

Editors' Note

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The previous two issues of this journal have featured special forums commemorating the centennial of the end of World War One and the Red Scare of 1919–1920. With this issue, we return to the equally important work of publishing cutting-edge research submitted to the journal on an ad hoc basis. This issue features works exploring the complexity, importance, and dynamics of racial thinking as it intersects with politics during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era at home and aboard.

The history of race and religion after the Civil War has tended to emphasize black separatism or white supremacy. But whether as a liberatory story of black aspirations for a religious community of their own or as a cautionary tale of white oppression, racial separation in the pews was not inevitable. Indeed, in the years after the Civil War, the northern Methodist Episcopal Church sought to recruit a biracial membership in the South. They established organizations such as the Freedmen's Aid Society to recruit African Americans by building schools to train black teachers and preachers. But, as Paul W. Harris explains in his essay "Dancing with Jim Crow," these efforts at interracialism triggered an agnozing and divisive debate over the extent to which Methodists would go in the name of racial brotherhood when the Methodist-funded Chattanooga University refused to admit African Americans. Ultimately, the Methodist Church would become ensared in Jim Crow, but the debate itself, according to Harris, stands as a rebuke to American racial hypocrisy even if it failed to put the principal of racial equality into practice.

Education and religion were not the only arenas in which white liberals backed away from the ideas of racial equality in the face of entrenched opposition in the years following the Civil War. While much has been written on Southern Populism in the late nineteenth century, Bryant K. Barnes uses the attempted lynching of H. Seb Boyle to explore how the Georgia Populist Party used the "rhetoric of corruption" in their campaigns of the 1890s. Historians have emphasized the economic and social origins of the Populists in the South who often attempted to link political and economic malfeasance with fears of the racial "corruptions" of miscegenation and the rhetoric of "Negro Domination." But, as Barnes argues, this form of rhetorical white supremacy clashed with the Populist insistence on racial political equality. To advance their reform agenda, Barnes explains, Populists ultimately came to abandon biracial politics and instead joined the chores calling for greater black disfranchisement and segregation, opening the door for increasing racial violence in the turn-of-the-century South.

Race and racial thinking were never constructed in a geographical vacuum. As Lorenzo Costaguta demonstrates, it is important to understand how racialist thought developed in dialogue with the increasingly international nature of the United States in the late nineteenth century. While historians of American socialism have investigated racial attitudes within the movement, they have often done so by looking predominantly to the early twentieth century, especially 1901 to 1914. But, as Costaguta demonstrates, late nineteenth-century socialist conceptions of race were crucial to the formation of the various socialist trajectories from the Socialist Party of America to the Knights of Labor.

Drawing on a variety of sources from the 1870s and 1880s, including German language socialist newspapers, to reconstruct how the immigrant origins of many Gilded Age socialists influenced their ideas on race, Costaguta delves into the technical ideas that various socialists had about race in relation to Darwinism and other theories of human origins and evolution. Through these close readings, he teases out the relationship between racialist ideas and socialist politics and discovers that one could have retrogressive or progressive ideas about racial origins and yet pursue social politics.

Finally, Rebecca Tinio McKenna's essay reveals the transnational implications of settler colonial ideas of racial thinking and property rights in the early twentieth century. She examines the U.S. Supreme Court decisions in two land dispute cases out of northern Luzon, the largest of the Philippine Islands, to explore the connections and commensurability between U.S. frontier expansion in the North American West and the U.S. Colonial Philippines. In both cases, the Supreme Court seemingly sided with the Indigenous claims and affirmed their individual ownership of the land. But, in doing so, they drew on the history and legal basis for land dispossession in the American West. The rulings, in other words, facilitated the dispossession of Indigenous lands by allowing natives to cede their lands directly, effectively opening native lands to the private market where American investors had a decisive advantage. And these rulings would be used later to justify further dispossession of Indigenous North Americans in the mid-twentieth century. The resulting story that McKenna tells is one in which the history of colonial land dispossession flows back and forth across the Pacific, suggesting the importance of both inter- and intra-imperial approaches to colonial history.