INTRODUCTION

AFTER WHITENESS EVE

No whiteness is so white as the memory of whiteness.
—William Carlos Williams

The antiseptic setting of the Hyatt Dulles hotel must have reassured the suits and ties that, whatever else would be said, they were gathered in a gentlemanly way on behalf of “white genetic solidarity.” That archaic-sounding phrase summed up the American Renaissance (hereafter AR) conference held in Herndon, Virginia, one oddly mild February weekend in 2002. With nearly three hundred participants, this was the largest assembly of the group since its founder and president, Jared Taylor, summoned the first meeting in 1994. The theme of the 2002 event struck a chord barely thinkable in the congregation’s early days. This year the conference invited the men of AR to focus their attention, less on non-European immigrants and citizens of color, and more on the vicissitudes of white identity as it seemed to disappear before our eyes.
Remarkable to the 2002 event, AR gathered precisely to fantasize about, rather than eschew, life on the country’s racial margins. (I say *fantasize* because as of 2000 citizens identifying as white in the United States accounted for 71 percent of the population, hardly conclusive of the national majority’s unmaking.) That recent historical achievement we call the white race, the group never tired of opining, is about to be historically discarded. In many ways, of course, the 2002 event was consistent with the previous four conferences. The affair was again pitched as “an opportunity to hear some of the most courageous academics, journalists, and scientists of our time discuss the forces that will determine our future.” But the newly loaded question of that future, not yet one year after the attacks of September 11, is what the AR conferees sought to whip into racially recognizable shape. Indeed, there was a sort of psycho-temporal fantasy being concocted here, part nostalgia and part prophecy, with a particularly American combination of desire and loathing stirred in. The men of AR were engaged in a weekend mourning ritual over what they kept referring to as the death of the white race—and this, while whiteness was everywhere still animated and brutally alive. Within the patriotic ether of post-9/11, the group’s goal was to mingle the story of white identity’s more glorious past with a prevailing despair over its widely storied passing. In doing so, the group pointed toward the dream of white racial purity (and permanence) that it could evidently no longer actually afford. The general claims of the conference were easy enough to predict. Foreign violence from within and foreign violence from without U.S. borders now constitute the twin beasts dogging authentic American identity. But in response to the combined aggression in New York and Washington, D.C., white folk must get clear about domestic racial issues just one or two steps removed. We need to join phenotypical ranks to secure our nation’s future. We must make it a priority to confront such things as immigration, black-on-white crime, and the unhappiest form of bioterrorism yet known in the phantasmatic fatherland, rampant miscegenation. Laced within AR’s patriotic fervor, then, was the evidently more urgent matter of the U.S. Population Reference Bureau prediction. You will know it, in one form or another: “Sometime during the second half of the twenty-first century, the arbiters of the core national culture for most of its existence, are likely to slip into minority status.” And so, sealed into the conventioneer’s haze of an airport hotel, we white guys sought “the memory of whiteness.”

My purpose at the AR conference was to get a story, to hold my nose and mix it up with people looking more or less like me. I would then report back on the experience as a sort of antiracist exposé for the *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education.* Toward that end, I spent three agonizingly isolated days among my kind, mulling over a fantasy of whiteness now storied to be gone. More irritat-
ing than that, these days turned out to produce certain moments of intimacy that I would have liked to let go unnoticed. Hearing the ideas circulating around a coming white minority by the buttoned-down men of AR, I could not help making some unseemly comparisons closer to home. I could not help recollecting the remarkable excitement generated around the once unremarkable race not three years before, when the academic rush to whiteness I had helped encourage with an earlier edited volume reaped an eerily similar exuberance. The story I was getting, but found myself wanting to resist, was a story I struggled to keep from recognizing as a version of my own.

Since the mid-1990s, whiteness has been a prominent topic at more mainstream and well-respected academic gatherings, such as the American Social Science Association, the Modern Language Association, the Institute for Culture and Society, the American Studies Association, and the like. Somehow the idea of particularizing whiteness as a normative historical fiction, combined with an under-interrogated desire to see that race on the margins, carried good professional and even political currency. Indeed, at some of those venues I have been able to present material that ended up in *After Whiteness*, in effect joining what has become a kind of academic rush to distinguish what was once assumed (by most white folk, anyway) to be an undistinguished, invisible, and undivided race. What seems like a long time ago, and at once, a time too close at hand, humanities research in the 1990s saw a kind of academic great white hype about a topic AR members would have recognized with ease. The ambivalent words “I write on whiteness” were the only credentials needed to get me an invitation to sit down at the 2001 assembly with Nick Griffin, the affable, sinister head of the racist British National Party, and a white guy, it turns out, remarkably well attuned to the plight of white working-class men. My point is simply to say that, while covering the AR story, I noticed how the same kinds of hopes and fears garnering whiteness its share (and then some) of academic attention were meshing too easily with the tortured hearts and twisted minds I mixed with at the AR conference. This was MLA through the ethnographic looking glass. As soon as I paid the cab, got a receipt for later reimbursement, and checked in to the conference hotel like all the other attendees, I knew this would be academic multiculturalism turned precisely on its head. Wrapped with more or less sociable manners, at the expected location, and in requisite business attire, white racial self-interest was never “so white,” once again.

The presidential address in the Grand Ballroom midway through the conference only consolidated this nerve-wracking feeling of inversion. The AR founder and current chief, Jared Taylor, mingled a description of white marginality with a future for white folk that he wanted to take back from the nation’s...
coming multicolored fate. The task, he insisted, was to hasten the inevitable mainstreaming of white racial self-interest and to celebrate the premonitions of nationalism that the current fantasy of a white-minority country should proceed to arouse and inflame. At a location in sight of the U.S. Capitol, Taylor wanted to see democratic jurisprudence repealed, *habeas corpus* surrendered, and the reach of an all-powerful domestic spy ring enlarged to maintain our white-national security. Beyond these evidently too moderate actions, Taylor wanted the forced segregation of communities and schools, mass deportation, forcible repatriation, and above all, racially based fertility control. This was the U.S.A. Patriot Act just a click beyond Senator Trent Lott’s nostalgic endorsement of the segregationist politics behind Strom Thurmond’s 1948 Dixiecrat presidential campaign. Taylor’s presidential address was meant to spawn the rebirth of a nation. At the same time, his was a pitch for a form of racist nationalism meant to burst forth from within a respectable white-collar core. He wanted to arouse the bankers and real estate brokers, the lawyers and academics, the political advisors and the one school board member, who spoke in turn at AR about the coming white minority. It was this professional vanguard who could most capably articulate the challenges of white-racial marginalization, Taylor said. It was they who were in the most secure positions to criticize, if not abolish, the racial status quo.

With the *merely* conservative-sounding conference subtitle, “In Defense of Western Man,” the eugenically based *cri de coeur* of past AR conferences attempted this time to reach out from above, like Nick Griffin’s civic-minded handshake, to the excitable white guy next door. Fred Pfeil would have called this excitable white guy, tongue-in-academic-cheek, “the new subaltern subject of Post-Fordism.”8 And this description would be technically right, at least according to the numbers, since the real earnings of white men in the United States, having dipped during the 1970s and 1980s, declined faster than those of any other group during the recession of 1999–2001.9 Diminished wages aside, during Taylor’s presidential address I had to keep asking myself whether his excitable white guy was me. The domestic crisis of the state, declining wages, the manipulations of a flexible workforce, diversity management, and other such manifestations of post-Fordist political economy are the express concerns of a book like *After Whiteness*. And they are concerns, more disturbingly to its author, that AR’s mixed-class rank and file would have been willing enough to consider—in a life-or-death kind of way.

Taylor’s pitch got a good deal spicier than a civic-minded handshake accidentally aimed at me, as the presidential address concluded. “In the homespun wisdom of my grandmother,” he said, “race was our most extended family.” After CUNY philosophy professor Michael Levin’s eugenicist screed that after-
noon, of course, there was nothing surprising in Taylor’s ancestral racist mus-
ings. But in what followed, the call for “biological loyalty” was made more in-
tense by the revelation of AR’s more occulted preoccupation. Taylor proceeded
to trace the graphically sexualized nature of white racial disintegration, episodes
he assured us that were all but unmentionable in respectable circles like our
own. Against his better judgment, then, Taylor claimed that he had to include
this material. It provided mighty inspiration for addressing all the other out-
rages against the white American majority that were documented at the confer-
ence so far. No, this time he meant neither the hijacking of commercial airlines
nor the bioterrorism of making mixed-race babies, but something still more
lamentable than either of those offenses, something Taylor “[had] to talk about
... no matter how horrible.” The emblem and the outcome of a post-white
America, he whispered in confidence, was “black-on-white male rape.” Taylor’s
own reluctance to pronounce this suitably torrid hypothesis made for an odd
anticipation in the room. Having accomplished such high dramatic tension, he
then made what to some may have sounded like an odd request. He appealed to
his audience to identify with—really, in some sense, to embody—the lost figure
of white male “solidarity” that he found in the allegory of homosexual rape.
This “solidarity” was best achieved, Taylor’s heated logic seemed to run, as a di-
rect consequence of the black/white homosexual violation, the very image he
begged his audience to envision. “Group solidarity in prison,” Taylor rallied,
“means that rape of one is rape of all.” “Whites [have] become blacks’ personal
property [in prison].” And in prison, as in the ballroom where we made our
fantasies that night, we must “fully commit to each other.” We must “commit
to each other,” Taylor charged, or risk a “long-term suicide” that kills heterosex-
ual masculinity and the white race in one swipe.

Two more scenes in this story. During questions from the floor a middle-
aged white man approached the microphone. Next to the speaker’s athletic six-
foot frame, the questioner looked risibly and self-consciously diminutive. He
was sweating, I remember, and had an air of fealty toward the AR president
that seemed to bring him to the brink of tears. “I commit to you, Jared Taylor,”
he said. “If somebody attacks you, or anybody in this room, I will come to
your aid.” Here again I had to ask myself, was I already in Jared Taylor’s aid?
Was I joined to him insofar as we two white male “radicals” in sports jackets
and ties share an interest—if an inverted one—in telling stories about the pass-
ing of whiteness? More shameful than that, were we to be positioned the same
way, as the country imagines whatever remains in the racial majority’s wake?
(There are, of course, always other ways than race to tally identity’s numbers.)
The title of this book, After Whiteness, could as easily have been the title of Tay-
lor’s plenary address. And as reported to me by his U.S. presidential campaign
advisor, Patrick Buchanan’s new book, *The Death of the West*, was supposed to be *The Death of Whitey*, after all.¹²

That irritating thought was not altogether soothed when later, following dinner and drinks, matters turned from the violently intimate nature of Jared Taylor’s presentation to a more public and political discussion (this progression, too, marking a certain inversion of the norm). After a short break Taylor resumed the dais, as was his way by now, and introduced “a man whose talk would go down best after a few beers.” The reveler in question was Nick Griffin, my contact from the afternoon’s earlier discussion about mobilizing excitable white working-class men. In the final presentation of the night, Griffin was to address the surprise electoral successes of his British National Party, which he touted alongside the rise of other such movements in Germany and France. In the King’s own English, Griffin began his talk by speaking the usual racist missives. He reminded us “not [of our] conservative, but [of our] revolutionary movement.” “We white racialists must put away our boots, and put on our suits,” he said, affirming a dress code already enforced. “There is nothing left to preserve except the color of our children’s skin.” “I want white genocide trials for the likes of Blair and Clinton, [and would see them] hanging from the nearest lamp post.” And so on, and so forth, to the roar of applause mixed with back slapping, foot stomping, and laughter. But another beer (or another Chardonnay) and two standing ovations later, it became clear that the two forms of nationalist “white racialism” at work in his and Taylor’s speeches were not really the same. Somewhere, in the midst of what was supposed to be a lot of white racist good cheer, for one fleeting moment the BNP’s nationalism and whatever it was that Taylor’s organization imagined to the right of Buchanan and Thurmond were not in touch with the same species of hate. Griffin’s distinctly U.S. white-collar audience, in spite of the strong desire to make merry, appeared to choke on the bitter pill he called, without flinching, “class struggle.” Griffin did not articulate the fact that U.S. CEOs were taking home on average in 2000 about five hundred times the salary of the middle-income worker, compared with “only” twenty-five times that amount in the 1960s. Neither did he weave into his dissatisfaction with international corporatization the sad fact that real income has fallen since 1970 for U.S. workers, and continues to fall.¹³ But rather remarkably and, it turns out, awkwardly for most of his audience that night, Griffin’s racist invective ended with one or two quotations from Marx. In thinking about our earlier discussion, as well as any number of other less onerous fantasies about class consciousness when whiteness is gone, I found that Griffin’s citation of Marx provided the oddest mix of hope and despair in my mind. It would have been tempting to go another round after hours with him in the lobby to see if Griffin could be nudged off his racist soapbox
while keeping his working-class fidelities in place. But at this late point in the weekend of conference proceedings, who had that kind of resilience? What is more, who would really want to admit to the confusing prospect that opposing evaluations on the white majority’s so-called death could mimic one another on class?

What was clear in Griffin’s plenary address, beyond our inverted twin fantasies of a unified post-white labor force, was our mutual insistence that all current political options have “betrayed the working class.” Griffin’s economically based appeal to whiteness had preceded the avalanche of corporate scandals in 2002. He was, therefore, relieved from having to further antagonize his host and the AR membership with concrete examples of the big money rip-offs of workers. But his appeal to Marx would not have played any better to his fellow racists had the timing been different than it was. Griffin wanted to peddle a version of white genetic solidarity that strongly opposed the globalization of the free market and the further exploitation of labor. He meant to bemoan—as leftist scholars critical of whiteness (myself included) have done for some time—what he called “reductions in the wages of the ordinary worker.” But in the minds of a relatively well-off group of men like those who made up his audience that night, it was decided to leave that behind. Any emerging anticapitalist resentment would fix itself in an all-white America. Griffin finally chose not to press the economic point too hard, and the emphasis on white solidarity soon won back its former pride of place.

I use the story of my experiences at the AR conference to introduce *After Whiteness* because the idea of a coming white minority has captured both popular and academic imaginations with effects that are ambivalent, at best. Indeed, that formulation, “white minority,” might be put a little more precisely. The recent popularity of whiteness, at least within academe, has created the not unreasonable suspicion that so much white-on-white debate merely signals the opportunistic gaming of a multicultural administrative system. Even with an attempt like the one that follows to make sense out of *how we make sense of* what no longer worms away from critique, those welcomed charges are sure to advance. So I concede from the start that any work on whiteness will be full of holes and contradictions.

In the volume that began this project, *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, I suggested that an initial wave of work on the topic attempted to break what Frantz Fanon referred to as the “ontogenetic” seal of white normativity. That first wave of work challenged both the absence of whiteness from discussions of race, that is, its pretense to unmarkedness or purity, and the risible assumption that the white majority as such would continue beyond its specific historical moment. But even in 1997, when well-known scholars in what one still hesitates to
call a field, agreed to contribute to that early volume, there was the sense that a critical rush to whiteness would be symptomatic of the very problem of hegemony Whiteness wrestled to demolish. My suggestion back then was that academic work on whiteness should not expect to rid itself of the contradictions it pins on mass culture. This point, borne as it was from materialist theoretical training, seemed to me to mark the threshold of a second wave of research on the topic. While nobody uses (or did use) the term “whiteness studies” unless in ironically damning ways, it is true that by twentieth century’s end writing on whiteness was a part of academic culture in the awkwardly popular sense. This is why I ended my 1997 summation of the phenomenon (which admittedly brackets centuries of unrecognized critical encounters with whiteness) by referring to a transitional moment within feminism during the early 1980s.15 My sense in reading that archive was, and still is, that the relations between identity and difference are historically (but not whimsically) portable. My other sense was that, over time, they are also prolific.

The phrase “over time” in that last sentence is critical and essential to the work that follows in the present book. The task at hand is to make sense of a set of unprecedented changes in the dynamics of racial identity in the United States. The task is no longer simply to mark the unmarked and unremarkable status of whiteness as such, the way it was less than a decade ago. That much has happened, with results that have ranged from the most naive forms of romancing the other to the insidious militancy of white genetic self-defense. The more difficult work I now have in mind still runs along the lines that Marilyn Frye, Toni Cade Bambara, and other feminists of color set out to draw in the later 1980s. It takes seriously what I alluded to above regarding the white racists of AR as “a psycho-temporal” problem where the stakes are life-and-death. I am interested, in other words, in a way of describing how the white majority’s imagined move into the past is coordinated with its thoroughly agitated status in the present, and I want to do so for a future that I am sure is beyond the capacity of white guys like me to know. The core concern of After Whiteness, then, is to explore the remnants of white identity as a way of mobilizing one’s democratic commitments within what might be called (a little awkwardly, I realize) an economy of absence. More to the point of the 1980s feminist work with which I introduced the earlier book, this one traces the demise of unmarked subjectivity as a way of placing white folk face to face with the kinds of political exigencies we are used to handling at some appropriately distant remove. From here we might ask some difficult questions: how, for example, does the imagined disappearance of the white majority—the nation’s incipient temporal hallucination—work to produce the kinds of continuities with fascism that I have alluded to in reference to AR? By extension, how can the phantasm of a post-
white America keep from ratcheting up the prevailing sense of nationalist fervor already in our midst?

Recent scholarship on race has increasingly turned to the historical pressures now besetting the fiction Americans still insist on calling the white race. In doing so, it has marked the same attention to whiteness that made it possible for AR’s men to echo, if not exactly endorse, the reckless claim that whiteness in the United States is effectively leaving the country. The ambivalent prospect of an end to whiteness haunts progressive scholarship on race as much as it haunts the paranoid visions of white-collar racists on the other side of the ethnographic looking glass. For both groups, ironically, whiteness is both gone and still very much here. And if such a body of discourse called whiteness studies actually exists, there is a sense that the blind proliferation of this work creeps toward an ugly metamorphosis that will keep it from progressive goals. Perhaps whiteness studies might better be dubbed after-whiteness studies, thus keeping the temporal irony of its absent presence at the forefront and in play. Scholarship on whiteness typically begins with the awkward premise that the very object it presumes to study is something less to be preserved than to be uprooted, if not abolished, one happy day. That work, wittingly or not, serves to nudge to the surface the troubling sense that the critical study of whiteness was destined to come up against the limits of modern epistemology. Thus the more general theoretical concern that runs through the course of this book is to advance the agenda of a post-white analytic, that is, to assess how we presume to know and value a thing by the fact of its not being there.

No figure of racial phantasmagoria has been more popular and, in her own way, less actually there than Eve, the computer-generated multiracial cover girl for *Time* magazine’s 1993 special issue, “The New Face of America.” Eve, you may recall, is a composite image of fourteen different racial and ethnic identities, digitally morphed into a muted picture of the nation’s uncharted post-white future. The name Eve is, of course, biblically provocative. She clearly reestablishes a Genesis myth within the Puritan tradition of American exceptionalism. Eve avows a nationally reinvigorated origin of the species, an ironic “rebirth of the nation,” in a prelapsarian, ultimately species-less pitch for heterosexual coupledom. In Lauren Berlant’s astute evaluation, the image represents the latest ruse of “normative citizenship” as “hygienic governmentality” moves unimpeded into “the abstracted time and space of the private.” Eve generates “the embrace of heterosexuality for national culture” (*QW*, 208), she writes, “turn[ing] the loss of white cultural prestige into a gain for white cultural prestige” (*QW*, 200). Michael Warner casts the face of Eve as a “divine Frankenstein,” a normative monster who ushers in the hegemonic optimism of “a happy monoracial culture” that is predicated on making mixed-race babies. “It is not
Take a good look at this woman. She was created by a computer from a mix of several races. What you see is a remarkable preview of...

THE NEW FACE OF AMERICA
How Immigrants Are Shaping the World's First Multicultural Society
symbolic femininity,” he writes, “but practical heterosexuality that guarantees the monocultural nation” (PCP, 189). Even Susan Gubar’s relative optimism about Eve, that “morphing postulates a visual elasticity beyond racial dualism,” is tempered by Donna Haraway’s wanting to shiver off the effects of “numbing” that Eve’s muted visage delivers.19 These critical responses to a face of mixed-race identity, and to its mixed messages, underscore a caveat that After Whiteness obeys at every turn. Beware the end of American whiteness, which might be nothing more than the fulfillment of its ends.

But the image has a certain popular allure that may, or may not, be so reductively admonished. In her appeal to the many scholars of culture and race (me included) who go on reproducing her face in our books, Eve’s frustrating silence almost absorbs the criticism laid at her nonexistent feet. If she is Frankenstein, she is also part Bartleby. In the rush to get a properly critical hold on this phantasmatic icon of post-whiteness, Eve manages without even trying to underscore what I keep calling the mobilization of absence in time (or here, literally, in Time). Her own popularity exists on account of her omni-critical dumbness, I want to say. Her silent face inspires a certain nervousness all around as she both declares, and effectively hides, our national future. Indeed, her message, if there is one, might be that this future, like Eve herself, is for the first time not self-evidently present to the nation that struggles to claim it. Perhaps then eve in lowercase is a better way to think of what I would claim is the more richly ambivalent historical terrain on which the white race may yet be unmade. In this sense, Eve’s (or eve’s) virtual visage might elicit that peculiar temporal mix I noted at the AR conference. That was a mix, recall, of our uncertainty about the passing of the white majority and the anticipation of a future that surely cannot be known in advance. In that sentence I am simply suggesting, again, that on the brink of what many are now imagining is a post-white American future (call that brink an “after-whiteness eve”), it remains a matter of both popular and academic uncertainty as to what will emerge in its place.

As a scholar who perhaps more than any other single figure might be called, no doubt reluctantly, a founding father of so-called American whiteness studies, David Roediger, too, is critically measured in his evaluation of Eve. He echoes the other scholars I have mentioned, in many ways. Roediger is clear about how this mixed-race assemblage of commercial media culture is “link[ed] to a multiracial denial of racial reality” insofar as the facts of exploitation and poverty remain out of view. But to complicate that denial, Roediger evokes Alexander Saxton, who writes that “white racism is essentially a theory of history.”20 With this I take Saxton to be saying, as I too want to say throughout After Whiteness, that we may well critique, even as we reanimate, the events we declare to be past. “We organize and write, like it or not,” Roediger says, “in the face of Eve’s
appeal, and the appeal of Eve’s face frankly causes serious problems for anti-racists” (CW, 15). The term “in the face of” may well be taken to mean in spite of Eve’s nefarious “nativist folklore credibil[ity]” (CW, 10). But the words “like it or not” and “appeal” also bespeak Roediger’s reluctant admission that U.S. academics may well have to begin where the rest of their countrymen do. We will have to begin, that is, with the contradictions at work in the mass culture about which we speak.

After Whiteness never leaves the contradictions that surround the virtual visage of Eve. This book is therefore part forensic report, part user’s guide, and maybe part hallucination. Its core question asks how an emergent post-white national imaginary figures into public policy issues, into the habits of sexual intimacy, and into changes within public higher education, at a moment when white racial change has declared its ambivalent debut.

Part One of the book examines the congressional and popular debates over multiracial identity that surrounded the census leading up to the 2000 count. Here, I argue, a new form of identity politics leaves behind the civil rights legacy and signals the crisis of the liberal state. In my account of racial self-recognition, the constitutional mandate for enumerating citizenship reaches a revealing point of computational unease. Census counting is now beset with forms of ontological complexity that press upon identity itself as the formal basis of democratic governing. The first two sections of Part One trace the unlikely, but ultimately successful, addition of a check-all-that-applies option to racial self-enumeration for the 2000 census. Along the way, I offer a brief account of the crucial link between 1960s civil rights legislation and the forms of official race classification as constructed for the last two census counts. I do this in order, first, to interrogate the precarious idealism behind the notion of consistent racial self-recognition. Second, I am interested in the civil rights movement’s influence on the census in order to link the various forms of misrecognition that now accompany the act of racial self-regard. The ontological permutations I want to trace in multiracialism signal a crisis within the liberal state where multitudes replace identity as such. The third section of Part One adjoins the U.S. census debates to developments regarding identity and the law that have occurred within Critical Race Theory. I am also interested in changes at work in what David Theo Goldberg calls the racial state. The goal here is to bring the contingencies of state-authorized racial self-categorization to bear on questions of juridical procedure. I maintain that the state’s postmodern interest in race is doubly coercive and protective, inclusive and exclusive. As the claims upon civil rights justice proliferate and intensify, the state has developed an accompanying experimental interest in racial heterogeneity. But this interest,
paradoxically, also enables the state’s presumed domestic obligations to all but disappear.

The fourth section of Part One applies the lessons of the preceding sections to the question of civil society in more general terms. Here, too, I want to complicate the Enlightenment ideals of intersubjectivity that multiracialism might seem to uphold. Of particular interest in this fourth section is the influential work of Jürgen Habermas on communicative reason, as well as Charles Taylor’s seminal endorsement of a politics of mutual, over purely self-, recognition. My claim is that the form of neo-Hegelianism espoused by these two distinguished social theorists never quite escapes Hegel’s nationalist longings, and indeed, is inadvertently sympathetic to a multiracial rebirth of the nation. The overall goal of my discussion of Habermas and Taylor (and secondarily, Hegel) is to trace civil society’s apparent disintegration, as much as to foster a more pronounced collision between individual and political life. I want to critique a liberal progressive-activist tendency that upholds a post-white national order by emphasizing racial oppositions and retaining civil rights solutions to them. The fifth and final section of Part One explores post-formalist conceptions of identity in the wake of civil rights, and offers a cursory rethinking of class as a way of coming to better terms with the immanent force of racial multitudes. In general, the goal of Part One of *After Whiteness* is to situate the state’s official turn to racial subjectivity as a way of governing via dissensus. The racial divisions that formally hindered civil society from ever becoming fully established are being removed, or so congressmen and multiracial activists would have us believe. And with that removal, or that alleged removal, identity politics are altered so that having a race matters less, and matters more, to the vanishing liberal state.

Part Two of the book traces the way whiteness is both surrendered and defended given the affective twists and turns expressed by two groups that are organized around white masculinity. In this account of the Christian men’s group the Promise Keepers (PK) and the neofascist organization the National Alliance (NA), I am interested in sussing out the volatile psychic investments that white heterosexual men have in men of color. The psychic intensity exhibited by each of these two groups, at their opposite extremes, advances a “radical” reclamation of traditional family structures. My analysis of PK and NA thus reveals how love and hate, arousal and repression, authority and submission, humility and pride cooperate in contemporary white masculinity. The anxieties produced by growing inequities of wealth are lived differently by today’s white men than simply by cordonning off color from whiteness, as in former times. Class angst is lived, not simply through modern forms of white
racial separatism, but via a postmodern, erotically charged softening of mutable racial distinctions.

The initial sections in Part Two trace the accelerated rise of the Christian men’s group the Promise Keepers in the early and mid-1990s. Touted as the largest evangelical movement in U.S. history, this group exhibits the pursuit of white racial reconciliation, and binds it to the dictates of masculine heterosexuality, specifically, to fatherhood and marriage. PK is only one of a number of formal organizations promoting what has been called the U.S. marriage movement. But given the group’s fundamental multicultural interests, it is curious that PK is bound (even if covertly) to the right-wing public policy groups that support it. In line with these groups, the ideological lineaments PK attaches to the heterosexual family become supercharged. But oddly, PK does this by appealing to hypermasculinized forms of self-sacrifice that are hinged to white racial transgression. The second section in Part Two develops this hypothesis with further examples from PK literature (and, less explicitly, from my own participation at PK events). Here I detail how PK’s interest in pursuing cross-racial forms of heteromasculine intimacy becomes the platform on which the achingly uncertain future of whiteness depends. The work of masculine recovery resides in the cultivation of a post-white sensibility within what PK terms “a father-shaped void.” At stake in this deliciously loaded phrase is the very heart of what I am calling “a fascism of benevolence.” By this phrase, I mean to highlight a process of white racial self-negation that returns in the inverted form of sexual self-reassertion. My general point regarding heterosexual masculinity is that the love and hate of color operate in common, and at the same time.

Subsequent to initial work on PK, the argument takes a more theoretical turn to discuss the role self-negation plays in forming what Theodor Adorno calls the authoritarian personality. The goal of this intermediary section will be to construct the conceptual bridges that join PK’s gentler approach to race (the love of color) to the explicitly neofascist aims of the National Alliance (the hate of color). Here I follow the lead of Paul Apostolidis’s impressive book on Adorno and the Christian right, which despite its subtle analysis of conservative religious radio culture leaves the issue of sexuality more or less to the side. I use Apostolidis’s work on Christian family policy groups to set up the psychic hinge revealed by the PK/neofascism connection with which I will eventually conclude. I also turn in this intermediary section to the work of Judith Butler and David Eng on the racial moorings of masculine heterosexuality. Eng’s path-breaking book on the relation between heterosexual masculinity and race is especially important for contextualizing my analysis of PK. However, my analysis differs from his on what seems to me an overly schematic account of the psychic life of heterosexual white men. Eng and Butler commonly suggest that racial re-
pudiation satisfies the mandates of white racial purity—an important formulation for anatomizing the neofascist imaginary in, for example, the infamous National Alliance novel I examine later, *The Turner Diaries*. But even when I apply the Butler-Eng hypothesis to this best-selling racist book, their theses do not explain the partnering of race and sexuality as it occurs within PK. In this group, white masculine sexuality plays out in terms that are exactly opposite to those that presume to maintain white racial purity through color’s strict repudiation. A carefully cultivated, if also extremely volatile, form of post-white sensibility is the unlikely basis by which heterosexuality is secured in PK. Indeed, PK and U.S. neofascism share the same heterosexuality logic, I will finally suggest. But they do so via a kind of mirrored libidinal inversion. Both groups seek to preserve masculinity, but the more curious point is that they do so by mobilizing exactly the opposite extremes regarding race and whiteness. According to an unlikely composite of racial benevolence and U.S. neofascism, white men’s relation to alterity is writ *doubly* as an attraction and an aversion to the future forms of racial multiplicity they cannot quite embody.

Part Three of *After Whiteness* is a critical account of identity studies and diversity within the contemporary public research university. Of concern here, to begin with, is the replacement of public support for the university with market-oriented forms of corporate funding that are indicative of the vanishing liberal state. The initial two sections trace the vexed effects of academic corporatization, among other places, within English studies. I also produce here a critical reassessment of Clark Kerr’s administrative classic, *The Uses of the University* (and related subsequent books), and evoke Bill Readings’s influential hypotheses in *The University in Ruins*. My general purpose, following that watershed book, is to connect the alleged collapse of traditional English studies to the public university’s withering claim on democratic purpose. From different quarters and with diverging agendas, both Kerr and Readings surmise the same problem. For Readings, it is the rise of social dissensus and cultural “de-referentialization.” Kerr signals the postmodern university’s rise by a far simpler name, the advance of what he calls the “mob” beyond the multiversity’s gates. Both Readings and Kerr allege that an earlier social contract between knowledge and the public has effectively come apart. And while they may use different language to say so, both authors allude to how such a moment of coming apart is the result of a kind of forcing together, indeed, a collision between the once assumedly separate realms of work and knowledge production. This coming apart of the modern university’s former public purpose and the current collision between thought and material life are best understood, I will argue, as symptoms of academic labor struggle. Related to this struggle, and in many ways central to it, is the issue of diversity or multiculturalism. Within the corporate university
scheme, I contend, the current flirtation with post-whiteness remains, at least partly, a highly managed affair. Cultural brokering within administrative circles organizes new and more fluid orders of work. Whether or not (more optimistically) that fluidity may give way to forms of democratic collaboration with labor as its most critical component remains very much to be seen.

Having measured the university’s stake in multiculturalism by contextualizing it within academic labor politics, the third section of Part Three fine-tunes the discussion by turning to the curious rise of so-called whiteness studies. Here I want to explore the ambivalent institutional locale of this relatively new-sprung branch of critical ethnography, which is, in effect, an accidental field, if a field at all. The argument here is that the recent attention paid to whiteness, as well-intended as its practitioners plead it was and it is, is best considered within the conditions of institutional ruin that whiteness studies cannot help but reveal. It has become a common enough charge that the spate of work that amassed on whiteness throughout the 1990s has served to exacerbate the problem of white hegemony that it only pretended to unmask. Critical responses to whiteness studies are of great importance, since they are attuned to the ways this work plays out materially, that is, how it tends to run contrary to an author’s best intentions. But there is a creeping redundancy in the soon-to-be hoary debate about the political efficacy of academic work on whiteness. My argument is that the contradictions surrounding whiteness studies remain one of its most salient and worthwhile features. In this sense, the study of whiteness was never—and with hard enough work will never be—an unproblematically unified institutional force. And this is so, not because whiteness studies scholars have resolved the contradictions upon which their writing secretly rests. Rather, a lack of institutional force is the only force the ruined university allows. The turn to whiteness in academe is symptomatic, in other words, of an increasingly exploitative labor environment that is itself predicated on cultural absence.

The fourth section of Part Three connects the infelicitous rise of whiteness studies to one of the most definitive, if also highly contested, developments within humanities scholarship in recent decades. In this section of the argument, I want to widen my concern over multicultural knowledge production and whiteness to include the boom in Cultural Studies (hereafter CS) as it entered the United States from the United Kingdom during the early 1990s. Bill Readings’s ideas about de-referential knowledge and the forms of social disensus pursuant to it—what is in fact a critical reinscription of Clark Kerr’s fear of the mob—are points here brought to bear on the legacy of the British New Left. The specific problem of interest here is a historical one concerning how writing and work are related. That an overdue encounter with labor in the ruined university occurs simultaneous to the collapse of writing’s representational
function is the point Readings makes about the rise of CS. This point recalls the collision between writing and work, and with that, what I have been calling the economy of absence that is endemic to academic life. In my account of CS’s investment in popular culture, the renowned Marxist cultural historian E.P. Thompson will be an essential figure. Here I will turn to his work on the eighteenth-century British working class, in particular, his writing on the crowd as a way to link back to Kerr’s fear of the mob. Thompson, as is well known, was one of the key New Left originators of British CS in the 1960s. Moreover, he is celebrated in North America as one of CS’s founding fathers and sometimes its guiding conscience. I will argue that Thompson’s work on the eighteenth-century laboring masses is seminal to the way U.S. CS wrongly uses popular culture to fortify its own troubled representational status. Thompson’s difficulties with Louis Althusser (as a stand-in for theory, in general) betray an under-historicized notion of political economy as it relates both to identity and knowledge production. Thompson glosses the historicity of this tripartite arrangement and allows, apropos the unlikely figure of Adam Smith, a false moral continuity between identity and object, and again, between writing and work.

Finally, section five of Part Three turns to the question of representational misfires within writing from the angle of contemporary literary studies. Such authoritative figures as Alvin Kernan and Harold Bloom bemoan the Western literary canon as something irretrievably lost. Literary studies, the charge proceeds, has been invaded by new knowledge, namely, the cobelligerent upstarts of multiculturalism and CS. But the storied demise of Western literature, like whiteness, remains attractive in the ruined university precisely because so many people gain authority by evoking its loss. In that sense, the whiteness studies trend and the dead-end turn to pop culture that plagues English are not antagonists to the traditional literary work once found there. Indeed, according to the institutional logic I will try to describe, race studies and CS are literature’s unlikely bedfellows and partners in crime. All three function according to an economy of absence that organizes the humanities in ruined academe. In the wake of identity studies and so much interdisciplinary work, the current afterlife of traditional literary studies—a field that insists on being addressed precisely as “dead”—is once again symptomatic of a larger set of problems that adjoin writing to mass politics and race.

One figure who is sufficiently popular, multicultural, and literary—and who I want to suggest is up to something like finding labor conflict within an economy of absence—is Toni Morrison. The text I have in mind is her award-winning work of nonfiction, Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination. In this text, Morrison provides an account of Africa as a figure of absence that, while historically excluded, is indeed generative of canonical
American literature. This hypothesis provides effective grounds for thinking critically through the normativizing effects of whiteness. But her deft attention to causality as that which is generatively gone (I will have been calling this labor power) has even further-reaching implications than this. *Playing in the Dark* makes use of writing’s necessarily dissensual ends. It shows how historically unclaimed affective arrangements can become the basis for more democratic reconfigurations of how we work and live in the future. In such a way, Morrison’s own work gestures beyond the ruined university, finding in its irrefutable disasters the necessary hope for a democracy whose time is not yet known. A more modest contribution to the achievement of that goal is the best I might hope for in writing *After Whiteness*. 