

Global white ignorance

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In a 2007 essay, “White Ignorance” (Mills 2007), I set out to map a non-knowing grounded specifically in white racial privilege. I was trying to contribute to the new “social epistemology” in philosophy by introducing the issues of race, white racism, and white racial domination into the debate. These factors have been crucial to the distortion of social cognition over the past few hundred years (i.e., modernity), but have been little discussed in philosophy in general and in epistemology in particular.¹ “White ignorance” was meant to denote an ignorance among whites—an absence of belief, a false belief, a set of false beliefs, a pervasively deforming outlook—that was not contingent but causally linked to their whiteness. “Whiteness” here, of course, has no biological connotations, but is being used in the sense that has become standard within critical whiteness studies, to refer to *people socially categorized as white* within a racialized social system (Painter 2010; Allen 2012). So I am presupposing throughout a social constructionist analysis, for which race is real but a social rather than natural kind (Haslanger 2012).

My discussion in the essay was focused mainly on the United States, but I intended the application of the concept to be much broader. Insofar as the modern world has been created by European colonialism and imperialism, and insofar as racist assumptions/frameworks/norms were central to the theories justifying white Western conquest and domination of that world, we would expect white ignorance to be global (Mills 1997). Modernity is supposed to be illuminated by the Enlightenment, but as numerous books on the Enlightenment have pointed out in recent decades, it was an enterprise cognitively compromised from the start. In the judgment of Dorinda Outram (2005, p. 135): “[The] contradiction between support for supposedly universal rights, and the actual exclusion of large numbers of human beings from the enjoyment of those rights, is central to, and characteristic of Enlightenment thought.” The political economy of racial domination required a corresponding cognitive economy that would systematically darken the light of factual and normative inquiry. This chapter sets out—necessarily very schematically, considering our limited space, but as a possible stimulus for further research on the usefulness of the concept—some of the key features of a white ignorance conceived of as global.

Global white ignorance: Space, time, content

First, some clarificatory points. Obviously white ignorance is not best theorized as an aggregate of individual mistaken white beliefs (though a sampling of such beliefs can be dramatically

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enlightening for bringing home the extent of white miscognition). Rather, it should be seen as a particular optic, a prism of perception and interpretation, a worldview—in the phrase of American sociologist Joe Feagin (2010, p. ix), a “white racial frame” which incorporates multiple elements into a “holistic and gestalt . . . racial construction of reality.”

Depending on one’s theoretical sympathies, this framing could be conceptualized in the old-fashioned language of Marxism’s claims about “ideology,” more recent Foucauldian “discourses,” Bourdieu’s “habitus,” or Anglo-American analytic philosophy’s apparatus (some of it derived from cognitive psychology) of motivated irrationality, self-deception, implicit bias, hot and cold cognitive distortion, and so forth. But whatever the overarching theoretical scaffold, “whiteness” needs to be playing an appropriate causal role in explaining the generation of mistaken cognitions; it cannot be merely a matter of ignorance among people who are white. The possible causal factors are multiple (and not at all necessarily mutually exclusive): socialization into a racist belief-set or a Eurocentric normative starting-point, inherited culture and tradition, inculcated social amnesia, typically skewed inferential pattern, deficient conceptual apparatus, material group interest, or epistemically disadvantaged social-structural location. But “whiteness” must be operative in the right way in producing, at least tendentially, a particular cognitive orientation to the world, an aprioristic inclination to get certain kinds of things wrong. So the claim is that, absent “whiteness” in one or more of the foregoing senses, or (for subordinated populations of color) absent the socialization into a white worldview,² the attainment of veridical cognitions on the particular matter at hand would be, if not certain, at least far more likely.

However, to speak of a “global” white ignorance should not be taken to imply that it is uniform either in space or over time. The European population spreads all over the world as a result of colonialism and conquest, but their social categorization as white is not coextensive with this process. Controversy exists as to when race enters the world as a concept and a social reality,³ and also indeterminacy about when “whiteness” emerges as a generally accepted racial social identity. In addition, the boundaries of whiteness will not always be drawn in the same way in different countries, nor does the designation of whiteness rule out internal “racial” heterogeneities and hierarchies within the white population itself. At one time, different European races would have been taken to exist—Teutons/Nordics, Alpines, Mediterraneans—which are no longer recognized as such today (Painter 2010, Chapter 15). Some literature has suggested that “inferior” Europeans were not really “white” at all, whether in their home European country or in emigrant destinations like the United States, while other theorists have replied that a hierarchy of “superior” and “inferior” white races is being mistaken for a hierarchy of whites and nonwhites (Ignatiev 1995; Guglielmo 2004).

So various issues are contested and unresolved. Scholarship in the field so far has been dominated by the U.S. experience, with Australia a respectable second (Carey and McLisky 2009). But as (one hopes) critical whiteness studies becomes globally established, presumably more detailed and country-specific accounts will become available that will track the geographical divergences in the boundaries both between whiteness and nonwhiteness and within local whitenesses. Steve Garner’s (2007) introduction to the subject, for example, looks at whiteness in the Caribbean and Latin America as well as the United Kingdom. Nonetheless, these uncertainties and lacunae should not be taken to threaten the central claim that over the past few hundred years whites were (and are) in general privileged across the planet, originally saw themselves as the superior race, and that this foundational miscognition necessarily ramified throughout their other perceptions, conceptions, and theorizations, both descriptive and normative, scholarly and popular. Hence the justification for the affirmation of a global white ignorance.

But if there is a periodization and spatialization of whiteness, there also needs to be a periodization and spatialization of ignorance. The nature of white ignorance—what whites

characteristically get wrong—changes over time and place. A macro-periodization roughly accurate for the planet as a whole would distinguish the period of several hundred years when racist beliefs (and their implications) were generally taken for granted among the white population from the more recent period (with the classic dividing-line being World War II, the Holocaust, and postwar decolonization) when such beliefs became generally less permissible, at least in Western nations. (This cautionary note is necessary because in many other white-dominated nations today, e.g., in Latin America, unreformed racism among the majority of whites is still alive and well.⁴) In the heyday of white racism and formal European domination of the planet, global white ignorance took the form of the acceptance of the inferiority (whether grounded in theological, cultural, or biological causes, or some combination thereof) of people of color, the normative legitimacy of white rule (colonialism and imperialism; indigenous expropriation, displacement, and killing; racial slavery), and the corollary racialized assumptions and frameworks, blindnesses and indifferences, necessary to render such domination consistent with both asserted fact and proclaimed moral principle. Today by contrast global white ignorance is more likely to take the form of at least a nominal, and sometimes even genuine, acceptance of nonwhite equality (conceived of in biological terms), coupled with prejudicial views along other axes, such as cultural ones, and broadly deracialized conceptions of social causality.

It is not, of course, that old-fashioned racism has ever gone away. Barack Obama's 2008 election, hailed at the time and for some time afterwards as definitive proof of the new "post-racial" United States, has instead brought out from the underground a level of oppositional viciousness that has forced even mainstream commentators to concede its racial character. (In February 2014, the mixed-race President of the United States was referred to as a "subhuman mongrel" by Ted Nugent, former rock star, while campaigning for a Republican candidate for governor of Texas.) And even apart from individual blog rantings and the publications of unreconstructed racist fringe groups in Western nations (white-supremacist, Klan, Nazi, skinhead), "scientific" racism continues to have its defenders in respectable quarters. Consider, for example, the bestseller success of *The Bell Curve* (Herrnstein and Murray 1994), or Nobel Laureate James Watson's matter-of-fact 2007 statement that Africans are indeed intellectually inferior to whites (CNN.com/technology 2007).

But such outbursts and declarations are not the norm. In general whites expressing racial sentiments today use a facially neutral language which has to be semantically "decoded," "cultural" racism taking the place of old-fashioned biological racism.⁵ Focusing on the United States, but I suggest with broader applicability, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2014) describes what he calls "color-blind racism," "racism without racists," in which whites deny any racism, declare their support of non-discriminatory liberal norms and ideals, but simultaneously decry the unwillingness to work, preference for living on welfare, culture of poverty, and/or refusal to assimilate of particular nonwhite groups. The real heart of white ignorance today, whether accompanied by such prejudicial characterizations or not, is the refusal to recognize how the legacy of the past, as well as ongoing practices in the present, continues to handicap people of color now granted nominal juridical and social equality. If classic white ignorance justified white advantage as the legitimate entitlements of the superior race, contemporary white ignorance generally either denies such advantage altogether or attributes it to differential white effort. That a system of illicit racial empowerment and disablement inherited from the past may still be at work, reproducing unfair privilege and handicap at different racial poles through a wide variety of interlocking societal mechanisms, is what is refused credence. To the (limited) extent that racism is still recognized as a social factor, it is individualized and personalized. Thus structural changes to achieve racial justice by correcting this legacy are not required.

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Racial erasure

The common element, then, is what could be called racial erasure: the retrospective whitening-out, the whitewashing, of the racial past in order to construct an alternative narrative that severs the present from any legacy of racial domination. Racism as idea and ideology, racism as national and global system, racial atrocity and racial exploitation, are collectively denied or at least causally minimized. Not merely in terms of factual account, but conceptual framework, a fanciful history is constructed whose upshot is the denial or downplaying of the extent of the violence and subordination of the previous epoch of formal Euro-domination, its structural and long-term shaping of systemic white advantage, and an accompanying white “innocence” about the role of racial exploitation in making the world what it is today, particularly its transcontinental distribution of “Northern” wealth and “Southern” poverty, but also its national racial patterns of white-over-nonwhite privileging. If the past few hundred years have been marked by the hegemony of white racist ideology and by global white domination with enduring effects, then the shape of the world needs reconsideration and remaking. A radical rethinking of inherited narratives and frameworks, and the prescription of corresponding measures of corrective racial justice—whether milder measures like affirmative action or more drastic policies like reparations—would seem to be called for. But if they have not, then the current shape of the world can be otherwise explained, and no such dramatic reconceptualization, no such policies of social reconstruction and moral rectification, are necessary.

Erasing white racism as the central modern ideology

To begin with, the centrality to Western thought of racism as an ideology—a system of thought itself—is denied. This erasure of the intellectual past was not the work of uninformed laypersons with a hazy sense of history; it was spearheaded by intellectual elites (just as racist theory had been). Writing two decades ago, Saul Dubow (1995, pp. 1–2) begins his book on scientific racism by observing that:

A curious form of collective amnesia has, until quite recently, obscured the centrality of intellectual racism in Western thought during the early part of the twentieth century. . . . There were, of course, always people who questioned the truth of [white] race superiority, but these critics were compelled to argue within the established terms of what amounted to a dominant racial consensus. . . . [T]he horrors perpetrated by Nazism have also had the effect of disguising the extent to which similar racial ideas were current in European and American thought in the pre-war generation.

Similarly, Frank Furedi (1998, pp. 1, 9) points out that “Assumptions about the superiority of the white races were rarely contested in Europe or the United States. The domination of the world by the West was seen as proof of white racial superiority. . . . [As late as the 1930s] the principle of racial equality had few intellectual defenders.” Only after World War II would this change.

What accounts for what Furedi calls this “volte-face”? The answer is Nazism, the Holocaust, and the postwar emergence as global players of independent nations of color, the (then) Third World caught up in the Cold War struggle between First and Second Worlds for their allegiance. In such a world, racism as official Western norm was no longer politic. Thus, in Léon Poliakov’s (1974, p. 5) judgment, the “collective amnesia” cited by Dubow was not at all contingent, but engineered. Poliakov argues that in the postwar period, embarrassed by the death

camps, Western intellectuals undertook a sanitization of the record in order to mask the simple truth that Hitler's ideas were built on a long tradition of racial thinking central to Western theory: "A vast chapter of western thought is thus made to disappear by sleight of hand, and this conjuring trick corresponds, on the psychological or psycho-historical level, to the collective suppression of troubling memories and embarrassing truths." The framing of racism as a deviation from the Western norm, the depiction of Nazism as an unprecedented break with Western morality and humanism, inverted the historical reality. Racism *had been* the norm. Racism was the white "common sense" of the age.

Moreover—a further crucial postwar misrepresentation—racism was not to be conceptualized and psychologized as individual "prejudice." Rather, as George Mosse (1985, pp. ix, 231) insisted in his *Toward the Final Solution*, "[racism] was, rather, a fully blown system of thought, an ideology like Conservatism, Liberalism, or Socialism, with its own peculiar structure and mode of discourse," indeed "the most widespread ideology of the time." A case could be made that racism was the meta-ideology that framed other ideologies, in the sense that its assumptions were in broad outline shared among political theorists with seemingly starkly divergent views (conservative, liberal, socialist).

In recent decades, a wave of revisionist scholarship has begun to reconstruct this occluded and denied past of white racial ideology and global domination. Oddly, postcolonial theory itself has not been as central to this undertaking as one would have expected. Alfred López (2005, p. 3) points out that—whether because of its "affinity for linguistic and literary, as opposed to sociological, critique"—"postcolonial studies has generally shied away from explicit discussion of race." More fruitful resources have been political theory, "critical" IR (international relations), the new imperial history, and that small body of scholars in philosophy working on race. From different disciplinary angles, they have sought to expose the complicity of most of the leading Western thinkers, political theorists, and philosophers of the age with racism and Euro-domination.

In political theory, what has come to be called the "imperial turn" has, for the last two decades or so, been charting the relationship between domestic and international political theory. A reconceptualization is under way that locates liberalism as the ideology not merely of (western) Europe but of Empire, with a corresponding shaping of its key terms (Mehta 1999; Pitts 2005; Levy and Young 2011; Losurdo 2011; Hobson 2012). It is no longer as shocking and heretical as it once would have been to declare that most of the leading thinkers of Western modernity—Locke, Hume, Voltaire, Kant, Jefferson, Hegel, Mill, de Tocqueville, and others—had racist views about people of color (Eze 1997; Valls 2005). Yet in mainstream white philosophy there is still resistance to the case that, for example, its leading ethicist, Immanuel Kant, has a far better claim to being the "father of modern racism" than the Comte de Gobineau (Bernasconi 2001).

But these intramural battles aside, the really interesting question now becomes what the implications are for the received view of liberalism. If liberalism—the most important ideology of Western modernity—has, in its dominant incarnations,⁶ been a *racist* ideology—a *Herrenvolk* ideology of white rule—then orthodox narratives of its evolution and its "principled" opposition to ascriptive social hierarchy (as in John Locke's famous critique of Sir Robert Filmer) are fundamentally misleading. Hegemonic liberalism was only ever opposed to intra-white *class* ascriptive hierarchy, not *racial* ascriptive hierarchy (nor, of course, intra-white hierarchies of gender). Thus the overcoming of past and present white ignorance would require a systematic excavation of the shaping by racial ideology and racial liberalism of both past theory (the social sciences and humanities; the relevant natural sciences, such as biology and physical anthropology) and practice (law, public policy, government), and an uncompromising investigation of

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what the purging of its legacy in the contemporary world would require of us, both nationally and internationally.

Denying white supremacy as a global system

Correspondingly white racism needs to be seen not merely in ideational terms, but as a system of domination—white supremacy—which, by the early twentieth century, after the partitioning of Africa, becomes global. Domenico Losurdo (2011, p. 227) emphasizes that “master-race democracy . . . characterized the overall relations between the West and the colonial world, whether internal or external.” That the European empires controlled most of the planet cannot itself, of course, be denied. But in keeping with the postwar sanitization of the past, an acknowledgment that this domination was *racial* and itself constitutive of a transnational *political* system became impermissible. What had once been taken for granted became a tabooed subject.

In a recent important contribution toward a social epistemology more sensitive than the mainstream literature to the realities of social oppression, Miranda Fricker (2007, p. 1) demarcates “testimonial” and “hermeneutical” injustice as two “distinctively epistemic” forms of injustice. Testimonial injustice involves the prejudicial derogation of an epistemic agent’s credibility, hermeneutical injustice the absence (because of social domination) of collective interpretive resources to make sense of some section of the world. Applying these concepts to racial domination, we could say that white ignorance is achieved and perpetuated through both varieties working in tandem: a general skepticism about nonwhite cognition and an exclusion from accepted discourse of nonwhite categories and frameworks of analysis. Thus a double handicap will result—people of color will be denied credibility and the alternative viewpoints that could be developed from taking their perspective seriously will be rejected as a priori wrong.

More than a century ago, W. E. B. Du Bois (1996, p. 13) famously indicted the global “color-line” separating “lighter” and “darker” races of men, a demarcation simultaneously normative, political, and economic. But it is only in the last few years that a new body of “critical” perspectives on empire and “critical” IR has begun to catch up with this insight—the perspective of a person of color involved in the transnational anti-racist movements of his time. Historians Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds pay tribute to Du Bois in their book title, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men’s Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality* (2008), as do IR theorists Alexander Anievas, Nivi Manchanda, and Robbie Shilliam in their edited collection, *Race and Racism in International Relations: Confronting the Global Color Line* (2014).

From the perspective of mainstream IR, however, these categories are heretical. The official story of IR recounts a raceless post-World War I “virgin birth at Versailles” narrative, and race makes virtually no appearance in journal articles and books in the field. Yet it was at that same conference that the six “Anglo-Saxon” nations (Britain, Canada, the United States, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand) vetoed the Japanese proposal to introduce a racial equality clause into the League of Nations’ Covenant, thereby, so to speak, formally ratifying the normative racial dichotomization in the planet’s population already evident in the fact of imperial and colonial rule (Lake and Reynolds 2008, Chapter 12). And in any case, as various critical IR theorists have pointed out, international relations theory in the modern period clearly dates back much earlier, in effect to the bloody birth of Empire.

Indeed, the successful whitewashing of this past is manifest, as emphasized at the start, not merely in particular proscribed belief-sets but in the way competing conceptual frameworks and their related categories now appear odd, perhaps even bizarre, to us. It is hard for us even to grasp them because of the deep cognitive naturalization of Eurocentrism and whiteness in our outlook. The very space and time of the polity—what could be more fundamental?—are being

challenged insofar as the nation-state seems the “natural” political unit, located in a sequential temporality of antiquity/medievalism/modernity, with modernity marking the advent of moral egalitarianism in the West. Thus anthropologist Jack Goody (2006) speaks of the “theft of history,” and the imposition of a Eurocentric periodization of world events that has become so foundational to our perceptions that we can no longer see its contingency and arbitrariness. But alternative categorizations of both space and time are possible that would bring to cognitive salience the existence of larger supra-national political entities of domination and subordination, which are normatively characterized by the *inequality* of most of the world’s population under “modern” Western racial rule.

For white supremacy was global, not merely in the aggregative sense of an assembly of white-dominated polities, but to a significant extent in transnational patterns of cooperation, international legislation, common circulating racist ideologies, and norms of public policy (slave codes, indigenous expropriation, colonial governance) in which white rulers in different nations learned from each other. White popular consciousness was likewise shaped by everyday cultures of imperialism, such as national literatures underwritten by unquestioned white entitlement, whether the American Western that pits courageous white settlers against hostile red fauna, or the imperial adventure novel in which intrepid British and French explorers risk their lives in darkest Africa and Asia. So even when there was inter-white conflict, it took place within a framework of the assumed legitimacy of white rule, and a related conviction that nonwhite rebellion in any of the discrete white systems was a threat to *all* of them. David Brion Davis (2007, pp. 7, 168) points out that the 1791–1804 Haitian Revolution “hovered like a weapon of mass destruction in the minds of slaveholders as late as the American Civil War”: “The blacks turned the entire white cosmos upside down when they forced the French to evacuate Saint-Domingue in late 1803.” Similarly, a century later, the 1905 Japanese defeat of Russia would send tremors through the transcontinental racial system. Thomas Borstelmann (2001) suggests that one could think of the decolonial movement (and, arguably, the earlier abolitionist movement) as a global civil rights struggle to establish the nonwhite equality denied—contra the orthodox narrative—with the advent of modernity.

Whitewashing white atrocity, eliminating nonwhite contribution

Finally, a reconstructed and racially sanitized past is crucial for the pre-emptive blocking of the question of the dependence of current white wealth and privilege, both nationally and globally, on the historic racial exploitation of the labor, land, and techno-cultural contributions of people of color.

The unquestioning adherence to Feagin’s “white racial frame” has been so complete until the last few decades that as recently as 1975, American historian Francis Jennings’s book title *The Invasion of America* could still carry an electric shock. Not a science fiction “parallel worlds” scenario (where, say, the Nazis win World War II), it performs the “simple”—but actually cognitively revolutionary—feat of telling the U.S. narrative from the Native American perspective, for whom, of course, invasion is precisely what European settlement actually was. Similarly, Australian historian Henry Reynolds cites a rare 1831 white “correspondent” who observes of Native Australians that “they look upon us as enemies—as invaders—as their oppressors and persecutors—they resist our invasion. . . . What we call their crime is what in a white man we should call patriotism” (Reynolds 2013, p. 12).

But such cognitive inversions were too thoroughly incompatible with the national white Australian story to be admissible; instead, bloodshed was either justified or obfuscated in Social Darwinist fantasies of “dying races”: “The iron laws of evolution had predetermined their

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[Native Australians'] fate and there was little anyone could do about it." By the early twentieth century, with aboriginal resistance over, the Aborigines were simply written out of official histories: "The national narrative became one of a hard and heroic fight against nature itself rather than one of ruthless spoliation and dispossession" (Reynolds 2013, p. 16). Only in the 1960s did critics begin to indict the "great Australian silence" on this issue, initiating a revisionist historiography (still resisted today by many white Australians) which began to face up to the ubiquitous violence and massacres of the frontier wars against native peoples. Likewise, Argentinians, citizens of the "whitest" country in Latin America, are not educated about the explanation for this whiteness, which is the genocide of the Amerindian population in a series of brutal wars, and the deliberate sending of Afro-Argentines to the frontline as cannon fodder in the country's various late-nineteenth-century conflicts with its neighbors.

In the case of the European powers—as against the white settler states—it is the violence of extra-continental colonial conquest and colonial rule that is disavowed. So pervasive is this phenomenon that it has now actually been given a name: "postcolonial forgetting" (Aldrich 2011, p. 334). Schoolchildren in Belgium do not learn that in the late nineteenth/early twentieth centuries King Leopold II presided over the deaths of ten million people in the Belgian Congo (Hochschild 1999). Italians are largely ignorant of their country's colonial record, especially its atrocities in Libya, Eritrea, and Ethiopia, and its use of mustard gas in the 1920s–1930s wars, in violation of the Geneva Protocol to the Hague Conventions (Ben-Ghiat and Fuller 2005). Far from admitting the tortures and massacres of the Algerian War (Lazreg 2008), the French Government actually passed legislation in 2005 to make it mandatory for teachers to emphasize the "positive role" of French colonial rule, especially in North Africa, though this was later repealed in response to protest. Germans know about the Holocaust, of course, given the importance of postwar de-Nazification (however incomplete in practice), but far fewer are aware of the earlier 1904 *Vernichtungsbefehl* of General von Trotha in German Southwest Africa (now Namibia), and the connections some have drawn between genocidal colonial policy against the Herero and Nama peoples and later Nazi exterminism (Langbehn and Salama 2011).

In his book on the European conquest of what he (somewhat unfortunately) calls "tribal" societies, Mark Cocker (1998, p. 23) observes that in doing his research, nowhere "could [he] locate the raw data to assemble the statistics of mass death inflicted by European invasion upon its tribal subjects." These are numbers that whites simply do not want to know, because unlike the six million Jewish deaths of a defeated and discredited Third Reich that only lasted twelve years, they constitute the unacknowledged necropolis of the Euro-Reich still in existence today, hundreds of years later. Whether through indigenous land expropriation, African slavery, or colonial pillage, "tribal society made a contribution to the wealth of European nations which is of incalculable magnitude" (Cocker 1998, p. 19).

Moreover, it is not merely the centrality of racial exploitation and genocide to the making of the modern world and its racialized configurations of wealth and poverty that is denied, but the intellectual achievements of people of color in general. Dick Teresi (2002, p. 15) starts his book on non-Western science with the admirably frank, but still remarkable, declaration: "I began to write with the purpose of showing that the pursuit of evidence of nonwhite science is a futile endeavor." He was chastened to discover how wrong he was, but the interesting question is why a major American science writer should have had such presuppositions in the first place, and what it says about his education and the broader culture. The pre-Columbian Americas were inhabited by many technologically sophisticated urban civilizations, yet so thoroughly extinguished were they by conquest, disease—and apologist colonial history—that their accomplishments are only now, hundreds of years later, being belatedly recognized and

acknowledged by their European conquerors (Mann 2006). Jennings (1976) and Reynolds (2013) both describe how the landscapes of their respective nations, the United States and Australia, were characterized by white settler ideology (and innumerable movies, at least in the U.S.) as “virgin” territories, unhumanized, when in fact they were the result of generations of careful land use and management, so that the Anglo “settlers” were actually walking (literally) in the footsteps of indigenous trail-blazers. Nor is there any general recognition of the contribution that Amerindian agriculture has made to the world supply of staples, such as the globally disseminated potato.

In his *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilisation*, John M. Hobson (2004, pp. 5, 11), great-grandson of the famous J. A. Hobson, makes a case for the crucial role of Islamic, African, and Chinese resources (“technologies, institutions and ideas”) for a British Industrial Revolution standardly represented as autarkically generated, in keeping with the general picture of a Europe falsely “seen as autonomous or self-constituting.” In sum, by the official story Europe and the Euro-implemented states have created themselves, owing nothing to others. Hobson (2004, p. 322) ends his book with a call, in the name of “global humanity,” “[to rediscover] our global-collective past,” thereby “[making] possible a better future for all.” Achieving a new world will require an admission of the white lies that have been central to the making of our current unjust and unhappy planet. Global justice demands, as a necessary prerequisite, the ending of global white ignorance.

Notes

- 1 See, for example, the complete non-discussion of race in Goldman and Whitcomb (2011).
- 2 To the extent that, in particular time periods and societies, whites have cognitive hegemony over people of color, at least some aspects of white ignorance will be shared by nonwhites, so that one would need to distinguish the generative from ascriptive senses of the “whiteness” in white ignorance—how it came about as against who actually has the beliefs.
- 3 Contrast for example the periodization of Fredrickson (2002) (race and racism as modern) with the periodization of Isaac (2004) (race and racism as going back to the ancient world).
- 4 See Andrews (2004, pp. 178–80): “The survival into present-day Latin America of anti-black stereotypes and prejudices dating from the colonial period and slavery has been amply documented in survey research throughout the region . . . In dealing with employment agencies, many Latin American firms explicitly indicate that they will not accept nonwhite applicants for white-collar positions . . . [R]acial barriers, if not actively worsening in the postwar period, at the very least remained very much in place.”
- 5 However, the growing psychological literature on implicit bias has raised the possibility that biological racism may simply have descended to the subconscious level, and that large numbers of whites who sincerely proclaim and believe themselves to be free of old-fashioned biologicistic assumptions continue, unawares, to be affected by them.
- 6 I phrase it this way because some theorists, like Pitts (2005), argue that a racist “imperial liberalism” only becomes the norm after the start of the nineteenth century.

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