

Race Traitor

“Abolish the White Race By Any Means Necessary”

The white race is a historically constructed social formation — historically constructed because (like royalty) it is a product of some people’s responses to historical circumstances; a social formation because it is a fact of society corresponding to no classification recognized by natural science.

The white race cuts across ethnic and class lines. It is not coextensive with that portion of the population of European descent, since many of those classified as “colored” can trace some of their ancestry to Europe, while African, Asian, or American Indian blood flows through the veins of many considered white. Nor does membership in the white race imply wealth, since there are plenty of poor whites, as well as some people of wealth and comfort who are not white.

The white race consists of those who partake of the privileges of the white skin in this society. Its most wretched members share a status higher, in certain respects, than that of the most exalted persons excluded from it, in return for which they give their support to the system that degrades them.

The key to solving the social problems of our age is to abolish the white race. Until that task is accomplished, even partial reform will prove elusive, because white influence permeates every issue in U.S. society, whether domestic or foreign.

Advocating the abolition of the white race is distinct from what is called “anti-racism.” The term “racism” has come to be applied to a variety of attitudes, some of which are mutually incompatible, and has been devalued to mean little more than a tendency to dislike some people for the color of their skin.

Moreover, anti-racism admits the natural existence of “races” even while opposing social distinctions among them. The abolitionists maintain, on the contrary, that people were not favored socially because they were white; rather they were defined as “white” because they were favored. Race itself is a product of social discrimination; so long as the white race exists, all movements against racism are doomed to fail.

The existence of the white race depends on the willingness of those assigned to it to place their racial interests above class, gender or any other interests they hold. The defection of enough of its members to make it unreliable as a determinant of behavior will set off tremors that will lead to its collapse.

RACE TRAITOR aims to serve as an intellectual center for those seeking to abolish the white race. It will encourage dissent from the conformity that maintains it and popularize examples of defection from its ranks, analyze the forces that hold it together and those which promise to tear it apart. Part of its task will be to promote debate among abolitionists. When possible, it will support practical measures, guided by the principle, Treason to whiteness is loyalty to humanity. Dissolve the club

The white race is a club, which enrolls certain people at birth, without their consent, and brings them up according to its rules. For the most part the members go through life accepting the benefits of membership, without thinking about the costs. When individuals question the rules, the officers are quick to remind them of all they owe to the club, and warn them of the dangers they will face if they leave it.

RACE TRAITOR aims to dissolve the club, to break it apart, to explode it. Some people who sympathize with our aim have asked us how we intend to win over the majority of so-called whites to anti-racism. Others, usually less friendly, have asked if we plan to exterminate physically millions, perhaps hundreds of millions, of people. Neither of these plans is what we have in mind. The weak point of the club is its need for unanimity. Just as the South, on launching the Civil War, declared that it needed its entire territory and

would have it, the white race must have the support of all those it has designated as its constituency, or it ceases to exist.

Elsewhere in this number, readers will find an account of John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry and some of the events it set in motion. Before the Civil War, the leading spokesmen for the slaveholders acknowledged that the majority of white northerners, swayed above all by the presence of the fugitive slave, considered slavery unjust. The Southerners also understood that the opposition was ineffective; however much the white people of the north disapproved of the slave system, the majority went along with it rather than risk the ordinary comforts of their lives, meager as they were in many cases.



When John Brown attacked Harpers Ferry, Southern pro-slavery leaders reacted with fury: they imposed a boycott on northern manufactures, demanded new concessions from the government in Washington, and began to prepare for war. When they sought to portray John Brown as a representative of northern opinion, Southern leaders were wrong; he represented only a small and isolated minority. But they were also right, for he expressed the hopes that still persisted in the northern population despite decades of cringing before the slaveholders. Virginia did not fear John Brown and his small band of followers, but his soul that would go marching on, though his body lay a-mould'rin' in the grave.

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When the South, in retaliation for Harpers Ferry, sought to further bully northern opinion, it did so not out of paranoia but out of the realistic assessment that only a renewal of the national pro-slavery vows could save a system whose proud facade concealed a fragile foundation. By the arrogance of their demands, the Southern leaders compelled the people of the north to resist. Not ideas but events were in command. Each step led inexorably to the next: Southern land-greed, Lincoln's victory, secession, war, blacks as laborers, soldiers, citizens, voters. And so the war that began with not one person in a hundred foreseeing the end of slavery was transformed within two years into an anti-slavery war.

It is our faith — and with those who do not share it we shall not argue — that the majority of so-called whites in this country are neither deeply nor consciously committed to white supremacy; like most human beings in most times and places, they would do the right thing if it were convenient. As did their counterparts before the Civil War, most go along with a system that disturbs them, because the consequences of challenging it are terrifying. They close their eyes to what is happening around them, because it is easier not to know.

At rare moments their nervous peace is shattered, their certainty is shaken, and they are compelled to question the common sense by which they normally live. One such moment was in the days immediately following the

Rodney King verdict, when a majority of white Americans were willing to admit to polltakers that black people had good reasons to rebel, and some joined them. Ordinarily the moments are brief, as the guns and reform programs are moved up to restore order and, more important, the confidence that matters are in good hands and they can go back to sleep. Both the guns and the reform programs are aimed at whites as well as blacks — the guns as a warning and the reform programs as a salve to their consciences.

Recently, one of our editors, unfamiliar with New York City traffic laws, made an illegal right turn there on a red light. He was stopped by two cops in a patrol car. After examining his license, they released him with a courteous admonition. Had he been black, they probably would have ticketed him, and might even have taken him down to the station. A lot of history was embodied in that small exchange: the cops treated the miscreant leniently at least in part because they assumed, looking at him, that he was white and therefore loyal. Their courtesy was a habit meant both to reward good conduct and induce future cooperation.

Had the driver cursed them, or displayed a bumper sticker that said, “Avenge Rodney King,” the cops might have reacted differently. We admit that neither gesture on the part of a single individual would in all likelihood be of much consequence. But if enough of those who looked white broke the rules of the club to make the cops doubt their ability to recognize a white person merely by looking at him or her, how would it affect the cops’ behavior? And if the police, the courts, and the authorities in general were to start spreading around indiscriminately the treatment they normally reserve for people of color, how would the rest of the so-called whites react?

How many dissident so-called whites would it take to unsettle the nerves of the white executive board? It is impossible to know. One John Brown — against a background of slave resistance — was enough for Virginia. Yet it was not the abolitionists, not even the transcendent John Brown, who brought about the mass shifts in consciousness of the Civil War period. At

most, their heroic deeds were part of a chain of events that involved mutual actions and reactions on a scale beyond anything they could have anticipated — until a war that began with both sides fighting for slavery (the South to take it out of the Union, the north to keep it in) ended with a great army marching through the land singing, “As He died to make men holy, let us fight to make men free.

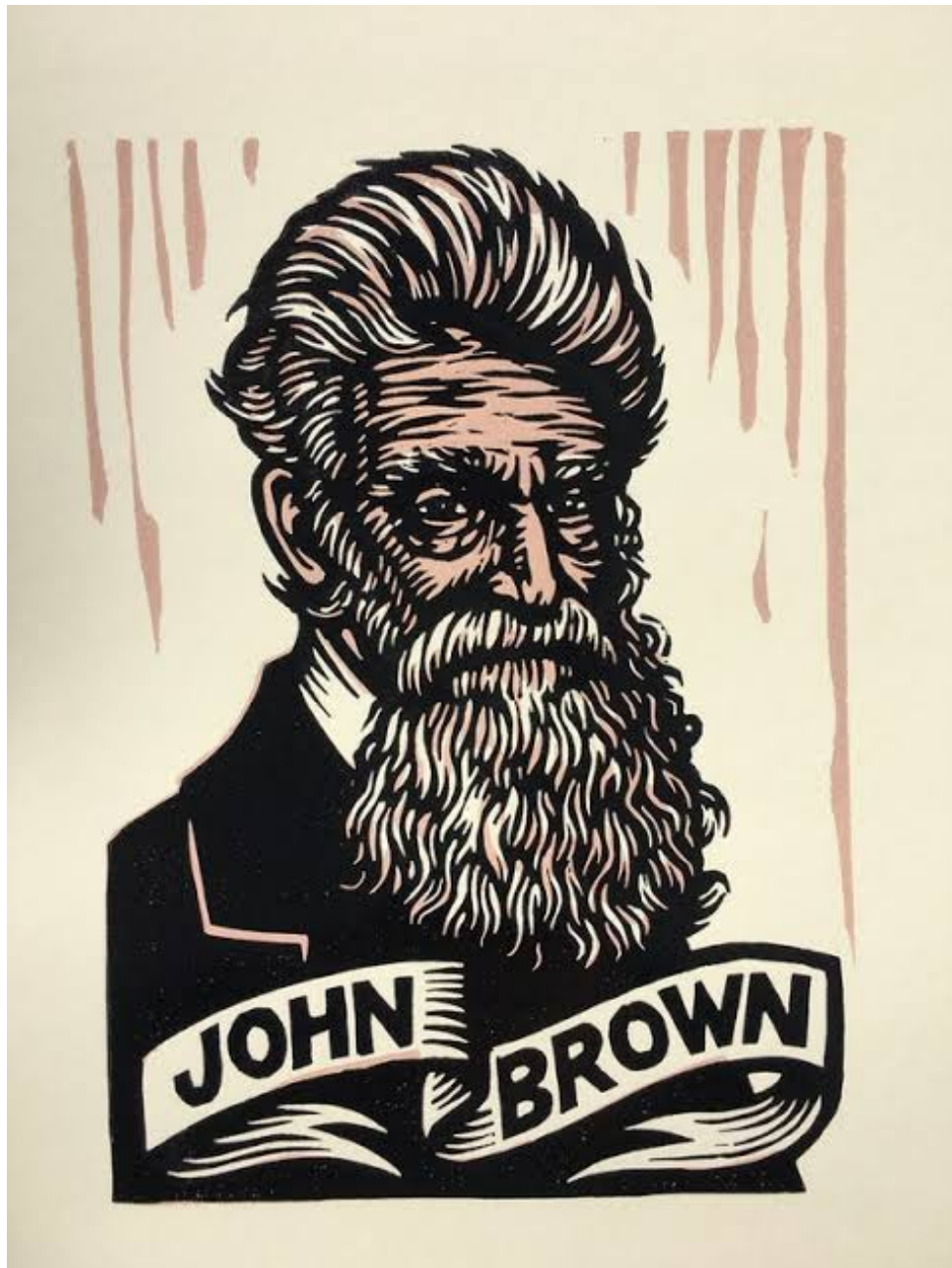
The moments when the routine assumptions of race break down are the seismic promise that somewhere in the tectonic flow a new fault is building up pressure, a new Harpers Ferry is being prepared. Its nature and timing cannot be predicted, but of its coming we have no doubt. When it comes, it will set off a series of tremors that will lead to the disintegration of the white race. We want to be ready, walking in Jerusalem just like John. What kind of journal is this?

RACE TRAITOR exists, not to make converts, but to reach out to those who are dissatisfied with the terms of membership in the white club. Its primary intended audience will be those people commonly called whites who, in one way or another, understand whiteness to be a problem that perpetuates injustice and prevents even the well-disposed among them from joining unequivocally in the struggle for human freedom. By engaging these dissidents in a journey of discovery into whiteness and its discontents, we hope to take part, together with others, in the process of defining a new human community. We wish neither to minimize the complicity of even the most downtrodden of whites with the system of white supremacy nor to exaggerate the significance of momentary departures from white rules.

We should say that there are some articles we are not interested in publishing. Since we are not seeking converts, we probably will not publish articles which lecture various organizations about their racial opportunism. Also we probably will not publish articles promoting inter-racial harmony, because that approach too often leaves intact differential treatment of whites and blacks and provides subtle confirmation of the idea that different races exist independently of social distinctions.

In the original film version of ROBIN HOOD (starring Errol Flynn), the Sheriff of Nottingham says to Robin, "You speak treason." Robin replies, "Fluently." We hope to do the same.

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Race Traitor

When Does the Unreasonable Act Make Sense?

Scientists have concluded that there are no biological standards for distinguishing one “race” from another, and social scientists have begun to examine how the white race was constructed and how it is reproduced. However, few scholars or activists have taken the next step: indeed, one might say that up to now the philosophers have merely interpreted the white race; the point, however, is to abolish it. How can this be done?

The white race is like a private club, which grants privileges to certain people in return for obedience to its rules. It is based on one huge assumption: that all those who look white are, whatever their complaints or reservations, fundamentally loyal to it.

What if the white skin lost its usefulness as a badge of loyalty? What if the cop, the judge, the social worker, the schoolteacher, and the other representatives of official society could no longer recognize a loyal person merely by looking, how would it affect their behavior? And if color no longer served as a handy guide to the dispensing of favors, so that ordinary whites began experiencing the sort of treatment to which they are normally immune, how would this affect their outlook?

Elsewhere in this issue it is pointed out that the rules of the white club do not require that all members be strong advocates of white supremacy, merely that they defer to the prejudices of others. The need to maintain racial solidarity imposes a stifling conformity on whites, on any subject touching even remotely on race.

The way to abolish the white race is to disrupt that conformity. If enough people who look white violate the rules of whiteness their existence cannot be ignored. If it becomes impossible for the upholders of white rules to speak in the name of all who look white, the white race will cease to exist. The

abolitionists are traitors to the white race; by acting boldly they jeopardize their membership in the white club and their ability to draw upon its privileges.

We recognize that this advice flies in the face of what is usually regarded as sound, practical sense. Even (we might say especially) in the ranks of the reformers the conventional wisdom teaches that the way to achieve social change is to strive to express the desires of an existing constituency. That is perhaps why most social reform is so useless.

We are calling for the opposite: a minority willing to undertake outrageous acts of provocation, aware that they will incur the opposition of many who might agree with them if they adopted a more moderate approach.

How many will it take? No one can say for sure. It is a bit like the problem of currency: how much counterfeit money has to circulate in order to destroy the value of the official currency? The answer is, nowhere near a majority—just enough to undermine public confidence in the official stuff. When it comes to abolishing the white race, the task is not to win over more whites to oppose “racism”; there are “anti-racists” enough already to do the job.

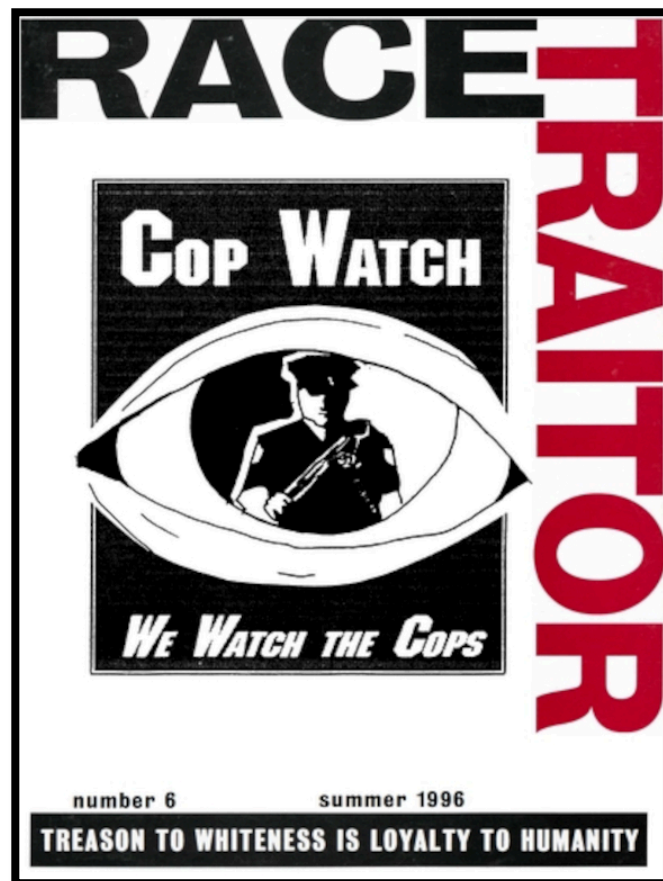
In a previous issue we wrote, “In a certain sense, the entire project of **Race Traitor** is to examine, from every possible angle, the moment when Huck Finn, and all the modern Huck Finns, decide to break with what Huck calls ‘civilization’ and take the steps that will lead to Jim’s, and their own, freedom.” Since we are talking about acts which are, by definition, unreasonable (because they fly in the face of all contemporary reasonable opinion), we could reformulate as follows the central problem **Race Traitor** seeks to address: When does the unreasonable act make sense?

In our pages we have published accounts from the past and present, where so-called whites have committed acts which defy reason but which turn out to have been socially effective. There are others we know of but have not written about, and still others we do not know of but want to report. We believe that to popularize such examples will contribute to altering current

notions of what constitutes reason, and will encourage others to be still bolder.

Finally, we know how devilishly difficult it is for individuals to escape whiteness. The white race does not voluntarily surrender a single member, so that even those who step outside of it in one situation find it virtually impossible not to step back in later, if for no other reason than the assumptions of others. But we also know that when there comes into being a critical mass of people who, though they look white, have ceased to act white, the white race will undergo fission, and former whites will be able to take part, together with others, in building a new human community.

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Race Traitor (Noel Ignatiev and John Garvey)

“Anti-fascism, “Anti-racism,” and Abolition”

More than twenty years ago, Race Traitor published an editorial addressed to anti-racist activists. We are re-posting it here, hoping to engage the brave individuals who risked their lives facing down the fascists in the streets of Charlottesville a few days ago and the many more people across the US who support and praise their actions. We have no simple answer to the question of how best to defeat today's fascists, who are more numerous, more sophisticated and more committed to a reactionary overthrow of the existing social and political order than were their forerunners a generation ago. Nor do we have a fully satisfactory analysis of the relationship among the various forces assembled within the block of Trump supporters and would not want to underestimate its volatility and potential danger. We note the inability of the president to enforce party discipline—even on members of his own family—when it came to defending his “wink and a nod” condemnation of violence, and think it wise to appreciate all of the official forces arrayed against him and his whims. We continue to believe that, if we defeated all the fascists and stopped all the “racists,” we would remain trapped within a society where “race” not only determines all too many matters of consequence for millions but also hinders the emergence of a mass movement that could put an end to the social and economic conditions that produce everyday misery for just about everyone and nourish the soil that allows fascist barbarism to attract thousands to its banners.

- Noel Ignatiev and John Garvey

Anti-fascism, “Anti-racism,” and Abolition

There now exist in this country and around the world a number of organizing projects, research centers, and publications that call themselves “anti-racist.” Almost all the attention of the “anti-racist” movement is focused on groups like the nazis and the klan that explicitly avow their racism, and on various movements like anti-abortion and anti-gay rights that are largely led by people on the far right of the political spectrum, and its programmatic initiatives are directed almost exclusively at combating these forces.

We think this is a mistake. Just as the capitalist system is not a capitalist plot, *race is not the work of racists*. On the contrary, it is reproduced by the principal institutions of society, among which are the schools [which define “excellence”], the labor market [which defines “employment”], the law [which defines “crime”], the welfare system [which defines “poverty”], and the family [which defines “kinship”]—and *it is reinforced by various reform programs which address many of the social problems traditionally of concern to the “left.”*

Racist and far-right groups in the main represent caricatures of reality in this race-defined society; at most they are efforts by a few to push the race line farther than what is currently considered proper. If that is the case, the “anti-racist” movement is seriously misreading the roots of the race problem, and pursuing an erroneous strategy for addressing it.

Race Traitor believes that the main target of those who seek to eradicate the color line should be the institutions and behaviors that maintain it: the schools, the criminal justice and welfare systems, the employers and unions, and the family. In this we stand with the original Abolitionists, who never tired of pointing out that the problem was not the slaveholders of Carolina, but the loyal citizens of Massachusetts.

We recently saw a report on an attempt by group of self-proclaimed nazis to hold a “Gay-bashing” fest in New Hope, Pennsylvania. According to the report, what happened is this: on learning that the nazis planned to march and rally, a group of their opponents called a counter-rally. The nazis, fearful for their safety, called off their march, but proceeded with the rally, which took place as scheduled behind a wall of police, who protected the nazis from the hostile crowd. The report states, “Residents of New Hope and anti-fascist organizers alike claimed the cancellation of the march as a victory for anti-fascist organizers. By creating the possibility of hundreds or thousands of counter-protesters willing to physically confront the nazis, we made it impossible for them to march. This strategy, of organizing for the possibility of physical confrontation, and bringing hundreds of people willing to carry it out, is clearly a successful one and needs to be pursued in the future.”



We are not so sure. That the cancellation of the march was a defeat for the nazis we have no doubt; but it seems to us that it was more of a victory for the state than for the anti-fascist organizers, because the state was

able to emerge as the defender of both free speech and law-and-order, marginalizing the “extremists” on both sides—those who want to build death camps and those who want to prevent their construction. We are inclined to agree with another commentator who called the counter-demonstration “ineffective.”

We favor beating nazis off the streets wherever they appear and militant confrontations with “racists” or other reactionaries of the right (or the left). But we ask, what is the purpose of this “strategy”? If it is to do material damage to the fascists, then it takes no genius to point out that such damage can be done them more effectively on virtually any day of the year other than when they appear in public surrounded by a wall of cops and television cameras. If it is to win people out of the nazi ranks, we have no way of knowing how effective such actions are. If the aim is to expose the state as the defender of nazis, that is only a very partial truth; the state is the defender of public order, and has shown itself quite willing to repress nazis and other white supremacist groups who threaten that order. And if the purpose is to win people to a vision of a world without race barriers, then we must say that any action which aims to crush the nazis physically and fails to do so because of state intervention has the effect of reinforcing the authority of the state, which, as we said, is the most important agency maintaining race barriers.

RACE TRAITOR

Treason to whiteness is loyalty to humanity



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