

shambles. . . . The east wing, inspired by historical relativism and showing a little sadly the traces of a wholly derivative design, is entirely neglected.⁴³

IV

Consensus among American historians in the postwar decades was even more striking in that realm which had always been marked by the greatest amount of dissension: the long mid-nineteenth-century crisis over questions having to do, in one way or another, with race. Whereas in the establishment of the American historical profession before World War I, historiographical agreement on these issues was grounded on the objective truth of scientific racism, consensus among historians after World War II was based on the objective truth of scientific antiracism. World War II itself, in principle, if not in practice, an antiracist crusade, is sometimes said to have influenced historiography in this direction, and perhaps to a limited extent it did. But a more important factor was the coming to maturity and professional influence of a generation of historians whose antiracist consciousness was formed in the 1930s. Older historians, North and South, continued to write in the old way, but their work was increasingly disparaged—or disregarded. Having played out their role as targets for the new generation, they were rapidly swept into the dustbin of historiography. The transition was accomplished as Max Planck said it customarily was in the physical sciences: “a new scientific truth does not triumph by convincing its opponents and making them see the light, but rather because its opponents eventually die, and a new generation grows up that is familiar with it.”⁴⁴

Richard Hofstadter, during World War II, attacked the racism which lay at the foundation of U. B. Phillips’s “Plantation Legend.” After the war, in *The American Political Tradition*, the abolitionist Wendell Phillips was the only one of the book’s protagonists of whom Hofstadter wrote warmly and approvingly. Northern-born historians began to find employment in the South, and brought with them a jaundiced view of local folkways. T. Harry Williams, who commenced a long tenure at Louisiana State University during the war, wrote back to his mentor William B. Hesseltine of the situation that developed when he was asked to give a talk at a local Negro college on southern history.

⁴³*Progressive Historians*, 344. I have transposed the order of Hofstadter’s description of the east and west wings.

⁴⁴*Scientific Autobiography and Other Papers* (New York, 1949), 33–34.

That Noble Dream, Novick

Remembering my alien ancestry, I decided to get an O.K. from the president. After I told him the facts he said: "The Board will raise hell if you speak to niggers. Niggers are trying to get in to L.S.U. The Board wouldn't like it if you spoke to niggers and then came back and spoke to our children. . . ." I asked with sarcasm that wasn't appreciated, I mean he didn't get it, "Is it all right if I go out and look at the buildings?" That was all right. But think, I went out and looked at nigger buildings and then came back and looked at our white buildings. Damn you, don't use this in an article.

Kenneth Stamp, like Williams a student of Hesselstine's, wrote his teacher just after the war to let off steam about the older generation of Civil War historians.

James G. Randall is a damned Negro-hating, abolitionist-baiting, doughface. . . . I'm sick of the Randalls, Cravens and other doughfaces who crucify the abolitionists for attacking slavery. If I had lived in the 1850's, I would have been a rabid abolitionist. When the secession crisis came I would have followed the abolitionist line: let 'em secede and good riddance. . . . But once the war came, I would have tried to get something out of it. I would have howled for abolition, and for the confiscation and distribution of large estates among negroes and poor whites, as the Radicals (some of them) did. I would have been a Radical because there was nothing better to be. I couldn't have been a conservative Lincoln Republican and rubbed noses with the Blairs and Swards; and I couldn't have been a Negro-hating copperhead. My only criticism of the Radicals is that they weren't radical enough, at least so far as the southern problem was concerned.⁴⁵

The decade of the 1950s saw an ever increasing commitment of historians to racial equality—and greater zeal in its pursuit. Inevitably, like everything else in this period, racial questions were caught up in the cold war. There was an ultimately successful effort in the Mississippi Valley Historical Association to cease holding meetings in cities where only segregated accommodations were available. Howard K. Beale, the most

⁴⁵Williams to Hesselstine, 19 April 1945, Hesselstine Papers, M66-132/5; Stamp to Hesselstine, 6 March 1946, *ibid.*, M68-25/3. Williams shared Stamp's dismay that racist scholarship was not labeled as such. He wrote Hesselstine that "it's a crying shame the way the profession has reviewed [E. Merton] Coulter's godawful book on Reconstruction. Isn't someone going to have the courage to say it's based on race prejudice and distortion of the sources?" (Undated [probably 1948] letter, Hesselstine Papers, M68-25/3.) John Hope Franklin wrote a scathing review of Coulter's *The South During Reconstruction* for the *Journal of Negro History* and mailed five hundred reprints to historians all over the country. "The reaction was tremendous," Franklin recalled many years later. "I got a stack of letters two inches thick from the historians telling me that they were touched, that they hadn't looked at the book the way I had." (Jack Star, "Above All, A Scholar," *Change* 9 [February 1977]: 30.)

militant and impatient of those involved in the struggle, made it clear in a letter to Thomas Clark of the University of Kentucky that desegregating the MVHA was an anti-Communist duty:

I wonder if Mr. [Dwight] Dumond and his friends, who I am sure are devoted to America, have ever thought of the tremendous service they are doing to communism in her fight against America and democracy to put into communist hands to use with the millions of people that our government is trying to win away from Russian influence, the record of a scholarly organization that is threatened with disruption in democratic America because a group . . . insists upon maintaining distinctions of class and color[;] think what a service we will do world communism in its fight against our country if we support the belief that a man, however great a scholar, however loyal an American, and however true a gentleman, must not be allowed to sleep in the same building with other scholars and gentlemen, or to mingle with them socially at scholarly meetings because of his color.⁴⁶

A number of historians worked on the NAACP brief in the epochal case of *Brown v. Board of Education*. By 1956, when the strife-ridden Brooklyn College History Department wanted to find a nominee for department chairman whom the president of the college couldn't turn down, they hit on the name of John Hope Franklin. By the late 1950s, as the civil rights movement gathered steam, an increasing number of young historians found in that struggle an outlet for social energies and idealism bottled up in the previous period of political quiescence. In the early 1960s some younger historians (Howard Zinn, Staughton Lynd) began teaching at southern black colleges. By-then-middle-aged historians like Walter Johnson, Hofstadter, and Woodward were marching with Martin Luther King from Selma to Montgomery.⁴⁷

Historical controversies on race-related issues were considerably more

⁴⁶Letter of 2 February 1954, copy in Shannon Papers, Box 2. Anti-Communism could work the other way as well. Protests by Negro students and others at the City College of New York were ultimately successful in ending the use of Samuel E. Morison and Henry Steele Commager's *Growth of the American Republic* in classes because of its racist characterizations of Negroes. But the initial reaction of the CCNY History Department was to defend the text—whose racism was privately acknowledged—because Communists were active in the campaign against it. (La Wanda Cox to Merle Curti, 6 October 1950, Curti Papers, 10–16.) Defending his characterization of slavery, Morison wrote a correspondent that “the Negroes were the most successful slave race; that is, as slaves, in modern history; much more satisfactory, as slaves, I mean, than the Greeks, the American Indians or any Oriental population. There must be some essential docility in their character that made it so.” (Letter to Harvey Wish, 8 October 1952, Wish Papers.) Interestingly, in light of a later shift in terminological fashion, one of the criticisms of the Morison and Commager text was that it sometimes employed the term “blacks” instead of “Negroes.” (*Time* 57 [26 February 1951]: 48–49.)

⁴⁷Jesse D. Clarkson of the Brooklyn Department explained their strategy to Franklin when sounding him out about the possibility of coming to Brooklyn. Reported, on the basis of

decorous and limited in scope than they had been in previous years, or were to be again, later on, in the late sixties and seventies. Historical writing on these issues had often been characterized by highly emotive, and moralistic, language, generally regarded as an index of the sharpness of the differences which divided the contestants. But as the profession moved toward consensus on substantive issues of interpretation, the question of the appropriate tone for discussing the issues remained. Indeed, the question of rhetoric often became central, as substantive issues became resolved, or narrowed in scope. As consensus on issues of racial justice became not just broader but deeper and more passionate, agreement on "the facts" ceased to be associated with the detached posture and neutral descriptive tone the traditional norms of objectivity had mandated. Historians repeatedly had to address the relationship of moral commitment and moralistic language to historical scholarship.

The new antiracist consensus was most clearly manifest in the historiography of slavery and of Reconstruction. In both areas insofar as there were ideological differences between scholars they were fairly narrow, between moderate conservatives, who in glossing the Supreme Court's famous phrase on the pace of integration stressed the word "deliberate," and moderate liberals, who stressed the word "speed." The main thrust of postwar historical writing in both realms was to turn earlier evaluations on their head. Slavery was brutal and repressive rather than benign. Reconstruction was a "tragic era" not because of excesses in its treatment of whites, but because it stopped so far short of effective emancipation of the Negro.

In a 1952 survey of the scholarly literature on slavery, Kenneth Stampp noted that while members of the "scientific" and "subjectivist-presentist-relativist" schools were still debating whether historians were entitled to pass moral judgments, and whether they could succeed in transcending their own backgrounds, it was undeniable that "so far as Negro slavery is concerned we are still waiting for the first scientific and completely objec-

conversation with Franklin, by Horace S. Merrill to William B. Hesseltine, 8 January 1956, Hesseltine Papers, M66-132/8. One interesting index of the growth of antiracism was the change in the historiographical fortunes of the abolitionists, who had, during the preceding decades, generally been treated as troublemaking extremists. During the 1960s the abolitionists' stock simultaneously went up, as that of "moderates" on racial issues went down; and got lower, as standards for what counted as thoroughlygoingly egalitarian racial attitudes got higher. In the early 1960s Martin Duberman, putting together an anthology of new essays on the movement, found it impossible to find any younger scholars who took the traditional view of abolitionists as "meddlesome fanatics." Those historians, North and South, whose work made clear their commitment to the cause of racial equality were frequently called "neo-abolitionists"—a not unfriendly characterization, and one which many so-designated embraced.

tive study of the institution which is based upon no assumptions whose validity cannot be thoroughly proved." Stamppp acknowledged that the very act of disapproving slavery was a "subjective bias," but to assert innate Negro inferiority went beyond this. Such an assertion demonstrated inexcusable "ignorance of, or disregard for, the overwhelming evidence to the contrary," particularly that embodied in Gunnar Myrdal's *An American Dilemma*. And he set forth the essential precondition of a "scientific and completely objective study": "No historian of the institution can be taken seriously any longer unless he begins with the knowledge that there is no valid evidence that the Negro race is innately inferior to the white, and that there is growing evidence that both races have approximately the same potentialities." Stamppp's 1956 *The Peculiar Institution* exemplified this outlook. In its most quoted sentence he made explicit his assumption that "the slaves were merely ordinary human beings, that innately Negroes *are*, after all, only white men with black skins, nothing more, nothing less."⁴⁸

At the end of the 1950s Stanley Elkins published his *Slavery*, and initiated a long discussion on the slave personality. Elkins provoked many historians with his suggestion that just as Nazi concentration camps had "infantilized" their inmates, slavery had produced "Sambo." The stereotype of the grinning, shuffling, feckless, childish slave was not, said Elkins, a racist fiction, but the consequence of incarceration in the "closed system" of North American slavery. In his focus on the brutalities of the system, Elkins clearly aligned himself with Stamppp rather than Phillips. But his acceptance of "Sambo" as psychic reality, rather than a form of "puttin' on ole massa," had implications for the twentieth century which were, for obvious reasons, not altogether congenial to most liberal integrationists.

Elkins had a certain ironic detachment from what he saw as Stamppp's uncritical acceptance of liberal pieties. In Elkins's view these gave *The Peculiar Institution* an unacceptable moralistic tone, and an undeserved reputation for objectivity.

With the "proved assumptions" of the social sciences at his disposal . . . Stamppp prepared to banish Phillips into full retirement and to produce the "objective study." In short, "objectivity" and the discrediting of Phillips were assumed to be not only fully compatible but inseparable. . . . To challenge Phillips' assumption of racial inferiority, Stamppp made use of the extensive Myrdal material, whose scientific legitimacy had been unimpeachably established. But he did so without

⁴⁸"The Historian and Southern Negro Slavery," *AHR* 57 (1952): 613, 619-20; *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (New York, 1956), vii.

making much distinction between what was clearly "scientific" in it and what was earnestly and animatedly normative. Since the Myrdal studies themselves crackled with moral electricity, Stamp, by adopting their attitude (his own pages similarly crackle), was returning to a long-familiar moral position through the back door. . . . Numerous "scientific" possibilities . . . were ignored in *The Peculiar Institution*. Whatever submissiveness, cheerfulness, and childishness could be observed among the ante-bellum plantation Negroes was automatically discredited; these features could not be accepted as typical and normal—not for a white man, and therefore not for anyone: "Negroes are, after all, only white men with black skins, nothing more, nothing less." . . . Professor Stamp, like his abolitionist forbears, is still as much concerned as they to prove slavery an abomination and to prove master and slave equal before their Maker.⁴⁹

C. Vann Woodward became the dominant figure in studies of the South in Reconstruction and thereafter. As Stamp's revised portrayal of the antebellum Negro had promoted a more hopeful view of the prospects for integration from one side, Woodward's writings on postbellum whites did so from the other. In a series of works of which the most influential was *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, Woodward endeavored, as he had done earlier in his *Tom Watson*, to "indicate that things have not always been the same in the South"; to show that "the belief that [southern racial policies] are immutable and unchangeable is not supported by history." In *Jim Crow*, whose first chapter was significantly entitled "Forgotten Alternatives," Woodward attempted to show that the elaborate legal structure of segregation, which most southerners believed was timeless, had not been instituted until some time after the end of Reconstruction. He cited evidence of peaceful mingling of whites and blacks in saloons, restaurants, and trains. If in the late nineteenth century, why not in the mid-twentieth century?⁵⁰

Many journals assigned the book to black reviewers, but black or white, all agreed in treating the book as a contribution to contemporary discussions of desegregation. Rayford W. Logan in the *American Historical Review* thought it showed that recent cracks in the Jim Crow wall were "understandable in part because of the relative recency of many of the segregation laws" and that "additional breakdowns of the barriers may be easier for the same reason." In the *Mississippi Valley Historical*

⁴⁹*Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (Chicago, 1959), 22–23. It is noteworthy that Elkins omitted the key word "innately" in his quotation from Stamp, since David Potter did exactly the same thing when reviewing *The Peculiar Institution*, and subsequently apologized for having done so. (For the original review, *Yale Review* 46 [1956]: 261; for the apology, see I. A. Newby, ed., *The Civil War and Reconstruction, 1850–1877* [New York, 1971], 106–7.)

⁵⁰(New York, 1955), 47.

Review a white historian teaching at the University of Tennessee thought the book would "help materially in easing the adjustments of thinking and viewpoint made necessary by recent decisions of the Supreme Court." E. Franklin Frazier in the *Saturday Review of Literature* believed that Woodward had shown that "the race problem was *made* and that men can *unmake* it, as they are attempting today," while in the *Journal of Southern History* a black historian was pleased that the book was reaching the reading public "at the precise period when it can make a very significant contribution to the embattled forces of law and order, of sanity and reason."⁵¹

Woodward himself had reservations about the uses to which the book was put, distressed that there were those who took him to be saying that Jim Crow was "superficially rooted and easily eradicated." David Potter, surveying Woodward's work and career some years later, agreed that the arguments of *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* had often been vulgarized by its readers, but thought that Woodward himself was not without responsibility for misunderstandings. And he pointed to the source of an ambivalence which pervaded Woodward's work.

When an historian has a strong ideological commitment, a tension may be set up between his devotion to the commitment and his devotion to realism for its own sake. . . . His historical realism was pitted against his liberal urge to find constructive meanings in the past for the affairs of the present. His realism never lost hold, but his liberal urge constantly impelled him to emphasize viewpoints which his realism constantly impelled him to qualify and dilute. . . . The urgency of Woodward's desire to find answers in the past which would aid in the quest for solution of the problems of the present . . . distorted his image of the past, at least for a time and to a limited degree.

For Potter, Woodward's work raised but did not answer the question: "Can history retain its integrity as a rigorous and disciplined form of scholarly inquiry even while partaking of public and functional uses in our encounter with current issues?"⁵²

By the 1950s the question of the origins of the Civil War was neither as much discussed nor as controversial as it had been in previous decades.

⁵¹Logan, *AHR* 61 (1955): 212; Stanley J. Folmsbee, *MVHR* 42 (1955): 579; Frazier, *Saturday Review* 38 (11 June 1955): 13; Rufus E. Clement, *Journal of Southern History* 21 (1955): 557.

⁵²Woodward, "What Happened to the Civil Rights Movement?" (1967), in *The Burden of Southern History* (rev. ed., Baton Rouge, 1968), 183; Potter, "C. Vann Woodward," in Marcus Cunliffe and Robin Winks, eds., *Pastmasters: Some Essays on American Historians* (New York, 1969), 397-98, 401-2, 406-7.

But it was this subject which most clearly counterposed the rival claims of moral commitment and detached objectivity in historical writing.⁵³

Writing in 1946, Bernard De Voto explained Civil War revisionism, the view that the conflict was avoidable, by the fact that revisionists like Avery O. Craven and James G. Randall "happened to be young and impressionable at a time when an intellectual fashion was developing the (erroneous) thesis that the United States could and should have stayed out of the First World War and the (false) theorem that we were betrayed into it by propaganda." It was the unwillingness of revisionists to acknowledge the great moral issue of the Civil War that outraged De Voto.

As for considering even theoretically that the problem of slavery may have involved moral questions, God forbid. History will not put itself in the position of saying that any thesis may have been wrong, any cause evil, or any group of men heretical. A thesis may have been insufficient and a cause may have been defeated but, even at the end of the [Second] World War, history will not deal with moral values, though of course the Republican radicals were, well, culpable.

A few years later Oscar Handlin struck a similar note in chastising Allan Nevins for failing to recognize that there was "surely a difference between being a fanatic for freedom and being a fanatic for slavery."⁵⁴

The Dutch historian Pieter Geyl, writing in *The New England Quarterly*, thought that the Beards, though not themselves Civil War revisionists, had laid the groundwork for that "amoral" viewpoint by their "despiritualization" of the episode; had directed their focus away from the moral issue—the fact that behind the abolitionists stood "the silent condemnation of the free North, of Europe, of the world." In considering Lincoln's struggle to preserve the Union from the perspective of the early years of the cold war, Geyl was "almost tempted to believe that it

⁵³David Donald suggested that one important reason for the neglect of the Civil War by consensus historians was that "so appalling an aberration is inexplicable, easiest to pass over in silence." ("American Historians and the Causes of the Civil War," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 59 [1960]: 354.) Daniel Boorstin confessed that the Civil War was an anomaly and an embarrassment for his interpretation, but undaunted sought to show how "the circumstances of the struggle circumscribed the Civil War debate and prevented it from becoming a free-for-all among political theorists [and] was even to reinforce our sense of the continuity of our history." (*Genius*, 99–100.) This led Richard Hofstadter to respond with a vision of a cartoon: "a Reb and a Yank meet in 1865 to survey the physical and moral devastation of the war. 'Well,' says one to the other consolingly, 'at least we escaped the ultimate folly of producing political theorists.'" (*Progressive Historians*, 462.) Probably the most important factor in the decline in Civil War studies was boredom with a subject which seemed, at least for the time being, to have been exhausted.

⁵⁴De Voto, "The Easy Chair," *Harper's* 192 (1946): 124, 126; Handlin, review of *The Emergence of Lincoln*, *Nation* 147 (1950): 513.

was inspired by a prophetic vision of our own times." If the South had successfully seceded, "the world role played by the United States today, and the role which no doubt it will be called upon to play in the future, would be impossible."⁵⁵

It was Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. who provided the most comprehensive statement of the necessity of considering the Civil War from the perspective of morality, and of twentieth-century diplomacy. In language which made manifest his debt to Reinhold Niebuhr, Schlesinger expressed his belief that

the vogue of revisionism is connected with the modern tendency to seek in optimistic sentimentalism an escape from the severe demands of moral decision; . . . it is the offspring of our modern sentimentality which at once evades the essential moral problems in the name of a superficial objectivity and asserts their unimportance in the name of an invincible progress. . . . We have here a touching afterglow of the admirable nineteenth-century faith in the full rationality and perfectibility of man; the faith that the errors of the world would all in time be "outmoded."

When Schlesinger reviewed Nevins's *Ordeal of the Union* in 1947 he saw it as taking a middle-of-the-road position on the question of revisionism, but he was bothered by what he took to be the book's implications.

The issue here posed—what policy would have averted war—goes down to the question we formulate today in terms of appeasement or resistance. A future historian might say, much in Mr. Nevins' language, that the primary task of statesmanship in the 1930's was to furnish a workable adjustment between the USA and Germany, while offering strong inducements to the German people to abandon the police state, and equal persuasion to the Americans to help the Nazis rather than to scold them. In essence, this is Mr. Wallace's current thesis about the Russians. Comparisons with the issues of the Civil War may be extreme: yet one must face the hard fact that closed and authoritarian social systems tend to create a compulsive intransigence in their own ruling groups—and that these groups may respond much more to a firmness which wakens them to some sense of actuality than to a forbearance which is never great enough and always to be discounted.

Two years later Schlesinger's position had hardened. By 1949 his tolerance for any hint that the Civil War was not inevitable had declined, and he now characterized Nevins's discussion of Civil War inevitability as showing "entire acceptance of revisionism." Whereas earlier he had sug-

⁵⁵"The American Civil War and the Problem of Inevitability," *New England Quarterly* 24 (1951); reprinted in his *Debates with Historians* (Cleveland, 1958), 244-45, 261-62.

gested that the lesson of the coming of the Civil War was that an American policy of firmness with the Soviets might produce moderation of their conduct, now he went to the brink of saying that the lesson to be drawn was the inevitability of armed conflict. Then, as in 1949, one was in the presence of "moral differences far too profound to be solved by compromise." Small wonder that John Higham privately characterized Schlesinger's article on the causes of the Civil War as "an obvious exercise in historical rearmament for World War III."⁵⁶

The presence of "moralism" in accounts of the Civil War was disturbing to two quite different groups of historians, each of which, though on completely different grounds, expressed a strong preference for a more austere and objective approach. For a number of pro-southern historians "moralism" in accounts of the Civil War was offensive because it was *northern* moralism. They somewhat disingenuously appealed to professional standards of impartiality. Nevins's work, unacceptable to Schlesinger because of its amoral "superficial objectivity," was the target of southern attacks for its moralistic departures from objectivity. Avery O. Craven called Nevins's work "shallow and biased," deficient in precisely the qualities of "objectivity and balance" which were most necessary in dealing with "a period when passions were aroused." Fletcher M. Green thought Nevins was "blinded by his sense of moral values." Robert H. Woody observed that "It may all be very well to take one's stand with freedom as against slavery; it is worth suggesting, however, that it makes difficult an impartial account."⁵⁷

If for southerners the "moralistic" character of professional discourse

⁵⁶"The Causes of the Civil War: A Note on Historical Sentimentalism," *Partisan Review* 16 (1949): 976, 979; review of *Ordeal of the Union*, *Saturday Review of Literature* 30 (18 October 1947): 9-10; "Causes of the Civil War," 977; Higham to Merle Curti, 9 January 1950, Curti Papers, 19-19. It was by no means gratuitous, or a sign of an unusually "presentist" frame of mind, for Schlesinger to draw contemporary lessons from Nevins's book, since Nevins himself had done so in the preface to *The Ordeal of the Union*: "Twice in a century and a half terrible calamities came; twice a failure of statesmanship if not of national character cost the country far more than it could afford to pay. The Civil War and the Second World War should have been avoidable. Because the people and leaders of the United States did not act with determination and sagacity in solving the problems of slavery, sectional irritation, and a right adjustment of races, part of the country was half ruined for generations, and all of it set back by decades. The subsequent failure to consolidate the victory won in the First World War—the refusal to help set up a system of collective security and to play a manly, farsighted part in the world community—imperilled the very existence of the republic. Only colossal effort and the sacrifice of a vast part of the national wealth saved it. Such errors can in time be largely retrieved. But they cannot be forgotten or forgiven, and their lessons should be driven home." (viii.)

⁵⁷Review of *The Emergence of Lincoln* by Craven, *Yale Review* 40 (1951): 723; Green, review of *The Ordeal of the Union*, *MVHR* 35 (1948): 128; Woody, review of *The Ordeal of the Union*, *South Atlantic Quarterly* 47 (1948): 389.

on the Civil War was unsatisfactory because of its particular tilt, for others, northerners with no interest in defending the Confederacy, such an approach was unsatisfactory because it implicitly renounced the goal of moving toward consensus on the objective explanation of the Civil War. Historians of the Civil War who wanted to expel moralism and produce a convergent, value-neutral explanation of the conflict, sometimes invoked the authority of objectivist philosophers—Morris Cohen, Ernest Nagel, Karl Popper—and characteristically urged that quantification or more rigorous concepts borrowed from the social sciences would aid in the search for closure. Edwin Rozwenc of Amherst, editor of an anthology on the causes of the Civil War, considered various strategies for escaping the “chaos of historical discourse which is completely subjective and partisan.” He thought the most fruitful approach, in “the day of the electronic computing machine and of the lavish research grant” was the mounting of “a comprehensive attack, with abundant tables and measurements, upon the causal variables in the explanation of the American Civil War.” Lee Benson, in a series of papers, explored social scientific strategies through which differences over the causes of the Civil War could be “objectively resolved,” eliminating unscientific explanations and assigning precise weights to causal variables.⁵⁸

But in epistemological posture, as in substantive interpretation, this was a period of compromise and conciliation. Synthesis rather than polarization was the order of the day. Those historians who prized detachment and who sought certitude and closure were willing to grant that their attainment was problematic. Elkins, who wanted to replace moralistic treatments of slavery with a social scientific approach, acknowledged that even for the most disinterested of scholars, “how a person thinks about Negro slavery historically makes a great deal of difference here and now; it tends to locate him morally in relation to a whole range of very immediate political, social, and philosophical issues.” Rozwenc admitted that

⁵⁸Rozwenc, “The Present Crisis in the Historical Explanation of the Causes of the American Civil War,” in his *The Causes of the American Civil War* (Lexington, Mass., 1961), 228–30; Benson, “Causation and the American Civil War,” *History and Theory* 1 (1961), reprinted in his *Toward the Scientific Study of History* (Philadelphia, 1972), 96–97; Benson and Thomas J. Pressly, “Can Differences in Interpretations of the American Civil War Be Resolved Objectively?” paper delivered at the 1956 meeting of the AHA, 73. The same desire to escape moralism in historiography via a social scientific approach was found among historians in adjacent fields. Elkins had complained that down through the 1950s “the rhythm of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ which characterized ante-bellum discourse on the subject of slavery has retained much of its original simplicity and vigor.” David Donald found Reconstruction historiography trapped into trying to deal with “questions involving value judgments. . . . To such questions . . . there can be no final answers.” (Elkins, *Slavery*, 1; Donald, *The Politics of Reconstruction, 1863–1867* [Baton Rouge, 1965], xiii.)

despite the utmost rigor of approach, "historical explanations will always tend to be tenuous and speculative." Benson, though indefatigable in his efforts to find ways to resolve differences objectively, and measure variables precisely, conceded that it was an open question whether this could in fact be accomplished.⁵⁹

Views that were in any respect relativist were expressed with even greater circumspection. Vann Woodward was always very conflicted about the "presentism" of his work. He alternated between denying it, qualifying it, and apologizing for it. In three separate surveys of the literature on the causes of the Civil War, Howard K. Beale, Kenneth Stampp, and David Potter found no prospect of ultimate agreement, and all agreed on the "relativistic" proposition that differences in historians' background and philosophy, and changes in the climate of opinion, would continue to cause historians' interpretations to diverge. But none of the three saw in this any grounds for discouragement. Beale, despite finding that every recent interpretation had already been offered in the nineteenth century, saw "the constant striving toward never-fully-obtainable objectivity or fairmindedness [bringing] us closer than we were to a clear and true picture of the causes of the Civil War." Stampp, too, found that "twentieth-century historians often merely go back to interpretations advanced by partisans while the war was still in progress," but remained confident that "we have gradually enlarged our knowledge and deepened our understanding." And Potter thought that despite the persistence of disagreement, there was "objective progress" insofar as increased factual mastery "narrows the alternatives between which controversy continues to rage."⁶⁰

The dramatic swings in the historical treatments of slavery, the Civil War, and Reconstruction during the course of the twentieth century produced a great many historiographical surveys, which sought to explicate and explain the evolution of interpretations over the years. In conducting such surveys, one could, on the one hand, stress the "plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose" dimension of scholarship—the extent to which changes in interpretation appeared cyclical, dependent on

⁵⁹Elkins, *Slavery*, 1; Rozwenc, "Present Crisis," 230; Benson, "Causation," 97.

⁶⁰For Woodward, see the successive editions of his *Strange Career of Jim Crow* and "The Strange Career of a Historical Controversy" in his *American Counterpoint: Slavery and Racism in the North-South Dialogue* (Boston, 1971), 234–60. Beale, "What Historians Have Said About the Causes of the Civil War," in Social Science Research Council, *Theory and Practice in Historical Study: A Report of the Committee on Historiography* (New York, 1946), 91; Stampp, *The Causes of the Civil War* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1959), v–vi; Potter, "The Literature on the Background of the Civil War," in *The South and the Sectional Conflict* (Baton Rouge, 1968), 146–47.

changes in the idiosyncracies of historians and shifts in the climate of opinion. On the other hand, one could focus on growing sophistication of approach, increments in reliable information, the demolition of misconceptions. One approach was professionally discouraging, the other encouraging.

The growing professional self-confidence of these years, to which we will turn in Chapter 12, inclined historians to optimism. Shortly after his discharge from the army in 1945, Thomas J. Pressly began writing *Americans Interpret Their Civil War*, the most comprehensive survey of middle-period historiography published in these years. Looking back at it from the early sixties, in the introduction to a paperback edition, Pressly noted that his views had evolved. During the course of the 1950s he had come to believe that historians' disagreements were more likely to be based on factual differences than on the ideological differences he had earlier emphasized. The book he had written as a young man maintained that historians' experiences and presuppositions were often more influential than evidence in shaping their interpretations. He had concluded that, paradoxically, rather than the passage of time providing perspective, it seemed to increase emotional commitment to partisan viewpoints. He had stressed the ways in which the climate of opinion influenced trained scholars as much as it did laymen. Overall, the book had not "provide[d] much warmth for the ego of the historian"—particularly in its suggestion that contemporaries "have interpreted the crises of their age with as much understanding as has been mustered by trained historians of later generations."

Were he to rewrite the book, he reflected in 1962, it would strike a much more professionally affirmative note. He would balance what he had previously written with the "satisfying conviction" he had come to that "'progress' in historical scholarship can be demonstrated."

This type of self-examination by historians, this type of historiography, can impart to the historian a proud sense of "guild expertise"—pride in the guild of historians whose members have been trained in techniques of historical research unknown to "laymen," pride in the guild whose members have collected a mass of information concerning past events, whose members have a perspective, due to the passage of time, which enables them to view the past with greater detachment and clarity than did participants in the past events.⁶¹

⁶¹(1954; paperback, New York, 1965), 11–13, 335, 358.

Every group its own historian

Over the last hundred years no component of the synthesis of ideas which went to make up the norm of historical objectivity had been more central and enduring than "universalism." Truth was one, the same for all peoples. It was, in principle, accessible to all and addressed to all. Particularist commitments—national, regional, ethnic, religious, ideological—were seen as the enemies of objective truth. They had to be transcended if unitary truth was to be approached. Ranke's commanding reputation rested in large part on the perception that he had risen above narrow nationalism and parochialism. American historians had taken from Francis Bacon not only their notions of the inductive method, but also his warnings against the "Idols of the Cave": particularistic commitments which blocked access to universal truth. Historians were attracted to those schools of social science which believed that empathic identification and *Verstehen* were legitimate methods of comprehension, but insisted, along with the social scientists, that these devices were available to all investigators, and were not the special prerogative of insiders. The close connection which historians saw between detachment and objectivity made them sympathetic to Mannheim's celebration of the vantage point of free-floating and socially detached observers, whose liberation from particularist loyalties allowed them to approach closer to objectivity.

American historians, as compared with historians of other nationalities, had always been especially attached to universalist norms, and were proud that these norms had strengthened as the profession developed—a particularly urgent task in a country with strong regional loyalties, and a multiethnic population. The process of professionalization had seen the gradual victory of national over particularist interpretations, and increasingly universalistic patterns of recruitment to the profession.

With the sharp decline in the number of historians who could lay claim to "forefathers in 1776" (or for that matter, 1876), insider claims, such as those voiced by Carl Bridenbaugh in 1962, became rarer, and were regarded as not just tasteless but fundamentally wrongheaded. There was an additional consideration. In every other country the great majority of professional historians wrote the history of their own national community, and frequently disparaged the capacity of outsiders to penetrate its *Geist* or *génie*. American historians, by contrast, were substantially more cosmopolitan in their subject matter. Within the profession as a whole, and in every major department of history, historians of the United States were a minority, most practitioners studying societies with which they had no organic connection. To acknowledge insider privilege would be to devalue either one's own work, or, at a minimum, that of most of one's colleagues.

The entry of large numbers of Jews into the upper reaches of the profession in the 1950s and early 1960s was widely seen as the fulfillment of universalist norms. It was otherwise with the arrival of blacks and women from the late sixties onward. For their rise to prominence within the profession coincided with a new, assertive, particularist consciousness which both directly and indirectly challenged universalist norms. They defined themselves not as "historians who happened to be Negroes," with a consensually acceptable integrationist standpoint, but as *black* historians, committed to one or another form of cultural nationalism; not "historians who happened to be women," seeking proportional representation in textbooks for members of their sex, but *feminist* historians with an overriding loyalty to their sisters, and agendas which called for a thoroughgoing transformation of historical consciousness. Jews, upon entering the profession, had insisted that they were "just like everyone else, except more so," committed to a sensibility which was not just integrationist but usually assimilationist as well. In a different cultural climate the new black and female entrants stressed the distinctiveness of their vision, and often were highly critical of central values of the profession.¹ Assertive particularism had implications not just for academic universalism in the abstract, but for values as basic to academic life as a commitment to "telling the whole truth." No one, it seems safe to say, tells the truth all the time. Other values intervene. We tell white lies to safeguard the feelings of those we care about. Often there are conflicts of

¹With a few noteworthy exceptions the Jews who rose to prominence within the profession did not venture into Jewish history; they certainly never attempted to define a "Jewish perspective"; it is probably not coincidental that the leading figures in developing the "consensus" interpretation of American history were all of Jewish background.

loyalties. When writing letters of recommendation, loyalty to clients conflicts with loyalty to colleagues. And, as a rule, we do not tell "the whole truth" to an enemy if we have good reason to believe that the enemy will use the information imparted to hurt or destroy us. In their academic writing scholars strive to present "the whole truth and nothing but the truth" for a variety of reasons, not least among them fear of the embarrassment which follows being caught doing otherwise—a fear which various institutionalized mechanisms are devised to reinforce. But beyond such prudential considerations, the obligation of complete scholarly frankness has a principled foundation. It implies commitment to solidarity in a common venture; a loyalty, superior to any other loyalties, to allies in the collective scholarly search for increased knowledge and understanding. If those ties of solidarity are weakened; if they are seen as subordinate to other loyalties; in the limiting case, if other members of the scholarly community are seen as enemies rather than as allies, the principled basis for academic openness and objectivity is in serious jeopardy.

Newer particularistic sensibilities also challenged universalist assumptions about cognitive style and modes of discourse. Turn-of-the-century racists had asserted that blacks were naturally subjective, whites objective. The popular belief that women were naturally intuitive while men were analytic has a long history. These were propositions which Negroes and women in the academy had scornfully repudiated as racist or sexist slanders. Enlightened egalitarians had consistently maintained that the approved academic cognitive style, including all the elements which went to make up objectivity, was uncorrelated with color or gender. In the seventies and eighties a substantial number of black and feminist scholars denied that blacks were, in Kenneth Stamp's words, "innately . . . only white men with black skins"; that women differed from men only in their reproductive systems. Serious claims were made for distinctive discursive and cognitive styles among blacks and women—differences which might possibly, in some distant future, be synthesized with those of white males, but ought on no account to be assimilated to them.

From the sixties onward black and feminist historians anticipated theses advanced by Michel Foucault about the relation between power and knowledge: the "disciplining" of subordinate groups through being made the object of "disciplines"; arguments by Edward Said about the occidental construction of "the Orient"; concern by ethnographers about the legitimacy of their franchise to describe and define non-Western cultures. (These discussions will be briefly treated in Chapter 15.) Other challenges to universalism came from "Public History," which sought to

legitimize historical work designed for the purposes of particularist constituencies. In the historiographical as in the political realm, *e pluribus unum* was falling on evil days.

I

During the twenty years following the publication of his *From Slavery to Freedom* in 1947, Negro history, so far as the profession was concerned, was represented above all by John Hope Franklin. This was something of a paradox, since Franklin always denied that he was a "Negro historian." His career was a demonstration that without sacrificing dignity, or pandering to whites, it was possible for a Negro to reach the heights of professional honor and respect, and to have warm relations of collegiality with leading white historians. In 1956, after teaching for twenty years at black universities, he became the first black historian to receive a regular faculty appointment at a white institution (Brooklyn College). Franklin was always deeply committed to the universalist and objectivist norms of the profession, to faith in America, and to optimism about the attainment of racial justice through integration. In both his life and his work, Franklin was the model Negro historian for white liberals in the 1950s. He became something of an antimodel for a new generation of black historians in the sixties and seventies.

Much of Franklin's scholarly work had nothing to do with blacks, which was the basis of his consistent claim that he was not a "Negro historian" but a "historian of the South" who happened to be a Negro. Franklin not only rejected the label "Negro historian" for himself, but deplored the fact that "Negro history" had been established as a separate area of inquiry early in the century. He expressed sympathy for those of his predecessors who had insulated themselves against racist attacks from white scholars by carving out the field, but argued that by so doing they had perpetuated their ghettoization, and held back the integration of blacks into the mainstream of the profession.

In denying that blacks had privileged "insider" access to the black experience, Franklin was in some measure protecting himself. To grant that skin color conferred epistemological privilege would be to denigrate the value of his own studies of white southerners. But it was his universalist ethos and rejection of particularist claims which dictated his choice of subject matter, not the other way round. His criticism of the profession, like his criticism of the American polity, was always directed to the gap between principles which he wholeheartedly accepted, and performance which he frequently found wanting.

Historians, operating under Ranke's mandate to write history as it actually happened . . . could not bring themselves to write about runaway slaves as normal, freedom-loving human beings. . . . In refusing to face the facts of history and in refusing to use the same canons of scholarship to judge all peoples, such historians forfeited their own claims of being scientific just as surely as the founding fathers had forfeited their claims that they were shaping political institutions in the interests of all the people.

Despite humiliations and rebuffs, of which he himself had had his full share, Franklin said that the Negro historian must resist "the temptation to pollute his scholarship with polemics, diatribes, arguments. . . . If he yields to this attractive temptation, he can by one act destroy his effectiveness and disqualify himself as a true and worthy scholar." The positive role for the Negro scholar was "to combat the forces that isolate him and his people and, like the true patriot that he is, to contribute to the solution of the problems that all Americans face in common."²

The postwar decades had seen slow but steady progress in desegregation, the decline of the most blatant forms of racism and discrimination, and the possibility, for men like Franklin, to achieve levels of success within white society unimaginable before World War II. By the early sixties optimism about the prospects for successful racial integration, the consistent theme of Franklin's work, was as high in the historical profession as in the rest of American society, and Franklin was the symbol of that integrationist optimism. And then, like so much else in those years, it all fell apart.

Black anger and impatience were hardly unknown before the sixties, but in the face which blacks turned to whites these were often disguised. Franklin wrote of having frequently repressed his true feelings—finding catharsis, in the wake of racial slights, by writing angry pieces which he then consigned to his desk drawer. In the mid-sixties white Americans were confronted with the full fury of a new generation of blacks who wore no such masks. Bloodied southern civil rights workers came to be disillusioned with the fruits of their "nonviolent" efforts, and with the prospects of cooperation with whites. Blacks in northern ghettos exploded in paroxysms of violence. Most of the new militants repudiated an "Americanism" rooted in older integrationist tactics, called for "black power," termed themselves "black nationalists."³

²"George Washington Williams and the Beginnings of Afro-American Historiography," *Critical Inquiry* 4 (1978): 658-59; "The Dilemma of the American Negro Scholar," in Herbert Hill, ed., *Soon, One Morning: New Writing by American Negroes, 1940-1962* (New York, 1969), 73, 76.

³For Franklin's "blowing off steam" in unpublished writings, see "Dilemma," 74-75.

"Black nationalism" is an ambiguous term. In the past it had sometimes meant "Back to Africa"; sometimes the establishment of an "autonomous black belt" in the South. In the sixties very few so-called black nationalists envisioned an independent black polity. The demand for "black power" was primarily tactical, an effort to build a power base to challenge structures of oppression, rather than pursue piecemeal integration. For some left-nationalists, black revolutionaries would be the vanguard of a broader transformation of American society, perhaps in alliance with Third World forces as well as with whites. But above all, black nationalism was cultural. It was an insistence on the distinctiveness of the American black experience, that blacks constituted "a nation within a nation." At a minimum, as with all proto-nationalisms, "black power" meant that blacks rather than whites should have the power to define and interpret black history.

The best publicized instance of blacks' resentment at white appropriation of their past came with the publication in 1967 of novelist William Styron's *Confessions of Nat Turner*. It was open to question whether the memory of Nat Turner and his 1831 slave revolt figured as largely in black folk memory as militants maintained. But as the leader of what was by far the largest black insurgency in the history of the United States, Turner certainly was a central symbol for the militants themselves, the outstanding example of that heroic, revolutionary consciousness which they sought to create in the present, and celebrate in the past. Styron's depiction of Turner, though sympathetic, was of an anguished soul, psychically maimed, and ambivalent to the point of paralysis. Not the sort of shining example the new black consciousness demanded, or that, in other circumstances, any patriotic history could tolerate in a national hero. The English Americanist Marcus Cunliffe, discussing the black outcry against the book, doubted whether, even 170 years after his death, "Americans would be indifferent to a description of George Washington in the act of masturbating." Though there were many debates over how much imaginative freedom the historical novelist should be allowed, the principal issue was who owned the black past. "You've Taken My Nat and Gone" was black historian Vincent Harding's charge against Styron, an indictment echoed in one way or another by most of Styron's black critics. The extravagant praise of Styron's work by white historians from Eugene Genovese and Martin Duberman to Vann Woodward and Arthur Schlesinger was an added provocation; further evidence of white determination to control blacks' history.⁴

⁴Cunliffe, "Black Culture and White America," *Encounter* 34 (January 1970): 30; Harding, in John Henrik Clarke, ed., *William Styron's Nat Turner: Ten Black Writers Respond* (Boston, 1968), 23-33.

The Styron controversy prefigured increasingly common assertions that it was blacks who should be the ones to write black history. This position was by no means new. It was Franklin's universalist stance, not that of the sixties militants, which was exceptional among twentieth-century black historians. Leaders of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, which began publishing the *Journal of Negro History* in 1916, had maintained the position for reasons which combined territoriality and conviction. Carter G. Woodson, founder of the association, was convinced that "if the story of the Negro is ever told it must be done by scientifically trained Negroes." "Men of other races," he wrote, "cannot function efficiently because they do not think black." There had been divisions of opinion as to how exclusive a sway blacks should exercise, but dependence on white philanthropic support, and contemporary norms of deference, had worked to moderate the claims of even those who sought monopoly. In any case, in earlier decades, so few white historians concerned themselves with the history of blacks as subjects that black historians had in fact enjoyed a near monopoly in the field. By the sixties the circumstances were very different. Whites were not only writing about blacks, but teaching courses, frequently to overflow crowds, on black history, and habits of black deference had given way to often belligerent assertiveness. A new generation of black historians aggressively challenged the claims of any whites to speak authoritatively on *their* past.⁵

Kenneth Stampp was told by militants that, as a white man, he had no right to write *The Peculiar Institution*. Herbert Gutman, presenting a paper to the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, was shouted down. A white colleague who was present (and who had the same experience), reported that Gutman was "shattered." Gutman pleaded to no avail that he was "extremely supportive of the black liberation movement—if people would just forget that I am white and hear what I am saying . . . [it] would lend support to the . . . movement." Among the most dramatic incidents of this sort was the treatment accorded Robert Starobin, a young leftist supporter of the Black Panthers, who delivered a paper on slavery at a Wayne State University conference in 1969, an incident which devastated Starobin at the time, and was rendered the more poignant by his suicide the following year. The black historian Vincent Harding, who was in the audience, ostentatiously walked out during Starobin's talk. One of the two black commentators was Sterling Stuckey, who mocked Starobin's interpretation of slave letters by reading

⁵Woodson and Wesley, quoted in August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, *Black History and the Historical Profession: 1915-1960* (Urbana, Ill., 1986), 289.

them aloud in black rather than white accents. The other was Julius Lester, who attacked Starobin for his presumption in attempting to write about blacks. Both left immediately after Lester's comments, and before Starobin's rebuttal, "to catch a plane." After Starobin's suicide Lester wrote:

It was one of those situations that are unavoidable when blacks and whites come together in post-Black Power America, a situation in which people are not individuals, but historical entities, playing out a drama whose beginnings are now so submerged that we will never find them. And, in these days, any white man who devotes himself to teaching and writing about black history must have the fortitude and strength of a bull elephant, because blacks will let him know that his presence is unwanted and undesirable. Whether this attitude is just or unjust is scarcely a question. In absolute terms it is obviously unjust. Historically, it is the present reality, and that day at Wayne State University my heart ached for Bob, though I didn't know him, but I knew what I had to do to him. He had to be attacked and I did so. . . . I bowed to the demands of history that day and will loathe myself forever for having done so. History makes its demands, but one does not have to accede to them. . . . All too often we let ourselves be History's willing victims, and, that day History demanded that I treat another human being as a category and I, not without hurting inside, acceded.⁶

The new separatist consciousness was hostile not just to histories of blacks by whites, but also to integrationist accounts produced by "Negroes" like Franklin, who were often privately referred to scornfully as "oreos"—black on the outside, but white at the core. "The Negro history movement has had its day," Stuckey wrote. "Its premises were exploded at Watts and Detroit when the armies of occupation moved in to put down the desperate rebellions. As faith in America waned among the black masses . . . young black intellectuals and artists had no interest whatever in focusing on the 'progress' of their people, on their patriotism." Harding wrote that Franklin, and other Negro historians of his generation, had "internalized America and its 'promise,'" and put their faith in "'well-meaning' whites." "Negro History" had to give way to "Black History":

While Negro History almost never questioned the basic goodness and greatness of American society, while it assumed its innate potential for improvement (pro-

⁶Stamp and Gutman anecdotes in Meier and Rudwick, *ibid.*, 292-93; for Starobin, see Linda Rennie Forcey, "Personality in Politics: The Commitment of a Suicide" (Ph.D. dissertation, State University of New York at Binghamton, 1978), 159-66; Lester, "Suicide of a Revolutionary," *Liberation* 15/16 (Spring 1971): 64. Between the Wayne State meeting and Starobin's suicide, he and Lester established reasonably cordial relations by correspondence.

vided it was ready to read additional volumes on Negro History), Black History has peeped a different card. . . . Black History allows us no hope in white saviors. It insists that we grow up—black. Our fathers in Negro History still generally lived in an age of belief in white deliverers. Our maturity and our fulfillment demand unbelief.⁷

The consciousness which substituted “black” for “Negro” history merged with the broader movement for programs in “Black Studies” in colleges and universities, many of which became bastions of militantly separatist black nationalism. While administrators rejected on principle demands by blacks for autonomous control of Black Studies programs, that all faculty in the programs be black, and that white students be excluded from some or all of the courses offered, these were occasionally granted in practice. At some institutions coherent interdisciplinary programs were established. But jerry-built structures, hastily conceded out of faculty and administrators’ guilt and fear, were rather more common, at a time when, as Cunliffe observed, “white facial muscles ache with nervous smiling, black ones with intimidating scowls.” In all, perhaps as many as five hundred colleges and universities had established Black Studies programs by the early 1970s. By the 1980s only about half of them survived, usually with few students, as well as depleted and demoralized faculties who produced little published scholarship, and sometimes still in operation only because academic administrators found it marginally less embarrassing to keep them in operation than to close them down.⁸

The decline of Black Studies as the institutionalization of separatist black consciousness was almost as rapid as its rise, in which it followed the fortunes of the nationalist movements in the ghetto which had brought it into being. But separatist black consciousness, in various, somewhat transmuted forms, was considerably more enduring, particularly in history. And those who practiced the new black history were by no means only, or even mainly, black.

In the late 1960s most white historians whose work touched in one way or another on the black experience were ambivalent about the new Black

⁷Stuckey, “Twilight of Our Past: Reflections on the Origins of Black History,” in John A. Williams and Charles F. Harris, eds., *Amistad 2* (New York, 1971), 287–88; Harding, “Beyond Chaos: Black History and the Search for the New Land,” in Williams and Harris, eds., *Amistad 1* (New York, 1970), 275, 278–79, 285–86.

⁸Cunliffe, “Black Culture,” 22. The observation about scholarly productivity refers to those whose primary affiliation—and loyalty—was to Black Studies, rather than to those with a strong disciplinary base, who for one reason or another *also* participated in the programs. Most productive black historians had some connection or other with Black Studies programs.

Studies programs. But they were not at all ambivalent about demands for the exclusion of whites from scholarly inquiry in this area, which they rejected out of hand. Lawrence Levine, who was beginning to study black folklore, experienced a sense of *déjà vu*. What was being put forward was a "new historical obscurantism" which exactly paralleled what he took to be Carl Bridenbaugh's suggestion, some years earlier, that it was incongruous for Levine, as a Jew of recent immigrant background, to study William Jennings Bryan. "This was a period," Eugene Genovese later recalled, "in which any white working in black history had to take a lot of crap."

We all felt it, but my attitude was I'm not going to take the crap. After awhile I didn't get very much because I quickly developed a reputation for being quite savage. One of these guys would get up and run off at the mouth about who are you to write about black people and I'd look him straight in the eye and say, "you're an idiot," and proceed from there. I didn't enjoy it but the point was I didn't know how else to handle this. Either you do that or you retreat.⁹

Few of the younger white historians of black history—Genovese is the only important exception—explicitly labeled their perspective "nationalist." But in practice all in one way or another, though paradoxically, the "nationalist" Genovese less than others, abandoned the traditional universalist, "ideal observer" posture which had been so central to the ethos of objectivity. The received universalist orthodoxy contrasted "insiders," with potentially distorting particularist commitments, and "outsiders," with less commitment, more detachment, and thus more likelihood of viewing matters objectively. The newer white historians who dealt with black issues insisted that their commitment to the black cause was every bit as deep as that of blacks, which it seemed to be. Though integrationists of the older generation, like Woodward and Stamp, had certainly written out of deep moral commitment to racial equality, younger scholars' commitment had been much more activist. Nearly all of the newer generation of historians had been heavily involved in sit-ins, demonstrations, and other forms of protest.¹⁰

"Of history and its consequences," Conor Cruise O'Brien has written, it may be said:

"Those who can, gloat; those who can't, brood." Englishmen are born gloaters; Irishmen born brooders. . . . A reformed gloater—an English liberal say, or a

⁹Levine, "The Historian and the Culture Gap," in L. P. Curtis, Jr., ed., *The Historian's Workshop* (New York, 1970), 325–26; Genovese, quoted in Forcey, 166.

¹⁰Meier and Rudwick, *Black History*, chaps. 2 and 3, *passim*.

Swede—feels, I think, a sense of guilt about South Africa; this is because he still identifies himself, probably without being entirely conscious of the fact, with the master race. The brooder, making the opposite identification, feels no sense of guilt, only a sense of outrage.

O'Brien's remarks are suggestive in considering the difference in the dimensions of black history addressed by gentile and Jewish scholars in the sixties and seventies. While there are some exceptions to the rule, those who have written the most influential studies of white attitudes and behavior toward blacks were almost all gentiles—David Brion Davis, George Frederickson, Winthrop Jordan, Morgan Kousser, James McPherson; those who wrote of blacks as subjects, were overwhelmingly Jewish—Ira Berlin, Herbert Gutman, Lawrence Levine, Leon Litwack, George Rawick. Whatever the reason for the disproportionate number of Jews who wrote about blacks from the black point of view, what is important for our purposes is the profound identification of all members of this latter group of historians, Jewish and gentile, with blacks. Though white, they prided themselves on "thinking black"; of being the reverse of "oreos"—vanilla wafers with chocolate filling. George Rawick, commenting on black historian John Blassingame's *Slave Community*, spoke of a new group of historians, mostly black, but including whites like Gutman and himself. Whatever his criticisms of Blassingame's book, he wanted to emphasize that it was "a work that is 'ours' rather than 'theirs.'" And the claim was sometimes accepted across the color line. The black historian Nell Painter, arguing that black and white historians had quite different sensibilities, acknowledged that "not all whites hold what I'm calling 'white' views; Lawrence Levine and Herbert Gutman, for instance, are able to think about history in what I'd call 'black' ways." It was this group of historians, who whatever their race, "thought black," who were representative of the new style and focus in black history.¹¹

The principal theme of the earliest black (or rather "Negro") history in

¹¹O'Brien, *To Katanga and Back* (London, 1962), 31; Rawick, "Some Notes on a Social Analysis of Slavery: A Critique and Assessment of *The Slave Community*," in Al-Tony Gilmore, *Revisiting Blassingame's "The Slave Community": The Scholars Respond* (Westport, Conn., 1978), 17-18; Painter, "Who Decides What Is History?" *Nation* 234 (6 March 1982): 277. The generalization about the difference in focus between gentiles and Jews applies with greatest force to those who came of scholarly age in the sixties and seventies, though one could observe it in the previous generation: Woodward and Stamp writing the history of racism and oppression from the white side, Herbert Aptheker and Philip Foner emphasizing black agency. By the 1980s the injunction to "think black" had become so powerful that the distinction began to break down. The examples of Aptheker and Foner suggest a partial explanation for the difference: Jews were considerably more likely to have a background in left politics—to be presocialized into identification with the oppressed.

the twentieth century was what has been termed "contributionism." For the most part integrationist in thrust, and written by blacks, it emphasized the achievements of noteworthy members of the race. For blacks it would be a spur to effort and enhance self-esteem. Insofar as it was read by whites, contributionist history suggested that blacks could be valuable members of the national community. Contributionism, at least as traditionally conceived, rapidly reached a point of diminishing returns. For perfectly explicable reasons there had not been that many black high achievers in most of the more important realms of American life. As one tried to expand the list one moved with embarrassing rapidity down to "contributions" that wouldn't get a footnote if made by someone white.

After 1945 a new theme became dominant. Also integrationist in orientation, but this time written mostly by and for whites, postwar historiography emphasized white oppression of blacks, and the toll it had taken, particularly under slavery, but also in its aftermath. Its avowed or tacit intention was to promote a sense of responsibility and guilt in its white audience, though the detailed exposure of patterns of racism and domination was not at all uncongenial to most blacks. But there was a political and rhetorical problem in work of this kind, which Dwight Macdonald once noted in socialist discourse. If capitalism was as inhuman and destructive as socialists maintained, its victims must have been psychologically maimed and brutalized. On the other hand, if workers were as noble and stalwart as they were in socialist depictions, could the system within which they had developed really be all that oppressive? This conundrum was inherent in all areas of black history, but particularly in treatments of slavery which emphasized its harshness and brutality.

In the older historiography of Ulrich Phillips, slavery had been a benign institution. Blacks were childlike by genetic inheritance. Kenneth Stampp's 1956 *The Peculiar Institution* challenged both Phillips's defense of slavery and his racist portrayal of blacks. Stampp pictured the institution as brutal and oppressive, and emphasized slave resistance rather than docility. He acknowledged that there were some slaves who lost their manhood, but for the most part their appearance of subservience was a disguise assumed to deceive the owners. Hailing Stampp's work, Woodward wrote that it exposed slavery for the atrocity that it was, and "left in shreds" the legend of "the gay, carefree black clown." Macdonald's conundrum remained latent in Stampp's work, but was to appear in all its starkness in Stanley Elkins's *Slavery* published three years later.¹²

¹²Woodward review of *The Peculiar Institution*, *New York Herald Tribune Book Review*, 21 October 1956, 6.

For Elkins, the "gay, carefree black clown" was no legend, but the predictable result of a closed and total system of oppression, similar in operation to Nazi concentration camps, and with parallel infantilizing consequences for their inmates. He was in accord with Stampff in rejecting Phillips's benign view of the plantation, but accepted Phillips's description of "Sambo" as the typical slave, with the difference that where Phillips had seen Samboism as a racial trait, Elkins's explanation was environmental, and could hardly be described as racist since it allegedly paralleled the process that Elkins's fellow Jews had undergone behind Hitler's barbed wire. "Absolute power for [the slaveowner] meant absolute dependency for the slave—the dependency not of the developing child but of the perpetual child."¹³

Elkins's book was the most extreme example of what in retrospect came to be termed the "damage," "victimization," or "deficit" model of black history, which in the course of the sixties and seventies was overwhelmingly repudiated by scholars. Sambo-bashing was the principal agenda of the field, and Elkins became the *bête blanche* of black history. As usual, those who came out on top saw the outcome as a victory for "the facts." Carl Degler thought it clear that "the flood of new evidence, whether traditional or novel, destroyed Sambo." The principal lesson to be derived from the fate of Elkins's work, he said, was that "historical evidence is crucial." Ideology might propose, but documentation disposed. And, again, as usual, losers saw it differently. Elkins's view was that by the late 1960s "the entire 'damage' argument, as applied to any aspect of Negro life in America, had become ideologically untenable." On the question of what was decisive in the controversy—not the relative merits of the respective approaches—Elkins had much the stronger case. The older model was abandoned because members of the newer generation of historians refused to accept that twentieth-century blacks were "damaged" as human beings, that they were (merely) "victims," that there was anything "deficient" about their culture.¹⁴

The question of damage became a highly charged contemporary issue in the bitter controversy surrounding Assistant Secretary of Labor Daniel Moynihan's 1965 report "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action." Moynihan's aim was to shift federal attention from legal equal-

¹³*Slavery* (Chicago, 1959), 130.

¹⁴Degler, "Why Historians Change Their Minds," *Pacific Historical Review* 45 (1976): 176, 179; Elkins, "The Two Arguments on Slavery," Appendix VI of *Slavery* (3d. ed., Chicago, 1976), 271. My remarks on the relative weight of ideology and evidence in responses to Elkins's work apply only to the question of "Sambo"; the balance seems to me quite different with respect to the evaluation of other theses advanced in *Slavery*.

ity to what, following the black psychologist Kenneth Clark, he called the "tangle of pathology" in northern ghettos, which would prevent those caught in its coils from taking advantage of formal equality of opportunity. He described communities in which "the fabric of conventional social relationships has all but disintegrated." Though the situation was the consequence of white racism and oppression, it was by now "capable of perpetuating itself without assistance from the white world." At the center of the tangle Moynihan located broken and matriarchal families. He saw family breakdown as primarily a consequence of black unemployment ("at disaster levels for 35 years"), and furthered by a welfare system which penalized families in which adult males were present. Accordingly his proposed remedies centered on jobs, job training, and changes in welfare allocation. But the roots of the problem went deeper. Slavery and post-Emancipation oppression in the South had systematically undermined the self-confidence of black males. In the most hyperbolic passage in a document not generally given to understatement, he cited Elkins in support of the proposition that "it was by destroying the Negro family under slavery that white America broke the will of the Negro people."¹⁵

The report produced a storm of protest from blacks and from white liberals and radicals. It was widely denounced as a racist slander of the black community. Critics denied that ghetto life was "a tangle of pathology"; if there was pathology, it was not to be found in the black family, which was a healthy adaptive response to white oppression. Any pathologies in the ghetto were not a legacy of slavery but the direct consequences of racism and discrimination in the here and now. The psychologist William Ryan, who in the turmoil surrounding the report coined the phrase which made him famous—"blaming the victim"—not only described the report's focus as "a subtle form of racism," but saw the invocation of history as a smokescreen:

We are told the Negro's condition is due to his "pathology," his values, the way he lives, the kind of family life he leads. The major qualification—the bow to egalitarianism—is that these conditions are said to grow out of the Negro's history of being enslaved and oppressed—*generations ago*. . . . Liberal America is pleading guilty to the savagery and oppression against the Negro that happened 100 years ago, in order to escape trial for the crimes of today.

Finally, the report was seen as not just wrong, but harmful. The novelist Ralph Ellison charged that "sociologists [are] propagating an image of the

¹⁵Lee Rainwater and William L. Yancey, *The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), 43, 93, 66, 62, 76.

Negro condition which is apt to destroy our human conception of ourselves just at the moment when we are becoming politically free."

From one perspective, slavery was horrible and brutalizing. . . . And the Negro writer is tempted to agree. "Yes! God damn it, wasn't that a horrible thing!" And he sometimes agrees to the next step, which holds that slaves had very little humanity because slavery destroyed it for them and their descendants. That's what the Stanley M. Elkins "Sambo" argument implies. But . . . there is from *my* perspective something further to say. I have to *affirm* my forefathers. . . . I am forced to look at these people . . . and conclude that there is another reality behind the appearance of reality which they would force upon us as truth. Any people who could endure all of that brutalization and keep together, who could undergo such dismemberment and resuscitate itself, and endure until it could take the initiative in achieving its own freedom is obviously more than the sum of its brutalization. Seen in this perspective, theirs has been one of the great human experiences and one of the great triumphs of the human spirit in modern times.¹⁶

The Moynihan Report did not succeed in reorienting federal policy toward blacks, but the report, and the controversy surrounding it, contributed a sense of urgency to reorienting black history. The Elkins thesis no longer was of "merely historical interest," but was perceived as central to contemporary debates on social policy; part of the larger outlook which led Nathan Glazer, who had been closely associated with both Elkins and Moynihan, to assert that the black American "has no values and culture to guard and protect." It was the Moynihan controversy which led Herbert Gutman to set aside his studies in labor history, and begin work on what became *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom*. Lawrence Levine explicitly aimed his *Black Culture and Black Consciousness* at Glazer's disparagement of black culture and values. The mid-1960s were both the high point of "black and white together, we shall overcome," and the time after which there was no longer any place for whites in the movement. White historians could at least participate vicariously by defending the historical reputation of the constituency with which they so deeply identified.¹⁷

¹⁶Ryan, "Savage Discovery: The Moynihan Report" (1965), reprinted in Rainwater and Yancey, 464; "'A Very Stern Discipline': An Interview with Ralph Ellison," *Harper's* 234 (March 1967): 76, 83-84.

¹⁷Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City* (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), 53; Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom* (New York, 1974), xviii; Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness* (New York, 1977), 443. Glazer, besides collaborating with Moynihan, had contributed the introduction to the first paperback edition of Elkins's *Slavery*—the form in which it first reached a large audience. For Gutman's continued hostile engagement with Moynihan, fourteen years after his report had appeared (and disappeared), see "The Moynihan Report: Black History Seduced and Abandoned," *Nation* 229 (1979): 232-36.

The new black history treated blacks as healthy subjects rather than maimed objects; emphasized collective strength rather than individual weakness; made black culture and the black community its central focus. The new school was strongly influenced by E. P. Thompson's stress on lower-class self-activity, and some of its major themes were inspired by the pioneering studies of black religion, folklore, and music which young black scholars produced in the sixties. The new work rested heavily on previously little-used black sources, particularly the more than forty volumes of slave narratives published on Rawick's initiative. But at least as significant as these positive influences was the negative and reactive agenda of black history. As consensus history was, above all, "counter-Progressive" history, the new black history was one long assault on the theses and general outlook of Elkins, Moynihan, and Glazer.

No force is as energizing and unifying as a shared enemy, which no doubt accounts for much of the power and excitement of the new black history published during the 1970s. The field attracted an extraordinarily talented and energetic group of historians, who explored difficult new terrain with innovative and imaginative approaches, and with a level of conceptual sophistication rarely equaled in American scholarship. Never before had any group of historical specialists constituted such an interactive and cooperative community, regularly sharing data and reading each other's work in manuscript. Much of the new work was not only technically accomplished, but written with a literary grace and evocative power unusual among professional historians. Members of the new school effectively refuted the exaggerations and distortions of those who had seen only damage in the black past. Inevitably, in the process, they introduced exaggerations and distortions of their own.

There was an all but universal commitment to accentuating the positive in the black experience, bracketing or minimizing the negative, particularly anything which suggested damage or pathology. Individual historians differed a good deal in how heavily their work was constrained by this commitment, but to one degree or another, all shared it. Differences were not a function of skin color. Gutman and Rawick, along with the black historian Leslie Owens, were among those who wrote almost exclusively about black strength. Black historians like John Blassingame and Thomas Holt joined with Genovese in greater willingness to acknowledge damage.

Black culture, and the institutions of the black community, were almost always treated as an unambiguously positive heritage. Lawrence Levine's tribute to the poetic beauty, richness of imagery, and emotional intensity in slaves' religious music was offered as evidence of a strong

communal consciousness, a refutation of the theses of damage and deficit. His treatment of spirituals ignored what W. E. B. Du Bois had noted three-quarters of a century earlier: that above all they were "Songs of Sorrow," with "eloquent omissions and silences. Mother and child are sung, but seldom father." Rawick was one of many who argued that slave folklore, particularly trickster tales, represented "the social insights of a people and express a most sophisticated view of human life"; Brer Rabbit "manages to assert himself and his humanity and overcome . . . victimization." This was certainly an important dimension of the stories, but there was another side, rarely mentioned, which Elkins noted:

Many of Brer Rabbit's tricks are responses to the requirements of self-defense and survival. But many others seem gratuitous. . . . He steals or cheats the other animals out of more of their food than he needs . . . a lady who resists his wooing he kills, skins, and smokes over hickory chips. He assembles his neighbors to help him build a spring house, and when this act of community is accomplished he has them all drowned. . . . Rabbit callously sacrifices his own wife and children to save himself. There may be much "complexity and ambiguity" in the tales . . . and "levels of meaning," but one thing about them is clear and simple enough: their "hero" is at best one nasty little hustler.

"In that world of lying, stealing, duplicity, and murder," Elkins concluded, "there is no friendship, no affection, and no mutual trust; 'family' counts for nothing, and of 'community' there is not a shred."¹⁸

Gutman's magnum opus, justly praised for its moving evocation of black fortitude, was from first to last an attorney's brief in the case of *The Black Family v. Daniel Patrick Moynihan*, and in lawyerly fashion Gutman gave not a point away to the adversary. Every aspect of the black family was portrayed as strong and adaptive. He minimized or denied what was weak, maladaptive, or suggestive of "victimization." Again, the more nuanced views of Du Bois received no consideration. Though Gutman used quotations from Du Bois as epigraphs to chapters, he never mentioned, let alone confronted, the evidence and conclusions of Du Bois (in his 1908 *The Negro Family*), which flatly contradicted Gutman's wholly affirmative picture of black family stability, and pictured serious weakness along with strength. Perhaps Gutman was right and Du Bois wrong, but Gutman's failure even to consider Du Bois's contemporary

¹⁸Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness* (Oxford, 1977), 30, 443; Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago, 1903), 259; Rawick, *From Sundown to Sunup: The Making of a Black Community* (Westport, Conn., 1972), 97, 100; Elkins, *Slavery* (3d. ed.), 282-83. Elkins's remarks on Brer Rabbit were directed not at Rawick's discussion but at an early treatment by Levine.

testimony suggested a posture so adversarial that contrary views were dismissed in advance.

Within the generally celebratory new black historiography, two inter-related themes stood out. One was "resistance." Previously historians had disparaged Herbert Aptheker's 1943 *American Negro Slave Revolts* for, in Rawick's words, "portraying black slaves as virtually always on the barricades," and no one had denounced Aptheker for exaggerating rebelliousness more vehemently than Genovese. Both Rawick and Genovese changed their evaluations. Genovese wrote that "specifics apart, he had been much closer to the truth than I on the way in which slave revolts . . . have to be understood." The relative scarcity of armed rebellion in North America as compared to other areas was explained more with reference to demography (the black-white ratio in the population) and topography (the absence of places of refuge) than in terms of any docility in the American slave. Blacks, both under slavery and thereafter, were depicted as constituting a community of resistance—and resistance was redefined. There was greater emphasis on running away, damaging property, spitting in the soup and pissing in the coffee. "Whereas Western scholarship has frequently confused resistance with bloodshed," Leslie Owens wrote, "Africans have often perceived it as an inner stance coiled to preserve identity." In a way which had many parallels to Jewish historians' discussions of the behavior of Jews during World War II, resistance came to be equated with endurance and survival. Responding to criticism that in *The Slave Community* he had slighted resistance, John Blassingame made the analogy explicit: "The most apt characterization of the slave's behavior is that Lucy Dawidowicz used . . . [in] *The War Against the Jews*: 'They learned not only to invent, but to circumvent; not only to obey, but to evade; not only to submit, but to outwit. Their tradition of defiance was devious rather than direct, employing nerve instead of force.'"¹⁹

The even more pervasive theme of the autonomy of the black community and black culture vis-à-vis white America, even under slavery, was directed against claims of blacks' "dependency." It was also directed against Stamp's tacitly integrationist assertion that "innately Negroes are, after all, only white men with black skins, nothing more, nothing less," which was now read as both condescending and mistaken. Ameri-

¹⁹Rawick, *Sundown to Sunup*, 74–75; Rawick, "Social Analysis of Slavery," 19; Genovese, "Introduction to the New Edition" of his *In Red and Black* (Knoxville, 1984), xlv; Owens, "The African in the Garden," in Darlene Clark Hine, ed., *The State of Afro-American History* (Baton Rouge, 1986), 35; Blassingame, "Redefining *The Slave Community*: A Response to the Critics," in Gilmore, 136.

can blacks' African heritage was frequently invoked. In earlier days, Negro historians had systematically minimized the African legacy. Acknowledgment of any such "savage" survivals would be an obstacle to integration. Now they maximized it, and, almost as rapidly as "black" had replaced "Negro," the preferred term became "Afro-American." Gutman, in arguing for the autonomous development of the black family, stressed its African roots. The Christianity of slaves could hardly be treated as wholly "autonomous," but Genovese, in his discussion of slave religion, argued that the absence of a conception of original sin in African thought made the slave's theology distinctive.

Men and women in bondage were clearly not autonomous in the ordinary sense of the term. What was insisted upon was their inner autonomy; their capacity to mold their own norms, and institutions like the family, rather than having their consciousness shaped by the masters. Elkins's case for infantilization required that the plantation be a "closed" system, like a concentration camp. The argument for the autonomy of the slave community and culture mandated that historians pry open the system to allow social space for autonomous development. One way in which this was commonly done was the privileging of life after hours. This approach was explicit in the title of George Rawick's *From Sundown to Sunup: The Making of the Black Community*. Even Blassingame, who thought the theme of autonomy had been exaggerated, wrote of life in the quarters as the "primary" shaping experience. What went on during the working day was a far less important "secondary environment." At its extreme, work in this vein suggested Teflon slaves, all but immune to the system which oppressed them. There were many grounds on which Genovese's *Roll, Jordan, Roll* and *Time on the Cross* by Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman were criticized. But for many younger historians what was most objectionable about the two works was that both argued against a fully autonomous slave culture, for some black internalization of white values. Genovese did this with his Hegelian portrayal of a master-slave dialectic, and paternalistic hegemony; Fogel and Engerman, much more crudely, with their picture of slaves thoroughly embracing a bourgeois work ethic. Neither work was consistent with the view that pictured "free slaves," who in the words of one of the younger scholars, "by passing their unique set of cultural themes from generation to generation . . . were able to resist most of white teaching, set themselves apart from white society, and mold their own cultural norms and group identity."²⁰

²⁰Blassingame, *The Slave Community* (New York, 1972), 41; Thomas L. Walker, *Deep Like the Rivers: Education in the Slave Quarter Community, 1831-1865* (New York, 1978), 261-62.

By the mid-1980s the frameworks which had been adumbrated in the 1960s, though still dominant, were starting to creak a bit at the joints. As Hofstadter had written of the Progressive Historians and the principle of conflict, the new historians of the black experience had pushed the mood of affirmation and the themes of resistance and autonomy so far that to go any farther could only result in caricature. Some members of the next cohort were objecting to the unrelievedly positive portrayal of black history; the unwritten rule against any but the most dismissive attention to "damage"; what one young historian called the myth of "the utopian slave community."²¹

It is a truism that all historical writing, at least on highly charged subjects, is the product of a particular moment in time, which shapes historians' decisions about what needs to be explained; which often leads them to conclude that their social responsibilities require that they write history of a certain sort. But some moments are more momentary than others. The black historiography of the seventies stands as a monument to the fruitful energies which presentist concerns can mobilize—and as an illustration of their sometimes untoward consequences.

Working in civil rights organizations during the 1950s, George Rawick had been struck by how few blacks joined in; by the generally low level of black activism. Independently of Elkins he concluded that slavery had created a dependent personality type among blacks which had endured until the present. When he read Elkins's work he embraced it. Within a few years, however, as a result of working with a new generation of black militants he reversed himself. It was, he said, no longer possible to write black history which stressed victimization. "Unless we find the real historical roots of Black Power we are faced with a situation unparalleled in world history: a massive revolutionary movement which comes from nowhere and is born fully grown." By the 1980s not much was left of the "massive revolutionary movement" which for Rawick, as for many others, had cried out for historical explanation.²²

After two decades in which by every measure ghetto pathology had deepened, black leaders were talking very differently in the 1980s than they had in the 1960s. When the Moynihan Report appeared, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People had taken the lead in attacking its emphasis on black family breakdown. In 1983 the execu-

²¹Peter Kolchin, "Reevaluating the Antebellum Slave Community: A Comparative Perspective," *JAH* 70 (1983): 581. Cf. Laurence Shore, "The Poverty of Tragedy in Historical Writing on Southern Slavery," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 85 (1986): 147-64.

²²Rawick, *Sundown to Sunup*, 74, n. 2; Rawick, "The Historical Roots of Black Liberation," *Radical America* 2 (July 1968): 1.

tive director of the NAACP put the "precipitous slide of the black family" at the top of the group's agenda. Eleanor Holmes Norton, former chairman of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, wrote of the crisis of the black ghetto family as the center of the "self-perpetuating . . . predatory ghetto subculture . . . originating in the historic atrocity of slavery." Whatever opportunity there had been to check family decline, Norton said, had been lost in the anti-Moynihan backlash, "driving the issue from the public agenda and delaying for a generation the search for workable solutions." The black sociologist William J. Wilson agreed, adding that "a new emphasis on the positive aspects of the black experience tended to crowd out older concerns."

Arguments extolling the strengths and virtues of black families replaced those that underlined the deterioration of black families. In fact, aspects of ghetto behavior described as pathological in the studies of the mid-1960s were reinterpreted or redefined as functional . . . because . . . blacks were displaying the ability to survive. . . . Ghetto families were described as resilient and as adapting creatively to an oppressive racist society.

Both Norton and Wilson were speaking much more of sociologists than of historians, and in any case it is unlikely that a different scholarly focus would have done much to redirect social policy in the seventies and eighties. But the troubling thought remained that insofar as the new black historiography of the seventies had discernable social impact, it was to divert attention from the urgent needs of the constituency which those who produced it were dedicated to serving.²³

Most members of the generation of young white historians who wrote the history of blacks in the seventies had left-wing backgrounds or involvement in the civil rights movement. Insofar as they were disproportionately Jews, they were products of the years when Jews were, in O'Brien's terms, brooders rather than gloaters. Certainly no one can confidently predict what new interpretations of the black experience will be forthcoming from a generation formed in the climate of the eighties. The continued momentum of the great body of scholarship which germinated in the sixties will surely continue to be influential. But much has changed in the succeeding twenty years. Concern with blacks is no longer fashionable with white liberals, now more concerned with issues of the

²³Benjamin Hooks of the NAACP, quoted in Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Family and Nation* (San Diego, 1986), 55; Norton, "Restoring the Traditional Black Family," *New York Times Magazine*, 2 June 1985, 79, 93; Wilson, "The Black Underclass," *Wilson Quarterly* 8 (Spring 1984): 89; Wilson, "The Urban Underclass," in Leslie W. Dunbar, ed., *Minority Report* (New York, 1984), 77-78.

environment, and the politics of sexuality and reproduction. It is by no means impossible to imagine that in an era of ever increasing conservatism and privatization of consciousness, and with the growing respectability of a frequently crypto-racist sociobiology, the thrust of seventies scholarship will be reversed: that a professional consensus will form around some version of "damage," but one whose policy orientation is malign neglect.²⁴

If the future direction of white historical writing on blacks is unknowable, generalizations about the present relationship of black historians to the overwhelmingly white historical profession are very difficult to formulate. Though many whites had, with some success, striven to "think black," and while many younger black historians had been successfully integrated into the profession, and internalized all of its norms, there remained a good deal of de facto segregation of consciousness. Some black historians, like Vincent Harding, had always maintained a certain distance from the profession. From his earliest writings, Harding had scoffed at "white" notions of detachment and objectivity. His 1981 magnum opus, *There Is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America*, combined religious messianism and revolutionary black nationalism in an account which portrayed slaves as constantly on the verge of insurrection. White academic reviewers did not quite know what to make of the book, which wasn't scholarly history as they understood it. The black historian Nell Painter, who unlike Harding was an "integrated professional," noted this fact with some asperity, and said that black historians, on the contrary, were quite comfortable with Harding's approach. She saw no likelihood of a convergence of sensibilities in the near future.²⁵

It would be difficult to find two more highly placed black historians than John Blassingame and Nathan Huggins, holders of the chairs in Afro-American history at Yale and Harvard, respectively. Unlike Harding, both Blassingame and Huggins had in the late sixties underlined their allegiance to traditional professional values. Both had spoken out against substituting myth for history, and for the maintenance of balance and objectivity in black scholarship. Ten or fifteen years later, when each wrote a major synthetic account of the black experience (in Blassingame's case in collaboration with Mary F. Berry), mainstream white historians were as much at a loss as they were in confronting Harding's work.

²⁴From the late 1960s onward *Commentary*, the semiofficial house organ of neoconservatism, has carried more sustained criticism of the new black history, and more defenses of the "damage" thesis (and of Moynihan) than any other journal. Awareness of this may be one reason why those with opposing views have clung to them so tenaciously.

²⁵Painter, "Who Decides What Is History?" 276-78.

Blassingame's *Long Memory*, a synthesis of three hundred years of black history, was a catalogue of white oppression and unavailing black protest, acknowledging neither nuance nor even change over time. Huggins's *Black Odyssey* was, he said, like Harding's book, conceived not in the ordinary academic mode, but as "epic": "the strokes are broad, antithesis muted or denied." Both books, he said, were written by blacks for blacks, in a distinctively black mood and idiom. Most white academic critics responded to Blassingame's and Huggins's works with the same nervous bewilderment with which they had greeted Harding's *There Is a River*: they "weren't history." Some younger black historians agreed; others vigorously dissented. The issue of the existence, and legitimacy, of a distinct, unassimilable "black perspective" on history was clearly going to be unresolved for some time to come.²⁶

II

Women's history was at least as great a particularist threat to professional norms of universalism as black history, and there were striking parallels in the ways in which the two developed. Both had their origins in the rise of new forms of militancy and collective consciousness outside the academy, and, once launched, grew with extraordinary rapidity into major historical fields. Those involved in both ventures were torn between professional obligations and a commitment to serving the psychic and political needs of their external constituencies and movements. In both cases arguments for at least semiautonomous cultures, with distinctive values and institutions, were forcefully advanced. With women, as with blacks, these constructs proved more ambiguous in their political consequences than their authors had originally believed.

Unlike blacks, women had been members of the organized historical profession from the beginning. But in many respects they were almost as marginalized as blacks. Among other things, most leading woman historians had been employed at institutions for "their own kind." In a variety

²⁶Huggins, "Integrating Afro-American History into American History," in Hine, *Afro-American History*, 164. One interesting feature of the book which Blassingame wrote with Berry is that while in his previous work he had acknowledged the scholarly assistance of both black and white historians, all of the dozen historians thanked in the preface of *Long Memory* were black. Other black historians moved in the opposite direction. Armstead Robinson, as a graduate student, had been a moving spirit behind the establishment of a separate Black Studies program at Yale in 1968. In the early 1980s he declined to be interviewed for Meier and Rudwick's *Black History* on the Franklinian grounds that he was not a specialist in black history, but a Civil War and Reconstruction historian. (Meier and Rudwick, *Black History*, 300.)