

The Invention of the White Race, Volume Two: The Origins of Racial Oppression in Anglo-America (Haymarket Series)

Theodore W. Allen



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On the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in 1963, Martin Luther King declared his dream of a racially integrated, non-discriminatory American society. Some three centuries before, that dream had in many ways been reality, since white skin privilege was recognized neither in law nor in the social practices of the laboring classes. But by the early decades of the eighteenth century, racial oppression would be the norm in the plantation colonies, and African Americans would continue to suffer under its yoke for more than two centuries. In this second volume of his acclaimed study of the origins of racial oppression, Theodore Allen explores the ways in which African bond-laborers were turned into chattel slaves and were differentiated from their fellow proletarians of European origin.

Rocked by the solidarity across racial lines exhibited by the rebellious laboring classes in the wake of the famous Bacon's Rebellion, the plantation bourgeoisie sought a solution to its labor problems in the creation of a buffer social control stratum of poor whites, who enjoyed little enough privilege in colonial society beyond that of their skin color, which protected them from the enslavement visited upon Africans and African Americans. Such was, as Allen puts it, "the invention of the white race," that "peculiar institution" which continues to haunt social relations in the US down to the present. Allen's two volumes are essential reading for students of US history and politics.

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