In both the United States and Latin America, racial myths projected onto the colonial period still masquerade as models for talking and teaching about race in the Americas. Among the most tenacious of such myths are the racial hybridity paradigm attached to colonial Iberian Atlantic history and its mirror image: British Atlantic history and the racial purity paradigm. This hybridity-purity dyad has dominated mainstream historiography and the public sphere in the Americas, on the left and the right, since the nineteenth century, and continues to exercise an enormous influence over scholars and students in both Americas. Indeed, just as religious conservatives and white supremacists in the United States sometimes find themselves on common ground, liberal scholars of race and white supremacists share an attachment to those twin paradigms that structure their interpretation of the histories of the United States and Latin America.

The assumption that racial mixture was the norm in colonial Spanish America and racial integrity the norm in colonial Anglo-America, is linked within white supremacist doctrine to another myth about the racial origins of the Americas: the Aztecs, Incas, and Mayas as Caucasians/Aryans/Whites. Since the heyday of white supremacism in the early twentieth-century United States (and in Latin America, where it often donned the ostensibly liberal disguises of mestizaje and
indigenismo), the myth of a primeval or pre-Columbian whiteness—of a white Aztlan—has been constructed from eugenics and other investigations into race and the history of Western and non-Western peoples. White supremacist interpretations of the history and prehistory of the Americas have proven to be as resilient as they are reductive, and digital technologies are expanding the reach of racial myths about the pre-Columbian Americas and about the present-day United States and Latin America. Today, white supremacist groups such as Aryan Nations and Stormfront are breathing new life into the myth of white Aztlan.

Affinities between analog and digital white supremacists are many: their recalcitrant desire to embrace new technologies and methodologies in the pursuit of their cause; their overlapping hatred for Africans, African Americans, Latin Americans, and Latino-Americans; and their unshakeable belief in the Spanish and Portuguese as chosen (white) peoples who forfeited first their racial integrity, and then their imperial power. Nonetheless, white supremacism has never been monolithic, and white supremacist interpretations of the prehistory and history of the Americas should be studied and taught in a manner that respects the material differences between white supremacists from the early twentieth century and contemporary white supremacists. Doing so reveals a great deal about white supremacism in the United States, bringing to the fore its national and hemispheric itineraries, and about how we talk—and do not talk—about race in the college classroom. Moreover, because they are trans-American in and of themselves, white supremacist accounts of the racial history of the Americas challenge scholars and students working in critical race studies to think and respond comparatively. As a result, Latin Americanists and Americanists—and our students, who will one day become scholars—are encouraged to dialogue with each other about issues ranging from the new media to immigration, religion, and politics.

Long before the Critical Race Theory (CRT) movement was launched by a handful of professors at U.S. law schools in the mid-1980s, race was studied, theorized, and taught to thousands of undergraduate students at U.S. universities across different disciplines, departments, and programs. There can be no doubt, however, that CRT has spurred critical race studies to become more sophisticated, theoretically, and more engaged (at least rhetorically) with power issues within and without the classroom. Far too little, however, has been done within critical race studies to problematize and conceptualize race in Latin America, and even less has been done to understand race in the Americas—that is, race as a floating signifier that means different things to different