

## Religion and Race

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# The Christian Criteria for Assimilation: Racially Reading Christianity, Civility, and Social Belonging in the Modern Western World

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**Abstract:** Recent surges of immigration in Western countries have produced statements about what successful assimilation requires. While it is commonly believed that proper assimilation in the West is rooted in shared democratic values, this article argues that beneath such values lies a Christian image of humanity, which, due to the colonial endeavor, is mostly clearly manifest by the white body. As a result of the link between whiteness, Christianity, and civility that develops within the western colonial context and persists into early twentieth-century U.S. immigration, one's spiritual state as well as one's fitness for social inclusion are judged along racial lines. By identifying this relationship, the present essay demonstrates the role that Christianity has played in the relentless, racially rooted visual distinction of those who are judged to fit within civilized society and those who are seen as a threat to the established social order.

**Keywords:** Race, Racism, Modern Racial Optic, Immigration, Blackness, Whiteness, Democratic Values, Assimilation, Politics, Visuality, imago Christi, image of Christ

Speaking at the 2010 Christian Democratic Youth Conference about the country's Turkish immigrant population, Chancellor Angela Merkel stated, "We feel bound to the Christian image of humanity, that is what defines us. Those who do not accept this are in the wrong place here."<sup>1</sup> For people thoroughly shaped by modern western sensibilities, the idea that Christian identity is integral to western social citizenship sounds antiquated. Belonging in a western democratic country is about shared ideals.<sup>2</sup> This is what former British Prime Minister David Cameron suggested at the 2011 International Conference on Security Policy.<sup>3</sup> "A genuinely liberal country... believes in certain values and actively promotes them," Cameron asserts. "Freedom... democracy, the rule of law, equal rights.... It says to its citizens, this is what defines us as a society: to belong here is to believe in these things."<sup>4</sup> According to Cameron, liberal societies are marked by their belief in democratic values; these values bind a society together and define its citizen. Social belonging in the West requires assent to such ideals.

In the wake of the nationalistic, anti-immigrant sentiment articulated around the British Referendum to exit the European Union, it is clear that social belonging is not as simple as Cameron suggests. While

1 Merkel, Paper presented at The Christian Democratic Union Youth Congress, Potsdam, August 16, 2010.

2 In the Park and Burgess classic, *Introduction to the Science of Sociology* (1921), the concept of shared values is presented as one of society's binding agents. Park and Burgess, *Introduction to the Science of Sociology*.

3 Former British Home Secretary David Blunkett made a similar claim in 2001. See Blunkett, "Full Text of David Blunkett's Speech".

4 Cameron, Paper presented at The International Conference on Security Policy, Munich, February 5, 2011.

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the concept of commonly held democratic beliefs is a standard narrative, there is perhaps more truth to Merkel's claim about the "Christian image of humanity" than we tend to acknowledge. The purpose of this essay is to identify the Christian image of humanity that underlies the frequently championed criteria of democratic values.

To make this claim, however, is not to say that Jesus Christ is at the heart of all western democratic countries. Instead, by tracing the way in which the white European colonizer serves as the representative of both Christ and human progress, I demonstrate how he has come to function as the Christian image of humanity in the West and, as a result, whiteness becomes a mark of not only Christian salvation, but also civility — of proper values and orderly social character. Thus, it is in relation to this white Christian image of humanity that a person's innate values and characteristics are discerned and, in this way, they are judged fit or unfit for participation in western democratic society.

Recent scholarship in the area of theology and race in the western world makes room for this argument by demonstrating the important role of Christian theology within the modern concept of race. In *The Forging of Race*, Colin Kidd reveals the role of Christian scriptural language and concepts in the social construction of race.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Willie Jennings identifies the framework of Christian values as the logic used to organize the newly discovered lands and peoples during the Age of Discovery. According to this conceptual order, it is the white European colonizer who functions as the normative center of modern racial evaluation and categorization.<sup>6</sup> He acts as an authorized representative of Christ as well as the paradigmatic embodiment of human civilization.

This essay argues that insofar as the white colonizer serves as both a representative of Jesus Christ and a model of western civilization, he operates as the Christian image of humanity. His white European body becomes a holy ideal. Whiteness, in turn, begins to function as a sign of one's spiritual and social state, of one's Christian and civilized character. Thus, it is in relation to this ideal of whiteness that people are visually evaluated, a process that is thought to reveal their spiritual condition and, in turn, their moral, intellectual, and social character.

Tracing the development of this racialized bodily evaluation that crystalizes during the Age of Discovery and persists into early twentieth-century U.S. immigration, I demonstrate the role of the white Christian image of humanity in determining a people's fitness for social inclusion within the so-called civilized society of western modernity. By acknowledging the relationship that solidifies between whiteness, Christianity, and civility, I point to the part that the Christian image of humanity has played in the relentless, racially rooted visual distinction of those who are judged fit for participation in modern, western society and those who are identified as a threat to the established social order.

The present study is divided into two parts. The first section looks at the development of the Christian image of humanity. It considers the intimate connection within colonial thinking between Christianity, civility, and the white European body.<sup>7</sup> During this period, Christianity and civility are conceptually concretized in the white European, who thereby functions as the Christian image of humanity. The second section follows the link between whiteness, Christianity, and civility within U.S. immigration discourse of the Twentieth Century. In this context, a people's internal character — their spiritual, moral, psychological, and social nature can be discerned through visual evaluation of the raced body, through how closely they imitate the white Euro-American and, thereby, manifest the Christian image of humanity.

Thus, this image acts as the measure by which people are evaluated as fit or unfit for participation in modern, western society. Whiteness serves as an indication of proper spiritual and social character and, therefore, of social belonging. To borrow, once again, from Chancellor Merkel, "the Christian image of humanity... is what defines us. Those who do not accept this are in the wrong place here."<sup>8</sup> Instead of an idiosyncratic position, Merkel's statement gestures toward western modernity's long-standing tradition of venerating the white Euro-American as the holy ideal of Christian discipleship and human civilization.

<sup>5</sup> Kidd, *The Forging of Races*, 19.

<sup>6</sup> Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 35.

<sup>7</sup> While the current essay focuses upon the role of race in communicating the ideals of Christianity and civility, it is important to acknowledge the significance of gender and sexuality in the development of the Christian image of humanity.

<sup>8</sup> Merkel, Paper presented at the The Christian Democratic Union Youth Congress, Potsdam, August 16, 2010.

## Colonialism's Christianizing-Civilizing Mission

To begin to understand the development of the white European and, later, white Euro-American as the Christian image of humanity, it is important to recognize the intimate partnership that existed between Christianity and the colonial mission. In *The Christian Imagination*, Jennings identifies how the 1455 Papal bull *Romanus Pontifex* officially sanctions the colonial endeavor and, thereby, solidifies the Church-Crown relationship.<sup>9</sup> This ecclesial document divides the known world among Christian rulers for the good of the Kingdom of God. In so doing, the salvation of souls from damnation becomes the undergirding logic of colonization.

Two important changes take place as a result of this ecclesial vision. First, the imperialism of colonization is injected with explicit evangelistic purposes. Second, colonizers — including soldiers and missionaries — are sent into the world armed with a comprehensive Christian vision. Newly discovered peoples are depicted as “sheep entrusted... by God into the single divine fold,” who through colonization “may acquire... the reward of eternal felicity, and obtain pardon for their souls.”<sup>10</sup> This suggests that the colonial endeavor is the will of God and, therefore, the duty of all Christians. In short, those engaged in the colonial mission are part of the great commission to go and make disciples.

Given this partnership, otherwise militaristic and exploitative colonial conquests are viewed as spiritual missions, which are endorsed by the Church. Instead of expeditions of greed and oppression, they are cast as victories for Christ and acts of mercy for the enslaved. In *Libro de las cinco excelencias del español* (1629), Benedictine theologian Benito de Penalosa y Mondragon describes Spanish colonial action as a means of hastening the Second Coming of Christ. According to historian Stanley Payne, Spain believed itself “the new modern incarnation of the chosen people.... Spain's mission was to be the living *imitatio Christi*.”<sup>11</sup> Spain and, in turn, the Spanish people are to be Christ to the world. By advancing the civilizing and Christianizing aims of the colonial mission, the European becomes a representative of both.

Through this wedded endeavor of cross and crown, the identity of the Christian disciple and that of the civilized European subject collapse. The white European as Christian disciple becomes the primary representative of Christ and the Christian life among otherwise lost peoples. Moreover, he serves as the embodiment of human progress. He is a beacon of light shining in the darkness, bringing the Good News of two gospels — that of Jesus Christ and of human civilization — to the dark-minded, black savage. Fulfilling these roles of discipleship, the white European operates as the Christian image of humanity, for he is both the image of Christ and the image of humanity at the height of progress. Whiteness and Christianity are bound together through the body of the white European disciple.

## Christian Discipleship and Colonialism's Christian Image of Humanity

The transformative power of the white European as Christian disciple is significant. Given this wedding of Christianity and whiteness within the European as disciple, discipleship itself becomes imprinted with the characteristics of whiteness. Turning to Scripture, we note the mimetic nature of Christian discipleship. The disciple imitates and represents Christ and, at the same time, calls others to imitate. According to Pauline theology, Christian disciples are to be transformed into reflections of Christ. By “seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror,” they “are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.”<sup>12</sup> As soft wax takes on the form of the seal, Christian disciples are to image and, thereby, represent Christ to the world.

The mimetic nature of discipleship, however, does not consist solely of the disciple's christological

<sup>9</sup> Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 26.

<sup>10</sup> “Papal Bull Pontifex,” 26.

<sup>11</sup> Payne, *Spain: A Unique History*, 79.

<sup>12</sup> 2 Corinthians 3:18 (NRSV).

conversion. It also applies to her ability to communicate the image and gospel reality of Christ so as to call others to a similar transformation. “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ,” Paul urges the Corinthians.<sup>13</sup> Here, imitation of the Apostle, who is himself a reflection of Christ, has the same outcome as direct imitation of Jesus. In both cases, whether imitating Paul or Jesus, the mimesis of discipleship results in *imitatio Christi*.

Positioning himself as a Christian disciple, a natural representation of Jesus among pagan peoples, the white European colonizer claims this ability to image Christ and call others to Jesus through himself. “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.” In the case of the white colonizer, however, the imaging of discipleship has been merged with the normativity of European culture and its conception of human progress. This renders the white colonizer not only the image of Christ, but also the Christian image of humanity. Relatedly, salvation requires something more than assent to essential Christian beliefs. Instead, these Christian commitments are bound together with the Western European idea of civility. It is only by being transformed into the likeness of the white European, who functions as the representative of Christ and civilized humanity, that the uncivilized pagan can be saved — both in his soul and in his humanity. In this manner, whiteness comes to signify essential internal attributes that, over time, become a visual indication of a person’s character and how well she will participate in civilized society.

## Cultivating Racialized Sight

The elevation of the white colonizer to this sacred and salvific status produces a certain way of visually ordering the world. Due to the connection forged between the white European, the true faith of Christianity, and human civilization, the black body is now viewed as altogether devoid of religion and prone to savagery. Addressing Columbus’ first voyage, Nelson Maldonado-Torres points out that, by identifying the Amerindians as “subjects without religion,” they are rendered “fundamentally uncivilized and indomitable. Subjects without religion were not so much mistaken as they were, from this perspective, ontologically limited.”<sup>14</sup> Thus, their dissimilarity to the white Christian image of humanity indicates their spiritual depravity, and their spiritual depravity indicates their ontological condition of sub- or inhumanity.

With the white colonizer as stabilizing center of the racially determined visual ordering of the modern world, all peoples can be thoroughly assessed and properly categorized. The modern racial optic provides a sense of order to an otherwise chaotic-seeming New World. One clear example of this form of visual and conceptual ordering can be found in the written records of Portuguese chronicler Gomez Eanes de Zurara. His 1450 account visually assesses a group of newly enslaved Guineans and places them into aesthetic and spiritual categories according to skin pigmentation. Some were “white enough, fair to look upon, and well proportioned,” he writes, “other were less white like mulattoes; others again were as black as Ethiops, and so ugly, both in feature and in body, as almost to appear... the images of a lower hemisphere.”<sup>15</sup> This passage provides a sense of the ontological hierarchy established between whiteness and blackness. Whiteness connotes spiritual purity and cultural progress insofar as it signifies European likeness.<sup>16</sup>

The darker one’s skin, the uglier and more demonic one becomes. Put differently, the darker one’s skin, the less one naturally images Jesus. It is in relation to this holy white ideal that Zurara evaluates the Guinean slaves. After all, the white European is the embodiment of Christian discipleship and civilized humanity.

This racial assessment of spiritual condition is not isolated to the Portuguese. The Italians deploy the same optic in relation to the Japanese. In this case, however, the Japanese are close enough to the ideal of the white European that they are judged “highly civilized” and “naturally very intelligent.”<sup>17</sup> Compared to South Indians, who are “blacks... of small sense” and “subsequently very difficult to improve and turn into good Christians,” the Japanese are “white and of good understanding and behavior... and when they

<sup>13</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:1 (NRSV).

<sup>14</sup> Maldonado Torres, “AAR Centennial Roundtable,” 650-51.

<sup>15</sup> Zurara, *The Chronicle of the Discovery and Conquest of Guinea*, 81.

<sup>16</sup> Kowner, “Skin as a Metaphor,” 30.

<sup>17</sup> Boxer, *The Christian Century in Japan*, 31-32.

are instructed they become very good Christians.”<sup>18</sup> The identification of a people’s blackness or whiteness functions as more than an aesthetic appraisal. It is a sign of their spiritual condition and, in turn, their intelligence and propensity toward orderly behavior.

Both of these accounts reveal how the white European functions as a model of Christianity, intelligence, and sociality, and how, as a result, character is discerned through the visual evaluation of the physical body. A person’s external attributes, more specifically, his degree of likeness to the white Christian image of humanity, functions as an indication of his internal attributes. According to the logic, the body reveals a person’s fitness for inclusion within Christian society, which is to say, within the ‘civilized’ society of western modernity; for, it indicates his true spiritual, moral, intellectual, and social nature. It discloses the orderliness or disorderliness of his character and how well he will participate in society.

## Discerning Bodies, Discerning Character in Early U.S. Immigration

Will the person standing in front of me contribute to proper societal order or will she threaten its stability? While this racialized vision takes shape through European colonial endeavors, the connection between visual evaluation of bodies, religion, character, and determinations of social stability comes to color the social imaginary of the United States as well. One finds evidence of this in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century U.S. immigration discourse.<sup>19</sup> In this context, the body continues to be an important means of discerning inherent values, orderliness of character, and, therefore, suitability for social inclusion. It continues to be treated as a window into a person’s authentic nature and, in turn, their propensity for proper social participation. Much like the colonial travel journals and chronicles, this new phase in Christianity’s civilizing mission utilizes the theologically rooted visual assessment and categorization of the modern racial optic. What changes is the manner in which this optic begins seeking scientific legitimation.

## The Modern Racial Optic’s ‘Scientific’ Turn

Through the scientific racism movement, assessment of the body is further established as a means of discerning character. However, in this iteration, discernible character includes the nature of a person’s future political participation. According to Charles Davenport’s work in *Heredity in Relation to Eugenics* (1911), genetically produce attributes, like physical, spiritual, moral, intellectual, and social traits, are the result of “unit characters” found in the blood at birth.<sup>20</sup> These unit characters are what set apart the races.<sup>21</sup>

Within the earliest white European immigrant group in the United States, Davenport identifies an “enriched... germ plasm which easily developed such traits as good manners, high culture, and the ability to lead in all social affairs.”<sup>22</sup> He recognizes the “early English and more recent Scandinavian immigration” to tend toward “ideals of community life in the open country, advancement by the sweat of their brow, and the uprearing of their families in the fear of God and the love of Country.”<sup>23</sup> Due to their proper unit characters, such people have the values and ideals that render them good citizens.

The same, however, cannot be said of subsequent groups. The Jews, who are considered black upon first immigrating to the U.S., are said to be prone to individualism and materialism, positioning them as “the opposite extreme” from the above-mentioned immigrants.<sup>24</sup> In fact, Davenport warns that the reproduction of such people threatens the stability and orderliness of modern society. For, the combination of certain unit characters will produce people who are “more given to crimes of larceny, kidnapping, assault, murder,

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>19</sup> The connection between the worldview established among western European colonial powers and the United States should not surprise us. After all, it is the citizens of these western nation-states who become the earliest settlers of the New World.

<sup>20</sup> Davenport, *Heredity in Relation to Eugenics*, 207.

<sup>21</sup> Galton, “Hereditary Talent and Character.”

<sup>22</sup> Davenport, *Heredity in Relation to Eugenics*, 207.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 216.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

rape... sex-immorality” and insanity. They will manifest characteristics that inevitably result in social disorder. Unsurprisingly, according to Davenport, this degradation of character will be accompanied by “darker... pigmentation.”<sup>25</sup>

Thus, it is in relation to the body of the white European immigrant that the potential citizenship of all peoples immigrating to the United States should be evaluated. In this context, the white European immigrant and, later, the white European/American functions as the image of godliness, orderliness, and civility, which is the Christian image of humanity. As during the Colonial Period, the less like the white ideal a person appears, the less civilized, less rational, and less fit for western democratic citizenship she is assumed to be.

## Scientific Evaluation of Bodies

Corresponding with this work on unit characters is the practice of physiognomy. It gestures toward the same idea, namely, that the body reveals the orderliness of one’s natural values and true character. Interestingly, the ‘scientific’ practice of physiognomy gains popularity alongside turn-of-the-century immigration discourse in the United States.<sup>26</sup> Based upon the belief that “differences of external form are the result and measure of pre-existing differences of internal character; in other words, that configuration corresponds with function,” physiognomy also reads mental, moral, and social characteristics through the body.<sup>27</sup> More specifically, it suggests a connection between internal conditions and external attributes, which are differentiated along racial lines.

According to “The Five Races of Man Illustrated,” an article printed in *The Illustrated Annals of Phrenology and Physiognomy*, the races display distinct characteristics. As before, the white body functions as the Christian image of humanity. It is the ideal toward which all other peoples are progressing. According to this article, the white race is the most advanced and civilized of the races. “It is among this race that the art and sciences have been carried to their highest point of cultivation, and skill and intellect to their mightiest results,” the author claims. “The history of this race is the history of *civilization, refinement, and of Christianity itself*.”<sup>28</sup> The link between civilization and Christianity that began with the white European colonizer now belongs to the white race.

Following this depiction of internal orderliness, the author moves on to the external “beauty and symmetry” of the white body, characteristics of the face, and the hue of the skin. As the height of beauty, intelligence, religious belief, and civilization, the white man functions as the model of human progress and spiritual development.

The author then addresses the “Mongolian race,” which is “next to the Caucasian in the scale of civilization, but is not celebrated for mental power.” After that comes the Malay, the Amerindian, and finally the Ethiopian — each group described with deteriorating mental capacity. This phrenological understanding of the races assumes a hierarchy of humanity. It situates humanity along a spectrum, from the lowest form of existence, identified with the black body, to the highest form, identified with the white. According to this logic, physical form, spirituality, morality, intelligence, and sociality are elements of human progress that are tied to race. “The capacity for progress is by no means shared alike by all races of men,” nineteenth-century American philosopher and historian John Fiske writes. While “the Aryan and Semitic” are particularly marked by progress, the “small-brained races — the Australians and Papuans, the Hottentots, and the majority of tribes constituting the wide-spread Malay and American families — appear almost wholly incapable of progress, even under the guidance of higher races.”<sup>29</sup> Human progress belongs to the white race and, therefore, entails moving toward whiteness, that is, toward the Christian image of humanity.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 219.

<sup>26</sup> *The Illustrated Annals of Phrenology and Physiognomy*, 4.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 5-6.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 35. Emphasis mine.

<sup>29</sup> Fiske, “The Progress from Brute to Man,” 255. Also cited in Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues*, 152.

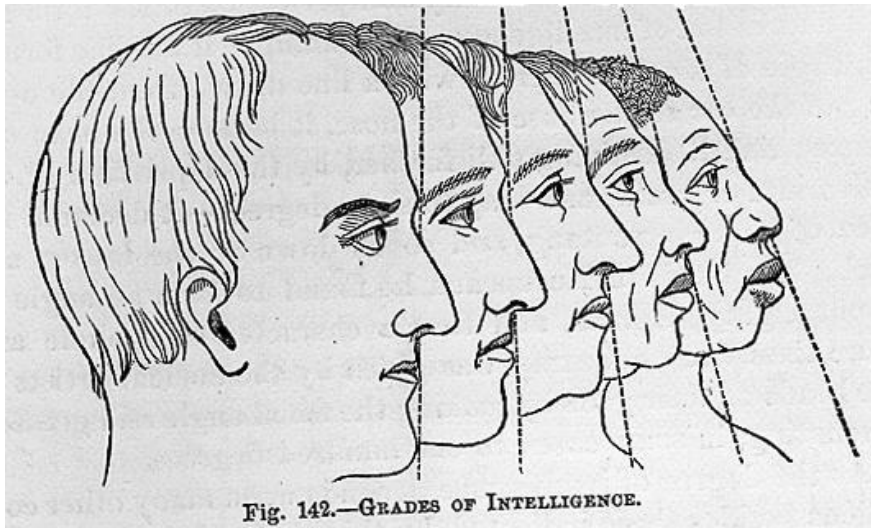


Figure 1. Samuel Wells, *New Physiognomy* (1871)

## Racially Determined Political Participation

As previously noted, this understanding of progress — spiritual, moral, intellectual, and social — is central to proper social participation in civilized society. It is thought to be essential to the success of this great democratic project. Matthew Frye Jacobson puts it this way:

This experiment in republican government demanded an extraordinary moral character in people — it called for a polity that was disciplined, virtuous, self-sacrificing, productive, far-seeing, wise — traits that were all racially inscribed in eighteenth-century Euro-American thought.<sup>30</sup>

The “Negro” is defined at this time by “idleness, treachery, revenge, debauchery, nastiness, and intemperance.”<sup>31</sup> Only the white European immigrant and his descendants are naturally equipped with the character necessary for the success of democracy. All others embody dangerously disordered attributes that threaten the stability of democratic society.

In the end, the internal characteristics and capacities of certain races establish them as inherently unfit for socio-political inclusion in western, democratic, civilized society. These qualities, being hereditary, are evinced by how closely a people manifests the white ideal. Put in theological terms, evaluation of a person’s fitness for social inclusion in the West depends upon how well she engages in mimetic discipleship of the white Christian image of humanity. “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.”<sup>32</sup>

While whiteness is certainly the trajectory toward which all peoples are called, we are confronted by the question of who is capable of such imitation. Who can sufficiently manifest the Christian image of humanity and, thereby, render themselves fit for social inclusion in western democratic societies? One author, writing for *Popular Science Monthly* (1903), claims that even a “savage brought up in a cultivated society” cannot truly conform to the ways of civilized, Christian men. Instead, the savage “will not only retain his dark skin, but is likely also to have the incoherent mind of his race.”<sup>33</sup> Here, the chaos and insufficiency of the savage’s body indicates a permanent state of disorder. “No amount of school instruction will ever make them intelligent voters and capable citizens in the truest sense of the word.”<sup>34</sup> Some, like the Irish, whose bodies are marked by “a black tint to the skin,” are not only considered of inferior body and corresponding

<sup>30</sup> Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues*, 180.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:1 (NRSV).

<sup>33</sup> Cattell, “A Statistical Study of Eminent Men.” Also cited in Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues*, 171.

<sup>34</sup> Terman, *The Measurement of Intelligence*, 91.

character, being “[l]ow-browed and savage, grovelling and bestial, lazy and wild, simian and sensual,”<sup>35</sup> they are also viewed as “constitutionally incapable of intelligent participation in the governance of the nation.”<sup>36</sup> Put simply, their inferior ontological condition prevents them from manifesting the characteristics necessary to participate properly in democratic self-governance.

The above statements reveal the link between the visually established racial evaluation of bodies and suitability for citizenship. The disorderliness of savagery is not about education, but inborn traits that correspond with dark skin. Certain peoples are said to be, by nature, incapable of democratic responsibility and, in some cases, predisposed toward unhealthy political engagement.

As Scottish-American journalist John Swinton puts it, “Liberty is a conception of the White race, not of the Yellow or Red or Black.”<sup>37</sup> This suggests that productive participation and belonging within a modern, western, democratic society is built into one’s genetic makeup, which is displayed visually through race. The values that are said to stand at the heart of successful assimilation in such a society are racial attributes. According to this logic, these values naturally belong to the civilized, to the chosen ones, to those who properly reflect whiteness and, thus, the Christian image of humanity.

## Conclusion

The criterion of the white Christian image of humanity is no longer as explicit as it once was; however, the network of meaning housed within the concept of whiteness persists. By voicing the idea that “We feel bound to the Christian image of humanity,” Merkel is articulating something more than religious identity.<sup>38</sup> Through this statement, she gives voice to the long-standing association between Christianity, whiteness, and civility that discreetly continues to shape the social imaginary in the West. Merkel’s claim is not simply about religion, but about religion, race, character, and social belonging.

The continued relevance of this connection is rendered particularly clear in light of Germany’s difficult relationship with its immigrants and the growing strength of its far-right political party. In May 2016, the Alternative für Deutschland issued a manifesto banning minarets and burkas in Germany.<sup>39</sup> They claimed that Muslim immigrants pose the greatest of Germany’s security threats. Hans-Thomas Tillschneider, who aligns himself with the AfD party, puts it this way: “Islam is foreign to us and for that reason it cannot invoke the principle of religious freedom to the same degree as Christianity.”<sup>40</sup> Here, religion and the democratic value of religious freedom go hand-in-hand. Certain religions produce people who are unsuited for political participation in a modern, western democracy. Certain people pose a threat to the stability of civilized society. While this appears to be an argument focused on religion and character, as we have noted, such evaluations are more often than not made through the external assessment of the body, that is, through the lens of race.

Within the United States, one finds this relationship between race, religion, civility, and social belonging played out in discourse and thought surrounding the immigration of Syrian refugees, the monitoring of the Mexico-U.S. border, and even police-involved shootings of unarmed black men. What does it mean for one race to have a monopoly on social belonging? More significantly, what are the implications of another race being laden with disorderly character, with the perceived chaos of paganism, irrationality, and incivility?

We find ourselves in a world where the darker one’s skin, the more threatening one’s presence in modern western society is assumed to be. What constitutes a danger to democracy is not as simple as a disagreement about intellectual assent to particular values. Instead, what registers as a threat is the assessment of peoples who, due to their dark-skinned bodies, are identified as naturally chaotic in character and, in turn, chaotic in belief and commitment. It is the darkness of the body, which is to say, its dissimilarity to the white

<sup>35</sup> Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*, 133.

<sup>36</sup> Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 48.

<sup>37</sup> Swinton, *The New Issue*, 11-12. Also cited in Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues*, 193.

<sup>38</sup> Merkel, Paper presented at the The Christian Democratic Union Youth Congress, Potsdam, August 16, 2010.

<sup>39</sup> Bellon, “Anti-Immigrant AfD Says Muslims Not Welcome in Germany.”

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.



Christian image of humanity that triggers fear of a people's disordering effect. Such people are not only viewed as unfit for self-government, but their presence also threatens the orderliness of civilized society. Their very bodies appear to reject the Christian image of humanity and, in turn, the ideals that stand at the heart of modern western society.

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