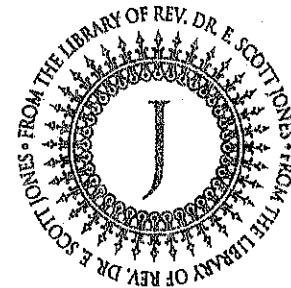


STAND YOUR GROUND

**Black Bodies and
the Justice of God**

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Prologue

The date was February 26, 2012. It was a Sunday evening in Sanford, Florida. It was a rainy evening. Seventeen-year-old Trayvon Benjamin Martin, who lived in Miami Gardens, Florida, with his mother, was visiting his father. Trayvon was walking back to his Sanford residence from a store, where he had just purchased a can of ice tea and a pack of Skittles candy. Trayvon was wearing a hoodie. A neighborhood "watch captain" spotted Trayvon. He called 911 to report a "suspicious" person in the gated neighborhood. The 911 operator advised the caller to remain in his car, not to follow the person, and police would be there. The "watch captain" did not follow instructions. Armed with a gun, he left his car. Shortly thereafter, shots were fired, and Trayvon was left dead on the Florida sidewalk. Trayvon was African American. The "watch captain" was not. Trayvon possessed ice tea and Skittles. The "watch captain" possessed a gun. Trayvon's body was taken to a morgue. The "watch captain" was freed to go home. The next day, Tracy Martin identified his son's lifeless body from a photo. The "watch captain" was not charged with a crime. The killer was seemingly protected under Florida's Stand Your Ground law. Almost two months later, after black communities across the country launched protest rallies calling for the arrest of the "watch captain"; he was finally arrested and charged. However, he claimed he killed Trayvon in self-defense.

A year and a half later, on Saturday night, July 13, 2013, a six-woman jury found Trayvon's killer not guilty. They acquitted him of both second-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter. He was a free man. The only person seemingly responsible for Trayvon's slaying was Trayvon himself.

The story of Trayvon Martin was an all-too-familiar story in the black community. It was eerily reminiscent of the 1955 lynching of

fourteen-year-old Emmitt Till, which also garnered national media attention. Emmitt was brutally murdered for allegedly “flirting” with a white woman in a convenience store. Like Trayvon’s killer, Emmitt’s killers were found not guilty. The only person held responsible for Emmitt’s death was Emmitt. And so it was that the story of Trayvon would go down in history as that of another young black male killed for no other reason than the fact of his blackness being perceived as “threatening,” with his killer getting away with it.

The story of Trayvon was the catalyst for this book. But since then, there have been many other stories like Trayvon’s—stories of unarmed black teenagers killed because they were perceived as a threat.

On November 23, 2012, seventeen-year-old Jordan Russell Davis was shot and killed at a Jacksonville, Florida, gas station after an exchange over loud music that was being played in the SUV in which he was a backseat passenger. Believing Jordan had a gun, the white male killer said he felt threatened. The killer, therefore, returned to his vehicle, retrieved a gun, and fired ten shots into Jordan’s fleeing vehicle. Three of the shots hit Jordan. Jordan did not have gun. Neither did the other three black male teens in the SUV with Jordan. Jordan was killed. His killer left the scene of the crime. The killer was eventually charged and found guilty of attempted murder for firing at the other teens in the vehicle. The jury hung on the murder charge. Once again, it seemed as if Jordan was responsible for his own murder. A retrial for the murder was scheduled.

On September 14, 2013, an unarmed twenty-four-year-old Jonathan Ferrell was killed by a white police officer. Jonathan’s slaying took place after he knocked on a door for help following a single car crash in which he was involved. Frightened, the homeowner called the police. After arriving, a white police officer fired twelve shots at Jonathan, ten of which struck him, causing his death. After an initial grand jury ruled not to indict the officer, a second grand jury indicted him on voluntary manslaughter charges.

Almost two months after Jonathan Ferrell’s slaying, a similar fate would befall a nineteen-year-old black female. On the Saturday night of November 2, 2013, Renisha Marie McBride knocked on a door seeking help after a single car accident in which she was injured. The homeowner, a white male, perceived her to be a threat. He opened

his door and, with shotgun in hand, killed Renisha. He pleaded self-defense. He was charged with second-degree manslaughter.

These incidents were becoming all too frequent. Why is it becoming increasingly acceptable to kill unarmed black children, I wondered? Why are they so easily perceived as a threat? How are we to keep our black children safe? As a mother of a black male child, I find these to be urgent questions. The slaying of Trayvon struck a nerve deep within me. After Jordan, then Jonathan, then Renisha I was practically unnerved. I knew that I had to seek answers. This book reflects my search for those answers.

Introduction

There has been no story in the news that has troubled me more than that of Trayvon Martin's slaying. President Obama said that if he had a son he would look like Trayvon. I do have a son, and he does look like Trayvon. Raising a black male child is not an easy matter in this society. As a parent, you encourage him to dream, to go for his dreams, and to believe in himself. At the same time, however, you have to make him aware of the society of which he is a part. This is a society in which black males are perceived as suspicious or dangerous. I was certainly aware of this from my son's earliest school days. Expectations were frequently lowered in terms of his academic abilities, while trouble was often anticipated. Whether the bias against black males is spoken or unspoken, conscious or unconscious, it is palpable. As President Obama observed in his July 19, 2013, press conference following the verdict in the trial of Trayvon's killer, there is virtually a visceral reaction to the black male presence—from locking car doors to clutching one's purse on an elevator.

Parents of black male children know that the world poses a much greater danger to our sons than they do to the world. We raise our black sons to be aware of their surroundings and to know how they are being perceived—whether they are shopping in a store, or walking down the street with a group of friends, or even wearing a hoodie over their heads. After hearing what happened to Trayvon as he was walking home from a store wearing a hoodie and carrying Skittles and ice tea, I was once again reminded of what a dangerous world this is for our sons. And I thought about Trayvon's mother. She sent her son on a trip to visit family, only to have him fall victim to the unfounded fears and stereotypes grafted onto black male bodies. Something must be said, I thought, about what is happening to our black children, especially our sons. This book is my attempt to do that.

But there is more. The killing of Trayvon was followed on July 13, 2013, by the acquittal of his killer.

On the morning following the Saturday night verdict, black congregations across the United States were united by profound feelings of hurt, disbelief, anger, confusion, and fear. In my own congregation that Sunday morning, men were shaken and women cried. "How could they have let him completely off the hook?" people asked. "Is not a black boy's life worth anything?" "How are we supposed to protect our children?" As the reality of the verdict sank in, black church people wondered if there would ever be justice for Trayvon. They also wondered if the world would ever be a just place for their children. As they shared stories of how their own bodies had been disrespected, harassed, stopped and frisked, just because of their blackness, they questioned if black bodies could ever enjoy peace in our American society. Indeed, when the judge read the verdict, black Americans were once again confronted with the harsh reality that their lives were virtually unprotected, if not dispensable. The Trayvon Martin case was a jarring "reality check" of how far we still had to go in the struggle for racial justice in America.

At the same time, on that Sunday morning, black congregations wrestled with issues of faith. Just as members of my congregation wanted to know what would become of their children, they also wanted to know what God was saying. They asked, "What is the message from God that we are to hear in this midst of this injustice?" "What does it mean to be faithful in times such as these?" "What are we to hope for?" Even as they affirmed their faith in a God that had brought them "a mighty long way," on that particular Sunday morning black church people contemplated the meaning of their faith in this time of "stand your ground." Black churchwomen and men recognized that in such a time, God has to be saying something. They yearned to know, however, what precisely this might be. And so this book also attempts to address such questions of faith concerning the justice of God.

Fifty years ago, in response to President Kennedy's assassination, Martin Luther King Jr. wrote: "Our nation should do a great deal of soul-searching. . . ." He went on to say, "While the question 'Who killed President Kennedy?' is important, the question 'What killed him?' is more important." King's words are instructive as we respond

to this current crisis. Our responses must go far beyond a concern for convicting Trayvon's killer. If, indeed, there is to be "justice for Trayvon," we must examine "what killed him." While the answer to this question certainly involves the Stand Your Ground law, which was a backdrop to the Trayvon Martin case, it goes beyond this law.

The Stand Your Ground law is an extension of English Common Law that gives a person the right to protect his or her "castle." Stand Your Ground law essentially broadens the notion of castle to include one's body. It permits certain individuals to protect their embodied castle whenever and wherever they feel threatened. Essentially, a person's body is his or her castle. In this regard, a person does not have to retreat from the place in which he or she is "castled"; they can stand their ground. While this law was initially invoked as a reason for Trayvon's slaying, it was not used as a formal defense. Nevertheless, Stand Your Ground law signals a social-cultural climate that makes the destruction and death of black bodies inevitable and even permissible. It is this very climate that also sustains the Prison Industrial Complex, which thrives on black male bodies. Most disturbing, this stand-your-ground climate seems only to have intensified as it continues to take young black lives such as those of Renisha McBride, Jonathan Ferrell, and Jordan Davis. The repeated slaying of innocent black bodies makes it clear that there is an urgent need for soul searching within this nation.

This book will explore the social-cultural narratives that have given birth to our stand-your-ground culture and the religious canopies that have legitimated it. This stand-your-ground culture has produced and sustained slavery, Black Codes, Jim Crow, lynching, and other forms of racialized violence against black bodies. This book is an attempt to untangle the web of social, cultural, and theological discourse that contributes to stand-your-ground culture as well as to provide a theological response to the ideological assumptions that undergird this culture.

This book is divided into two parts. Part I examines the stand-your-ground culture that took Trayvon's life. This part explores the origins of this deadly culture and the social-cultural and religious narratives that foster it. These narratives have surfaced during the current stand-your-ground crisis. The underlying assumption of Part I is that what happened to Trayvon is about more than what took place one evening

on a Florida sidewalk. Trayvon's slaying has its roots in the backwoods of ancient Germany and was set in motion with the founding of this nation.

Chapter 1 addresses America's grand narrative of exceptionalism. This chapter explores the way in which the Anglo-Saxon myth has shaped this narrative and the way in which this narrative provides the essential foundation for a stand-your-ground culture. In the end, this chapter explores the various ideologies spawned by American exceptionalism that have led to the "hypervaluation" of whiteness and the denigration of blackness. This chapter also explores the theological implication of these narratives, namely, God's presumed "preferential option" for Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism.

Chapter 2 explores the construction of the black body as perpetually guilty chattel. This chapter identifies a natural-law theo-ideology that provides religious legitimation for this construction. The underlying assumption is that the black body as chattel is the foundation upon which all other racially stereotypic perceptions of the black body are grafted. In the end, the chapter shows how the suspicious pursuit of Trayvon was a result of the black body being constructed as guilty chattel.

Chapter 3 examines the relationship between the narrative of Manifest Destiny and stand-your-ground culture. This chapter argues that America's sense of Manifest Destiny has resulted in the declaration of a "just war" on black bodies. The various manifestations of this war, such as Black Codes, Jim Crow, lynching, and the war on drugs, will be examined. In the end, this chapter argues that a deadly stand-your-ground culture is practically inevitable when it comes to the black body.

Part II of this book addresses the meaning of God for these stand-your-ground times. It seeks to understand the message of black faith in the wake of the deaths of Trayvon, Jordan, Renisha, and Jonathan. In doing so, it further explores the theological and faith concerns raised in Part I. In the end, this part will show the strength of the black faith tradition and suggests where God is and what God is saying in a stand-your-ground war.

Chapter 4 addresses the strength of black faith and the freedom of God. This chapter explores the theological narratives that have provided the fundamental understanding of God within the black faith

tradition. It revisits black faith understandings of the Exodus tradition. It pays particular attention to black faith as it emerged during slavery and was informed by the African faith tradition. In the end, this chapter explores the paradox of maintaining black faith in the midst of a stand-your-ground-culture war.

Chapter 5 explores the theological and faith dynamics between Jesus and Trayvon. Through an examination of the cross and resurrection, it specifically addresses the justice of God. In the end, this chapter answers the question, "Where was God when Trayvon was slain?"

Chapter 6 explores black prophetic testimony and the time of God. With Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech as the backdrop, this chapter revisits America's narrative of exceptionalism and the black faith tradition to discern the message of God to us in this stand-your-ground time. In the end it recognizes this time of crisis in the black community as a *kairos* moment.

Throughout this book, I highlight a mother's perspective, and I conclude with an epilogue that reviews the stand-your-ground cases discussed throughout this book with reference to the Michael Brown case, with appreciation for the paradox of a mother's grief and hope.

In the end, I do not attempt to resolve the many issues of stand-your-ground culture. This book is an invitation to engage in the hard soul searching needed if our country is ever to become a safer place for our black sons and daughters, and if we are to end the stand-your-ground-culture war on the Trayvons, Jordans, Renishas, and Jonathans of our world.

America's Exceptionalism

"If Trayvon was of age and armed, could he have stood his ground on that sidewalk?" This is the question that President Barack Obama asked during a July 19, 2013, press conference in which he tried to help the nation understand the black community's response to Trayvon Martin's killer being found not guilty. For black people it was a rhetorical question. They had asked and answered it well before President Obama posed it. It was a topic of conversation within black households, barbershops, beauty parlors, and churches not long after the circumstances of Trayvon's murder came to light. While black women and men may not have known the details of the Stand Your Ground law that provided the rhetorical backdrop for Trayvon's slaying, within their historical consciousness they understood the reason for it. The black community instinctively knew this law was concerned with defending and protecting property—and not just any property. It was meant to safeguard America's most cherished property—the property at the very heart of American identity and America's sense of self. This law concerns the property that keeps America "exceptional."

In the end, the details of Stand Your Ground law do not matter. It is not significant that this law was not used in the legal defense for Trayvon's killer. What happened to Trayvon Martin on his way home from the store that deadly evening was not about a law. Rather, it was about cherished property and the culture that was forged to preserve that property. Whether or not Trayvon "could have stood his ground on that sidewalk" rested upon his right to possess such property. This is considered a "divine right." Yet, it is a right not established in a

church or even in a courtroom. It was established somewhere in the woods of ancient Germany.

This chapter, like this book, is not about the Stand Your Ground law. Rather it is about the culture that produced the law. The underlying assumption of this book is that the seeds for Stand Your Ground law were planted well before the founding of America. These seeds produced a myth of racial superiority that both determined America's founding and defined its identity. This myth then gave way to America's grand narrative of exceptionalism. This narrative, replete with its own sacred canopy, in turn constructed cherished property and generated a culture to shelter that property, thus insuring that America remain "exceptional." I identify this culture as "stand-your-ground culture." This culture is itself generative. It has spawned various social-cultural devices—legal and extralegal, theoretical and ideological, political and theological—to preserve America's primordial exceptional identity.

What happened to Trayvon Martin on February 26, 2012, is a result of America's narrative of exceptionalism. In order to answer whether or not Trayvon had the right to stand his ground, one must understand the complex meaning of this narrative. It is through understanding this that the significance of a stand-your-ground culture becomes clear. This chapter attempts to discern the meaning of America's exceptionalism by tracing the process through which it was established. In the space of a chapter, it is impossible to explore all the aspects of that process and thus the many implications of America's exceptionalism. This chapter does not pretend to do so. The purpose of this chapter is to answer the question of how we got here to this stand-your-ground moment, so to answer the question of Trayvon's rights. The answer to both questions begins with the words of an ancient Roman historian.

The Making of the Anglo-Saxon Myth

Tacitus's *Germania*

In 98 C.E. the Roman historian Tacitus published *Germania*, which has been called "one of the most dangerous books ever written."¹ Perhaps it is. The danger is not so much in what Tacitus said, but in how

1. Quote from Christopher B. Krebs, *A Most Dangerous Book: Tacitus's*

his words have been construed. In the brief space of thirty pages, he offered an ethnological perspective that would have tragic consequences for centuries to come. This perspective played a significant role in the Nazi's monstrous program for "racial purity." It is the racial specter behind the stand-your-ground culture that robbed Trayvon of his life.

In *Germania* Tacitus provides a meticulous portrait, based on others' writings and observations, of the Germanic tribes who fended off Rome's first-century empire-building agenda. He identifies the tribes as an "aboriginal" people "free from all taint of intermarriages."² They are, he says, "a distinct unmixed race, like none but themselves," with "fierce blue eyes, red hair, huge frames."³ Tacitus commended these Germans for their bravery and strong moral character. "No one in Germany," he explained, "laughs at vice." He went on to say that for these Germans "good [moral] habits" were more effectual than "good laws."⁴ Perhaps what is most significant, at least in garnering the attention of political architects for centuries to come, is that Tacitus portrayed these ancient Germans as possessing a peculiar respect for individual rights and an almost "instinctive love for freedom."⁵ This was evident, he said, by the way in which they governed themselves. According to Tacitus, within the various tribes "the whole tribe" deliberated upon all important matters, and most final "decision[s] rest with the people."⁶ Tacitus seemed to be describing a community that encouraged the participation of its members (at least the male members) in governance and criminal procedures. According to many later interpreters, Tacitus was describing the perfect form of government. This was one that respected "common law," trial by jury, and individual liberties. Tacitus's description of these tribal governing systems influenced the nature of various Western systems of

Germania from the Roman Empire to the Third Reich (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2012), 16.

2. Tacitus, *Germania*, Medieval Sourcebook, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/tacitus1.html>.

3. Tacitus, *Germania*.

4. Tacitus, *Germania*.

5. Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 26.

6. Tacitus, *Germania*.

government throughout history. As we will see, it played no small role in America's form of democracy. But this was not the only way in which the *Germania* influenced the shape of various Western societies. Along with playing a role in determining systems of governance, it laid the foundation for the subjugation, if not elimination, of certain peoples: those people who were not members of the "unmixed race" that Tacitus described.

Even though the precise ethnic make-up of these Germanic tribes was not certain, they are considered the progenitors of the Anglo-Saxon race. Tacitus's ethnological description spawned the construction of the Anglo-Saxon myth. This myth has been a ubiquitous, even if unspoken, ideology in the modern world. Initially, this myth highlighted Anglo-Saxon forms of governing. Building on Tacitus's admiration for the way these Germanic tribes ruled their communities, the myth stressed the unique superiority of Anglo-Saxon religious and political institutions. Eventually, and perhaps inevitably, the myth shifted its focus to Anglo-Saxon blood. In so doing, it seized upon Tacitus's characterization of the ancient Germans as "free from taint," and it suggested that the superiority of their institutions was a result of their blood. It argued that strong moral qualities and a high regard for freedom flowed uniquely through Anglo-Saxon veins. In due course, the superiority and purity of blood became the focus of the Anglo-Saxon myth. The way in which this myth became transformed is as important to the meaning of America's exceptionalism and its production of a stand-your-ground culture as the myth itself. In order, therefore, to appreciate the complex impact of this myth on America's social-cultural consciousness, we must first understand how it came to America and later spawned America's grand narrative. To do this, we must begin in England.⁷

An Anglo-Saxon Identity

This myth, replete with reverence for Tacitus, arrived in America by way of England's post-Reformation struggles. The English

7. In interpreting the impact of the Anglo-Saxon myth on American identity, I am indebted to the analysis of Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).

fascination and overt identification with Tacitus's Germans began in the aftermath of the sixteenth-century Reformation. In an effort to establish the antiquity of the Church of England and to justify the 1559 Elizabethan Settlement, Archbishop Matthew Parker encouraged research into the culture, history, and politics of Anglo-Saxons. This research continued for at least two centuries. If the Elizabethan Settlement was concerned with finding an acceptable "middle way" between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, then Anglo-Saxonist studies were concerned with substantiating the connection of the English Church and government with the governing practices of ancient Germans.

The English considered themselves the descendants of the Germanic tribes identified by Tacitus. They believed that these tribes were their Anglo-Saxon ancestors. They, therefore, traced their systems of governance back to the ancient German woods. Even non-English scholars recognized this connection. In *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748), a book popular in both England and colonial America, French nobleman Montesquieu wrote, "In perusing the admirable treatise of Tacitus *On the Manners of the Germans* we find it is from that nation the English have borrowed the idea of their political government. This beautiful system was invented first in the woods."⁸ Fueled with this understanding of their ancestral lineage, the early English reformers were intent on restoring English church and society to their free Anglo-Saxon past.

Notwithstanding the fact that some of Tacitus's ancient tribes were probably of Norse heritage, these reformers generally agreed that corruptions entered into English church and society with the Norman conquest in 1066. Popular belief held that the Normans adulterated the very English laws and institutions that served to protect individual liberties. Thus, the English Reformation was about more than just a struggle between King Henry VIII and the Roman papacy. It was concerned with cleansing English church and society of Norman contaminations and restoring both to their true Anglo-Saxon ways. The road to restoration was not, however, without contention.

8. Charles de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, *Complete Works*, vol. 1. *The Spirit of the Laws*, 1748, Online Library of Liberty, <http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/837>. Original Source: Charles de Secondat, "Of the Constitution of England," bk. XI, chap. VI, in Charles de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, *The Complete Works of M. de Montesquieu*, 4 vols. (London: T. Evans, 1777), I, paragraph 212.

There were reformers who believed that the church and government was not sufficiently cleansed of Norman taint. The reformers who would have the greatest impact on America's religious and political culture, and thus transport the Anglo-Saxon myth to America, were the Pilgrims, Puritans, and even radical Whigs, such as the Levelers. Both the Pilgrims and Puritans thought the Church of England did not go far enough in the eradication of Catholic and Norman abuses. The Pilgrims, the more radical of the two groups, severed their ties with the church, while the Puritans remained an agitating force within it. Given the fact that the king of England was head of both church and state, to rebel against the church was also to rebel against the state. This, of course, would have consequences for America. Both groups fled England and made their exodus across the Atlantic.

The Levelers, a prominent group of protestors during the English Civil War (1642–1648), were more directly focused on state matters. They believed that radical reform was needed in the English system of governance, more radical than what they had seen. They were guided by the principle that all people possessed natural rights, especially the right to be free. They also insisted that the government not place limits on this freedom—unless such limits were necessary to protect the freedom of another. At issue were common law, trial by jury, and the overall relationship between the Parliament and the Crown. Leveler political ideology influenced American political sensibilities.

The Anglo-Saxon myth came to America through these radical English reformers. In transporting this myth across the Atlantic they actually imported the cornerstone for stand-your-ground culture. This myth was the essential piece in the construction of America's exceptional identity. The religious reformers were the ones who guaranteed this myth a decisive role in defining that identity.

An Anglo-Saxon Remnant

The Pilgrims and Puritans fled from the Church of England to build a religious institution more befitting Anglo-Saxon virtue and freedom. They considered themselves the Anglo-Saxon remnant that was continuing a divine mission. They traced this mission beyond the woods of Germany to the Bible. Thus, they saw themselves "as the Israelites

in God's master plan."⁹ Upon arriving at Plymouth, Massachusetts, in 1620, the Pilgrims drafted the Mayflower Compact. This compact clarified that their "undertaking" to "plant a colony" was for the "glory of God." The Pilgrims' radical separatist ways led to their demise as a distinct and identifiable group. The Puritans, on the other hand, had a more enduring and pervasive impact on American religious and political culture.

Arriving ten years after the Pilgrims, the Puritans understood their mission to be like that of their radical predecessors, except they were not separatists, and they arrived with a royal charter. No one better expressed the views of the Puritans than Reverend Francis Higginson. During a farewell addresses to the people of London he reportedly said, "We do not go to New England as separatists from the Church of England; though we cannot but separate from the corruptions in it; but we go to practise the positive part of church reformation and propagate the gospel in America."¹⁰ Echoing these same themes Puritan leader John Winthrop crafted "A Model of Christian Charity" while still aboard the *Arabella*. In it he declared, "We must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us, so that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and a byword through the world."¹¹ These words gave birth to two legitimating canopies for American identity, one civil and one Christian. The wider theological implications of these canopies will be discussed throughout this chapter. The important point for now, however, is to recognize that these reformers' exodus from England was first and foremost a religious mission. They were fleeing the Church of England because of its perceived corruption, notably its Roman Catholic tendencies. A part of their mission, therefore, was not simply to build a nation that was in keeping with their Anglo-Saxon political heritage, but also to build a religious nation.

9. Martin E. Marty, *Pilgrims in Their Own Land: 500 Years of Religion in America* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), 59.

10. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, *Life of Francis Higginson: First Minister in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, and Author of "New England's Plantation" (1630)* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1891), 29.

11. Governor John Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity," *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society* (Boston, 1828), 3rd series 7:31-48.

In fact, for them, building an Anglo-Saxon nation was virtually synonymous with building a religious nation. And, according to one of these legitimating canopies, it meant building a Protestant Christian nation. In general, the Pilgrims and the Puritans not only insured that the Anglo-Saxon myth was the defining piece of American identity, but they provided this myth with religious legitimation. They gave it sacred authority. The importance of this becomes apparent as America's grand narrative is enacted.

These first Americans, Pilgrims and Puritans alike, believed that a straight line could be drawn from the "freedom loving Anglo-Saxons" in the woods of ancient Germany to them. They carried their Anglo-Saxon heritage across the Atlantic Ocean with a self-righteous pride. Believing that they were the true and chosen heirs to a divine Anglo-Saxon mission, they were determined not to betray their Anglo-Saxon roots, as they thought the English had done. This determination initially expressed itself as a resolve to establish the Anglo-Saxon forms of governance that cherished freedom and individual rights. From its earliest beginning, therefore, America's political identity was an Anglo-Saxon identity. Its sense of democracy and freedom was inextricably linked to the Anglo-Saxon myth and Tacitus's Germans. America's democracy was conceived of as an expression of Anglo-Saxon character.

In his book *The Racial Contract*, Charles Mills argues that America's democracy is qualified by an unspoken subaltern contract that is defined by race.¹² He essentially argues that the liberty America promises to its citizens is intended only for its white citizens. Mills's observations are perhaps apt. However, what will become clear, particularly as the narrative of America's exceptionalism is established, is that the racial limitations of America's democracy are not the result of a subaltern contract. Rather, they result from the palpable Anglo-Saxon chauvinism that defined America's beginnings.

The "city on the hill" that the early Americans were building was nothing less than a testament to Anglo-Saxon chauvinism. This chauvinism would be consequential for non-Anglo-Saxons in America centuries later, as Mills suggests. It ushered forth America's grand nar-

12. Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).

ative. That it would be a defining force in determining America's identity was practically assured, given the ethnocentrism of the founding fathers. There was no one who evinced Anglo-Saxon chauvinism more than the "Father of America's Democracy," Thomas Jefferson.

The Making of America's Grand Narrative

Anglo-Saxon Chauvinism

"Tacitus I consider as the first writer in the world without exception," wrote Jefferson to his granddaughter Anne.¹³ Jefferson's reverence for Tacitus is befitting for one as admiring of Anglo-Saxons as Jefferson. Jefferson was a thoroughgoing and unabashed Anglo-Saxonist, to the point of studying Anglo-Saxon language and grammar. Though he referred to this study as "a hobby," it was really much more than that.¹⁴ In "An Essay on the Anglo-Saxon Language," he wrote, "The pure Anglo-Saxon [language] constitutes . . . the basis of our language. . . . Hence the necessity of making the Anglo-Saxon a regular branch of academic education."¹⁵ In an attempt to do just that, Jefferson produced a grammar to make this language available to students. In a "Report of the Commissioners for the University of Virginia" he proposed the Anglo-Saxon language as one of "the branches of learning . . . [that] should be taught in the University." He argued, "Anglo Saxon is of peculiar value" because it is "the first link in the chain of . . . our language through all its successive changes to the present day."¹⁶ Jefferson's focus on language foreshadows the place that language will have in the formation of stand-your-ground culture. As for Jefferson, his fascination perhaps renders him particularly vulnerable to a belief in the supremacy of Anglo-Saxon peoples. We will explore this connection later.

13. Thomas Jefferson, "From Thomas Jefferson to Anne Cary Randolph Bankhead," December 8, 1808, <http://wwwFOUNDERS.archives.gov>.

14. Thomas Jefferson, "Letter to the Honorable J. Evelyn Denison, M.P.," Monticello, November 9, 1825, American History from Revolution to Reconstruction and Beyond, <http://www.let.rug.nl/usa>.

15. Thomas Jefferson, "An Essay on the Anglo-Saxon Language," in *The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Adrienne Koch and William Peden (New York: Random House, 1998), 158.

16. Thomas Jefferson, "Report of the Commissioners for the University of Virginia, August 4, 1818," <http://www.vindicatingthefounders.com>.

I don't see this racial motivation in their story

What are clear are Jefferson's Anglo-Saxon chauvinism and his strong conviction concerning the superiority of Anglo-Saxon institutions.

Echoing the attitudes of Saxonist scholars a century before him, Jefferson avowed that the "rightful root" of the English constitution was "the Anglo-Saxon." He also shared in the opinion that the English constitution "was violated and set at naught by Norman farce."¹⁷ Jefferson went so far as to associate the Whigs with Anglo-Saxons and the Tories with the Normans.¹⁸ Jefferson was, therefore, resolute in his thinking that Americans were obligated to establish a form of government commensurate with their Anglo-Saxon political past. In his mind, to do anything less would not only betray their heritage, but also lead to an inferior form of governing. He conveyed this sentiment in a discussion he had with a friend concerning the right of individuals to own property. Jefferson writes, "Has not every restitution of the ancient Saxon laws had happy effects? Is it not better now that we return at once into that happy system of our ancestors, the wisest & most perfect ever yet devised by the wit of man. . . ."¹⁹ It is worth noting that associating the right to own property with an Anglo-Saxon heritage portends the nature of America's cherished property. It is interesting to note that what will be two of the pivotal aspects of a stand-your-ground culture are critical to Jefferson's political philosophy. (What this again suggests is the inevitable emergence of this culture in America, given the ideological biases of its preeminent founding father.)

Sacred Canopies of Legitimation

Jefferson justified his high regard for Anglo-Saxon systems of government with another fundamental element of America's identity. He believed, like his Pilgrim and Puritan forebears, that Americans were chosen by God to implement an Anglo-Saxon system of governing.

17. Thomas Jefferson, "Letter to Major John Cartwright, Monticello, June 5, 1824," *American History from Revolution to Reconstruction and Beyond*, <http://www.let.rug.nl/usa>.

18. *Ibid.*

19. Thomas Jefferson, "Letter to Edmund Pendleton, Philadelphia, August 13, 1776," *American History from Revolution to Reconstruction and Beyond*, <http://www.let.rug.nl/usa>.

He too considered Americans the New Israelites. The seal that he proposed for America symbolized his understanding of America's divine Anglo-Saxon heritage and mission. John Adams described it in a letter to his wife. He said, "Mr. Jefferson proposed. The Children of Israel in the Wilderness, led by a Cloud by day, and a Pillar of fire by night, and on the other Side Hengist and Horsa, the Saxon Chiefs, from whom We claim the Honour of being descended and whose Political Principles and Form of Government We have assumed."²⁰

Jefferson was not the only founding father to believe that America had a divine purpose. Benjamin Franklin believed the same and also expressed this in his proposed seal. John Adams says of Franklin's suggestion, "Dr. F[ranklin] proposes a Device for a Seal. Moses lifting up his Wand, and dividing the Red Sea, and Pharaoh, in his Chariot overwhelmed with the Waters.—This Motto. Rebellion to Tyrants is Obedience to God."²¹

While Jefferson's and Franklin's beliefs that America was the New Israel and Americans the New Israelites reflected the religious narrative introduced by the Pilgrims and Puritans, they did so in a non-sectarian way. For Jefferson and Franklin, this religious narrative was not about Christianity. It was about the sacred nature of Anglo-Saxonism. It would become known as American civil religion.²² If Jefferson's and Franklin's expressions of America's religious canopy were sectarian, they were sectarian in terms of race, not religion. In many respects, Anglo-Saxonism was their religion. However, the Christian aspect of the Puritan and Pilgrims religious narrative would not be lost in the formation of America's identity. It was manifested through another canopy that the Puritans spawned. Like its parent canopy this one would also serve to legitimate the Anglo-Saxon myth. It, however, would bring race and Christianity together as defining pieces of America's identity and mission. It initially expressed itself as a way to explain the revival spirit that spread across New England known as the Great Awakening. This religious canopy is best identified as a

20. "Letter from John Adams to Abigail Adams, August 14, 1776," *Massachusetts Historical Society*, <http://www.masshist.org>.

21. *Ibid.*

22. See Robert Bellah, *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Time of Trial* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975; 2nd ed., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

Protestant evangelical canopy. A leading Puritan revivalist, Jonathan Edwards, gave voice to this evangelical canopy.

Edwards was convinced that the "glorious work of God," which would culminate in the Second Coming of Christ, was destined to begin in America. Based on his interpretation of the prophecy of Isaiah, Edwards said, "It is signified that it shall begin in some very remote part of the world, with which other parts have no communication but navigation. . . . I cannot think that any thing else can be here intended but America." Edwards went on to say that "this new world is probably now discovered, that the new and most glorious state of God's church might commence there; that God might in it begin a new world in a spiritual respect, where he creates the new heavens and the new earth." According to Edwards, America was carrying forth the true church of God. He notes, "America was discovered about the time of the reformation," in which God was trying to rescue the world from the "depths of darkness and ruin" into which it had sunk. Yet, "in order to introduce a new and more excellent state of the church" where "the power of God might be more conspicuous," God had to start all over in a new world, America. "America, and especially in *New England*," Edwards argued, was the "forerunner of something vastly great" that God was doing with the world.²³

While the canopies of civil religion and Protestant evangelicalism were different in terms of their sectarianism, they both functioned in the same way. They legitimated America's Anglo-Saxon mission; at the same time they gave sacred validity to the Anglo-Saxon myth. They connected both to God. Such legitimation would valorize America's sense of "Manifest Destiny." While Manifest Destiny will be explored more fully later, it is worth noting that it is another aspect of America's sense of self that flows from the Anglo-Saxon myth. As such, it will play a significant role in what happened to Trayvon on the Florida sidewalk. The point of the matter is, a myth that declares the "supra-status" of a group of people compels a sense of destiny that is bound to turn deadly.

23. Jonathan Edwards, "Some Thoughts concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England, and the Way in Which It Ought to Be Acknowledged and Promoted. Humbly Offered to the Public, In a Treatise on the Subject," in *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 1*, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org>.

America's Exceptionalism

What is becoming clear thus far on the road toward the emergence of a stand-your-ground culture is the formation of the narrative that will demand it. This is the grand narrative of American identity. It is fitting, therefore, that America's preeminent founding father, Thomas Jefferson, personified this narrative and that his proposed seal was emblematic of it. Born from the Anglo-Saxon myth, the grand narrative is the story of Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism. The narrative of Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism is America's exceptionalism. This grand narrative is responsible for the culture that has determined the history of particular peoples in America, notably black people. It is vital to America's identity if not existence.

American exceptionalism has long been debated.²⁴ The phrase has become a consistent part of America's twentieth- and twenty-first-century political discourse. However, its contemporary usage does not truly reflect the intricacies of its original meaning, at least as the first Americans as well as founding fathers shaped that meaning. Even though the precise phrase "American exceptionalism" likely did not enter into American discourse until the twentieth century, the culture of exceptionalism emerged with the dawning of America. While most contemporary understandings associate America's exceptionalism with its form of democratic governing and its mission to spread democratic principles across the world, to understand it as simply about politics and mission does not capture the racial or divine character of America's narrative of exceptionalism. To be sure, in America's earliest beginnings its sense of exceptionalism focused on the nature of its institutions, as we have seen. It must not be overlooked, however, that what made America's institutions exceptional was their Anglo-Saxon character. America's exceptional identity was grounded in the Anglo-Saxon myth. To reiterate, this myth stressed that it was Anglo-Saxon institutions that best respected individual rights and liberty. Inasmuch as America stayed true to its Anglo-Saxon character when forming its governing institutions, then it would maintain its excep-

24. For a more thorough discussion of the debate concerning American exceptionalism and its use in political discourse, see James W. Ceasar, "American Exceptionalism: Is It Real, Is It Good?: The Origins and Character of American Exceptionalism," <http://www.polisci.wisc.edu/uploads/documents/ceasar.pdf>.

tional identity. This exceptionalism was initially expressed as a chosen identity. With the formation of America's grand narrative, the two key pieces of America's sense of self come together: its Anglo-Saxon character and its "chosen" nature. Both of these things are fundamental to American identity. Both are defining factors in America's exceptionalism. Thus, America's grand narrative of exceptionalism is the narrative of America's identity. To be a chosen nation is to be an Anglo-Saxon nation. To be an Anglo-Saxon nation is to be a chosen nation. It is this constructed racial-religious synchronicity that makes America exceptional. And, it is this synchronicity that demands a stand-your-ground culture. To appreciate the inexorable reality of stand-your-ground culture, one must recognize that America's exceptionalism is deeply rooted in the Anglo-Saxon myth. Even if this myth initially had an institutional focus, its Anglo-Saxon qualifier was always its defining feature when it came to American identity. This fact becomes even clearer as the myth itself undergoes the inauspicious transformation from an institutional focus to a decidedly racial focus. To comprehend the tremendous impact this change had on America's collective consciousness and hence its continuing sense of exceptionalism, we will explore the catalysts for this transformation more carefully. This exploration will bring us even closer to understanding the determining factors in Trayvon's right to stand his ground on that sidewalk.

A Matter of Blood

In 1751 Benjamin Franklin wrote a short essay on demography that, similar to Tacitus's treatise, had influence far beyond its length. Franklin's observations concerning the significance of available labor and natural resources for population growth influenced theories on population nearly a century later.²⁵ As prescient as his demographic observations may have been, other remarks within that essay are more telling when it comes to America's exceptionalism and the stand-your-ground culture that it has spawned. Franklin's concern for population was not primarily about numbers. It was about the Anglo-Saxon myth. Franklin said this:

25. Thomas Malthus quoted Franklin in his 1802 "Essay on the Principle of Population."

Why should Pennsylvania, founded by the English, become a colony of Aliens, who will shortly be so numerous as to Germanize us instead of our Anglifying them, and will never adopt our language or customs, any more than they can acquire our complexion?

Which leads me to add one remark: That the number of *purely* [emphasis mine] white people in the world is proportionately very small. All Africa is black or tawny. Asia chiefly tawny. America (exclusive of the new comers) wholly so. And in Europe, the Spaniards, Italians, French, Russians and Swedes are generally of what we call a swarthy complexion; as are the Germans also, the Saxons only excepted, who with the English make the principal body of white people on the face of the earth. I could wish their numbers were increased. And while we are . . . scouring our planet, by clearing America of woods, and so making this side of our globe reflect a brighter light to the eyes of inhabitants in Mars or Venus, why should we in the sight of superior beings, darken its people? Why increase the sons of Africa, by planting them in America, where we have so far an opportunity, by excluding all black and tawneys, of increasing the lovely white and red?²⁶

Franklin's comments presage what is to come as America tries to make good on its exceptional identity. They reflect a menacing shift in the Anglo-Saxon myth. Franklin makes clear that the purity of Anglo-Saxon institutions is not his chief concern. His overwhelming anxiety involves the purity of the nation. The people who inhabit the nation are the measure of its purity. (Franklin therefore emphasizes the need to protect the language, customs, and complexion of "pure white people.") Most telling in his remarks is the way in which he speaks about the Germans. There are for Franklin "superior beings" for whom an increase in population is desired. They were decidedly not the Germans, at least not those who were now streaming into America in droves. Franklin's regard for the Germans points to problems to come as the matter of blood becomes more central to America's sense

26. Benjamin Franklin, "Observations concerning the Increase of Mankind, Peopling of Countries, &c." (Tarrytown, NY: S. Kneeland, 1775), 223 (emphasis mine).

of exceptionalism. Again, Franklin's remarks reflect the fact that the matter of blood had already become the focus of the Anglo-Saxon myth.

This myth began to stress that the "secret of [Anglo] Saxon success lay not in the institutions but in the blood."²⁷ It was now not enough for a people to carry on Anglo-Saxon institutions. They had to also be carriers of Anglo-Saxon blood. In fact, the ability to build Anglo-Saxon institutions was a function of blood.

Perhaps this shift in focus to blood was inevitable. When so high a premium is placed on the institutions of a people, eventually the people themselves will be regarded as extraordinary. However, what no doubt hastened this shift was the coming together of two eighteenth- and nineteenth-century cultural occurrences: romanticism and philological studies. These cultural events helped to transform the Anglo-Saxon myth from one that projected an institutional chauvinism to one that promoted racial bigotry. In so doing, these two historical events also influenced the ways in which America's exceptionalism was enacted and subsequently the construction of America's cherished property. Characteristic features of each influenced the way America's grand narrative of exceptionalism was expressed in relation to certain peoples, thus, again, tilling the social-cultural soil for a stand-your-ground culture. It is for this reason that I will look at these two events more closely.

Two Pivotal Cultural Events

Romanticism cultivated a reverence for the individual. It eschewed the Enlightenment focus on universals for a focus on particularities. The romantic movement highlighted the differences, as opposed to the similarities, between peoples. It emphasized the unique qualities and spirit of nations and cultures. Romanticism fueled cultural and national chauvinism as it specified exceptional gifts and qualities of certain groups of people. The romantic movement thus fed into the Anglo-Saxon myth. It stoked the fires that were already burning and lauded the special qualities of the Anglo-Saxons first identified by Tacitus: qualities such as the love of liberty and high moral character. There is perhaps no better representative of the way in which roman-

27. Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 24.

ticism and the Anglo-Saxon myth coalesced in American culture than Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Emerson was clearly well versed in the Anglo-Saxon myth, including its origins in Tacitus. His book *English Traits* includes several references to Tacitus. In this book he describes various branches of the Saxon race, with the primary attention given to the English. He does, however, make a special effort to reinforce the connection between Tacitus's Germans and Americans. He says that when reading Tacitus he "found abundant points of resemblance between the Germans of Hercynian forest, and our *Hoosiers*, *Suckers*, and *Badgers* of the American woods."²⁸ As for the Saxon race, Emerson credits it with having a "democratic principle."²⁹ He referred to the "moral peculiarity of the Saxon race" in an 1847 speech to the Manchester Athenaeum. He went on to describe Saxons as having a "commanding sense of right and wrong."³⁰ With his romantic emphasis on the specialness of peoples, Emerson wonders if the unique traits are in the blood. He asks, "Is this power due to their blood, or to some other cause? Men hear gladly," he says, "of the power of blood or race." While Emerson may not have been quite sure from whence the traits of particular peoples were derived, he was certain that those traits were distinctive enough to warrant a differentiation between races. Moreover, he was confident that the "oldest blood of the world" belonged to the Celts, one of the three sources from which all Saxon stocks derive.³¹

Emerson's discussion of the blood origins of racial traits reflected the ongoing interest in the origins of humankind that flourished simultaneously with the romantic movement. This search for human origins was the second cultural event that contributed to the transformation of the Anglo-Saxon myth. Before examining this search for humanity's origins, it is important to note another aspect of Emerson's romanticism.

Having once been a Unitarian minister, Emerson had theological concerns. In terms of his theology he is best described as a transcendentalist. Reflective of both his romantic and his transcendentalist

28. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *English Traits*, chapter IV, paragraph 6, <http://www.bartleby.com>.

29. *Ibid.*, chapter V, paragraph 1.

30. "Speech at Manchester," in Emerson, *English Traits*.

31. Emerson, *English Traits*, chapter IV, paragraphs 4, 19.

beliefs he viewed humans as virtually a “divine reality.” He placed great stock in the goodness of humankind and thought that humans possessed a certain “intuition” that allowed them, without a mediator, to connect with God. This intuition manifests itself as virtue/justice. Emerson said, “If a man is at heart just, then in so far is he God. . . .”³² This almost complete identification between God and humans, while reflecting the romantic spirit, resonates with the American sense of chosenness and the sacred legitimation of its exceptional character. We will see later how it perhaps made Emerson vulnerable to notions of Anglo-superiority in such a way that it diminished the worth of other people. It is in this way that Emerson will exemplify how the American cultural ethos, shaped by romanticism and saturated with the Anglo-Saxon myth, again created the perfect soil for a stand-your-ground culture to thrive and grow.

Let us return to the second decisive event for transforming the Anglo-Saxon myth: the quest for human origins. This quest actually clarified how much of a difference blood made. It was aided by a similar search—the search for the roots of Anglo-Saxon languages, specifically German and English. This linguistic search flourished in the late eighteenth century with the appearance of the *Asiatic Research Journal*. Through this journal philological findings and theories were disseminated across Europe. Various philologists began to overtly associate language with race. They generally agreed that Anglo-Saxon languages emerged from an Indo-European family of languages that originated with a people from the Asian steppes. As German and British scholars developed this theory, they eventually constructed a myth “of a specific, gifted people—the Indo-Europeans—who spilled out from the mountains of central Asia to press westward following the sun,” carrying with them their language.³³ Nineteenth-century French historian Jules Michelet explained their movement this way:

Trace the movements of humankind from east to west along the path of the sun and the magnetic currents of the globe, observe humankind on this long journey from Asia to Europe, from

32. Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Divinity School Address: Delivered at Harvard Divinity School before the Senior Class,” July 15, 1838, Ralph Waldo Emerson Texts, <http://www.emersoncentral.com/divaddr.htm>.

33. Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 33.

India to France. . . . At the point of departure, in India, in the cradle of all races and religions—the womb of the world. . . .³⁴

A prevailing notion began to take hold that catapulted a change in the Anglo-Saxon myth, and subsequently created a new urgency in the enactment of America's exceptionalism. This notion suggested that an Urfolk, Indo-Europeans, emerged from the Asian steppes. These were the original people. An elite branch of these Urfolk came to be known as Caucasians. These Caucasians, following the sun as Michelet explained, migrated westward into Germany. These were Tacitus's Germans. The ancient Germans were considered the most gifted of the Caucasians. But Anglo-Saxons were the elite of the Germans.

As for language, these Urfolk gave birth to the Indo-European languages, one of which was Anglo-Saxon. Just as Anglo-Saxons were the elite descendants of the Indo-Europeans, Anglo-Saxon language was the superlative Indo-European language. The Anglo-Saxon language was the language of a gifted people, the people who eventually founded America.

The Sanctity of Blood

With the culmination of the searches for origins, the table was now set for the transformation of the Anglo-Saxon myth. Taking their cues from the romantics and the philologists, the stewards of the Anglo-Saxon myth were compelled to realize that the Anglo-Saxon capacity for morality and free institutions was not an accident. It was an innate capacity. It was in the blood. Morality and freedom flowed through Anglo-Saxon veins. The instinct for liberty was essentially genetic. It had been passed down through the generations, starting presumably with the Urfolk Indo-Europeans. To be Anglo-Saxon, then, was to be a moral and freedom-loving people. Morality and freedom literally belonged to them. It was in their blood as if it were a genetic marker. Language, thanks to philological studies, became an indication of one's stock. One's language indicated what branch of

34. Jules Michelet, *On History: Introduction to World History (1831); Opening Address at the Faculty of Letters, 9 January 1834 Preface to History of France (1869)* (Open Book Publishers, 2013), 26.

the Indo-Europeans one was from, that is, if one was merely Caucasian or Anglo-Saxon.

This emphasis on blood was not lost on America's founding fathers. It is behind both Jefferson's and Franklin's fixation on language. A marker of America's exceptionalism, therefore, was the language of the nation. For Jefferson this meant insuring that Americans were familiar with their mother tongue, thus keeping it alive in the nation. Franklin took this a step further. He was not so much concerned with keeping the mother tongue alive as he was concerned with making sure that English remain the predominate, if not only, language spoken in the country. Clearly for him, as well as for others, English was the modern equivalent to Anglo-Saxon. Again, the language of the nation indicated the "stock" of the nation, and it was America's stock that made it exceptional. To the degree that America's exceptionalism was defined by the Anglo-Saxon myth, and it was, then the "stock" of people that populated America mattered. America's divine exceptionalism was now a matter of blood, a matter of Anglo-Saxon blood. Benjamin Franklin understood this; thus, his attitude toward the Germans. Franklin's anti-German bigotry actually presaged, as suggested earlier, the way in which America would begin to exert its exceptionalism.

Language would become the indicator of the kind of blood flowing through a people's veins. The precedent was set for this through the search for human origins. In the final analysis, as language became associated with race in the quest for human origins, it took on new meaning for the stewards of Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism. Language was another necessary link toward forming a stand-your-ground culture. It was decisive in the construction of America's cherished property. It was with this construction that a stand-your-ground culture became real. Essentially, the construction of America's cherished property is America's exceptionalism, exerting itself with stand-your-ground culture acting as its shield. Let us dig deeper to see how this is the case, and how it all comes to a deadly head on a Florida sidewalk. Before we do this, however, let us review how we got here.

The Anglo-Saxon myth was a fundamental part of America's founding identity. This myth extolled the virtues of Anglo-Saxon institutions. This myth, along with America's sense of being chosen, produced America's grand narrative of exceptionalism. It is this

defining narrative of exceptionalism, invested with sacred legitimation, that necessitates a stand-your-ground culture. With the decidedly racial turn, this narrative will exert itself in the construction of cherished property, the final piece in the puzzle for the formation of a fully formed stand-your-ground culture. It is to the construction of cherished property that we will now turn.

The Making of Cherished Property

The Underside of Romanticism

The romantic recognition of the peculiar traits of a people does not necessarily suggest the superiority or inferiority of that people in relation to others. However, as mentioned earlier, when inordinate recognition is given to the peculiar character and genius of a people, this can easily morph into arrogance and condescension, especially when that recognition comes in contact with ethnocentric perspectives, such as the Anglo-Saxon myth. This was what happened in America, thus providing the impetus for the construction of cherished property. Emerson exemplifies how easy it is for racial chauvinism to emerge when a romanticist spirit arises in a social-cultural context defined by racial exceptionalism.

Emerson's previously cited book, *English Traits*, epitomizes the troubling amalgam of romanticism and the Anglo-Saxon myth, and in so doing points toward America's cherished property. In this book, even though he acknowledges that the English are of "mixed origin," Emerson extolls them as "collectively a better race than any from which they are derived."³⁵ He goes so far as to call the English "the best stock in the world."³⁶ Earlier in his treatise he comments on other Anglo-Saxon branches of people. As he does so, he can't help but to comment on a race decidedly not Anglo-Saxon, the "Negro." No doubt influenced by the Anglo-Saxon myth, Emerson says, "Race in the negro is of appalling importance."³⁷ What is clear is that even though Emerson's romanticism led him to stress the inherent virtue of humans, he did not believe that all humans were equal. The qualifying

35. Emerson, *English Traits*, chapter IV, paragraph 11, 12.

36. *Ibid.*, chapter VIII, paragraph 9.

37. *Ibid.*, chapter IV, paragraph 6.