

Introduction

A WHITE BUS PACKED with men, women, and children departs from a private detention center. There are bars across the bus windows. The passengers are in chains. Eventually the bus stops at a small airfield, one among the recent proliferation of Immigration and Customs Enforcement deportation hubs that include Alexandria, Louisiana; San Antonio, Texas; and Mesa, Arizona. Often wearing whatever they were arrested in, the deportees, hobbled by shackles, climb down from the bus. Older children with school backpacks reach toward their parents, younger ones drowse in their parents' arms, crowded by the straps of purses and duffel bags. Red mesh sacks, what counts as luggage for many, slouch beside the tattered suitcases of those who had time to gather their things.

Private guards from the detention center and federal officials in dark windbreakers shepherd the families across the tarmac and to the rolling staircase to a Boeing 737, provided by Swift Airlines or another private contractor. They remove the prisoners' leg irons—there is nowhere to run on an airplane—and gather them for the next busload. As has already happened again and again in their jails, guards pat down the deportees' pockets and look into their mouths, one last bodily indignity to endure on American soil. In 2016 the United States deported more than 110,000 people on chartered flights, and 6,100 more on commercial airlines.¹ In the twenty-first century—an age of mass migration, mass deportation, and mass incarceration—flying “ICE Air” has become an American journey—as American, perhaps, as apple pie in a prison mess hall.

Aboard the plane, a mix of fear, anxiety, and nerves. Seatbelts are fastened beneath shackled hands and compete for space with waist chains. Many of the passengers have never flown before. Others were shuttled between a diz-

zying number of detention centers, where they were locked for long periods. The blue fabric seats, the white-pebbled plastic trays, crowd close. Suffice to say, there is no first-class cabin on ICE Air. Economy, after all, is the point. ICE flight attendants spray cloying air freshener into the plane, thin cover for the underlying odor of bodies and long-unwashed clothes. Passengers have at best limited access to the toilet on a journey that can last from a few hours to half a day, depending on the number of stops the plane makes. Through the engine's incessant whine, beyond airsickness or turbulence to come, the deportees pass the time, planning how to survive the coming months and if or how to return to the United States, where they can try to make a life again. They get a meal in a cardboard box. It can't be easy to eat.

Officials laud the efficiency and speed of removal aboard the planes, framing their collaborations with private contractors like Swift Air as a dynamic and welcome innovation. Acting Director of ICE Matt Albence, aware of widespread protests over grim conditions in immigrant detention and removal, quipped about how much deportees enjoy the amenities: "They're smiling!... This is probably better than some of the commercial airlines I fly on." Television crews don't film deportees' faces. Any smiles, perhaps at the thought of reunion with family and friends from whom they have long been apart, must be tempered by worries about how they'll make ends meet. They left their homes in Guatemala, El Salvador, Ecuador, or elsewhere, because life had been too dangerous, or too wracked by poverty, to survive. In addition to the brute fact of forced removal, one man reported that guards deliberately "tried to make us feel bad." And even when guards are friendly, it's clear enough to all that this airplane is a mobile prison. No one doubts that there is a can of mace just behind the sprayed potpourri.²

Flash back a century ago, and you could encounter a similar scene. Rather than boarding an airplane, the group of deportees would have been forced onto a reconfigured Pullman tourist train car, administered by the Immigration Bureau and the Department of Labor. Today's ICE Air 737s are slightly aging but certainly serviceable for the advanced infrastructure of global air travel. A century ago, the Pullman cars had seen some miles, but they were sturdy too. They had been designed in 1907 and introduced for service in 1910. The train's steel frames were a safety improvement on wooden carriages of an earlier era, and featured electrical light and a low-pressure vapor heat system. By

1917, Pullman cars advertised “innumerable hidden mechanisms” designed to make travel more comfortable. An individual car contained “nearly a mile of laminated copper wire, over a half mile of pipes,” as well as a dizzying number of switches, circuit boards, dynamos, motors, ventilators, push-buttons, “and other apparatuses.”³ Enthusiasts of the day could marvel at the train’s feats of mechanical and electrical engineering, and ordinary passengers on Pullman cars enjoyed the comforts appropriate to the tickets that their budgets—or race, given Jim Crow regulations—allowed.⁴

Pullman train cars were wonders of modern technological development, and after 1914 they were updated for deportation traffic with bars across the windows. Deportation trains were prison cars. Like ICE airplanes, once the doors were shut and the wheels turning, the trains were closed vessels, conveniently suited to forced travel. Guards and matrons—hard men and stern women from the immigration bureau, or on loan from the Southern Pacific Railroad or another train company—were stationed at each end of the carriage and walked up and down the aisles, prepared if they thought any of the deportees got out of hand.⁵

One trip in 1920 had around forty deportees aboard, gathered from state hospitals, prisons, or jails. In Portland, Oregon, immigration agents brought aboard a Turkish man, whom the trip’s doctor described as a “weazened [*sic*] dark skinned little fellow of about a hundred pounds... well dressed in a black suit and panama hat” who was being deported “because he had been a procurer.” Another was a Spaniard, convicted of violating the White Slavery Act. Three Germans were also added to the train. It was in the wake of the First World War, and one young man had been at Alcatraz, presumably a prisoner of war. The two older German men had been in asylums in Oregon and Washington. Another was an Italian convicted of bootlegging.⁶ In Pendleton, Oregon, an insane Italian man was brought aboard, and in Omaha, Nebraska, additional deportees included insane Bulgarian and Canadian men.⁷ In Chicago, immigration agents brought aboard five more deportees, including a “middle aged Italian with long black moustache and wild flashing eyes full of resentment.” He was being deported along with his four-year-old son, “who was likewise wide eyed with wonder at being placed in such surroundings.” There was also a “blank faced Finn,” a “dull countenanced Swede,” and an anarchist, for whom the guards showed particular disdain.⁸

Newspapers of the day covered deportation traffic, much as the occasional

story runs about ICE Air today, but some of the richest descriptions come from novelist Theodore Irwin, who recounted a deportation journey in his 1935 book *Strange Passage*. In the book's opening scene, Paul, an artist and the male protagonist, describes the smell of the train: "The disinfectant in the air—these men from the county jails seem to breathe it out. The smell from our bodies—we haven't bathed in a long time. The foodstaleness—from the stuff some have taken along. The scent of five-and-ten powder on the women. The baby. The burned coal. The lavatories, open-doored." Paul imagines how he would paint the scene: "I would have to find new colors, all of them muddied with a dung-brown smear."⁹ The astringent cut of disinfectant, a result of the medical controls to which they had been subject and dangers of bacteriological contagion. That the passage ends with a sense of shit—smeared, no less—reveals much about not just the reality of closely packed bodies but also how people facing deportation in this earlier era were perceived. The novel's opening passages conclude by describing the train as a living, convulsing beast, consuming and vomiting undesirable aliens:

At Spokane, at Whitefish, at Glacier Park, at other key cities over the long journey, aliens were being swallowed up; the Deportation Special was gorging itself. To the exit gate of the nation, and the train would spew out what it had swallowed along the way. Then, out with you, go back where you came from, you dago, you hunky, you scoovy, you mick, you sheenie, you limey. Get out and stay out.¹⁰

Between 1914 and the Second World War, the Immigration Bureau's reconfigured prison railroad cars made constant circuits around the nation, gathering so-called "undesirable aliens"—disdained for their poverty, political radicalism, criminal conviction, or insanity, perceptions compounded by maligned national and ethnoracial difference—and conveyed them to ports and borders for exile overseas. The trains were the culmination of a century's worth of immigration law, materialized in the steel of its rail networks and force of its engines, expanded in its complex links of public administrative bureaucracies and private corporate power. It was complex network—or, put another way, a politico-technical assemblage—that conjoined a host of security-oriented laws, agencies, and techniques, and enabled and extended the will and desire for an expansive understanding of national protection.¹¹

The trains were mobile, carceral spaces, and their history reveals the deportees' journey as a process through which national territory, political

sovereignty, and community—three defining features of modern nationhood—were created and contested.¹² Previous deportation procedures had been violent, expensive, and relatively ad hoc.¹³ But the use of the railroad—perhaps the exemplary technology of industrial modernity—facilitated the mass expulsion of the undesirable. The material capacity to deport large numbers of people—or at least to make a deportation credible threat—powerfully affected those who remained. Indeed, thanks to the train, American nativists’ long-standing fantasies of immigrant exclusion and mass deportation finally appeared within reach. ICE Air is just the latest manifestation of the impetus behind the American deportation trains. This book tells the story of those trains, and of some of the people who were forced aboard them.

Along with the mounting number of restrictive immigration laws in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, deportation was a governmental attempt to regulate the periods’ unprecedented forces of global mass migration—some twenty-six million migrants arrived in the United States between 1870 and 1920—but also a means of trying to control the flows of commodities and capital, including labor, in a rapidly globalizing, racially structured economy.¹⁴ Compared with the twenty-first-century standards, the numbers of people officially expelled in the first part of the twentieth century were small, climbing from 1,630 in 1893 to 4,741 in 1914. Official removals dipped during the First World War, and annual reports documented the more than 4,500 people with approved deportation warrants between 1915 and 1919 who could not be officially removed due to limits on oceanic travel.¹⁵

But expulsions from the interior accelerated in the first half of the 1920s (from 2,765 in 1920 to 9,495 in 1925) and climbed to 18,142 in 1931.¹⁶ The numbers that the immigration bureau generated are sketchy, however, and inconsistently account for those deported under Chinese exclusion law rather than ordinary immigration law, for people who were turned back at ports of entry, and for people who were coerced into “voluntarily” removal and whose numbers were never recorded. Between 1914 and 1931, nearly 130,000 people were deported from the nation’s interior to beyond its hardening borders, with the numbers climbing steadily.¹⁷ According to the Department of Homeland Security, in the age of rail-based removal—roughly from 1914 through 1945—some 939,456 people were either “removed” or “returned” from the United States.¹⁸

Yet significance of rail as a means of mass removal exceeded the numbers of people expelled in any given year, because it offered anti-immigrant officials a system with the flexibility to expand or contract in response to its

political or economic desires. In the century since the trains' deployment, deportation has grown into a massive regime and flashpoint of contemporary global racial political economics.¹⁹ Removal rates skyrocketed under the Clinton, Bush, and Obama administrations—this has been a bipartisan effort undertaken by Democrats and Republicans alike—and in 2013 alone, 434,015 people were expelled. Recent Department of Homeland Security documents report more than fifty-six million “returns” and “removals” from the United States between 1892 and 2018.²⁰ Donald Trump and his supporters saw this as far too few, and as a result, built a far more punitive system on their predecessors' foundation.²¹

Then, as now, people who were deported from the United States were typically poorly educated and working class. They were, in the most literal sense, the United States' most marginalized peoples. Among them were the mad and the criminal; the destitute and the disabled; people who were criminalized for the location of their birth, and the passage of racist and restrictive laws, or for the beliefs they held. Underlying deportation was a persistent logic of eugenics: a notion that states should control the reproduction of their biological populations, and that “unfit,” “defective,” “degenerate” people should not be permitted to exist. That included people of color. Eugenicists like Lothrop Stoddard portrayed immigrants as a flood, an invasion, or as in the title his best-selling 1921 book, a “rising tide of color.” Each “wave” threatened to drown an imagined American national past of racial purity and imperil the country's future. In an article called “Scum from the Melting Pot,” Edwin E. Grant, a former California state senator and president of the California State Law Enforcement League, was forthright about the eugenic benefits of mass deportation. “Systematic deportation,” he praised, “eugenically cleanses America of a vicious element.” Grant believed the United States shone upon the world as city on a hill and that the benefits of forced removal would trickle down to the darker corners of the globe. “The moral effect upon their native countries makes deportation of offenders,” he continued, “in an international sense, doubly worthwhile.”²² Harry Laughlin, of the Eugenics Records Office, echoed the sentiment in his “expert” testimony before Congress in 1928, calling deportation the “last line of defense against contamination of the American family stocks by alien hereditary degeneracy.”²³

Not everyone endorsed such outright scientific racism, but even committed liberals could embrace racist and eugenic logic when it came to forced removal. “Deportation laws are, of course, necessary,” wrote reformer Ruben

Oppenheimer in 1931. “No other penalty than deportation will protect the United States from being inundated by defective, diseased, delinquent, and incorrigible persons. No other penalty will adequately discourage border jumpers or stowaways or the industry of smuggling undesirable aliens at our borders.”²⁴ The belief in the American nation as coherent and sovereign, the insistence on the inviolability of its territory, and the desire to control the future of its population, of who might contribute to its wealth and benefit from its resources—these were ideas shared by liberals and conservatives alike.

The deportation regime described throughout this book took shape in a period when the United States was climbing to a position of global prominence, and it coincided with the accelerated integration of a modern, global, racially stratified, and industrially dominated economic world system.²⁵ Some explanations for America’s rise celebrate an ethereal American exceptionalism, the nation’s godliness and genius and capacity for democracy. Other explanations are more persuasive. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the United States had absorbed the vast wealth generated through the centuries of the anti-Black chattel slavery that fueled the US economy and reinvested it into its massive and expanding productive apparatus. That apparatus was peopled by the global working classes who had themselves been displaced from their homes in the Atlantic and Pacific worlds by the forces of imperialism, or through local variations on the global theme of industrial disruption. By the turn of the twentieth century, the United States had wrested military and political control of the western half of the continent from Native Americans and occupying Mexican colonial societies and was fully engaged in luring fresh workers from around the globe to extract wealth from the land. The United States was, structurally speaking, transforming from a relative semiperiphery to a core, if not the core, of the global economy.

Across the planet, railroads were at the center of colonial and economic accumulation. Within North America the transcontinental railroad has stood among the master symbols of the United States’ social and industrial progress, and for good reason. The railroads were literal as well as metaphorical engines of US political, territorial, and economic expansion, accompanied by a boosterism that has led scholars and enthusiasts to echo grandiose claims about the “epic tale” of American railroads.²⁶ Testimony before the 1887 Congress’s Pacific Railway Commission gave a partial list of why the trans-

continental railroads should be built, but foremost among them were its military and economic potential. Rail lines would “furnish a cheaper and more rapid means of transportation for mail, troops and munitions of war,” which might finally “end the Indian wars.” Military capacities of rail infrastructure would also help the United States fend off rival or “foreign” imperial claims on the continent. And perhaps most important, the transcontinental rail would have inestimable economic benefits, speeding “the development of the resources of the vast and then unpeopled territory between the Missouri and Sacramento Rivers.”²⁷

Railroad corporations did this and more. Facilitated by the US military and paid for by US taxes and major financial institutions’ investments, railroads accelerated the dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their lands. They did so in many and diverse ways, but perhaps most simply by delivering brute numbers of migrants from across the planet deep into the continent, whose sheer volume wreaked catastrophic harm on Indigenous worlds. Occupation of the land made conquest, previously only notional, into a harsh reality. In the same stroke the railroads knit together the continent’s material resources and linked formerly peripheral regions of the global economy under the auspices of US-led free trade.²⁸ The rail system was recognized as integral to industrial development and the United States’ so-called Manifest Destiny to overtake the continent. But in what has become a recurrent motif of American history, the people who actually built the lines were reviled as racial threats to law and order and American citizenship.²⁹ Moreover, their work was dangerous, highly coercive, and poorly paid. Irish workers displaced by famine and English colonialism were central to building transport infrastructure in the mid-nineteenth century Eastern Seaboard and northern-central states; Chinese workers in the Pacific states and Mountain West did similar work under terrible conditions in the second half of the century.

In the post-Civil War South, Black workers, criminalized through the convict lease system, were forced under the lash to build the infrastructure that sped the regional transition from slavery to industrializing capitalism and deeper integration in world markets. After the 1882 Exclusion Act dammed the legal flow of Chinese workers, eastern and southern Europeans filled the gaps in the lowest echelons of US midwestern and central states’ railroad labor, while smaller but still significant numbers of Japanese and then Mexican workers built and maintained the increasingly dense rail networks traversing the North American West and southwestern borderlands from the

1880s through the Mexican Revolution. By the time of the First World War and the 1917 Immigration Act, when poor workers from eastern and southern Europe could no longer cross the Atlantic, Mexican track workers traveled further from the southwestern borderlands and into the Midwest, the northern central states, and the mid-Atlantic and East Coast.³⁰ By 1916 more than 250,000 miles of rail traversed the United States. Exploited and racialized workers were not incidental to the building of American wealth and railroads; they were at its heart.

Railroads have loomed equally large in US popular culture. Under the heading “Westward The Star of Empire Takes Its Way,” a June 1871 issue of *California Mail Bag* shows a locomotive charging through the Sierra Nevada mountains, scattering crudely drawn Indians and wildlife from its path.³¹ With greater acuity and loftier ambitions, John Gast’s *American Progress* (1872) depicts the rail as a key component in the expansion of white civilization, driving out Indigenous peoples and bison—an expression of the Manifest Destiny of enlightened American Christendom and a progression of frontier to farms, towns, and cities.³² And entering the era that concerns us here, John Ford’s 1924 silent film *The Iron Horse* brought the story to America’s movie theaters. In Ford’s telling, visionary surveyors, intrepid explorers, and a multiethnic crew of workers battled corrupt businessmen, hostile Indians, and the land itself to build the transcontinental road. By expanding west, they symbolically reunited a north and south riven by Civil War, and realized America’s proclaimed world-historical mission of westward expansion.

In Ford’s film, white, American-born men directed the Union Pacific works coming from the east, while their female counterparts served either as gentle tamers of the masculine frontier or as devious seductresses. The white Americans were aided by Irish men as sidekicks and comic relief, lower on the white racial scale but still useful. The Irish also helped to challenge Italian workers—lower still among the Europeans—when the Italians threatened to go on strike. Chinese workers, too, labored for the Central Pacific in California’s mountains, though by the time Ford’s film was made, the Chinese had been prohibited from coming to the United States for more than forty years. Still, the film’s idea of American whiteness—variegated as it was into the hierarchy of Anglo-American, Irish, and Italians—was usefully defined against three foils: the Chinese, as racially undesirable and legally prohibited migrants; the Indians, whom the white settlers forced from the

land; and African Americans, whose enslaved labor built the United States and Atlantic world economy, but who, once emancipated, were entirely absent from Ford's American epic.³³

Ford's story was compelling and the film was popular, not least because it narrated the building of the railroads as a project in which immigrant classes contributed to this self-consciously American project. The film fit within a liberal vision of the United States as a nation of immigrants, as a melting pot and land of opportunity, of which many Americans have long been proud. Nevertheless, migrant denizens and travelers who could not or would not adhere to the eugenic contours of settler citizenship risked capture, arrest, and expulsion as undesirable aliens, often along the very tracks that Ford's celebrated immigrants helped build.³⁴ Large-scale deportation, whose legal precepts were increasingly materializable in the early twentieth century thanks to new federal capacities for coordinated capture and removal, operated in tandem with incarceration as a means of racial, spatial, and behavioral governance.³⁵ Deportation asserted sovereignty over national territories by regulating community membership through the partitioning of citizenship, undesirable alienage, and criminality.

The deportation assemblage made "undesirability" appear as an individual person's failures, even as that person was part of a group identified by its supposed racial or national characteristics: their personal disabilities, their bad choices, their immorality, and so forth.³⁶ It was generally conjoined by any number of particular racializing processes; the supposed atavism of being an Irish man, which was taken to be distinct from French women's particular immorality, as distinct from the deviance that racial scientists understood characterized South Asian men or that lay behind putative Chinese docility. Yet looking at the deportation train as part of an expanding system, or what some have called an integrated assemblage, allows us to see this key facet of structured and spatialized inequalities through the networked relationships among the multiply dispossessed as they were located in an increasingly interconnected economic world system. That system had long been shaped by racial hierarchies. Some were primarily anti-Black, in the traditions of chattel slavery, segregation, ghettoization, and, in years since, the capacious forms of mass incarceration. Others were anti-Indigenous, such as settler-colonial policies of forced removal, extermination, and forced assimilation in boarding schools. Here, anti-immigrant nativisms were reinvigorated and targeted the foreign-born through its networks of capture and removal.³⁷

This book is guided by a few major concepts. The first, and largest, is racial capitalism.³⁸ By this, I mean a global political and economic system dating from at least the fifteenth century based on capitalist relations among people (whose sorting into racialized groups enables exploitation and mitigates against working-class solidarities), and between businesses and the more-than-human world, in which the search for profit trumps all other values. Racial capitalism is an analytic term to make sense of what has become a global system, but this isn't to say the system is everywhere the same. Far from it. The specific details of particular places matter, just as the varying and mutable processes of racial marking and ethnic differentiation are central to its creation, sustenance, and operation. Because racial capitalism concerns the reproduction of wealth, the reproduction of racialized groups, and the reproduction of workers over time, it is also invested in ideas and worries about social and biological reproduction. This is one reason why gender—imaginings and practices of differently gendered bodies, identities, and desires, put in hierarchal relations—is a key feature in the reproduction of racial capitalist systems over time.

Scale matters, too. The material consequences of place offer the people who live and work in different regions, countries, and even neighborhoods within regions and countries, very different opportunities, crises, and dangers. Place-making also validates and indeed, actively constructs, racial identities and hierarchies. Those who live in the centers of capital and benefit from the privileges of whiteness tend to have better living conditions and more opportunities than those who live in its peripheries, and, with European economic expansion from the fifteenth century on, the centers—by and large, Europe and the United States in this period—and the peripheries relate, more or less directly, to the histories of European imperial expansion and colonization across the globe. They map, too, onto the imagined human racial geographies and civilizational discourse of the late nineteenth century, in which notions of whiteness were located in northern and western Europe and the United States, along with the hazier, not-quite-white identities of southern and eastern Europeans, while the multiple forms of racial denigration were placed across Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Again, scale matters, and the spaces of racial capitalism's enactment—and moreover its partial regulation by states—demands that we analytically zoom in and pan out (from the micro- to the meso- and macro- levels), from bodily to the architectural, from neighborhoods to cities, nations, regions, and the borders imposed between them.³⁹ Racial capitalism may be a large concept, but

it stakes room for people's individual and collective actions. Indeed, the decision for people to migrate is a principal factor in how they address spatialized racial and political-economic inequalities.

A second major concept is settler colonialism. This describes a process in which settlers (or, put another way, invaders) find a land that is new to them and claim it as their own by attempting to eliminate or absorb Indigenous peoples and then replacing the population with the people they think are most appropriate to build a new, durable and, they hope, permanent version of their older society. The United States, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand are prime examples of settler-colonial societies in the Anglophone world. Settler colonialism is different than extractive colonialism. Where settler colonies generally seek to replace Indigenous populations with their own, extractive colonies seek to control preexisting political systems and populations, while syphoning wealth and political power into their own coffers (think of the British in India).⁴⁰ A century ago, much like today, economic changes and human migration across borders made American settler communities anxious and prompted strident assertions of national sovereignty.⁴¹ There was deep irony. The US government had little compunction about disregarding Indigenous sovereignties, deeming Native Americans as legal aliens and, through warfare, fraud, and force, displacing and removing Indigenous peoples from the lands and confining them in reservations.⁴²

But in its immigration and deportation policy, the United States—a settler nation embedded within a racial-capitalist world system—was attempting to both stabilize its territorial borders and determine who, among all the people set into motion by that system, would be permitted to arrive and remain in the land it claimed.⁴³ Immigration control and the deportation apparatus was thus a second-order process of settler colonialism, regulating who might be permitted as a settler and eventually, perhaps, a full citizen, and restricting or expelling the rest.⁴⁴ Race—or rather, racism—was a central determinant of a person's ability to travel. In a 1915 essay, W.E.B. Du Bois, the towering Black American intellectual and critic who had already identified the color line as the problem of the twentieth century *within* the United States, saw it playing out globally:

[A] white man is privileged to go to any land where advantage beckons and behave as he pleases; the black or colored man is being more and more confined to those parts of the world where life for climatic, historical, economic, and political reasons is most difficult to live and most easily dominated by Europe for Europe's gain.⁴⁵

Du Bois referred to the global partitioning of imperial metropolises and colonized lands, but it applied as a color line of enclosures and exclusions built of walls and topped with barbed wire, which targeted Chinese workers and then generations of racialized and otherwise disdained migrants, limiting their arrival into the United States.

A third concept is biopolitics. The term sounds complicated and, in many scholars' hands, it is. But here, I mean it to describe a modern mode of governance in which the US state used police and welfare institutions to regulate its population en masse, and to determine the physical, biological, and behavioral characteristics of its desired citizenry.⁴⁶ This, in turn, would shape who would and would not be able to have children within America's borders and thus propagate the country's population into the future. Gender, particularly as it intersects with race and other forms of perceived differences, becomes central. Biopolitics, whose key concern is the governmental control of life, is conceptually counterposed to more violently foundational forms of rule and racial domination, which others call "necropolitics" and which makes freer use of murderous force. (The Nazis offer the most familiar, but hardly the only, example. Nazi policies to improve the health, well-being, comfort, and reproduction of the so-called Aryan race can be seen as firmly biopolitical, while the highly bureaucratized genocide of the Jews, Roma, queer folks, people with disabilities, and communists, among the others the Nazis hated—inspired by their racial-colonial aspirations—can define necropolitics).⁴⁷

Modern governments draw on both biopolitics and necropolitics: sometimes in tandem, depending on the target population; sometimes emphasizing one over the other in the interests of efficacy. Because the United States is a settler-colonial society, it was (and remains) deeply invested in controlling the specific qualities of who can—and cannot—become a settler. Over its history the United States has drawn on a full spectrum of biopolitical and necropolitical mechanisms and institutions to offer support to its citizens, secure the capitalist economy, and to dominate or eliminate those they saw as unfit or as "undesirable aliens"—people who hailed, not coincidentally, from across the colonized world, or the peripheries of the global racial economy. At many stages in the American past, from dispossessing Indigenous peoples, to replacing them with European settlers, to expelling the so-called unwanted, the railroads have been central to America's domestic empire and to the American nation itself. The Nazis, of course, also used deportation trains. But the US deportation regime refined these techniques,

with parallel goals but a different result, and they did so a generation before the Nazis.

The American deportation regime flourished in the early twentieth century because, in perverse but important ways, it was understood to satisfy modern, positive, and beneficial aspects of US governance. It was integral to the complex ways in which the ideas and practice of modern citizenship would be bolstered and enforced.⁴⁸ In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, many Americans turned toward government for protection from the vicissitudes of an unpredictable world. For many, big industries were the face of that unpredictability. In cities and towns, industrialized assembly lines crushed the bargaining power that skilled workers once cherished. If workers organized, they could be replaced by machines operated by new migrants—often Black Americans or noncitizens formerly excluded from the labor aristocracy. At the same time, industrialization made many work harder, faster, and at someone else's direction. Farmers, sharecroppers, or migrant workers saw the fruits of their labor thrust into global markets and suffered the fluctuations of commodity prices, and their own prospects varied accordingly. At the heights of the economy, smaller firms were driven out of business or engulfed by massive, vertically integrated corporate trusts, whose middle managers drove production and whose bosses wielded tremendous power with friends in government.

Still, elected officials were forced to respond to voters, and as ordinary white citizens and liberal elites argued for governmental regulations of the free market, politicians and bureaucrats responded with slow steps toward social welfare.⁴⁹ Since the advent of welfare, its managers have sorted its recipients into the so-called deserving and the undeserving poor. From almshouses and workhouses to asylums, charities and social welfare institutions, public and private organizations offered benevolent (if patronizing) support to those who fell on hard times, or, for whatever reason, were poorly suited to industrializing capitalist production. In the tradition of the English poor laws, welfare was also to be allocated by location and belonging. Benefits were always calibrated by race, sex, class and political power, into those citizens who were to be varyingly pitied or entitled to social welfare.⁵⁰

But the modern state developed harsher options for those who were deemed to be undeserving, such as the mad, the criminal, or those who rejected wage labor or the state's claimed monopoly on violence. Prisons

anchored the harsh, violent, and more explicitly racialized end of the modern disciplinary carceral-welfare spectrum. As a generation of research into the US carceral state has shown, it grew across the late nineteenth and twentieth century, arriving, at the turn of the twenty-first century, at the largest prison system that the world has ever known. At the level of intents and ideals (though hardly in actual practice) carceral institutions were geared toward the recuperation of errant citizens through the temporary withdrawal of citizenship rights and meant to help manage the nation's population across time. The institutions partitioned those who undermined or fit poorly within national citizenship projects into facilities ostensibly tailored to their specific shortcoming (hospitals for the physically ill; jails for the recalcitrant or violent; asylums for those with mental illness or cognitive differences).

In the case that the mad might be coaxed to rationality, the thief or pauper taught to love labor, and the prostitute returned to her wifely homebound duties, each might be redeemed and their citizenship restored. The citizens that each of these various institutions sought were supposed to be radically self-sufficient, independent, autonomous, able to vote in an election without suasion, and capable of wage labor. They would not need support from external agencies or collectivities—save perhaps for the male-led nuclear families of which they were part. As self-regulating, able-bodied, self-contained individuals, of sound mind, and within male-led families, proper and sanctioned citizens would help to reproduce the nation into the future.⁵¹

Some scholars have suggested that the American welfare state arose as “a means of organizing mutual aid among strangers,” but the coincidence of the deportation regime's emergence alongside that of the proto-welfare/carceral state reveals who was considered too much a stranger to merit aid.⁵² The deportation apparatus helped to systematically differentiate between the “beneficiaries” of the national carceral/welfare systems and those noncitizens who would be shunted beyond it. The deportation system that emerged in the late nineteenth century and matured with the deportation train in the early twentieth century, then, was coterminous with the rising demands of a modern US penal-welfare state. Carceral and social welfare systems existed on a spectrum from which noncitizens would be excluded. Indeed, under modern carceral-welfare states the social safety net, such as it was, became a web, ever more widely cast and finely spun, not just to discipline and correct citizens but to ensnare and deport noncitizens.⁵³ Rather than a correctional or dis-