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Constructions of Racial Savagery in Early Twentieth-Century US Narratives of White Civilization

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This article examines the constructions of Black "degeneracy" through which white Americans rationalized Jim Crow terror. Ruminations on African Americans' supposed downward trajectory, I argue, drew relational meaning from a range of colonial discourses. Claims that African Americans were deteriorating outside the bonds of enslavement were articulated within wider transnational imperialist discourses circulating in this period that imagined that the world's savage peoples were destined to recede in the march of civilization. Here, I examine white Americans' narratives of African American degeneration through two other imagined hemispheric encounters between white civilization and savagery. In the article's first half, I consider images of Haiti employed in cultural and political texts to signify the durability of innate Black savagery and the apocalyptic potential of Black freedom. In the second half, I consider discourses of Black degeneration in freedom alongside the genocidal construction of the "vanishing Indian." I focus on two memorial projects: the 1931 monument to the Faithful Slave erected in Harpers Ferry and the never-completed National American Indian Memorial, for which ground was broken in 1913 at Fort Wadsworth.

At the turn of the twentieth century, anti-Black racist terrorism in the form of lynching, pogroms, and forced expulsions formed a quotidian feature of the social landscape in the United States. White newspaper editors, novelists, scientists, social reformers, and politicians made pessimistic assessments that located the source of this violence as emanating from the racial proclivities and shortcomings of Black people themselves.[1] The problem was frequently

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[1] For a contemporaneous account of white Americans' shifting constructions of "the Negro Problem" to explain white violence see Frederick Douglass, *Why Is the Negro Lynched? Reprinted with Permission from the AME Church Review for Memorial Distribution, by a Few of His English Friends* (Bridgewater: John Whitby and Sons Ltd, 1895). For a contemporary analysis see Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2010). On violence during and after Reconstruction see Leon F. Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (London: Athlone

framed as the inability of a primitive race to adapt to the fast currents of white civilization. Social scientists martialed data on infant mortality, mental and physical disease, crime, promiscuity, and so on, to assert that African Americans, cast outside the protective care of slavery, were "lapsing, rapidly back to their ancestral state of savage life in Africa."[2] The statistician Frederick Hoffman declared in 1896 that the Black race was destined for a "downward course," having lost the "virtues and the moderate degree of economic efficiency developed under the regime of slavery." Their "low and anti-social condition" was produced by their own sexual immorality and lack of self-sufficiency. "Gradual extinction," he concluded, "is only a matter of time."[3] Hoffman's prediction of extinction as the inevitable outcome of innate "traits and tendencies" sat alongside active threats of extermination. Shortly after the Civil War, a writer in North Carolina warned that if formerly enslaved people were given political equality with former masters, it would spark a "spirit of exterminating violence toward the Black race," who would then become as rare as Indians or buffalo.[4]

As this threatening invocation of Native genocide illustrates, white Americans' analyses of the meaning of Black citizenship in the US, and their conjectures about the nature of the Black race, drew from other reference points in the multi-sited violence of racial capitalism. In this article, I will suggest that the white Americans' narratives of Black savagery within the nation become clearer if we consider them alongside other narratives of imagined confrontations with savagery external to it. To this end, I will contextualize discourses of African American degeneracy against racist narratives of Haiti, including those of paternalistic concern that emerged in the period of US invasion as well as enduring configurations of the Haitian Revolution as

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Press, 1980; first published 1979); George C. Rable, *But There Was No Peace: The Role of Violence in the Politics of Reconstruction* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984); Kidada E. Williams, *They Left Great Marks on Me: African American Testimonies of Racial Violence from Emancipation to World War I* (New York: New York University Press, 2012); Elliot Jaspin, *Buried in the Bitter Waters: The Hidden History of Racial Cleansing in America* (New York: Basic Books, 2007).

[2] John David Smith, *An Old Creed for the New South: Proslavery Ideology and Historiography, 1865–1918* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), 53.

[3] Frederick L. Hoffman, "The Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro," *Publications of the American Economic Association*, 11, 1–3 (1896), 328–29. For an excellent analysis of Hoffman's work see Chapter 2 in Muhammad's *Condemnation of Blackness*, 35–87. Other helpful work on the discourse of Black degeneration includes Felipe Smith, *American Body Politics: Race, Gender, and Black Literary Renaissance* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998); Martin Summers, "Suitable Care of the African When Afflicted with Insanity: Race, Madness, and Social Order in Comparative Perspective," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 84 (2010), 58–91; and Daryl Michael Scott, *Contempt and Pity: Social Policy and the Image of the Damaged Black Psyche, 1880–1996* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

[4] Rable, 23.

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a cataclysm of civilization-destroying Black savagery. In the second half of the article, I examine discourses of Black degeneration alongside those of the "vanishing Indian." Here I will focus on two memorial projects, the monument to the Faithful Slave erected in Harpers Ferry, Virgina in 1931, and the never-completed National American Indian Memorial, for which ground was broken in 1913 at Fort Wadsworth, New York. I argue that Native sovereignty was imagined as the primeval prehistory of US nationhood, with Indian death – savagery receding – its necessary condition, whereas Black sovereignty – savagery resurging – was imagined as a disastrous American anti-history. In each scenario, autonomous Black and Native life are relegated outside the bounds of modernity.

The discursive resonances I trace here, of course, emerged from intertwined historical shifts within and beyond US borders. While white intellectuals in the North calculated Black "regression" and white southerners unleashed convulsions of violence against African Americans, the federal government opened new conduits to appropriate Native lands and eradicate indigeneity.[5] As students of W. E. B. Du Bois have argued, the overthrow of Reconstruction, which culminated in the repressive new social order of Jim Crow, also ushered in a new era of imperialism and global violence. "The defeat of democracy in the U.S. South," Robin D. G. Kelley writes, "opened the door for the invasion of Cuba, the Philippines, and Haiti, as well as a consolidation of white supremacy, increased nativism, social Darwinism, and formal colonialism throughout Africa."[6]

These multiple struggles, and their longer histories, are imprinted in the claims about African Americans' moral, mental, and physical degeneracy considered here. They fit into a broader white-supremacist common sense used to explain the ongoing terror of "civilization" at the many front lines of racial

[5] On the interconnections of settler colonial dispossession and its interconnections with anti-Black repression in the Reconstruction era see Alaina E. Roberts, *"I've Been Here All the While": Black Freedom on Native Land* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021); Kevin Bruyneel, *Settler Memory: The Disavowal of Indigeneity and the Politics of Race in the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021), chapter 2. On the period more generally see Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (New York: Open Road Media, 2012); David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2020).

[6] Robin D. G. Kelly, "Labor against Empire: At Home and Abroad," in M. Marable, I. Ness, and J. Wilson, eds., *Race and Labor Matters in the New U.S. Economy* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 57–70, 59. See also Moon-ho Jung, "Black Reconstruction and Empire," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 112, 3 (2013), 465–71; Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2002); and, of course, W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America 1860–1880* (New York: The Free Press, 1992).

capitalism. A key figure within this common sense was the savage, a being defined by the inability to transcend and transform wilderness. Savage incapacity – for history, governance, industry, enterprise, ownership, statebuilding, and so on – provided a useful rationale for diverse projects of dispossession and exploitation. An essential characteristic of savagery was its imminent death. In the prevailing wisdom, the savage races were, as Patrick Brantlinger writes, "unable to speak the present and future tenses of history."[7] Among a diverse range of observers in the imperialist nations of the global North, it was held as a certainty that "savagery was vanishing of its own accord from the world of progress and light."[8] The "recession" of savages was construed both as the inevitable outcome of civilizational advancement, and as its sustaining condition.

This genocidal notion that the primitive races died out as white civilization flourished is plainly evident in US constructions of Native Americans and American nationhood. It is also at work in the discourses of African American degeneration. While Hoffman and other social scientists predicted "gradual extinction" at the turn of the twentieth century, overwhelmingly the "Negro problem," as its formulators understood it, was distinguished by its unfortunate permanence. Unlike the narratives of extinction directed at Indigenous peoples in settler states in North America and Oceania, African Americans were not understood to be conveniently vanishing. Rather than disintegrating in the sweep of "progress and light," in much early twentieth-century racist discourse, the Black population of the nation represented a stagnant pool of racial savagery threatening to erode the civilization in which it was unfortunately situated. In this regard, narratives of Black degeneracy bore resonance with discourses about other colonial contexts, for example South Africa and, as I will explore below, Haiti, in which unreceding savagery either obstructed or reversed the development of white civilization.

While in-depth historical analyses of US imperialism in Haiti and the genocidal relations between the nation and the Indigenous peoples it dispossessed are beyond the bounds of this article, I trace these discursive strands guided by

[7] Patrick Brantlinger, *Dark Vanishings: Discourse on the Extinction of Primitive Races, 1800–1930* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2003), 2–3. Such constructions of savagery were not the exclusive purview of white supremacists. Some Black and Native American actors sought to establish their own capacity for labor, culture, and civilization by differentiating it from the figure of the unproductive savage. See Roberts; Jane Ana Gordon and Keisha Lindsay, "Black on Red: Late-Nineteenth and Early-Twentieth-Century New World Black Interpretative Uses of Native American Political Experience," *Journal of Race, Ethnicity and Politics*, 42, 2 (2019), 324–51; and on the Caribbean context see Shona Jackson, *Creole Indigeneity: Between Myth and Nation in the Caribbean* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012). [8] Brantlinger, 2–3.

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the principle that, as US anti-Black racism did not emerge in isolation, our understandings of it are enriched by examining its cultural and material connections with other projects of domination with which it is entangled. A number of scholars have argued that as distinct but fundamentally interrelated modes of domination and extraction, settler colonialism and transatlantic slavery produced distinct but interrelated regimes of race.[9] Capturing this view and situating it within a global framing, Justin Leroy writes that "black racialization occurred in tandem with settler ideology and not merely adjacent to it"; the "dual logic of colonialism and racism" animated the struggle to establish and expand the US racial capitalist settler state to its current borders, and they also animated its imperial ventures across the globe. The discourses I consider here were underpinned by common logics, even as they were expressed through contrasting images and emotional registers. With their fixation on death and decay, these discourses illustrate Leroy's observation that, "for all their differences," settler ideology and anti-Black racism are both "violent justifications for extermination – of bodies, of sovereignty, of self-possession."[10] At the same time, these discourses of death also implicitly speak to the enduring threat posed to systems of extermination by those who survived them.

A SECOND SANTO DOMINGO: DISCOURSES OF BLACKNESS AND CIVILIZATION

Fantasies of Haiti as a site of violent civilizational undoing were frequently invoked by white Americans in their fabrications of African American degeneracy. Multivalent constructions of Haiti emerged in US public discourse across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, drawing relational meaning from other historical struggles. When Marines invaded Haiti in 1915, the beginning of an occupation that would last nearly two decades, US politicians, media, missionaries, and military viewed Haitians through the prism of anti-Black racism and their own nation's history of slavery, as well as the romantic narratives of the US frontier. Marines facing the resistance of Haitian Cacos, for example, likened themselves to "Indian fighters."[11] Prevailing colonial constructions of Africa as a land outside history were also particularly powerful as

[9] Patrick Wolfe, *Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race* (London: Verso, 2016); Ikyo Day, "Being or Nothingness: Indigeneity, AntiBlackness, and Settler Colonial Critique," *Critical Ethnic Studies*, 1, 2 (2015), 102–21; Robin D. G. Kelley, "The Rest of Us: Rethinking Settler and Native," *American Quarterly*, 69, 2 (2017), 267–76.

[10] Justin Leroy, "Black History in Occupied Territory: On the Entanglements of Slavery and Settler Colonialism," *Theory and Event*, 19, 4 (2016), muse.jhu.edu/article/633276, 4, 8.

[11] Mary A. Renda, *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915–1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 65, 154.

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invaders sought to demonstrate the depth of Haiti's failure as a modern nation. A representative of the American Bible Society described his group's missionary efforts as "fighting the powers of darkness and evil" in "this American Africa," a phrase presumably meant to strike its target audience as oxymoronic.[12]

This designation of an "Africa" in the Americas draws upon both imperial discourse of Africa and, more implicitly, settler colonial narratives of white civilization in the New World. In the first instance, it offers insight into transnational tropes of anti-Black racism, which, as Shona Jackson points out, is in its essence anti-indigenous. Anti-Blackness, she writes, is "a rejection of indigeneity (both in the New World and in Africa) as incompatible with the epistemic terrain of European modernity, its social and political structures, representative frames, and transformative processes."[13] Damning assessments of Black people's presence and future in the Americas continually trotted out grotesque concoctions of African indigeneity, emergent from multicentury violence. As European powers set upon the African continent in a colonial frenzy at the turn of the twentieth century, white writers, scientists, politicians, and missionaries engaged in the discursive production of the "Dark Continent." Europeans' enslavement of African peoples in the recent past and their present projects of extraction and colonial domination were rationalized as a product of Africans' own supposed savagery.

In British and American cultural, scientific, and missionary discourses from the second half of the nineteenth century, Africans were posited as the quintessential humans without capacity for civilization or history, imagined to be permanently mired in barbarism, disease, devil worship, and cannibalism.[14] While some particular groups of Africans were believed to be destined for extinction, racist constructions of African savagery emphasized their supposed fecundity and heartiness, ascriptions which clearly served to trivialize the genocidal devastation of slavery.[15] For example, in his best-selling 1920 exposition of the world's "primary races," Lothrop Stoddard asserted that Africans lacked the capacity for history and culture ("the Black peoples have no historic pasts") but were endowed with a "superabundant animal vitality," which showed itself

[12] Ibid., 125.

[13] Shona N. Jackson, "Humanity beyond the Regime of Labor: Antiblackness, Indigeneity, and the Legacies of Colonialism in the Caribbean," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 6 June 2014, at https://decolonization.wordpress.com/2014/06/06/humanity-beyond-the-regime-of-labor-antiblackness-indigeneity-and-the-legacies-of-colonialism-in-the-caribbean.

[14] Patrick Brantlinger, "Victorians and Africans: The Genealogy of the Myth of the Dark Continent," *Critical Inquiry*, 12, 1 (1985), 166–203, 184.

[15] Ibid., 187; Brantlinger, *Dark Vanishings*, 70.

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in their "ability to survive harsh conditions of slavery under which other races have soon succumbed."[16]

Colonial narratives of African savagery were also given meaning in relation to colonial narratives of the New World. That Africans did not "vanish" led to pessimistic assessments of the potential for settler colonialism on the continent, distinguishing it from the North American context where vigorous whites supposedly replaced unproductive savages to build a nation on a cleansed racial slate. As he reflected on the global expansion of the Anglo-Saxon race in *The Winning of the West*, his history of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt described the problem that he believed faced white men in South Africa:

> the English … are there confronted by a very large native population with which they cannot mingle, and which neither dies out nor recedes before their advance. It is not likely, but it is at least within the bounds of possibility, that in the course of centuries the whites of South Africa will … be swallowed up in the overwhelming mass of Black barbarism.[17]

Viable civilization building, in Africa and elsewhere, depended upon the "recession" of native peoples. This threat of "Black barbarism," namely that an ineradicable population of Black people could swallow up white civilization, is one that a number of observers found to be fully realized in Haiti. As an "American Africa," Haiti was cast as profoundly incongruent: an island of darkness, in the same hemisphere as the United States, in which savages eradicated white men rather than vice versa.

In 1912, three years before US Marines landed in Port-au-Prince, journalist William Bayard Hale wrote an urgent exposé of the imagined dangers of the United States' nonintervention in the "intolerable conditions" that prevailed throughout the "republics" south of the border. (Hale placed quotation marks around the word "republics" to cast Caribbean and Latin American claims to nationhood as mere pretense.) He gave a dismal review of the state of affairs in a number of countries, but dwelt in particular horror on the "Black blight that seems to fall like a magician's curse on everything Haytian." Hale links this "Black blight" to the destruction of slavery. In the previous century, he wrote, "magnificent plantations checkered the soil, splendid palaces rose on the hillsides, and great aqueducts, noble roads, and monumental bridges stretched through a rejoicing and opulent land." And now the island's inhabitants "dully exist[ed]," "re-enact[ing] the life of Central Africa and the Australian bush," untouched by even a "dim echo of civilization," as the

[16] Theodore Lothrop Stoddard, *The Rising Tide of Color against White World-Supremacy* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1920), 14.

[17] Theodore Roosevelt, *The Winning of the West* (New York and London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1889), 28.

natural resources of the land fell to waste. Of the flourishing white civilization once imposed on the island, he lamented, "The jungle has conquered it all."[18] In Hale's article, Black savagery has a momentum that pushes backward outside historical time, a force disintegrating white men's civilization into a dark, ravaging jungle.

The imagery of Black regression in Haiti mirrored US discourses that elaborated upon the domestic degeneration of the Black race outside the bonds of slavery. In a vivid example, geologist and race scientist Nathaniel Southgate Shaler laid out the "African problem" in 1890. Just as Hale asserted that the jungle had overgrown the roads, aqueducts, and "magnificent plantations" of European civilization in Haiti, Shaler argued that the virtues of civilization "implanted in Blacks were in need of constant tillage, lest the old savage weeds overcome the tender shoots of the new and unnatural culture." While African Americans may appear to be socially and culturally similar to poor white people, "experience had shown," he warned, that

> if we could insulate a single county in the South, and give it over to negroes alone, we should in a few decades find that his European clothing, woven by generations of education, had fallen away, and the race had gone down to a much lower state of being than that it now occupies.[19]

The images of Haiti as a regressive jungle, cursed by a "Black blight," and that of the hypothetical "county in the South" given over to autonomous Black rule, were directly connected by some. During the US occupation, Secretary of State Robert Lansing, for example, asserted that Haitians, like Liberians and African Americans, shared an "inherent tendency to revert to savagery," a tendency that made it impossible for Haitians to independently govern themselves and that made the "negro problem [in the United States] practically unsolvable."[20]

Hale's description of "Black blight" is one illustration of a long-standing US discourse depicting Haitian nationhood not only as inferior, but also as unnatural. Michel-Rolf Trouillot has famously argued that the Haitian Revolution and its production of a modern Black state were "unthinkable," in their time and long after, as they "challenged … the ontological order of

[18] William Bayard Hale, "Our Problem in Central America," *World's Work*, 24 (1912), 443–52, 450.

[19] N. S. Shaler, "Science and the African Problem," *Atlantic Monthly*, 66 (1890), 36–45, 42. On scientific discourses of race in this period see Lee D. Baker, *From Savage to Negro: Anthropology and the Construction of Race, 1896–1954* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

[20] Brenda Gayle Plummer, "The Afro-American Response to the Occupation of Haiti, 1915–1934," *Phylon*, 43, 2 (1983), 125–43, 130.

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the West and the global order of colonialism."[21] If Haiti "turned the white cosmos upside down," as David Brion Davis puts it, it bore particular relevance for white enslavers in the United States. Gerald Horne describes Haiti, a nation forged from abolition, as the antipode to its northern neighbor; its sovereignty was necessarily an existential threat to an enslaving republic. Those invested in slavery sought to nullify Haitian sovereignty by making it historically unintelligible. Thomas Jefferson, for example, described the leaders of the Revolution as the "Cannibals of the Terrible Republic."[22] Jean-Jaques Dessalines exposed the grotesque hypocrisy of the savagery talk when he declared he had avenged America by rendering "war for war" on "these true cannibals," the enslavers and colonizers who razed the New World into plantations.[23]

Before and after emancipation in the United States, as Black subjection remained essential to social order, writers through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries continued to depict Haiti's nationhood as an undoing of history and to invoke it to signify the calamity of Black freedom and self-governance more generally. The antebellum doctor Samuel Cartwright, who famously opined that fugitive slaves were afflicted by a mental illness called "drapetomania," published his insights on another "disease peculiar to the negro." Foreshadowing the claims of race scientists in later decades who quantified the deterioration of Black people after emancipation, Cartwright pathologized Black freedom. "Dysaethesia aethiopica," he claimed, afflicted nearly all free Black people not under the care of a white person, causing sufferers to "break, waste and destroy everything they handle," to "raise disorders" and "disregard the property of others." To write an aetiology of this "negro disease," he said, would be "to write a history of the ruins and dilapidation of Hayti, and every spot of earth they have ever had uncontrolled possession over for any length of time." Lothrop Stoddard reiterated precisely this assessment seventy years later. Summing up the global career of "the Negro," he described Haiti as having degenerated back to the African baseline of un-history: "Everywhere his presence has spelled regression, and his one New World field of triumph – Haiti – has resulted in an abysmal plunge into the jungle-level of Guinea and the Congo."[24]

[21] Michel-Rolf Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1995), 89.

[22] David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 168–69. Gerald Horne, *Confronting Black Jacobins: The United States, The Haitian Revolution, and the Origin of the Dominican Republic* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2015), 22, 83.

[23] "Liberty or Death!", *Franklin Repository*, 13 June 1804, 2.

[24] Samuel A. Cartwright, "Report on the Diseases and Peculiarities of the Negro Race," *New Orleans Medical and Surgical Journal*, May 1851, 691–715, 709–10. Stoddard, 142.

As I will now discuss, this fearful imagery of Haiti as a kind of anti-nation, where the "jungle had conquered it all," was invoked by some to deny African Americans' political and historical agency and to illustrate the terrible fate that the United States had thus far avoided but against which it must still remain vigilant.[25]

"A SECOND SANTO DOMINGO"

In 1902, virulent anti-Black author Thomas Dixon Jr. made repeated references to Haiti in his best-selling novel *The Leopard's Spots: A Romance of the White Man's Burden*, the first of his trilogy lionizing the Klan as the saviors of white civilization in Reconstruction- era North Carolina. In contrast to the nostalgic construction of the faithful slave, discussed in the second half of this article, who adored both his master and his captivity, the ex-slaves of *The Leopard's Spots* treacherously plot against the state's white men to "make this mighty South a more glorious San Domingo."[26] Like the novel's Black characters, the white characters also invoke Haiti to conceptualize the political transformations that have revealed Black people's true nature, as well as the consequences of Black rule. At the end of the excessively melodramatic novel, the hero of the narrative, Charles Gaston, gives a speech at the Democratic convention at Raleigh on the glorious history of the white race and the sacred cause of disenfranchising Black men. Moving his audience into a delirium of weeping and cheering, Gaston tells them that they are situated at a pivotal moment in world history: "the Anglo-Saxon is entering the new century with the imperial crown of the ages on his brow and the scepter of the infinite in his hands." Yet "the mightiest nation of the earth," which their race had wrought from "continental wilderness," was imperiled by the Black savagery in its midst.

To establish the dilemma facing white manhood, Gaston gives an overview of global race history, using the familiar tropes of Africa as a body of stagnation and Haiti as a vortex of regression. Despite occupying the African continent for three thousand years, "the African," Gaston asserts, "has never taken one step in progress or rescued one jungle from the ape and the adder." Once again, the "jungle" wilderness of Haiti was pointed out to illustrate the permanence of African savagery and the destructive force of Black autonomy.

> In Hayti and San Domingo [the Negro] rose in servile insurrection and butchered fifty thousand white men, women and children, a hundred years ago. He has ruled these

[25] Hale, 450.
[26] Thomas Dixon Jr., *The Leopard's Spots: A Romance of the White Man's Burden, 1865–1900* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1902), 91.

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beautiful islands since. Did he make progress with the example of Aryan civilization before him? No. But yesterday we received reports of the discovery of cannibalism in Hayti.[27]

Dixon used especially graphic imagery of death and decay to envisage the corrosive impact of Black people's presence on the white body politic and its global future. In this new century in which steam and electricity were transforming the face of the earth, white men of the South could dream not just of "local supremacy" but of "the conquest of the globe," Gaston tells his ecstatic audience. But "Negroid corruption" threatened to tether them to "filth and degradation." In the clash between white futurity and the anti-historical verve of African savagery, Black citizens, those would-be bearers of Santo Domingo, are imagined as a "decaying corpse," dragging down the white nation. "What is our condition to-day in the dawn of the twentieth century?" Gaston demands of his listeners. "If we attempt to move forward, we are literally chained to the body of a festering Black Death!"[28]

The populist pro-lynching South Carolina Senator Ben Tillman, whose speaking tours attracted large and enthusiastic audiences in the North, regurgitated the histrionics of *The Leopord's Spots* in the often-cited speech he made on the Senate floor in 1907 to justify lynching in the South. He also evoked the imagery of Black death, savagery, and a terrifying landscape of Haitian jungle. To make the case that in the "irrepressible conflict between white civilization and Black barbarism" lynching was a necessary tool of order, he recounted for his colleagues the supposedly apocalyptic circumstances that South Carolinians faced during Reconstruction living under "negro rule": "we felt the very foundations of our civilization crumbling beneath our feet." Manifestations of this supposed crumbling under the Black-led Reconstruction government included a programme of land distribution unequaled anywhere else in the Reconstruction South, the state's first public-school system, and increased rights for women with regard to property and divorce.[29]

Tillman openly described his efforts with South Carolina's paramilitary Red Shirts to terrorize and murder would-be Black voters and to stuff ballot boxes. In his speech before the Senate, Tillman contrasted the righteousness of manly action in defense of civilization and the restricting, emasculating rule of written law:

I here declare that if the white men of South Carolina had been content to obey the laws which had been forced down our throats at the point of the bayonet and submit

[27] Ibid., 437.

[28] Ibid., 435, 436.

[29] *Congressional Record*, 21 Jan. 1907 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1907), 1440. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 396. Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877* (New York: Perennial, 2002), 375.

to the reconstruction acts which had thrust the ballot into the hands of ignorant and debased negroes, slaves five years before, and only two or three generations removed from the barbarians of Africa, the state of South Carolina to-day would be a howling wilderness, a second Santo Domingo.

By refusing to submit to the decadent laws of Reconstruction, which diminished their rightful manhood and authority, Tillman suggested, these white men, like their descendants in lynch mobs, resurrected civilization by vanquishing the Haitian dystopia imminent in Black freedom.[30]

Like Dixon, Tillman likened the Black population to a corpse, invoking the image of an ancient punishment in which a dead man is chained to a living man, "back to back, limb to limb." In just this manner, he declared, in 1865 as the South lay helpless before the conquering North, the "dead carcass of slavery [was] chained to it by the 14th and 15th amendments." To illustrate the depth of corrosion unleashed by these amendments, which respectively granted African Americans citizenship and equal protection before the law as well as granting suffrage to African American men, Tillman elaborated upon the image of the chained men in nauseating detail. In a change of tone from his gloating about the paramilitary terrorism that overthrew Reconstruction, he pleaded with his colleagues in the Senate to aid the South in its battle against Black barbarism (using phrasing copied almost verbatim from the speech in Dixon's novel): "In the name of civilization, do something to relieve us from this body of death."[31]

"THE LIVING AND THE DEAD"

Before Tillman and Dixon warned the nation about the "decaying corpse" chained to the long-suffering white South, the image was employed in the 1872 minority report of the Congressional committee charged with investigating the activities of the Ku Klux Klan in the former Confederacy. While the committee's Republican majority condemned the Klan as "cowardly midnight prowlers and assassins who scourge and kill the poor and defenseless," the authors of the minority report were less inclined to condemn the violence. They alternated, K. Stephen Prince observes, between "denying the Klan's existence and condoning its activities."[32] The report anticipated the arguments frequently made in the early twentieth century about the danger of unequal

[30] *Congressional Record*, 21 Jan. 1907, 1440.
[31] Ibid., 1443–44. On the imagery of "the body of death," including its usage by Booker T. Washington, see Smith, *American Body Politics*, 59–62.
[32] K. Stephen Prince, *Stories of the South: Race and the Reconstruction of Southern Identity, 1865–1915* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 76.

races living in proximity, the catastrophe of Black political rights and the inevitability of "race war."

The authors of the report linked Black political activity to the imagined apocalypse of Haiti, lamenting the reckless government policies which had turned South Carolina, where Black men outnumbered white in the state legislature, into a "Santo Domingo." Claiming both nature and God to have ordained the inferiority of the Black race, they claimed that the Reconstruction system that enshrined Black political power threatened to destroy "constitutional liberty on this continent, and the glorious form of government bequeathed to us by our forefathers." They employed a striking imagery of death and decay to drive home their warning:

> It is the very acme of folly and fanaticism to suppose, in this day of enlightenment and its consequent pride of feeling among the superior race, that there can be a reproduction of the ancient fable of tying the living and the dead together without causing death to both.

How could "African freedmen" rule over a "sovereign State of the Union," with political authority over the property and rights "of a race who have ruled the destinies of nations ever since the government was known among men"? Noting that even many of those who had opposed slavery now hated the Negro for "his insolence and arrogance in the ready self-assertion of his new-found rights and privileges," the authors of the report predicted a sorrowful future for "the poor, deluded negro." There was only one outcome in the clash between the superior and inferior races, between the living and the dead. The rational man could only foresee "either the exodus or the extinction of this disturbing element in the social and political condition of the more powerful race."[33]

In the final wrenching chapter of *Black Reconstruction*, W. E. B. Du Bois powerfully subverted these tropes of Black life and death. In this chapter, he describes the new civil war unleashed upon Black people after emancipation by the reactionary forces of the South – a war, as he wrote, that had yet to end. The chapter catalogues the political terror waged across the southern states by armed paramilitaries – murder, whippings, and massacres of dozens to hundreds of people at a time – documented, but not halted, by federal authorities. He considers the minority report, cited above, that excused this cascade of violence alongside making assertions of Black people's impending doom. The accomplishment of this war waged on freed people, Du Bois concludes, was to "establish a new dictatorship of property in the South through

[33] United States Congress, *Report of the Joint Select Committee to Inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1872), 517–18.

the color line … a triumph of men who … [replaced] equality with caste and [built] inordinate wealth on a foundation of abject poverty."[34]

At the outset of his reflections on the betrayal of Reconstruction, Du Bois describes the repression that wrested Black people back toward slavery as the binding of "Black Prometheus … to the Rock of Ages by hate, hurt and humiliation." In contrast to the image of the Black race as a "body of death" chained to the nation's body politic, here, Black folk, embodied in the heroic male figure of Prometheus, are (re)chained by white barbarism. Rather than burdening the innocent white body of civilization with decay and dependence, the allegorical Black body here is one of suffering but not of death – the definitive characteristic of mythical Prometheus, after all, being his enduring life in the face of bodily destruction. Black Prometheus "has his vitals eaten out as they grow, yet lives and fights."[35]

Du Bois again explores the themes of Black suffering and *rebirth* in the closing pages of *Black Reconstruction*. Though he does not refer to Haiti in the passage, it's relevant for the discussion here because of the manner in which it so powerfully rejects the discourse of Blackness as a force of anti-history that undergirds the "Santo Domingo" imagery I have examined. As C. L. R. James would later reflect in an essay analyzing *Black Reconstruction* alongside his own *Black Jacobins*, Du Bois insists not merely that Black people have a history, but also that their struggle in the New World is historically momentous for all of humanity. Du Bois writes,

> The most magnificent drama in the last thousand years of human history is the transportation of ten million human beings out of the dark beauty of their mother continent into the new-found El Dorado of the West. They descended into Hell; and in the third century they arose from the dead, in the finest effort to achieve democracy for the working millions which this world has ever seen.[36]

Read in the context of this descent and emergence from hell, Du Bois's Promethean figuration of Black America subverts the understanding of the Negro as antithetical to civilization. Just as the mythical Prometheus brings fire to humanity, and thus the capacity for civilization and freedom from the tyranny of the gods, the Black demand for absolute equality offers the possibility for workers to unite in the devouring wilderness of American capitalism and for the nation to free itself from its brutal history. Against the nauseous racism that deflected its own violence by construing Black people as a corpse degrading civilization, Black Prometheus, chained, tormented but

[34] Du Bois, 707.
[35] Ibid., 670.
[36] C. L. R. James, "The *Black Jacobins* and *Black Reconstruction*: A Comparative Analysis (15 June 1971)," *Small Axe*, 8 (2000), 85–87. Du Bois, 727.

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undying, brings the fire through which a true democracy can be realized in a Western modernity built upon the mass destruction of life.

MEMORIALIZING RACIAL SELF-SACRIFICE

In this second half of this article, I examine another dimension of the construction of Black savagery – its counterpart nostalgia for Black captivity, explored here in a memorial to the "Faithful Slave" erected by the United Daughters of the Confederacy. The emotional tone of the project is distinct from the dark visions of decay and violence considered in the previous section. However, the veneration of the "Faithful Slave" and the supposedly wholesome relations of slavery likewise construes Black freedom and sovereignty as deviations from the norms of civilization, thus casting ominous shadows on Black people and their future in modernity. To contemplate these discourses, I will examine them alongside discourses of Indigenous "extinction," epitomized in another memorial project, a never-realized monument to the supposedly vanishing American Indian. While the qualities and condition of each group were often explicitly contrasted, ultimately each memorial cast its object as unfit for autonomous existence in the contemporary US nation.[37]

To make sense of these early twentieth-century memorial projects, I will first trace the narratives of Blackness and Indigeneity that these projects sought to solidify in granite. The basic racial schema of the tractable and hearty African and the Indian who could neither adapt nor amalgamate to the onslaught of civilization was continuously reiterated in popular and scientific Western thought. Nathaniel Southgate Shaler, the race scientist cited above who hypothesized that Black autonomy would result in a reversion to savagery, emphasized the unique utility of the Black race in the Americas. Unlike the "American savage," who was vigorous but "untameable," the "negro" was "[p]atient, laborious, and enduring, endowed with a rare capacity for imitating the ways of his master." He became a "a most invaluable servant" for the English colonists: "No other savage in the world has ever proved so readily domesticable in a civilized country."[38]

Evident in the twentieth-century memorial projects examined below, the untameable Indian and useable Negro were attributed with specific racial qualities that rationalized slavery and settlement as racial destinies. Winthrop Jordan writes that colonial white Americans imputed to the "braves of the Indian 'nations' an ungovernable individuality," and conversely imparted to the Africans they held in captivity "all the qualities of an eminently governable

[37] I thank the anonymous reviewer for helping me refine this point.
[38] N. S. Shaler, *Nature and Man in America* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1892), 203.

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sub-nation."[39] If each figure served to naturalize violence, the meaning attributed to conflict, actual or potential, between white men and each racial other was often starkly divergent. As a captive class lodged with violence in the homes of their so-called masters, the resistance of an "eminently governable sub-nation" and "most invaluable servant[s]" was difficult to recuperate for sustaining narratives of American nation. As I have already explored in the first half of this article, slave insurrection and Black freedom were constructed as being perversely antithetical to American civilization. Jordan observes that early white Americans seemed incapable of imagining a slave revolt that ended only in the destruction of slavery rather than in white people's annihilation:

> The specter of Negro rebellion presented an appalling world turned upside down, a crazy nonsense world of Black over white, an anti-community which was the direct negation of the community as white men knew it … Negro insurrection threatened their lives, liberties, prosperities, and every other human blessing.

The prospect of slave uprising "loomed as total destruction, as the irretrievable loss of … America itself" – a prospect that, as I've shown, was frequently imagined through the prism of Haiti as a kind of anti-nation. On the other hand, the genocidal violence of settlement was imagined as the emergence of true American nationhood. In the white American imagination, bloody conflict with "untameable savages" at the edges of expanding white civilization personified "the conquest of the American difficulties, the surmounting of the wilderness," Jordan writes. "To push back the Indian was to prove the worth of one's own mission, to make straight in the desert a highway for civilization."[40]

Thus, while both Native and African Americans were constructed as primitive races, peoples outside history, their imagined conditions of savagery, and the imagined landscapes to which they were tied, were given strikingly different emotional resonance and historical meaning in racial narratives of US nationhood. As we have seen, the racist construction of unfettered Black savagery was imagined as a devouring jungle, creating Africas in America on the ruins of white civilization. In contrast, in one common strain of US discourse, the imagined Indian animated an idyllic wilderness of American prehistory, in which white men would make their destiny. Of course, US Americans produced a range of racial tropes of "Indians," including as weak and dependent "wards." But as David Anthony Tyeeme Clark and Joane Nagel observe, the image of the ungovernable, proud savage continued to resonate in the US cultural imagination throughout the twentieth century precisely because this image of Indianness, and its associated

[39] Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550–1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 90–91.
[40] Ibid., 90–91.

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imagery of pre-conquest flora and fauna, could be appropriated as symbols of white US manhood. "[W]hite men used their 'Indian' to fabricate and lay claim to western landscapes as sites of white American masculine power."[41]

Thus, in a process that was mutually reinforcing rather than contradictory, some white Americans imagined the essence of the "vanished Indian" to be infused in the nation built through the ongoing dispossession of living Indigenous people. "Our memory of the Indians connects us with the soil and the waters and the nonhuman life about us," the poet Kenneth Rexroth wrote later in the twentieth century. "They take for us the place of nymphs and satyrs and dryads – the spirits of the places. They are our ecological link with our biota."[42] In contrast to the construction of free Black people as a "body of death" chained to the nation, constructions of Indigenous vanishment frequently proposed a lingering ethereal presence that, rather than being corruptive, enhanced white Americans' ties to the land and claims to authentic nationhood. Whereas the "howling wilderness" of Santo Domingo depicted a kind of American anti-history, the ruins of civilization, the Indian's savage wilderness depicted the raw material from which white men would forge self and nation. These themes – the horror of Black uprising and the parasitic fetish for Native death – materialize in the memorial projects I consider in the next section.

"THE BEST IN BOTH RACES"

In 1931 the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) dedicated a Monument to the Faithful Slave at Harpers Ferry, Virginia, the site of John Brown's 1859 attempt to start a guerrilla war against slavery in the South. The monument was decades in the making and part of a wider project of memorializing what its planners and their sympathizers saw as the tragically receding world of the slave South. Eager that they should not be remembered by history as "a race of slave-drivers and traitors," as one Virginian put it in 1899, organizations such as the Confederate Veterans and the United Daughters of the Confederacy aggressively set out a reinterpretation of the Civil War and Reconstruction through which the South was morally sanctified and a resurgent southern identity could be nationally reincorporated with honor. The so-called Lost Cause discourse proliferating in the new century

[41] David Anthony, Tyeeme Clark, and Joane Nagel, "White Men, Red Masks: Appropriation of 'Indian' Manhood in Imagined Wests," in Matthew Basso, Laura McCall, and Dee Garceau, eds., *Across the Great Divide: Cultures of Manhood in the American West* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 109–30, 123.

[42] Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600–1860* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973), 17.

asserted that the cause of the Confederacy had been noble and honorable and thereby emphasized Black inferiority and the benevolence of slavery. Alongside these narratives of the past, national audiences were inundated with news stories, literature, and scholarship from "the missionaries of Jim Crow" detailing the corrosive threat of uncontrolled Black freedom, in the embodied form of brutes, rapists, and criminals, to the white people of the South.[43]

A central premise of the Lost Cause narrative, essential both to consecrating the slavery of the past and to rationalizing the anti-Black terror of the present, was that enslaved Black people had not merely been content in bondage but passionately devoted to it. "Lost to near oblivion in white memory by the early twentieth century," David Blight observes, "were the countless wartime testimonies of planters about the 'defections' and 'betrayals' of their most trusted slaves."[44] Instead, southern writers cultivated an immersive nostalgia for their faithful Black "servants." As Micki McElya has observed, such memorial projects to imagined slaves were not conceived merely to memorialize a lost past but as a means of forging "new relationships of affinity and power"; their planners sought, as one of member of the UDC put it, to teach "coming generations … the lesson of self-sacrifice and devotion."[45] Longing for imagined antebellum Blackness was inextricably interlinked with the construction of Blackness degenerating in freedom, that lurking savagery waiting to impose itself against civilization. The loving docility of the "faithful old slave," fostered in the harmonious and mutually beneficial embrace of slavery and total white dominion, drew into sharp relief the monstrous nature of their free descendants. The nostalgia for loving Black slaves was thus the logical counterpart of the disturbing stories of "Negro rape fiends," with their graphic depictions of imagined Black transgressions and torture of Black mob victims that were common fare in the nation's press.[46]

The Faithful Slave monument at Harpers Ferry was a long time in the making. In 1920, the UDC's president general, Mary McKinney, told the annual national meeting of the organization that the John Brown raiders had killed Heyward Shepherd, the chosen embodiment of the faithful slave, "because he held too dear the lives of 'Ole Mass' and 'Ole Miss'us' to

[43] Caroline E. Janney, *Remembering the Civil War: Reunion and the Limits of Reconciliation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 206. David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), 283; Prince, *Stories of the South*, 208–9.

[44] Blight, 287.

[45] Micki McElya, *Clinging to Mammy: The Faithful Slave in Twentieth-Century America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 23.

[46] Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, *Revolt against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Women's Campaign against Lynching* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

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fulfill Brown's orders of rapine and murder." She urged the convention to honor this man's memory and to tell future generations the truth of John Brown's raid.[47] It took another decade before the UDC received approval for the monument, due to opposition from Storer College, a local Black college founded after the Civil War, and apprehension among town leaders that the project would incite racial tensions, particularly given increasing activity of the resurgent Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s. From the perspective of its planners, the antagonism to their project underlined the need for it. In 1909 the students of Storer College had reconstructed the fort that Brown took refuge in during the raid and opened it as an abolitionist museum. The UDC memorial committee was incensed to learn that the museum held "ridiculous examples of spike collars, handcuffs and other freak collections" aimed toward spreading "false propaganda" about the cruelty of slavery. Harpers Ferry's town council and mayor, the son of a Confederate veteran, finally approved the project in 1931.[48]

The UDC's portrayal of Heyward Shepherd as the ideal embodiment of the self-sacrificing slave because he defied Brown's raiders to protect his white friends was a revealing distortion of historical fact. Shepherd was a free man and an employee of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad which ran through Harpers Ferry. He was not instructed by Brown to kill or rape but met the raiders by chance on a railway bridge, where they shot him, presumably to stop him from raising the alarm. That Shepherd was a free man did not faze the UDC, and indeed served to underscore the memorial's underlying message. The eulogy inscribed onto the monument, a granite boulder, suggested that Shepherd's "sacrifice" epitomized the "character and faithfulness" of the "thousands of negroes" who, even when faced with the "temptations" of the Civil War years, "So conducted themselves that no stain was left upon a record which is the peculiar heritage of the American people, and an everlasting tribute to the best in both races."[49] The best in Black race, then, was the cherishing of domination above the unnatural temptation of freedom.

At the 1931 dedication ceremony of the monument, Laura Bashinksy, then serving president general of the UDC, stated that Shepherd had given his life "in defense of his employer's property." Exactly what property he was meant to be protecting is unclear, but the term clearly has broader and suggestive implications. Whatever its details, supposed truths of slavery were read into and through Shepherd's death. From a speaker's stand draped in

[47] Ibid., 139–40.
[48] Scott French, *The Rebellious Slave: Nat Turner in American Memory* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004), 191–92; Paul A. Shackel, "Heyward Shepherd: The Faithful Slave Memorial," *Historical Archaeology*, 37, 3 (2003), 138–48, 140–41.
[49] Shackel, 142.

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Confederate bunting, Bashinksy told her audience that they had gathered to commemorate Shepherd and "the thousands of others of his race who would … have suffered death rather than betray their masters."[50] To highlight the virtue of the slavery that inspired such faithfulness and the "maelstrom of inferno" that Brown's rebellion threatened, Bashinsky framed her talk around the dread cautionary tale of Haiti, where "all vestiges of civilization [were] burned and destroyed" when the slaves rose in vengeance. With unintentional irony, she wondered aloud whether John Brown and his comrades were "entirely ignorant of the horrors of … race war" that occurred there.[51] In fact, Brown told his jailer that he had "read and reread all the literature he could find about [Toussaint] L'Ouverture for a dozen years" and "patterned his life after the San Domingan." After Brown's execution, the people of Haiti held three days of national mourning and raised twenty thousand dollars for his family and those of the other rebels, reflecting, as Mathew Clavin writes, the border-transcending nature of abolitionism in the Americas.[52]

Bashinksy's understanding of enslaved people's resistance was informed by a deep sense of US exceptionalism. Like others before her, she presented Haiti as an image of what could have been in the United States. She claimed the "reversion" to African savagery began even before the revolutionaries overthrew slavery. "Race war" – a phrase that notably strips political and historical meaning from the revolution – never materialized in the US South because the white southern people's commitment to the duties of "civilization and Christianity" made it unthinkable. The Black race in Saint Domingue was allowed to "revert to paganism and the revolting practice of 'voodoo'" because the French Creole masters "reveled in ease and luxury" rather than managing their slaves with tender paternal care as did their pious US counterparts.[53]

Unsurprisingly, the Black press took exception to the UDC's effort to enshrine Black subjugation as an achievement of refined sentiment and civilization. W. E. B. Du Bois, who had in the same year received a grant for the research that would form *Black Reconstruction*, summarized the intent of the celebration in *Crisis*: "During the exercises, the white speakers condemned the Haitian revolution, lauded the 'Black mammy,' and called John Brown crazy. It was a pro-slavery celebration."[54] An editorial in the *Northwest*

[50] Ibid., 141. L. M. Bashinsky, "Address by Mrs. L. M. Bashinsky, President General, U.D.C., at the Dedication of the Faithful Slave Memorial, Harper's Ferry, W.Va., October 19, 1931," *Alabama Historical Quarterly*, 6, 1 (1944), 36–45, 44.

[51] Bashinsky, 39.

[52] Matthew J. Clavin, *Toussaint Louverture and the American Civil War: The Promise and Peril of a Second Haitian Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 59.

[53] Bashinksy, 41.

[54] W. E. B. Du Bois, "Postscript," *Crisis*, 41, 1 (1932), 467–68, 474, 467.

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Enterprise, a Black paper in Seattle, ridiculed the event's obscene sentimentality, writing that the orators' tributes to "'Black mammies' and 'Uncle Toms' … caused rebels [i.e. Confederates] in the audience to snivel audibly into their handkerchiefs."[55] The author of the editorial celebrated the intervention made by Pearl Tatum, a local Black woman in attendance at the dedication. Tatum was meant to introduce the choir, but instead she made her own address to the crowd:

> Though threatened by the rebel women, Mrs Tattem [*sic*], who was not on the program to speak, announced that she was the daughter of a Union veteran, who fought for the cause that John Brown made holy, that slavery was a curse and her own eyes were turned toward the future and a new freedom for the Negro.[56]

As Tattem's disruption made clear, while the UDC's warm eulogy for their lost slaves has a contrasting emotional tone to the sickening imagery and threats of extermination that Dixon and Tillman traded in, it likewise imagines Black freedom as a calamity and thus Black people as "incapable of speaking the future tenses of history."[57]

"HE WOULD NOT YIELD"

In 1913, seven years before the UDC began their initial planning to commemorate the Faithful Slave in Harpers Ferry, Joseph K. Dixon, a photographer, author, and self-appointed "Friend of the Indian," spearheaded a campaign to build a Memorial to the North American Indian at Fort Wadsworth on the New York harbor. Dixon had taken upon himself the wider project of documenting the nation's "vanishing" Native American tribes. In a book published in the same year as the memorial groundbreaking, Dixon claimed to capture never-before-seen insights into the life and mind of the Indian, just as he was bidding the world "a solemn farewell."[58] The memorial project received widespread support from various luminaries of American political life, including Theodore and Franklin Roosevelt and John Rockefeller, but Congress only authorized the use of public land with the provision that the monument would incur no expense to the federal treasury.[59] Dixon ultimately failed to raise the funds for the elaborate plans. Nevertheless, the official groundbreaking ceremony was held and received effusive coverage in the

[55] "Black Barbara Frietchie," *Northwest Enterprise*, 22 Oct. 1931, 4. [56] Ibid.
[57] Brantlinger, *Dark Vanishings*, 2.
[58] Joseph K. Dixon, *The Vanishing Race: The Last Great Indian Council* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1913), title page.
[59] Russel Lawrence Barsh, "An American Heart of Darkness: The 1913 Expedition for American Indian Citizenship," *Great Plains Quarterly*, 751 (1993), 91–115, 96–97.

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national press. The event was attended by a group of Native American men in ceremonial dress, as well as President William Taft.[60]

The mournful farewell to the Indian enacted a deranged performance of US relationships with Indigenous nations that entirely obscured the ongoing processes through which the US state was in that same moment actively appropriating native lands and attempting to eradicate Indigenous peoples. Just twenty-six years before the groundbreaking, the Dawes Allotment Act of 1887 was enacted, authorizing the federal government to survey and divide tribal lands into individual plots. By 1934, the allotment process "turned ninety million acres of Indigenous collective territory into settler-owned private property."[61] The systematic removal of Indigenous children from their families and communities into boarding schools designed to eradicate their indigeneity, a practice that Brenda J. Child calls "assimilationist policy at its most genocidal," was the counterpart of dispossession.[62] While these policies were imagined as a wholesome shift from warfare to benevolent training, the transformation of savages into productive human beings that could be absorbed into the body politic, bouts of outright state violence continued to be utilized against Indigenous people.[63] In the 1890 Wounded Knee massacre, soldiers murdered three hundred Mniconjou adults and children. Rather than an aberration, Nick Estes writes, the genocidal act was entirely in step with settler logic "to ensure the political and economic acquisition of Native land and title." The government awarded eighteen Medals of Honor to the men who perpetrated the killing.[64]

Fixed in distant heroic past with an unalterable trajectory, rather than ongoing genocide, the monument's Indian was presented, in the established mode of extinction narratives, as "futureless," while white Americans were positioned as solemn observers of the process, paying their historical respects.[65] The plans for the memorial and the activities of the groundbreaking essentially performed the long-articulated ideology that the recession of the futureless enabled the realization of white modernity. The death of the Indian was dramatized at the groundbreaking with exaggerated sentimentality – a specially composed song entitled the "Indian's Requiem" was played at the ceremony – but the memorial explicitly confirmed the Indian's dying was a pang of the nation's birth. In his speech, Taft asserted that the monument would

[60] "Indians See Taft Handle the Spear," *New York Times*, 23 Feb. 1913, 3.
[61] Bruyneel, *Settler Memory*, 91.
[62] Brenda J. Child, "The Boarding School as Metaphor," *Journal of American Indian Education*, 57, 1 (2018), 38.
[63] On the ideological construction of "the Indian Problem" as one of training and assimilation see Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction*, chapter 1.
[64] Nick Estes, "Wounded Knee: Settler Colonial Property Regimes and Indigenous Liberation," *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, 24, 3 (2013), 190–202, 198.
[65] Brantlinger, 3.

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perpetuate "the memory of the succession from the red to the white race in the ownership and control of the Western Hemisphere."[66]

In contrast to the figure of the emasculated faithful slave, who thrived under the care of "Old Master" and "Old Miss," and whose most virtuous quality was his denunciation of freedom, the Indian memorial discourse emphasized the virility of the so-called Red Man. The fierce American savage was a familiar fixture of settler colonial narratives of the American wilderness as the forge of an invigorated white manhood. In *The Winning of the West*, for example, Theodore Roosevelt described white settlers' struggle with "the most formidable savage foes ever encountered by colonists of European stock."[67] Dixon presented the "Notable Indian Chiefs" who participated in the groundbreaking as "warriors who have participated in hundreds of battles," even claiming, fallaciously, that they "were the very Indians" who had annihilated General Custer and his troops at the famous Battle of Little Big Horn.[68] In contrast to the Santo Domingo narrative, in which white civilization is inundated by Black barbarism, here the fictive Indian's inevitable defeat and vanishment makes his violent rejection of white civilization valiant rather than monstrous; this struggle legitimizes hard-won American nationhood.

Where the Faithful Slave memorial idealized the absence of Black sovereignty, imagining its subject's loving acquiescence in his master's dominion, the Vanishing Indian monument sought to pay tribute to the Indian's irrecoverable dominion of American lands and the transference of sovereignty to its destined bearers. The printed program for the groundbreaking enthused that the memorial would capture, in "granite and bronze," "voices from the past, voices from the primeval forests, voices from the far stretches of the Western plains," constructing Native "voice" as kind of poignant haunting – prehistorical and pre-political.[69] This imagery of mystical "primeval forests" is different in tone to the manner in which Indians' relationship to land was presented in Congressional debates that generated the policies of dispossession.

Less than twenty years before the pamphlet writers imagined Indian spirits calling to them from the forests, Indian Affairs Commissioner Thomas Morgan utilized the well-worn logic of white civilizational genius and savage incapacity. "A wild Indian requires a thousand acres to roam over, while an intelligent man will find a comfortable support for his family on a very small tract." Once the present generations of Indians had been absorbed into civilization through education and citizenship, "a vast domain of [land

[66] "Indians See Taft Handle the Spear," 3.
[67] Roosevelt, *The Winning of the West*, 19.
[68] National American Indian Memorial Association (NAIMA), *The National American Indian Memorial at Fort Wadsworth, Harbor of New York* (1913), 11. Barsh.
[69] NAIMA, 13.

that was] now useless" would be transformed into farms, homes, towns, and industry. "Barbarism is costly, wasteful and extravagant." In a speech before the House of Representatives supporting the Homestead Act of 1862, which eventually sundered nearly 300 million acres of collectively held Indigenous lands into privately held property of individual settlers and railroad companies, Pennsylvania Congressman Galusha A. Grow argued for the need to protect and support those heroic settlers who "spanned the continent with great empires of free States built on the ruins of savage life."[70]

The unintelligent savage roaming over "useless" lands contrasts starkly with the ghostly Indian imagined in the memorial pamphlet. Here the Native's presence was majestic – he "once had liberty to roam over the entire continent." The pamphlet endows its Indian's (past-tense) relationship to the natural world with a gendered authority, describing "the sea, the sky, the land" as the Indian's "patrimony." Rather than making native wilderness (the "ruins of savage life") antithetical to US civilization, the pamphlet writers link the two. The Indian is described as "the First American" and the pamphlet authors felt it was "pregnant with significance" that the groundbreaking was taking place on George Washington's birthday.[71]

If distinct in tone, the discourses of savagery as wastefulness, on the one hand, and mystic patrimony, on the other, ultimately serve the same purpose. Kevin Bruyneel writes that a "key function of the work of settler memory" is to weave Indigenous peoples "into the American past and outside the political present."[72] The grandiose scale of the fantasy monument (the authors imagine an "Indian brave" 165 feet tall on a seventy-foot base) emphasizes both the national might of the US and the finality of Indigenous extinction:

> The gigantic bronze figure that will surmount the splendid pedestal will face the sea, extending the universal peace sign of the Indian, giving welcome to the Nations of the earth as they pass through this greatest gateway to the New World. A lonely, lofty figure, where the sea will forever moan a dirge for a vanished race; where sun and stars, and wind and thunder, the gods in his great World-cathedral, may utter the speech of his soul – while a child of the woods and plains – but now to fall upon unheeding ears of bronze.[73]

The "First American" was thus not destined to be a living member of the "Nations of the earth," but his cenotaph would stand as a herald of US nationhood. The self-serving nature of the Indian death fantasy is readily apparent here. As the authors of the pamphlet continually assert that actual Indigenous people are on the cusp of disappearing forever – already spoken

[70] Homestead Bill, 37th Congress, 2nd Session, *Congressional Globe*, 21 Feb. 1862, 910.
[71] NAIMA, 12–13. [72] Bruyneel, *Settler Memory*, 43. [73] NAIMA, 13.

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about in the past tense as the authors plan the books and edifying artworks that will be sold in the gift shop – the monument is clearly designed not *for* the Indian but to sanctify white inheritance. "Posterity will applaud the honor we do ourselves," the pamphlet notes, "in gathering up the life story of this virile and picturesque race while yet the rays of the setting sun fall upon their departing footprints."[74]

In his multifaceted role as "Friend of the Indian," Dixon sought to encourage Native Americans to take up American citizenship at the same time as mourning their impending death. Claiming that the memorial would light the flames of patriotism in the hearts of Native Americans, he toured reservations in 1914, presenting local people with a US flag and urging them to sign a pledge of loyalty. This overture to Native citizenship didn't diminish his commitment to proselytizing imminent Native "vanishment." In keeping with the maudlin morbidity of the ceremony, in *The Vanishing Race* Dixon presents the genocide of Native peoples as a tragic but beautiful testament to their own "virile, untamed" nature. Faced with the ruthless march of civilization, the Indian had a choice, "to give up all that was his and all that was dear to him – to make himself over or die." Dixon's imagined Indian made the bitter but clearly manly choice to choose death over the loss of primitive freedom: "He would not yield. He died. He would not receive his salvation by surrender; rather would he choose oblivion, unknown darkness – the melting fires of extermination."[75] Rather than the self-denying sacrifice of the Faithful Slave who lived and died for his master, the Indian's death is a sacrifice of racial existence, an act of self-imposed "recession" that clears the ground for white nation building. In each case, sovereignty is a source of death.

Native thinkers throughout the early twentieth century sought to challenge the crocodile tears of the "vanishing-race" discourse. The *New York Times* printed the statement of Lakota actor and activist Chauncey Yellow Robe that "[t]he Indian wants no such memorial monument, for he is not yet dead." Yellow Robe tied the false memorial to the "fraudulent savage demonstrations" of Wild West shows and the stamping of the Indian's image on five-dollar bills, a "reminder of his savagery."[76] In 1916, Carlos Montezuma, Yavapai Apache author and founding member of the Society of American Indians, published a poem with the pointed title "Changing Is Not Vanishing." The Indian might "change externally," losing his feathers, paint, and moccasin, becoming "an industrial and commercial man," but he would never vanish. "Wherever you see an Indian upholding the standard of his

[74] Ibid., 12–13.
[75] Dixon, *The Vanishing Race*, 3.
[76] "Notes and Gleanings," *New York Times*, 19 April 2014, 36.

race, there you see the Indian man."[77] As Ned Blackhawk observes, in the pernicious logic that casts Native peoples as outside history, "any changes or adaptations they have made become only further evidence of their demise." In such thinking, "change over time – the commonplace definition of history – becomes a death knell" for Indigenous peoples.[78] Such logic was actively pursued in assimilationist policies which purported that transformation of Indians as a purging of Indianness; see the commissioner of Indian affairs who stated in 1903 that the purpose of Indian education was "to preserve him from extinction, not as an Indian, but as a human being."[79] Montezuma's insistence that changing is not vanishing refuses the underlying tenet of the extinction discourse that fixes indigeneity in a timeless past, forever outside both modernity and humanity.

CONCLUSION

The constructions of savagery examined in this article rendered Native and Black peoples in the Americas unintelligible as political and historical actors and therefore, in one way or another, as death-bound. The fantasy of Native peoples consigning themselves to the "fires of extermination" or that of Black people regressing into fiendish savagery once free from slavery's disciplining embrace transmuted terror and genocide into the peculiar qualities of moribund races ill-fitted for civilization. With ascriptions of savage racial morbidity, the incapacity for history and civilization, white Americans cast Native sovereignty as the primordial antecedent of their own nation-state, from which living Indigenous people were necessarily disappeared. They cast Black sovereignty, whether in Haiti or South Carolina, as eruptions of wilderness, the nightmare Other of white civilization.

These narratives of extermination expose the enormous violence of the past they sought to sanctify and the present they sought to justify – a violence against which those allegedly without history or future continued to "live and fight," as Du Bois envisioned Black Prometheus. Even as they seek to denounce, distort and/or assimilate Black and Indigenous world making, these narratives also betray the limits of US racial capitalism and its inability

[77] David L. Moore and Kathryn W. Shanley, "Native American Poetry: Loosening the Bonds of Representation," in Deborah L. Madsen, ed., *The Routledge Companion to Native American Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 439.

[78] Ned Blackhawk, *Violence over the Land: Indians and Empire in the Early American West* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 5.

[79] Department of the Interior, *Indian Affairs. Part 1. Report of the Commissioner, and Appendixes* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1904), 2.

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to fully eradicate or coopt that which challenges, refuses, or exceeds it. The fight of the living – past, present, and future – is refracted in these discourses of death.

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