

## INTRODUCTION

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### *The Color Line and the Assembly Line*

IN 1903 HENRY FORD INCORPORATED the Ford Motor Company. That same year the sociologist, historian, and activist W. E. B. Du Bois published this remarkably prescient claim: “The problem of the 20th century is the problem of the color line—the relation of the darker to the lighter races in Asia and Africa, in America and in the islands of the sea.”<sup>1</sup> Within two decades Ford would expand to become one of the largest employers on earth, a global company with workplaces, dealerships, and customers in more than twenty countries. By 1927 its product, the Model T, would be far and away the top-selling car in the world, accounting for half of all cars on the planet. So, too, would the color line expand, to “belt the world” as Du Bois subsequently described it, bringing increasing rather than decreasing numbers of people into white supremacist–structured hierarchies. Despite this shared and simultaneous globality, however, both are conventionally treated as relating to far more nationally specific realities—Ford to narrowly American realities, and Du Bois to narrowly African American ones.<sup>2</sup>

This book is a study of how, and how unevenly, the Ford Motor Company promoted both the idea of and the application of the color line to structure mass production as it expanded globally. Simultaneously, it demonstrates how what I call the “ethos of the assembly line” was put to work in the service of white supremacist ideas and racial-segregationist practices at Ford and via Ford as the company built its self-described empire through the 1930s. In these years Ford relied on the color line and the assembly line as mutually reinforcing forces in the global production of not just cars but also “men,” a goal Henry Ford himself bragged about regularly and often. Indeed, from 1914 through the Great Depression, Ford and his managers claimed to be as devoted to “making men” as they were to making cars in the United States

and all over the world.<sup>3</sup> This book further argues that Ford's claim to do both—make cars and make men—accounted for broad transnational interest in and embrace of techniques in social engineering and mass production that by the early 1920s were coming to be known as “Fordist.” Men-making was a core contribution of this early Fordism and led governments, social scientists, intellectuals, financiers, and nationalists globally to seek out the ideas associated with Ford as well as the actual investment of the company in their countries after World War I.

This study examines societies where Ford—the company as employer and Henry and his small coterie of managers as ideologues—was mobilized in the service of dynamics that I call “race development” and “white managerialism.” It focuses explicitly on the white supremacist expressions and national developmentalist goals of Fordist men-making in Brazil, South Africa, and the United States. Relationships begun between transnational Ford managers and nationalizing elites in these years would prove to be hugely significant as Ford became one of the largest and most powerful industrial employers in each of these countries by the middle of the twentieth century. Specifically this work examines a set of sites where local elites and intellectuals accessed workers on the job and in their homes. Making common cause with Ford's ideas about men-making and the management of production meant thinking both dialectically and instrumentally about homeplace and workplace.

The fact that the assembly line affected ideas about and organization of work even in workplaces where no actual assembly line existed is an essential feature of the methodological approach of the book as well as of its findings. The massive changes that attended assembly line production in the emergent auto industry were felt largely in economic and social terms. But they were always imbricated in other systems of repression, dominance, protest, and struggle. As Ford management increased its capacity to standardize and control production via technology, it constantly needed to find ways to control the subjective expressions of workers. Thus “the assembly line” as a social problem entered the homes and lives of workers on multiple scales.

In each of these national contexts idealized notions of standardization and efficiency promoted by Ford influenced social scientific theory and became intertwined with beliefs in white supremacy as a mechanism of national improvement and progress. For the emergent class of liberal social scientists and managerial bureaucrats in Brazil, South Africa, and the United States in the 1920s, the “problem” of national development had been named a racial one. The case studies here demonstrate that this took very different

shape because of different conditions in each of these societies. But they also show how elites in these societies shared in common an overarching belief in “white” as the racial designation of civility, progress, modernity, and order as well as a determination to use ideas and techniques associated with Ford in social reform projects.

Through the first four decades of the twentieth century, liberal elites across the globe who made arguments about the desirability and feasibility of racial segregation and national improvement increasingly did so in terms of efficiency and standardization. In South Africa and Brazil, like the United States industrializing countries with “mixed” European, African, Asian, and Indigenous populations, these debates reflected shared commitments to the idea that mass production, mass consumption, and white racial supremacy were parts of a twentieth-century modern whole. In each of these societies, as in the United States, ideas about work, consumption, and progress became inseparable from developmental concerns about the very bodies of those who worked and consumed. How such workers would be viewed, often through the prism of eugenic ideas—as citizens, potential citizens needing fixing, or those who needed to be excluded from citizenship—was framed in terms of racial “fitness.”<sup>4</sup>

Looking at early evidence of Ford’s presence in Brazil and South Africa shows that the company supported local and national efforts to name, draw, redraw, and harden the color line in the years between World Wars I and II. It also reveals that South African and Brazilian interest in Ford reflected the sense that the company was willing to accede to local political and social concerns that took the shape of exclusionary or segregationist practices. Elites believed that the practical and ideological application of Fordism served the interests of their own national and racial development dreams, seeing in Ford a source not just of jobs and capital but also of social and cultural direction in building “new” societies and “new” people. The company encouraged Brazilian and South African planners to borrow from Ford’s modern industrial process, connecting Fordist ideas to white supremacist social initiatives that were local. This means that in each national case presented here, white managerialism was understood and promoted as progressive, civilizing, transformative, and efficient—all ideals associated with Ford’s combined efforts in making cars and making men. Further, the case studies presented here show how these processes are much more aptly described as Fordist “Brazilianization” and Fordist “South Africanization” than they are as “Americanization.”

It is perhaps ironic that through serious consideration of the range of historical *differences* in these societies, a *similar* transnational interest in racial development and improvement becomes discernable across the spectrum of liberal and corporatist ideologies in Brazil, South Africa, and the United States. In all of these places the word Ford—evoking both Henry Ford and his company—became associated with what one South African journalist described as a commitment to “saving human detritus from the scrap heap of history.”<sup>5</sup> And as the historian Jerry Davila has shown in his meticulously researched *Diploma of Whiteness*, social scientists and planners in Brazil accessed Fordism not just as a source of economic modernization but for improvement of the so-called national racial stock via social scientific and educational reforms.<sup>6</sup>

#### DEARBORN AS CENTER OF THE FORD EMPIRE

The company’s global expansion coincided with and depended on the growth of Ford in the United States itself. In 1927 Ford was the largest employer in the largest industry in the largest economy in the world. Throughout the late teens and twenties Ford’s devotion to vertical integration was coming to fruition as the company sucked up coal mines, timber mines, gravel pits, rail-lines, ships, and land in its quest for total control of the terms of mass automobile production. By 1925 in Michigan the massive new River Rouge complex had eclipsed Ford’s first belt-driven assembly plant in Highland Park. Plans for the new plant had begun even as Highland Park was being celebrated for its astonishing success in the use of moving assembly line technology and for productivity increases that date to the introduction of the five-dollar daily wage in 1914. But Ford was distinguished from its earliest years forward by management’s attention to constant improvement in the search for what Henry Ford called “the one best way”; almost immediately the limits of production at the first assembly plant were seen as surmountable and would be resolved, or so management argued, both in and via the megafactory on the Rouge River.

More than a decade in the making, by the time the Rouge was fully on line (the period under study in this book) Ford’s commitments to Americanizing immigrant workers that had famously attended the advent of the five-dollar day at its Highland Park plant were all but over. The timing of these developments is of significance to the argument of this book for several reasons.

Ford's reputation as a welfare capitalist interested in the well-being of his often immigrant employees was earned in an earlier political and economic era in the United States and in Detroit. As Stephen Meyer so brilliantly documented more than three decades ago, the "progressive" Sociological Department at Ford was replaced—by the end of World War I—with increasingly repressive techniques of surveillance and control of the workforce. Interest in the Americanization of European immigrants gave way to support for immigration restriction among Ford managers, culminating in their acquiescence to or outright support for the passage of the Johnson-Reed Act in 1924. Like many of their peers who supported immigration restriction, Ford managers increasingly saw themselves as Anglo-Saxons historically and Anglo-Americans politically, claiming the arguments for white Protestant racial purity that bolstered Johnson-Reed as their own.<sup>7</sup> Second, it was in these years that Ford began to hire African American workers overwhelmingly for work in the forge and foundry at the new Rouge plant and to attract Mexican migrants to Detroit. This hiring took place at the height of Ford's public support for racist political activism and anti-Semitism, which calls into question the oft-repeated idea that Henry Ford was unique among his peers for seeing African American workers as being "the same" as white workers. This study challenges the notion that hiring African American workers made Ford a more socially progressive firm than others in Detroit. Instead, by situating this history in the context of a transnational consideration of how Ford helped to strengthen belief in the color line, it asks us to rethink the terms in which we understand the history and dynamics of racism in the U.S. urban north. It argues that Ford thought of Black migrant workers to Detroit as more akin to colonized subjects and treated them as such. African American workers were to the company neither sufficiently American nor Americanizable, a fact that pushes us to find new language to describe Ford's relationship to Black Detroit in the context of overall arguments about the company's paternalism.

At home as well as globally Ford exploited unevenness, so much so that we ought to question whether debates over Fordism take sufficient account of questions of scale and therefore of race. From the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci's seminal "Americanism and Fordism" we gain a strong sense of Fordism as the product of uniquely U.S. conditions and innovations leading to an epochal bargain that offered workers relatively high wages in exchange for unprecedented high levels of sped-up exploitation. Gramsci inquired passionately (and with useful skepticism) about whether Fordism could

revolutionize the sedimented production practices of Europe. Absent from his writing, however, is a consideration of Fordist expansion beyond Europe. Likewise lacking is the reality of the racialization of immigrants and African Americans in Ford's U.S. factories. Nor can Ford's initiatives in the global South be accounted for in "Americanism and Fordism." The result, which we inherit, is a lack of realization of the extent to which Fordism aligned itself with "productions of difference" in and out of the United States. Even David Harvey's provocative periodization of Fordism as applying to the world system only from the ascent of trade union power within the United States and the social power of organized labor in post-World War II Western Europe leaves us with a U.S.-European lens that flattens unevenness and distorts the process by which Fordism took hold in different locales.<sup>8</sup>

## QUESTIONS AND METHODS

As the company most often credited with developing and improving assembly line production, Ford occupies a unique place in the history of mass production and the globalization of American investment and manufacturing. When the company created the "five-dollar day" in 1914, tying the alleged benefits of mass consumption to the promise of factory work and citizenship in the United States, it made necessary the continuous ideological and cultural reinforcement of the idea that consumer goods—things—were as beneficial to workers as time or skills or health or wages. Beyond the consumer market this effort included Ford's urging of belief in colonialism and empire, in racial hierarchy and white supremacy, in Christian civility and native savagery, and in U.S. exceptionalism. All were constantly evoked and deployed by the company for a variety of purposes both material and promotional. In thinking about what his workers needed, Henry Ford always expressed confidence in the ability of work to make or save the man. His extensive reliance on ideas developed by Frederick W. Taylor in *The Principles of Scientific Management* are well studied and often remarked upon.<sup>9</sup> However, for a time the company's concern with the lives of its racialized immigrant workers outside of the workplace was as insistent. For Ford, and for those reformers who leaned on Fordist ideas in social engineering schemes, controlling the realm of the home was an essential component of controlling workers on the job.

The above concepts are explored here through four related but distinct themes that form the backbone of my argument about why the social and

cultural impact of Ford was so great and that structure its individual chapters. First is the relationship between life on the clock and life at home. These tend to be seen as separate spheres, one where production happened and the other where consumption happened. Here I show how dynamic the relationship between those spheres was and, from the viewpoint of Ford's management, had to be. The second theme concerns how Ford promoted and linked marriage, family, and gender-based behavior at home to the structure of work in its plants. Men-making, for Ford, ultimately necessitated family-making. This has been most thoroughly understood by scholars studying the earlier Americanization programs at Ford. Here I take those insights and apply them to Ford's efforts outside of the United States. The third theme that structures this inquiry is the centrality of managers to making cars and making men. I argue for an understanding of managerial power as being linked to ideologies that transgressed the factory walls but also lived within them. Finally, the fourth and overarching theme that links these chapters is the simultaneous promotion of white supremacy in varied registers in each of these societies.

One of the workplaces considered here, Ford Motor Company of South Africa's assembly plant in Port Elizabeth, was just beginning to bring moving assembly line production into being in the years under examination here. In two others, Fordlandia and Belterra, Ford's rubber plantations in northern Brazil, no assembly line would ever exist. Yet in each of these societies (and many others in the world) Ford's assembly line came to embody the idea of social improvement through efficiency, mass society, and progress. None of these concepts existed outside of belief in racial and national hierarchies.

The pairing in this work of the assembly line and the color line is not intended to be one of opposing forces. We tend to treat the assembly line as the epitome of the modern, scientific, productive, and standardized. The color line—the oppressive “worldview of race”—that Ralph Bunche, following Du Bois, strove to reduce to infamy, seemed on the other hand to have been drawn variously and arbitrarily, as the different racial systems of South Africa, the United States, and Brazil demonstrate.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the brutalities associated with racial rule are retrospectively seen as unscientific and even atavistic. That the rationality of the assembly line must have challenged the irrationality of the color line thus becomes an easy assumption.

Such a mistaken view gains further traction if we focus narrowly on the most massive site of assembly line production in U.S. history, Ford's River Rouge plant, which was also its most celebrated site of the employment of



African American workers. Yet at the same time it pursued this multiracial hiring policy in this one Michigan factory, in South Africa Ford would work with the state to exclude from employment all but white workers for nearly three decades. In the two Brazil plantations studied here Ford deliberately sought out a labor force of men it understood as being “mixed-race.”<sup>11</sup> Thus the energy that drives this book derives from the assertion that the assembly line’s most advanced expressions proved compatible with a spectrum of white supremacist practice and ideology.

Indeed this work sees Ford as especially powerful but not especially innovative in this regard. In 1907, the labor historian John R. Commons argued that the decision to bring Black, immigrant, and so-called native (meaning Northern European–descended white American) workers together in industrial workplaces signaled a managerial interest in fostering racial conflict more than it did a commitment to racial equality. The Chicago meatpacking plants on which the assembly line in auto production was based are an early example of this practice, which featured the employment of Black workers. These plants housed the awe-inspiring assembly lines that Commons had just finished touring when he wrote that “almost the only device and symptom of originality displayed by American employers in disciplining their labor force has been that of playing one race against another.” If we consider also, as this study emphasizes, Ford’s frequent marketing of itself as a producer of “race development,” the auto giant’s practices were anything but a challenge to the ideologies that produced color lines.<sup>12</sup>

Though Ford was legendarily a transgressor of the color line in Detroit, such innovations unfolded within sharp and self-interested limits at the Rouge plant. Even there management overwhelmingly segregated Black workers into the most dangerous and dirty jobs. At the Highland Park plant, where the Model T was first produced in 1908 and the five-dollar-a-day wage introduced in 1914, Ford employed very few Black workers. There questions of race centered on the possible Americanization of variously racialized European immigrants, leading to experiments in social improvement that would first gain Ford its international reputation as a progressive reformer. Social interventions into the lives of these eastern and southern European newcomers to Detroit so overtly relied on attempts to “Americanize” them—herding workers into a literal melting pot at Ford English School graduation ceremonies—that the link between Ford and Americanism is almost assumed. In other Ford settings in the United States, however, exclusion remained the norm, as for example in continuing production at Chicago and



Dallas and in some sub-assembly and parts plants. The historian Howard Segal describes the small Ford plants—Christened “village industries” by the company—scattered in mostly rural areas: “Few of the village industries employed African Americans however and none employed Mexicans.” Ford had come to be described as a progressive who was devoted to the uplift of Black workers and the possibility that “all men when given a job and a chance”—but only at certain times, in certain places, and, even at the Rouge, in certain departments. Ford management’s devotion to the idea of “one best way,” which the famous term “Fordism” tries to capture, did not lead to consistent racial practices, except in the most general sense that the racial knowledge its self-consciously white managers commanded could reorder the world.<sup>13</sup>

#### GROUNDINGS, CONTESTATIONS, AND CONTOURS OF THE STUDY

The most fascinating appreciations of Fordism, and the ones most attuned to Ford’s attempted reduction of labor to a series of motions in which the race and nationality of the workers would seem to have mattered little, draw from rich traditions on the Marxist left. From the *Communist Manifesto* forward, historical materialist accounts have at times thought of capitalist production as imparting a “cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country.” What Marxists have sometimes called “abstraction” describes capital as desirous of purchasing through wages a series of predictable motions and processes that exist independent of the history and personality of the workers who embodied the labor power. Indeed the historian Dipesh Chakrabarty has recently argued that Marx understood that such a desire on capital’s part was necessary to a continuing and expanding process of accumulation, one which set for itself the task of vanquishing differences even at the level of motion. The acknowledgment, however, of such a universalizing quest has too often led, in Gramsci’s writings as well as in the accounts of Fordism by later scholars who study the historical emergence of work processes, to the neglect of how thoroughly Ford managers believed the world was ordered by racial hierarchy.<sup>14</sup>

What the sociologist Grace Hong has called the “ruptures of capital”—strategies to make differences among workers meaningful—now seem in the context of recent scholarship to be as impressive, calculated, and productive

as capital's universalism.<sup>15</sup> Over the past decades labor historians have begun to examine systematically the managerial use of race to divide workers, especially in Hawaii, in the deep and border South in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and within Asian American history.<sup>16</sup> "In the history of the United States," the literary scholar Lisa Lowe writes, "capital has maximized its profits not through rendering labor 'abstract' but precisely through the social productions of 'difference,' . . . marked by race, nation, geographical origins, and gender." Indeed as Chakrabarty suggests regarding matters beyond the United States—his insight holds deep relevance for the study of Fordism transnationally—it may be that capital seeks not final universalizing victories that standardize all workers by eliminating differences but constant and varied new challenges in that regard.<sup>17</sup>

In a transnational economic context, growth often requires that development remain uneven. Such unevenness has produced not only opportunities to make races and nationalities compete but also to market Fordism to elites internationally as a mechanism for improving their own "national stock." Ford's direct impact on such heterogeneous international development leads us to take seriously not only the concept of combined and uneven development, as recent scholars have eloquently done, but of a combined and uneven Fordism. In political economic terms, but also in racial and national ones, Ford particularized as much as it universalized. It is for such reasons, and to underline the fact that Ford did not (and could not) evenly impact the entire world, that the critical engagement here is with particular transnational histories, rather than with a synthetic "global" history.<sup>18</sup>

In producing and selling the Model T as "the Universal Car" Ford promised to bring into being not just a universal product but also a universal method and thus a universal worker. In 1926 Henry Ford wrote: "An operation in our plant in Barcelona has to be carried through exactly as in Detroit . . . a man on the assembly line in Detroit ought to be able to step into the assembly line in Oklahoma City or Sao Paulo, Brazil."<sup>19</sup> But the reality was quite different. Rather than dissolving historically rooted colonial categories, Ford in fact helped consolidate a modern racial reality in both Brazil and South Africa, as it did in the United States. Despite Ford's professed interest in a universal system, and despite convergences of interest in this idea across the political spectrum, the distance of history allows us to see that Ford made men by making race and gender. Given such specific national contexts and changing exigencies, any notion of a unified Fordist system becomes difficult to sustain.<sup>20</sup>

Questions about national differences, development, and the possible spread of Fordism have until recently been the concerns of those doing comparative history, an important source of ideas and inspirations for this study. The national contexts considered in this book—Brazil, the United States, and South Africa—have been among the nation-states whose histories have been most insistently compared. Legacies of slavery and colonial settlement and the subsequent place of racial categorization necessarily play a large role in these comparisons. Indeed the best of such comparative studies, including those of George Fredrickson, John Cell, Anthony Marx, and Stanley Greenberg, make the interplay between differing material circumstances and the production of race an organizing principle of their inquiries.<sup>21</sup>

Comparative history's basis in case studies, however, also potentially aggrandizes the nation-state as a unit of analysis and misses transnational processes that show how national histories are indiscrete, unplanned, and contradictory. Moreover, capital's role in the pursuit of empire can disappear in state-centered accounts, even comparative ones. This book has profited from recent works transcending what Ella Shohat and Robert Stam have called the "narcissism of national difference" by showing institutions and individuals operating in international networks within and across empires.<sup>22</sup> Other such supranational work has illuminated how white supremacy was created through international and imperial collaborations, as in the work of Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds. Likewise, the flowering of recent work on pan-Africanism shows how this form of Afro-internationalism made analysis of and opposition to the color line parts of a dialectical whole.<sup>23</sup> Andrew Zimmerman's and James Campbell's studies showing how ideas and practices regarding race moved between specific places in Africa and the United States have likewise informed my analysis. I draw special inspiration from Zimmerman's call for a scholarship attentive at once to a "geopolitical logic of white supremacy and a political economic logic of racial specificity." For him, such specificity unfolded within a "global division of labor."<sup>24</sup>

That division of labor occurred in much of the world's territory and in the lives of workers through the mechanisms of empires.<sup>25</sup> Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper have considered how such empires, like places of Ford investment, functioned as "differentiated spaces" in which "hierarchies of production, power and knowledge . . . emerged in tension with the extension of the domain of universal reason, of market economics, and of citizenship."<sup>26</sup> The labor historian David Montgomery recognized the complexity of this reality when he wrote: "Formal and informal empires have defined the realm

of possibility for working people in both imperialist countries and the portions of the world that those countries dominated.”<sup>27</sup> Ford, working to extract largesse from foreign governments and to control enclaves outside the United States, was a leading example of what Montgomery meant by informal empire, even as it also brazenly utilized, through its own creation of the wholly independent Ford of Canada, the established colonial networks of the British Empire.<sup>28</sup>

Keeping empire, transnational capital, and national specificity within the same frame is thus a hallmark of this study. The work is shaped by the sense that privileging the nation-state as the primary container of historical narrative can miss as much as it allows us to understand about the processes through which history is made and written. But it does not seek merely to replace the nation-state with another unit, such as the multinational corporation, as some scholars of contemporary capitalism have urged.<sup>29</sup> In Ford’s case, especially in war production and immigration policy, the U.S. state was central to the company’s expansion, its changing strategies of factory discipline, and its ability to go out into the world. Similarly, in Brazil and South Africa Ford helped spin the very webs that connected those states to U.S. capital, to various kinds of progressive professionals, to racial liberals, and to investors. The goal then is a history unbounded by nation-states but attuned to their specific histories. How Ford’s vast privately owned enterprises in Detroit or the Amazon or Georgia sometimes acted like states is one historical reality that points toward the need for this kind of method.

Within the context of U.S. history a “transnational turn” has been especially salutary insofar as it can help make “America” a more foreign place to the historians who study, write, and teach about it. When that turn focuses on labor, race, and management, results have been especially promising. Few histories could benefit more from critical and de-nationalized treatment than that of Ford. Examining across borders the daily reality of how the Ford Motor Company built cars, sold tractors, mined timber, and tried to produce rubber, among other pursuits, enables a far more complex examination of this firm and of the handful of men who ran it in the years it expanded globally. Stepping outside the borders of the United States allows us to frame questions differently. In the case of the Ford Motor Company this means acknowledging that not only was Ford almost *always* a multinational corporation, but also that this necessitates seeing the company’s actions as political and cultural, not just economic. Looking at Ford’s practices inside and outside the formal borders of the United States provides a way to

consider how racial ideologies enabled states and private capital to work together.<sup>30</sup>

#### ON METHOD: DAILY AND GLOBAL LIFE

Avoiding some of the pitfalls of comparative history and social theory while borrowing from their contributions has given *The Color Line and the Assembly Line* a particular structure. Within the three national contexts under examination, eight sites are highlighted, underlining the point that nations are not homogenous units to be plugged into comparisons. This also allows us to see how inequalities between nation-states did not preclude the existence of inequalities within them. In the United States the factories at Highland Park and River Rouge differ dramatically as managerial regimes and as racial projects. Each compares to and contrasts with the Fordist management of Black workers off the job in Inkster, Michigan, as well as management at Ford's plantation in Richmond Hill, Georgia. In the Rouge, Ford cemented a reputation as the nation's leading employer of Black workers; elsewhere in the United States it scarcely departed from the norms of Southern Jim Crow and Midwestern "sundown towns." In Brazil managers of mixed-race laborers on the rubber plantations that Ford created, first at Fordlandia and then at Belterra, sought to improve workers using strategies very different from one place and time to the next. Both Brazil sites contrasted sharply with the U.S. context, where mixed-race people were never a category constituting legitimate objects of management (or other forms of legitimacy or social control). In South Africa, Ford participated through its Port Elizabeth factory in national and transnational projects—the latter profoundly shaped by Ford's integration into the British Empire through its Canadian enterprise—to hire and thus redeem poor whites deemed to be failing in their racially assigned positions in a system of white supremacy. The African workers excluded by Ford meanwhile fashioned a community, Kwaford, from the company's discarded shipping crates.<sup>31</sup>

The book starts with a consideration of the first fifteen years of Ford during which the company gained its reputation as a social reformer for its work in attempting to Americanize European immigrants at its Highland Park plant. During those years Ford also became a transnational company, developing connections to world markets well before World War I would propel it and other American firms further into the world. However, the book's

main focus is on the critical decades after World War I. Ford's Highland Park Americanization campaigns were over by this time but they nonetheless lay the basis for much of the embrace of Ford outside the United States. This work frames Ford's move into Brazil and South Africa through a discussion of the particular social goals of state-crafters in those countries who found in Ford a useful ally, and at times a guide. The company had garnered a reputation for linking social improvement to high wages and found adherents on all sides of the political spectrum—at home from socialists like Kate O'Hare to Ku Klux Klan members, and abroad from emerging fascists to V.I. Lenin and various Soviet planners.<sup>32</sup>

In focusing on the 1920s and early 1930s this study follows the lead of the Italian scholar of Fordism Ferruccio Gambino, who has eloquently urged attention to the heterogeneity of Fordist practices across time and space. Gambino has particularly called our attention to the importance of keeping the long period of “Fordism without unions”—and indeed against them—distinct from what some analysts regard as the “golden age of Fordism” after World War II. Even as innovative a book as political scientist Mark Rupert's *Producing Hegemony: The Politics of Mass Production and American Global Power*, which does devote considerable attention to pre-union labor relations, ends up seeing the global reach of Fordism as occurring after the U.S. entry into World War II, a development that coincided with industrial unionism's triumph at Ford. This overarching emphasis on international relations and on the project of incorporating unionized workers into support of U.S. empire allows Rupert to intervene interestingly in debates within his field of international political economy. But in missing the efforts of Fordism both earlier and beyond Europe and the United States, Rupert and others also pay only the most glancing attention to the role of race in Fordist management, within or outside the United States.<sup>33</sup>

## THE ARGUMENTS AND THE CHAPTERS

This history of Ford focuses on uneven development and racial regimes that made Brazil and South Africa different from one another and from Detroit, which was in turn different from other U.S. sites. Implicit in its argument for a methodology that is at once transnational and comparative is that such multiple approaches help us to see how uneven development and varied mechanisms of white supremacy existed in the United States as well as

outside of it. To examine in the same book such a variety of Fordist plans and practices with roughly half the study devoted to each—allows for appreciation of how the confidence and flexibility it gained domestically allowed Ford to penetrate not just new economic worlds but new social worlds. In those worlds it sought not to impose a system but instead to apply an approach inspired by a broad commitment to white supremacy, especially in the realm of management.

In the United States, Brazil, and South Africa, Ford jobs and wages were packaged in social engineering schemes that sought to distinguish, categorize, and segregate workers by deepening and naming national, racial, and bodily differences. Thus the role of mass consumption cannot be severed from the role of mass production, though historians of Americanization frequently do so.<sup>34</sup> Central to the book's arguments is acceptance of Gramsci's observation that being seen to possess the most rationalized labor process in the world enabled Ford to rule workers and reshape society in the interwar years. Gramsci's passing remark in "Americanism and Fordism" that "hegemony was born in the factory" is especially important.<sup>35</sup> As a literal truth, the provocation only gets us so far; its limits are clear for example in the case of Ford's rubber plantations. But as a point of departure it is fruitful. At its most basic level the linking of hegemony and factory enables a vital broadening of analytical possibilities, supplementing scholarship that places the United States in the world by stressing the spread of its culture and consumer products. Important as those matters were, it was the discipline of mass production at Ford, as well as its advertised ability to transform "backwards" workers through regimented labor, that first made Ford so attractive to foreign leaders and that slowed its spread to countries with stronger industrial unions.

Seeing Ford's managerial practices, labor processes, and claims to race development as commodities that it marketed alongside the Model T connects Ford to long processes that David Roediger and I have discussed under the heading "whiteness-as-management."<sup>36</sup> This book argues that an analysis of workplace management is essential to understanding both the daily life of a factory and the larger cultural and social development of capitalism as a system. In this regard, it is necessary to remember that it is managers themselves, not capital as an abstraction, whom workers confront on the job. Studying managers' actions and ideas helps us to understand not just the daily life of industrial production but the broader meaning of assembly line production in American and subsequently transnational, political



economies. At least until the late 1920s “foreigners” were seen as racially, not just culturally, different, a phenomenon re-emerging starkly in the United States today. Indeed, as burgeoning numbers of immigrants from the poorest sections of Europe became the core of the U.S. working class, management increasingly compared the “races” from which these southern and eastern European “new immigrants” came with “old stock” Americans, with workers of color, and with each other. Racial knowledge was used directly by “supervisors, section heads, foremen and other minor functionaries” to establish not only workers’ places but their own, “solidifying [their] own position[s] of belonging and Americanness.”<sup>37</sup> Necessary precisely because of the alienating and backbreaking pace of work in Ford plants, managers played both supervisory and disciplinary roles in the daily lives of workers. However, such roles should not be seen as being without *political* impact or meaning. The political aspirations of managers and their self-conceptions are intimately linked to the jobs they did every day.

Thus within working-class studies this work seeks to shift the focus from “labor and capital” to the more daily and lived reality of “workers and managers.” It recognizes the significance of Marx’s observation that “capital is also necessarily always a capitalist” and calls us to study its human representatives. For Marx, capitalism itself creates the reality (and necessity) of managerial structure and ideology, even a “personality as against labor.” Indeed as Marx later maintained, “An industrial army of workmen, under the command of a capitalist, requires, like a real army, officers [managers], and sergeants [foremen, overlookers], who, while the work is being done, command in the name of the capitalist. The work of supervision becomes their established and exclusive function.”<sup>38</sup> To emphasize the centrality of management is made easier in Ford’s case because the superb business history of the company, by Allan Nevins and Frank Ernest Hill; the best early biography of Henry Ford, by Keith Sward; the best fictional rendering of Ford, by Upton Sinclair, and the best labor histories of Ford, by Stephen Meyer and David Gartman, all take management as a point of departure.<sup>39</sup>

Recent biographical studies of Henry Ford have been less acute in this regard, preferring to focus on the personal roles, idiosyncrasies, and often genius of their subject in ways that offer little opportunity to understand managerial ideologies and structures. Most histories of the man and the company—however thorough in other ways—have not urged an analysis of the close connection between the company’s vast international presence and the political convictions of Henry Ford and the managers who functioned as his

lieutenants. Conflicts between Henry Ford's professed nineteenth-century cultural values and his modernizing impact are more dramatized than explained. Thus Ford is seen as the great modernizer who hated urban cultural life, supported Prohibition, and thought workers should learn to folk dance; as the paternalist who hired more African Americans than any other Detroit employer before WWII but who was also a vicious anti-Semite who authored *The International Jew: The World's Foremost Problem*; the richest man in the world who also despised banks; the high-wage payer who hated unions; and, perhaps at the heart of all of these, the enabler of mass consumption who believed that most workers were not civilized enough to responsibly organize their own relationships to time and money. But to call attention to such matters only as paradoxes is not to explain them, or even necessarily to connect them.<sup>40</sup>

Most of Ford's overseas production began as or after links among race, management, and colonialism were being made and national variations of white supremacy were maturing. The company's development and transnational expansion deepened these already-existing dynamics, but it did not challenge them. In Brazil and South Africa Henry Ford and his leading managers—Charles Sorensen, Ernest Liebold, and Harry Bennett—found contemporaries who shared an approach to industrial, political, and social life with them personally and with their company's approach to social engineering, mass consumption, and mass production. In the South African case, Ford managers abjured the opportunity to play race against race as they did in Detroit, working with the local state's legislation of whites-only hiring. In Brazil, it regarded mixed-race people as particularly improvable even as no such category was positively affirmed in the United States. Such diverging priorities clearly said as much about the significance of emerging racial systems in the countries hosting Ford as they did about the relevance of race to the Ford Motor Company where investment and production were concerned. In combination with its extraordinary wealth and power, it was confidence in the idea that Ford could apply racial knowledge across locality and nation—never insisting on a set configuration of such knowledge—that made Ford appealing to national elites interested in racial improvement. That a consistent belief in the supremacy of whites could transcend deeply contradictory applications of it in practice in different locales suggests that its power derived from something other than its veracity or internal consistency.

Ford's regime of production both necessitated and enabled the making of "new men," and the chapters that follow show that this uneven process was

inseparable from both extant and emerging state-driven nationalizing practices around the globe. Ford apprehended specific racial and national subjects through mass production and mass consumption, engaged workers and their families in the physical spaces of work and home, and aligned itself with managers and others involved in nationalizing projects in Brazil, South Africa, and the United States.

*The Color Line and the Assembly Line* unfolds in five chapters. Chapter 1, “Ford Goes to the World; the World Comes to Ford,” details how, from almost its founding moments, the Ford Motor Company was fully transnational. By the time Ford introduced the five-dollar wage the company already had sizable holdings and boundless ambitions outside of the United States. The chapter shows how this massive expansion was made possible by the changes in the labor regime and the patterns of social reproduction of immigrant workers in Ford’s Highland Park plant. In the Highland Park years Ford managers bossed, and the “sociologists” Ford employed molded, those immigrant workers thought to be of multiple European “races.” They were required to participate in Americanization programs that included learning to speak English and professing allegiance to new values on and off the job.

Chapter 2, “From the Melting Pot to the Boiling Pot: Fascism and the Factory-State at the River Rouge Plant in the 1920s,” moves the investigation of Ford from Highland Park to the River Rouge plant, famously chosen in 1932 by Diego Rivera to be the subject of his *Detroit Industry* frescoes. Here we see how thoroughly the welfare activities that would earn Ford its reputation around the world had been replaced by brutality, surveillance, and arbitrariness in the control of workers. The Rouge came fully on line as the new home of Model T production while European immigration to the United States was being curtailed by war and then nearly stopped through the immigration restrictions of 1924. The chapter situates managerial changes in this new reality. It also considers the built environment and management of the Rouge plant in relation to Ford managers’ political interests in fascism and fascist political interest in Ford. Indeed the Rouge functioned transnationally not as a model of racial integration but as an inspiration for Nazi factory management, a fascist-like factory-state run by managers who at times professed strong affinities for fascism.

Chapter 3, “Out of the Melting Pot and into the Fire: African Americans and the Uneven Ford Empire at Home,” looks at the story of the Rouge plant, the only workplace where Ford hired significant numbers of Black workers, through the experiences there of African American workers. In the wake of

immigration restriction Ford recruited Black and Mexican workers by the thousands to work at the Rouge. Even as Ford was celebrated by local Black elites for hiring African American workers at the Rouge, those workers were increasingly concentrated in the hottest and worst jobs. One concern of this chapter is thus to shed light on the contradictory reality that the “best jobs” in Detroit for African Americans were in a factory that workers nevertheless described as “the house of murder.”<sup>41</sup> In challenging the notion that paternalism is the framework through which to understand Ford’s relationship to Black workers, this chapter also considers Ford’s involvement in racial uplift projects in two contexts more aptly described as colonial than as paternal. In 1932, the company purchased the “Black town” of Inkster, Michigan, its segregation partly premised on Ford’s failure to stand up for fair housing in and around Dearborn. Credited with saving the residents of Inkster from the crisis of the Depression, Ford’s Inkster “experiment” was modeled on a plan of debt peonage and perhaps consciously constructed a colonial relation with African Americans in the United States. In 1936, Henry Ford bought one million acres near Savannah, Georgia, restarting a plantation he named Richmond Hill. There the company launched a series of Jim Crow social uplift projects designed to save the white residents from racial neglect and the Black residents from themselves.

Chapter 4, “Breeding Rubber, Breeding Workers: From Fordlandia to Belterra,” continues the consideration of Ford as a colonial power in tracing its decision to buy and build two vast rubber plantations in the Amazon region of Brazil. From 1925 to 1945 the Ford Motor Company engaged in an experiment in social engineering at its new rubber plantations in the Amazon, Fordlandia, and Belterra. This chapter demonstrates how Ford’s intervention was fully in sync with the aspirations of Brazilian politicians and modernizers. Further, the company’s belief in the racial improvability of Amazonian people structured the very choice of location of the plantations. Specifically influenced by what it perceived as the racial potential of the people in the region, Ford first recruited single men and then whole families to the plantations. Social and biological reproduction of children replaced attempts to improve rubber tappers who resisted Ford’s importation of its “one best way.”

Chapter 5, “‘Work in the Factory Itself’: Fordism, South Africanism, and Poor White Reform,” examines the earliest moments of Ford’s arrival in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, where it would ultimately become one of the most powerful employers. This chapter examines how the Poor White Study of the

Carnegie Corporation provided a social scientific rationale for the racial segregation of industrial work with which Ford complied. Though in South Africa Ford's processes of mass production and mass consumption were both mobilized in projects of racial improvement, the Carnegie report specifically endorsed the idea of work in the factory as the most effective route to the racial improvement and discipline of so-called poor whites. While Ford would gain its reputation for investing in South Africa years later when the company was a supporter of apartheid, the roots of its relationship with this racist state are in the 1920s and 1930s, when Ford had a reputation for racial paternalism and even liberalism in the United States. In part because of challenges to the company's ties to the apartheid regime, specific records for Ford in South Africa are relatively scarce, but the existing record allows for reconstruction of the company as part of broader white managerialist efforts to address the "problem of poor whites."

A short Conclusion, "From the One Best Way to The Way Forward to One Ford—Still Uneven, Still Unequal," considers race, management, and uneven development in the so-called post-Fordist world of auto production.

The first part of the paper discusses the importance of the research and the objectives of the study. It then presents a literature review of the existing research on the topic. The second part of the paper describes the methodology used in the study, including the data collection and analysis techniques. The third part of the paper presents the results of the study, and the fourth part discusses the implications of the findings. The paper concludes with a summary of the main findings and a list of references.

The research was conducted in a systematic and rigorous manner, following the principles of good research practice. The data was collected from a representative sample of the population, and the analysis was carried out using appropriate statistical methods. The results of the study are presented in a clear and concise manner, and the implications of the findings are discussed in detail. The paper is well-written and easy to read, and it provides a valuable contribution to the field of research.

The findings of the study have important implications for the field of research, and they provide a basis for further research. The results of the study are consistent with the findings of previous research, and they provide new insights into the topic. The paper is a valuable contribution to the field of research, and it is well-recommended for reading.

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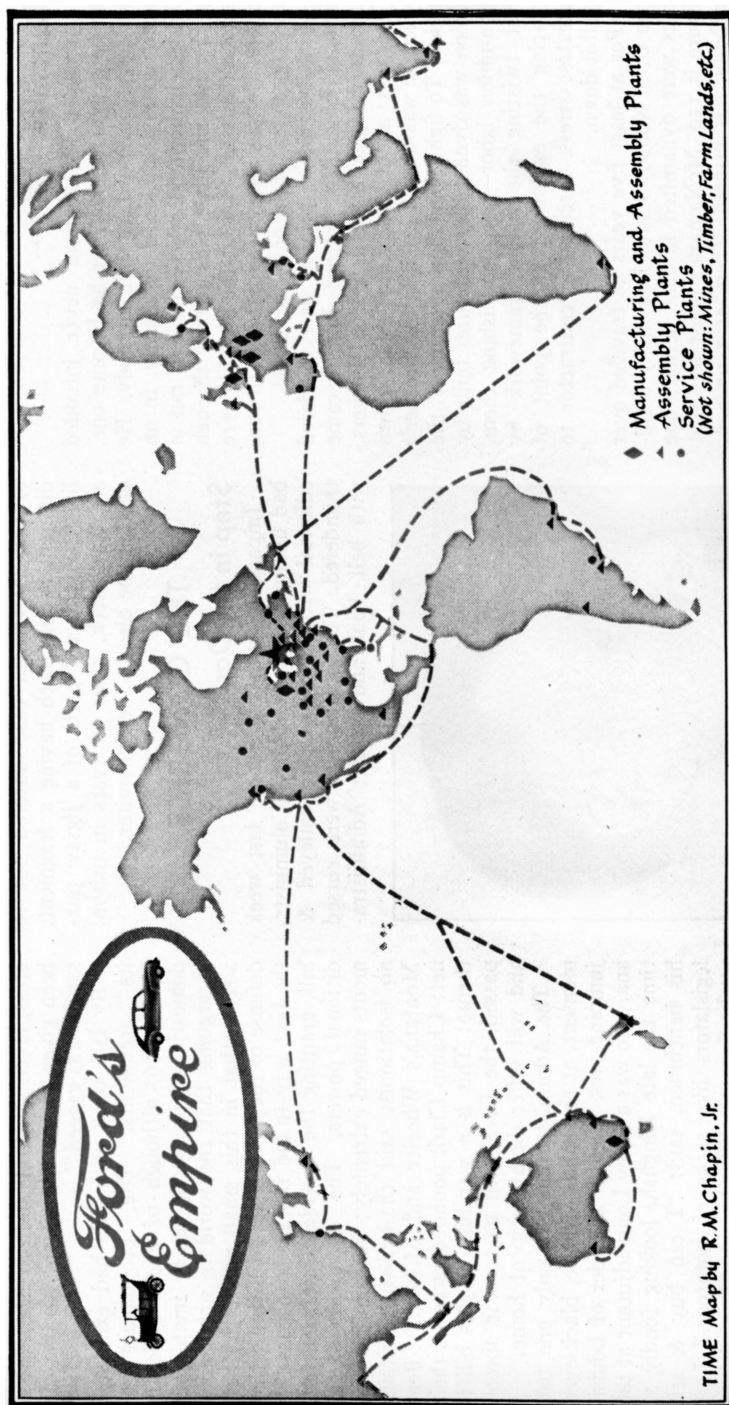


FIGURE 2. The Ford empire circa 1941. Courtesy R.M. Chapin, Jr., for *Time Magazine*, March 17, 1941.