

Beginnings

Racial Worlds, Medieval Worlds: Why This Book, and How to Read a Book on Medieval Race

GROWING UP in a Singapore that was undergoing a process of decolonization from the British Empire, one of my earliest memories of race came as a result of having to earn a badge in the Girl Guides – which was at that time the tepid equivalent, for girls, of the Boy Scout corps created by Lord Baden-Powell and spread across the British imperial world of the twentieth century. As I was born female and Chinese (the majority racial group in Singapore), sexism and misogyny were not unfamiliar recognitions in childhood (for instance, the old immigrant woman from China who lived downstairs in our apartment block still had tiny, crippled, bound feet, or “lotus buds,” as the classic pillow book *The Golden Lotus* called them), but race is not as easily recognizable for those who inhabit a majority race. Malay neighbors, Indian classmates, Eurasian friends, and the intertwining, multicultural, multireligious life-worlds in Singapore did not foreground racial apartness or a palpable racial hierarchy for a child who belonged to the majority race.

To earn my Laundress badge in the Girl Guides, however, I had to travel to the home of an Englishwoman in a tony part of town, and show her that I knew how to launder, iron, and care for clothing of various kinds. I had to show her that I knew how to wash woolen sweaters by hand, for instance, and dry them not on a line or a bamboo pole – as most Singaporeans dried their clothing before the widespread advent of washing machines and dryers – but laid flat and spread out on a towel, to soak in the moisture, so that the knit would not lose its shape.

I had never before been to this opulent part of town, where mostly the English lived in large, mansion-like houses nestled in green groves of manicured lawns tended by local servants, in what were called, appropriately, *residential estates* where people did not live cheek-by-jowl in government-built public apartment blocks. I remember the hushed, spacious interiors of the Englishwoman’s enormous house, the servants moving invisibly, soundlessly, unobtrusively – the sheer quiet. I washed a woolen sweater to perfection, and dried it on a towel. I passed my laundress test and got my Laundress badge.

I also left the Girl Guides soon after. Not only did it seem wrong that there was a badge to be earned for laundry, only by girls, but the *type* of clothing that one was expected to know how to launder in this equatorial city-state in maritime Southeast Asia struck me as

ludicrous. Why, in an equatorial country located 1 degree 20 minutes north of the equator, where days and nights were blazingly, steamingly hot year-round (this was before the advent of air conditioning) and the humidity close to unbearable, would one need specialized knowledge of how to launder woollens made in England? And how come white people got to live in enclaves of grand mansions on manicured grounds, tended by a servant population of Asians?

This small encounter with colonial race – a “click” moment in an unsuspecting childhood – even as decolonization was in the process of transforming the country brought a recognition that race, like the structure of power exercised by even would-be benign forms of colonial privilege, can only be made visible when the conditions of privilege inhabited by those who wield power are not invisible, natural, and the norm. Decades later, teaching and publishing as a gendered, raced, postcolonial subject in one of the most conservative fields in the Western academy – medieval studies – I would unsuspectingly encounter another “click” moment.

A white, male English medievalist from London, at a metropolitan university in the heart of the old British Empire, decided that my literary practice of reading, which he labeled “postcolonial,” was inadequate and inadequately “postcolonial,” unlike the practice of many of my colleagues, because I had not sufficiently promoted the paramount importance of medieval French – the lingua franca of the European Middle Ages – in my first book, *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy*.

The irony was remarkable: When the importance of French – an imperial language – is not sufficiently thematized and its literature sufficiently held up for attention, female nonwhite postcolonial subjects do not adequately practice “postcolonial” critical readings of medieval texts. A white Englishman at the metropolitan heart of the old British Empire had pronounced this *ex cathedra*.

Who gets to speak for us? an old friend and renowned doyenne of postcolonial theory used to ask. Who gets to decide how we should conduct ourselves? The answer, from these small memories bookending several decades, had to be relearned again and again: Those in command of racial, gender, class, and colonial privilege, then and now – in decolonizing Singapore and in the Western academy today. Racial-colonial privilege, with its institutional power, becomes visible only when occasions of privilege are looked at more closely.¹

Remarkably, questions of power and privilege were also on the minds of other medievalists. In 2004, David Staines and Richard Emmerson, representing the Medieval Academy of America, requested that I edit an anthology of essays for a volume to be entitled *Medieval Ethnicities* or *Medieval Race* and published in the Academy’s MART series. After I had gathered a selection of essays, however, and after various committee meetings by the MART board had taken place, in 2008 this request instead became a commission from the Medieval Academy and its publisher, Toronto University Press, to write a short book on medieval race, intended as the inaugural volume for a new series of volumes being planned by the Academy and Toronto Press.

As I undertook the commission, however, it became clear that it would not be possible to write a *short* book on race in the European Middle Ages. The subject was enormous and immensely complex, and I wanted to treat a variety of populations – not just Jews and Muslims and the portrayal of blackness in literature, which was the focus of a few medievalists who were tentatively working on the subject of ethnorace at the time.

Moreover, the Academy was, in many ways, ahead of its time, as were Rick Emmerson, the-then executive director; David Staines, chair of the MART board; and the enthusiastic members of the board itself, which included Bob Stacey and Pamela Sheingorn. In 2008, medievalists in general were not convinced the concept of race had any purchase for the medieval period. Race theorists also deemed the project presentist, convinced that race was a *modern* phenomenon and that they could safely ignore the Middle Ages, which they saw as a prepolitical era with scant relevance for the cultures of modernity that followed, and thus a period of little interest to them.²

It became clear that race needed to be understood differently from its definition by canonical twentieth-century race theories, and in ways apposite to the medieval past, for medievalists and race theorists to be willing to look at the past anew. After testing the waters for a few years with talks delivered across the country in different venues to different types of audiences, in 2011 I published a two-part article, “The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages 1: Race Studies, Modernity, and the Middle Ages” and “The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages 2: Locations of Medieval Race.” Race theorists, and medievalists, began to change their minds. As of September 2017, this two-part article has garnered more than 25,000 document views on Academia.edu. One of the scholars to whom this book is dedicated is a renowned race theorist who eventually became convinced that the European Middle Ages, after all, was a time that was part of the long history of race.

The working minimum hypothesis of race that I devised, a hypothesis that animates this present volume, is found in Chapter 1:

*“Race” is one of the primary names we have – a name we retain for the strategic, epistemological, and political commitments it recognizes – that is attached to a repeating tendency, of the gravest import, to demarcate human beings through differences among humans that are selectively essentialized as absolute and fundamental, in order to distribute positions and powers differentially to human groups. Race-making thus operates as specific historical occasions in which strategic essentialisms are posited and assigned through a variety of practices and pressures, so as to construct a hierarchy of peoples for differential treatment. My understanding, thus, is that race is a structural relationship for the articulation and management of human differences, rather than a substantive content.*³

Given the variety of scholarship that critical race studies had amassed over the decades, my working hypothesis was hardly controversial. It stood to reason that the differences selected for essentialism would vary in the *longue durée* – perhaps battenning on bodies, physiognomy, and somatic attributes such as skin color in one location; perhaps on social practices, religion, and culture in another; and with perhaps a multiplicity of interlocking discourses elsewhere.

Moreover, in addressing the nested discourses formative of race in the European Middle Ages, it was particularly important to note that *religion* – the paramount source of authority in the medieval period – could function both socioculturally and biopolitically: subjecting peoples of a detested faith, for instance, to a political theology that could biologize, define, and essentialize an entire community as fundamentally and absolutely different in an interknotted cluster of ways. Nature/biology and the sociocultural should not thus be seen as bifurcated spheres in medieval race-formation: They often crisscrossed in the practices, institutions, fictions, and laws of a political – and a *biopolitical* – theology operationalized on the bodies and lives of individuals and groups.

This was not to claim, of course – absurdly – that race-making throughout the medieval period was in any way uniform, homogenous, constant, stable, or free of contradictions or local differences across the countries of Latin Christendom in all localities, regions, and contexts through some three or four centuries of historical time. Neither would it be to concede, in reverse, that local differences – variation in local practices and contexts – must always render it impossible to think translocally in the medieval period. The effort to think across the translocal does not require any supposition of the universal, static, unitary, or unvarying character of medieval race.

The chapters of this volume thus point to particular *moments* and *instances* of how race is made, to indicate the exemplary, dynamic, and resourceful character of race-making under conditions of possibility, not to extract repetitions without difference. They point to racializing momentum that manifests unevenly, and nonidentically, in different places and at different times – to sketch the dynamic field of forces within which miscellaneous instances of race-making can occur under varied local conditions.

But, more fundamental than arriving at a reformulation of what race is, why in the first place would we need a long history of race that recognizes and acknowledges racial practices and racial forms in the medieval period? Like other sociopolitical endeavors that have engaged with the past – feminism comes readily to mind as a predecessor moment; queer studies is another – the project of revising our understanding by inserting premodernity into conversations on race is closely dogged by accusations of presentism, anachronism, reification, and the like. Why call something *race* when many old terms – “ethnocentrism,” “xenophobia,” “premodern discriminations,” “prejudice,” “chauvinism,” even “fear of otherness and difference” – have been used comfortably for so long to characterize the massacres, brutalizations, executions, and mass expulsions of the medieval period?

The short answer is that the use of the term *race* continues to bear witness to important strategic, epistemological, and political commitments not adequately served by the invocation of categories of greater generality (such as *otherness* or *difference*) or greater benignity in our understanding of human culture and society. *Not* to use the term *race* would be to sustain the reproduction of a certain kind of past, while keeping the door shut to tools, analyses, and resources that can name the past differently. Studies of “otherness” and “difference” in the Middle Ages – now increasingly frequent – must then continue to dance around words they dare not use; concepts, tools, and resources that are closed off; and meanings that only exist as lacunae.

Or, to put it another way: The refusal of race destigmatizes the impacts and consequences of certain laws, acts, practices, and institutions in the medieval period, so that we cannot name them for what they are, and makes it impossible to bear adequate witness to the full meaning of the manifestations and phenomena they installed. The unavailability of race thus often colludes in relegating such manifestations to an epiphenomenal status, enabling omissions that have, among other things, facilitated the entrenchment and reproduction of a certain kind of foundational historiography in the academy and beyond.

To cite just one example, explored in Chapter 2: How often do standard (“mainstream”) histories of England discuss as constitutive to the formation of English identity, or to the nation of England, the mass expulsion of Jews in 1290, the marking of the Jewish population with badges for three-quarters of a century, decimations of Jewish communities by mob violence, statutory laws ruling over where Jews were allowed to live, monitory apparatuses such as the Jewish Exchequer and the network of registries created by England

to track the behavior and lives of Jews, or popular lies and rumors like stories of ritual murder, which facilitated the legal execution of Jews by the state?

That the lives of English Jews were *constitutive*, not incidental, to the formation of England's history and collective identity – that the built landscape of England itself, with its cathedrals, abbeys, fortifications, homes, and cities, was dependent on English Jews – is not a story often heard in foundational historiography. Scholars who are invested in the archeology of a past in which alternative voices, lives, and histories are heard, beyond those canonically established as central by foundationalist studies, are thus not well served by evading the category of race and its trenchant vocabularies and tools of analysis.

For race theorists, the study of racial emergence in the longer *durée* is also one means to understand if the configurations of power productive of race in modernity are, in fact, genuinely novel. Key propensities in history can be identified by examining premodernity: the modes of apparent necessity, configurations of power, and conditions of crisis that witness the harnessing of powerful dominant discourses – such as science *or* religion – to make fundamental distinctions among humans in processes to which we give the name of race.

A reissuing of the medieval past in ways that admit the ongoing interplay of that past with the present can therefore only recalibrate the urgencies of the present with greater precision.⁴ An important consideration in investigating the invention of race in medieval Europe (an invention that is always a *re*invention) is also to grasp the ways in which *homo europaeus* – the European subject – emerges in part through racial grids produced from the twelfth through fifteenth centuries, and the significance of that emergence for understanding the unstable entity we call “the West” and its self-authorizing missions.⁵

How to Read This Book on Medieval Race

The aim of this book is to sketch paradigms and models for thinking critically about medieval race, not to produce a thin description of all the territories of racial Europe from west to east, north to south. The book is organized around case studies and the identification of modular instants, exemplars, iconic events and symbols, and key artifacts of culture or history that call attention to tendencies and patterns, inventions and strategies in race-making and identify crucibles and dynamics that conduce to the production of racial form and raced behavior. A number of territories, however – England, the Mediterranean, parts of Western and Eastern Europe, Eurasia and China, the American continent and the North Atlantic – do weave in and out of individual chapter discussions.

Necessarily, the book investigates the materialization of race and racisms through different kinds of critical attention. You will find a variety of formal approaches and styles in the pages below because of the variety of subjects the book treats.⁶ This means that, unlike *Empire of Magic*, *The Invention of Race* is not a volume of readings of literature as such, with comprehensive bibliographies of literary scholarship (apologies, therefore, to those in search of literary criticism and literary bibliographies per se).⁷ The book tries not to privilege literature over all other disciplines (especially as literature is my home discipline), and only analyzes literary texts when these are the documents most trenchantly apposite to the discussion of race – when they are the fittest and most revealing exemplars of racial terrain.⁸

As often as not, with guidance from the scholarship of economic historians and art historians, historical sociology and anthropology, and religious studies, *The Invention of Race* works to retrieve the economic and social relations between ethnoracial groups; grasp the politics of international war, colonizing expeditions, and commercial trade; unravel the meaning of iconic artifacts or phenomena – such as the baffling statue of a black African St. Maurice in Germany or Marco Polo’s mercantile gaze on the races of the world – or calibrate from eyewitness and other accounts the West’s understanding of global ethnoracial relations in macrohistorical time.

This book is marked by its early beginnings, and continues to honor stipulations made in the original arrangements to produce the book. In commissioning the short volume, the Medieval Academy envisaged multiple audiences, with the book aimed at the widest possible readership and not directed solely to professional medievalists or to academic faculty. To reach as many readers as possible, I was asked to use translations in English, or supply translations with every use of a non-English or nonmodern language.

In its present long form, *The Invention of Race* hews closely to those original commitments. I have assiduously sought out translations in English for ease of reading whenever available (but often point to the original languages in sources for those wishing to undertake professional research). I also avoid the use of distracting diacritical marks for non-European languages – tutored by the example of scholars such as David Nirenberg, who pointedly remind us that diacritics are superfluous for those who already have familiarity with a language and alienating for those who do not.

Most importantly, this book stands on the shoulders of scholarship in several disciplines, and features, foregrounds, and highlights the accomplishments of many distinguished scholars on whose work it depends, and without which it could not have been written. No one person in a lifetime can amass the range of knowledges and specializations needed in the many disciplines that must be put into play for the discussion of medieval race. The book is thus guided by and depends on the work of the disciplinary specialists it cites, without which it would not have been possible to build a discussion of medieval race.

These scholars furnish important points of entry into a field, a subject, or a focus, and have bibliographies that support investigations farther afield. The volume also owes much to the generosity of colleagues who have shared their work in progress, and their understanding of their subject or field; they are thanked and acknowledged in the Acknowledgements and in the pages that follow.

What This Book Contains

Chapter 1, “Race Studies, Modernity, and the Middle Ages,” begins by outlining a critical vocabulary and apparatus useful for the discussion of the ethnoracial in the European Middle Ages, surveys how canonical race studies has treated the premodern past, and suggests possible new trajectories that can acknowledge a long history of racial relations. The chapter summarizes how premodernists themselves have treated the subject of race, and sketches some of the locations of medieval race – in the treatment of Jews, in medieval cartography, in the conquest and colonization of fellow-Christian neighboring countries, and in the treatment of skin color, blackness, and Africans.⁹ Religious race, colonial race, cartographic race, and epidermal race are critically surveyed.

Chapter 2, “A Case Study of the Racial State: Jews as Internal Minority in England,” delineates the conditions – economic, legal, theological, sociocultural, biopolitical – that enabled manipulations of English Jews, and that resulted in the emergence of the first racial state in the history of the West. The chapter is a sustained case study of an internal minority in a country of the Latin West that Robert Stacey has called “archetypical” of Europe, and considers the following: English laws and statutes ruling on Jewish domicile, livelihood, conduct, dress, and relations with Christians; state institutions and bureaucracies that administered race, such as the Exchequer of the Jews and the *Domus Conversorum*; the vexed economic relations between Christians and Jews; collusions between state and church; the power of *story* (like ritual murder and blood libels) to congeal communities of consent to violence; the success or failure of religious conversion as a *techne* to effect racial transformation or racial passing; the instrumentality of *sensory race* – racial understanding that is absorbed through the senses – and the imagining of an English national community after the expulsion of England’s Jews in 1290, in the first ever forcible mass expulsion initiated by a country in the West.

The chapter’s final section, “England’s Dead Boys,” offers a finer-grained, longer-range view of ritual boy murder by analyzing a cluster of four texts in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, written before and after the Expulsion: a pre-Expulsion Anglo-Norman ballad and two post-Expulsion Middle English texts (including Chaucer’s *Prioress’s Tale*) that group themselves around the story of young Hugh of Lincoln’s putative slaughter by Jews, with a fourth text as a coda that turns on its head the formula of Jewish child murder altogether. A comparative view of thematically grouped stories fanning out across time allows us to see – up close, through the prism of a popular tale of child murder – how the cultural treatment of Jews before and after the Expulsion changes, and how the changes install a new vision for England.

Chapter 3, “Race Figures in the International Contest: the Islamic ‘Saracen,’” zooms out from the analysis of a single country in Europe to survey the panorama of the international contest between Latin Christendom and Islamdom. The chapter’s first two sections discuss how Islam and its Prophet were understood, the killing fields of war as a crucible of race-making, and political theology as a racializing system of knowledge: as blood-races are theorized; as the enemy is dehumanized into an abstraction, or evil incarnate, or comestibles; and as *gens Christiana* emerges as the name of Latin Christian racial form in the First Crusade.

The section entitled “Sex, Lies, and Paradise” details how a cultural fiction about “Saracens” (a name ingeniously characterizing the enemy as liars, through the narration of a lie about them) enables a heretical, outcast Islamic group abominated by Sunni and Shiite Islam alike to be transformed into an icon of Islam, in order that an icon of Christianity, the equally fictitious Prester John, might defeat them and establish the civilizational identities of Christendom and Islamdom as absolutely and fundamentally unlike and opposite.

The chapter’s penultimate section explores the ironies of racial mixing and miscegenation, and the creation of de facto new races: in the Iberian peninsula, where the Caliphs of Córdoba were blond-haired, mostly blue-eyed men (with one exception, who was red-haired) because of their Caucasian slave mothers; and in Egypt, where European, especially Italian (and especially Genoese) slavers supplied the Mamluk dynasties with boys from elsewhere, including, prominently, the Caucasus. For 300 years, the racial resupply of Islamic Egypt,

issuing from the greed of European slavers, ensured the replenishment of the finest professional army in Dar al-Islam, and sustained a military race of Mamluks who vanquished crusaders, recaptured territory from Europeans, and defeated Christendom in its holy wars. The blond-haired caliphs of Islamic Spain and the Caucasian sultans of Islamic Egypt bookend the panorama of racial ironies produced by war and mercantile capitalism.

Chapter 3 thus concludes by studying the impact of the profit motive on race relations. Do the imperatives of European, especially Italian, mercantilism – business at any cost, all the time, even during the long centuries of holy war – trump enmity, elide ethnoracial/religious differences, and undermine allegiance to homeland and Christianity? What do the racial economies of greed look like?

Chapter 4, “Epidermal Race, Fantasmatic Race: Blackness and Africa in the Racial Sensorium,” turns its attention to the politics of color in the European Middle Ages. Most studies of medieval race fix attention on *blackness* as their ground of racial identification in literary, historical, and artistic representations of the European Middle Ages. By contrast, returning to a question that is raised in Chapter 1 – when does *whiteness* ascend to centrality as a marker of Latin Christian European identity? – Chapter 4 begins by exploring how *whiteness* became normative, integral, and central to Christian European identity in the thirteenth century.

Guided by the work of art historians such as Madeline Caviness and Paul Kaplan, this chapter investigates *both* epidermal whiteness and epidermal blackness as touchstones of raced identity by evaluating the meaning of a series of cultural creations: Wolfram von Eschenbach’s brilliant early thirteenth-century Middle High German romance, *Parzival*; the remarkable mid- to later-thirteenth-century Middle Dutch *Moriaen*; the late medieval Middle English *King of Tars* and *Sultan of Babylon*; and the extraordinary sandstone statue of the Black St. Maurice of Magdeburg Cathedral in east Germany, issuing from the first third of the thirteenth century.

Three sections address the meaning of gender, color, and religion as they intersect in the charged depictions of a symbolic, putatively Christian Arthurian white knight, a symbolic Christian black African knight, a symbolic black African heathen queen, and offspring of color miscegenation who range from newborns to adults. The final section, “The Racial Saint,” suggests how Africa is mobilized to serve Latin Christian Europe’s needs beyond the simple equivalence of blackness with sin and/or the demonic. Chapter 4 also studies the power of blackness, paradoxically, to confer reassurance to sinners and enact promises of salvation, and contemplates the charged erotics of female-gendered black skin.

The final three chapters of *The Invention of Race* extend the book’s attention beyond the Abrahamic religions to see how the West made intelligible for itself the strange races encountered that did not fit into the triangulated grid of religious race supplied by Judaism–Christianity–Islam. More than the others, two of these last chapters depend on a number of literary-textual accounts – the only surviving evidence from the medieval period that describes indigenes in the North American continent and Mongols in Eurasia and China. Chapter 7 relies on decades of Romani studies scholarship to understand the plight of the peoples who traveled westward out of India and into the countries of Europe after traversing the Islamic Near East and Byzantium.

Chapter 5, “A Global Race in the European Imaginary: Native Americans in the North Atlantic,” examines the depiction of Native North Americans in the Old Norse Vinland Sagas – narrative accounts of expeditionary voyaging and colonization in the North American continent by Greenlanders and Icelanders in the first years of the eleventh

century. Cultural memories encapsulated in the saga narrations are read against the archeological record accrued from excavations at L'anse aux Meadows in Newfoundland and studies on the paleo-ancestors of Native American and First Nation populations compiled by historical anthropologists. Trade, war, food, technology, animals, children, climate and environmental conditions, relations between women, and relations between women and men form the thematic clusters of discussion in this section.

Chapter 6, “The Mongol Empire: Global Race as Absolute Power,” traces the dramatic history of how the Latin West received the arrival of Mongol armies at its doorstep, and witnessed with horror the rise and consolidation of the Mongol empire. Beginning with early denunciations of this alien, catastrophic, and relentless enemy race, missionary accounts and travel narratives track the stage-by-stage transformation of the Mongol peoples for the Latin West, recording changing perspectives as the initially demonized race is reevaluated when the greatest civilization in the world – Yuan China – is folded into the Mongol imperium.

To plot the evolution of Western response, the first two sections compare early eyewitness accounts by two Franciscan friars written soon after the Mongol onslaught on Europe. Within a single decade of the thirteenth century, 1246–55, we have the terse formal report of John of Plano Carpini, who was sent by Pope Innocent IV and was the first official envoy from Europe to reach the Mongol court, and who directed his report to everyone in the Latin West; and the expansive account of William of Rubruck eight years later, who undertook a preaching mission to Eurasia with the blessing of King Louis IX of France, but was not Louis’s ambassador and corresponded only with one addressee in view, the French king.

In the course of these early missionary encounters, we see how Mongols gradually became familiar aliens in less than a decade, transmuting from the inhuman barbarians without civilized practices, mores, and customs described by the Pope’s alarmed ambassador into the possessors of rudimentary culture and ceremony pictured by William of Rubruck, who lived with Mongols at close range as a camp follower of the Great Khan Mongke. Concomitantly, we see how, as the inhumanness of Mongols begins to recede for William, Nestorian Christians come to supply the face of the alien instead, and are fingered as agonists to be reckoned with in the competition for Christian dominion.

William’s report instructively demonstrates how, under the umbra of the thirteenth-century Latin Christian church, differences of faith, liturgy, and practice in other Christianities could harden into absolute and fundamental differences – predisposing *heretics*, so called, who practiced other forms of Christianity into a virtual race. These sections also address the letters written by Franciscan missionaries later in fourteenth-century China, when enmity with Nestorian Christians escalated and ramified in the contest of Christianities once the Great Khans countenanced the presence of Latin Christian missions in China.

The third section on Mongols examines the vision proffered in Marco Polo’s/Rustichello da Pisa’s hybrid narrative, *Le Devisement du Monde* (The Description of the World), as this seminal text surveys the magnificence of Mongol China’s cities, ports, and hinterlands and details a vision of modernity, security, efficiency, welfare, success, and unimaginable prosperity and power the like of which is found nowhere else in the world. From the gigantic tax receipts of its ports to the glories of imperial gardens and architecture; from

exorbitant feasts to massive granaries; from the exquisite abstraction of paper money as symbolic currency to the high-speed postal relay gridding the empire; from welfare and disaster relief to a panoptic surveillance system; from military might to statesmanlike innovations in governance – Mongol China's incarnation of an economic, aesthetic, technological, and ethical sublime for Polo/Rustichello transmutes the Mongol race and empire into an object of fascination and desire under the Western gaze.

Extraordinary, iconic Mongols – not only the Great Khan Kublai, so beloved of Marco, but also the indomitable warrior princess Aiyurug-Khutulun, both of whom were well-attested historical personages – are held up for attention or admiration, as Mongols transmogrify, in this third phase of their depiction by Western authors, into a kind of racial sublime. Moreover, the inventory of the world's diverse races, religions, and resources furnished by this narrative text in the course of tallying up the world's commodities, manufacturers and exporters, markets, and forces of supply and demand raises an urgent question with which this section engages: Do race and religion become irrelevant and of scant import when the world is viewed as a network of goods and trading relations, webbed by the dynamics of mercantile capitalism and driven by the profit motive?

The fourth and last section, on Mongols, examines the politics immanent in a purported travel account of even greater influence and dispersion than Polo's/Rustichello's, and which exercised an authoritative impact on how the world and its peoples should be viewed for two and a half centuries: *Mandeville's Travels*, or the *Book of John Mandeville*. Cited as an authority on the world and its peoples in a variety of contexts – even making an appearance on world maps and the first globe ever fashioned – this fictitious blockbuster survives in twice as many manuscripts as Polo's/Rustichello's account, was translated into all the major European languages, and was carried as a truthful guide by explorers such as Columbus and Frobenius as they journeyed into terra incognita.

Mandeville's Travels adds little on the subject of the Mongol race that is new or not already found in Polo/Rustichello. However, this resourceful creation affords the West a threshold onto the fabulous Mongol empire by producing an emperor and an empire that are equally – indeed, more – desirable by virtue of their Christian faith: Prester John and his wondrous kingdom. Resurrecting the old legend of a priest-king located somewhere in the East, this ingenious text fructifies the old legend by making it a window that opens onto a panorama of early global Christianity, and adds the promise that Christianity will one day be global again, if certain simple conditions are met by Latin Christians and crusaders.

The seductive promise of a triumphal pan-Christianity winds its way through a number of scenarios and depictions of non-Christian religions such as Islam, Hinduism, animism, and the like: At one point, the promise is even vouched for by the supreme representative of an enemy faith, the Sultan of Egypt. The text is thus a wonderful exemplar of the work – the kind of service – that culture, always resilient, can perform to improve on intractable historical circumstances.

In narrating non-Christian religions, the Mandeville author is generous to a fault – bending over backward even to ameliorate censure of human sacrifice that is committed before a gigantic idol on the Indian coast, by reverting to the default position that religious piety and devotional intensity should be admired and valued. The *Travels* insists, moreover, that peoples everywhere, however different, have some understanding – intuitively or consciously – of the tenets of Latin Christianity, and harbor some knowledge – by virtue

of nature or culture – of the Christian God. Unlike other texts examined in this chapter, *Mandeville's Travels* does not inveigh against multifarious Christianities or condemn them as heresies. This text doesn't sweat the small stuff, and never fails to keep its eye on the prize: the paramount importance that the Christian faith *must* become global (again).

This part of the chapter is also an appropriate place to discuss the journey made by a pious Far Eastern Christian monk of Uighur or Ongut descent, Rabban Sauma, who was born in Beijing and journeyed to the West as the Nestorian ambassador of the Ilkhan Arghun near the end of the thirteenth century. Sauma's report of his visit to the holy places and shrines of the West to revere relics, his saying mass at the behest of Edward I of England, and his diplomatic disputations with the Roman Curia on differences of creed takes the measure of tolerance evinced by churchmen and monarchs in the late thirteenth-century West, and indicates what might successfully bridge cleavages within the Christian faith that otherwise seemed insuperable.

Just as it would seem, however, that we are finally at the point of history where a literary-textual informant can be found in the West that looks past religious race as the identifier of human difference, *Mandeville's Travels* damns the Jews. A series of anti-Semitic narrations culminates in a horrific vision of eschatology, in which a multitude of Jews imprisoned behind Alexander's gate of mountains, and guarded by the Queen of the Amazons (gender versus race is one of the text's talented formulations), will break loose to war upon Christendom in the last days, joined by their eager coreligionists in the countries of the West. This sanguinary vision of primal, and also terminal, hatred is the threat faced by Europe, and it looms over the prospect of an incandescent future in which Christianity can be global again. We are back at the Jews, and enmity made manifest in the endless religious-racial war of Abrahamic faiths.

Chapter 7, "Gypsies: A Global Race in Diaspora, a Slave Race for the Centuries," ends this book by calling attention to a people thus far mostly neglected in investigations of medieval race: the Romani. Tracing their trajectory out of Northwestern India, Chapter 7 engages with the Romani peoples' struggles, adaptations, and strategies as they journeyed through Western and Eastern Europe in the late medieval period. Initially received with curiosity, even kindness, in the West, these sojourners are subsequently resisted with increasing hostility in country after country, particularly in the Rhineland, and, as the diaspora of their communities advanced, persecutions unfolded and intensified. In Southeastern Europe the Romani were enslaved, and remained in slavery for centuries into the modern era, so that their very name became synonymous with enslavement and "Gypsy" was the name of a slave race.

Most importantly, the determination of the Romani to retain their ethnoracial identity – through all the long history of their enslavement and persecution, and after gaining the status of free peoples – testifies to the tenacity of racial identity, even for a diasporic community as heterogeneous and internally differentiated as the Romani. The Romani offer an example of the desire *for* racial identification, in a paradigm of racialism issuing from the minority community itself. Persistent Romani allegiance to a collective ethnoracialization across all the cultural, national, and religious multifariousness of their far-flung communities attests the intransigence of race as an element of human identity that is embraced as integral, both for those who are raced by others and for those who declare their own racial identifications.

The story of race thus does not come to an end.

What This Book Does Not Contain

That this book addresses race in the European Middle Ages does not mean, of course, the book assumes there was no race, and there were no racisms, outside medieval Europe. Others have found analogues for the instantiations and phenomena discussed in the pages to come. For instance: The badge or *signum* that medieval Jews were forced to wear in Christian lands is analogous to the belt or *zunnar* that the Peoples of the Book or *Dhimmi*, including Christians and Jews, had to wear in Islamic lands, and that is attested in the Pact of Umar. Bernard Lewis has volumes (*Race and Color in Islam*, *Race and Slavery in the Middle East*) on Islamic civilizations' negative responses to black skin and Africans (despite, apparently, al-Jahiz' laudatory *Treatise on the Pride of the Black Race*).

Geoff Wade discusses fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Chinese imperialism, a strain of which is spectacularly manifest in the shock-and-awe "treasure-ships" of the Ming imperial fleet commanded by the eunuch admiral Zheng He in the fifteenth century. Though Zheng He's naval expeditions are popularly assumed to be voyages of "exploration," Wade points to the Chinese fleet's colonial behavior in maritime Southeast Asia, where the fleet forcibly deposed local rulers, installed surrogates, and intervened in a muscular fashion to shape local and regional politics in the South China Sea and Indian Ocean.

It is thus worth reiterating that it's not the particular intention of this book to seek to "blame the West, not the rest." Here and there, the book takes a moment to notice homologies or resemblances between cultural responses that a reader may find salient. A note in Chapter 2 observes that while medieval Christians viewed Jews as the killers of Christ, and thus *God-killers*, several *suras* of the Quran refer to Jews as the killers of *prophets* – and prophets, including Muhammad and Jesus, are the most esteemed personages in Islam (e.g., *suras* 2:61, 2:87, 2:91, 3:181, 3:183, 4:155, 5:70 *passim*).

A note in Chapter 4 recalls that, like some medieval Christian authors, the highly admired sociologist-historiographer Ibn Khaldun, subscribing to theories of climate as determinative of racial physiognomy and character, discusses black Africans pejoratively in his fourteenth-century *Muqadimmah*, where African character traits are presented in racially essentialist terms and black peoples are even called stupid (63).

But obviously, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* is not a study of how the entire premodern world conceptualized and instantiated race. Because we work within the fields of our training (however broadly conceived), where we can hope to have some competence, it is up to others – Indologists, Japanologists, Sinologists, Asianists, Africanists, Islamicists, Eurasianists, Mesoamericanists, and others – to extend the work on premodern race as they see fit or not, in their own fields of training and competence.

How China or Japan has treated its minority communities; what relations religion might have predisposed between the Hindu and Muslim populations of South Asia, or whether the caste system is a racial system; and what racialization might look like in sub-Saharan or Sudanic Africa or in Native America and Mesoamerica, is beyond the scope of this (already long) book, and will perhaps require more volumes on premodern race.

Because *The Invention of Race* concentrates on how larger populations, especially populations of wide dispersal, are racialized in the European Middle Ages, it does not focus on individual minority groups in Europe that are unique and singular and constitute a special,

localized phenomenon, such as the *Cagots* who lived on either side of the western Pyrenees – a group whose name, provenance, and characteristics are still not well understood. The contradictory descriptions of *Cagots* in the historical record – a group that may or may not have originated in local leper colonies, that may or may not once have been Muslims or Christian heretics or the “poor of Christ” (*pauperes Christi*), and that was or was not possible to distinguish phenotypically from non-*Cagots* – have produced a scholarship that is still in flux and divergent.¹⁰

The radical othering of *heretics*, too, is so large a subject that it deserves a separate volume of its own. Whether or not individual heretical groups in the territories of the Latin West are transmogrified into virtual races, depending on locale, period, and historical circumstances, is for others to decide. Nestorians are the only “heretical” peoples discussed in this book, as they transformed into de facto racial others for thirteenth-century Franciscans such as William of Rubruck in his sojourn in Eurasia, and became the enemies and competitors of Franciscan missionaries in fourteenth-century China.

This book is thus, in a crucial sense, unfinished. Just as it builds upon the work of others in order to begin the task of discussing medieval race, so too it asks for others to continue that task and keep building the discussion. Like *Empire of Magic, The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* offers no conclusion at the end of its seven chapters. In large part, this is because there is no easy summation to be had, issuing out of the long, multifaceted conversations in the preceding pages, no neat and tidy closure to the discussion of medieval race.

This book can only say, with T. S. Eliot, *In my end is my beginning*. The conversation on premodern race needs to re-begin, again and again, and continue.

Notes

- 1 Recently, at the 2017 conference of the International Medieval Congress at Leeds, non-Caucasian medievalists were outraged that despite the conference theme – “Otherness” – every plenary speaker pronouncing on “otherness” was a white male European, who seemed, like the Englishman at the University of London, oblivious of any irony in their speaking position. One plenary lecturer even made a racial joke trivializing skin color, again outraging the nonwhite scholars in the audience at this conference of 2,400 people from fifty-six countries. After the cultural trauma inflicted by the conference, fraught conversations on “the whiteness of medieval studies” ignited on both sides of the Atlantic, and made their way into the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (see Chan): www.chronicle.com/article/Medievalists-Recoiling-From/240666. Who gets to speak for scholarship on the Middle Ages, and for medievalists – and not just on otherness, postcoloniality, or race – is now a heated question to be taken up at panels planned for several conferences in 2018.
- 2 For an argument on the repeated efflorescence of modernities within premodern time, and alternate views of temporality that are afforded by a global perspective of the thousand years conventionally assigned as the time of the Middle Ages, see my “Early Globalities.”
- 3 Definitions and formulations here in this introduction can also be found in the various chapters that follow.
- 4 The understanding that *religion* – not just science, the principal authorizing discourse of the high modern racism that characterized the eighteenth through mid-twentieth centuries – can predispose racial practices and racial phenomena has turned out to be apposite, not only for the European Middle Ages, but also for today’s twenty-first century: a time when religion is once

- again on the rise as a prime factor in differentiating among human groups, and assigning selective essentialisms.
- 5 The *invention* of race, a key term for this book, is not the same thing as the *origin* of race. An *origin* is the coming into being of what has never before existed, whereas an invention is often a *reinvention*, as fields of force within society and culture shift, alter, and reconstitute at particular historical junctures. Invention, unlike origin, can thus be a re-patterning, or re-beginning, that occurs at various historical moments, and becomes productive of exemplars.
 - 6 Where appropriate, I have chosen not to eschew what in the Western academy is usually called “theory”: This is in part to avoid the condescending assumption that most readers outside literary studies would find “theory” too difficult to follow, and in part to acknowledge that all writing embeds theoretical positions of some kind, whether these are explicit or not – there is no “outside” where one can stand, which is devoid of theoretical subscription. That being said, I attempt to avoid opaque, jargon-filled terminology, and strive for plainness.
 - 7 My apologies, also, to literary scholars who may not find their work cited in this volume. For economy, I cite only work most directly pertinent to how I discuss race in each literary text, and regrettably eschew the full apparatus of citations I would ordinarily undertake in a volume of literary readings.
 - 8 Though I consciously attempt not to over-privilege the scholarship of my home discipline, literature, I concede that some unconscious attention of this kind may be unavoidable. Like *Empire of Magic*, which identified and analyzed a number of literary texts that were little known and little discussed at the time, and that now receive significant attention from medievalists and graduate students, *The Invention of Race* also identifies cultural creations, issues, and phenomena deserving of future work and that are likely to prove productive, including, I may hope, for literary scholars.
 - 9 Since Chapter 1’s primary aim is to introduce a critical vocabulary and apparatus and supply some background to how medieval race has been discussed, this chapter does not traverse the full panoply of subjects treated in the rest of the volume. Muslims, Native North Americans, Mongols, and the Romani are not discussed in Chapter 1, but are treated in subsequent chapters.
 - 10 For a point of entry on the *Cagots* – or *capots*, *cassots*, *gésitains*, *crestiaa*, *gabets*, *agots*, among the various names this group that is found in Béarn, Aquitaine, Navarre, and the Toulousain has been called – see Daniel Hawkins’ revised Master’s thesis on Academia.edu (www.academia.edu/15057536/Chimeras_that_degrade_humanity_the_cagots_and_discrimination) which surveys theories on the *Cagots* and furnishes a bibliography. Hawkins makes a strong argument for the *Cagots* as impoverished, subaltern peoples who at some point likely decided to band together in hamlets, then possibly became conflated with lepers (whether or not they actually had Hansen’s disease), and who may have been further ostracized and abjected because of the occupations in which they worked.