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Scholars often argue that race is a “social construct”--an idea that is put into action and made reality by people who pass and enforce laws in stratified, hierarchical societies, and who must continually maintain and reify the fiction of race, with its attendant ideological justifications and theoretical explanations. It is similarly argued that relying on science to explain the differences between the races among human beings has led to biologically determinist scientific racism, which attributes inferior mental, physical, and/or moral qualities to different races.

The Edmund Morgan reading does not offer a definition of the term, or concept, “American Paradox,” which is why I define it, and gave case study historical examples of it, during lecture. The midterm paper question asks whether the U.S. resolved or reaffirmed the American Paradox, which was inherited from slavery, but which can be understood to later mean the dilemma posed by discrimination against blacks, Indians, Mexicans, and Chinese in a nation dedicated to personal freedoms and individual liberties. Since Edmund Morgan argues that whites could only become politically equal by implementing not only slavery, but also a system in which free blacks, mulattoes, and mixed-race people were treated as black (without first-class citizenship or full rights), did this pact, with poor and working-class whites as the key, maintain advantages and unfair privileges that were denied African Americans and other nonwhite groups through laws, policies, and both public and private differential treatment?

The Shari Huhndorf reading therefore expands on what Edmund Morgan called the American Paradox as it played out through the turn of the 20th century. Hence, Huhndorf states: “The history of America, ... born from the genocide of Native peoples and built on slave labor, undermined the values of liberty and equality the nation claimed to hold dear.” In this regard, think about how race has structured inequality from the colonial period through the end of the nineteenth century, and whether race or class, or a complex combination of both, is the driving motor of U.S. History.



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