To date, revolutions have given us nothing but defeats. Yet these unavoidable defeats pile up guarantee upon guarantee of the future final victory. There is but one condition. The question of why each defeat occurred must be answered. **– Rosa Luxemburg.** // There will be a special page in the book of life for the men who have crawled back from the grave. This page will tell of utter defeat, ruin, passivity, and subjection in one breath, and in the next, overwhelming victory and fulfillment. **– George Jackson.** // Palestine, in my opinion, is actually the most beautiful place; not because of her greenness, blueness, yellowness, redness, crops, bounty, or nature. Her beauty is that she is the one who answered my search for meaning, and she is the one who answered my existential questions, and who justifies my existence and cures my chronic anxieties. **– Basel al-Araj.** // We are all responsible for our dream of storming the heavens. We cannot turn ourselves into dwarves now, after having dreamed, elbow to elbow, each feeling the others' heartbeats, of attacking and overthrowing the gods. This is the dream that makes power afraid. **– A. M. Bonanno.** // 'Hope' is not a scientific category. Nor is it a necessary obligation in polemical writing. On the other hand, intellectual honesty is and I try to call it as I see it, however wrongheaded my ideas and analyses may be. I believe that we have arrived at a 'final conflict' that will decide the survival of a large part of poor humanity over the next half century. Against this future we must fight like the Red Army in the rubble of Stalingrad. Fight with hope, fight without hope, but fight absolutely. **– Mike Davis.** // It must be admitted that Brown assumed tremendous responsibility in making war upon the peaceful people of Harper's Ferry, but it must be remembered also that in his eye a slave-holding community could not be peaceable, but was, in the nature of the case, in one incessant state of war. **– Frederick Douglass.** // Extermination or communism is the choice – but this communism must be more than just the sharing of wealth (who wants all this shit?) – it must inaugurate a whole new way of working together. **– Antonio Negri.** // The next 50 to 100 years or so, beginning from now, will be a great era of radical change in the social system throughout the world, an earth-shaking era without equal in any previous historical period. Living in such an era, we must be prepared to engage in great struggles which will have many features different in form from those of the past. **– Mao Tse-Tung.** // The crisis is permanent, the government is but provisional. **– Karl Marx.**

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# SEMI-AUTOMATIC SUBJECTS



## DOWNWARD MOBILITY, RACE TREASON AND WHITE TERROR IN AMERICAN HISTORY

## NOTES

1. Later published in *Treason to Whiteness is Loyalty to Humanity*.
2. Colonial Records of the State of Georgia, Compiled and Published under the Authority of the Legislature, vol. 18 p. 226, 1910
3. Michael Fitzgerald, *Reconstruction in Alabama: From Civil War to Redemption in the Cotton South*, 2017
4. A January reportback from a demonstration against deportation flights chartered through the Gary airport, available on our blog.
5. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America*, p. 701
6. Robert W. Fairlie and William A. Sundstrom, "The Emergence, Persistence and Recent Widening of the Racial Unemployment Gap," in *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* vol. 52 no. 2 (January 1999)
7. Baran and Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital* p. 329
8. See Endnotes vol. 4, "A History of Separation," in particular the section titled "The Defeat of the Workers' Movement."
9. From "Response to Bring the Ruckus" in *A Brilliant Red Thread* p. 151
10. Kenneth A. Couch and Robert Fairlie, "Las Hired, First Fired? Black-White Unemployment and the Business Cycle," in *Demography* vol. 47 no. 1, February 2010
11. Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia* p. 16
12. Paige Williams, "Kyle Rittenhouse, American Vigilante," NYT, June 28, 2021
13. Larry Buchanan, Quoctrung Bui and Jugal K. Patel, "Black Lives Matter May Be the Largest Movement in US History," NYT, July 3, 2020
14. Shemon and Arturo, "Theses on the George Floyd Rebellion," published June 24, 2020 on **illwill.com**.
15. Pew Research, "Americans' Views of Deportations" March 26, 2025.

*welfare state, can compete with WAR [White Aryan Resistance] for the allegiance of the alienated, dispossessed white youth.*

Nothing presently available is sufficient, and only the vision of a new world will do.

### Some Lingering Questions

While working on this essay, I realized I had several unanswered questions that I could not clarify. I will leave them here for people to pick up if they choose.

How and to what extent is US citizenship relevant to maintaining the present color line? Is there anything meaningful to observe about the quantity of high-profile BIPOC Proud Boys or the sociological fact that 75 percent of Black Americans believe either all or some "illegal immigrants" should be deported by the Trump administration?[15] Has there been a change in the legal implementation of US citizenship in the twentieth century that might explain this?

These are challenging questions of ideology that I can't answer adequately beyond stating "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas" or making a vague reference to *Black Skin, White Masks*. I would love for this essay and these questions to spark further discussion among those interested. Peace to the villages, war to the palaces!



# SEMI-AUTOMATIC SUBJECTS

***Sam Williams · April 10, 2025***

### Young Americans

On August 25th, 2020, during the George Floyd Uprising's Hot Summer, rebels in Kenosha set a used car dealership ablaze. And as those Civics, Camrys, and Altimas bathed in flame, white teenagers nationwide felt a stinging in their brains, as a feeling of immense moral sentiment activated at the sight of charred F-150s. It was this cruel visage that compelled Kyle Rittenhouse to grab his AR-15 and launch from his mother's home in Illinois like out of a railgun, driving across state lines into Wisconsin to "protect local businesses" with a citizen militia. By sunrise, he had murdered two people and injured another.

Six months before the 1991 L.A. Uprising, Noel Ignatiev wrote an unpublished essay on the future of US trade unionism, "The American Intifada," in which he remarked:

> *Years ago I knew a Chicago steelworker whose son liked to throw rocks at the buses that carried black workers to the mill. "I asked the kid," he recounted, "what do you want to bother the niggers for? They're just going to work." What led that young man, just out of high school, to elevate the white supremacy his father took for granted into a program for militant action? It was the knowledge that he would never get the sort of decently paying, fairly steady job his father held—or the fear that he would. Many like him, for whom traditional union white supremacy with a human face can no longer deliver the goods, are turning toward national socialism… One thing is certain: no regenerated social-democracy, no bigger and better welfare state, can compete with WAR [White Aryan Resistance] for the allegiance of the alienated, dispossessed white youth.*[1]

"What led that young man, just out of high school, to elevate the white supremacy his father took for granted into a program for militant action?" While fear of downward mobility is a motivating factor at the level of daily life, this fear only hints at the bigger picture. The question is correct, and the answer points in the right direction: what materially led this white teenager to take the racial order passively accepted (to our knowledge) by his father and make it into something active? And what, thirty years later, caused yet another white teenager to do the same, equipped with more than stones?

There is something to examine here concerning the historical role of US

citizenship, the restructuring of global capital in the twentieth century, and around all of this, the public and psychological lives of the white US citizens who respond compulsively to fear with *squadrismo*.

## The Reactive Feature of the White Citizen

From the establishment of plantation colonies in North America, settler governments instituted two legal labor regimes: one for those toiling in conditions of temporary bondage who could enter into wage labor upon the conclusion of their contracts of indentured servitude, and another for those living in conditions of permanent bondage: slaves. As European toilers' conditions of indentured servitude ended and they entered the ranks of the wage laboring population, they became identified with the bourgeoisie and half of the colonial legal regime, and "free labor" came to mean "white labor." The rest of the toiling class, in particular, those Africans brought to North America in chains, came to be identified totally with the other half, slavery. As the United States lurched towards Civil War, this total identification seemed to waver slightly through the freedom suits and individual Common Law Petitions in the court systems and state legislatures; ultimately, this did not make abolition, and in 1857 the Dred Scott decision effectively barred legal rights from all black people, thoroughly identifying them with slavery. Crucially, the court argued the US Constitution did not extend *citizenship* to black people.

For this to have happened any other way before the Civil War, the nature of US citizenship would have had to be radically different. Indeed, a large part of civil life in the early US was policing slaves; most white settlers, men and women, were regularly *obliged* to participate in slave patrols. A 1757 Georgia decree on the organizing of such patrols reads:

> *Which Persons Male and Female whose Names shall be so enlisted shall be answerable for the Patrol Service of that District severally, successively, and in turns… excepting such Women who hath not three Slaves…*
>
> *Nothing in this Act shall… extend to subject the Commander in Chief… or any of the members of His Majesty's Honourable Council or their Clerk or of the Commons House of Assembly or their Clerk the Public Treasurer, the Powder Receiver, Commissary General, nor any Judges of the General Court or Ministers of the Gospels, Custom-House Officers, or other Officers Commissioned by Vertue of His Majestys Sign Manual or the Pilots or Ferry-Men in any part of this Province to serve upon any Patrol Duty…*
>
> *Every Patrol shall go to, and examine the several Plantations in their District as they in their discretion shall see fit so that they be obliged to do Patrol Service one Night in fourteen at least and which shall be performed in such manner so as to visit every Plantation within their respective District once in every Month… Said Patrol shall have full Power to search and examine all Negro-Houses for offensive Weapons and Ammunition… It shall and may be*

mostly-white crowds unfolded across the country, exemplified by cities like 70 percent white Portland, which not only weathered extreme repression from Trump's *federales* but also managed to reopen the window for radical street tactics long after Minneapolis rebels had burnt the Third Precinct and progressives had buried its memory. On this conflagration, Shemon and Arturo write:

> *A new generation of people have experienced a powerful movement, and in the face of ongoing inequalities and crises people are unlikely to sit back and accept them. The rebellion has produced a new political subjectivity—the George Floyd rebel—initiating a set of processes with many possible outcomes which will be determined by class struggles in the present.*[14]

The George Floyd Uprising was only five years ago; it is as of yet unclear if the figure of the George Floyd rebel is here to stay. But if the protests against the genocide in Gaza since October 7th are any indication (despite their smaller absolute scale), some semblance of it has. The author of this essay was a George Floyd rebel, too, after all.

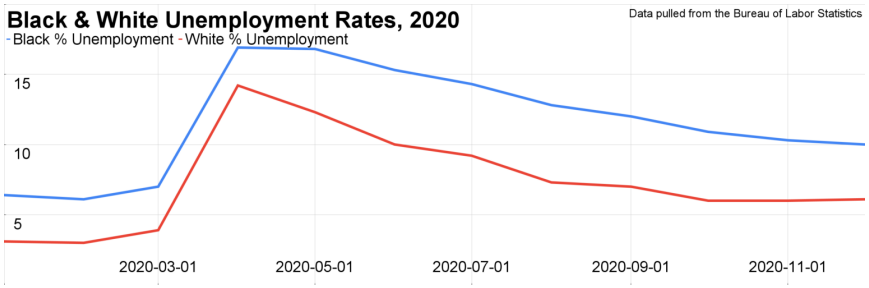
Historically, any proletarianization of white workers, any diminishment of the material wage of whiteness, would cause the psychological wage to flail in terror and enact it in response. However, the protector of white rule is not the only possible subject produced by white downward mobility anymore. It is worth recognizing the novelty of the race traitor's mass emergence: class struggle on a knife's edge is underway concerning the consciousness of white workers. Will they continue to guard their social betters' table in return for smaller and smaller scraps or join the proletariat gnawing at the table's legs?

After all this, Noel's initial question, which this historical study and analysis has sought to clarify. "What led that young man, just out of high school, to elevate the white supremacy his father took for granted into a program for militant action?" For most of US history, white workers' proletarianization to *any* degree would result in extreme white terror, as the decline in the material wage of whiteness was compensated for by an increase in whiteness's psychological wage, automatically producing a subject ready to kill to restore the law of the way of the world. However, as capital has globalized, the color line, always a provisional historical bargain, has diminished utility; the cross-class alliance is no longer worth what it once was to the class on the other side of the arrangement, and further immiseration will follow. However, as white workers are depressed downwards, there is also a greater tendency towards the automatic production of a second and opposing subject, that of the race traitor, formed of solidarity, not terror. These subjects will find it increasingly hard to swallow empty promises of past or future greatness, except through the social system's total transformation. Returning to Noel,

> *One thing is certain: no regenerated social-democracy, no bigger and better*

line remained sweet enough through the consumption of cheap commodities to justify fulfilling their side of the cross-class alliance.

Noel died in November 2019. Mere months later, the situation changed drastically. In March 2020, the World Health Organization declared the coronavirus outbreak a pandemic; in April 2020, the black and white unemployment rates shot up to 17 and 14 percent, respectively. The ratio of black and white unemployment rates fell from its historical resting rate of double to 1.2:1, the closest to parity the two have been since 1940. Simultaneously, shortages created by the global supply chain shocks meant white workers suddenly found themselves without essential commodities, albeit momentarily.




A month later, as the pandemic raged and unemployment remained high, Derek Chauvin murdered George Floyd. Cities across the US erupted with insurrection, bringing with them property destruction and the free flow of commodities out of looted stores radiating out from Minneapolis. This crisis was enough to bring out the US *squadre*, whose combatants could be found in most cities, whether mobilized in a militia or as lone defenders of property; as a Reconstruction-era grand juror said of the First Klan, "In some places they are organized, but in general they are not, nor is there more necessity for it than for so many rattlesnakes to organize to bite or for a vacuum to organize." Kyle Rittenhouse, then, a downwardly mobile white teenager raised in a financially unstable household bereft of cheap commodities during a global crisis, was just the most notorious rattlesnake looking to bite.[12]

And yet, after decades of creeping immiseration, these sudden shocks together were enough to disrupt the color line, albeit momentarily. Not only was the George Floyd Uprising the largest protest in US history, but many of its participants were white, far more than any uprising previously seen.

> *More than 40 percent of counties in the United States — at least 1,360 — have had a protest. Unlike with past Black Lives Matter protests, nearly 95 percent of counties that had a protest recently are majority white, and nearly three-quarters of the counties are more than 75 percent white.*[13]

Though it would be absurd to suggest the George Floyd Uprising was mostly-white itself, scenes of radical struggle against the police from



> *lawful to and for any Person or Persons between the Age of Sixteen and Sixty to do Patrol Service…*[2]

As is apparent, not all settlers had to patrol; government officials, priests, large planters who employed overseers, and women whose husbands owned less than three slaves were exempt from these duties. But for those compelled small planters and servants, working on a slave patrol was a reprieve from the day-to-day, and even brought social privileges with it: initially, the state exempted patrollers from standard militia duties, jury duties, and taxes at various levels of government; eventually, the government paid lump sums drawn from their financial surpluses. Of course, *refusing* to work on a patrol would incur fines unless one could pay for a replacement, again, exempting those with means enough to pay. For the small planters and servants on patrol, civic life was conditional upon their suppression of slaves.

Following the US War of Independence, these obligations and their implications became a high-priority topic. Much like the later relationship between the ideals of the French Revolution and the profitability of Haitian bondage, the US government put extreme care into clarifying how newly acquired political independence did not apply to slaves and could never benefit black people, even potentially. When Jefferson's draft constitution for Virginia stated, "No freeman shall ever be debarred the use of arms," his peers struck it down for its potential to put weapons in the hands of freed slaves, who would then free others and initiate an uprising. More than a natural right, "arms" were a required implement for poorer white settlers to fulfill their side of the political deal with their social betters. Their civil rights, social exemptions, and inalienable right to bear arms without compulsion were their reward for doing so. This relationship marked the antebellum status quo, enforced by the US's social structure (particularly its courts, as seen in the Dred Scott case).

Once the Civil War broke out, and especially once it had become about emancipation and slaves were escaping plantations *en masse*, the situation changed. In 1865, the Union closed the Civil War, Booth assassinated Lincoln, Congress ratified the Thirteenth Amendment, and the First Klan formed. The Thirteenth Amendment banned involuntary servitude (except for criminal punishment, which has received much attention lately), marking a transition away from the dual legal regimes of labor that characterized the antebellum United States. Legally formalized slave patrols sunset along with the labor regime. Almost immediately after, however, Southern white society swept freedmen back into conditions of economic bondage in the sharecropping system, the slave patrols returned in the form of the First Klan, and legal terror resumed in every jurisdiction while purporting to follow unenforced federal law. However, where once white capitalists and laborers saw property, now stood freedmen, for whom there was no longer an economic rationale to value or protect, regardless

of where a white person stood in the US class structure. In the new legal regime of labor, freedmen even stood next to white laborers as potential competitors, prompting extreme social backlash at the individual and structural levels. The legal slave regime may have sunset, but this was far from social reality.

There is a more serious line of continuity to uncover between the night-riders and Kyle, beyond the obvious. As Michael Fitzgerald writes on the Klan's composition,

> *Various sources reveal nearly six hundred names of those plausibly accused, at the time, of being disguised night-riders or active Klan participants. Those located in 1870 were mostly young, with a median age of twenty-four, and their median real wealth as individuals was exactly zero. A substantial minority were described as farm laborers, day laborers, and the like. Many still lived at home, and their family means do not look prepossessing. Average household wealth of suspects is $1,975 [$47,893.15 in 2025], with median wealth $500 [$12,045.99 now].*

Young men living with their parents, owning very little, and earning very little. The contrast to their antebellum social station is stark:

> *Most of these young men were dependents in parental households before the war. Of 147 men whose own wealth, or that of their parents' households, can be located, the average household wealth was $19,837 [$716,095.41 in 2025], with a median wealth of about $5,000 [$180,494.89 in 2025]. The evidence thus suggests a tenfold reduction in wealth during the war decade. Postwar formation of new households accounts for some of this contrast, but terrorist participants look prosperous before the war. Slaveholding provides the revealing measure. Of those whose families could be located before the war, a majority appear in the slave censuses. The average number reported is thirteen slaves, and if men of vast wealth were uncommon, planter families were well represented. Most names disappear from sight, but all the comparisons between prewar and postwar wealth suggest dramatic loss… Impoverishment and emancipation provided the underlying grievances, and political Reconstruction provided the spark. Elite social permission, by former slaveholders' sons, editors, and supplanted Democratic officeholders, allowed political violence to metastasize.*[3]

The night-riders were composed of young men whose families had jumped down several magnitudes in wealth from the start of the Civil War to 1870, from a median wealth of $180,494.89 to $12,045.99 in terms of 2025 USD; from the top decile of the middle classes to below the "poverty line" in nine years. Not only had these families lost their slave labor in the reconfiguration of the labor regime, but their downward mobility meant they also stood next to them in the same system as legally free toilers. This downward mobility was a disruption of the sweetheart deal; these white planters and their families were no longer granted the same tion and the historic cross-class alliance of the color line. However, this tug-of-war has not turned back the clock toward direct racial rule; in fact, little has changed; those white workers affected by deindustrialization, and their children, filled the growing US service sector, while black workers were expelled from the production process altogether or strove to do the same, albeit still more precariously. At the same time, the postwar global dominance of the US Dollar and outsourcing of production by US firms to the peripheral economies have flooded the US with a surplus of cheap commodities, ballooning standards of living and consumption levels relative to the majority of Earth's exploited population; in the postwar period, access to cheap commodities *is* the essence of the US order, taken for granted by those who can afford it and converted into a program for action by those who cannot.

What does this conflict between the US economy and its historical political arrangement tend towards? In the last instance, a protracted struggle between US capital's tendency towards depression and the US' social and political reality attempting to reassert the historical order of things would result in a victory for capital, not white civil society. This victory would appear as proportional equalizing between black and white workers into misery and near parity of the black and white unemployment rates. As global capital affords fewer and fewer privileges in exchange for white workers' loyalty, it would shred the color line itself in favor of profit maximization and equal-opportunity immiseration. In the meantime, the precise contours of this contradiction's near-future unfolding are anyone's guess, especially given the success of Trump on exactly a platform of returning the US to an old order of things, or a phantastical image of it, before civil rights supposedly wrecked the beautiful postwar boom—is it any coincidence the Civil Rights Act passed when Trump and a sizable block of his supporters were either young adults or children?

However, there is another subject these conditions can produce besides the Kyle Rittenhouses, though US society has historically tipped the scales against its emergence. In the late 1960s, towards the end of the Civil Rights Movement but before the onset of deindustrialization, Noel Ignatiev, whose words began this essay, began to push a line as a member of Students for a Democratic Society and then Sojourner Truth Organization, following Marx, that "Labor cannot emancipate itself in white skin where its black skin is branded," and that a crucial task of any revolutionary group in the US is to demonstrate to white workers, through struggle, that it was in their class interests to "repudiate their white-skin privileges and oppose white supremacy." The journal *Race Traitor*, which Noel founded in the early 1990s with John Garvey, sought to explore how white people could do so, albeit on the level of individual treasonous acts. And yet, for most of Noel's lifetime, the white race traitor did not emerge *en masse*; most white workers had a lot more to lose than their chains, and the color

tion at the expense of black workers who suffered it in the extreme, from the 1970s onwards, this changed. And just as downward mobility and emancipation spurred an incredible white backlash after the Civil War, rust-belting did the same. The First Klan's night-riders were not more immiserated than freedmen. However, their consumption standards relative to their planter-capitalist parents fell massively at the same time as emancipation was legally uplifting slaves. Similarly, white workers in the late twentieth century were not poorer than black workers, who in every case remained first in line for their bosses to fire.[10] But white workers were being fired more than before, especially compared to their parents, who could count on a stable standard of living from the postwar boom. It is not coincidental that these instances of downward mobility seemed to accompany the elevation of black workers: in one case, emancipation and citizenship for black people, and in the other, the civil rights that on paper enforced and protected their rights as citizens. Deindustrialization occurred with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Black Panther Party, and the Black Power Movement all in recent memory, and most adult white workers would have remembered the pre-Civil Rights Act US, associated with their postwar boom childhoods and their family friend Jim Crow.

In the United States, *any* diminishment in the material wage of whiteness, in economic advantages formerly conferred to white workers, produces an uptick in whiteness' *psychological* wage, their phantasies of superiority. When threatened, the psychological wage elevates the status quo racial order into a terror program.

> *The lamenting subject threatens to harden in its being-just-so and thereby to fulfill once again the law of the way of the world.*[11]

In these moments, US white workers, with tacit support from white capitalists, reach for a return to more direct racial rule which could return their privileges; in one instance, to the original dual legal regime of slavery and wage labor, and in the other, to the segregated sharecropping economy, preferably during the postwar boom but before the Civil Rights Movement. It should follow then, much like the emergence of the night-riders after emancipation, during and after the Civil Rights and Black Power movements a thousand hands reached out to pick up the white robes of the Klan, now integrated and cross-recruiting with the similarly growing American Neo-Nazi movement to enact a decentralized terror program and try again, in vain, to turn back the clock.

## Crisis and the Possibility of Mass Treason

There is a throughline between the original night-riders, the Third Klan, and finally, Kyle Rittenhouse, as standard bearers of a specific historical relationship: in short, between white workers' proletarianization and the terror that unfolds in reaction to it. Here, there is a conflict between the economic and the political, between the drive towards industrial reservation at the expense of black workers who suffered it in the extreme, from the 1970s onwards, this changed. And just as downward mobility and emancipation spurred an incredible white backlash after the Civil War, rust-belting did the same. The First Klan's night-riders were not more immiserated than freedmen. However, their consumption standards relative to their planter-capitalist parents fell massively at the same time as emancipation was legally uplifting slaves. Similarly, white workers in the late twentieth century were not poorer than black workers, who in every case remained first in line for their bosses to fire.[10] But white workers were being fired more than before, especially compared to their parents, who could count on a stable standard of living from the postwar boom. It is not coincidental that these instances of downward mobility seemed to accompany the elevation of black workers: in one case, emancipation and citizenship for black people, and in the other, the civil rights that on paper enforced and protected their rights as citizens. Deindustrialization occurred with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Black Panther Party, and the Black Power Movement all in recent memory, and most adult white workers would have remembered the pre-Civil Rights Act US, associated with their postwar boom childhoods and their family friend Jim Crow.

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protection from the boom and bust cycle of the capitalist economy that reliance on slave labor afforded. And though they were not poorer than any freedman, they fell farther relative to them. In 1868, Congress ratified the Fourteenth Amendment, making all freedmen citizens, meaning the privileges previously afforded only to white citizens were now the purview of freedmen, too; white capitalists and laborers no longer had the monopoly on bearing arms, speaking freely, or doing any of the things citizenship afforded them. With this reconfiguration of the capital-relation and its forms of appearance, many young white planter scions felt the indignant burn of history and enacted terror to resist it. If not in full, then in part, enough violence and social abjection could restore the dual legal labor regimes, they would regain sole possession of a citizen's privileges, and their family's wealth would return on the backs of a resurrected slave system; in their phantasies, even with the very same individual slaves, now identified with their Yankee foes and requiring cruel punishment to compensate for their family's downward mobility, for making a white man feel like a slave.

Sadly, they partially got what they wanted; the clock did not turn back, but it slowed dramatically. Jim Crow, sharecropping, and the Klan partially reintegrated the antebellum state of affairs into postwar life, and not every white regained their family's wealth, but some managed to. In 1877, despite attempts to enforce emancipation, Reconstruction was over, and in 1879, the first group of Exodusters left the South.

With this history in mind, the dynamic sketched out on Lake Effect in the past and its relation to the present political moment, as L.S. wrote in *Opening Acts*, can be grasped more fully:

> *The class relation here was and continues to be hashed out in racial terms, and that as a result, falls in the bourgeois consumption standards of the white middle class will immediately provoke calls for a return to older and more direct forms of that racial class rule. 'Economic anxiety' is racial paranoia; bourgeois class rule is white-supremacist dictatorship.*[4]

In other words, there is an objective relationship between downward class mobility among white workers and the terror compulsively enacted by white subjects to preserve their privileges.

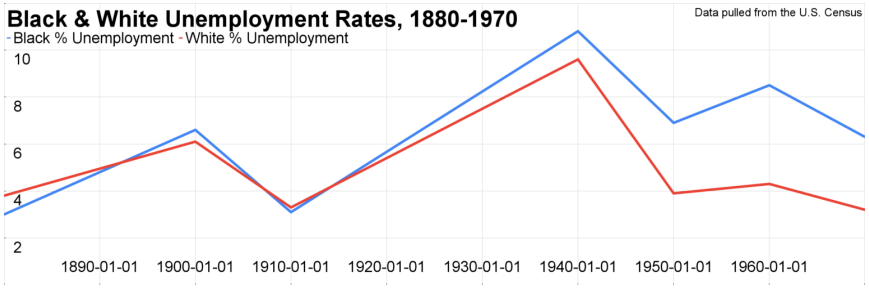
## It Grows as It Wears

This historically conditioned relationship between depression and terror is the heart of the US squadre. In *Black Reconstruction in America*, Du Bois writes:

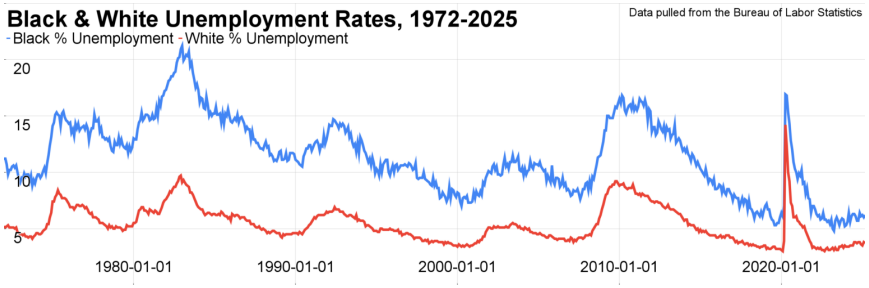
> *The white group of laborers, while they received a low wage, were compensated in part by a sort of public and psychological wage. They were given public deference and titles of courtesy because they were white. They were admitted freely with all classes of white people to public functions, public parks, and*

*the best schools. The police were drawn from their ranks, and the courts, dependent upon their votes, treated them with such leniency as to encourage lawlessness. Their vote selected public officials, and while this had small effect upon the economic situation, it had great effect upon their personal treatment and the deference shown them. White schoolhouses were the best in the community, and conspicuously placed, and they cost anywhere from twice to ten times as much per capita as the colored schools. The newspapers specialized on news that flattered the poor whites and almost utterly ignored the Negro except in crime and ridicule. The result of this was that the wages of both classes could be kept low, the whites fearing to be supplanted by Negro labor, the Negroes always being threatened by the substitution of white labor.*[5]

This dynamic is the color line; white workers join in with the white bourgeoisie to suppress black workers, and in exchange, are afforded privileges in civic and inner life. Du Bois says "this had small effect upon the economic situation," but that is not quite right; the color line was not only the result of immiseration, but also immiseration's premise: during Reconstruction, a combination of local legislation and terror ensured the defeated planter bourgeoisie's capital stayed out of freedmen's hands, and the legal and civil segregation system born during Reconstruction kept freedmen and their children from the well-funded schools, profitable farmland, and higher-paying jobs in the industrial centers. However, while that system and its agents kept freedmen and their children from prospering, this alone did not result in exclusion from the labor force; from 1880 to 1950, the ratio between the black and white unemployment and joblessness rates remained 1:1.[6]




From 1950 onwards, that ratio would double on average and remain that way into the present.




What accounts for this change? In the words of Baran and Sweezy on the historical black and white unemployment rates:

*Until roughly a decade and a half ago [1950], with the number of unskilled jobs remaining stable, Negroes were able to hold their own in the total employment picture by replacing white workers who were moving up the occupational ladder. This explains why… the Negro unemployment rate was only a little higher than the white rate at the end of the Great Depression. Since 1950, on the other hand, with unskilled jobs disappearing at a fantastic rate, Negroes not qualified for other kinds of work found themselves increasingly excluded from employment altogether. Hence the rise of the Negro unemployment rate to more than double the white rate by the early 1960's. Negroes, in other words, being the least qualified workers are disproportionately hard hit as unskilled jobs (and, to an increasing extent, semiskilled jobs) are eliminated by mechanization, automation, and cybernation.*[7]

Contrary to Du Bois, the unfolding of the color line alongside the development of the technical production process demonstrates its effect upon the economic situation.

However, this state of affairs cannot exist forever; the enhanced protection of white workers from the effects of capitalist immiseration is a historically specific and provisional political arrangement, at odds with capital's tendency towards throwing unneeded workers into the industrial reserve army. Lo and behold, beginning in the 1970s, postwar international competition between global capital blocs became global overproduction and export saturation, which became deindustrialization, particularly in the West, as multinational firms relocated out of the metropole and into the newly independent but quickly re-integrated periphery for cheaper labor power.[8] Suddenly, what had happened twenty to thirty years earlier for black workers was also affecting white ones in "skilled" positions; capital at large determined that in a globalized world economy, maintaining the color line at the expense of profit maximization simply has too strong of an opportunity cost. To quote Don Hamerquist in a debate with Bring the Ruckus,

*Maintaining political equilibrium in particular countries, including this one, is increasingly subordinated to requirements for profit maximization and political equilibrium in a capitalist world system, a system which is no longer in any sense "white" or even Euro-American. The loyalty of US white workers is no longer worth as much and less will be paid for it. The social democratic and "communist" challenges to global capitalism are increasingly defanged and incorporated, reducing the potential risks of incorporating potential challenges within the hegemonic framework of capital through social democratic parliamentarism. This further undermines any incentive for the ruling class to subsidize white supremacy.*[9]

Where once the color line protected white workers from proletarianiza-