

2-1-2008

Race and Redemption: Racial and Ethnic Evolution in Rudolf Steiner's Anthroposophy

Peter Staudenmaier

Marquette University, peter.staudenmaier@marquette.edu

Published version. *Nova Religio*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (February 2008): 4-36. DOI. © 2008 by University of California Press. Copying and permissions notice: Authorization to copy this content beyond fair use (as specified in Sections 107 and 108 of the U. S. Copyright Law) for internal or personal use, or the internal or personal use of specific clients, is granted by the Regents of the University of California/on the University of California Press for libraries and other users, provided that they are registered with and pay the specified fee via Rightslink® on JSTOR (<http://www.jstor.org/r/ucal>) or directly with the Copyright Clearance Center, <http://www.copyright.com>. Used with permission.

Race and Redemption

Racial and Ethnic Evolution in Rudolf Steiner's Anthroposophy

Peter Staudenmaier

ABSTRACT: With its origins in modern Theosophy, Rudolf Steiner's Anthroposophy is built around a racial view of human nature arranged in a hierarchical framework. This article examines the details of the Anthroposophical theory of cosmic and individual redemption and draws out the characteristic assumptions about racial and ethnic difference that underlie it. Particular attention is given to textual sources unavailable in English, which reveal the specific features of Steiner's account of "race evolution" and "soul evolution." Placing Steiner's worldview in its historical and ideological context, the article highlights the contours of racial thinking within a prominent alternative spiritual movement and delineates the central role of a racially configured conception of evolution within Anthroposophy past and present.

Anthroposophy, the Esoteric worldview promulgated a century ago by Austrian-born occultist Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925), continues to gain adherents and admirers within alternative spiritual circles today. Already firmly established in Europe through its network of public projects, from Waldorf schools to biodynamic farms to holistic medical pursuits, the Anthroposophical movement appears to be increasing in influence in other parts of the world as well.¹ In Germany, historians of religion have described Anthroposophy as "the most successful form of 'alternative' religion in the [twentieth] century."²

Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions, Volume 11, Issue 3, pages 4–36, ISSN 1092-6690 (print), 1541-8480 (electronic). © 2008 by The Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, at <http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo.asp>. DOI: 10.1525/nr.2008.11.3.4

An amalgam of Western and Eastern Esoteric beliefs with a Christian cast that emerged within the prolific context of early twentieth-century Theosophy, Anthroposophy encompasses a wide array of spiritual and social doctrines, some of which might meet with skepticism but could hardly be considered injurious.³ Like many new religious movements that owe their ideological inheritance to a single charismatic founder, however, Anthroposophy also contains several strands, some of them in more or less latent form, which merit greater scrutiny.⁴ Among these more contentious aspects of the Anthroposophical legacy are Steiner's distinctive doctrines about race and ethnicity.

Steiner's racial theories are a source of ongoing controversy between Anthroposophists and outside scholars and critics, with Steiner's defenders typically denying that his voluminous published works contain any racist elements. Much of the debate has been conducted in German, the language in which Steiner wrote.⁵ Perspicacious studies of Steiner's influence, meanwhile, have sometimes downplayed the importance of Anthroposophy's racialized worldview.⁶ A further complicating factor is the tradition of mainstream Christian polemics against occultist tendencies including Anthroposophy, though these have rarely addressed racial doctrines.⁷ The significance of Anthroposophical race thinking thus remains in dispute, with some historians emphasizing the universalist and humanist elements in Steiner's work, in contrast to the anti-semitism and racism common among several of Steiner's occult contemporaries.⁸

This view of Anthroposophy, shared by Steiner's admirers, reflects one side of Steiner's multifaceted teachings, but it does not account for the pervasive racial assumptions that run throughout his work. The present explication of Steiner's racial views aims to rectify such partial assessments and restore the complexity and ambiguity of Anthroposophical doctrines on race. Since Steiner's substantial publications on racial and ethnic questions are internally contradictory, this study will concentrate on drawing out the less frequently scrutinized aspects of Anthroposophy's racial theory.⁹ In recognition of the controversial nature of the topic, the presentation will focus on providing extensive selections in their original form from Steiner's published works on race, with particular attention to texts unavailable in English.¹⁰

To elucidate the origins of Steiner's doctrines, a brief examination of their historical and ideological context is in order.¹¹ A number of Steiner's early political and philosophical involvements played a role in shaping his mature views on race and ethnicity, from his participation in the Austrian pan-German movement in the 1880s and his engagement with Goethe's scientific writings to his association with Ernst Haeckel and the Monists around the turn of the century. Haeckel, the foremost German Social Darwinist of the era, influenced Steiner's views on evolution and the relationship between biology and society. Steiner

often invoked his philosophical background in his mature Esoteric phase and consistently referred to Anthroposophy as a “spiritual science.” Indeed the polysemous theme of evolution, which occupies a central place in Steiner’s racial worldview, may have played a mediating role in his transition from secular to sacred vocabularies.¹² The decisive factor in the development of Steiner’s racial theories, however, was his conversion to Theosophy at the beginning of the twentieth century.¹³

THEOSOPHICAL ORIGINS

Based in large part on the writings of Helena P. Blavatsky, the syncretic occult framework of fin-de-siècle Theosophy incorporated elements of Buddhism and Hinduism refracted through a Western lens.¹⁴ Steiner served as General Secretary of the German Section of the Theosophical Society from 1902 until 1912, when he broke away to found the Anthroposophical Society.¹⁵ The Theosophical movement combined organizational pluralism with an unusual set of racial teachings.¹⁶ While membership in the Theosophical Society was open to people of all races, nations, and creeds, and the stated goal of Theosophical activities was to promote brotherhood and unity within humankind, basic Theosophical texts frequently displayed a deep-seated attachment to racial ideology. These premises were central to Theosophy’s narrative of reincarnation, spiritual progress, and cosmic renewal.¹⁷

Blavatsky’s two-volume magnum opus *The Secret Doctrine* (1888) presents an elaborate theory of “root races” that have developed over eons, identifying the currently predominant fifth root race as the “Aryan race.”¹⁸ Much of volume two is devoted to the theme of racial evolution and racial decline, emphasizing the “great differences between the intellectual capacities of races” and stressing the “abject and savage condition” of non-Aryan racial groups.¹⁹ According to Blavatsky, “the inferior races” represent “the lowest specimens of humanity” with “brains devoid of intellect”; she held that “the lowest races of men” were “the senile representatives of lost archaic nations” whose extinction is “a Karmic necessity.”²⁰ The Aryans, on the other hand, represent “the final adjustment of the human organism, which became perfect and symmetrical only in the Fifth Race.”²¹ Other leading Theosophists extended these teachings during the period of Steiner’s active participation in the movement.²²

The Theosophical theory of root races, which Steiner adopted into Anthroposophy, is structured around an evolutionary narrative of lost continents, wandering peoples, national karma, and racial destiny.²³ The particulars of Steiner’s racial mythology are so intricate that attempts to summarize them inevitably run the risk of distortion and oversimplification.²⁴ Following Blavatsky, Steiner held that a succession of five root races had arisen in the distant past: Polarians, Hyperboreans, Lemurians, Atlanteans, and Aryans.²⁵ Each root race was further divided

into sub-races, which also appear in succession. According to Steiner, the Aryan root race emerged on the lost continent of Atlantis, and the Atlantean root race was preceded by a still older root race that inhabited another lost continent, Lemuria; non-white and indigenous communities today are the degenerate remnants of these earlier root races.²⁶

Steiner's doctrine of racial evolution is more than a biological appendage to his spiritual cosmology. For Anthroposophy as for Theosophy, evolution is the link between the human and the divine, it is a process supervised by higher powers and a vehicle for the soul's elevation and purification. In moving from Theosophy to Anthroposophy, Steiner abandoned the cyclical structure of Blavatsky's root-race concept while retaining its linear evolutionary thrust. The guiding thread throughout Steiner's race mythology is the motif of a small, racially advanced group progressing into the next era while the great mass of backward populations declines. In the current era, the dominant race is the Aryan race, which evolved out of a small number of specially advanced colonists from Atlantis.²⁷ In Steiner's words: "Ever since the Atlantean Race began slowly to disappear, the great Aryan Race has been the dominant one on earth."²⁸

According to Theosophical teachings, the Aryan root race was to give way to a sixth race in the distant future, when physical distinctions would play a less prominent role.²⁹ Ideas such as these took on a more sinister cast, however, in the cultural context of late Imperial Germany and Austria. During Steiner's tenure as the leading representative of Theosophical thinking in German-speaking Europe, several of his students advocated a sort of synthesis between Anthroposophy and Ariosophy, an aggressively racist offshoot of Theosophy.³⁰ While Steiner did not sympathize with such efforts, they continued among his followers, with Steiner's tacit acceptance, even after the split from the Theosophical Society.³¹ The ideological legacy that Steiner inherited from classical Theosophy thus left an ambivalent imprint: on the one hand, a universalist thrust and a vision of a future beyond racial difference, and on the other hand a wide range of invidious assumptions about the spiritual significance of race. Both of these aspects established themselves within Steiner's publicly proclaimed doctrines from the beginning of his Esoteric career.

RACE AND BROTHERHOOD

An early instance of this juxtaposition of contrary racial perspectives appeared in a pair of public lectures that Steiner gave in Berlin in 1905. In one of these lectures, under the title "Brotherhood and the Struggle for Survival," Steiner distanced himself from Social Darwinism and boasted of Theosophy's rhetorically anti-racist orientation, portraying his own teachings as a progressive and tolerant version of Esotericism.³²

The other lecture, given two weeks earlier in the same venue, carried the title “Basic Concepts of Theosophy: The Races of Humankind.”³³ Here Steiner outlined the foundations of his racial theory, based on the Theosophical consensus prevalent at the time. His account posited a specific conception of brotherhood, one that is at odds with the notion of equality, and conjoined this with a clear postulate of racial inequality.³⁴ The lecture began on a note of interracial unity, but immediately shifted to an emphasis on racial difference, stressing “how different the natural abilities, how different the talents of the individual races are.” Steiner then acknowledged: “People often feel that it is an injustice of nature that some are doomed to an existence in a race that stands far below, while others are raised up to an apparently perfect race.”³⁵ Steiner explained this seeming injustice by invoking the doctrine of reincarnation: “Each of us passes through the different racial stages, and the passage signifies a progressive development for the individual soul.”³⁶

In the course of the lecture Steiner clarified that racial progress for some requires that others regress: “Progress in human capabilities can only occur if certain so-called higher grades of human existence are attained at the expense of the regression of earlier stages of development.”³⁷ Steiner emphasized that “only the progressing race is able to develop itself upward in the appropriate way.” Those who fail to progress, on the other hand, become decadent: “Our ancestors were structured differently from us today, and those they left behind encountered conditions that they could not tolerate. They therefore had to develop themselves downward, they fell into decadence, they degenerated.”³⁸

Steiner went on to elaborate the profound differences among “the Negro race,” “the Mongol race,” and “the Caucasian race,” the last of which Steiner identified as “the truly civilized race.”³⁹ He reviewed various scientific accounts of racial difference current at the time, concluding that none of them can offer an adequate understanding of the meaning of race. Instead Steiner presented his own version of “spiritual science” as the key to comprehending race:

But if you contemplate the past from the perspective of spiritual science, you will gain a very different view. You will find that our white civilized humankind originated because certain elements segregated themselves from the Atlanteans and developed themselves higher here, under different climatic conditions. Certain elements of the Atlantean population remained behind, at earlier levels; thus we can see that the peoples of Asia and America are remnants of the various Atlantean races.⁴⁰

While remarking that in the future “we will have other paths to follow than the ones made by race,” Steiner’s focus was on the spiritual function of race in the contemporary world: “Each person proceeds

through race after race. Those that are young souls incarnate in the races that have remained behind on earlier racial levels.” The lecture concluded by drawing together the themes of racial stratification and human brotherhood; in the Anthroposophical conception of the spiritual significance of race, these two principles did not conflict—indeed a proper comprehension of the hierarchical nature of racial evolution was necessary, in Steiner’s eyes, for a genuine appreciation of the goal of universal brotherhood:

Our own souls once lived within the Atlantean race, and they then developed themselves upward to a higher race. That gives us an image of the evolution of humankind up until our time. In this way we can comprehend how to justify the principle, the core principle of universal brotherhood without regard to race, color, status, and so forth. . . . Our souls march from one level to the next, which is to say from one race to the next, and we come to know the meaning of humanity when we examine these races.⁴¹

This basic statement of Steiner’s racial theories, presented early in his career as a spiritual teacher, encapsulates the paradoxical approach to racial questions that would mark his mature extrapolations on the topic. While claiming for his doctrine the mantle of tolerance and enlightened thinking and rejecting the most obvious motifs of outright racial prejudice, Steiner simultaneously incorporated a series of normative suppositions about human development into the heart of the belief system he propagated. The result was an expansive Esoteric framework within which attention to the spiritual relevance of race came to play a crucial role, taking on key significance for the evolution of the individual and the cosmos.

RACIAL CONCEPTS IN STEINER’S WORLDVIEW

Of the principal texts of Anthroposophy, three display this ambiguous emphasis most clearly: *Knowledge of Higher Worlds* (1905), *Cosmic Memory* (1908), and *The Mission of the Folk Souls* (1910). In the first of these, Steiner described the role of national souls and race spirits as part of the path of initiation that students of the occult must tread; at one point he posited that individuals are the “executive organs” of these “racial spirits.”⁴² Steiner went on to say that “everyone receives his allotted task from his family, national, or racial group soul,” and that the student of spiritual science “must not only know his own tasks, but must knowingly collaborate in those of his folk, his race.”⁴³ In the process of esoteric initiation, the student must “acquire those powers which are vested in the national and racial spirits.”⁴⁴ The passage suggests that the duty of the occult student is to move from unconscious involvement in his racial and ethnic tasks to conscious participation in them.

Here Steiner made a notable shift from racial identity as a matter of cosmic destiny and impersonal evolutionary progress to racial identity as a form of conscious participation in spiritual and physical evolution.

In the book's final chapter, Steiner returned to his original conception of racial evolution in a passage that summarizes the fundamental Anthroposophical view of gradual progress toward a perfected human state:

For peoples and races are but steps leading to pure humanity. A race or a nation stands so much the higher, the more perfectly its members express the pure, ideal human type, the further they have worked their way from the physical and perishable to the supersensible and imperishable. The evolution of man through the incarnations in ever higher national and racial forms is thus a process of liberation. Man must finally appear in harmonious perfection.⁴⁵

The notion of "higher racial forms" became a structuring principle of Steiner's theories on race. His major work on Anthroposophical cosmology, *Cosmic Memory*, provided a detailed overview of this foundational narrative of racial progress:

The ancestors of the Atlanteans lived in a region which has disappeared, the main part of which lay south of contemporary Asia. In theosophical writings they are called the Lemurians. After they had passed through various stages of development the greatest part of them declined. These became stunted men, whose descendants still inhabit certain parts of the earth today as so-called savage tribes. Only a small part of Lemurian humanity was capable of further development. From this part the Atlanteans were formed. Later, something similar again took place. The greatest part of the Atlantean population declined, and from a small portion are descended the so-called Aryans who comprise present-day civilized humanity. According to the nomenclature of the science of the spirit, the Lemurians, Atlanteans and Aryans are root races of mankind.⁴⁶

Steiner observed: "Each root race has physical and mental characteristics which are quite different from those of the preceding one." For this reason, "there are always populations which show different stages of development living beside each other on earth." Indeed each racial group has distinct tasks, and "at the present time it is the task of the Aryans to develop the faculty of thought and all that belongs to it."⁴⁷ Racial inequality became a central component of both the distant past and the modern present: the simultaneous existence of different racial groups, at "different stages of development," figured as a primary motor of evolutionary progress. Within Steiner's broader conception of cosmic development, the point of the ascending arrangement of distinct racial groups was that "we are to acquire new capacities through repeated incarnations in the successive races."⁴⁸

This optimistic nod toward racial evolution as a path of spiritual education was somewhat undermined by the equally firm emphasis on the determining power of race within each incarnation. Steiner's book on *Volksseelen*, "folk souls" or "national souls," which included chapters on the "The Evolution of Races" and "The Five Root Races of Mankind," explored this theme in depth.⁴⁹ Here Steiner expounded on the spiritual bases of "the racial differences in mankind," which are "bound up with heredity."⁵⁰ While looking forward to a time when "racial characteristics" will give way to "national characteristics," Steiner classified different racial groups according to their ostensible level of development:

The black or Negro race is substantially determined by these childhood characteristics. If we now cross over to Asia, we find a point or centre where the formative forces of the Earth impress permanently on man the particular characteristics of later youth or adolescence and determine his racial character. Such races are the yellow and brown races of our time. If we continue northward and then turn in a westerly direction towards Europe, a third point or centre is reached which permanently impresses upon man the characteristics of his adult life.⁵¹

Steiner then insisted:

This is simply a universal law. Since all men in their different incarnations pass through the various races the claim that the European is superior to the black and yellow races has no real validity. In such cases the truth is sometimes veiled, but you see that with the help of Spiritual Science we do after all light upon remarkable truths.⁵²

In Steiner's depiction, the ineluctable nature of racial destiny is a source of neither pride nor denigration; it is a fundamental aspect of the cosmic plan. Steiner did not shy away from drawing the inevitable conclusions:

The forces which determine man's racial character follow this cosmic pattern. The American Indians died out, not because of European persecutions, but because they were destined to succumb to those forces which hastened their extinction.⁵³

The ornate racial taxonomy spelled out in such texts anchors an essential segment of Anthroposophical doctrine about the relationship between the physical plane and the spiritual plane. These teachings are built around three related concepts: the notion of a Universal Human as the end-point of evolution; the intertwining of race development and soul development; and the contrast between racial progress and racial obsolescence. A fuller comprehension of the logic of Steiner's stance requires an overview of each of these core concepts.

THE UNIVERSAL HUMAN

Steiner's vision of redemption posited an intrinsic connection between the hierarchy of races and the progress of the soul. A 1912 lecture spelled out the correspondence between spiritual improvement and racial advance:

If we want to understand this, we must carefully distinguish between race development and soul development. The two must not be confused. A human soul can develop itself in such a way that it incarnates in a particular race within a given incarnation. If it acquires certain capacities in this incarnation, then in a later incarnation it can incarnate in a different race.⁵⁴

As the incarnating souls "became steadily better and better," Steiner explained, "the souls eventually passed over into higher races, such that souls which had earlier been incarnated in completely subordinate races developed themselves upwards onto a higher level and were able to incarnate later into the physical descendants of the leading population of Europe."⁵⁵ Steiner further contended that the very existence of different racial groups on the Earth at the same time was a cosmic mistake, a detour from the proper route of humankind's development. This claim was tied to Steiner's vision of the eventual emergence of a "Universal Human," the goal of his teleological conception of evolution. While pointing toward the ultimate disappearance of race as a meaningful factor in human existence, Steiner's theory of the Universal Human is built around a contrast with "lower types of people," which constitute the necessary counterpart to the "uniform, perfect, beautiful type of human being," the cosmic goal that underlies "the meaning of our whole earthly evolution."⁵⁶

According to Steiner, the creation of such an undifferentiated and perfected human form was the original aim of the divine beings who guide evolution, but this aim was frustrated by Lucifer and Ahriman, two demonic powers who play a central role in Anthroposophical cosmology. Their untimely intervention resulted in "the racial diversities on the earth."⁵⁷ These diversities were not part of the "original conception" of human development, in which the separate races were to appear "successively, one after the other."⁵⁸

Lucifer and Ahriman opposed this; they did not want it to happen that way. They fought against this harmonious tendency of development in the evolution of humanity. . . . Instead of the intended consecutive development of races, there was a coexistence of races. That is how it came about that physically different races inhabited the earth and are still there in our time although evolution should really have proceeded as I have described it.⁵⁹

This view of racial difference informs many of Steiner's other statements on race. In a series of lectures on the Apocalypse of St. John held in Nuremberg in 1908, Steiner extended this perspective to prognostications about the racial future. Here he described "how the human race will develop when our present epoch has run its course, how it will divide, so to speak, into two streams, into the good and the evil races." The emergence of a "race of good" and a "race of evil" will happen "after the War of All against All."⁶⁰ Because "whole bodies of peoples remain immature and do not develop their capacities," Steiner explained, "only a small group becomes capable of providing the germ for the next civilization." Steiner thus distinguished "the specially chosen population of Atlantis which lies at the foundation of our culture" from the "lukewarm races" that failed to advance physically and spiritually. According to Steiner, these races "were incapable of developing, they were overripe, so to speak. You may still see stragglers of these old overripe races today, especially among the Chinese." The "old Chinese," Steiner said, "could not progress any further."⁶¹ Steiner continued:

The race may fall behind; the community of people may remain backward, but the souls progress beyond the several races. . . . Only the souls which as souls had remained backward had to take bodies which as bodies had remained at a lower stage. If all the souls had progressed, the backward races would either have decreased very much in population, or the bodies would be occupied by newly incoming souls at a low stage of development. For there are always souls which can inhabit backward bodies. No soul is bound to a backward body if it does not bind itself to it.⁶²

RACE DEVELOPMENT AND SOUL DEVELOPMENT

The notion that individual souls are responsible for their own racial advance or decline is crucial to Anthroposophy's conception of karma and spiritual evolution. Along with the Chinese, Steiner identified Jews as exemplars of racial stagnation, in contrast to the Anthroposophical notion of karmic progress toward higher racial forms, and he sometimes relied on antisemitic imagery to illustrate this notion.⁶³ These ideas were typically intertwined with predictions of the eventual disappearance of race and the overcoming of "group-soulness" via the assimilation of retrograde ethnic and racial groups into the advancing segments of the population.⁶⁴ Steiner drew a sharp contrast between racial development and racial decadence as crucial criteria for "the progress of humankind":

Those who remained behind, who bound themselves up with their race, as they say, they degenerated, while the advanced ones founded new civilizations. The last stragglers on the way to the east, the Mongols, still

retain something of the culture of the Atlanteans. In the same way, the bodies of those people who do not develop themselves in a progressive fashion will continue into the next era and will constitute the Chinese of the future. There will once again be decadent peoples. The souls that inhabit Chinese bodies are those that will once again have to incarnate in such races, because they had too strong an attraction to that race.⁶⁵

Steiner thus applied his racial categories to the past, present, and future, and his proclamations of the gradually diminishing significance of race depended centrally on the model of a racial ladder leading from obsolete races of the past to the uniform race of the future. Because the quality of individual souls varies, different physical groups must be available for incarnation.⁶⁶ In a 1909 lecture on “The Manifestation of the Ego in the Different Races of Men,” Steiner outlined the process whereby “the most advanced human souls” incarnated in “the best section of the population.”⁶⁷ Had properly advanced physical forms not been available, “the Lemurian population would have gradually died out, having to succumb to passions, and the best souls of the North would not have descended to earth at all, for they would not have been able to find suitable bodies.”⁶⁸

Steiner went on to differentiate “people whose inner nature was correctly balanced and who were normal” from “peoples who had completely surrendered themselves to the outer world.” He explained the significance of this difference:

Thus it was the normal human beings that were the best material for the initiates to use for the evolution of the future, and they were also the ones that the great sun initiate, Manu, gathered around him as being most capable of evolving. Those peoples whose ego impulse was developed too strongly, so that it permeated their whole being and made it a manifestation of egohood, these people gradually wandered to the West and became the nation the last survivors of which appeared as the Red Indians of America. Those people whose ego-feeling was too little developed migrated to the East, and the survivors of these people became the subsequent Negro population of Africa.⁶⁹

Reinforcing the link between “normality” and racial progress, Steiner continued:

Those people, however, who had developed their ego being too little, and who were too exposed to the influences of the sun, were like plants: they deposited too many carbonic constituents beneath their skin and became black. This is why the Negroes are black. Thus both east of Atlantis in the black population and west of Atlantis in the red population we find survivors of the kind of people who had not developed their ego-feeling in a normal way. The human beings who had developed normally lent themselves best to progress.⁷⁰

The white population, then, represent normal human beings who continue to progress, while Asians and Africans are abnormal peoples who were not as capable of evolving. Statements like these can be found throughout Steiner's works, and may reflect the prejudices prevalent among educated Europeans of his era.⁷¹ Perhaps the most instructive instances are Steiner's various statements about black people. In a 1906 essay on "The Occult Significance of Blood" Steiner raised the "question of race" in the context of colonialism:

To what extent are uncivilised peoples capable of becoming civilised? How can a Negro or an utterly barbaric savage become civilised? And in what way ought we to deal with them? [. . .] Those who are not aware of the conditions governing a people—whether it be on the up- or down-grade of its evolution, and whether the one or the other is a matter conditioned by its blood—such people as these will, indeed, be unlikely to hit on the right mode of introducing civilisation to an alien race.⁷²

Years later, addressing the first generation of Waldorf teachers in 1923, Steiner responded to a question about teaching French with the following remarks:

The French are committing the terrible brutality of moving black people to Europe, but it works, in an even worse way, back on France. It has an enormous effect on the blood and the race and contributes considerably toward French decadence. The French as a race are reverting.⁷³

Similar fears of racial decay surfaced during this period. In a 1922 lecture at the headquarters of the Anthroposophical movement in Dornach, Switzerland, Steiner made the following claims:

Recently I went into a bookstore in Basel and found an example of the latest publishing agenda: a Negro novel, just as the Negroes in general are entering into European civilization step by step! Everywhere Negro dances are being performed, Negro dances are being hopped. But we even have this Negro novel already. It is utterly boring, dreadfully boring, but people devour it. I am personally convinced that if we get more Negro novels, and give these Negro novels to pregnant women to read during the first phase of pregnancy, when as you know they can sometimes develop such cravings, if we give these Negro novels to pregnant women to read, then it won't even be necessary for Negroes to come to Europe in order for mulattoes to appear. Simply through the spiritual effects of reading Negro novels, a multitude of children will be born in Europe that are completely gray, that have mulatto hair, that look like mulattoes!⁷⁴

Anxiety over racial decline may also have played a role in Steiner's 1922 discussion of the link between skin color and intelligence, when he

claimed that blonde hair, blue eyes and fair skin are directly tied to advanced mental abilities.⁷⁵ A related series of concerns about health and decay appears in Steiner's 1906 discussion of racial karma: "Just as the animals have separated off from the evolutionary path of mankind, so have certain lower peoples and races fallen behind. The Mongols were Atlanteans whose physical development had taken a downward course." The decaying substance of this "decadent people" spread when the Mongols invaded Europe, and in this way "the astral bodies of Europeans became infected."⁷⁶

RACIAL PROGRESS AND RACIAL OBSOLESCENCE

A number of Steiner's underlying racial and national assumptions, which serve to flesh out his overarching race theory, came to the fore during the First World War.⁷⁷ In a lecture in Stuttgart in 1915, Steiner declared:

How could people fail to notice the profound differences, in terms of spiritual culture, between the European and the Asian peoples. How could they fail to notice this differentiation, which is tied to external skin color!⁷⁸

Steiner explained that the special destiny of the "Germanic peoples" is to "carry down the spiritual impulses" onto the physical plane and into the human body. According to Steiner, this integration of the physical and spiritual is what accounts for white skin:

This carrying down, this thorough impregnation of the flesh by the spirit, this is the characteristic of the mission of white humanity, the whole mission of white humankind. People have white skin color because the spirit works within the skin when it wants to descend to the physical plane . . . but where the spirit is held back, where it takes on a demonic character and does not fully penetrate the flesh, then white skin color does not appear, because atavistic powers are present that do not allow the spirit to achieve complete harmony with the flesh.⁷⁹

These racial-spiritual differences led Steiner to predict a cosmic struggle between white people and non-white people:

But these things will never take place in the world without the most violent struggle. . . . The transition from the fifth cultural epoch to the sixth cultural epoch cannot happen in any other way than as a violent battle of white humankind against colored humankind in myriad areas.⁸⁰

Similar themes resonate throughout Steiner's works on race: the stratified nature of racial difference, the determinate role of racial

identity, the disparity between racial regression and racial advancement, and the necessity of ethnic-racial conflict in the ongoing process of race evolution. A revealing instance of the consequences of such doctrines is Steiner's portrait of American Indians as a racial group. Steiner generally depicted Native Americans as an obsolete race that represented the feeble and elderly stage of human existence, while simultaneously subscribing to the Romantic myth of American Indians as uniquely close to nature. Reviewing "the way in which spiritual science thinks about evolution," Steiner characterized Native Americans as "a primitive aboriginal people that has remained far, far behind," noting that they originally descended from the same Atlantean racial stock as Europeans.

But the Europeans have ascended to a higher level of culture, while the Indians have remained behind and become decadent. One must always pay attention to this evolutionary process. It can be described as follows. In the course of millennia our planet transforms itself, and this transformation also demands a development of humankind. Those side branches that no longer fit in to current conditions become decadent. Thus we have an upright evolutionary trunk as well as side branches which decay.⁸¹

Steiner then drew a sketch for his audience to illustrate his point. It shows a straight line pointing upward, marked "evolution of humankind," and divided into a lower and a higher period; the lower stage reads "Atlanteans" and the higher stage reads "Europeans." Coming off of this main trunk of evolutionary progress are two side branches. The first of the side branches is designated "apes—decadent side branch," and the second reads "Indians—decadent side branch."⁸²

SKIN COLOR AND SPIRIT

Near the end of his life Steiner recapitulated the main themes of his racial doctrine in a 1923 lecture in Dornach titled "Color and the Races of Humankind."⁸³ As this text, like many of Steiner's statements on race, is not available in English, extensive translation and quotation are provided here. Steiner began by re-affirming the central importance of race to a proper understanding of spiritual reality:

One can only understand history and all of social life, including today's social life, if one pays attention to people's racial characteristics. And one can only understand all that is spiritual in the correct sense if one first examines how this spiritual element operates within people precisely through the color of their skin.⁸⁴

He provided an overview of the various racial groups on the Earth, offering definite instruction about which races belong where:

When we ask which race belongs to which part of the earth, we must say: the yellow race, the Mongols, the Mongolian race belongs to Asia, the white race or the Caucasian race belongs to Europe, and the black race or the Negro race belongs to Africa. The Negro race does not belong to Europe, and the fact that this race is now playing such a large role in Europe is of course nothing but a nuisance.⁸⁵

Steiner then embarked on an extended disquisition on the distinctive features of each race, complete with drawings to illustrate their physiological and mental differences. He reported that black people are distinguished by their “rear-brain,” yellow and brown people by their “mid-brain,” and white people by their “fore-brain,” adding that black people are marked by a powerful “instinctual life,” yellow and brown people by a potent “emotional life,” and white people by a highly developed “intellectual life.”⁸⁶ Steiner went into considerable detail about black people:

In the Negro the rear-brain is especially developed. It goes through his spinal cord. And this is able to assimilate all the light and warmth that are inside a person. Therefore everything connected to the body and the metabolism is strongly developed in the Negro. He has, as they say, powerful physical drives. The Negro has a powerful instinctual life. And because he actually has the sun, light, and warmth on his body surface, in his skin, his whole metabolism operates as if he were being cooked inside by the sun. That is where his instinctual life comes from. The Negro is constantly cooking inside, and what feeds this fire is his rear-brain.⁸⁷

Steiner went on to examine differences between Asians and Europeans, claiming that Asians are incapable of making technological discoveries on their own or using European inventions properly.⁸⁸ Genuine creativity comes from the capacity of “the white race” to explore and inhabit all parts of the globe; indeed for Steiner, “[t]he whites are the ones who actually develop humanity in themselves.”⁸⁹ He presented these claims about racial difference as a set of objective spiritual facts, meant to impress upon his audience the need for mutual understanding and interracial cooperation, based on recognition of the “natural dispositions” that mark each racial group. At the conclusion of the lecture, Steiner offered a synopsis of his racial teachings:

On the one hand there is the black race, which is the most earthly. When this race goes toward the West, it dies out. Then there is the yellow race, in the middle between the earth and the cosmos. When this race goes toward the East, it turns brown, it attaches itself too much to the cosmos and dies out. The white race is the race of the future, the spiritually creative races.⁹⁰

This closing passage sums up the lecture and provides a precis of Anthroposophical thinking on race: the black, brown, red, and yellow races all have their special characters and their special roles to play, but at this stage of cosmic development they are dying out, whereas the white race continues to move forward into the racial future.

CRITIQUE AND CONTROVERSY

The point of this survey of Steiner's public statements about race is not to provide a mere parade of prejudices that appear alternately quaint and alarming from today's perspective. The point is to understand how these beliefs functioned within their original setting, Anthroposophy. Keeping in mind the inconsistent nature of these doctrines, an overview of Steiner's teachings on race might run as follows.

While professing to reject the outmoded racial bonds of the past and calling for their transcendence in the future, Steiner consistently reiterated the mutual co-determination of racial identity and spiritual status, the lynchpin of his racial doctrine overall. Prefacing his teachings with dismissals of their value implications, Steiner distinguished specific peoples and races according to whether they were on the up-grade or down-grade of evolution. He associated normality and spiritual progress with whiteness, while portraying non-white skin as a mark of racial regression and atavistic influences. Steiner's theory of racial succession is structured around explicitly racialized stages of spiritual advancement leading toward eventual redemption in the form of the ostensibly race-less and ethnicity-less Universal Human. All of these elements are central to the Anthroposophical version of karma and reincarnation. Anthroposophy thus incorporates a wide range of racial assumptions about human existence in its spiritual and material aspects.

A contextual understanding of Anthroposophy's racial and ethnic concepts also requires locating these teachings within the intellectual landscape of early twentieth-century European culture, a period when racial classifications were a common element in mainstream scientific thought.⁹¹ The specific contours of Steiner's race theories may align more closely, however, with those of other occult systems then prevalent, Theosophical and otherwise, in a variety of European contexts.⁹² In this respect, Steiner's ideas about race could be viewed as a convergence of two contemporaneous strands: the turn of the century occult revival, and the attempt to popularize the natural sciences for a lay audience, in line with the broader Theosophical and Anthroposophical aim of reconciling science and spirituality. It is important to recognize that similar notions about race did not go uncontested in Steiner's day; there was a lively critical discussion of these issues at the time.⁹³ From this perspective, Anthroposophy's concrete claims about race may be viewed as controversial not only with the benefit of historical hindsight, but in their original era as well.

The analysis presented here is vehemently rejected by Steiner's followers today.⁹⁴ In one sense this is understandable; since Steiner's racial doctrines display numerous contradictions, both critics and defenders of Anthroposophy can find a measure of textual support for their interpretations. But the reception of Steiner's racial theories among the first generation of Anthroposophists was less ambiguous; many of Steiner's closest and earliest followers devoted substantial attention to questions of race, and produced a large body of racist work on the topic.⁹⁵ These texts frequently celebrate the achievements of the "Aryan race," often in direct contrast to "Semites" and other less forward-looking racial and ethnic groups.⁹⁶ Not a few of these works have been re-published by Anthroposophists after 1945.⁹⁷

For many Anthroposophists today, Steiner's racial doctrines nevertheless reflect his far-sighted spiritual wisdom. This may be due in part to the fact that a number of English translations of Steiner's works have been cleansed of racist and antisemitic content.⁹⁸ But even when the original content remains intact, Anthroposophists commonly continue to endorse it.⁹⁹ Similarly, Anthroposophist authors sometimes acknowledge central elements of Steiner's racial doctrine while insisting that this doctrine contains the key to overcoming racism.¹⁰⁰ Such arguments reflect a broad consensus among contemporary Anthroposophists that Steiner's views on race fundamentally express a profound concern for interracial understanding and harmony.¹⁰¹

This reading of the material disregards Steiner's program of progressive racial evolution and its hierarchy of racial and ethnic forms. Steiner invested each of these forms with starkly divergent spiritual significance, and ranked them from lower to higher. For those souls that are capable of moving upward, this model of racial evolution presents the possibility of one day transcending race; but those that refuse this cosmic advance face racial decadence. Steiner projected this fundamental racial-spiritual dichotomy into the future, emphasizing that the decisive discrepancy between advanced souls and moribund souls is essential in order to "understand the direction evolution will actually take."¹⁰²

CONCLUSION

For believers in Esoteric versions of "spiritual science," this model of evolution can hold a powerful appeal. Beyond envisioning a new racial dispensation, Steiner also correlated his typology of good and evil to present-day spiritual choices, declaring that "the souls now living in bodies which have the heart to hear and feel Anthroposophy" will survive the coming War of All against All and pass onward to a new spiritual era.¹⁰³ In this future age, "[u]pon the forehead and in the whole physiognomy it will be written whether the person is good or evil. He will show in his face what is contained in his inmost soul."¹⁰⁴

The process described by these teachings has been aptly characterized by one of Steiner's followers as "cosmic eugenics."¹⁰⁵ The implications were sometimes unsettling; according to Steiner, cosmic evolution functions in this way so "that might be destroyed which is not worthy to take part in the ascent of humanity."¹⁰⁶ This may be the crux of Steiner's racial doctrine:

Humanity has risen by throwing out the lower forms in order to purify itself and it will rise still higher by separating another kingdom of nature, the kingdom of the evil race. Thus mankind rises upward.¹⁰⁷

The path toward the Universal Human requires that unworthy elements be destroyed, that "the evil race" be overcome through "throwing out the lower forms" so that purification will be possible. In this way, the progressive and regressive facets of Anthroposophical race thinking are inextricably intertwined. From Steiner's point of view, progressive racial evolution was a route to redemption, promising release from the bonds of material existence and its racial diversities and ethnic particularities. Conceived as a universal framework holding potential for all souls willing to progress, his racial doctrines are nevertheless founded on prejudicial categories and value-laden classifications that have patently racist consequences.

The historian's task, however, is not to pronounce a verdict on the past, but to provide material for informed assessment in the present. In this regard, the continued popularity of Anthroposophical institutions and ideas demands critical attention from outside of the movement itself; such critical attention may in turn be occasion for historical reflection on the part of Anthroposophists. Unconventional claims about Atlantis, etheric forces, and cosmic evolution are the prerogative of any religious sub-culture, but spiritual assertions about race and ethnicity typically take on a different kind of cultural valence. Without overstepping the bounds of scholarly discretion, then, it may be appropriate to observe that unless thoroughly revised or rescinded, the racial doctrines promulgated by Steiner and his followers will remain incompatible with Anthroposophy's self-image as bearer of spiritual wisdom and cosmopolitan tolerance.

ENDNOTES

¹ The June 2003 edition of *Utne Magazine* carried a 48-page special supplement titled "An Emerging Culture: Rudolf Steiner's Continuing Impact in the World," while the cover story of the June 2003 issue of *Conscious Choice: Journal of Ecology & Natural Living* celebrated "The Spiritually Gifted Life of Rudolf Steiner."

² Stefanie von Schnurbein and Justus Ulbricht, *Völkische Religion und Krisen der Moderne* [Volkish religion and crises of modernity] (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2001), 38.

³ For background on Western Esoteric traditions see Antoine Faivre and Wouter Hanegraaff, eds., *Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion* (Leuven: Peeters, 1998); Olav Hammer, “Esotericism in New Religious Movements” in *The Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements*, ed. James R. Lewis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 445–65; Kocku von Stuckrad, *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge* (London: Equinox, 2005).

⁴ The existing scholarly literature on Anthroposophy generally gives little attention to the topics explored here. The sole book-length study in English, Geoffrey Ahern’s *Sun at Midnight: The Rudolf Steiner Movement and the Western Esoteric Tradition* (Wellingborough: Aquarian, 1984), is based entirely on English-language sources and only briefly addresses Steiner’s racial views. Robert Galbreath’s “Spiritual Science in an Age of Materialism: Rudolf Steiner and Occultism,” Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1970, a sympathetic account of Anthroposophy’s intellectual context, similarly overlooks Steiner’s racial doctrines.

⁵ For a sampling of Anthroposophist standpoints, see *Anthroposophie und die Frage der Rassen* [Anthroposophy and the question of races] (Frankfurt: Info3, 2000); Hans-Jürgen Bader and Lorenzo Ravagli, *Rassenideale sind der Niedergang der Menschheit: Anthroposophie und der Rassismuvorwurf* [Racial ideals are the downfall of humankind: Anthroposophy and the charge of racism] (Stuttgart: Freies Geistesleben, 2002); Pietro Archiati, *Die Überwindung des Rassismus durch die Geisteswissenschaft Rudolf Steiners* [Overcoming racism through Rudolf Steiner’s spiritual science] (Dornach: Verlag am Goetheanum, 1997). For critical analyses from non-Anthroposophists, see Georg Schmid, “Die Anthroposophie und die Rassenlehre Rudolf Steiners zwischen Universalismus, Eurozentrik und Germanophilie” [Anthroposophy and Rudolf Steiner’s racial doctrine between universalism, eurocentrism, and Germanophilia] in *Anthroposophie und Christentum: Eine kritisch-konstruktive Auseinandersetzung* [Anthroposophy and Christianity: A critical-constructive dialogue], ed. Joachim Müller (Freiburg: Paulus, 1995), 138–94; Helmut Zander, “Sozialdarwinistische Rassentheorien aus dem okkulten Untergrund des Kaiserreichs” [Social Darwinist racial theories from the occult underground of Imperial Germany] in *Handbuch zur ‘Völkischen Bewegung’ 1871–1918* [Handbook on the Volkish movement 1871–1918], ed. Uwe Puschner, Walter Schmitz, and Justus Ulbricht (Munich: Saur, 1996), 224–51; Helmut Zander, “Anthroposophische Rassentheorie: Der Geist auf dem Weg durch die Rassengeschichte” [Anthroposophical race theory: The spirit on its way through racial history] in Schnurbein and Ulbricht, *Völkische Religion und Krisen der Moderne*, 292–341; Peter Bierl, *Wurzelrassen, Erzengel und Volksgeister: Die Anthroposophie Rudolf Steiners und die Waldorfpädagogik* [Root races, archangels and national spirits: Rudolf Steiner’s Anthroposophy and Waldorf pedagogy] (Hamburg: Konkret, 2005).

⁶ See for example Cees Leijenhorst, “Anthroposophy” in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, ed. Wouter Hanegraaff (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 82–89, particularly 86. In other respects Leijenhorst’s entry is a significant improvement on earlier efforts; cf. Robert McDermott, “Anthroposophy” in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 320–21.

⁷ On academic analogues to this tradition see Wouter Hanegraaff, “Forbidden Knowledge: Anti-Esoteric Polemics and Academic Research,” *Aries* 5, no. 2 (2005): 225–54.

⁸ See for example George Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism* (New York: Fertig, 1978), 96. Similar conclusions are found in Michael Reißmann, “Nationalsozialismus, völkische Bewegung und Esoterik” [Nazism, the Volkish movement, and Esotericism], *Zeitschrift für Genozidforschung* 4, no. 2 (2003): 58–91.

⁹ Useful studies of the development of racial thinking include Hannah Augstein, *Race: The Origins of an Idea, 1760–1850* (Bristol: Thoemmes, 1996); Sara Eigen and Mark Larrimore, eds., *The German Invention of Race* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006); Werner Conze, “Rasse” [Race], in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland* [Basic historical concepts: Historical lexicon of political-social language in Germany], ed. Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck, vol. 5 (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1984), 135–78.

¹⁰ Throughout the article I will quote Steiner’s published works, both written texts printed during Steiner’s lifetime as well as posthumously published transcripts of his lectures, which Anthroposophists consider authentic. A large proportion of the lectures was transcribed by professional stenographers and edited by the executors of Steiner’s literary estate, who publish the *Rudolf Steiner Gesamtausgabe*, the official edition of Steiner’s complete works, from Anthroposophy’s world headquarters in Dornach, Switzerland. When available, I will quote from authorized English translations of Steiner’s books, including the lecture cycles; otherwise I will provide my own translations from the *Gesamtausgabe* editions, and include the original passages in the footnotes.

¹¹ On Steiner’s place within the broader religious landscape of early twentieth century Germany see Thomas Nipperdey, *Religion im Umbruch: Deutschland 1870–1918* [Religion in transition: Germany 1870–1918] (Munich: Beck, 1988), 145–46.

¹² Steiner’s transition to the Theosophical worldview after 1900 marked his self-distancing from both mainstream natural science and standard methods of historical research; the opening pages of his 1904 work *Cosmic Memory*, a founding text of Anthroposophy, explicitly reject both “scientific materialism” and “ordinary history” in favor of “direct spiritual perception” based on “a spiritual world conception” and “a true understanding of mysticism, theosophy, and gnosis.” Rudolf Steiner, *Cosmic Memory: Prehistory of Earth and Man* (New York: SteinerBooks, 1987), 25–31.

¹³ For a brief history of modern Theosophy see James Santucci, “The Theosophical Society” in *Controversial New Religions*, ed. James R. Lewis and Jesper Petersen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 259–94.

¹⁴ See the fine analysis by Jörg Wichmann, “Das theosophische Menschenbild und seine indischen Wurzeln” [The Theosophical conception of man and its Indian roots], *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 35, no. 1 (1983): 12–33; as well as Helmuth von Glasenapp, *Das Indienbild deutscher Denker* [The image of India among German thinkers] (Stuttgart: Koehler, 1960), particularly the chapter on “Theosophie und Anthroposophie.”

¹⁵ A number of scholars of religion consider the split between Anthroposophy and the parent Theosophical Society primarily organizational, and continue to classify Steiner's movement as a variant of Theosophy. See for example Antoine Faivre, *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition: Studies in Western Esotericism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000). Maria Carlson concurs: "Rudolf Steiner's Anthroposophy is a refinement and redirection of Theosophy, not a mutually exclusive movement. [. . .] The general worldview and the basic cosmology remained similar." Carlson, *"No Religion Higher than Truth": A History of the Theosophical Movement in Russia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 33.

¹⁶ Racial ideology appears to have played a role in the split between Anthroposophy and the parent Theosophical Society. In 1911 a prominent Anthroposophist, Günther Wagner, wrote that Steiner's followers believed that "since we are the most advanced race, we have the most advanced religion." Quoted in Norbert Klatt, *Theosophie und Anthroposophie: Neue Aspekte zu ihrer Geschichte* [Theosophy and Anthroposophy: New aspects of their history] (Göttingen: Klatt, 1993), 102. For Steiner's negative assessment of Asian spiritual traditions in European contexts see among others, Rudolf Steiner, *Luzifer-Gnosis* (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Nachlaßverwaltung, 1960), 370–71; Rudolf Steiner, *Westliche und östliche Weltgegensätzlichkeit* [The contrast between western and eastern worlds] (Dornach: Philosophisch-Anthroposophischer Verlag, 1927), 226–39; and Rudolf Steiner, *Gedankenfreiheit und soziale Kräfte* [Freedom of thought and social forces] (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1971), 125–41.

¹⁷ For a conspicuously mild summary of Theosophical root-race doctrine see Robert Ellwood, *Theosophy: A Modern Expression of the Wisdom of the Ages* (Wheaton, Ill.: Theosophical Publishing House, 1986), 88–102. Even Ellwood's account observes: "The fundamental category for the further understanding of human development, from the theosophical perspective, is the concept of 'Root Races'" (88). A more complex treatment is available in Gauri Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), particularly chapter six, "Conversion, Theosophy, and Race Theory" (177–207).

¹⁸ Helena P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy*, 2 vols. (London: Theosophical Publishing Company, 1893). On the contrast between "civilized people and savages" see 2: 331–32; on the "intellectual difference" between Aryans and non-Aryans see 2: 439. Blavatsky's narrative combines unified human origins with profound racial distinctions:

Though all were of one common origin, yet, for reasons given, their potentialities and mental capabilities, outward or physical forms, and future characteristics, were very different. Some superior, others inferior, to suit the Karma of the various reincarnating Monads, which could not all be of the same degree of purity in their last births in other Worlds. This accounts for the difference of races, the inferiority of the savage and other human varieties (2: 259).

¹⁹ Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine*, 2: 332, 786.

²⁰ Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine*, 2: 171, 177, 824–25. A condensed version of Blavatsky's racial theories is available in Basil Crump, *Evolution as Outlined in the Archaic Eastern Records* (London: Blavatsky Association, 1930). Similar accounts can be found in other Theosophical texts, for example Annie Besant and Charles W. Leadbeater, *Man: Whence, How and Whither* (London: Theosophical Publishing

Company, 1913), 45–55, 239–89, 330–31; Alvin Boyd Kuhn, *Theosophy: A Modern Revival of Ancient Wisdom* (New York: Henry Holt, 1930), 220–31; A. T. Barker, ed., *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett* (London: Fisher Unwin, 1923), 68–70, 82–88, 94–97, 118–22, 149–59; Ludwig Deinhard, *Die Geheimlehre* [The secret doctrine] (Leipzig: Max Altmann, 1909), 38–75; Alice Hamaker, “Karma: Its Racial and National Aspect,” *Theosophist* (April 1925): 53–67; Edouard Schuré, *The Great Initiates* (London: Rider, 1913), 3–25; Isabelle Pagan, *Racial Cleavage, or The Seven Ages of Man* (London: Theosophical Publishing House, 1937).

²¹ Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine* 2: 307. For Steiner’s praise of *The Secret Doctrine* see Rudolf Steiner, *Die Welträtsel und die Anthroposophie* [The riddle of the universe and Anthroposophy] (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Nachlaßverwaltung, 1985), 119; and Rudolf Steiner, *Spiritualism, Madame Blavatsky, and Theosophy*, ed. Christopher Bamford (Great Barrington: Anthroposophic Press, 2001), 103. Even in the midst of the acrimonious break with the Theosophical Society, when Steiner criticized *The Secret Doctrine* for drawing too heavily on non-Christian and non-European sources, he continued to portray himself as the true inheritor of Blavatsky’s teachings; see Steiner, *Spiritualism, Madame Blavatsky, and Theosophy*, 130.

²² Examples include Annie Besant, *The Pedigree of Man* (London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1904), 89–118, 143–51; Annie Besant, *The Changing World* (London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1910), 113–18; Charles W. Leadbeater, entry on “Races” in *Extracts from the Vahan*, ed. Sarah Corbett (London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1904), 671–73; Fio Hara, “The Secret Doctrine of Racial Development,” *Theosophist* (August 1904): 661–69; A. Schwarz, “Notes on the Pedigree of Man,” *Theosophist* (June 1905): 545–57.

For divergent interpretations of some of these texts see Carla Risseuw, “Thinking Culture through Counter-culture: The Case of Theosophists in India and Ceylon and Their Ideas on Race and Hierarchy (1875–1947)” in *Gurus and Their Followers: New Religious Reform Movements in Colonial India*, ed. Antony Copley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 180–205; and Catherine Lowman Wessinger, *Annie Besant and Progressive Messianism* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 1988), 195–200. See also the discussion of race in Johan van Manen, ed., *Transactions of the First Annual Congress of the Federation of European Sections of the Theosophical Society* (Amsterdam: Theosofische uitgevermaatschappij, 1906).

For the international historical context to Theosophical teachings see Herman de Tollenaere, *The Politics of Divine Wisdom: Theosophy and Labour, National, and Women’s Movements in Indonesia and South Asia, 1875–1947* (Nijmegen: Uitgeverij Katholieke Universiteit, 1996).

²³ Anthroposophist apologias for Steiner’s racial teachings sometimes claim that he abandoned the root race theory when he broke organizationally from the Theosophical Society. While Steiner rejected the cyclical format of Theosophical race theory in favor of a more forthrightly progressive model of increasingly higher racial forms, he did not repudiate the basic contours of the root race scheme. This specific ideological continuity between Theosophy and Anthroposophy is acknowledged by a number of sympathetic commentators. See for example Richard Smoley and Jay Kinney, *Hidden Wisdom: A Guide to the Western Esoteric Tradition* (New York: Arkana, 1999), 279; Bruce Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom Revived: A History of the Theosophical Movement* (Berkeley: University of

California Press, 1980), 158; and Dan Burton and David Grandy, *Magic, Mystery, and Science: The Occult in Western Civilization* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 224.

²⁴ A schematic overview from an Anthroposophist perspective is available in Adolf Arenson, *Leitfaden durch 50 Vortragszyklen Rudolf Steiners* [Guide to fifty lecture cycles by Rudolf Steiner] (Stuttgart: Freies Geistesleben, 1961), particularly the entry for “Rassenentwicklung” [Racial evolution], 779–82; as well as the entries for “Arische Rasse” [Aryan race], 59; “Seelenentwicklung” [Soul evolution], 812; and “Wurzelerassen” [root races], 956.

²⁵ See among others Steiner, *Cosmic Memory*, 45–47; Rudolf Steiner, *Die okkulten Wahrheiten alter Mythen und Sagen* [The occult truths of old myths and legends] (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Nachlaßverwaltung, 1999), 37–39; Rudolf Steiner, *Kosmogonie* [Cosmogony] (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Nachlaßverwaltung, 1979), 246–48; Rudolf Steiner, *Grundelemente der Esoterik* [Fundamentals of Esotericism] (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Nachlaßverwaltung, 1972), 283–85 and passim.

²⁶ On the intellectual and political context of such doctrines see Franz Wegener, *Das atlantidische Weltbild: Nationalsozialismus und Neue Rechte auf der Suche nach der versunkenen Atlantis* [The Atlantean worldview: National Socialism and the New Right in search of the lost Atlantis] (Gladbeck: Kulturförderverein Ruhrgebiet, 2001); Arn Strohmeyer, *Von Hyperborea nach Auschwitz* [From Hyperborea to Auschwitz] (Cologne: PapyRossa, 2005); and Sumathi Ramaswamy, *The Lost Land of Lemuria: Fabulous Geographies, Catastrophic Histories* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

²⁷ For the history of the notion of an “Aryan race” see Stefan Arvidsson, “Aryan Mythology As Science and Ideology,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 67, no. 2 (1999): 327–54; Colin Kidd’s chapter entitled “The Aryan Moment: Racialising Religion in the Nineteenth Century” in his book, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 168–202.

²⁸ Rudolf Steiner, *The Temple Legend* (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1997), 201; lecture from 1905 on “The Relationship of Occultism to the Theosophical Movement.” As this text is not based on professionally prepared transcripts but on the notes of Steiner’s followers in the lecture audience, fastidious readers may object to the characterization of such passages as “Steiner’s words”; the book’s Anthroposophical editor, however, remarks that “even though we are not always dealing with a word-for-word transcript, the contents as they have been conveyed to us form a unique and indispensable part of the complete works of Rudolf Steiner” (4).

²⁹ A range of Theosophical writings nevertheless indicates that the coming sixth race is to be a white race; see for instance C. W. Leadbeater, “The Beginnings of the Sixth Root Race,” *Theosophist* (February 1910): 487–98; W. A. Meyers, “Contemporary National Evolution,” *Theosophist* (June 1898): 523–28; and Marie Russak, “The Call of the Sixth Root Race,” *The Channel* (December 1915): 99–103.

³⁰ For background on the German and Austrian reception of Theosophy see George Mosse’s chapter, “The Occult Origins of National Socialism” in his book, *The Fascist Revolution* (New York: Fertig, 1999); Jeffrey Goldstein, “On Racism and Anti-Semitism in Occultism and Nazism,” *Yad Vashem Studies* 13 (1979): 53–72; Jackson Spielvogel and David Redles, “Hitler’s Racial Ideology: Content and

Occult Sources,” *Simon Wiesenthal Center Annual* 3 (1986): 227–46; Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism* (New York: New York University Press, 1992); Corinna Treitel, *A Science for the Soul: Occultism and the Genesis of the German Modern* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

³¹ Figures who combined Anthroposophical and Ariosophical themes include Karl Heise, Max Seiling, Harald Grävell, Johannes Balzli, and Gregor Schwartz-Bostunitsch. For Steiner’s 1905 critique of Ariosophical race thinking as excessively materialistic, see Steiner, *Luzifer-Gnosis*, 500–04.

³² Rudolf Steiner, “Bruderschaft und Daseinskampf” [Brotherhood and the struggle for survival], chapter eight in Steiner, *Die Welträtsel und die Anthroposophie* [The riddle of the universe and Anthroposophy]. The book’s title recalls the influence of both Haeckel and Theosophy. Steiner’s criticisms of Darwinian thought sometimes exacerbated, rather than alleviated, his own racist assumptions, as this passage from 1906 indicates:

Darwinism has made many errors in regard to the differentiation expressed by the races actually existing on the Earth. The higher races have not descended from the lower races; on the contrary, the latter represent the degeneration of the higher races which have preceded them. Suppose there are two brothers—one of whom is handsome and intelligent, the other ugly and dull-witted. Both proceed from the same father. What should we think of a man who believed that the intelligent brother descends from the idiot? That is the kind of error made by Darwinism in regard to the races.

Rudolf Steiner, *An Esoteric Cosmology* (Blauvelt: Spiritual Science Library, 1987), 23.

In a 1912 lecture on “Darwin and Supernatural Research” Steiner praised Arthur Gobineau’s seminal racist tome, *The Inequality of Human Races*. See Rudolf Steiner, *Menschengeschichte im Lichte der Geistesforschung* [Human history in the light of spiritual research] (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Nachlaßverwaltung, 1962), 480–87.

³³ Steiner, “Die Grundbegriffe der Theosophie. Menschenrassen” [Basic concepts of Theosophy: The races of humankind], chapter six in *Die Welträtsel und die Anthroposophie*.

³⁴ In other contexts, Annie Besant also distinguished between “brotherhood” and “equality,” endorsing the former while rejecting the latter. See Besant, *The Changing World*, 76–77.

³⁵ Steiner, *Die Welträtsel und die Anthroposophie*, 132–33: “wie verschieden veranlagt, wie verschieden begabt die einzelnen Menschenrassen sind. [. . .] Man empfindet es oft als eine Ungerechtigkeit der Natur, daß sie den einen zu einem Dasein in einer tief untenstehenden Menschenrasse verurteilt und den andern zu einer scheinbar vollkommenen Rasse heraufhebt.”

³⁶ Steiner, *Die Welträtsel und die Anthroposophie*, 133: “Ein jeder von uns geht durch die verschiedensten Stufen der Rassen hindurch und der Durchgang bedeutet für die einzelne Seele gerade eine Fortentwicklung.”

³⁷ Steiner, *Die Welträtsel und die Anthroposophie*, 138: “Ein Fortschritt in den menschlichen Fähigkeiten findet nur dadurch statt, daß gewisse sogenannte höhere Grade des Menschendaseins mit dem Zurücktreten früherer Stufen der Entwicklung erkauft werden.” On the importance of the notion of progressive spiritual evolution to the modern Western Esoteric tradition, particularly its

Theosophical variants, see Wouter Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 470–82.

³⁸ Steiner, *Die Welträtsel und die Anthroposophie*, 143: “Unsere Vorfahren waren anders gestaltet wie wir heute, und die, welche sie zurückgelassen haben, kamen in Verhältnisse, die sie nicht vertrugen. Sie mußten sich daher herunterentwickeln, sie kamen in Dekadenz, sie degenerierten.”

³⁹ Steiner, *Die Welträtsel und die Anthroposophie*, 144: “Die Bevölkerung, die man die kaukasische Rasse nennt, stellt die eigentliche Kulturrasse dar. . . .”

⁴⁰ Steiner, *Die Welträtsel und die Anthroposophie*, 145:

Wenn Sie aber geisteswissenschaftlich die Vergangenheit betrachten, so werden Sie zu ganz andern Anschauungen kommen. Sie werden finden, daß unsere weiße Kulturmenschheit dadurch entstanden ist, daß gewisse Teile sich von den Antlantiern absonderten und hier unter andern klimatischen Verhältnissen sich höher entwickelten. Gewisse Teile der atlantischen Bevölkerung sind zurückgeblieben eben auf den früheren Stufen, so daß wir in der Bevölkerung Asiens und Amerikas Überreste von den verschiedenen atlantischen Rassen zu sehen haben.

⁴¹ Steiner, *Die Welträtsel und die Anthroposophie*, 153–54.

Innerhalb der atlantischen Rasse haben unsere eigenen Seelen gewohnt, welche sich dann heraufentwickelt haben zu einer höherstehenden Menschenrasse. Das gibt uns ein Bild der Entwicklung des Menschen bis zu unserer Zeit. So begreifen wir auch den Grundsatz, den Kern einer allgemeinen Brüderschaft zu begründen ohne Rücksicht auf Rasse, Farbe, Stand und so weiter. [. . .] Unsere Seele schreitet von Stufe zu Stufe, das heißt von Rasse zu Rasse, und wir lernen die Bedeutung der Menschheit kennen, wenn wir diese Rassen betrachten.

⁴² Rudolf Steiner, *Knowledge of Higher Worlds* (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1993), 197–98.

⁴³ Steiner, *Knowledge of Higher Worlds*, 199.

⁴⁴ Steiner, *Knowledge of Higher Worlds*, 200.

⁴⁵ Steiner, *Knowledge of Higher Worlds*, 207.

⁴⁶ Steiner, *Cosmic Memory*, 45–46.

⁴⁷ Steiner, *Cosmic Memory*, 46.

⁴⁸ Steiner, *Cosmic Memory*, 231.

⁴⁹ Rudolf Steiner, *The Mission of the Individual Folk Souls in Relation to Teutonic Mythology* (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1970). For Steiner, race spirits and national spirits were real entities that oversaw racial and ethnic evolution and steered “whole nationalities and races” from the higher realms:

The peoples and races of our earth are indeed guided by the spirits called Archangels or Spirits of Fire. [. . .] From hoary antiquity to the present day our earth has been led and guided from people to people, from race to race, by the Spirits of Fire whose bodies are the Folk-Souls and who are in charge of the course of earthly evolution.

Rudolf Steiner, *Universe, Earth and Man* (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1987), 49.

⁵⁰ Steiner, *Mission of the Folk Souls*, 73.

⁵¹ Steiner, *Mission of the Folk Souls*, 75.

⁵² Steiner, *Mission of the Folk Souls*, 76.

⁵³ Steiner, *Mission of the Folk Souls*, 76. On the notion of the inevitable disappearance of “primitive races” and its standard association with “sentimental racism” see Patrick Brantlinger, *Dark Vanishings: Discourse on the Extinction of Primitive Races, 1800–1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).

⁵⁴ Rudolf Steiner, *Christus und die menschliche Seele* [Christ and the human soul] (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1997), 92:

Wir müssen, wenn wir das verstehen wollen, genau unterscheiden zwischen der Rassenentwicklung und der Seelenentwicklung. Diese beiden dürfen durchaus nicht miteinander verwechselt werden. Eine Menschenseele kann sich so entwickeln, daß sie in einer Inkarnation in einer bestimmten Rasse sich verkörpert. Wenn sie sich da bestimmte Eigenschaften erwirbt, so kann sie sich in einer späteren Inkarnation in einer ganz anderen Rasse wieder verkörpern. . . .

The same idea is explored in other works: “Now there were some beings in that Atlantean period very low on the human ladder and they eventually became the backward races.” Other bodies, in contrast, continued up the ladder:

When they had belonged to highly developed individuals these bodies were pure and good. Exalted spiritual beings then descended into such bodies; and so it frequently happened during the Atlantean epoch that beings who would not otherwise have been able to incarnate on earth made use of such advanced bodies in order to descend among men.

Steiner, *Universe, Earth and Man*, 104.

⁵⁵ Steiner, *Christus und die menschliche Seele*, 93:

Aber sie wurden immer besser und besser, und das führte dann dazu, daß die Seelen allmählich in höhere Rassen übergingen, daß also Seelen, die in ganz untergeordneten Rassen früher verkörpert waren, auf eine höhere Stufe hinauf sich entwickelten und sich später verkörpern konnten in den leiblichen Nachkommen der führenden Bevölkerung Europas.

⁵⁶ Rudolf Steiner, *The Universal Human* (New York: Anthroposophic Press, 1990), 42, 76, 93.

⁵⁷ Steiner, *Universal Human*, 73.

⁵⁸ Steiner, *Universal Human*, 74.

⁵⁹ Steiner, *Universal Human*, 75. Steiner repeatedly emphasized that had cosmic evolution proceeded according to the divine plan, “there would have been one united type of human being spread over the whole face of the earth. However, Lucifer and Ahriman interfered and thwarted the original design” (76).

⁶⁰ Steiner, *The Apocalypse of St. John* (London: Anthroposophical Publishing Company, 1958), 92, 142.

⁶¹ Steiner, *Apocalypse of St. John*, 140. Since some races advance while others decline, the “most advanced part of the Atlantean population” evolved higher and founded the great civilizations of antiquity, whereas “the greater part of the Atlantean population was not sufficiently mature to develop further, it was incapable of coming over into our epoch” (79).

⁶² Steiner, *Apocalypse of St. John*, 80.

⁶³ Steiner oscillated between antisemitic and philosemitic attitudes. For a detailed analysis see Peter Staudenmaier, “Rudolf Steiner and the Jewish Question,” *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 50 (2005): 127–47.

⁶⁴ For examples see Rudolf Steiner, *Das Hereinwirken geistiger Wesenheiten in den Menschen* [The effect of spiritual entities on man] (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 2001), 194–95; Steiner, *Universal Human*, 10; and Steiner, *Apocalypse of St. John*, 25, 129.

⁶⁵ Rudolf Steiner, *Menschheitsentwicklung und Christus-Erkenntnis* [Human evolution and knowledge of Christ] (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1981), 186:

Die Zurückgebliebenen, die sich, wie man sagt, mit der Rasse verbunden haben, die sind verkommen, während die Fortgeschrittenen neue Kulturen begründet haben. Die letzten Nachzügler auf dem Wege nach Osten, die Mongolen, haben noch etwas von der Kultur der Atlantier behalten. Ebenso werden die Leiber derjenigen Menschen, die sich nicht fortschrittlich weiterentwickeln werden, über die nächste Zeitenwende hin überwachsen und die Chinesen der Zukunft bilden. Es wird wieder in Dekadenz befindliche Völkerschaften geben. Es leben ja auch in den Chinesenkörpern Seelen, die, weil sie eine zu große Anziehungskraft zur Rasse gehabt haben, noch einmal in solchen Rassen werden verkörpert sein müssen.

⁶⁶ Steiner, *Universe, Earth and Man*, 157: “The souls coming over from Atlantis really did vary greatly in their qualities and it was right in a certain sense for these souls, some of whom were more advanced than others, to be divided into castes according to the karma they had previously incurred.” Just a page later we are reassured that “the concept of race will gradually disappear along with all the differences that are relics of earlier times” (158). But in this ostensibly non-racial future, “Mankind will be divided according to differences in intellect and morality and on such a basis a new spiritualised caste system will come about” (159).

⁶⁷ Rudolf Steiner, *The Being of Man and His Future Evolution* (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1981), 115. The racially advanced populations migrated to the temperate zones of the northern hemisphere, while the “stragglers” who were “left behind” from earlier eras now populate the southerly regions of the Earth.

⁶⁸ Steiner, *Being of Man and His Future Evolution*, 116–17. In Steiner’s account of progressive evolution, bodily characteristics fulfill a crucial function:

We must keep in mind that no matter how highly developed an individuality is, if it descends into an unsuitable body because it cannot find a suitable one, this individuality cannot express his or her soul-spiritual faculties because it lacks the necessary physical instruments.

Steiner, *The Universal Human*, 33.

⁶⁹ Steiner, *Being of Man and His Future Evolution*, 118.

⁷⁰ Steiner, *Being of Man and His Future Evolution*, 119.

⁷¹ Recent research in the history of anthropology suggests that Steiner’s racial theories may have exceeded the consensus view at the time. “Racial types were not linked to cultural categories,” according to one study of German anthropology before World War One: “Prior to the war, and despite the movement toward

natural science, German anthropology was still dominated by the liberal conviction that there was no direct connection between race and human faculty—a stance that inhibited, indeed made all but impossible, the positing of racial hierarchies.” H. Glenn Penny and Matti Bunzl, *Worldly Provincialism: German Anthropology in the Age of Empire* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 20.

⁷² Rudolf Steiner, *The Occult Significance of Blood* (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1967), 13. The first English translation of the text appeared as Rudolf Steiner, “Blood Is a Quite Peculiar Fluid,” *Theosophical Review* (October 1907): 105–17; this version omits the paragraph on “the race question.” The context for Steiner’s remarks was the genocidal campaign against the native inhabitants of Germany’s colony in South-West Africa; for the historical circumstances see Isabel Hull, *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 5–90.

⁷³ Rudolf Steiner, *Faculty Meetings With Rudolf Steiner* (Hudson: Anthroposophic Press, 1998), 558–59. These comments were made in the midst of a heated propaganda campaign against the deployment of French colonial troops on German soil; for essential background see Christian Koller, “*Von Wilden aller Rassen niedergemetzelt*: die Diskussion um die Verwendung von Kolonialtruppen in Europa zwischen Rassismus, Kolonial- und Militärpolitik (1914–1930)” [“Massacred by savages of all races”: The discussion of the deployment of colonial troops in Europe between racism, colonial politics and military policy (1914–1930)] (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2001); Keith Nelson, “The ‘Black Horror on the Rhine’: Race as a Factor in Post-World War I Diplomacy,” *Journal of Modern History* 42, no. 4 (December 1970): 606–27; Gisela Lebzelter, “Die ‘Schwarze Schmach’: Vourteile—Propaganda—Mythos” [The ‘black horror’: Prejudice, propaganda, myth], *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 11 (1985): 37–58.

⁷⁴ Rudolf Steiner, *Über Gesundheit und Krankheit* [On health and illness] (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1994), 189:

Neulich bin ich in Basel in eine Buchhandlung gekommen, da fand ich das neueste Programm dessen, was gedruckt wird: ein Negerroman, wie überhaupt jetzt die Neger allmählich in die Zivilisation von Europa hereinkommen! Es werden überall Negertänze aufgeführt, Negertänze gehüpft. Aber wir haben ja sogar schon diesen Negerroman. Er ist urlangweilig, greulich langweilig, aber die Leute verschlingen ihn. Ja, ich bin meinerseits davon überzeugt, wenn wir noch eine Anzahl Negerromane kriegen, und wir geben diese Negerromane den schwangeren Frauen zu lesen, in der ersten Zeit der Schwangerschaft namentlich, wo sie heute ja gerade solche Gelüste manchmal entwickeln können—wir geben diese Negerromane den schwangeren Frauen zu lesen, da braucht gar nicht dafür gesorgt zu werden, daß Neger nach Europa kommen, damit Mulatten entstehen; da entsteht durch rein geistiges Lesen von Negerromanen eine ganze Anzahl von Kindern in Europa, die ganz grau sind, Mulattenhaare haben, die mulattenähnlich aussehen werden!

This passage was omitted, without indication, from the authorized English translation of the book. See Rudolf Steiner, *Health and Illness*, vol. 2 (Spring Valley: Anthroposophic Press, 1981); it would have appeared on page 16. The passage was also excised, without indication, from the second English translation

of the book. See Rudolf Steiner, *From Comets to Cocaine* (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 2000); it would have appeared on page 160. The “negro novel” Steiner ridicules was Rene Maran’s award-winning *Batouala*. For background see Brent Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 70–106, 171–79; and Femi Ojo-Ade, *Rene Maran, the Black Frenchman* (Washington: Three Continents Press, 1984).

⁷⁵ Steiner, *Health and Illness*, 2: 85–86.

⁷⁶ Rudolf Steiner, *At the Gates of Spiritual Science* (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1970), 65–66. This attitude toward Asians was not limited to the Mongol invasions of the past, but extended to the present as well: “Asians do not care for the kind of thinking we have in Europe. They want images, like the images you see in the monasteries of Tibet. Asians want images. The abstract notions Europeans have are of no interest to them, they make their heads hurt, and they do not want them.” Rudolf Steiner, *From Beetroot to Buddhism* (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1999), 228–29.

⁷⁷ On German Theosophists and Anthroposophists during the war see Ulrich Linse, “‘Universale Bruderschaft’ oder nationaler Rassenkrieg—die deutschen Theosophen im Ersten Weltkrieg” [“Universal brotherhood” or national race war—German Theosophists in the First World War] in *Nation und Religion in der deutschen Geschichte* [Nation and religion in German history], ed. Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Dieter Langewiesche (Frankfurt: Campus, 2001), 602–45.

⁷⁸ Rudolf Steiner, *Die geistigen Hintergründe des Ersten Weltkrieges* [The spiritual background of the First World War] (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1974), 35–36: “Wie sollte denn den Menschen nicht auffallen die tiefe Verschiedenheit, wenn es sich um Geisteskultur handelt, sagen wir der europäischen und der asiatischen Völker. Wie sollte denn nicht auffallen die Differenzierung, die gebunden ist an die äußere Hautfärbung!” Compare these remarks from 1907: “But this oriental form of truth is worthless for us western peoples. It could only obstruct us and hold us back from our goal. Here in the West are the peoples who shall constitute the core of the future races.” “The dying races of the East still need the Oriental school. The Western school is for the races of the future.” See Rudolf Steiner, *Aus den Inhalten der esoterischen Schulen* [From the contents of the Esoteric school] (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1995), 221, 227.

⁷⁹ Steiner, *Die geistigen Hintergründe des Ersten Weltkrieges*, 37:

Und dieses Hinuntertragen, dieses Durchimprägnieren des Fleisches mit dem Geiste, das ist das Charakteristische der Mission, die Mission überhaupt der weißen Menschheit. Die Menschen haben ihre weiße Hautfarbe aus dem Grunde, weil der Geist in der Haut dann wirkt, wenn er auf den physischen Plan heruntersteigen will. [. . .] [D]a, wo er zurückbleibt, wo er einen dämonischen Charakter annimmt, das Fleisch nicht vollständig durchdringt, daß da weiße Hautfarbe nicht auftritt, weil atavistische Kräfte da sind, die den Geist nicht vollständig mit dem Fleisch in Einklang kommen lassen.

⁸⁰ Steiner, *Die geistigen Hintergründe des Ersten Weltkrieges*, 38:

Aber ohne die heftigsten Kämpfe gehen diese Dinge in der Welt nicht ab. [. . .] Das aber muß dazu führen, daß der Übergang von der fünften Kulturepoche in die sechste Kulturepoche sich nicht anders abspielen kann denn als ein heftiger Kampf der weißen Menschheit mit der farbigen Menschheit auf den mannigfaltigsten Gebieten.

⁸¹ Steiner, *Menschheitsentwicklung und Christus-Erkenntnis*, 244:

Aber die Europäer sind hinaufgestiegen zu einer höheren Kulturstufe, während die Indianer stehengeblieben und dadurch in Dekadenz gekommen sind. Diesen Entwicklungsvorgang muß man immer beachten. Er läßt sich darstellen wie folgt. Im Laufe der Jahrtausende verändert sich unser Planet, und diese Veränderung bedingt auch eine Entwicklung der Menschheit. Die Seitenzweige, die nicht mehr in die Verhältnisse hineinpassen, werden dekadent. Wir haben also einen geraden Entwicklungsstamm und abgehende Seitenzweige, die verfallen.

⁸² A reproduction of the sketch appears on page 245 of *Menschheitsentwicklung und Christus-Erkenntnis*.

⁸³ Rudolf Steiner, "Farbe und Menschenrassen" [Color and the races of humankind], *Vom Leben des Menschen und der Erde* [On the life of man and of the Earth] (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1993). This lecture on "Color and the Races of Humankind" was excised from the otherwise complete English translation of the book it appeared in: Rudolf Steiner, *From Limestone to Lucifer* (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1999). There is no notice of this omission in the text, apart from an ambiguous allusion on the copyright page.

⁸⁴ Steiner, *Vom Leben des Menschen und der Erde*, 52:

[W]eil man eigentlich die ganze Geschichte und das ganze soziale Leben, auch das heutige soziale Leben nur versteht, wenn man auf die Rasseigentümlichkeiten der Menschen eingehen kann. Und dann kann man ja auch erst im richtigen Sinne alles Geistige verstehen, wenn man sich zuerst damit beschäftigt, wie dieses Geistige im Menschen gerade durch die Hautfarbe hindurch wirkt.

⁸⁵ Steiner, *Vom Leben des Menschen und der Erde*, 53:

Also wenn wir fragen: Was gehört zu diesen Erdteilen für eine Rasse hinzu?—so müssen wir eben doch sagen: Zu Asien gehört die gelbe Rasse, die Mongolen, die mongolische Rasse, und zu Europa gehört die weiße Rasse oder die kaukasische Rasse, und zu Afrika gehört die schwarze Rasse oder die Negerrasse. Die Negerrasse gehört nicht zu Europa, und es ist natürlich nur ein Unfug, daß sie jetzt in Europa eine so große Rolle spielt.

For background on these themes see Hans Werner Debrunner, "Classifying Africans: Racial Theories in Relation to Africans in Europe" and "Africans in Germany and Switzerland 1890–1918" in his book, *Presence and Prestige: A History of Africans in Europe before 1918* (Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 1979), 140–45, 351–68.

⁸⁶ Steiner, *Vom Leben des Menschen und der Erde*, 58.

⁸⁷ Steiner, *Vom Leben des Menschen und der Erde*, 55:

Beim Neger ist daher das Hinterhirn besonders ausgebildet. Das geht durch das Rückenmark. Und das kann alles das, was da im Menschen drinnen ist an Licht und Wärme, verarbeiten. Daher ist beim Neger namentlich alles das, was mit dem Körper und mit dem Stoffwechsel zusammenhängt, lebhaft ausgebildet. Er hat, wie man sagt, ein starkes Triebleben, Instinktleben. Der Neger hat also ein starkes Triebleben. Und weil er eigentlich das Sonnige, Licht und Wärme, da an der Körperoberfläche in

seiner Haut hat, geht sein ganzer Stoffwechsel so vor sich, wie wenn in seinem Innern von der Sonne selber gekocht würde. Daher kommt sein Triebleben. Im Neger wird da drinnen fortwährend richtig gekocht, und dasjenige, was dieses Feuer schürt, das ist das Hinterhirn.

⁸⁸ Steiner, *Vom Leben des Menschen und der Erde*, 59.

⁸⁹ Steiner, *Vom Leben des Menschen und der Erde*, 62: “Die Weißen sind eigentlich diejenigen, die das Menschliche in sich entwickeln.”

⁹⁰ Steiner, *Vom Leben des Menschen und der Erde*, 67:

Auf der einen Seite hat man die schwarze Rasse, die am meisten irdisch ist. Wenn sie nach Westen geht, stirbt sie aus. Man hat die gelbe Rasse, die mitten zwischen Erde und Weltenall ist. Wenn sie nach Osten geht, wird sie braun, gliedert sich zu viel dem Weltenall an, stirbt aus. Die weiße Rasse ist die zukünftige, ist die am Geiste schaffende Rasse.

⁹¹ Historical studies of this topic include Nancy Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain, 1800–1960* (London: Macmillan, 1982); Waltraud Ernst and Bernard Harris, eds., *Race, Science and Medicine, 1700–1960*, (New York: Routledge, 1999); and John Haller, *Outcasts from Evolution: Scientific Attitudes of Racial Inferiority, 1859–1900* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971).

⁹² For the case of France see the discussion of “Race and Ethnicity in Esoteric Thought” in David Allen Harvey, *Beyond Enlightenment: Occultism and Politics in Modern France* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005), 158–70; for Britain see Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 134–35. For a brief consideration of “the deeply contradictory racial politics” of the turn of the century occult revival in the United States context see Susan Gillman, *Blood Talk: American Race Melodrama and the Culture of the Occult* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 166.

⁹³ Examples include Franz Boas, *Race, Language and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Jean Finot, *The Death-Agony of the ‘Science’ of Race* (London: Steads, 1911); Jean Finot, *Race Prejudice* (London: Constable, 1906); Friedrich Hertz, *Rasse und Kultur: Eine kritische Untersuchung der Rassen-theorien* [Race and culture: A critical examination of racial theories] (Leipzig: Kröner, 1915); Friedrich Hertz, *Moderne Rassen-theorien: Kritische Essays* [Modern race theories: Critical essays] (Vienna: Stern, 1904); William Babington, *Fallacies of Race Theories as Applied to National Characteristics* (London: Longmans, 1895); Joseph-Antenor Firmin, *The Equality of the Human Races* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002; originally Paris: Pichon, 1885).

⁹⁴ For a sense of the intense objections generated by such discussions, and the response faced by non-Anthroposophist historians who address the topic, interested readers may consult a myriad of Anthroposophist websites devoted to refuting the notion that racial concepts constitute a significant aspect of Steiner’s doctrines; the following may be representative: <<http://www.americans4waldorf.org>>; <<http://www.defendingsteiner.com>>, accessed 15 September 2007.

⁹⁵ Among many examples see Richard Karutz, *Rassenfragen* [Questions of race] (Stuttgart: Ernst Surkamp, 1934, co-published by the Goetheanum in Dornach); Elise Wolfram, *Die germanischen Heldensagen als Entwicklungsgeschichte der Rasse* [Teutonic sagas as evolutionary history of the race] (Stuttgart: Der Kommende

Tag, 1922); Richard Karutz, "Zur Rassenkunde" [On the study of race], *Das Goetheanum* (3 January 1932): 3–6; Guenther Wachsmuth, *Mysterien- und Geistesgeschichte der Menschheit* [Mystery-history and spiritual history of humankind] (Dresden: Emil Weise, 1938); Massimo Scaligero, "Razzismo spirituale e razzismo biologico" [Spiritual racism and biological racism], *La Vita Italiana* (July 1941): 36–41; Massimo Scaligero, "Per un razzismo integrale" [For a complete racism], *La Vita Italiana* (May 1942): 428–34; Ettore Martinoli, "Gli impulsi storici della nuova Europa e l'azione dell'ebraismo internazionale" [The historical impulses of the new Europe and the actions of international Jewry], *La Vita Italiana* (April 1943): 355–64.

⁹⁶ For a particularly revealing juxtaposition of the contradictory components of Anthroposophical race theory see Richard Karutz, *Von Goethe zur Völkerkunde der Zukunft* [From Goethe to the ethnology of the future] (Stuttgart: Surkamp, 1929), 57–66, 115–27.

⁹⁷ See for example Ernst Uehli, *Nordisch-Germanische Mythologie als Mysteriengeschichte* [Nordic-Germanic mythology as mystery-history] (Stuttgart: Mellinger, 1965; originally 1926); Ernst Uehli, *Atlantis und das Rätsel der Eiszeitkunst* [Atlantis and the riddle of ice age art] (Stuttgart: Hoffmann, 1957; originally 1936); Ludwig Thieben, *Das Rätsel des Judentums* [The enigma of Jewry] (Basel: Perseus, 1991; originally 1931); Sigismund von Gleich, *Der Mensch der Eiszeit und Atlantis* [Ice-age man and Atlantis] (Stuttgart: Mellinger, 1990; originally 1936); Sigismund von Gleich, *Siebentausend Jahre Urgeschichte der Menschheit* [Seven thousand years of prehistory] (Stuttgart: Mellinger, 1987; originally 1950); Ernst Uehli, *Kultur und Kunst Ägyptens, Ein Isisgeheimnis* [The culture and art of Egypt, a secret of Isis] (Dornach: Philosophisch-Anthroposophischer Verlag, 1955); Guenther Wachsmuth, *The Evolution of Mankind* (Dornach: Philosophisch-Anthroposophischer Verlag, 1961); Fred Poeppig, *Das Zeitalter der Atlantis und die Eiszeit* [The age of Atlantis and the ice age] (Freiburg: Die Kommenden, 1962).

⁹⁸ In addition to the several instances noted above, compare Steiner, *Welt, Erde und Mensch*, 106–07, and Steiner, *Universe, Earth and Man*, 88–89. All of the specific references to "the black race," "the Malayan Race," "the Mongol race" and "the American Indians" as "degenerate races" were excised from the English edition, with no notice to the reader. Steiner's entire 1924 lecture on "The Essence of Jewry" was omitted from the otherwise complete English translation of the book it appeared in; compare Rudolf Steiner, "Vom Wesen des Judentums" [On the essence of Jewry] in Steiner, *Die Geschichte der Menschheit und die Weltanschauungen der Kulturvölker* [The history of mankind and the worldviews of the civilized nations] (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Nachlaßverwaltung, 1968), 179–96, to Rudolf Steiner, *From Beetroot to Buddhism* (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1999); aside from an equivocal reference on the copyright page, there is no indication of the omission anywhere in the text. This raises a difficult question about how believers in a particular spiritual tradition deal with controversial components within that tradition. In my view, maintaining textual integrity is essential to straightforward engagement with the problematic aspects of Anthroposophical doctrine. In order to transcend the disagreeable facets of Steiner's racial teachings, it is necessary to recognize them accurately in the first place and take their implications seriously; this process is hindered when the original content is obscured.

⁹⁹ The 2004 catalog of the Anthroposophic Press, for example, carries the following endorsement of Steiner's book, *The Universal Human*: "No anthroposophist should approach racial problems without first pondering this lecture and its implications." In 2005 Steiner's book on *The Mission of the Folk Souls* was re-published in English, unabridged and without commentary. And even the cleaned-up version of *Universe, Earth and Man* includes unambiguous passages contrasting "the Asiatic type" to "the race which founded the Aryan stock" (91). According to this translation, "the Asiatic type" had been "held back at the level of the lower human forces," while the Aryans were "the most advanced."

¹⁰⁰ The prominent American Anthroposophist Stephen Usher, for example, writes that according to Steiner, "the interference of the evil gods created racial diversity," which was contrary to "the normal course of evolution," but maintains that Steiner's racial theories will "lead to universal understanding and love among people of all races." Usher concludes: "Rudolf Steiner explains that had the interference not occurred, then human beings would all be incarnated in uniformly beautiful bodies. As a consequence, love would exist among people because of natural beauty and lack of differences." Stephen Usher, "Race—The Tapestry Of Love," *Journal for Anthroposophy* 74 (Easter 2002): 60–63.

¹⁰¹ A similar analysis appears in Bernard Nesfield-Cookson, "A Response to the Claim That Anthroposophy Is Racist" in *The Future Is Now: Anthroposophy at the Millennium*, ed. Sevak Gulbekian (London: Temple Lodge, 1999), 174–88.

¹⁰² Steiner, *Apocalypse of St. John*, 133.

¹⁰³ Steiner, *Apocalypse of St. John*, 206. This will involve a confrontation between "the good race" and "the race of evil." "The most capable must be chosen and prepared to live beyond the period of the great War of All against All when men will confront those who bear in their countenances the sign of evil" (152).

¹⁰⁴ Steiner, *Apocalypse of St. John*, 82.

¹⁰⁵ Sigismund von Gleich, *Die Menschwerdung des Weltzwortes* [The cosmic word becomes man] (Stuttgart: Waldorf-Verlag, 1939), 9; Gleich also uses the term "holy eugenics" (13).

¹⁰⁶ Steiner, *Apocalypse of St. John*, 89.

¹⁰⁷ Steiner, *Apocalypse of St. John*, 84.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.