1

Key Questions and Concepts

This is a book about belonging and nationalism in the United States of America, referred to simply as "America"[1] by most of its citizens, and many others around the world. It is also a story about the meaning of "America," what is unique about its character and possibilities, and its claim to being special in the history of nations on this planet. These intertwined issues are widely conceptualized in both lay and scholarly discourse as the spirit of American exceptionalism.

A little more than one century after its creation, the U.S. nation-state expanded to become a global power, including a pattern of territorial expansion deemed by many to be imperial. By the mid–twentieth century, the United States was the number-one world power. As the hegemonic power within the world-system, the United States was forced to consider how contradictions within its own borders reflected on its position as *the* world leader. Anticolonial struggles that occurred throughout the globe were often viewed as aligned with movements for social change among marginalized populations within its borders.[2] The nation struggled with the question of how it would be positioned and perceived in this new era of imperialism. How could the rhetoric of democracy and justice be rationalized as interventions around the globe intensified? In the 1980s, the Reagan era provided narratives of benevolence and leadership that justified military actions in the eyes of many people in the United States. By the time of George W. Bush's presidency, nationalism and patriotism expressed through military might were generally assumed to be virtues that trumped all else. After September 11, 2001, Bush told the public, "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists."[3]

However, various events simultaneously led to heightened contestation about the meaning and parameters of U.S. nationalism, patriotism, and loyalty. The oft-heard phrase "Support the Troops" began to signify interpretations simultaneously of sending more soldiers to war and of bringing home those already in combat; questioning and dissent were viewed as seditious by some and as matters of social responsibility among other public officials. This "nation of immigrants" spawned a new generation of minutemen to defend national borders from "outsiders," many of whom could claim that we stole their land rather than that they are stealing our resources.[4] We can easily say that "notions of nation" and who "belongs" have been in transition; the tensions of nation and belonging have never been more acute. With a growing foreign-born population,[5] the issue has been raised about whether the United States as a nation ever was or can truly ever be a veritable multicultural union or whether it is a nation guided by a hegemonic (white) Anglo-Protestant culture into which others are asked to assimilate, as Samuel Huntington (2004a, 2004b) asserts. Does claiming national allegiance provide a vantage point from which to stand for peace, justice, and equality (Nussbaum 1996, 136), or does it divide those within the U.S. nation (providing the rhetoric of "unity" despite radically disparate social and economic stations) and separate the U.S. population from peoples of other nations? Indeed, what functions do nationalism, patriotism, and citizenship serve in today's interconnected world in a nation founded and built on the presumption of empire?[6] What is the function of nation? What are the relationships between the political, economic, and social structures and ideologies of capitalism, white world supremacy/Euro dominance, the U.S. nation, and the idea of an American Dream?

With these questions in mind, in this book, we seek to address the origins and development of the U.S. nation and empire, the founding principles and their lived reality, the belief in exceptionalism, the issue of "belonging," the American Dream and the corresponding portrait of a "nation of immigrants," and the relevancy of nation to empire within the historical world capitalist system. We explore these topics historically as well as through the lens of contemporary respondents.

The eminent political scientist Rogers M. Smith tells us that since the inception of the United States, scholars have described the nation as the preeminent example of modern liberal democracy, a country in which governance is determined by popular consent, with respect for the equal rights of all people. Most assert that if this image has not been entirely true, then the history of U.S. political development has been a matter of working out these democratic principles over time. Illiberal and antidemocratic themes in U.S. history are mostly deemed exceptional, irrational, and destined for the dustbin of history, since these expressions are not part of the nation's creed (Smith 1993, 549).

Smith traces this affirming tradition to Alexis de Tocqueville's 1835 classic *Democracy in America.* While he accepts that this analysis of the United States contains some truths, he believes that Tocqueville does not properly recognize and proportion the inegalitarian and antidemocratic ideas that have shaped and

undergirded U.S. political culture. For example, for two-thirds of U.S. history, the majority of the domestic population was not eligible for full U.S. citizenship because of their race, original nationality, lack of property, or gender. The subjects of Tocqueville's narrative are white men of northern European ancestry (Smith 1993, 549).

Joel Olsen shares Smith's reservation, pointing out that the early nineteenth century heralded the rise of the first mass democracy in the world yet was also one of the most turbulent and violent periods in U.S. history, marked by riots, lynch mobs, and insurrections, mostly in defense of slavery and the subordination of Africans. Olsen tells us that the mobs attacked "Black people, abolitionists, 'amalgamators' and anyone whose actions or mere existence not only challenged white supremacy, but systematically raised the specter of social equality" (2001, 164). These were not simply the actions of a few drunken mechanics but were organized and led by some of the nation's most prominent gentlemen: mayors, congressmen, attorneys general, physicians, lawyers, and newspaper editors. These riots were not seen by the perpetrators as antidemocratic but as defenses of democracy itself (Olsen 2001, 164). Race and racism were used to frame the very idea of democratic citizenship as a right of only those with no African blood.

Immanuel Wallerstein's (2003a) reflections on citizenship as a historically constructed concept provide a clearer understanding of its role in the modern world-system. While in theory, the concept of "the citizen" as articulated in the French Revolution was intended to be inclusive, in practice, citizenship has always been defined such that some are excluded. The reason for this disjuncture between rhetoric and reality is simple: Historical capitalism requires social inequality, though social stability is best served by public perception of equality of opportunity *and* the existence of real opportunity for upward mobility, at least for *some.* But upward opportunity for *all* would place a great deal of pressure on employers to pay higher wages. In a competitive economic system, employers of wage labor seek to impose some restraints on the pressure to pay higher wages. Wallerstein and others argue that inequality is a fundamental reality of the modern world-system, as has been the case for every known historical system. What they see as particular to historical capitalism is that equality and democracy have been proclaimed as its objective, and indeed as its achievement.

As we explore the contours of belonging, nationalism, and the American Dream, we take heed of the cautionary remarks of Smith, Olsen, and Wallerstein about the simultaneous inclusiveness and exclusiveness of citizenship in the United States. While this component of the tension is similar to what exists in all nations, the scale of the phenomenon in the United States requires special comment. We argue that to understand the modern world, we must recognize the inherent connection between capitalism/imperialism, white supremacy/Euro dominance, the emergence of the U.S. nation as a "city on the hill," and the concept of the American Dream. Each of these has worked in synchrony, simultaneously supporting the development of the historical world-system aimed

toward its contemporary crisis. The question is what will come next for each of these social realities.

We examine this history to understand whether an idea that seems so innocent—that of the possibility of a better life—could possibly have a dark side. Do these "tensions" coexist in a bipolar reality? Is it only a dream or reverie? Is it all rhetoric? Is the dream in fact a reality and questioned only by those unwilling or unable to achieve it? These questions form the substance of our inquiry.

2

Citizenship and Nation

Citizenship as a Concept

Cedric Robinson, Elizabeth Martinez, Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz, and others have argued that the formation of nation-states and political regimes always leads to the development and elaboration of "origin myths," which dominant strata use to promote social cohesion, legitimate the social order, and exercise class hegemony. In the United States, a central motif running through these narratives is the destruction and domination of savages (those who are illiterate, ignorant, undeserving poor, illegals, and so forth) in the interests of a higher civilization. In the original formulation, these savages were the indigenous peoples of the Americas and the Africans, though this discourse has been applied throughout the course of U.S. history to such policies as manifest destiny and in imperial conquests throughout the globe. As labor, land, or resources were needed for expansion, the generation of wealth, or the appeasement of a managerial class with some (but not always extreme) privilege and resources, various populations were assigned such labels as savage, unworthy, criminal, or evil to justify their exploitation.

The conquest and decimation of the native peoples was asserted as a *fait accompli*, establishing them as a conquered people, a historical relic necessarily sacrificed for the greater good of the new utopia, the "newly discovered" home of the brave and land of the free. Africans were captured and remain to this day a significant labor force.[1] The ideological attack on these populations was and has been central to the positive conception of the U.S. social order as a "white republic." W.E.B. Du Bois articulates the significance of the reversal of radical reconstruction as a manifestation of this ideological attack on the African American people:

It is not only part [of the] foundation of our present lawlessness and loss of democratic ideals; it has, more than that, led the world to embrace and worship the color bar as social salvation and it is helping to range mankind in ranks of mutual hatred and contempt, at the summons of a cheap and false myth. ([1935] 1979, 723)

The frontal attack on racism during the course of the Civil War had not been intended by the dominant social classes. Many enslaved Africans grasped their strategic and tactical significance on the terrain of the battleground in the South and encapsulated themselves within the Union Army, thus depriving the Confederate Army and the slave system of its workforce. In the course of these events, they transformed the Union Army temporarily into an army of liberation. In the aftermath of the Civil War, the freedmen were indispensable allies in the weakening of the old dominant order in the defeated Confederacy. But once this alliance of whites and Blacks in the Union Army was no longer needed, the freedmen were abandoned as part of a larger sociopolitical process. Howard Zinn argues:

In the year 1877, the signals were given for the rest of the century: the Blacks would be put back; the strikes of the white workers would not be tolerated; the industrial and political elites of North and South would take hold of the country and organize the greatest march of economic growth in human history. They would do it with the aid of, and at the expense of, Black labor, white labor, Chinese labor, European immigrant labor, female labor, rewarding them differently by race, sex, national origin, and social class, in such a way as to create separate levels of oppression—skillful terracing to stabilize the pyramid of wealth. (1980, 247)

The terracing described by Zinn is compatible with T. H. Marshall's notion of social citizenship, which entails a basic equality associated with a concept of full membership in a political community, yet it is still consistent with the inequalities that distinguish the various economic levels in society. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, citizenship became the architect of legitimate social inequality as individuals and groups were assigned different stations in society. For those who received public benefits, such benefits were provided at the expense of their citizenship rights. Otherwise, citizenship rights would have disproportionately distorted the balance of social power in favor of the lower social strata, thus interfering in the market-based stratification system. Marshall distinguishes between three elements of citizenship: civil rights, political rights, and social rights. For Marshall, the original source of social rights was membership in a local community and functional associations. This source was supplemented and progressively replaced by a Poor Law and a system of wage regulation that was nationally conceived and locally administered.

The Poor Law was the last remnant of a system that sought to adjust real

income to the social needs and status of the citizen and not solely to the market value of his labor. But a startling reversal occurred in the administration of the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, which renounced all claims to interference with operation of the free market and the wage system. Hereafter it offered relief only to those who, because of illness, were incapable of competing in the free market or those who were weak, gave up the competitive struggle, and cried for mercy. By requiring the lower strata to effectively renounce their citizenship rights, the upper strata protected the market-based system of social stratification for those with dominant market-based power.

Marshall explains:

> The Poor Law treated the claims of the poor, not as an integral part of the rights of the citizen, but as an alternative to them—as claims which could be met only if the claimants ceased to be citizens in any true sense of the world. For paupers forfeited in practice the civil rights of personal liberty, by internment in the workhouse, and they forfeited by law any political rights they might possess. . . . The stigma which clung to the poor relief expressed the deep feelings of a people who understood that those who accepted relief must cross the road that separated the community of citizens from the outcast community of the destitute. (1964, 80–81)

Marshall distinguishes between two conceptions of class: one based on the hierarchy of status, and the other based on the hierarchy of the market. The establishment of citizenship rights was profoundly destructive to status-based class distinctions but had a more gradual effect on market-based class distinctions. Perhaps counterintuitively, it initially strengthened the class system by eliminating its less defensible (status-based) consequences. These more subtle class distinctions putatively rooted in the operations of the market were said to be a natural phenomenon operating outside the control of societies, and therefore attempts to control such market forces would be harmful to the economy.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, social rights were explicitly separated from the rights of citizenship. As Marshall argues:

> Where they were given officially by the State, this was done by measures which, as I have said, offered alternatives to the rights of citizenship, rather than additions to them. But the major part of the task was left to private charity, and it was the general, though not universal, view of charitable bodies that those who received their help had no personal right to claim it. (1962, 87)

While citizenship rights were based on a principle of equality, they were also necessary for the efficient functioning of the competitive market economy, which was rooted in a principle of inequality. Marshall explains that civil rights gave each person the power to engage as an individual unit in the economic struggle.

This meant that the individual could be denied social protection, because he or she was theoretically fully equipped with the means of self-protection. The modern social contract is therefore an agreement between people who are equal in status but not in power. Thus property rights imply the right to obtain but not to own property; the right to freedom of speech is bestowed on those who have the means to make themselves heard, but not all people have such means, so freedom of speech is not effectively available to all people. Equality before the law applies only if one has the means to seek remedies in cases that are contested. Clearly, under these types of conditions, social equality is quite limited, though the *appearance* of equality is there.

In the later part of the nineteenth century, however, as the social power of the working class increased in the industrializing pan-European world, a growing interest developed in equality as a principle of social justice and thereby rooted in community and the common good. With an increase in the political power of the working class, measures were taken to broaden the scope of citizenship rights. This effort effectively narrowed the magnitude of economic inequality, first through the broadening of civil rights (e.g., the right to collective bargaining) and then through the broadening of social rights (e.g., minimum wage laws, social security).

The diminution of inequality strengthened the bargaining position of the working classes and gave increasing strength to a sentiment that demanded its complete abolition. By and large, this demand was met through incorporating social rights into the status of citizenship and thereby creating a universal right to a real income not tied to the market value of the claimant. In this way, social democracy and notions of social entitlements as basic human rights became hegemonic forces in the advanced industrial societies of the pan-European world.

Marshall does not view the extension of social services as a means of equalizing incomes. What matters for him is that "there is an enrichment of the concrete substance of civilized life, a general reduction of risk and insecurity, and equalization between the more and the less fortunate at all levels. Equality of status (entitlement) is more important than equality of income" (1964, 102–103). However, the compromise entailed in the social compact of the postwar period is especially significant in our discussion because of the limited incorporation of Blacks, Latinos, Asians, and women in what Richard A. Piven and Frances Fox Cloward (1997) refer to as the "American Social Compact" and the public awareness of those limitations. The racialized and gendered nature of the exclusions (from the social solidarity expressed in the social compact) was central to the social reality of the United States from inception. We must acknowledge this history if we are to fully understand the evolution of U.S. society, who is considered to belong (or not), and what the nation is truly about.

Nation as Political Community

"Nation" is the name given to the construction of a political community that is considered to coexist with a state. Converting the structural apparatus of a

state into a nation-state provides coherence and creates a kind of glue in which citizens identify themselves with this political entity. Patriotism allows citizens to express their solidarity and loyalty through the defense of this political community and makes the nation one of their highest priorities.

As indicated above, this coherence does not imply equality among citizens, but, as Marshall argues, it provides an articulation of personhood and community and eliminates status distinctions as a basis of inequality. Inequality within such communities is therefore deemed solely to be market-based. Though the long civil rights movement sought to eliminate the status and economic distinctions of race in U.S. society, almost all members of the movement came to recognize the relationship between the status distinctions based on race and the deeply institutionalized structures of racism embedded in all aspects of society. Status as an element of inequality was at first quite explicit but became unmentionable, since it provoked extensive efforts to end racism among a large segment of the population. Such efforts also combined with efforts to transform structural inequality, or what had previously been viewed as market-based inequalities, which were deemed to be a natural result of unequal abilities and not a problem of concern to society.

When some social scientists and activists responding to the struggle for racial equality began to interrogate the relationship between so-called market-based and status-based inequality, they discovered that substantial portions of what had been considered market-based inequalities were rooted in social status and reproduced by the structures and institutions of society. The Black intelligentsia who identified this connection thereby developed the concept of institutional racism. Thus, the question of who belongs to the nation evolved with an increasing demographic and social significance and became a central issue for the twentieth-century development of the U.S. nation.

It is here that the central question of *Tensions in the American Dream* arises: How can the principle of equality in citizenship be reconciled with the principle of inequality in the economic and political structure? The founding myths noted above gave rise to categories of citizenship that fit more neatly into the image of the modern world. Robinson argues that Black history began in the shadow of the national myths about Black people and was their dialectical negation (Robinson 1983, 190).[2] While this effort sought to negate the racist myths, it also encapsulated racial-uplift ideology, which benefited the Black middle class. This strain ran through the sentiments of what Wilson Moses (1978) calls the "golden age of Black nationalism" (1850–1925), what he argues was largely the ideology of the Black middle class. Alexander Crummell and Du Bois's notion of the talented tenth derived essentially from the racial-uplift themes of their era. This concept was essentially an assimilationist ideology closely tied to that of the pan-European group, but it differed in the articulation of who could be assimilated. For whites, Blacks were considered to be beyond the pale of citizenship. For Robinson, this position entailed a price that had to be paid, supporting "integration" but not equality. This disparity is precisely Marshall's point and an

extremely important analytic statement: The pairing of the antiracist and anti-sexist struggle with the overall struggle for social equality is anathema for those who wish to continue operating on the principle of inequality. Though the radicals in the New Negro Movement of the early twentieth century emphasized the issue of Black Pride and self-respect, they also argued that racial oppression was part of the essentially and inherently oppressive nature of the capitalist world.

The definitions of race and racism, then, were important elements in the evolution of the identity of not only African American people but also those who would be constituted as members of the white nation. Du Bois's radicalism emerged in the context of debates with elements of New Negro radicalism (especially Hubert Harrison, the Messenger Group, Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association [UNIA], Cyril Briggs and the African Blood Brotherhood); with the Communist Party USA (CPUSA) and, in turn, its criticism of the centrist liberalism of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP); and in the multiple splits within the NAACP. Du Bois did the most to develop the scaffolding on which a new identity would emerge, but he was far from alone. While Du Bois is widely acknowledged today as a giant in the intellectual life of the modern world, he was a marginal figure in academia for most of the twentieth century. Despite the positive contributions of sociology to the study of race, Du Bois's marginal position within sociology is consistent as well with the shortcomings on the study of race and racism among sociologists. Sociology, too, was a site of the hegemony of centrist liberalism *and* the colonial ontology that so dominated pan-European world views.

While social scientists have played an exemplary role in changing the tenor of the scholarly and public discourse on race, in this book we focus on the issues of structure and agency in the formation of racial, ethnic, and national categories and identity. While oppressed groups have been and continue to be categorized in an invidious manner by the more privileged, for the more privileged, such distinctions are central in reinforcing the identity formation that they view as the basis for their dominance in society.

We examine several dimensions of this dynamic, including how oppressed groups form a sense of racial or ethnic identity and reflect on and act on racial oppression or ethnic stratification in their national identifications and affiliations. We also question how privileged groups align around practices and ideas with a legitimating notion that their ideas and practices are universal, objective, and civilizing in who they consider to be members of their own national community. Subsumed within this question is the issue of how race, racialization, racism, and liberation are viewed, particularly in the way that the concept of "nation" articulates a cohesive force for both groups but with very different meanings.

At times in this book, we particularly focus on white versus Black polarity, not because of a belief in the essentialism of such a binary but because of the central role that this opposition has played in defining the "race first" ideology of the pan-European world both on an international scale and within the

borders of Euro-dominated states. The creation and elaboration of the concept and structures of race first took place within British North America and later throughout the capitalist world economy under European hegemony in relationship to Africa.

The central role of racialization in the creation of the U.S. nation and the New World accounts for the centrality of the fight against racism and for the rights of "communities of color" who have been so central to U.S. history. Thus we must examine the emergence and development of the concept of the American Dream in U.S. history in various temporalities that provide the context for the struggle for equality and U.S. history more generally. The development of the nation as Benedict Anderson's (2000) "imagined community" helps us understand this social-political-economic construct.

The nation is the name given to the construction of a political community that is considered to coexist with a state. It should be clear, however, that though we tend to believe that the construction of peoplehood gives rise to nations and subsequently to the demand for a sovereign state, in reality the political structuring of the world-system gives rise to the nation. As Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein argue, "The states that are today members of the United Nations are all creations of the modern world-system. Most of them did not exist either as names or as administrative units more than a century or two ago" (1991, 80–81). However, once the interstate system was constructed within the modern world-system, nationalist movements emerged and demanded the "right to self-determination," which amounted to the creation of new sovereign states.

The creation of new states reflected again the inherently polarizing logic of the social system, which led those excluded to organize in an effort to protect themselves against those who would subordinate and marginalize them in the social order. Counterintuitively, the creation of new states was a part of a liberal program, an idea that is clear if we briefly review the revolutionary movement that emerged in the European arena of world capitalism during the 1840s.

The nineteenth-century workers movement included members who were implacable foes of a capitalist system that they believed would increasingly undermine the very foundations of social life as it ground workers beneath the wheel of a heartless profit-making juggernaut; other players within the movement hoped that the social struggles of workers would result in humanizing the capitalist system. During the 1840s, workers rebelled against this system, culminating in what has been called the revolution of 1848. When this revolution was defeated and order was restored, the upper strata pursued a policy not of reaction but of liberal reform to co-opt the danger of popular revolt. The package extended to workers included an extension of suffrage, the protection of the weak in the workplace, the beginning of redistributive welfare, and the building of educational and health infrastructure for citizens. This liberal reform program combined with the propagation and legitimization of the notion of the white man's burden in the wider world, the civilizing mission, the "Yellow peril," and a new anti-Semitism that Wallerstein (1999) argues served

to incrustate the pan-European lower strata within a national identity that was right wing and nonliberatory.

Nationalism organized within the liberal states of the pan-European world received even greater cohesion from their hostility to enemies from the extra-European world whom they dominated politically and economically. This domination was for the benefit of the dominated, because they were being offered the gift of civilization. Wallerstein thus argues that the pan-European world "defined itself as the heart, the culmination, of a civilizational process which is traced back to Europe's presumed roots in Africa. Given the state of its civilization and its technology in the nineteenth century, the pan-European world claimed the duty to impose itself, culturally as well as politically, on everyone else—Kipling's 'White man's burden,' the 'manifest destiny' of the United States, France's 'mission civilisatrice'" (2004, 66).

This nationalistic worldview was not merely the action of the state, which the masses simply passively observed; "it was the passion of the nation, the duty of the citizens" (Wallerstein 2004, 66). Here, the liberals and the conservatives converged in their common interest of ensuring internal order within the state. But for Wallerstein, the effectiveness of nationalism as internal pacification is highlighted by the fact that despite their ideological adherence to the notion of proletarian internationalism, the radicals also bought into this liberal program, such that "when virtually all European socialist parties opted in 1914 to support their national side in the war, it was clear that the conservative belief about the effect of nationalism on the erstwhile dangerous classes had been correct" (2004, 67).

Samir Amin argues that the concept of the nation has deep mythological roots that present it as a "natural" phenomenon, something of a biological perception, which he argues leads to racism. The concept of a universal humanity did not exist during the time when ethnic groups, tribes, and clans were the predominant forms of societal organization that led these groups to feel distinct from one another; even deities were thought of as being specific to individual groups. But the first big wave of what Amin refers to as the cultural revolutions that inaugurated the tributary age (500 B.C.E. to 700 C.E.) saw the birth of the concept of universality, with the birth of the great religions (Zoroaster, Buddha, Christianity, and Islam) and of the great philosophies (Confucian, Hellenistic; 1997, 8).

For Amin, the concept of nation as a political community evolved during the rise of capitalism in Europe and the conquest of the New World, which was also the period in which the Enlightenment, or the Age of Reason, took hold in politics, philosophy, science, and communications. The Enlightenment defined the nation not on the basis of a biological myth but on the basis of a social analysis of society. Thus the nation was said to be based on a social contract between free men who wanted to live according to the nation's laws (Amin 1997, 9–10).

3

The Shifting Terrain Makes Clear
the Tensions in the American Dream

In this book, we focus on a time period when citizenship, belonging, and questions of community are in flux. In doing so, Melanie's previous work *Everyday Forms of Whiteness: Understanding Race in a "Post-Racial" World* insists that we frame our understanding of contemporary white racism and racial animosity as evidence of a transition from a period from the 1930s to the 1970s (centered in the 1960s), when public opinion was weighted toward a collective responsibility for the common good, toward a time emphasizing a belief in the social survival of the fittest (M. Bush 2011, 1). During the 1960s and 1970s, the working-class Americanism of the 1930s and 1940s came to maturity. This period is often treated *only* as a break from the past sparked by the immaturity of youthful rebels who, because of the upward mobility of their parents, did not appreciate the historical trajectory of the United States toward "a more perfect union." However, the intersection of these two historical strands is crucial to our understanding of the evolution of the concept of the American Dream.

The accumulation of social power that was sparked by the coalescence of working-class Americanism with excluded populations did indeed provoke a break from the liberal geoculture.[1] This newfound power incited a segment of the white population to move away from a commitment to the common good, partially involving a redefinition of who was included in the collective "we." This transformation was related to tectonic shifts in the social structures of the United States and the larger world-system that altered the social psychology of everyone within the United States. However, this change was not simply a matter of individual psychology; the redefinition of "we" was a profoundly social phenomenon. This period was an important marker in the social history of the U.S. nation.

The brief narrative presented here suggests that substantive support for a commitment to the common good has emerged in many "societies" as well as in global movements that wanted a transnational organization of society devoted in principle to the common good rather than the benefits of the propertied few. In the twentieth-century United States, this sentiment came increasingly to be identified as the "American creed," a liberal civic nationalism that viewed the United States as exceptional due in part to its lack of a feudal past and thus a natural source of the development of democratic and egalitarian institutional structures. Such historians as David Hollinger have distinguished between the civic nationalism of the United States and the ethnic nationalism of other countries.

Those who uphold the United States as a model of a potentially democratic civic nationalism should be mindful of Stephen Steinberg's (1989) cautionary epilogue in the second edition of *The Ethnic Myth*, entitled, "Ethnic Heroes and Racial Villains in American Social Science." Here, he argues that the dominant thesis of U.S. social science and popular culture is that those who have successfully assimilated into U.S. society and moved up the economic ladder have been able to do so because of their ethnic values. This myth also states that for those who have not done so, it is due to shortcomings in their cultural values. In the most extreme cases of Blacks and Latinos, it is attributed to their cultural pathologies or their adherence to a culture of poverty. Steinberg's class analysis applies to groups who have been racialized, so he posits that U.S. society could be divided into ethnic heroes and racial villains.

The real possibilities for democracy within the United States and within the world-system are most evident when communities of color are involved in the creation of democratic publics. Nothing is clearer to those who have historically been excluded from the benefits of the American Dream than the fact that the United States is a deeply divided society in which inequalities are justified by the supposedly different cultures of some groups, which, in turn, isolate them from the economic mainstream and its values. This U.S. civic nationalism has been the glue of U.S. civil society, serving as not only the basis for the idea of U.S. exceptionalism but also the focus of a set of counterhegemonic discourses and practices from those at the margins of U.S. society and for those in the periphery of the U.S.-dominated world-system, whose strengths have varied over time. They not only have articulated values that were much more faithful to the putative U.S. ideal but also have seen that ideal as intimately linked to the values and ideals of all humankind struggling for liberation from political domination and economic exploitation.

Is the United States a meritocracy? How frequently does hard work lead to success? Do those who work at the hardest jobs with the longest hours reap the greatest rewards? We pose these questions as the grounding for our exploration of what we feel to be a fundamental contradiction between the vision of the United States as a "shining city on a hill" and the vision of the United States as an imperial nation, with a manifest destiny to extend human elevation and hu-

man happiness.[2] Thomas Jefferson identified the United States as the "Empire of Liberty" (Foner [1990] 1998, 50). The belief was established that the United States had been chosen by God for the greatest experiment in human history—the achievement of liberty—and its expansion was part and parcel of this nation's providential design. Eric Foner quotes the French historian Michel Chevalier, who argues that the idea of liberty in the United States was a practical idea as well as a mystical one that meant a "liberty of action and motion which the American uses to expand over the vast territory that Providence had given him and to subdue it to his uses" ([1990] 1998, 50).

Foner, however, points out that the land was not empty. For centuries, the West had been a meeting ground of peoples whose relationships were shaped as much by conquest as free choice, and thus these relationships were characterized by clashing concepts of liberty. Native Americans wished to preserve their cultural and political autonomy and to retain control of their ancestral lands, but this desire was incompatible with the Western settlers' notion of liberty as the right to expand across the continent and establish farms, ranches, and mines on land that the Native Americans considered their own. Indian removal by fraud, intimidation, and violence was therefore the order of the day throughout this period (Foner [1990] 1998, 51).

According to Carl Degler, one journalist of the era described the American people as "the most independent, intelligent, moral, and happy people on the face of the earth" (1984, 119). Within that framework, Caleb Cushing, a member of the Massachusetts legislature and an army officer, justified the annexation of Mexican land by the United States after the Mexican War by asking, "Is not the occupation of any portion of the earth by those competent to hold and till it, a providential law of national life?" (Degler 1984, 119). This idea of design from above was thus an important element of the self-perception of the United States, but that idea was also connected to practical designs. In the summer of 1845, John O'Sullivan, editor of the *Democratic Review*, argued that it was "our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our multiplying millions" (Zinn 2003, 151).

The idea that the United States is a living manifestation of a meritocracy is at the very heart of what some refer to as American exceptionalism. In this chapter, we evaluate the rather contradictory social reality in which the United States has been described by some as a perfect democracy, the "city on a hill," and by others as an imperial nation. Here, we explore the origin and development myths of this nation and empire.[3] Bacon's Rebellion (1676), the institution of slavery (1619 onward), the Declaration of Independence (1776), the Constitution (1787), Black Codes (1800–1866), the Treaty of Guadeloupe Hidalgo (1848), and such legislation as *the People v. Hall* (1854), the *Dred Scott* decision (1857), Jim Crow laws (1876–1965), and the ruling in *Brown v. Board Education* (1954) are some of the many markers in U.S. history of how nation, empire, and white supremacy have been intrinsically linked in the development of the U.S. nation. The story of "America" is entrenched with and built on the presumption of exceptionalism

and superiority. From the early years of European conquest, enslavement, and expansion, "nation" was equated with a white European racial portrait, contradicting notions of enlightenment, common unity, and belonging. Did "all" ever truly mean *all*, did "men" ever truly mean "human," and did "equal" ever truly mean equal access, opportunity, outcome, or treatment?[4]

The relationship between the construct of nation, the political and economic structures of capitalism, and the presumption of white supremacy have together provided the foundational justification for trespass, genocide, domination, exploitation, and presumed entitlements of land, labor, and wealth. As the colonies were established and then the nation was created, struggles occurred regarding whose interests would be served and who could claim which rights. Ideas about who would be valued and protected were embedded in the nation's documents and its laws. Subsequently, in the nineteenth century, the demand was made of European immigrants to become like "us," like it or not, but peoples from other parts of the globe were told that they would never be like "us" (Smedley 1993, 32). The case was built for who belonged and who did not; who was "same" and who was "different," "civil," or "savage"; who could own land; who could be educated and literate; who could assemble; who could be in charge of and exploit other people's labor; and who could not. These questions were resolved into naturalized hierarchies of race, language, culture, and gender and through thinly disguised notions about national belonging. Such core values as "democracy," "equality," "freedom," and "justice" were evoked on behalf of "all" yet implemented only on behalf of "some."

Patriotism in this context demanded unquestioning loyalty and presumed European superiority and the equation of might and right. This ideological framing of nation disallowed discussion about the structure of society and asserted an elusive notion of national identity evoked as needed to enlist complicity with the whims of those in power. The question of who belongs (and which entitlements their belonging implies) has vacillated between tangible notions of naturalization and citizenship, unambiguous birthrights, and an ambiguous notion that being "American" corresponds to a particular belief system.[5]

Ideas about belonging and inclusion were embedded in the Declaration of Independence and the early years of the U.S. nation, as described by William J. Wilson in 1860: "They the white people and they alone, find its boundaries too circumscribed for their greedy grasp. Possessing acres by the millions, yet they would elbow us and all others off of what we possess, to give them room for what they cannot occupy" (qtd. in Roediger 1998, 65). In his famous speech "What to the Slave Is Your Fourth of July?" Frederick Douglass puts the spotlight on the issue of whose perspective is assumed and whose does not matter ([1855] 1970, 349). In her discussion of the annual practice of "muster" (a time when armed whites terrorized the enslaved population in anticipation of revolts), Harriet Jacobs (1861) suggests that this institution served to unite whites across class lines (Roediger 1998, 336); the practice also defined the parameters of citizenship.

These examples of the centering and privileging of the European experience have been endemic, "not just a by-product of white supremacy but also

an imperative of racial domination" (Roediger 1998, 6). The new nation of the United States was built by using the labor of Africans, Chinese, and new immigrants and exploiting the land and natural resources of indigenous peoples and Mexican territories, simultaneously excluding most of these groups from citizenship and the benefits of "belonging." Immigrants from Europe in the nineteenth century were initially excluded but ultimately integrated into the expanding industrial economy where there was opportunity for upward mobility. Through this economic assignment, and the policies and programs of the early twentieth century that provided further opportunities and supports for upward mobility, such as the G.I. bill and Federal Housing Administration (FHA) loans, European immigrants and their descendants were enlisted in a pan-ethnic racial "club" and "became party to strategies of social closure that maintained others' exclusion" (Waldinger 2001, 20). National identification in the United States has always been inherently tied to racial status.

The initial emergence of the notion of European racial superiority corresponded to the appearance of capitalism more than six hundred years ago (Cox 1948, 322). While contact and interaction across geographically distinct populations occurred during earlier times, no evidence of racial prejudice exists even in the Hellenistic empire, which had extended farther into Africa than any other European empire (Cox 1948, 322). St. Clair Drake describes the sixteenth century as "a historic watershed in global relations between Black and white people" and states that neither racial slavery nor systemic white racism existed prior to this time, although color prejudice was present in some places (1987, xxiii). While interethnic interactions have a long history, in the past they did not necessarily reflect inevitable conflict, competition, or struggle (Smedley 1998, 690). Identities were constructed by a wide range of characteristics, including, but not limited to, place of birth, language, kinship, religion, or occupation. They were generally context-specific and malleable up to the seventeenth century (Smedley 1998, 691–692). Drake has found that until the seventeenth century, Blackness was not a stigma, nor was race essentialized in the way that it later came to be (Harrison 1998, 620–621).

With the emergence of capitalism, the colonial exploration of the globe, and the beginning of the slave trade between Africa and parts of the "new" world, racial notions were used to justify the subordination and exploitation of large numbers of people who formed a labor pool for building settlements and cultivating agriculture. During the earliest period in the development of capitalism, "the white man had no conception of himself as being capable of developing the superior culture of the world—the concept 'white man' had not yet its significant social definition—the Anglo-Saxon, the modern master race, was then not even in the picture" (Cox 1948, 327). Racial dynamics, however, quickly developed within the context of the expansion of capitalism and colonial settlements. This process initially took the form of a European center with Euro-dominated colonies. The link between national development under capitalism and white supremacy was forged at this time.

Ultimately, the British settler colony of North America evolved into the United States, which then became the new center of the economic and political world-system (Drake 1987). A vivid example of this process of racial development was the fateful Bacon's Rebellion in 1676 in Virginia, which established early boundaries distinguishing Africans, Europeans, and native peoples (Zinn 1995, 37–59). This event is generally portrayed solely as a response to common exploitation and oppression, as African and European bond-laborers rebelled to demand an end to servitude. However, another key component of this struggle was an orchestrated attempt by the dominant elites to drive a wedge between these groups and the native population. Any combination of these forces was a tremendous threat to the white planters, whose wealth was great compared to that of the general white population. Poor Europeans had much more in common with enslaved Africans, and a potential alliance could have been disastrous for those in power: "In the early years of slavery, especially, before racism as a way of thinking was firmly ingrained, while white indentured servants were often treated as badly as Black slaves, there was a possibility of cooperation" (Zinn 1995, 37). The plantation bourgeoisie responded to the threat of coalition by offering European laborers a variety of previously denied benefits, such as amnesty for those who rebelled; corn, cash, and muskets for those finishing their servitude; the right to bear arms; and the opportunity to join slave patrol militias and receive monetary awards: "They constituted the police patrol who could ride with planters, and now and then exercise unlimited force upon recalcitrant or runaway slaves; and then, too there was always a chance that they themselves might also become planters by saving money, by investment, by the power of good luck; the only heaven that attracted them was the life of the great Southern planter" (Du Bois [1936] 1979, 27). This may be viewed as the nation's first "affirmative action" policy (Harrison 1998, 621).

These actions were taken to quell this potentially dangerous alliance and as a means for control. Racism on the part of poor whites became a practical matter (Zinn 1995, 56). The explicit use of race and white supremacy was implemented as a tool to divide and conquer and framed the development of nation from the very beginning. Prior to this period, there was little advantage and therefore little motivation for poor whites to ally themselves with the ruling powers. At this time, though, they were accorded "social, psychological and political advantages" calculated to alienate them from their fellow African bondsmen (Du Bois [1936] 1979, 700; Morgan 1975, 331–333, 344).

Racism was implemented as a means of control to establish and then maintain the structure of social organization in the "new" world. Racial domination became encoded in the process of nation-state building for the United States, as "Blacks were sold out to encourage white unity and nationalist loyalty to the state" (Marx 1998, 267). Slavery, therefore, played a critical role in providing a justification for the unification of whites racially as a nation (Marx 1998, 267), a pattern that continues to influence national identity, notions of whiteness, and formulations of race in society today. Whites were told that their whiteness

rendered them "superior" and that to maintain this status they needed to place their allegiances with those in power who controlled the resources and could divvy up benefits.

"During America's colonial era the ideal of white identity was male, English, Protestant, and privileged. Over time this ideal evolved into free, white, male, Christian, propertied and franchised. These characteristics developed into a norm that subsequently became synonymous with American" (Davis 2005, 155, citing Babb 1998). This identity was also intertwined with notions of freedom, thereby reinforcing the relationship between whiteness and Americanness: "There were perfectly strategic reasons to allow the identity of American to evolve in opposition to Blackness—exploitation, appropriation, and subordination of Blacks and Black labor" (155).

While it particularly applied as a Black-white polarization, this ideological formulation of race was also flexible. A stigma of racial inferiority could be invoked as needed to maintain divisions and enforce a social hierarchy. For example, during the mid–nineteenth century, Chinese workers were used as the primary labor force in building California's railroads. Their subsequent brutalization, subjugation, and exclusion were framed overwhelmingly in racial terms (Smedley 1993, 268). This stigma was similarly applied to native and Mexican peoples who were characterized as savages unfit to own and govern their land "coincidentally" at the time that those lands were desired by the wealthy elite. The "Trail of Tears" and the annexation of one-third of Mexican land are brutal testaments to this history of internal colonization, land appropriation, and genocide.

Throughout the eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries, the formation and consolidation of working-class whiteness (Roediger [1991] 1999, 14) and "American" identity were founded not just on economic exploitation but also on racial folklore (Du Bois 1970). Du Bois describes this dynamic eloquently:

> It must be remembered that the white group of laborers, while they received a low wage, were compensated in part by a sort of public and psychological wage. They were given public deference and titles of courtesy because they were white. They were admitted freely with all classes of white people to public functions, public parks, and the best schools. The police were drawn from their ranks, and the courts, dependent upon their votes, treated them with such leniency as to encourage lawlessness. Their vote selected public officials and while this had small effect upon the economic situation, it had great effect upon their personal treatment and the deference shown them. (1979, 700–701)

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, various theoretical trends emerged in the social and biological sciences to further justify this ordering of the world: "These models created a new form of social identity as the concept of 'race' developed as a way to rationalize the conquest and brutal treat-

ment of native populations and the institution of slavery" (Smedley 1998, 697). Another dimension was the emergence of "American English" during the early part of the nineteenth century: "When the new nation formed, British culture was still dominant, and it was not yet clear what it meant to be American. [Noah] Webster thought it was vital to shake off 'foreign manners' and build an independent national culture. . . . Webster's political purpose in writing his dictionaries was promoting national unity. . . . He believed that a 'federal language' could be a 'band of national union'" (A. Cohen 2006). Certainly, this viewpoint played a significant role in the much later emergence of the "English-only" movement and the depiction of those speaking languages other than English as less "American" and therefore unworthy.

By the mid–nineteenth century, this arbitrary ranking of peoples and racial ideology had spread around much of the world (Smedley 1998, 695), translating directly into emerging notions of who was "American." A vivid example of this phenomenon was the 1903 World's Fair, where being "American" and being "white" were explicitly viewed as superior to coming from the colonized world of those considered lesser beings, such as Filipinos and Africans.[6]

The end of the nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth century were marked by two significant U.S. Supreme Court decisions concerning the Fourteenth Amendment,[7] signifying important shifts in the racial order within the United States (Baker 1998, 2). In 1896, *Plessey v. Ferguson* codified the practice of "separate but equal," and in 1954, the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling overturned it: "The social context from which turn-of-the-century constructs of race emerged—industrialization, poll taxes, public lynching, unsafe working conditions, and Jim Crow segregation—at the same time gave rise to a professional anthropology that espoused racial inferiority and, as a consequence, supported and validated the status quo" (Baker 1998, 3). Much of this framing rooted in white-supremacist terms also applied to other scholarly disciplines and state policy as well. The legitimacy of the racial order was thereby validated and inscribed in "science" and social practices that reinforced the concepts of race, hierarchy, and nation.

The turn of the twentieth century marked a period of contestation about who was to be designated "white," as a huge influx of immigrants from Europe and other parts of the globe tested the boundaries of citizenry and racial identity. Paralleling the pace of immigration at the end of the nineteenth century, the first decade of the twentieth century witnessed the largest number of immigrants (8.8 million) admitted into the United States (Kraly and Miyares 2001, 47). The vast majority (92 percent) of these people originated from Europe.[8] At issue was the question of how they would be integrated and racially designated in U.S. society. The nation's expanding industries needed labor; mass immigration made cheap labor easily available.

Immigrants were exploited but also "used as an instrument for more effective exploitation of others, whether native or immigrant. For this reason, im-

migrant workers were sometimes compelled to put aside their ethnic loyalties" (Steinberg 2001, 38). African, Asian, and Mexican workers were used as low-paid labor for the least skilled jobs and sectors and established the infrastructure for industrialization and modernization. European immigrants worked primarily within the modern industrial sector, which strategically provided them with opportunities for upward mobility (Blauner 1972, 62). This reality challenges the popular notion that "all Americans 'start at the bottom'" and work their way up the ladder, because the racial labor principle designated a different bottom for different groups (62–63). The slogan "nation of immigrants" therefore describes most predominantly the European experience, despite the fact that Jews, Italians, and Irish were not fully accepted as whites.

During this period, Du Bois significantly contributed to a paradigm shift in the social sciences toward recognition of the connection between race and the concept of culture, united in an understanding of economics and politics (Baker 1998, 107–110). He describes race as a social relationship, integral to capitalism, and the ultimate paradox of democracy constructed to reinforce and reproduce patterns of systemic inequality (Du Bois [1903] 1986, 372): "Back of the problem of race and color, lies a greater problem which both obscures and implements it: and that is the fact that so many civilized persons are willing to live in comfort even if the price of this is poverty, ignorance and disease of the majority of their fellowmen: That to maintain this privilege men have waged war until today" (Du Bois [1953] 1961, xiv). In this way, race and nation have been intrinsically linked.

During the first half of the twentieth century, an ethnicity-based paradigm was often used to understand the social relations in the United States emerging as an extension of challenges made to biologistic and social Darwinist conceptions of race (Omi and Winant 1994, 12). Ethnicity was offered as a description of group formation that focused on culture and descent rather than biology and on the process of migration and the adaptation of immigrants in the United States. In 1913, Robert Park of the University of Chicago, a leading theorist within this group, asserted that by their second generation, Poles, Lithuanians, and Norwegians were indistinguishable from native-born Americans (Schaefer 1995, 111). Park projected that ethnicity would dissolve as immigrants integrated into society, and he identified a pattern of integration into U.S. society that he labeled the "race relations cycle," which involved stages of contact, accommodation, assimilation, and amalgamation achieved through intermarriage (Steinberg 2001, 47). Park considered all modern nationalities to be a mixture of several groups. According to this idea, ethnicity was expected to disappear into a new American culture.

This period marked a new stage in the consolidation of whiteness as a racialized category such that European Americans were transformed into a pan-ethnicity that represented the distancing of individuals from their national origins, heritages, and languages and labeled them as "white" (Alba 1990, 312). Hence, too, white classification was always clearly linked to national identity.