

Race and America's Long War

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PREFACE AND
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The United States developed its forms of democratic politics and capitalist economics from processes of imperial expansion, colonial dispossession, and racial domination. To observe this is to state a banal truth, yet one that is dimly acknowledged, disavowed, or defensively protested across large swaths of the country. Dispute over the meaning and interpretation of such basic facts gives rise to intense political and ideological struggles over the boundaries of civic belonging and recognition and distributions of material harm and benefit. From abolitionism to the modern labor, civil rights, and black power movements, these struggles have produced exacting visions of solidarity in opposition to racial division and inequality (less so to colonial dispossession) and engendered ever more subtle and intractable forms of accommodation to, and collective reinvestments in, racial and colonial ordering. Until recently, the last point might have been controversial, for many people, perhaps the majority, now reject or condemn slavery, Indian removal, Jim Crow, and racially based immigration and naturalization restrictions, and doubt that similarly extreme forms of exclusion actively shape current U.S. political culture and policy. The successful presidential campaign of Donald Trump shows, however, that no one

should be surprised by the resilience of racism's historical legacies and current appeal.

To conceptualize the reanimation and reinvention of racism as more than attitudinal, but rather as a publicly sanctioned ordering of social and economic life along the lines of group inequality and enmity, is no simple matter. An inevitable temptation in the face of its recurrence and disavowal is to lament stubborn continuities of history or deficits of human nature. Racism's manifold extensions from small-scale failures of interpersonal recognition to consequential aggregation and differentiation of group vulnerabilities and privileges is similarly vexing: it can seem omnipresent, yet located nowhere in particular. The great black intellectual and activist W. E. B. Du Bois famously described racial division as "the problem [that] cuts across and hinders the settlement of other problems." Du Bois's relentless mastery of discipline after discipline and his scrutiny of local, national and global contexts showed how presumptions of racial hierarchy structured the broad field of what could be known and what could be valued in the modern world. Examining how forces of white supremacy prevailed following the Civil War and Reconstruction, he observed the specific role played by scholars who made a "propaganda of history," one in which the testimony of emancipated slaves and their descendants remained "barred from court."¹

The intellectual and political struggles of the past century have lifted some, but not all, of these epistemic blinders. Invariably, racism returns in the double guise of sanctioned violence and sanctioned ignorance that Du Bois identified. Many contemporary antiracists argue that racial violence, and antiblackness in particular, is the ongoing, constitutive basis of U.S. civil and civic organization. A little more than a century ago, the white supremacist, political theorist, and historian John Burgess affirmed this exact point, insisting that any consideration of the rights of "barbaric populations" was "petty and trifling in comparison with the transcendent right and duty to establish political and legal order everywhere."² In a country

that arrests, deports, and incarcerates millions of people each year—disproportionately black people and people of color—and which, in the name of collective security, engages in police and military action all around the world, including summary assassinations of anonymous enemies who possess no rights that Americans are bound to respect, we must ask how far we have progressed from the modes of racial dominance out of which the wealth of modern nations grew.

Those of us who are committed to contesting and overcoming these historical legacies make a mistake, however, when we regard the manifest continuities of racial hierarchy as a sign of its strength and permanence. Collective efforts of reparations, reconstruction, and resistance by and for the enslaved, segregated, undocumented, colonized, and dispossessed—that is, people generationally burdened by socially antagonistic and fragmenting violence—have provided cognitive and moral resources for a different account and accounting. To remain transfixed at the point of racial abjection and brokenness, repeatedly bearing witness to the bareness of life stripped of well-being, rights, and physical protection, can lead to intellectual solipsism and political paralysis, rendering us oblivious to variation and contingency and to the difference made by struggles for survival, political transformation and collective world making. As a regime of power, racial ordering betrays political weakness. Since it must continually secure and even coerce compliance and also prevent defection among perpetrators, it is unstable and ideologically fragile. Dependent upon morally discomfiting public force, it is subject to continual delegitimation. If there is a lesson that I hope to convey, it is not the inexorability of racial domination but the record of social failure that its defectors, critics, opponents, and survivors have illuminated.

Amid racism's historical ruins and contemporary wreckage, it is not easy to balance understanding of continuity and change. A central claim of this book is that we are living in a period in which the structural violence of racial division and animus has been renewed and renovated under the sign

and aegis of war. The frontier wars, the wars of the early U.S. empire, and the twentieth century's world wars all illuminated affinities between war making and race making, activating or reanimating distinctions between friend and enemy along an internal racial border. "We have two enemies to contend with," announced the mayor of Richmond, Virginia, during the war of 1812: "the one open and declared; the other nurtured in our very bosoms." In a dispatch from the Philippines in 1899, Marine sergeant Howard McFarland recounted his desire to "blow every nigger into a nigger heaven," confirming the observation of an unnamed black soldier who thought that U.S. counterinsurgency was an extension of "home treatment for colored people."³ After the racial pogroms in several U.S. cities during World War I, a disillusioned Du Bois wondered, "How could America condemn in Germany that which she commits, just as brutally, within her own borders?" "Our life is a war, and I have been a traitor all my born days, a spy in the enemy's country, ever since I give up my gun back in the Reconstruction," Ralph Ellison's protagonist notes in the opening pages of *Invisible Man*, recalling his grandfather's deathbed revelation. Following the U.S. invasion of Vietnam, James Baldwin observed that black and brown people in the central city also lived in occupied territory: "The meek Southeast Asians, those who remain, shall have their free elections. The meek American Negroes—those who survive—shall enter the great society."⁴

Ellison and Baldwin wrote in the milieu of the rising black-freedom movement that developed in a contentious dialectic with U.S. globalism. From its inception after World War II, U.S. global power rested on the pillars of an aspirational racial liberalism and economic growth. Through the expansion of international circuits of resource extraction, trade, finance, and manufacturing, economic growth was the medicine that would forestall communist "slavery" and cure international capitalism of its colonial hangover. The cold war was also the crucible for fundamental concessions to black civil rights and political participation and rejection of national origin as a cri-

terion for immigration and naturalization. Domestic racial injustice was magnified by the global claims and staging of U.S. power. Internal racial conflict, in turn, became a lens for viewing U.S. military engagement overseas and adjudicating whether it represented a departure from or an extension of colonial domination, and for examining an internal colonial divide within the affluent society. Following the passage of successful national civil-rights legislation and intensifying urban black protest, Martin Luther King Jr.'s indictment of the Vietnam War for foreclosing the promise of a generous, inclusive, full-employment welfare state at home brought these issues together in a uniquely powerful way. It also highlighted a widening gulf between a national, institutionalized black politics, whose fortunes were now tied to the liberal-pluralist distributive order, and internationalist black radicalisms, fragmented and denuded in battles with repressive state power.

From the 1970s onward, the imagined fulfillment of the black civil-rights imperative and public claims to a new national standard of racial inclusivity suggested progress beyond the old, tortured dialectic of the inner and outer war. Instead, the dialectic was entering a new phase. The pacification process directed at black and third world radicalisms after the 1960s, in particular, was a seedbed from which new conceptions of inequality were realized and practiced in trials by violence: the wars on crime, drugs, and now terror. Through the 1990s, the success of neoliberal policies that rolled back welfare-state protections and market regulations in the name of austerity, efficiency, and individual responsibility carried a similarly sharp racial edge as they sought to separate the deserving from the threatening poor. At the same time, as it settled into orthodoxy, neoliberalism came to represent a paradoxical bifurcation of the racial order, with promises of upward mobility linked to values of racial diversity and market- and investor-friendly public policy, and widening states of economic precariousness managed through de facto racial profiling, criminalization, and ever stingier, means-tested assistance for the poor.

Much as *Gilded Age* capitalists claimed title to the abolitionist legacy against the backdrop of lynch law and the small wars of U.S. empire, neoliberal exponents of market progressivism appropriated liberal antiracism and civil rights discourse in the shadow of the carceral state and the launching of the global war on terror. In this context, commonplace pronouncements about the end of racism and racial divisions strike a discordant note. Some on the political Left (historically committed to struggles for racial justice), for example, have argued that under the terms of neoliberal order, talk of racial disparity has come to obscure fundamental material deprivation and class violence, including a convergence of market-induced debilities—stagnant wages, joblessness, homelessness, and ill health—for the black and nonblack poor alike.⁵ In the decades following World War II, publicly subsidized, racially discriminatory suburban housing markets and transportation infrastructures contributed to stark, multigenerational disparities between black and white household wealth. Since the 1970s, flat wages and the steady loss of manufacturing jobs have widened economic inequalities across the board. Greater black access to private home ownership (often financed by subprime mortgages), preceded the great recession of 2008. In that year alone, more than \$7 trillion in household equity evaporated, dramatically eroding the financial standing of the (aspiring) middle class as a whole and leading to the highest numbers of people in poverty in the United States in almost half a century.⁶ In a society that protects ever-narrower bands of wealth and privilege against the needs of the many, the race line and the class line follow increasingly similar contours.

What the renewed attention to class division and class struggle overlooks, however, is how technologies of sequester, confinement, and partition—informed by a long history of white supremacy and imperial citizenship—also expanded decisively during this period, despite declining rates of crime. Today, forms of militarized police enclosure—from gated communities to carceral spaces—represent a kind of generalized protective custody—

a broad and flexible modality of class rule that augments and conjoins police and military power as necessary to managing capitalism's unevenness across borders and within populations, and reanimates racial despotism as a vector of community protection. The primary casualties and victims of the new regime of racial sequester, black men of prime working age, have been removed from public life in staggering numbers.⁷ No less significant, though less visible, is the removal of several million undocumented migrant workers since the 1990s.⁸ In the wake of these trends, the response to the attacks of September 11, 2001, engendered a sweeping expansion and reorganization of the security state. Today sharply differentiated zones of affluence and dereliction, militarized policing, and criminal stigma have been substituted for urban and suburban racial geographies, the legal dualism of Jim Crow, and the overt racial stereotyping of the previous racial regime. Emerging alongside the liberalization of market action and tolerance for racial diversity is a society of walls, cages, and endless war.

The commonsense view that overt, racially targeted state-sanctioned violence is now unacceptable and a social problem leads to assessments that deem such violence—for example, police shootings of unarmed black men and women—as arising from justified fear, accident, or individual error, rather than a structured and structuring public mechanism and investment.⁹ Racial differentiation, however, persists as a specific type of social relation precipitated in and through the state and the public sanctioning of violent exceptions to consensual politics under cover of law—in the service of material inequality and collective security. This past history of race making has yielded vast territories of exception drawn around hollowed-out central cities, border zones, impoverished suburbs, agricultural deserts, and carceral corridors that run from urban schools to rural prisons.

In the context of a global history of imperial and colonial capitalism, in which the liberalism of metropolitan centers was little more than a pale shadow, race making also develops through forms of national aggression and

predation that produce new racist assemblages. The socially created artifact of racism, race is a fungible assemblage rather than a coherent, preconstituted entity. Not only is there no singular racism, but, like any complex collectivizing or aggregating figure (like class), race is heterogeneous, and it also works through heterogeneity. Gender, religion, economic conditions, sexuality, disability and other key markers of social and embodied difference are the modalities in which race is lived; they are also selectively accented in processes of ascribing racial characteristics to groups, especially ideas about deviant sexuality, mental incapacity, moral deficiency, and behavioral threat. Rather than illuminating racism's uniformity and constancy, the ebb and flow of animus against migrants, the more recent rise of Islamophobia, or the periodically renewed ambit of anti-blackness from slavery and Jim Crow to mass imprisonment, illustrate change as well as constancy in racial orders.

It is often observed that the experience of national belonging requires citizens to forget the founding violence that lies at the origins of modern nation-states. For the most part, however, forgetting and disavowal remain the prerogative of dominant states and national insiders. Those outside this charmed circle have been marked as fair game. Race is a product of racism, but it is not imposed only from the outside. Predatory violence against people presumed to be lacking in sovereignty or unfit for self-government has imprinted and burdened individual bodies, intergenerational kinship relations, and spatially demarcated contact zones with memories and expectations of stress, vulnerability, and proximity of death. Memories and identifications form narrative enclosures and conceptions of "linked fate" and common struggle for affected groups, whose differentiation by both traumatic and quotidian violence is recast by the very society that depends upon but disavows such violence in official stories about inherent group deficiencies and threats. Such is the discursive weave (and the only real and substantive basis) of racial differentiation.¹⁰

Race, in short, is a modality of group domination and oppression. Yet it requires a story (whether biological, sociological, anthropological, or historical) explaining how and why such practices persist and can be justified. Paradoxically, to be counted as an ethical and reasonable person within contemporary society requires the rejection of race as a legitimate mode of ascription. Where racism is overt, it is often met with opprobrium (though this and other features of the post-civil rights era liberal order may be giving way). Historical indexes of racial domination, including group-differentiated vulnerabilities to violence, poverty, punishment, and ill health, are in this view, thought to be vestigial, unsystematic, unintended, and lacking in social authorship, and their elimination is considered socially desirable. Deepening the paradox is that for elite institutions, evidence of nontransformative racial diversification is the surest proof of racism's vestigial character—up to and including electing a black president.

Arguably it was at this very moment when the shadow lineage reasserted itself. By 2008, the containment of race talk by a color-blind, postracial consensus, enlivened with a little diversity, was falling apart. Racist talk, thought to have been banished, reemerged with a vengeance. When it lamented loss of country and Muslim/socialist/illegal alien/terrorist-sympathizer occupants of the White House, it was ridiculed as fringe. But decades of torture, abuse, murder, deportation, and imprisonment of black and brown men and women, by police and military forces of the United States—from Guantanamo to Abu Ghraib and Bagram to the streets of Chicago, St. Louis, Baltimore, New York City, and beyond—suggested otherwise. The idea that the toxicity of race is consigned to the past is similar to the denial that humans have made the planet hotter and less habitable.

The essays in this book take the imperial, settler-colonial, and slaveholding provenance of the United States as their starting point. They consider race making as an artifact and product of this history, its economies of extraction and expansion, affluence and precariousness, dispossession and security. They

reject an oft-told story in which the Indian Wars were tragic, inevitable, and consigned to the past, and the "original sin" of slavery was redeemed in successive American wars of liberation from bondage.¹¹ Exploring the interrelationship between the inner and outer war over a wide swath of American history, they point to a more violent and corrupt set of origins for today's endless wars in the interior of U.S. society and in its imperial history. They suggest that the "long peace" after World War II—the supposedly virtuous circle linking liberal internationalism overseas and liberal (racial) reform at home—was not only shaped by the cold war but shadowed by the wars on America's internal racial border.

These essays were written over several years and influenced by many people working on common fronts. The premise that guides them is that labors of egalitarian social transformation will fail if they do not frontally address the forms of human sacrifice and sundering of human commonality effected by state-sanctioned violence. *Race and America's Long War* trespasses on terrain explored more deeply and more fully by many able scholars and writers. Particularly influential on my thinking in this book is the work of historians and theorists of the carceral state; studies that examine the postcolonial history of the U.S. empire; the recent and powerful resurgence of indigenous and critical theoretical accounts of North American settler colonialism; scholarship on the global lineaments of counterinsurgency and police power; and work in African American studies that tracks the afterlives of Atlantic slavery.¹² In the interests of brevity and accessibility, I do not expressly engage with this secondary literature or probe the work of individual scholars for lines of agreement or disagreement. In no way should this approach be considered a diminution of my debts to them or an indication of their agreement with me.

I thank the individuals and collectives who have sustained me and helped me to develop many of the ideas presented here. During a decade at the University of Washington in Seattle, I learned to think about U.S. race

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Since moving to New York University in 2008, I have been lucky to teach with two of the most luminous scholars and thinkers of my generation. In my graduate course with Ruth Wilson Gilmore "Race, Prisons, War," I first tested many of these ideas under the watchful eyes of a visionary teacher and renowned activist scholar. In our undergraduate course "Slavery, Race, and Radicalism," Jennifer Morgan pushed me to rethink everything I thought I knew about gender, race, and slavery, and in doing so posed questions that I will grapple with long into the future.

Charting new terrains of theory and research, Monica Kim's forthcoming book on the interrogation rooms of the Korean War is a profound work of

scholarship that will change our understanding of the cold war and the U.S. approach to decolonization. Likewise, Stuart Schrader's forthcoming book on U.S. counterinsurgency and professional policing will make it difficult for anyone to consider U.S. global military empire as distinct from the expansion of police power and the fashioning of domestic racial order after World War II. Both Monica and Stuart have been generous readers of my work. I also want to recognize one of the most spirited cohorts of graduate students I have had the good fortune to work with, including Emma Shaw Crane, Maya Wind, Jackson Smith, Cos Tollerson, and Sam Markwell, who stuck it out with me for a two-year graduate seminar, "Security and Freedom in the U.S. in the World." Special thanks are due to Rachael Hudak and the staff of the NYU Prison Education Program for their support during the period when completing this work competed for my time. Finally, I am grateful to Shira Mogil, Dore Brown, and Erika Búky for their fine work preparing the manuscript for publication.

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Introduction

The Long War

America has never been an empire. We may be the only great power in history that had the chance and refused.

George W. Bush, "A Distinctly American Internationalism," 1999

We don't seek empires, we are not imperialistic, we never have been. I don't know why you would ask the question.

Donald Rumsfeld, press conference, 2003

The United States has now been at war for almost two decades. Initiated in Afghanistan in response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and extending to Iraq and the greater Middle East, the war, sometimes framed as a single "global war on terror" and sometimes as a series of discrete military campaigns, has left hundreds of thousands dead and hundreds of thousands more maimed, displaced, diseased, and traumatized.¹ Marred by military atrocities, torture scandals, fiscal waste, toxic exposure, popular opposition, and public disgust, the U.S. invasion of Iraq induced a regional death spiral and inspired new terrorist networks of the kind that the war was ostensibly fought to vanquish. Even as the active U.S. military presence has decreased, there have been repeated calls to return large-scale U.S. combat forces to the region and renewed panic about "Islamic" terrorist infiltration of the U.S.

"homeland."² The longest U.S. war to date, this conflict has taken on an aura of permanence that is extraordinary by any measure.³

A few years after the 2003 invasion of Iraq, U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld predicted "a long war" lasting generations. "Just as the cold war lasted a long time, this war is something that is not going to go away. It is not going to be settled with a signing ceremony on the USS *Missouri*. It is of a different nature."⁴ Though Rumsfeld and others inside the George W. Bush administration regularly invoked the cold war as a precedent, most commentators have struggled to make sense of this "war of a different nature." The unilateral decision to invade Iraq—a contentious and rule-breaking event that provoked wide dissent—abandoned historical and legal commitments to international order that had been developed over more than half a century.⁵ U.S. war planners struggled to justify the Iraq invasion because of the tenuousness of the claims of an imminent threat to U.S. national security and the consequent failure to attain international legitimacy for an attack through the sanction of the United Nations Security Council.⁶ Against the backdrop of shuffling pretexts for the war, the return of terms like *empire* and *imperialism* to the pages of elite opinion-forming publications, like *Foreign Affairs* and the *New York Times*, acknowledged the role of the United States as the world's most militarily dominant state but also flirted with more unsettling reconsiderations of the meaning of U.S. global power.

The conventional story told about the rise of the unparalleled military power of the United States typically forecloses the question of empire. In this view, U.S. power and diplomacy serve to guarantee and secure a peaceful world order, defined by mutually beneficial multilateral trade and national sovereignty. After World War II, the United States went to great lengths to promote and realize the vision of a world governed by international rules, mediated by global institutions, and underwritten by the promise of consensual political order and economic growth and development. Formal opposition to imperialism and colonial domination and a growing commit-

ment to universal human rights—delinked from race, religion, and national origin—were core features of the U.S. understanding of itself and its role in the world.

The militarized cast of the cold war compromised this liberal internationalist vision, but it did not fundamentally alter its core commitments. Complicating the defensive justifications for war, the cold war institutionalized affirmative use of U.S. military power in the name of the security and functioning of capitalism itself. The United States engaged in continuous covert and overt military interventions between 1946 and 1989, including involvement in the overthrow of popular or democratically elected governments in Guatemala, Iran, the Congo, Brazil, Indonesia, Chile, Nicaragua and Grenada; devastating, total wars in Korea and Vietnam; interventions in civil wars and support for counterinsurgencies in Greece, the Philippines, Lebanon, Laos, the Dominican Republic, Vietnam, and Thailand; and proxy wars in Central America, the Middle East, Angola, and Afghanistan. The U.S. intervention in the longstanding colonial and civil war in Vietnam (extending into Cambodia), resulted in several million deaths and the chemical poisoning of the land and people that lingers fatally half a century later.

One of the contradictions of the American empire—if indeed we decide to settle on that term—is that the period identified as "a long peace" and an economic golden age was also an epoch in which the United States engaged in continuous and accretive wars all over the world—some named, almost all formally undeclared—whose toll of violence has been excluded from the balance sheet of moral, political, and material costs and benefits. U.S. military incursions overseas (when avowed) were said to be welcomed, even actively sought, by weaker or emerging states. They were formalized in multiple and bilateral regional security compacts and mounted under the strictures of Congressional war powers and international law and its primary institutions, particularly the United Nations. Even in Vietnam, U.S. military intervention genuflected to nation-state sovereignty, multilateral rules and

norms that supposedly limited and decentered U.S. coercive power as an exclusive agent of global ordering.

At the end of World War II, Henry Stimson, the last important secretary of war before the position was recast to oversee a sprawling national security project, made the case for the cold war while also cleaving to the postwar promise of building "a world peace, not an American peace." Heralding what he called a "new interrelation of American life with the life of the world," Stimson cautioned against "the childishness of parochial hopes and un-American fears" and especially the temptations of launching a "preventive war" against the Soviet Union. The realm of foreign affairs, Stimson argued, was now "an intimate domestic concern." In consequence, domestic policy and politics were also subject to the exacting standards of global leadership. Against the backdrop of the devastating firebombing of Tokyo and the nuclear annihilation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Stimson affirmed a need to offer the world "leadership towards . . . life" by helping to reconstruct those parts "closest to us in history, politics and economics" and by recognizing our indivisible "connections with . . . life everywhere."

During and after World War II, U.S. elites claimed the mantle of cosmopolitanism and universalism as the strategic and ideological requisite of global leadership. "The forces which have all but annihilated longitude and latitude," the black intellectual Alain Locke wrote in 1942, made it impossible to avoid reckoning with the fundamental partitioning of the world by race. With "the unresolved problem of the Negro in America," Locke wrote, "the Achilles of the West has a dangerously vulnerable heel."⁸ Commentators like Gunnar Myrdal highlighted what Stimson left implicit: American universalism meant modeling a form of global power capable of engaging the emerging "darker nations," whose rising power he called "axiomatic." In 1950, the Republican senator Henry Cabot Lodge found himself elevating a metaphor of wartime black radicalism, describing the long shadow of U.S. racial domination as "our Achilles heel before the world." Running for the

presidency in 1960, vice president Richard Nixon explained the geopolitical stakes to a white Southern voter: "I am deeply concerned with the impact of racial division in terms of world power. Most of the people of the world belong to the colored races. They deeply resent any slurs based on race. If we of the United States are considered racists, then we may lose to the Communist camp hundreds of millions of potential friends and allies. That would leave us disastrously isolated in a hostile world."⁹

Framed as a moral aspiration and driven by political realism about the balance of forces in the world, the vision of a global, American-centered, racially inclusive world, one organized around formally equal and independent nation-states, was a controlling fiction that for several decades has been unraveling. The causes of its dissolution are complex. The long and disastrous Vietnam War shattered illusions that U.S. power was arrayed on the side of a just and peaceful decolonization. Domestic opposition to the war radicalized the civil rights, black power, and peace movements, advancing a sharply revisionist view of the United States as a new kind of empire, internally riven by racial crisis and disorder. Defeat in Vietnam inspired official handwringing, including Congressional efforts to limit executive power and rein in overseas military action. Public hunger to turn away from a legacy of U.S. war crimes in Vietnam brought to the fore a more definitive emphasis on the importance of human rights in U.S. foreign policy.

This uneasy period of reflection and ambivalence ceded to a renewal of cold war conflict by the 1980s. What some historians have called "the second cold war" was something of a shadow play, behind which the terms of global economic and political order rapidly shifted, as evidenced by Nixon's unilateral decision to break from the gold standard and float the dollar against other currencies and by the opening to China in 1972.¹⁰ Strained by military defeat and fiscal crisis, U.S. hegemony, which was based not only on a preponderance of military force but also on the conviction among international partners that the United States was a stable and reliable guarantor of the

international order (a justification for fighting the Vietnam War in the first place), was under severe strain. The Carter administration's ratcheting up of the cold war, in response to the Soviet war in Afghanistan, was a response to this situation. The success of Ronald Reagan's more muscular foreign policy and the securing of a U.S.-Soviet nuclear arms control agreement seemed to signal a decisive restoration of an American-centered world order.

In retrospect, the signal crisis of an imperial foreign policy and domestic racial division that had emerged during the Vietnam War remained unresolved. The phenomenon of globalization itself—a concept that emerged at the end of the cold war—represented a widening distribution of capital accumulation on a global scale, but one that coincided with enduring challenges to Western prosperity, rising inequality, and, beginning in the 1970s, low productivity and slowing economic growth within the United States.¹⁰ Although the end of the cold war presented the possibility of a “peace dividend” and solidified commitments to liberal internationalism and human rights under U.S. leadership, what happened instead was a renewed emphasis in national security circles on the costly maintenance of an absolute preponderance of U.S. military power, including prerogatives to use military and police power preemptively, and a gradual withdrawal of U.S. investments in the global balancing of forces and respect for international public opinion.¹¹

The long civil rights movement that benefited from superpower competition and decolonizing pressures during the cold war, and struggled to widen circles of inclusion with respect to race and national origin in the United States, was a casualty of this shift. Following the extension of the formal rights of liberal democracy to African Americans and the end of national-origin strictures in U.S. immigration policy in 1965, the U.S. government defined fighting crime as a core feature of national security, a project announced by Lyndon Johnson in 1967 as “a war within our borders” and labeled by his successor, Richard Nixon, as a “war on crime.” “If there is one

area where war is appropriate,” Nixon declared, “it is in the fight against crime.” Nixon’s rhetoric erased a wide array of local and regional social and economic determinants of criminal acts that were viewed under the rubric of poverty amelioration. According to one of his closest aides, H. R. Halde-
man, “Nixon recognized the fact that the whole problem is really the blacks, you have to devise a system that recognizes this without appearing to. [He] pointed out that there has never in history been an adequate black nation.”¹² As the juxtaposition suggests, for Nixon, African Americans were domestic in a foreign sense, tied to the “darker nations,” but subject (like them) to a new political calculus.

In the wake of Vietnam and black urban unrest, U.S. policy makers not only reasserted the value of force and violence over rule and consent in foreign policy but also recast the use of force in the pursuit of domestic order. When U.S. army forces were sent in alongside the National Guard and state police to quell the 1967 riots in Detroit, it became clear that war on the home front was not a metaphor. Nixon’s rhetorical emphasis on criminalizing non-prescription drug use was followed by Ronald Reagan’s declaration of a “war on drugs.” This too was war, and it marked the start of equipment transfers from military to police forces, the extensive use of special weapons and tactics (SWAT) forces in drug arrests, and the authorization of Pentagon over-sight of and National Guard assistance with drug interdiction that contravened longstanding prohibitions on the domestic deployment of military forces. As the North American Free Trade Agreement spurred an economic crisis in rural Mexico and increased migration to the United States, U.S. policy makers responded by militarizing the southern border and criminalizing immigration violations. Most significant was the widening ambit of criminal punishment in general: the unprecedented investment in state capacity to cage, control, and punish populations deemed dangerous to the U.S. body politic, numbering approximately 370,000 in 1970, 1.1 million in 1990 and 2.3 million in 2000—the majority black and brown, and poor.¹³

The metastasization of a carceral state of walls and cages directly paralleled the weakening of the support mechanisms of the social-welfare state. Together, these phenomena represent the most significant political and institutional development in American life since the late 1960s.¹⁵ More specifically, widening the ambit of criminal stigma eroded equal protection with respect to nationality and citizenship (both actual and prospective). Limited by post-1960s figurations of welfare queens, street terrorists, and illegal aliens, the carceral state, to paraphrase Ruth Wilson Gilmore, blossomed as a state-sanctioned regime of group-differentiated dishonor, dis-possession, and premature death—one that was less reliant on formal racial ascription and categorization than on the inflation of the public and moral salience of crime and the enhancement of practical means to identify criminal enemies located within (and outside) the body politic. Bluntly dubbed the “new Jim Crow” by a popular chronicler, this was perhaps the clearest warning signal that post-New Deal democratic politics and its progressive liberal firmament had entered a period of terminal crisis.¹⁶

Scholars of U.S. diplomacy and international relations typically separate questions of global power from domestic politics. I suggest instead that foreign policy and domestic politics develop in a reciprocal relationship and produce mutually reinforcing approaches to managing social conflict. The corruption of globalist ideals exposed by the Vietnam War, as Martin Luther King Jr. predicted, had a domestic analogue. The criminal burglary and scandal that brought down the Nixon administration are better remembered than the international crimes that initiated them, especially the illegal bombing of Cambodia but also the administration’s support for Pakistani military atrocities in Bangladesh and sponsorship of the coup that led to the overthrow of the socialist government of Salvador Allende in Chile.¹⁷ Just as Secretary of State Henry Kissinger pronounced that the democratic affairs of Chile were too important to be left to Chilean voters, influential policy analysts like Samuel Huntington, friendly to the U.S. government, expressed

concerns about “a crisis of democracy” at home, fueled by rising demands for rights and inclusion by formerly passive groups and constituencies.¹⁸

By the end of the 1970s, the racial crisis of poverty and spatial isolation, the health crisis of drug addiction, and the economic downturn precipitated by oil shock and stagflation had yielded a military revolution in policing at home. Riot control in particular had emerged as a major field for the transfer of ideas and technology between military operations and domestic policing. During this period, the urban space itself was being reconceptualized as a zone that needed to be expressly pacified and reclaimed for commercial and propertied interests. In 1978, a key campaign adviser to Ronald Reagan, William Casey, cofounded the Manhattan Institute, an influential think tank that was at the intellectual forefront of these trends. Its projects included neoliberal visions for reducing welfare-state tax requirements and entitlement commitments while augmenting policing capacities and techniques of surveillance and spatial control. Daryl Gates, the chief of the Los Angeles Police Department, who presided over the militarization of one of the nation’s bellwether urban police forces, voiced the folk wisdom that animated the new dispensation: “The streets of America’s cities had become a foreign territory.”¹⁹

To grasp the importance of these developments for our own period, we must follow the storylines of both the inner war and the outer war. When we think about the outer war today, it is tempting to think that history began anew on 9/11. Members of the Bush administration viewed the terrorist attacks that occurred on that day as an “opportunity” to awaken the martial appetites of a wary public and to realize long-held aspirations to bring unilateral military supremacy to bear against a host of potential threats, adversaries, and combinations of adversaries for the foreseeable future. But the intellectual and political reflexes that led to this moment were developed over a longer period. One of the engineers of the Iraq invasion, Paul Wolfowitz, was a member of the infamous group of hard liners known as Team B, assembled by Central Intelligence Agency director George H. W. Bush and

reporting to Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld, President Gerald Ford's chief of staff and secretary of defense. Team B prepared a "worst-case" assessment of the Soviet threat to rival the one that had been put forth by the CIA's National Intelligence Estimate in 1975. In response to what they viewed as a warning of cold war resolve, a new generation of prodefense conservatives (later known as neoconservatives), which included the future President Reagan, had revived the early postwar Committee on Present Danger. Prominently inserting themselves into the national security debate, they enthusiastically embraced Team B. Subsequently criticized for overestimating the Soviet threat, the report laid the groundwork for reanimating the enmity-driven politics of the cold war as the baseline of responsible national security stewardship against disarmament efforts, making sure that movement towards détente with the Soviets (and Chinese) would not hinder offensive U.S. military preparedness and planning.²⁰

A key aim for these government insiders was to restore a flexible mandate for aggressive U.S. military intervention, including forms of executive and covert action that they believed had been compromised by the Vietnam War and its boggy aftermath of Congressional investigation, increased oversight, and public skepticism. They sought a renewal of cold war interventionism in the developing world, seeing the United States "in opposition" to hostile postcolonial states whose international significance and rights of sovereign protection they increasingly derided as a cover not only for communism but also for criminality, corruption, and state failure.²¹ Important figures in the Reagan and first Bush administrations (wrongly) claimed that the Soviets were engaged in a large-scale military buildup and were sponsoring revolutionary violence and international terrorism around the world.

Under Reagan, "cowboys" in the CIA and the National Security Administration were given leave to arm the Afghan mujahideen and their Islamist allies in an effort to "bleed the Soviets white," as it was put by the man installed as Reagan's CIA director, William Casey. Under Casey, the CIA

became involved in an illegal, covert trade involving drugs, arms, and American hostages in Iran to support right-wing paramilitaries and Central American death squads. Winning the cold war—Reagan's crowning achievement of international arms control and unchallenged U.S. global military supremacy—dominates retrospective hagiography and is credited for overcoming a Soviet challenge that was already long in remission. This narrative fails to capture the scope of a new violent dispensation in formation that resulted in another major political scandal rooted in foreign policy malfeasance: Iran-Contra. With Casey in the White House bunker, this period marked the beginning of a conscious return to older colonial models of small wars and proxy wars, with an eye toward the circumvention of public scrutiny and Congressional oversight of military affairs and helping to seed the wars of the future.²²

Cheney, Rumsfeld, and Wolfowitz resurfaced in the presidential administration of George H. W. Bush, where they launched Operation Just Cause against Panama and helped to forge the international consensus and financial support for the first Gulf War to discipline and punish the cross-border aggression of the former U.S. ally Saddam Hussein. The invasion of Panama was literally a police action, mounted to serve an arrest warrant for Manuel Noriega, a former CIA asset turned drug dealer. Though undertaken in the name of toppling a dictator and promoting democracy, the invasion was a reversion to the old hemispheric police power in which national sovereignty was a relative value weighed against U.S. claims to administer justice. In Iraq, President Bush claimed that with this, the first large-scale demonstration of U.S. military force since the Vietnam War, the United States had finally "kicked the Vietnam syndrome," ushering in nothing less than a "new world order." The implication was that restraints on muscular and morally righteous uses of American military power—imposed by technologically inferior insurgents, antiwar moralists, dovish internationalists, and calculating realists—had finally been overcome. Those who supported the

first Gulf war on these terms, however, were dejected by a venture they viewed as too cautious by half. Watching the nascent Iraqi uprising crushed by Saddam Hussein's forces under the terms of the U.S. cease-fire, Wolfowitz casually drew from the lexicon of urban crime, describing U.S. inaction as comparable to "idly watching a mugging."²³

During the 1990s, Iraq was subject to a murderous blockade, causing hundreds of thousands of fatalities. As many Iraqi children died in these years as in the fires of Hiroshima. Expressing less than complete satisfaction with the status quo, President Bill Clinton's U.N. ambassador, Madeleine Albright (later secretary of state), flashed her irritation with the architect of the cease-fire, General Colin Powell, in a famous quip: "What is the point of having this superb military you are always talking about if we can't use it?"²⁴ While genocide raged in Rwanda, the NATO bombing campaign spurred by Serbia's ethnic cleansing presumed a new international legal mandate for humanitarian intervention. More decisive was the bipartisan passage of the Violent Crime and Law Enforcement Act (1994) and the Anti-terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (1996), that enshrined crime and terrorism at the center of national security thinking. Largely forgotten (against the backdrop of Clinton's impeachment scandal) was another round of sordid military misadventures, culminating in the firing of fourteen cruise missiles into the Al Shifa pharmaceutical factory in Sudan in 1998 in retaliation for the Al Qaeda embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania. The factory, which was Sudan's largest producer of medical products, including antimalarial drugs, was taken out on the grounds—later discredited—that it was a chemical weapons facility with links to Osama Bin Laden.²⁵

These were a few signs of the longer-term atrophy of American thinking about the balancing of force and consent and the relationship between military coercion and sustainable political order, both at home and abroad. Today's wars were still the tentative plans of nongovernmental operatives in Southwest Asia and in Washington, DC, think tanks (like the Project for a

New American Century). The astute British military historian Michael Howard discerned the decisive turn early on, one that ran against the tenor of cosmopolitanism and universalism that had been central to the post-1945 conception of world order: "When global organization began to appear possible and necessary, the image that came to many American minds was not that of balancing power between states, but of protecting law and order against its disturbers, the protection to be provided by a sheriff with his *posse comitatus*. If human corruption and inefficiency made this impossible, it must be provided by the efforts of a few good men following the dictates of a moral law within . . . [an] American populist belligerence, termed by some historians 'Jacksonian.'"²⁶

George W. Bush's swaggering declaration of a "global war on terror" (initially called Operation Infinite Justice) appeared to be the apotheosis of this tendency. Bush described the war as a "crusade" against a new kind of "evil" loosed upon the world. His starkly dichotomous moral rhetoric, evocative of a long history of Western incursions into Muslim lands under the banner of Christian piety and a civilizing imperative, was soon rejected as unsuitable for wars that would require the cooperation of "good" Muslim allies to defeat "bad" Muslim enemies.²⁷ Instead of proclaiming a "clash of civilizations"—the prospect offered by disenchanting policy intellectuals like Samuel Huntington as a new paradigm for post-cold war conflicts—the administration defaulted to the vocabulary of cold war American universalism. The people of the world, Bush argued, were menaced by "a new totalitarian threat," its perpetrators akin to those "who once killed in the name of racial purity or class struggle." He depicted the new enemy as engaged in a "conspiracy against our liberty"—this time motivated not by radical political ideology but by "false religious purity."²⁸

Bush's rhetoric retained fidelity to the normative insistence on ascribing to U.S. military power noble aspirations toward racial, religious, and international comity. Even as Muslims, Arabs, and South Asians were suddenly

subject to new forms of racial profiling, vigilante attacks, immigration scrutiny, and biometric screening, the new wars were proclaimed as a defense of freedom itself—defined as a secular liberal order in which Christians, Jews, and Muslims stood united in the capitalist marketplaces and tourist meccas of the world.²⁹ Following the 9/11 attacks, the *New York Times* even reported a lowering of long-simmering interracial mistrust—including, most improbably, expressions of sympathy between black communities and the New York City Police Department (NYPD), despite raw memories of the police killing and torture of unarmed black criminal suspects such as Amadou Diallo and Abner Louima in the late 1990s. The hip-hop artist Talib Kweli added a note of skepticism, drolly remarking: “We saluting flags, wrapping them around our head, when niggaz ain’t become Americans till 9/11.”³⁰

When it came to the public symbolism of racial and ethnic division, the interrelation of American life with the life of the world that Henry Stimson called for remained a demanding proposition. On the eve of the invasion of Iraq, the Canadian intellectual and politician Michael Ignatieff offered one of the most important liberal defenses of the project, arguing that the United States had achieved global ascendancy after World War II by refraining from conquest and restraining unilateral military action, despite a history of “significant lapses in our own hemisphere.” He acknowledged that the power of the U.S. military—with its thousand military bases in eighty countries around the world—might warrant the use of the term *empire*. What legitimated the U.S. recourse to coercive force, however, was that it was “unlike empires past, built on colonies, conquest and the white man’s burden.”³¹ Noting that liberal internationalism and its peaceably ordered “security community” seemed to be intact on the one-year anniversary of the invasion, John Ikenberry affirmed the judiciousness of the initial assessment: “If the United States is an empire . . . it is like no other before it.”³²

In retrospect, we might detect a note of fear and plaintiveness in these pronouncements, like the person who hopes to restrain a violent fellow by

reminding him of his better self. Although a few pundits like Niall Ferguson and Max Boot were willing to identify the new era of global war as a return to pre-World War II liberal imperialism, marked by the West’s militarized governance over disordered and benighted peoples, such commentary met with stern rebukes. Writing after 9/11, John Lewis Gaddis, the dean of U.S. diplomatic historians, admitted more frightening precedents, but he downplayed their salience. In the United States, “apart from two glaring exceptions—the persistence of slavery and the persecution of Native Americans—there was no compelling desire to construct a formal empire against the wishes of those to be included within it. The acquisition of the Philippines half a century later did, to be sure, violate this principle; but that event proved to be an anomaly, not a pattern for the future.”³³

Lurking just beneath the surface of these legitimating treatises was a pressing counterpoint: the possibility that “the long war” marked this specific *recrudescence*—neither a “clash of civilizations” nor the embrace of active, imperial administration recommended by a few outlying pundits, but a reengagement with the more primal terms of American race war and the fantasy of national social and economic regeneration through (frontier) violence. Amid the claims of existential defense and emancipatory ends used to justify the Afghanisthan and Iraq wars, the administration’s war policy conjured a host of less salutary, historically disavowed racial and imperial precedents. “Look back on the Philippines around the turn of the century,” observed Jay Garner, the first administrator of Iraq. “They were a coaling station for the navy, and that allowed us to keep a great presence in the Pacific. That is what Iraq is for the next new decades: our coaling station that gives us great presence in the Middle East.”³⁴ In the face of stiffening Sunni resistance and insurgency after defeat of Iraqi military forces, Robert Kaplan enjoined U.S. planners and publics to remember the bloody U.S.-Philippines War of 1898 for the lessons it provided as “the most successful counterinsurgency fought by a Western army in modern times.” Efforts to

rebrand strategy and tactics drawn from a host of brutal, morally and politically discredited counterinsurgency wars from the late colonial era became the stock-in-trade of a rising cohort of warrior-intellectuals predicting a future defined by "small wars" of pacification and de facto imperial logics of indirect rule.³⁵

In the very text in which he describes U.S. empire as anomalous, Gaddis doubles back, framing the Bush administration's national security policy in terms of U.S. territorial expansion: the global frontiers of liberal society, threatened by terrorists and other nonstate actors, are like those once besieged by "native Americans, pirates, marauders, and other free agents." Likewise, for Kaplan, "'Welcome to Injun Country' was the refrain I heard from troops from Colombia to the Philippines, including Afghanistan and Iraq. . . . The War on Terrorism was really about taming the frontier. But the fascination was never meant as a slight against Native North Americans."³⁶ From within the war zone, the Marine Corps chronicler Bing West described the Sunni combatants in Fallujah, who were besieged and burned alive with the white phosphorus that U.S. forces once used on the Vietnamese, as a "strange, sullen, wild-eyed" people with a "rough analogy" to "American Indian tribes in the nineteenth century, sharing a hostility toward settlers while launching raids at different times for different reasons."³⁷ A member of the illegal, hatchet-wielding Seal Team 6 (the outfit credited with killing Osama Bin Laden, dubbed Geronimo, in 2011) made such connections vivid: "Our job is to ensure that we conduct ourselves in a way befitting the American people and the American flag. The hatchet says, 'We don't care about the Geneva Conventions' and that 'we are above the law and can do whatever we want.'"³⁸

The prison camp at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, a space governed by the suspension of international laws of war and U.S. constitutional protections, emerged as perhaps the most baleful symbol of U.S. impunity. Populated by means of the rendition and torture of "enemy combatants," it owes its very existence and status as an offshore prison to the hemispheric intervention of

1898 in support of limited Cuban independence from Spain.³⁹ Writing about his many years of confinement beginning in 2002, the Mauritanian detainee Mohamedou Ould Slahi called Guantanamo the "place where the law has nothing to say." His torture there, he writes, in a text heavy with black redaction marks, was "a thick line drawn between my past and future." Rebuking his captors, he observes that it was "not the first time [Americans] kidnapped Africans and enslaved them."⁴⁰ Critical commentators have interpreted the events at Baghdad's Abu Ghraib prison in a similar vein, observing that the stacking and arrangement of bodies and celebratory photographs of naked, tortured, and sexually abused prisoners was reminiscent of a lynching party.

No less than on the troublesome frontier, the aggravating presence of blacks in the body politic haunts contemporary U.S. wars. Many of the military police and guards involved in the torture got their start in onshore U.S. prisons, infamously rife with abuse. Richard Zuley, Slahi's principal torturer in Guantanamo, was an important figure in the Chicago police unit that established the equivalent of a black site in the city, where predominantly African American criminal suspects were sent for interrogation, without being charged with specific offenses. If spaces like Guantanamo have remained "foreign in a domestic sense," to use the language of the Insular Cases that governed the annexations and occupations of 1898, we might say that the Chicago precincts where Zuley, John Burge, and others tortured predominantly African American criminal suspects over a generation are domestic in a foreign sense, in the wake of slavery and its afterlife.⁴¹

Given our history, these examples should not shock or surprise, and yet they do. Rather than appearing as anomalies or exceptions, these occurrences, and the histories of slavery, Indian wars and hemispheric interventions that they evoke and extend, raise a different possibility. Instead of the idea that "the United States has never been an empire," we confront the proposition that the United States has only ever been a kind of empire.

Taking this idea as the point of departure, the chapters that follow suggest a different set of political and historical reference points for understanding the recent period of U.S. military violence. They call into question the claims of forward-strategic thinking, ideological self-confidence, and renewed commitments to universalism among U.S. defense and policy intellectuals and planners. They suggest that the many labored rhetorical and historical efforts to fit the global war on terror into the threadbare garments of postwar and cold war internationalism—including official stances against racism and imperialism—protest too much. The open-ended authorization of militarism by the executive branch that underwrites our era of war thus represents a substantive devolution. Walter Benjamin famously argued that the unresolved violence of the past has a way of erupting in moments of emergency. It should not be surprising that in a moment when the U.S. government deploys an increasingly malleable sense of law and retrofits it to purposes of war, we also find ourselves in the midst of a renewed delimitation of civic politics through idioms of racialized dishonor and dispossession.

In an insightful observation after 9/11, but well before he became president, Barack Obama hinted at the new and dangerous alignments of the inner and outer wars, writing that the conflict between “worlds of plenty and worlds of want twists the lives of children on the streets of Jakarta or Nairobi in much the same way as it does the lives of the children on the South Side of Chicago.” Failing to comprehend this dynamic, the powerful needlessly intensify a destructive spiral with their “dull complacency[.] . . . unthinking applications of force[.] . . . longer prison sentences and more sophisticated military hardware.”³² Obama advanced his successful presidential campaign by characterizing the Iraq War as a grievous error on the grounds of its departure from strictures of multilateral diplomacy; its trading of U.S. and international law, particularly with regard to policies of torture and rendition; and the manner in which its excessive emancipatory claims about

democracy and nation building strained domestic political, fiscal, and military capacities. Seizing the mantle of civil rights and racial inclusivity as an extension of his personal narrative and political success, Obama called on the nation to “choose our better history,” one in which persistent struggles—for abolition, racial equality, and full citizenship—was expressly tied to American ecumenicism and consensus building around the world.³³

Obama’s appeal to racial inclusivity in defense of the American realm was part of a worn-out body of thought and action—one that was already on life support. In 2005, after Hurricane Katrina, scenes of black bodies adrift, shivering in ship holds and herded into stadiums, brought the contradictions of the inner and outer wars to a head. In response to an event that occasioned comparisons to the unfolding disaster of torture and insurgency in Iraq, the Bush administration dispatched its highest-ranking black official, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, to the Gulf Coast to replaster the crumbling ideological façade. Rice sounded a familiar theme and went further still: “Across the empire of Jim Crow, from the upper Dixie to the lower Delta, the descendants of slaves shamed our nation with the power of righteous-ness and redeemed America at last from its original sin of slavery. . . . By resolving the contradiction at the heart of our democracy, America finally found its voice as a true champion of democracy beyond its shores.”³⁴ In one awkward turn of phrase, Rice conjoined “empire and Jim Crow” as the polar opposite of the American global ideal. The problem, as Hurricane Katrina laid bare, was that Jim Crow was as American as cherry pie.

Rice adeptly drew on the rhetoric of “cold war civil rights,” in which domestic advances against racial oppression were heralded (against a similar litany of public racial atrocities) as proof of the superiority of American democracy and the legitimacy of U.S. global leadership in the struggle against communism.³⁵ Indeed, Rice’s was a mature, even hyperbolic, example of this discourse: she enlisted her own position as a senior cabinet official as a sign of definitive racial progress, labeling the scenes of black abjection in

New Orleans a “vestige” of the old South. Much as Gaddis marked out the broad sweep of U.S. history before 1950—defined by settler colonial expansion, indigenous extermination and removal, racial slavery and Jim Crow, gunboat diplomacy and overseas colonization—as exceptional to an otherwise consistent anti-imperialist stance, Rice externalized Jim Crow and white supremacy as an imperial form, alien to American democracy.

The question raised, of course, was the depth and persistence of the contribution of “the empire of Jim Crow” to the U.S. vision of world order, both past and present. Writing soon after World War II, Hannah Arendt observed that European imperialism worked in part by drawing a strict boundary between “colonial methods and normal domestic politics.” The rise of Nazi power in Europe had illuminated the folly of believing that the separation really held and presaged what she described as a “boomerang effect . . . [for] the introduction of colonial methods into European affairs . . . [and with it] the temptation to deprive all citizens of legal status and rule them with omnipotent force.”⁴⁶ But in the United States (whose history Arendt understood poorly), extreme police measures were always in use in a targeted manner along the inner, racial border. Even as Rice was pronouncing on the vestigial nature of race and empire in the American South, Louisiana governor Kathleen Blanco issued her directive to the National Guard troops brought in to restore civic order and protect private property from “looters” (a racial code word): “These troops are fresh back from Iraq, well trained, experienced, battle-tested, and under my orders to restore order in the streets. . . . They have M-16s and they are locked and loaded. . . . These troops know how to shoot and kill, and they are more than willing to do so if necessary, and I expect they will.”⁴⁷

In New Orleans, the redemptive national narrative—of racial progress, common citizenship, and militarized foreign policy in the service of emancipatory ends overseas—turned violently on itself, like a snake eating its own tail. The corruption and cronyism that had been on display in Iraq emerged

again here, with no-bid, multimillion dollar contracts for reconstruction awarded to the firm Kellogg, Brown and Root (a subsidiary of Halliburton, the security and oilfield-services company once led by Dick Cheney). Many of the private mercenaries from the Blackwater Corporation who roamed Kabul and Basra with impunity were employed under the Department of Homeland Security contracts to secure New Orleans’s higher ground against predation from the newly homeless, most of whom were African Americans. As Baghdad was being ethnically partitioned by U.S. forces, plans were hatched to permanently rezone the new swamplands of New Orleans to make the city’s historically black ninth ward safer, smaller, and whiter. Disaster capitalism consistently brought home unsettling comparisons with the theater of war. With a few notable exceptions, most commentators failed to observe that the social contexts of racial(izing) division at home and civil(izing) war overseas were more than uncanny, parallel universes: they were parts of the same economic, cultural, political, and societal condition.⁴⁸

African American collective existence has long manifested and negotiated the proximity of racism and war. Participation in the nation’s wars has been understood as one of the surest routes to full citizenship, from the Civil War’s famous black regiment to the frontier war’s Buffalo soldiers to promised rewards for black participation in the twentieth century’s world wars, best epitomized by W. E. B. Du Bois’s call to “close ranks” during World War I. Yet black communities have just as frequently conceived warfare abroad in an intimate relationship to a persistent, ongoing, undeclared race war at home. Thus, even as military service has represented a means to imagine and enact a shift from racial to national belonging, it has just as frequently amplified the disjuncture of the two. Thousands of slave men and women fled to the British side during the Revolutionary War. Indian country held the promise of freedom from slavery for those who dared to cross its threshold. A century ago, black publics viewed the Philippine insurgency through the lens of domestic racial subjection. Bitter memories of the post-World War

I red scare and racial pogroms led black activists to call for a "double victory" against racism at home and fascism abroad during World War II.

World War II exhibited the full range of contradictory conjunctions of race and war for African Americans. Antblack riots and strikes rocked the home front even as a heightened emphasis on cultural pluralism and modest efforts at domestic racial reform sought to highlight the difference between democracy and fascism. By the 1960s, the sense of the intimate proximity of violent racial abjection, of race making at home and war making overseas, had become integral to black critical discourse. Radical activists such as Jack O'Dell argued that the contempt bred by America's familiarity with ongoing, sanctioned violations of black life and limb was the link that connected "Selma and Saigon." Martin Luther King Jr. observed that the promises of Johnson's Great Society had been shot down on the battlefields of Vietnam, expressing his regret that "my own country is the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today."⁵⁰ Twenty years on, when George H. W. Bush was kicking the "Vietnam Syndrome" in Iraq, the rapper Ice Cube tied it to the violence of the drug war, memorably describing the first Gulf War as a giant "drive-by shooting." The acquittal of the New York City police officers who killed an unarmed black man, Sean Bell, in a hail of gunfire in 2007 prompted the family's minister to remark, "Here it's just like Iraq, we don't have any protection."⁵¹

These commentaries illustrate how black collective life in the United States has been viewed from within as indistinct from a situation of war. They illuminate in a more concrete and compelling manner Michel Foucault's inversion of Clausewitz's famous maxim, "War is the continuation of politics by other means," suggesting how (racial) politics remains indelibly imprinted with the logic of war:

While it is true that political power puts an end to war and establishes or attempts to establish the reign of peace in civil society, it certainly does not do so in order to suspend the effects of power or to neutralize the disequilibrium revealed by the last battle of war. According to this hypothesis, the role

of political power is perpetually to use a sort of silent war to reinscribe that relationship of force, and to reinscribe it in institutions, economic inequalities, language, and even the bodies of individuals. . . . What is at work beneath political power is essentially and above all a warlike relation.⁵²

Foucault associates the development of the modern concept of race with wars of conquest. The violence of war constitutes a traumatic line of division in a population that comes to share a single sphere of political representation. We might say that race becomes the name for manifestations of divided collective experience that are, as he puts it, "anchored in a certain relationship of force that was established in and through war at a given moment that can be historically specified."⁵³

But what if the actual history of race war is even more proximate and considerably less silent than we think? Before it became a figure for science, law, and biopolitical regulation, racial difference was conceptualized as a domain of recurrent and continuous warfare. American thinking about space and power has returned again and again to the elimination or sequestration of "savages" as the grounds of a story whose reiterated violence fortifies the national body and thus, we are told, should be neither grieved nor redressed but instead renewed. It has long been possible to acknowledge the fundamental injustice of the Indian wars while asserting their necessity and inevitability. "Who is there to mourn for Logan?" Thomas Jefferson asked in *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1787), referencing the Indian chief, the last of his slaughtered kin, whose natural freedom Jefferson claimed to admire. "Not one," was his answer. Andrew Jackson viewed Indian removal as the progress of civilization: "What good man would prefer a country covered with forests and ranged by a few thousand savages to our extensive Republic, studded with cities, towns, and prosperous farms embellished with all the improvements which art can devise or industry execute, occupied by more than 12,000,000 happy people, and filled with all the blessings of liberty, civilization and religion?"⁵⁴ Theodore Roosevelt mocked the

anti-imperialists of his day who opposed U.S. counterinsurgency wars in the Philippines and Cuba as sentimentalists who would give Arizona back to the Apaches. More than half a century later, General Maxwell Taylor made the dismantling of the Vietnamese countryside legible to the U.S. Senate by observing, "It is hard to plant the corn outside the stockade when the Indians are still around. We have to get the Indians farther away in many of the provinces to make good progress."⁵³

Metaphors of "Indian country" routinely emerge in the rhetoric of U.S. militarism overseas, from the Philippines at the start of the twentieth century to the Pacific battlefields of World War II to Vietnam in the cold war and Afghanistan and Iraq today.⁵⁴ Even the most famous U.S. scholarly reconsideration of the theory of the just war, written in part in response to the injustice of the Vietnam War, preserved this reasoning. Justifying Israel's preemptive first strike in the 1967 war that led to the occupation of the West Bank, the Golan Heights, and the Gaza Strip, Michael Walzer suggests the "analogy" of "an unstable society like the Wild West of American fiction," in which "a state under threat is like an individual hunted by an enemy who has announced his intention of killing or injuring him. Surely such a person may surprise his hunter if he is able to do so." In the context of the current wars, Gaddis echoes Roosevelt's dismissal of those who might be squeamish about the violence required to subdue a continent: "Would you want to give it all back?" Another prominent Iraq War supporter, Paul Berman, makes the more categorical and telling assertion that "if you reject the Indian Wars, you reject America." This is something considerably more than the common injunction against litigating injustice long past. In every case, even when tragedy or excess is admitted, the Indian Wars are redeployed as an ideal for regulating and directing attitudes toward U.S. state violence in the present. Part of what this shows, to paraphrase the important theorist of settler colonialism Patrick Wolfe, is that in the United States, (and other settler colonies), invasion, occupation, and territorial dispossession constitute not a

singular event but a structure of reasoning, feeling, even imagination (*pace* Walzer's fictive Wild West), one that demands fealty and that orients attitudes toward the present and future.⁵⁶

If recursive yet generally disavowed violence marks the national mythos concerning Indians, the nation's other others have often been invited into the orbit of settler freedom. During the twentieth century, particularly after World War II, the abolition of slavery and the overcoming of Jim Crow were used to legitimate U.S. world power in the eyes of nonwhite peoples and to link it to their own aspirations. Similarly, diverse histories of immigration have been used to lay claim to an idea of the United States as the "universal nation" and a "nation of nations." Less savory continuities, deriving from a long internal history of antiblack insurrectionary fear—from the patrolling of racial borderlands to the criminalization of black life and its subjection to paramilitary policing (the precursor to the militarized policing and hyperincarceration of our own time)—are largely downplayed. Likewise, the formative histories of "enemy aliens," internment, surveillance, and deportation that have routinely come to the fore, especially in times of war, are largely disregarded as constitutive elements of the U.S. national security landscape that consistently worries and confuses whether the greatest "foreign" threats come from the inside or from the outside. An intranational problematic of race and alien status in this way has informed domestic political contention over U.S. foreign relations and has also given shape to a comparative racial and imperial politics along widening arcs of U.S. global involvement.

Today it is rarely acknowledged that histories of enslavement, frontier violence, and coerced migration continue to trouble the United States in the present. One prominent study recognizes the long influence of federal Indian policy in shaping U.S. views on governing "third world" places, polities, and peoples, and slavery and its abolition in shaping an emancipatory narrative of U.S. world power, but it presents these histories only as

background to the main story.⁵⁷ The history of territorial expansion that required more than a century of wars with hundreds of indigenous polities, scattered over 80 percent of the continent in 1776, is forgotten or else quietly inscribed as a lasting achievement of U.S. nationhood.

The centering of the Indian Wars in the U.S. historical experience marked the elevation of the violent prerogatives of the executive through undeclared wars or police actions in a manner that sought to directly oppose popular local will to legal protections and treaty obligations that offered support for indigenous title to land. The influence of these "wars," including support for local sovereign initiatives, states' rights, and sanctioned homicide, echoes through Frederick Jackson Turner's account of the glorious history of U.S. democratic self-fashioning: the advancing of the line of American civilization in its ceaseless confrontation with savagery (a narrative in which he tellingly describes slavery as "but an incident.") As John Grenier writes, "The 205 years between the first Indian war in Virginia in 1609 and the end of the Creek War in 1814 were the seedbed from which the rest of U.S. military history grew." The military tradition conferred by the Indian wars included practices of "extirpative war" that observed no distinction between combatants and civilians, combined with the adoption of forms of exemplary, extravagant violence said to have been learned from the savages themselves, such as scalping. Settler frameworks, in turn, consciously blurred the lines between war and policing, investing ordinary citizens with an expansive police power.⁵⁸

Savage war and race war have been closely related as antitheses of a consensual order based on the peaceful disquisitions of contract and property. Claims about the Indians' fundamental injustice or "wickedness" drew their greatest force from the notion that Indians placed no limit on violence and observed no established forms of reciprocity in war. Indians were similarly regarded as incapable of establishing ordered civil relations, despite considerable historical evidence about the precontact ritual limitation of warfare and the establishment of robust and far-reaching indigenous net-

works of kinship and trade. This view is concretely expressed in the U.S. Declaration of Independence, with its representation of "merciless Indian Savages, whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions."⁵⁹ Wars of extirpation against Indian tribes were represented as just, defensive, and retributive in the face of Indian atrocities, regardless of political disputes over territory that might have been the proximate cause. Adding to the difficulty, insofar as warfare was defined as the prerogative of sovereign states (that is, "the law of nations"), settlers engaged in violent conflicts with native peoples used the term *war* inconsistently and often eschewed it altogether, rendering indigenous counterviolence illegitimate or illegible from the outset.

If U.S. settler freedom was defined in opposition to Indians, it came to linger in complex ways on blacks and blackness. Blackness cultivated and reproduced under the slave regime remained a permanent threat. The African presence—central to capital accumulation through agricultural development and trade—presented an unwanted and ongoing reminder of hierarchy, heterogeneity, and imperial subjection. By contrast, natives, in spite of their resistance and survival, were slated for historical obscurity. The two populations represented different but interrelated threats: if Indians in the state of nature were "jurally minimalist creatures who were to a greater or lesser extent at war with one another," slaves were by nature criminals harboring murderous wishes and intentions that needed to be held permanently in check.⁶⁰ As I argue in chapter 1, both populations featured in the development of a racialized narrative of security, one that invested every white person with the sovereign right to kill and blurred the lines between military and police action, as citizen militias and slave patrols were functionally equivalent in many parts of the nation.⁶¹

What arguably makes the United States distinctive among modern imperial states is a sustained ambiguity and conflict over the boundaries of political membership and the delineation of territorial borders. Throughout

its history the United States has been both an “imperial nation” and an “empire state,” in which commitments to democratic self-government and coercive subjection within a domestic realm are intertwined with anti-imperial affirmations of sovereign protection and independence, and military conquest of foreign peoples and territories.⁶² Imperatives of expansion and emancipation are politically and discursively yoked together, but with contradictory implications for the heterogeneous populations that are party to these encounters. Intertwined in a complex skein of legalism and myth, material accumulation and moral disavowal, a national narrative of ever-expanding freedom has oscillated against commonsense and institutional commitments to permanent yet unpredictable violence that is viewed both as freedom’s instrument and as its guarantor. Continuously weighing calculations of prosperity against the necessary attrition of life elsewhere, the people of the United States have arguably never been at peace. In this respect, as the historian Richard Hofstadter sharply puts it, “Americans certainly have reason to inquire whether, when compared with other advanced industrial nations, they are not a people of exceptional violence.”⁶³

Violent contestations of physical frontiers and internal borders gave shape to a conception of foreign relations insular in its knowledge and understanding of peoples elsewhere and at the same time boundless in its sense of an entitlement to involve itself with those peoples and their lands, markets, and resources—what might be termed an effort to domesticate or annex the foreign, unknown world. The mirror and analogue of this process has been the development of a civic and political culture that is characterized by a similarly paradoxical combination of high levels of quotidian violence and long-term expansion of infrastructures and bases of centralized authority—what might be termed the normalization of civil insecurity as a feature of national belonging.

Most consequential, struggles over the boundaries of national belonging—particularly the legacies and ongoing practices of antiblack domina-

tion, anti-indigenous frontier warfare, and anti-alien immigration restriction—have never been removed from questions of the state’s foreign policy: that is, military intervention and debates over the proper frontiers of U.S. state action, especially coercive and violent state action, wars both declared and undeclared. Engagement with imperial forms of rule, most fundamentally government without consent of the governed—by way of police and military action—has characterized U.S. involvement at the local, regional, continental, hemispheric, and global scales.

Putting questions of race and violence at the center of the story of American empire does not displace motives of capitalist profit, the expansion of circuits of wealth accumulation, or class division. Rather, as I argue in chapter 2 by way of a reading of Marx’s *Capital*, Volume I, it suggests tightly woven connections between racism, war, and liberalism in the development of capitalist power and material accumulation. If the American road to capitalism circumvented the encrustations of a landed aristocracy and the densities of urban class stratification and accommodation, it also marked a dramatic compression of the time and space between money, violence, and materially consequential decision under terms that Marx described as “primitive accumulation,” that is, an ability both to purchase and seize land and to purchase and command labor. The relatively low protection costs and the dispersed, decentralized aspects of the settlement project meant that the direct application of force and violence in the service of property ownership and productive investment has played a far more direct role in American historical development than is generally acknowledged.

What the historian Sven Beckert terms “war capitalism” was central to the development of modern imperialism, overseas colonization, and slavery around the world as well. But what distinguishes the American form of empire is the intensive development of infrastructures of violence—made up of segregated and carceral spaces, suburban idylls and racialized ghettos, militarized green zones and internment camps—to manage a population sharply

divided along multiple racial lines. This development has achieved wide public sanction and evolved alongside a form of governance that privileges the pursuit of private wealth and property. To quote Holstadter, "the primary precedent and primary rationale for violence has come from the established order itself."⁶⁴ As its own mode of valuation and risk assessment, racial judgment developed along with processes of capital formation and accumulation. We cannot understand the commingling of expansively consensual visions of U.S. nationhood as self-government and private contract, and the coercive subjections of U.S. racism and empire, without understanding the nexus of race and capital formation that has been integral to its history.

One of George W. Bush's favored locutions was that fighting terrorists "over there" was a kind of preventive medicine, a way to forestall having to fight them "at home." In this framing of global military engagement, the American nation, or people, remained at a reassuring distance from the United States' extensive and violent global project, its strategic planning, its network of military bases and multiple theaters of military operation. As I suggest in chapter 3, it is tempting to view the moral and ideational separation of the U.S. domestic and overseas realms—with American civilians enjoined to shop and conduct business as usual as its military specialists struck at enemies faraway and unseen—as a strange, contemporary mutation of an American way of war, a peculiar prophylaxis whose signal figures are the stealth operatives and remote warriors, the drone operators working in unmarked trailers, and the special-ops commandos whose names we will never know. But perhaps the active disconnect between the foreign and the domestic is where we must look if we are to understand the evolution of empire in the U.S. global age—not the refusal of the temptations of empire but the equally persistent claim never to have been one.

An unmistakable result of the military responses to 9/11—the launching of two long, large-scale wars—was to give war making a sense of normalcy and permanence. The idea that we live in an age of permanent war now

appears to reverberate indifferently across a chain of iconic signifiers, historic military calamities, and rallying cries, from the U.S. frontier wars with Native Americans and Mexico, the Spanish-American War (particularly in the Philippines), World War II (especially in the Pacific theater), and the cold war in Asia: the Alamo, Wounded Knee, Pearl Harbor, and (more often invoked as things deteriorated in Iraq), the "quagmire," Vietnam. Each of the following chapters represents an effort to take the measure of the shadow cast by the long war, in some cases tentatively, by considering how America's outer wars—that is, exercises of externalized state violence focused on threats from beyond its borders—emerge from and remake our society and its history.

American war craft remains perennially bound to American race craft as the politics of fear and lineaments of enemies without and within morph together, intertwine, and mutually inform and at times reinforce one another.⁶⁵ Following the unilateralist military departures of the war on terror came a rejection of those parts of the post-World War II international order most definitively identified with rule-boundedness, consensus, and inclusivity. It was further accompanied by the erosion of fundamental and universal personal protections; the Bush administration's public embrace and legal defense of torture; extralegal rendition; the abrogation of ancient rights of habeas corpus; and an insidious reassertion of an integral relationship between national origin, biophysical marking, threat potential, and subjection to extreme police measures. As I argue in chapter 4, in an examination of the changing contours of U.S. racial formation in the post-civil rights era, one of the important effects of the long war has been a renewal of forms of *state racism*, either long since pronounced dead or thought to be in remission, across the political spectrum.

The election of Barack Obama in 2008, and his promised, partially successful efforts to scale back the officially sanctioned violence and rhetoric of the war on terror, augured a return to normative antiracism and consent-based

internationalism. Obama quietly lowered the volume on the bellcose rhetoric and lightened the military footprint of the long war. He moved the mass deportation of undocumented migrants back into the shadows and inaugurated modest reforms of the drug wars and the mandatory sentencing guidelines that have been key to expanding the criminal punishment complex. Nonetheless, Obama strengthened the interrelationship between the inner and outer wars, as well as their legal and institutional basis. By expanding the use of unmanned, armed drones in targeted assassinations, Obama also added a new and terrifying dimension. The arrogation of the right of the U.S. president to kill anyone anywhere in the world without due process suggests a government that regards itself above and beyond the law. According to one study, as of 2015, U.S. attempts to kill forty-one individuals resulted in more than one thousand deaths. Another study of a period of five months of drone strikes in Afghanistan in 2015 revealed a 10 percent success rate. Even if assassination by drone were somehow deemed acceptable, these assessments suggest a level of operational failure, a lack of transparency and accountability, and a disregard for human life that call for redress.⁶⁵

The rise of Donald Trump, who in his campaign for U.S. president promised to bring back waterboarding and racial profiling, increase deportation, and require Muslim registration—and who, despite his belated opposition to the Iraq misadventure, prioritizes violent and unilateral state action in foreign affairs—grimly suggests another terrible turning of an infernal gyre. My final chapter offers an early assessment of the rise of Trump in the context of the broader arguments presented here. Though Trump indicated a rejection of liberal internationalism in the name of nonintervention, his stated admiration of Andrew Jackson—a favored reference point for his chief adviser, Steve Bannon—might also be viewed as a signal of renewing what one historian terms an “imperialism beyond the liberal variant.”⁶⁶ Jacksonianism has a number of important valences in U.S. domestic and international relations. Among the most important is its justification of territorial expansion and

extraterritorial jurisdiction in support of the economic prerogatives and security claims of a settler polity. The Seminole War, which Jackson prosecuted against both Southern tribes and the fugitive slaves who had found refuge among them, provided a U.S. model and precedent for later nineteenth-century depredations by colonial powers in Asia and Africa by affirming the right to designate racial exceptions to the protections of natural law.⁶⁸

By the start of the twentieth century, the United States was the world's leading model of a society founded on colonial settlement, and the world's “leading racist jurisdiction.” Its history was invoked as a precedent for the Nuremberg laws and during World War II by Nazi officials seeking to justify territorial annexations in eastern Europe.⁶⁹ Though openly legalized racism has faded, the settlement precedent lives on. In his infamous 2003 memo defending executive action and torture in the war on terror, John Yoo tellingly cited the 1873 case of *Modoc* Indian prisoners as precedent for an exemption from the Geneva Conventions as well as domestic statutes on the grounds that “the strictures that bind the Executive in its role as a magistrate enforcing civil laws have no place in constraining the President in waging war.” As the relevant passage from the 1873 case states, the “laws and customs of civilized warfare may not be applicable to an armed conflict with Indian tribes on our Western frontier,” since Indians obey no “recognized laws of war.” To paraphrase the Chickasaw scholar Jodi Byrd, this suggests that anyone who is “made Indian” can be killed with impunity, even as violence on the part of “Indians” is always already criminalized—that is, outside the realm of legitimate politics or rational grievance.⁷⁰

The term that most succinctly defines the articulation of sovereignty as a right of exclusion, with a claim that binds kinship and nationality to an ideology of freedom, is *racial nationalism*; Jacksonianism was one of its formative and most coherent expressions. To be more specific, we might identify how the Jacksonian tradition of “small wars” and “police actions” against

savages reproduced a distinctive (and fictive) "American" ethnicity and mode of government action that furthered the development of the United States as a racial state by transforming a vision of blood spilled in battles against racial enemies into the empowering abstractions and material gains promised by inclusion in a protected and privileged domain of national subjectivity. This is why the Indian wars remain an Ur-text for framing U.S. war making: they have been a basis for an inclusive, even at times a racially alchemical, conception of U.S. nationality. In historical terms, however, and against the backdrop of the rising power of American capitalism, Jacksonianism was always a defense of slavery: it was directed equally toward racial enemies within and those without.⁷¹ When these traditions are invoked today, therefore, they are not only metaphorical: they also refer to ongoing struggles over appropriation and dispossession, and to populations whose very existence is deemed an affront within shrinking kingdoms of Western prosperity. As a consequence, they pose for the United States questions thought settled: who is an object of dread and elimination, and who is a subject of rights and inclusion?⁷²

Race, War, Police

[For] preventing the many dangers and inconveniences that may arise from the disorderly and unlawful meetings of Negroes and other slaves, patrols should be established.

Georgia General Assembly, 1818

The police power is the counterpart . . . to the realm of individual liberty.

John Burgess, 1899

Once the classic method of lynching was the rope. Now it is the policeman's bullet.

Civil Rights Congress, 1951

FROM WAR TO POLICE

It is common to speak of the militarization of policing, and the blurring of the boundaries between war and police in the United States today. In the context of the long history of U.S. racial formation, policing has arguably never been distinct from a kind of civil warfare. Criminal assignment has linked presumptions about individual and group propensities to antisocial behavior and threat to embodied stigma and subjection to sanctioned violence that exceeds the logic of civil compact. Policing makes race and race has defined the objects of police at the point where relations of force take primacy. W. E. B. Du Bois famously observed this race making dynamic,