is still a precondition for these groups to become white.

Furthermore, this point brings up another problem with whiteness studies. Even in Gordon's narrative, agency in the realm of racial formation is restricted to the desire to become "white," rather than fashioning a distinct non-white racial identity (or perhaps, even an identity free of race altogether). In privileging whiteness as the condition to which all people aspire, scholars such as those discussed in this paper ignore the possibility that in some contexts, non-white racial identities might also possess social and material advantages. Even given that in broader society whiteness, as exemplified by Americans of Anglo-Saxon descent, carries with it more privileges than any other racial category, it does not necessarily follow that claiming a white identity is the best choice in all possible situations. Roediger, Ignatiev and Gordon all briefly describe periods of time during which "provisional whites" and non-elite Anglos cooperated with definitive non-whites for certain purposes. They lament and question the failure of such egalitarian interaction to last, finding the answer in the claim to whiteness forged by non-elite or

"provisional" whites. But perhaps in some situations it would be better to look for ways in which these groups continued to interact not as merely whites and non-whites (the ever-present binary), but in other, differently racialized ways. It follows, also, that if we can discern a spectrum of whiteness, perhaps we also need to look for evidence of socially constructed racial orders *within* non-white groups—spectra of blackness, brownness, redness, or yellowness. (Of course, it will also be necessary to find ways of speaking and writing about these spectra that are not so dependent on Anglo visions of race exemplified in the very categories just delineated.)

In recounting his experience performing *Hajj*, the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca, Malcolm X located the moment when he first began to rethink the racial ideology of the Nation of Islam:

> That morning was when I first began to reappraise the "white man." It was when I first began to perceive that "white man," as commonly used, means complexion only secondarily; primarily it described attitudes and actions. In America, "white man" meant specific attitudes and actions toward the black man, and toward all other non-white men.[39]

Whiteness historians have recognized that whiteness is primarily manifested not in skin color but in attitudes, actions, and the material advantages that accrue there from. However, in emphasizing the attitudes and actions of (Anglo) whites and not-quite-white ethnics (who are assumed to be striving for whiteness), whiteness scholars have oversimplified the societies they describe. This failure to open up to a wider discourse of critical race theory is, perhaps, whiteness scholars' greatest weakness.

[39] Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1973 [1964]), 383.

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