

Introduction: Race as Scripture Problem

Given that race is a cultural construct, it should occasion little surprise that the dominant feature of western cultural life – Christianity – should have exerted an enormous influence on its articulation. The book of Genesis has played a very large role in the cultural construction of race. Nevertheless, scholarly discussion of racial constructs has tended, on the whole – though there are important exceptions – to drift into the territorial waters of sociology. Race is contextualised alongside issues of status and class, and the social relations of power are, reasonably enough, accorded pride of place in interpretations of the rise of racism. That race is also a theological construct has hitherto attracted much less attention, though it has occasionally intruded at the margins of the more scrupulous studies of race – albeit as a somewhat anomalous factor. It is one of the central arguments of this book that, although many social and cultural factors have contributed significantly to western constructions of race, scripture has been for much of the early modern and modern eras the primary cultural influence on the forging of races. ‘Race-as-theology’ should be an important constituent of the humanistic study of racial constructs alongside accounts of ‘race-as-biology’, ‘race-as-ethnicity’ and ‘race-as-class or -caste’. On the other hand, this study also investigates the extent to which the dethronement of scripture from its dominant position in western intellectual life in the centuries following the Enlightenment has contributed to a reconfiguration of racial attitudes. It asks how far a decline in the authority of scripture opened up an ideological space for the uninhibited articulation of racialist sentiments. An appreciation of the theological inflections of racial discourse is essential to a proper parsing of the early modern and modern histories of race.

Although the Bible is itself colour-blind with regard to racial difference, the book of Genesis offers a compelling explanation of the origins of mankind, the peopling of the world after the Flood by the sons of Noah and their

offspring, and the confusion of languages (and consequent division of humanity) that accompanied God's displeasure at the Tower of Babel. According to the Bible, the whole of humanity descends from Adam and Eve, by way of Noah and his wife and their three sons – Ham, Shem and Japhet – and their wives, the only human survivors of a universal Flood. Genesis sets out in some detail the lineages which descend from the sons of Noah; but there is no discussion of the ethnicity of the peoples listed. Among the very few exceptions to the invisibility of matters of race and colour in the scriptures is the remark found in Jeremiah 13:23 – 'Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?' The ultimate insignificance of ethnicity and race surfaces in the New Testament. Acts 17:26 sets out a clear statement of the unity of humankind – 'And [God] hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth.'

Thus the Bible is a text which treats of issues apparently pertinent to race and ethnicity, but in a manner oblivious of the fact of racial difference. It describes, for example, the peopling of the world, but ignores the racial identity of the detailed lineages it describes which originated with Noah's sons. It is this very incongruity between the Bible's significance for an understanding of ethnicity and its silence on matters of race that has tempted theologians and other readers of scripture, including anthropologists, race scientists and ideologues of all sorts, to import racial meanings and categories into the Bible.

The most influential passage of scripture came in Genesis 10. This appeared to provide a map of ethnic filiation, which set out the families of the sons of Noah and claimed that 'by these were the nations divided in the earth after the Flood'. The sons of Japhet were listed as Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech and Tiras. In addition, scripture also specified the sons of Gomer – namely Ashkenaz, Riphath and Togormah – and those of Javan – that is, Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim and Dodanim. The sons of Ham were identified as Cush, Mizraim, Phut and Canaan, while further details were given of the sons of Cush, Mizraim and Canaan. Similarly, the children of Shem were Elam, Asshur, Arphaxad, Lud and Aram, with a great deal of further detail, for the bulk of the Old Testament constituted, of course, the history of the lineage of Shem through Arphaxad, the distant direct progenitor of the Abrahamic line. Such genealogical listings seemed to have been accorded ethnological significance. The sons of Shem, it was announced in Genesis 10:31, were set out 'after their families, after their tongues, in their lands, after their nations'. Chapter 11 then sets out the story of the Tower of Babel and the confounding of the world's languages. To all intents and purposes, for

orthodox readers of scripture, Old Testament genealogy was the essential point of departure for understanding the races, linguistic groups, ethnicities and nations of the world.

Seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century antiquaries usually identified Celts as the offspring of Gomer, the son of Japhet, and the Germanic peoples as a particular line of descent from Gomer's son Ashkenaz. Whereas Germans and Celts were identified for much of the early modern period as closely related ethnic groups, during the nineteenth century they were seen by many commentators as distinct and discrete racial groups who shared very little in common and exhibited sharply contrasting racial characteristics. This shift in attitudes is explained, in large part, by the emergence of a more secularised ethnology whose point of departure was no longer the Table of Nations set out in Genesis 10.¹

Of course, Old Testament anthropology runs into the sand. There is a huge gap – or perhaps not so huge, depending upon one's scheme of chronology – between the facts of ethnicity set out in Genesis and the appearance of ethnic groups in the historical and ethnographic works of Greece and Rome. From which of Noah's sons came the Scythians, say? A great deal of early modern anthropology involved the reconstitution of the lineages of peoples between the petering out of scriptural ethnography and the start of the classical record.

Whereas race depends on a – supposedly – naturalistic perception of racial difference as a 'biological fact', the reliance of most early modern and some modern ethnological theories on the irrefutable historical testimony of the Old Testament transmutes the concept of 'race' into the neighbouring, but qualitatively distinct, category of 'lineage'. In general, when, under biblical inspiration, race is collapsed into lineage, this should inhibit racial prejudice. This is because the interpretation of the supposed biological 'facts' of racial difference through the lens of scripture tends to result in the ascription of the racial Other to some part of the Noachic family tree, however distant from the Japhetite branch to which the white race was customarily assigned. Scripture has the benign capacity to render racial Otherness as a type of cousinage or remote kinship.

Unfortunately, scriptural notions of lineage also possessed a more sinister capacity to encourage the importation of divinely authorised categories of blessed and cursed – and by extension objective moral categories of good and evil – into the reading of the ethically neutral differences between races. Most obviously, the Bible was capable of exacerbating negative attitudes towards the racial Other by ascribing, say, the blackness of Africans to the divine curse placed on the descendants of

Ham, or to the mark placed upon the murderous Cain (and presumably inherited by his descendants). The central issue was not so much one's possession of a particular colour of skin as one's membership of a particular lineage singled out in the Old Testament for special favour or disfavour. The idea of race-as-lineage is capable of generating pronounced tensions between the notion of a family of races underpinned by the sacred anthropology of the Old Testament and the universal message of the New, and the idea of cursed and blessed lineages. In these respects the Bible serves, confusingly, both to diminish and to exacerbate racism.

Crucial evidence of the intimate connection between scripture lineages and the discourse of race can be found in the very terminology of race and ethnology, which is saturated with theological and biblical terms. Terms of abuse and technical expressions alike bear witness to the scriptural provenance of the race question whether in the low-level discourse of the public bar or in the more rarefied conversations of the intelligentsia. The concept of the 'ethnic' is itself an emblem of the religious saturation of the language of ethnicity. Johnson's *Dictionary* (1755) defined 'ethnick' as 'heathen; pagan; not Jewish; not Christian', and also included an entry for 'ethnicks', meaning 'heathens; not Jews; not Christians'. Other dictionaries reiterate the same broad definition of ethnic as 'heathenish'. Thomas Blount's *Glossographia* of 1656 defined 'ethnick' as 'heathenish, ungodly irreligious: And may be used substantively for a heathen or gentile'. In Nathaniel Bailey's *Universal etymological dictionary* (6th edition, 1733), 'ethnick' is given a similar definition: 'heathenish, of or belonging to heathens'. This usage can be traced throughout the early modern British world. There has been a subtle but significant shift in the meaning of 'ethnic' over the past couple of centuries, from an original association with religious Otherness – although early modern pagans would tend not to be white Europeans – towards a more secular description of racial, national or cultural distinctiveness.²

Sacred history left its mark most indelibly in the field of linguistics, whose nomenclature – 'Semitic', 'Hamitic' – betrays a scriptural provenance. Associations with Noah's other son, Japheth, have in the long run proved less enduring; but they were common until the end of the nineteenth century in philological writings. In 1767 the English antiquary James Parsons (1705–70) published an influential work on the relationships of the ancient languages of Europe entitled *Remains of Japhet*. Even the Indo-Europeanist transformation of philological classification did not disturb this established identification of the lineage of Japheth with Europe.

During the nineteenth century, as we shall see, Japhetite was a common synonym for Aryan or Indo-European, and part of the success of this new philological concept appears to stem from its ease of incorporation within an established biblical genealogy for the world's cultures and peoples. The boundaries between quite distinct systems of nomenclature – biblical and philological – were fuzzy and permeable. Examples of category fusion abounded. The distinguished American scientist Alexander Winchell (1824–91) wrote of the 'early dispersion of the Japhetites or Indo-Europeans – called also Aryans'. Similarly, the Irish anthropological writer and lawyer Dominick McCausland (1806–73) claimed that one of the leading families of the Caucasian race 'has been designated by historians as the Aryan, by philologists as the Indo-European, and by religionists as the Japhetic – all denoting one and the same people'. For example, Sanskrit was the 'language of the eastern Japhetites', according to McCausland, who described India's dominant ethnic group as 'Hindu Aryan Japhetites'.³

Noachic categories persisted limpet-like in the field of ethnology, even cohabiting on occasions with a subversive irreligious intent. Somewhat improbably, the deistic French polygenist, Bory de Saint-Vincent (1780–1846), who believed that the earth's human population was composed of fifteen distinct species of humanity, had recourse at times to a conventional biblical nomenclature, naming the species found in Europe, for example, the 'Japetic'. The legacy of the supposed curse upon Ham long survived in South Africa, particularly in the Western Cape, where 'Gam' – alluding to Ham – has been employed as a 'pejorative label for the coloured labouring poor'. However, Noachic nomenclature in the sphere of ethnology and linguistics sometimes led to a degree of confusion. When terms like 'Semitic' and 'Hamitic' were used to describe families of languages, these terms created the impression that such languages were quite distinct, belonging to the divergent dispersals of the descendants of Shem and Ham. The German biblical scholar Friedrich Gesenius (1786–1842) was the first scholar to show that the supposed Semitic language family included languages conventionally described as Hamitic. The nineteenth-century British ethnologist James Cowles Prichard (1786–1848) also ventured into the philological no man's land where Semitic and Hamitic languages appeared to overlap. Hebrew, he believed, belonged to the Canaanitish or Hamitic family of languages, not to the Syrian, or Semitic proper, grouping. To avoid inaccuracy, Prichard preferred a regional description of the latter grouping, deploying the term 'Syro-Arabian' rather than Semitic.⁴

African history and anthropology were long in thrall to the 'Hamitic hypothesis', the notion that everything of value in the culture of sub-Saharan Africa had been brought there by the Hamites, a Caucasoid people (surprisingly enough given the associations of Ham with blackness). According to Edith Sanders, the Hamitic hypothesis emerged during the nineteenth century as a scholarly by-product of theological concerns. In particular, the argument that only Canaan had been cursed as a punishment for the disrespect shown by his father Ham seemed to imply that the rest of Ham's progeny had escaped – white and uncursed. The Egyptians were considered to belong to the non-Canaanite descendants of Ham, and it suited nineteenth-century ethnologists and Egyptologists to emphasise that the high civilisation of Egypt had been white and Caucasoid. Africanists speculated on the diffusion of high culture from Egypt to central and southern Africa by way of a race of Hamitic nomadic pastoralists. Despite the supplanting of theology by science, the Hamitic idea survived into twentieth-century anthropology. Curiously, the term 'Hamite' was to be replaced by another ethnic label, which was also of biblical provenance, though, perhaps, less embarrassingly so: the 'Hamites' of nineteenth-century ethnological speculation tended to become the 'Southern Cushites' of mid-twentieth-century African anthropology. In this way, a residue of a much older theological debate survived into twentieth-century theories about the ethnology of Africa.⁵

The term 'Caucasian', which in common currency denotes the physical characteristics of the – supposed – white European race, is also indirectly indebted to scripture and the Noachic story. As Hannah Augstein has shown, the anthropological classification of a 'Caucasian' race had its roots in the study of biblical geography, in particular the quest by sacred geographers to locate the final resting place of the Ark, and hence presumably of the post-diluvial beginnings of humankind. Some late eighteenth-century ethnologists claimed that the Caucasus Mountains abounded in sea shells. Did this confirm speculation that humanity had dispersed from its Caucasian navel? Or did it suggest rather that the Caucasus too had been inundated and that the centre of humanity might well be found in the higher regions of the Himalayas? As an ethnological term, Caucasian provides only the merest hint of its provenance in a contested field of biblical scholarship; nor does it now possess the monogenist, Eurasian associations of its first coinage.⁶

However, the connection between race and scripture goes *much* deeper than the words used to denote racial, linguistic and ethnic groups. The

logical coherence of Christian theology depends upon a certain reading of the significance of race. Conversely, race has the potential to undermine some of the central doctrines of Christianity. This book contends that between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries intellectuals confronted race primarily as a theological problem. Indeed, race – as we shall see in more detail in later chapters – started out as a theological problem in the early modern period. In particular, the unity of the human race was fundamental to Christian theology. If mankind did not spring from a single racial origin, then theologians were confronted with a scenario that undermined the very essence of the Christian story. The sacred drama of Fall and redemption rests upon assumptions of mankind's common descent from Adam. Otherwise, the transmission of original sin from Adam would not have polluted the whole human race. In the second place, Christ's atonement – however limited the scope for election – would not apply to the whole of mankind. This issue will recur throughout the book. A monogenist theory of race is inextricably interwoven with some of the central tenets of Christian doctrine. The overriding importance of the unity of mankind for the biological transmission of original sin and indeed for defending the historical truths set out in Genesis meant that Christian commentators on race were inclined to refuse the apparent fact of distinctive races or racial types for fear of endorsing the destructive heresy of polygenesis. So much discussion of race was framed by the question of monogenesis that it distorted western ethnology in an anti-pluralist direction. Theology tended to inhibit a full acceptance of racial diversity.

It is a central argument of this book that the construction of race has been significantly restricted in its articulation and meanings by theological imperatives. At times theological considerations have run against the grain of biological understandings and sociological uses of race. On occasions, theology has constrained the expression of racialist sentiments, though the capacity of the Bible to yield multiple and sometimes contradictory readings means that Christianity has rarely been sufficient in itself to prevent acts of racial oppression when whites – however staunchly Christian – have found themselves presented with tempting opportunities to obtain wealth or power. Nevertheless, social realities notwithstanding, constructions of race tended not to follow a sociological logic, but conformed to theological imperatives.

Cross-cultural comparisons help to foreground the Christian inflections of European racial thought. In the cultures beyond Christendom, racial speculation was framed somewhat differently. Frank Dikotter notes

that monogenesis was an alien concept imported into China in the seventeenth century by Christian missionaries, and that it never obtained the same dominance in the East. Instead, polygenesis exercised an uncontroversial purchase in the non-Christian cultures of China and Japan, and bigenism – the notion that mankind arose from two distinct origins (a single origin for the yellow race and a separate source for the other races of the world) – was more pronounced in the racialist theories of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Chinese intellectuals than in the West which, Darwinism and secularisation notwithstanding, retained a preference for some form of monogenist explanation.⁷

Indeed, it seems probable that the influence of theology on the construction of race was most profound not when it served to inscribe obvious scriptural patterns on the taxonomy of race, but when it acted as an obstacle to the exaggeration of racial difference. As we shall see, in the early modern period, during the Enlightenment, and even at the high noon of nineteenth-century racialism, theological imperatives drove the conventional mainstream of science and scholarship to search for mankind's underlying unities. The emphasis of racial investigation was not upon divisions between races, but on race as an accidental, epiphenomenal mask concealing the unitary Adamic origins of a single, extended human family. The deepest impact made by theology on the construction of race was thus, arguably, of a negative kind; quietly, subtly and indirectly, theological needs drew white Europeans into a benign state of denial, a refusal to accept that human racial differences were, literally, anything other than skin deep. Obviously, this negative inhibitory influence is hard to measure; but, as we shall see throughout this book, the ongoing defence of monogenesis tended over the course of early modern and modern history to direct the focus of racial analysis away from differences towards similarities. Theological factors, more than any others, dictated that the proof of sameness would be the dominant feature of western racial science.

The defence of monogenist orthodoxy dictated that the discourse of race as often as not became fixated not upon the empirical facts of human difference, but upon ways to reconcile such differences with the deeper truth (and theological necessity) of aboriginal human unity. Theological pressures encouraged many Christian ethnologists to dismiss skin colour or other physical characteristics as superficial traits which might be explained away in environmentalist terms. The principal objective of the Christian ethnologist was to search for the underlying commonalities which would confirm the biological unity of mankind. Theological

perspectives on the question of race promoted the notion that ultimately race was a matter of delusive appearances.

Distorted in a benign fashion, generally speaking, by theological anxieties, the western discourse of race focused less than might be imagined upon visible signs of ethnic variety and more upon the invisible Adamic sameness which must, according to the revealed Word of scripture, lie beneath the apparent Otherness of the world's peoples. The demands of Christian theology meant that western observers of race were encouraged to view the phenomenon through the wrong end of the telescope. Christianity – for reasons of orthodoxy, principally, rather than out of philanthropy – saw through the outer anatomical and epidermal cladding of the races of the world, concerned only to establish their ultimate Adamic pedigree. This was a distortion of truth, though it erred, possibly by chance, in the direction of philanthropy.

Despite the rise of a more secular worldview in recent centuries, the legacy of scriptural authority continues to leave its mark on the field of race and ethnology. Within the world of science in general (and ethnology in particular), there endured archaic survivals from a biblicist culture. The anthropologist Audrey Smedley has argued against a crude distinction between naturalistic knowledge and supernatural beliefs. Rather, she argues, these were often 'intertwined'. According to Smedley, 'certain theologically based assumptions and propositions survived undiluted in scientific thought'. The rise of science was accompanied by unchallenged beliefs in the 'Judeo-Christian idea of a single creation and the Noachian explication of human diversity'.⁸

Even as the nineteenth-century science of race slipped its biblical moorings and abandoned the scriptural genealogy of peoples set out in Genesis, residual patterns derived from scripture continued to shape the study of race. Indeed, George Stocking, the pre-eminent historian of anthropology, has argued persuasively that in nineteenth-century Britain the new science of ethnology emerged as an 'outgrowth' of biblical scholarship, notably from a monogenist tradition concerned with the nature of man, the origins of language and the peopling of the world. Just how 'scientific' was the dominant monogenist racial science of the nineteenth century, with its genealogical and 'migrationist' paradigms of aboriginal human unity and differentiation? The spectre of Genesis haunted the birth of ethnology. Similarly, although many ethnologists and biologists no longer traced racial pedigrees back to Noah's three sons, Ham, Shem and Japhet, several scientists nevertheless retained a curious attachment to a triadic division of races. Scientists were slow to jettison

the conventions of Genesis, despite the strong affinities between their theories of racial types and the hypothesis of multiple creations. The leading French naturalist Georges Cuvier (1769–1832) was a Protestant who subscribed to the story of man's common descent but was dissatisfied with several elements in the Genesis story, including its system of chronology. Cuvier conserved a very weak version of monogenesis (verging on polygenesis), but argued that three subspecies of mankind – Caucasian, Mongolian and Ethiopian – had diverged at a very early stage in human history and had developed in isolation from one another. In Britain, Cuvier's disciple, the soldier and naturalist Charles Hamilton Smith (1776–1859), appeared to combine a monogenist position with an adherence to a tripartite scheme of races in his *Natural history of the human species* (1848). Hamilton Smith conjectured that man had originated in three basic aboriginal types, which nevertheless sprang initially from a common zone near the Gobi desert. Similarly, the French racial theorist Count Gobineau (1816–82), a proponent of racial hierarchy whose arguments were underpinned by a theory of racial types, appeared to mimic the book of Genesis in his division of mankind into three races – the white, the black and the yellow. Moreover, while Gobineau's system of racial typology seemed to lead logically to polygenist conclusions, he felt constrained nonetheless by Christian norms, and instead fastened his racial typology somewhat unconvincingly to ultimate monogenist beginnings. Throughout the nineteenth century – if not beyond – inherited biblical patterns lurked within the workings of racial science, acting as a powerful brake on the shift towards new theories – whether polygenist or evolutionary – in the biological sciences.⁹ Even in today's secularised academy, as we have already seen, the legacy of the scriptures has not been totally erased from the human sciences, though such survivals now exist only in the form of an inherited nomenclature and no longer distort basic disciplinary paradigms.

Besides the central theological problem generated by Europe's encounter with the racial Other, there are a number of sub-problems or puzzles which have arisen from attempts to reconcile scriptural interpretation with the apparent 'facts' of race. What did the flesh-and-blood peoples of the Bible look like? To which races did the main characters of the scriptures belong? The various puzzles which follow are indicative of the rich interplay of racial and theological discourses in a variety of contexts. Nevertheless, these puzzles are presented here – largely shorn of context – both as a means of introducing the reader to these themes and also as a

way of demonstrating the persistence of these issues (albeit in various formulations) in different periods, cultures, geographical settings, social structures and racial environments.

WAS ADAM WHITE OR BLACK?

Speculation about the colour of Adam, the first man, arises not only from a natural human curiosity but from a deeper concern about the racial identity of the first human. Of what colour was mankind originally? In particular, if Adam were created in God's likeness, does this confer a divine sanction upon a particular hue? However, more was at stake than just racial pride. Other weighty issues depended in some measure upon the colour of Adam. Indeed, the maintenance of Christianity as a viable intellectual system depended upon the assumption that the racial diversity of the world could be reconciled with the Genesis narrative of Adam, the first man. The expansion of white Europe across the globe led to a growing realisation that the extremes of racial variation posed a potential threat to the authority of the Bible, which says that all mankind is descended from Adam. Moreover, the whole Christian scheme of Fall, transmission of original sin and redemption through Christ, if it has a valid claim to universality, seems logically to require that all humans are descended from the first parents Adam and Eve. This is the position known as monogenesis, that all the peoples of the world, regardless of race, spring from a common origin. On the other hand, some observers have been so overwhelmed by the huge differences in physique, colour and visage which appear to separate races that they have posited an alternative – and heretical – notion of polygenesis, that humankind takes its rise from more than one set of original parents. One solution to this problem, which besets theology as well as science, is to conjecture how different environmental conditions might have transformed the physical appearance of the descendants of Adam and Eve, resulting in a chain of subtle gradations of hue which might eventually encompass all the racial features found across the globe. However, the plausibility of such a monogenist solution is determined by its point of departure. It is harder to suspend disbelief in the progressive environmental mutation of descendants of a white Adam into blacks (or vice versa) than in that of the descendants of an intermediately tawny Adam into both blacks and whites. But, of course, there are other factors to consider besides scientific plausibility. In particular, a solution to this problem must take into account the conventional assumption of white Christians that the Bible

from start to finish is populated by whites. Thus there were two quite distinct issues in the ongoing problem of Adam's colour. One was scientific: was it easier for intellectuals committed to the biblical truth of the unity of the human species to explain the transformation of an aboriginal whiteness into racial blackness, or the other way round, to provide an acceptable scientific account of how an original black colouring became lighter, or to posit some other aboriginal hue for Adam? The other question was racial. White and black racialists alike tended to believe that theirs was the aboriginal and authentic colour of mankind. The issues were technically quite separate, but their reverberations travelled beyond the fields of science, race and theology.

The scientific issue first assumed prominence during the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, when there was a serious attempt to explain the racial composition of the world in naturalistic terms. However, while a few daring *philosophes* were only too happy to cock a snook at the shibboleths of old-time religion, the generality of scientists, particularly in the British and American Enlightenments, tried to produce theories that did not overstep the bounds of Christian orthodoxy.

The most obvious answer which occurred to enlightened white writers on racial matters was to assume that Adam had been white like themselves. In his *Universal system of natural history* (1794–1803), the astrologer and medical scientist Ebenezer Sibly (d. 1800) came to the predictable conclusion that 'we must consider white as the stock whence all others have sprung. Adam and Eve and their posterity, till the time of the deluge, were white; in the first age of the world no black nation was to be found on the face of the earth.' Indeed, Sibly believed that no humans had reached Africa till after the dispersal from Babel, that the continent's first inhabitants had been white and that Africans had become dark only as a result of the actions of the climate there over successive generations.¹⁰ Nevertheless, for some commentators an intermediate colour like red seemed to fit more persuasively with naturalistic explanations of racial diversification from an original hue. Was it not more plausible to trace the emergence of the full racial spectrum as a sequence of modifications of shade from a colour which stood midway between the extremes of white and black? In mid-eighteenth-century Virginia, John Mitchell (1690?–1768), a British physician interested in racial questions who lived in the colony between 1735 and 1746, argued that 'an intermediate tawny colour', found among Asiatics and native Amerindians, had been the 'primitive and original complexion' of mankind.¹¹ Similarly, in his *Anthropologia: or dissertations on the form and colour of man* (1808),

Thomas Jarrold (1770–1853), a Manchester physician, hazarded a solution to this vexing question of 'the colour of our first parents'. If it could be 'fully ascertained' that it was a reddish colour, then 'this would remove many difficulties; for redness is so much a medium colour, that it was well adapted for the descendants of our first parents to have commenced their migrations with'.¹²

Unsurprisingly, the identification of Adam as reddish or copper-coloured held out another kind of significance for native Amerindians. The link with Adam was seized upon by William Apess (1798–1839), a part-Pequot. Apess grew up in hardship, and was indentured for a while to white families. He then converted to Christianity and eventually became a Methodist minister. Apess had a keen sense from his own upbringing of the subordinate status of his own people, and supported campaigns to gain recognition for Amerindian rights. In his writings he also tried to boost native American self-worth and dignity. In *A son of the forest*, Apess boasted of the racial connection between Amerindians and Adam: 'I humbly conceive that the natives of this country are the only people under heaven who have a just title to the name, inasmuch as we are the only people who retain the original complexion of our father Adam.' Reinforcing this point, Apess also took the line that the native peoples of North America were of Semitic stock, being descended from the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel. Hence, it seemed unsurprising to Apess that Amerindians might more closely resemble the original Adamic appearance than Europeans, who were more distantly related, he believed, to the original Semitic line.¹³

This identification also held some appeal for black writers, who saw an opportunity here to undermine white pretensions. In his *Principia of ethnology* (1879), the black American writer Martin Delany also argued that Adam had been of a reddish complexion:

It is, we believe, generally admitted among linguists, that the Hebrew word Adam (ahdam) signifies red – dark-red as some scholars have it. And it is, we believe, a well-settled admission, that the name of the Original Man was taken from his complexion. On this hypothesis, we accept and believe that the original man was Adam, and his complexion to have been clay color or yellow, more resembling that of the lightest of the pure-blooded North American Indians. And that the peoples from Adam to Noah, including his wife and sons' wives, were all of one and the same color, there is to our mind no doubt.¹⁴

This position – that neither white nor black was the natural or aboriginal colour of mankind – was not uncommon among black writers.

However, another, more promising option was also open to black writers. In the medical science of the Enlightenment era, there had also sprung up another intellectually respectable tradition, which reasoned that the first man had been black. The celebrated Scottish doctor John Hunter (1728–93) took the line that modifications of colour in the natural world were ‘always ... from the dark to the lighter tints’. Hunter speculated whether where there were ‘specimens of a particular kind, entirely black, the whole have been originally black’. Looking at humanity, Hunter noted that few people were ‘perfectly white’. Hunter redefined the ‘fair man or woman’ in strict terms as ‘a spotted or variegated animal’.¹⁵ Behind such generalised and discursive comments about racial colouring in mankind lurked the controversial – if not quite heretical – probability of a black Adam.

A version of this line was adopted by James Cowles Prichard, mentioned above, the leading figure in British ethnology during the first half of the nineteenth century and a stout defender of monogenesis. Prichard detected three varieties of colour in man – melanic, albino and xanthous. He went on to argue that the ‘melanic’ – or black – was the ‘complexion generally prevalent’ among most of mankind, and that ‘it may be looked upon as the natural and original complexion of the human species’. Prichard made much of the phenomenon of white negroes. He also claimed that the xanthous – or yellow – variety springs up out of every melanic race. Whiteness and yellowness were offshoots of an aboriginal blackness. The implication was clear to his readers, though he did not spell it out: Adam had been black.¹⁶

Indeed, by the mid-nineteenth century the idea of a coloured Adam had become less distasteful to scientists worried by the need to reconcile scripture with the science of racial diversity. The Scottish Free Churchman, geologist and journalist Hugh Miller (1802–56) concluded that Adam must have stood somewhere among the many intermediate types found between the two racial extremes – according to Miller, the Goth and the Negro. If Adam – or indeed Noah – had been of ‘the mingled negroid and Caucasian type – and who shall say they were not? – neither the Goth nor the negro would be so extreme a variety of the species as to be beyond the power of natural causes to produce’.¹⁷

But there was another less conventional solution. Examining the evidence drawn both from scripture and from the sciences, the American scientist Alexander Winchell concluded that, if Adam had been the father of all humanity, then he had not been white. On the other hand, Winchell believed it more likely that Adam had been merely the parent of

the white race alone, a race preceded by pre-Adamite races of other hues. Thus, a way was found of securing the whiteness of Adam, though at the cost of downgrading him from his conventional status as the father of all humanity.¹⁸

WAS CAIN BLACK? WHICH RACE DID HE ENCOUNTER IN THE LAND OF NOD?

The curious story of Cain in Genesis provides a number of riddles surrounding the issues of race and the origins of mankind. Cain is now generally remembered by the public at large as the first murderer. The outline of the story ran as follows. Having been informed by God that his offering of corn to God was less acceptable to the Deity than Abel’s sacrifice of sheep, Cain got into a quarrel with his brother Abel and then killed him. However, there are other aspects of the Cain narrative which have puzzled generations of interpreters. After his crime, Cain was cast out as a fugitive to wander the earth, and he was somehow marked by God, apparently for Cain’s own protection. In the words of Genesis 4:15 – ‘And the Lord set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him.’ What was the mark of Cain? Was it, as some racial commentators believed, blackness? However, the mystery deepens – more puzzling still were the verses which followed:

And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden. And Cain knew his wife; and she conceived, and bare Enoch: and he builded a city, and called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch. (Genesis 4:16–17)

Having been cast out from the family of Adam and Eve, whom did Cain marry and which people did he recruit to follow him and to help him build the city of Enoch? Was the land of Nod, perhaps, already populated? Were any races Cain encountered there descended from someone other than Adam? Or did Cain commit incest by marrying one of his sisters? John Painter, for example, concluded that Adam’s thirty-three sons and twenty-three daughters (a traditional reckoning of Adam’s progeny) had intermarried with one another; but that, in the circumstances of the time, this had not been a sin: ‘The sons of Adam must have married their sisters and nieces, and the second generation their first cousins: in marrying thus they committed no wickedness, seeing that it was a case of necessity.’¹⁹ Other commentators were much less sanguine

about the probability that incest was intrinsic to the biblical history of man. Morally, the best solution seemed to be some form of exogamy.

However, the alternative to a story of sin was a narrative encompassing something even more horrific – heresy, in particular the belief that there had existed pre-Adamites, men before Adam, a separately created race unmentioned in Genesis. This solution threatened to undermine the essential logic of the scriptures which told of man's Fall in Adam, the biological transmission of original sin to his descendants and then Christ's redemption of mankind on the cross. However, the rise of biblical criticism in the nineteenth century – damaging as it was to certain conventional understandings of the Bible – suggested a solution to the puzzle of Cain's marriage. Now Old Testament scholars came to recognise that there were two separate accounts of the creation of man in the first and second chapters of Genesis. While the mainstream of biblical critics took the view that these were different accounts of the same supposed event drawn from multiple sources, some orthodox literalists saw the possibility that these creation accounts might refer to two distinct, indeed historically separate, creation processes – first of the pre-Adamites, described in the first chapter of Genesis, and then of an Adamite race, detailed in the following chapter. There was, moreover, the further riddle of how to interpret the sixth chapter of Genesis. According to Genesis 6:2, after the gradual multiplication of peoples on earth, the 'sons of God' had intermarried with 'the daughters of men'. Did the 'sons of God' and 'daughters of men' refer to distinct pre-Adamite and Adamite races? In addition, Genesis 6:4 pointed out that there were 'giants in the earth in those days'. Might the existence of these different races of 'sons of God', 'daughters of men' and 'giants' provide a watertight solution to the puzzle of Cain's marriage? Cain had not committed incest and it was not necessary to advocate heresy in order to evade that conclusion, for polygenesis, however long overlooked, was implicit in the scriptures themselves.²⁰

For many commentators, the mark of Cain also portended a more particular racial significance. Some, such as the author of *Clearer light*, an anonymous English tract of 1874 which dealt, among other things, with the problem of race in the scriptures, claimed that Cain was the primal ancestor of all black people: the mark upon Cain should be read as a racial transformation which included changes to the texture of his hair and the blackening of his skin. This author also maintained that at this time Adam and Eve had no other surviving children but, even if there had been, it would have been extremely unlikely that Cain had gone on to

marry any of his sisters, not least because they would have been reluctant to marry their brother's murderer. Therefore the compelling conclusion was that there had been two distinct racial creations of mankind, one distinct from Adam and Eve into whose body Cain had married. Indeed, *Clearer light* proposed that the early Bible history of mankind told the story of three distinct races: the white race whose creation was mentioned in Genesis 1:27; the descendants of Adam and Eve (excluding Cain who now bore his mark) who were 'red or copper-coloured, resembling the Asiatic nations'; and the black negroid descendants of Cain.²¹ By contrast, John Overton (1764–1838), the English genealogist of Christ, had identified Cain as the father of the Chinese race, a people whose very high antiquity suggested that in their east Asian remoteness they had escaped the Deluge which had engulfed the rest of the known world in the age of Noah.²² This line persisted later in the nineteenth century in the influential work of Dominick McCausland.²³

Champions of black pride transformed the curse of Cain. Surely white was the mark of evil? In particular, the black nationalist leader Marcus Garvey (1887–1940) inverted the white racist version of the mark of Cain. Garvey argued that Adam and Eve had been black as had their sons Cain and Abel. The subsequent whiteness of Cain and his descendants – down to modern Europeans – was a punishment for sin: 'When Cain slew Abel and God appeared to ask for his brother he was so shocked that he turned white, being the affliction of leprosy and as such, he became the progenitor of a new race out of double sin. The white man is Cain transformed, hence his career of murder from Cain to Mussolini.'²⁴

WERE NOAH AND HIS SONS THE FOUNDERS OF THE GREAT RACIAL DIVISIONS OF MANKIND?

The Bible does not tell us what Noah looked like. However, in the non-canonical Apocrypha the Book of Enoch appears to describe Noah as an albino. Recording the birth of Noah the son of Lamech (106:10), it stated that 'the colour of his body is white as snow ... and the hair of his head is whiter than white wool'. Disregarding the Book of Enoch and the lack of any account in Genesis of Noah's racial characteristics or the details of his movements after the Flood, some scholars began to speculate that Noah had ended up in China, where he was remembered under another name as Fohi, the founding father of Chinese civilisation.

The identification of Fohi as Noah helped to resolve one of the trickiest areas of early modern apologetics, the difficulty encountered in

synchronising sacred history with the high antiquity of Chinese civilisation. This generated not only a complex mathematical calculation, but also posed an acutely pressing problem for Christian chronology. How could China's great antiquity be reconciled with the orthodox position that the earth had been created around about 4000 BC? There was scope to fudge the issue. Although Archbishop Ussher (1581–1656) famously dated the Creation with some precision to 23 October 4004 BC, chronological orthodoxy permitted a bit of leeway.²⁵ As a result, there developed a line of argument that Noah himself had very promptly settled China in the immediate aftermath of the Flood. Samuel Shuckford (d. 1754), in his *Sacred and profane history of the world* (1728–37) rebutted the explosive claim that Chinese history was older than the Mosaic past, by claiming that Fohi, the first king of China, had lived about the time of Noah around 2952 BC and indeed was a corrupted memory of Noah himself. Shuckford found confirmation of this in Chinese associations of Fohi with a rainbow, which had featured prominently in the Bible story of the Flood, and in the Chinese boast that Fohi had been parentless, a rendering of the notion, according to Shuckford, that Noah had been 'the first man in the post-diluvian world'. Although now obscure, Shuckford's work long enjoyed some wide influence among scholars, going through at least eight editions in Britain and the United States up to 1858.²⁶ In a similar vein, Simon Berington argued that it was not clear just where Ararat was and went on to speculate that the Ark might have come to rest in central Asia; while many of Noah's descendants had travelled west, Berington believed that Noah himself had gone to the East where he had established many of the excellences in government and culture of Chinese civilisation. Indeed, Berington contended that the utter distinctiveness of the Chinese language, which sounded 'more like the pipping of young turkeys, than a human speech', rendered it likely that it had been the primeval language belonging to those eastern descendants of Noah who had avoided the confusion of tongues at Babel.²⁷ This identification of a Chinese Noah finds an echo in the medical researches of the eighteenth-century Virginian doctor, John Mitchell, who reckoned that Noah and his sons had been 'of a complexion suitable to the climate where they resided' and had therefore been of 'a dark swarthy, a medium betwixt black and white', the colour of 'the southern Tartars of Asia, or northern Chinese'.²⁸

Nevertheless, the sons of Noah presented a much more significant problem than the identity of Noah himself. Ham, Shem and Japhet were traditionally considered to be the fathers of the different divisions of

mankind, Ham of the Africans, Shem of the Hebrews, Japhet of the Europeans. Did the progeny of Noah look different, and if so why? So influential were scriptural readings of racial difference that even those scientists who wished to treat the subject of race in a naturalistic manner, detached from its biblical moorings, would long find it necessary to do battle on theological terrain. During the Enlightenment, the sceptical French biologist Claude-Nicolas Le Cat (1700–68) argued that the racial myth of the three sons of Noah – 'l'un étoit blanc, le second basané, et le troisième noir' – had been formulated in a culture unaware of the existence of the 'Red Indians' of the New World; otherwise the Book of Genesis would have told the story of the four sons of Noah. Nevertheless, Le Cat doubted whether even this number of sons was requisite to explain the wide range of colour types found across the earth:

Les auteurs de cette tradition – là ne sçavoient pas qu'il y avoit une quatrième race d'hommes couleur de cuivre, car ils auroient assurément donné à Noé quatre fils, dont chacun auroit été d'une de ces couleurs; et j'ai lieu de craindre encore que ces quatre frères n'eussent pas suffi à fournir toutes les espèces d'hommes reconnues sur la surface de la terre.

Indeed, Le Cat concluded, even if the number of Noah's sons had matched the number of racial colourings found in the world, then this still left the further puzzle, of how if Noah and his wife had been white – as tradition had it – they had produced offspring of different races: 'comment de Noé et de sa femme, qui étoit blancs, ont pu naître tous ces enfans de diverses couleurs'.²⁹

The nineteenth-century American ethnologist Josiah Priest (1788–1851) took a curious – but, as we shall see, ultimately sinister – line on the providential emergence of racial divisions. Priest believed that Noah, like his ultimate ancestor, Adam, had been reddish in complexion. From the reddish race there had emerged white and black variants. However, these had not arisen as a result of gradual, natural changes, but by way of two sudden heavenly interruptions of the course of nature. Priest argued that God had intervened 'in an extraordinary and supernatural manner' to alter the skin colour of two of the babies of Noah's wife while they were still in the womb. God had given to these two sons – Ham and Japhet – 'such forms of bodies, constitutions of natures, and complexions of skin, as suited his will'. As a result, Japhet was born white, and Ham was born black. Priest was a convinced anti-abolitionist and his theory of the miraculous changes which had been wrought upon the embryonic Ham

in particular was designed to refute the abolitionist notion that 'in the veins of Adam, the first man and great father of all mankind, the blood of the negro race, as well as the blood of the other races, flowed free and full'. If the abolitionists were right, then this seemed to justify the equality of races. However, Priest insisted that there was 'never any negro blood in the veins of Adam'. 'Negro blood' had been created specially by divine intervention in the embryonic Ham, on account of which Ham had been 'born a negro with all the physical, moral, and constitutional traits, which mark and distinguish that race of men from the other two races'. So far so good for the racialist Priest; but, to his alarm, he was nearly hoist on his own petard. By Priest's own reasoning, the Adamic line which passed through Shem was reddish in colour, which carried the further implication that Christ had therefore come of copper-coloured stock. Priest was adamant that the 'Saviour of mankind, though born of a Jewish copper colored woman, was nevertheless a white man'. Christ, Priest insisted, had been of a 'bright, fair complexion', with hair of a 'yellow or golden color', eyes of a 'hazel or blue cast' and with a forehead which was 'high, smooth and broad'. Christ's racial identity – as we shall see below – constituted another critical issue for Christian ethnologists, but one which was not always easily reconciled with the racial science of the Old Testament.³⁰

The identification of the Noachids with the division of races came to be adopted by other cultures when they came into contact with Christianity. India provides a fascinating example of the encounter of Old Testament templates and the indigenous imagination. British scholars in India sought to reconcile Indian religion with sacred history, on the assumption that the mythologies of other cultures were misremembered or corrupted versions of the shared early history of mankind found in the first eleven books of Genesis. Their Indian amanuenses were encouraged to look out for parallels between the legends of Indian antiquity and the early part of the Old Testament. This had some unfortunate results, as in the case of Francis Wilford (1761?–1822). An apparently serendipitous Orientalist, Wilford found himself deceived by an all-too-helpful pandit who had interpolated a Noah-figure, Sayavarman, and his three sons S'arma (Shem), Kharma (Ham) and Jyapati (Japhet) into a manuscript of the Padma Purana.³¹

On the other hand, in nineteenth-century New Zealand the Maori assimilated this tripartite division of the races of the world and used it for their own purposes. The earth, they noted, had been peopled by the descendants of Taapeta (Japhet), Heema (Shem) and Hama (Ham).

Maori patriots insisted upon their ethnic origins in the noble lineage of Shem, identifying themselves closely with ancient Israel; by contrast they located the *pakeha*, or whites, as the offspring of Japhet. Moreover, the Maori also went on to fashion pedigrees for their native aristocracies out of the genealogies of prophets found in the Old Testament.³²

DID THE CURSE UPON HAM TURN HIM AND HIS POSTERITY BLACK?

One element in the story of Noah and his sons drew particular attention from writers on racial topics. In the ninth book of Genesis is the curious tale of how Noah planted a vineyard, drank of the wine it yielded and, drunk, collapsed in his tents, his garments awry, thus accidentally exposing himself. Ham chanced upon his father in this state and gossiped about Noah's nakedness to his brothers, Shem and Japhet, who loyally covered up their father. When Noah realised what had happened, he was angry with Ham and pronounced an anathema on Ham's lineage, or to be more exact, on the line of Ham's son Canaan:

Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren.

And he said, Blessed be the Lord God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant. God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant.
(Genesis 9:25–7)

This passage appeared to justify race slavery, for the line of Ham was associated with Africa, and the passage seemed to indicate that at least some of Ham's descendants through Canaan were condemned by this patriarchal curse to be the servants of the lighter-skinned descendants of Shem and Japhet.

The curse of Ham managed to hold its own alongside naturalistic explanations of colour during the age of Enlightenment. James Boswell (1740–95) in his *Life of Johnson* (1791) records a lively discussion at Clifton's eating-house in Butcher-row on Saturday, 25 June 1763:

Johnson and an Irish gentleman got into a dispute concerning the cause of some part of mankind being black. 'Why, Sir, (said Johnson), it has been accounted for in three ways: either by supposing that they were the posterity of Ham, who was cursed; or that God at first created two kinds of men, one black and another white; or that by the heat of the sun the skin is scorched, and so acquires a sooty hue. This matter has been canvassed among naturalists, but has never been brought to any certain issue.'³³

In 'The Ordination', the Scots poet Robert Burns (1759–96) encapsulates the story of Ham in a couplet describing a well-known biblical text to be expounded from a Scots Presbyterian pulpit:

How graceless Ham leugh at his Dad,
Which made Canaan a niger.³⁴

Despite the insensitive frivolity of Burns's tone, the story of Ham had immense staying power and was put to very serious and sinister ends.

Some theologians questioned folkloric misunderstanding of the significance of the curse. In *Negro slavery unjustifiable* (1804), the Reformed Presbyterian pastor of New York city and uncompromising opponent of slavery, the Reverend Alexander McLeod, exposed the fragile chain of logic upon which apologists for slavery depended when they invoked the curse upon Ham's son Canaan:

In order to justify Negro slavery from this prophecy, it will be necessary to prove four things, 1. That all the posterity of Canaan were to suffer slavery. 2. That African Negroes are really descended of Canaan. 3. That each of the descendants of Shem and Japheth has a moral right to reduce any of them to servitude. 4. That every slaveholder is really descended from Shem or Japheth. Want of proof in any of these particulars will invalidate the whole objection.³⁵

Nevertheless, such a precise reading tended to have less impact than the conventional misreading of the curse. According to Thomas Peterson, the story of Ham was 'certainly among the most popular defenses of slavery, if not the most popular' in the American South in the decades before the American Civil War.³⁶

The legend of the curse of Ham remained a vital influence on racial attitudes into the twentieth century. In apartheid South Africa theologians of the Dutch Reformed Church – the church of 42 per cent of the white population of South Africa – still felt the need to pronounce on the question of the curse of Ham. The significance of the curse upon Ham featured in *Human relations and the South African scene in the light of scripture*, an authoritative report approved by the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church in October 1974. The curse, the report noted, was limited to Canaan and was 'later fulfilled in that the Canaanites became servants of the Israelites'. There was, the report pointed out firmly, 'no scriptural foundation on which the subordinate position of some present-day peoples, which is the result of all sorts of historical and cultural factors, can be related to the curse on Canaan'. However,

notwithstanding this non-racialist reading of the story of Ham, the Dutch Reformed Church did not reject the authority of the book of Genesis for modern-day society. Instead it found justification for separate development in the story of the Tower of Babel. The true message of the Babel story, according to the church, lay in the unspiritual and arrogant assumption of early mankind that its destiny lay in a united body of humanity which spoke a single language, as described in Genesis 11:6. God's punishment, the confounding of languages and the scattering of peoples across the globe, was a welcome corrective, which highlighted man's true destiny in a providentially ordered pluralism, a world of separate nations and communities.³⁷

DID MOSES PROVIDE A PRECEDENT FOR MISCEGENATION?

Behind white America's fear of the black male there lurked an abhorrence of miscegenation. However, on this particular point scripture presented some problems for racialists, for the Bible itself appeared to endorse miscegenation. In Numbers 12:1 the scriptures seemed to describe the marriage of Moses to a black African woman: 'And Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married: for he had married an Ethiopian woman.'

Discussion of the racial significance – or rather racial insignificance – of this passage had a long pedigree. The seventeenth-century English scholar and physician Sir Thomas Browne (1605–82) thought that the description of Moses' wife as an Ethiopian was somewhat misleading: 'the wife of Moses translated in scripture an Ethiopian, and so confirmed by the fabulous relation of Josephus, was none of the daughters of Africa, nor any Negro of Ethiopia, but the daughter of Jethro, prince and priest of Madian, which was a part of Arabia the stony, bordering upon the Red Sea'. Richard Kidder (1633–1703), an Anglican cleric working along parallel tracks, claimed that Miriam and Aaron's complaints did not concern race per se. Rather the issue at hand was the fact that Moses 'had married a stranger, and not one of the stock of Israel'. Thomas Stackhouse (1677–1752) in his *New history of the Holy Bible* (1733) noted the quarrel between Moses and his siblings over his marriage. Inter-racial marriage, however, did not seem to be the prime cause of concern. Was the bride of Moses really black? Did the term 'Ethiopian' strictly denote someone of Negroid complexion? Stackhouse thought not. He read the passage to mean that Moses had married an 'Ethiopian, or rather Arabian woman', and did not suggest that the cause of the quarrel was the issue of

race, but rather a religious question of whether it was appropriate for Moses to marry into an idolatrous nation.³⁸

Race loomed larger for later centuries. Opponents of exclusively white Caucasian interpretations of scripture sometimes pointed to Moses' intermarriage with another race as evidence of the anti-racial message of scripture. For instance, the Reverend J. B. Clifford of Bristol denounced the racialist interpretations of scripture which had become so pronounced during the last third of the nineteenth century. To confound racialists, Clifford claimed that the Bible itself provided numerous examples of racial intermixture, including most spectacularly the case of Moses who 'married an Ethiopian woman, descended from Ham'. The anti-racialist Clifford took tremendous comfort from such examples of ethnic intermarriage: it was 'as if God would pour contempt on all the pride of national genealogy and ancestry; and reiterate by facts, as well as by words, that Christ is the Seed, in whom alone all the nations of the earth are to be blessed'.³⁹ Even the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa in its report of 1974 conceded that Moses had in fact married a black woman. The marriage was 'obviously between persons of different racial origin'. Indeed, these scrupulous literalists conceded that scripture does not in fact pronounce against mixed marriages.⁴⁰

By contrast, some racists resorted to awkward casuistry in the face of Moses' marriage. Josiah Priest, an American critic of abolition and, of course, of miscegenation, produced the argument that Moses had contracted his marriage to the Ethiopian woman in ignorance of God's will, as the marriage had taken place about forty years before the law had been given to Moses at Mount Sinai, which placed a divine ban upon racial intermarriage. On the other hand, the leading Southern clergyman, the Belfast-born Presbyterian Dr Thomas Smyth (1808–73) of Charleston, argued of the Midianites 'from whom Moses selected his wife' that they 'could not have been negroes'.⁴¹

While some black theologians now take pride in the fact that Moses married a Cushite, other black nationalist commentators – particularly those who dislike racial integration as much as white racialists – question whether Moses himself had been white and whether his marriage had indeed been across racial lines. A racially ambiguous Moses, or Musa, features prominently in the doctrines inherited by the black nationalist religion, Nation of Islam. Fard Muhammad, whose teachings inspired Nation of Islam, identified Moses, or Musa, as a mulatto prophet sent by Allah to assist in the civilising of the barbaric white race.⁴² The influential black nationalist minister Albert Cleage (1911–2000) also advanced the

line that the marriage of Moses to the Midianite was the uncomplicated union of two blacks, Moses being the leader of the ancient black nation of Israel and, in Cleage's words, 'unquestionably all non-white'. Indeed, Cleage turned the whole notion of Mosaic miscegenation on its head. The marriage of Moses was evidence of black Israelite separatism: even when marrying out of the immediate ethnic group, the nation of Israel had deliberately avoided contact with white people.⁴³

WHICH RACE CONSTITUTES THE SURVIVING REMNANT OF THE LOST TRIBES OF ISRAEL?

Perhaps the most influential of all the racial puzzles drawn from the Bible which have surfaced in the cultural and scholarly traditions of the West concerns the search for the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel.⁴⁴ The Old Testament records twelve original tribes in the Jewish nation, associated with the various sons of the patriarch Jacob: the tribes of Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zebulun, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Judah, Benjamin and Joseph. The distribution of the tribes was somewhat complicated. The Levites, who functioned as a hereditary priesthood, were diffused among the other tribes, while the tribe of Joseph was split into two, the tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim. Furthermore, the tribes did not comprise a single political unit, but were divided into two distinct Jewish kingdoms. The southern kingdom of Judah included the tribes of Judah and Simeon and most of the tribe of Benjamin, while the northern kingdom of Israel was composed of the ten remaining tribes, including Ephraim and Manasseh. Between 732 BC and 721 BC, the Assyrians invaded the northern kingdom of Israel, and the ten northern tribes were removed to the lands of Assyria and Media.

Where had the Ten Lost Tribes gone? Which modern-day communities, wondered theologians, constituted the descendants of the Ten Lost Tribes? The quest was significant, for the Bible identified the Lost Tribes as the future beneficiaries of certain divine promises and blessings. The Apocrypha appeared to offer a clue as to the location of the Lost Tribes. In II Esdras 13:40–6 it was recorded that the Lost Tribes had sought security in a remote inhospitable land far beyond the narrow passages of the Euphrates river:

these are the ten tribes who were taken captive from their land in the days of King Hoshea, whom Shalmaneser, the king of the Assyrians, led away into captivity and transported them across the river; thus it was that they transferred

into another land. But they decided to leave the multitude of peoples and proceed to a more remote region where no human species ever lived, and there perhaps observe their ordinances which they did not observe in their land. So, when they passed through the narrow entrances of the Euphrates River, the Most High performed miracles for them and held back the courses of the river until they had crossed over. The way through that country, which is called Arzareth, required a long trek of a year and a half. Since they have lived there . . .

A number of commentators suspected that the Ten Lost Tribes were to be found in the remoteness of Afghanistan, or in adjacent areas.⁴⁵ However, another influential strain of literature appeared during the early modern period, which identified the native American peoples of the New World as the Lost Tribes of Israel.⁴⁶ The myth of the Lost Tribes of Israel has in fact enjoyed a global resonance. Almost every culture or ethnic group on the planet has put forward some claim or other to be the genuine descendants of the Ten Lost Tribes.⁴⁷ In the mid-nineteenth century, the bizarre ideology of the British Israelites gained ground and became firmly entrenched in Protestant religious culture on both sides of the Atlantic. This was the notion that the Anglo-Saxon peoples of Britain and North America were the descendants of the Ten Lost Tribes and, more significantly, the heirs of the prophecies associated with the tribes. Thus the story of the Lost Tribes provided a justification for racial empire: it was foretold in scripture; therefore, it was argued, it was divinely sanctioned.⁴⁸

Even more pernicious, of course, and offensive to Jewish people, was the idea that various non-Judaic peoples were true descendants of ancient Israelites and that modern Jewry was somehow of less importance in the divine dispensation. The scholarly quest for the Ten Lost Tribes displayed at different times and in different hands various combinations of genuine philo-Semitism and anti-Semitism, but at all times manifested an insensitivity towards contemporary Judaism. Eventually, the twentieth-century heirs of the British Israelites, the Christian Identity movement in North America, would exploit the puzzle of the Ten Lost Tribes to justify an openly anti-Semitic and virulently racist agenda.⁴⁹

WAS JESUS WHITE OR BLACK?

The central figure in the New Testament, God's son, Jesus Christ, partakes both of a divine and a human nature, his human incarnation encouraging – and, to some extent, legitimising – speculation about his racial features. However, the Bible itself is silent on this question. The Bible does not describe Christ's physical appearance. Nevertheless, in a sense, most people seem

to have a fixed mental image of what Christ looked like, which draws on depictions of Christ within the western tradition in art and, even more influentially today, on Hollywood depictions of Jesus on the screen. These various images – both artistic and cinematic – usually conform to a stereotype, but one ungrounded in any serious research on the historical Jesus or the ethnology of New Testament Palestine. Our image is, by definition, a bogus one, received second- or third-hand from a spurious, but resilient, canon of images. According to William Telford, 'The canonical Gospels do not tell us what Jesus looked like and so filmmakers . . . have been dependent on a secondary imagined, one might even say specious misrepresentation of Jesus in art and painting.' What art has bequeathed Hollywood is 'the icon of the blond, bearded, long-haired, blue-eyed, white-robed Aryan'. This image became standard in motion pictures from Cecil B. DeMille's *The King of Kings* (1927). Sometimes Jesus is literally Nordic, as in Max von Sydow's portrayal of Christ in George Stevens's film, *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1965). Even in Martin Scorsese's otherwise controversial motion picture, *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988), Christ is still played by a very European-looking Willem Dafoe. Hence the shock value – for a mainstream white audience, at least – of a truly subversive film such as *Dogma* (1999), the work of a provocative Roman Catholic writer-director, Kevin Smith, which suggests that Christ was black and that this fact has been obscured by the dominant white cultural tradition.⁵⁰

Christ's racial identity became a matter of some import for modern American racists. The American anthropologist and champion of the Nordic race Madison Grant (1865–1937) read racial significance into traditional European depictions of Christ: 'In depicting the crucifixion no artist hesitates to make the two thieves brunet in contrast to the blond Saviour. This is something more than a convention, as such quasi-authentic traditions as we have of the Lord strongly suggest his Nordic, possibly Greek, physical and moral attributes.'⁵¹ However, for the mid-nineteenth-century American defender of race slavery Buckner Payne (1799–1883), it was not enough simply to prove that Christ had been white, but to show that 'the Saviour of the world was of a white slave-holding nation'.⁵²

Numerous challenges have been made to the dominant assumption of a white Christ. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, British Orientalists turned to Indian antiquities in the hope of finding there some independent verification of the revealed truths of the Judeo-Christian tradition. The credulous Francis Wilford appeared to have

alighted upon a Hindu folk memory of Christ when he encountered the tale of Salivahana, the son of a virgin, who had been crucified on a Y-shape plough.⁵³ But might Indian corroboration of the gospel not turn out on closer inspection to be a more damaging Hindu Ur-narrative from which the story of Christ was itself derivative? One English theologian did contemplate a Christ of various racial hues, black and white and yellow. The Reverend J. B. S. Carwithen (1781–1832) in *A view of the Brahminical religion and its confirmation of the truth of the sacred history* (1810) kept an open mind concerning the claims of both Christianity and Hinduism to ‘an origin equally divine’. Carwithen went on to raise the possibility ‘that Christ, the only-begotten of the Father, has probably appeared, at different periods of time, in different parts of the world, under various denominations, and in different forms of humanity’.⁵⁴ However, some other scholars began not only to trace the origins of the Christ story in Indian antiquity and legend, but also to draw out the racial implications of an Indian prototype Christ. One of the first scholars to suggest that Christ had not been white was the eccentric English Orientalist Godfrey Higgins (1773–1833). In *Anacalypsis* (1836), Higgins suggested that Christ was a distorted folk memory of a more ancient eastern deity representative of solar power. Christ was a derivative of ‘Cristna’, later ‘Krishna’, the god of a black race in India. Proclaimed Higgins, ‘The Romish Christ of Europe is the Cristna of India’, who were both in their turn, ultimately, ‘renewed incarnations of the same Being, and that Being the solar power’. Moreover, the Christ of Europe, it seemed, had inherited the dark racial features of Cristna. Higgins contended that ‘in all the Romish countries of Europe . . . the God Christ, as well as his mother, are depicted in their old pictures and statues to be black’.⁵⁵ Working along parallel lines, the American mythographer Sarah Titcomb (1841–95) claimed that depictions of Christ’s appearance owed more to ancient Aryan symbolism than to any biological reality. Christ’s reddish-blond, wavy and abundant hair constituted the symbolic representation of a sun-god.⁵⁶ Another version of such speculations surfaced in the work of the French mythographer Louis Jacolliot (1837–90), who argued that the roots of biblical Christianity were to be found much longer before in ancient India. Christianity was derivative of ancient Indian religion. The Trinity, for example, drew upon the three creative, preserving and spiritual principles found, respectively, in the principal Hindu deities Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. Christ himself was borrowed from the ancient Indian incarnated redeemer-deity Christna – also named Jezeus, meaning ‘pure divine essence’ – born of a virgin named Devanaguy.⁵⁷

Twentieth-century black America is far from convinced by white representations of a Nordic Christ. In his 1920 miscellany *Darkwater*, the black American leader and prolific writer on behalf of black causes W. E. B. DuBois (1868–1963) published a short story entitled ‘Jesus Christ in Texas’. Here a Christ – whose ‘hair hung in close curls far down the sides of his face and his face was olive, even yellow’ – puts in appearances on both sides of the racial divide in the American South. Conventional Southern racists are troubled by the presence of this mysterious figure of indeterminate race: ‘Why, the man was a mulatto, surely; even if he did not own the Negro blood, their practised eyes knew it.’⁵⁸ In 1929 another black writer, Countee Cullen (1903–46), published a volume of poetry in which the central piece was ‘The Black Christ’.⁵⁹

Much more explicit was George Alexander McGuire (1866–1934), a disillusioned black Episcopalian priest who became active within Marcus Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association and primate of the related African Orthodox Church. In a sermon at the UNIA convention in 1924, Bishop McGuire rejected the traditional image of the Caucasian Christ:

If God be our Father, and we bear His image and likeness, why should we not teach our children that their Father in Heaven resembles them even as they do Him? Why should we permit the Caucasians to constantly and indelibly impress upon their youthful minds that God is white? Why should not this race, which bore the Cross of the Man of Sorrows up Mount Calvary and has borne it ever since, not claim Him as their own, since He carried in His veins the blood of Ham as well as the blood of them?

McGuire argued that ‘at least two’ of Christ’s forebears were of ‘Hamitic descent’, Tamay, the mother of Phares (who was the son of Judah) and Rahab, the mother of Boaz (who was the great-grandfather of David). Jesus Christ, so McGuire’s argument ran, was a lineal descendant of both Phares and Boaz, each of whom had Hamitic – and presumably black – ancestors. Mary, the mother of Christ, was of this same lineage herself. McGuire urged those responsible for mediating images of the Madonna to be true to her ethnic roots, as McGuire interpreted them: ‘When, therefore, our Negro artists, with brush, chisel or otherwise, portray the Madonna for their race, let them be loyal to truth, and present the Blessed Virgin Mother and her Most Holy Child in such manner as to reveal both the Hamitic and Semitic blends.’ But theology, it seemed to McGuire, remained silent on the great issues of race. He proclaimed that had Christ lived in the American South of McGuire’s own era Jesus

would have been a victim of its vile code of racial discrimination, a subject which Christianity tended to skirt around: 'If the Man of Sorrows lived today in Dixie with his pedigree known as it is, the color line would be drawn against Him. Why may we not write the facts down in our theology?'⁶⁰

The mainstream Christian position that Christ's racial background is irrelevant in the light of Christ's universal colour-blind message did not go far enough for champions of the black Christ. The most influential proponent of black liberation theology, Professor James H. Cone, rudely dismissed the anxious liberal cry that 'surely Christ is above race' as a species of white liberalism which would only serve to perpetuate the ugly racist legend of a white Christ:

White liberal preference for a raceless Christ serves only to make official and orthodox the centuries-old portrayal of Christ as white. The 'raceless' American Christ has a light skin, wavy brown hair, and sometimes – wonder of wonders – blue eyes. For whites to find him with big lips and kinky hair is as offensive as it was for the Pharisees to find him parrying with tax-collectors. But whether whites want to hear it or not, *Christ is black, baby*, with all of the features which are so detestable to white society.⁶¹

Cone has been a powerful voice in the campaign to rid theology of its unconscious as well as conscious racial assumptions. Ultimately, however, for Cone, Christ's blackness stands as a metaphor for Christ's identification with the oppressed of the earth. Other leading proponents of black theology, such as Albert Cleage, the author of *The black Messiah* (1968), were more explicit, and took the view that Jesus Christ was quite literally black. Cleage, indeed, insisted that Jesus was black and the leader of a revolutionary movement against white Roman oppression.⁶²

WAS JESUS ARYAN OR SEMITIC?

Quite apart from the question of Christ's colour, there has been considerable speculation, not least from anti-Semites, about Christ's ethnic background. Some anti-Semitic Christians have found it hard to reconcile their religious commitment to Christianity with the notion that Jesus Christ was Jewish. For most people the insensitive, but unthinking, message of art and film that Jesus is white may have some subliminal influence on their racial attitudes; but, in general, it does not turn them into full-blown racists. On the other hand, as we shall see, the coincidence of the rise of racial anthropology in nineteenth-century European intellectual life alongside a shift in Christological interpretation away from a

supernatural Messiah of universal significance to the immediate and particular worldly context of the historical Jesus raised, in somewhat sinister form, the issue of Jesus' racial background.

Nowhere was this more apparent than in the German world, but the racialist reading of Christ which would emerge in late nineteenth-century Germany fed on earlier developments in France. Here the renegade former seminarian Ernest Renan (1823–92), presented in his popular *Vie de Jésus* a human and historical Jesus drained of Judaic significance,⁶³ and, more directly, Emile Burnouf (1821–1907) distanced the origins of Christianity from the distinctive characteristics of the Semitic race and suggested that Jesus' homeland of Galilee had been an Aryan region somewhat different from the rest of Semitic Palestine. Burnouf tried to reduce the phenomenon of religion to a science, but a science whose key was racial. The story of Christianity, he argued, could be understood properly only by way of an analysis of the relative proportions of conflicting Aryan and Semitic elements in its formation. Burnouf claimed that historically the Jewish community had been composed of two distinct coexisting racial elements. While the bulk of the ancient Israelite nation had been Semitic, there was a minority based north of Jerusalem, around Galilee, which was 'probably' Aryan. Burnouf attributed the Aryan character of the Christian religion in good part to the role played by the Galilee region in the earliest days of Christianity and to the fact that Christ had spent only a short time in the undoubtedly Semitic city of Jerusalem. A racial pattern also emerged, as it appeared to Burnouf, in the chequered reception of the Christian message in its earliest days. The fact that Jesus had not been Semitic helped to explain not only the fact that Christianity's 'earliest enemies were the Semites of Judaea [who] killed Jesus', but also that Aryan Greeks and Hellenised Jews in neighbouring lands had been prominent in adopting Christ's faith and in setting up the first Christian churches.⁶⁴

Under the influence of Aryan ethnology, Christian anti-Semites could console themselves that there was nothing Jewish about Jesus. Nobody did more to popularise the Aryan interpretation of Christ than Houston Stewart Chamberlain (1855–1927), a Germanophile Englishman who had assimilated to his adopted country with the zeal of the Germanophile convert; indeed he had become Wagner's son-in-law. In his major work *The foundations of the nineteenth century* (1899), Chamberlain asked directly whether Christ was a Jew by race. A crucial part of the answer concerned the composition of Galilee. Chamberlain claimed that the northern districts of Palestine had been home to aboriginal non-Israelites,

and that these peoples had kept themselves somewhat apart from the rest of the region. Moreover, he also drew attention to the transmission of 'purely Aryan blood' into Galilee by means of Phoenician and Greek migration as well as Assyrian colonisation. The result was 'a strong admixture of non-Semitic blood'. Moreover, the Galileans, it seemed, did not speak Hebrew. Chamberlain concluded that it was a strong probability, if not a near certainty, that Jesus had not been Jewish. Race mattered in this instance, as Chamberlain believed that the form of the skull within a race community determined its basic thought patterns. Chamberlain sharply contrasted the mental characteristics of the Jews and their materialistic idolatry with the imaginative superiority of the Aryan mind, and, by extension, Aryan religion. Primitive Christianity had not, as far as Chamberlain was concerned, started its long and chequered history bearing the imprint of the Jews.⁶⁵

Chamberlain's views were influential. Abroad, the American racial theorist Madison Grant claimed that 'the Jews apparently regarded Christ as, in some indefinite way, non-Jewish'.⁶⁶ At home Chamberlain's views were amplified by German biblical scholars and theologians during the first half of the twentieth century. Moreover, Christ became a totem of Aryan manliness among pro-Christian Nazi ideologues. Artur Dinter, Gauleiter of Thuringia and a bestselling writer under the acknowledged influence of Chamberlain, was emphatic on the subject of Christ's Aryanhood. Furthermore, Dietrich Klagges, a friend of Goebbels, argued that Christ had led his fellow Galileans against Jewish hegemony in the region, portraying Christ as a sturdy opponent of Judaism.⁶⁷

On the other hand, there was also a decisively pagan alternative to the Aryan reading of Christ. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries there were intimate and ideologically important connections in Germany between theories of the occult and the promotion of racial purity. Many thinkers dabbled in the occult, especially in supposedly ancient pagan mysteries which were identified as the religious worship of their Aryan ancestors. One branch of this racialist mysticism involved the debunking of Christ as a recent impostor, superimposed upon a more remote Germanic deity, Krist. Behind the supposed 'Christ', figures such as Rudolf Gorsleben and Karl Maria Wiligut identified an ancient Aryan Krist religion.⁶⁸

There were marked tensions between proponents of Aryan paganism and Aryan Christianity. Indeed, the Nazi ascendancy marked a potential crisis for even the most racist German Christians, for there was no clear Nazi consensus on the subject of religion. Christians were forced on to

the defensive when confronted with the claims of some leading Nazi ideologues that Christianity was quintessentially Jewish and un-German, and ought to be replaced with a pagan religion native to the German *Volks*. The alternatives were to jettison Christianity or to refurbish it as an acceptable Aryan religion. Similarly, what policy, German Christians wondered, should they adopt with regard to the Old Testament? Should it be discarded as a relic of Jewish religion or preserved as an integral feature of Aryan Christianity? Between 1939 and 1945 the Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on German Church Life, based at Eisenach in Thuringia, worked under its director, Professor Walter Grundmann, to revive an authentic Christianity purged of its alien Judaic corruptions. Grundmann published a life of Jesus in which he argued that Jesus had been a Galilean and, hence, most probably Aryan. Other scholars within the German scholarly tradition had pronounced the Galilee of Jesus' time to be either *judenrein* or Jewish only in so far as its non-Semitic inhabitants had been forced to convert to Judaism. To describe Christ as Jesus of Galilee or Jesus the Galilean was to employ a racially loaded nomenclature. Professor Susannah Heschel concludes that by this stage German New Testament scholarship was no longer simply committed to a quest for the historical Jesus but had become deeply implicated in justifications of anti-Semitism and the legitimization of Nazi ideology.⁶⁹

Adolf Hitler himself absorbed elements of the tradition of the Aryan Christ. It mattered enormously to the leader of Nazism that Christ had not come from Semitic stock. In his table talk Hitler discussed Christ's Galilean background and its ethnological significance: 'Galilee was a colony where the Romans had probably installed Gallic legionaries, and it's certain that Jesus was not a Jew. The Jews, by the way, regarded Him as the son of a whore – of a whore and a Roman soldier.' This is a reference to the legend, found in the second-century pagan philosopher Celsus and in rabbinical sources, that Christ's father had been a Gallo-Roman legionary called Panthera, or Pandera. Hitler blamed St Paul for the Semitic corruption and 'decisive falsification' of the Galilean's anti-Jewish message into a species of Judaeo-Bolshevism: 'If the Jew has succeeded in destroying the Roman Empire, that's because St Paul transformed a local movement of Aryan opposition to Jewry into a super-temporal religion, which postulates the equality of all men amongst themselves, and their obedience to an only god.'⁷⁰

At first glance some of these puzzles seem esoteric, antiquarian and the insignificant stuff of theologians' parlour games. Nevertheless, the

intimate association between German repudiations of Jesus' Jewishness and the regime responsible for the Holocaust serves as a warning that questions of racial identity, even concerning the identities of remote biblical characters, can have serious social and political consequences. The Nazi regime provides only the most obvious and obnoxious example of the ideological salience of such puzzles. The strategy of African-American leaders and writers to challenge complacent white assumptions that the Bible was peopled by white Europeans and that Jesus was of a blond, Nordic appearance has had ramifications well beyond the realm of theology in boosting black American self-confidence and political, as well as religious, activism. After all, on the other side of the racial divide, slaveholders and their apologists had utilised the curse upon Ham to justify to a Christian society the enslavement of generations of African-Americans. Even today the movement of 'white nationalist' reaction in the United States against the achievement of civil rights for blacks and what is considered to be a Jewish-controlled mainstream media draws considerable inspiration from the literature of the search for the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel.

The remit of the study which follows has been limited to Protestantism within the Atlantic world.⁷¹ The emphasis that Protestantism places on the individual's freedom to interpret scripture has generated an enormously rich literature on the question of the Bible's racial significance. Indeed, in some cases this has triggered an intense engagement with the words, logic and narrative coherence of scripture, leading interpreters into positions which were conventionally assumed to be heretical. Subjected to certain impeccably Protestant strategies of close reading, scripture appeared to yield the presence on earth of men before Adam – in the eyes of the orthodox, surely phantom pre-Adamites whose very being ran counter to the consensus of Christian tradition and whose hypothesised existence must have originated in hermeneutic error. Such findings not only posed problems for defenders of biblical authority and the systems of theology that flowed from acceptance of the scriptures, but also had an impact on the significance, relationships and genealogy of races. Moreover, on the fringes of the Protestant world, particularly in the United States, some religious groupings – as we shall see in chapter 7 – came to stake their claims to biblical truth and denominational distinctiveness on interpretations of those portions of scripture from which an ethnological or racialist message might conceivably be drawn. Both 'Protestantism' and the 'Atlantic world' have been broadly and generously defined, with

the latter not excluding, for example, British discussions of the races and religions found in its vast empire to the east in India. More controversially, perhaps, 'Protestantism' is justifiably stretched to embrace groupings whose origins (if not their primary identities) lie within Protestant culture, including, for example, Mormonism, black Hebrews and even Nation of Islam. Such a blanket definition is not intended in any way to indicate disrespect towards these religions, merely to point out the influence of a Protestant culture of hermeneutic freedom in shaping the extra-Christian fringe of religiosity, particularly in the United States. New religions coined in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries bore an imprint from the Protestant norms of the surrounding culture, as well as, in some cases, from the racial attitudes of the culture in which they emerged. It should also be stressed that, as no one scholar is now capable of mastering even the North American literature on race between 1600 and 2000, the historical investigations which follow are meant to be suggestive rather than exhaustive or comprehensive.

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CHAPTER 2

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