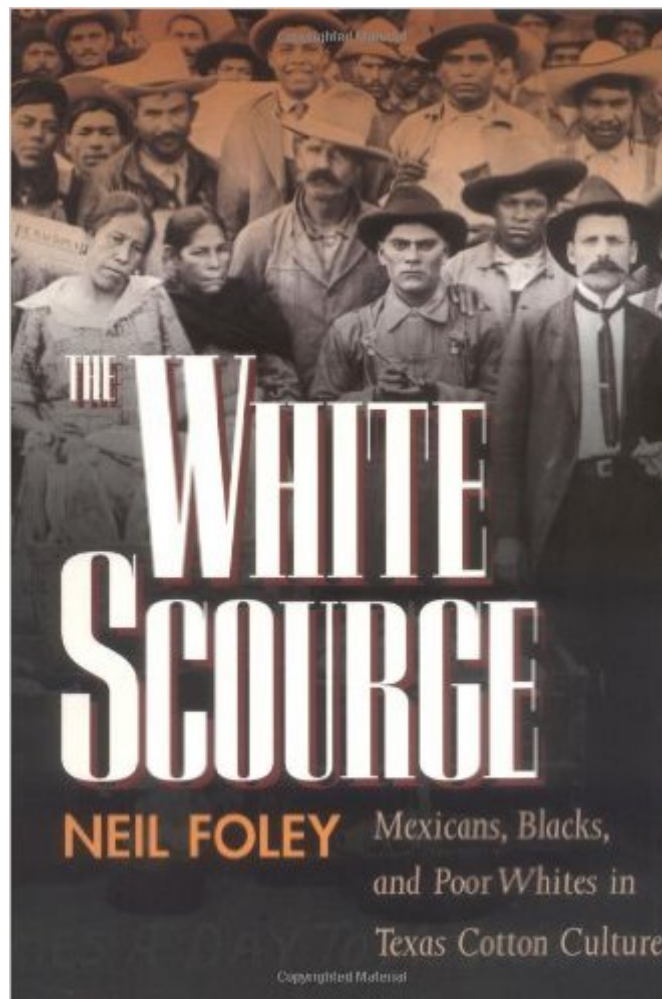


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# The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, And Poor Whites In Texas Cotton Culture (American Crossroads)



## Synopsis

In a book that fundamentally challenges our understanding of race in the United States, Neil Foley unravels the complex history of ethnicity in the cotton culture of central Texas. This engrossing narrative, spanning the period from the Civil War through the collapse of tenant farming in the early 1940s, bridges the intellectual chasm between African American and Southern history on one hand and Chicano and Southwestern history on the other. *The White Scourge* describes a unique borderlands region, where the cultures of the South, West, and Mexico overlap, to provide a deeper understanding of the process of identity formation and to challenge the binary opposition between "black" and "white" that often dominates discussions of American race relations. In Texas, which by 1890 had become the nation's leading cotton-producing state, the presence of Mexican sharecroppers and farm workers complicated the black-white dyad that shaped rural labor relations in the South. With the transformation of agrarian society into corporate agribusiness, white racial identity began to fracture along class lines, further complicating categories of identity. Foley explores the "fringe of whiteness," an ethno-racial borderlands comprising Mexicans, African Americans, and poor whites, to trace shifting ideologies and power relations. By showing how many different ethnic groups are defined in relation to "whiteness," Foley redefines white racial identity as not simply a pinnacle of status but the complex racial, social, and economic matrix in which power and privilege are shared. Foley skillfully weaves archival material with oral history interviews, providing a richly detailed view of everyday life in the Texas cotton culture. Addressing the ways in which historical categories affect the lives of ordinary people, *The White Scourge* tells the broader story of racial identity in America; at the same time it paints an evocative picture of a unique American region. This truly multiracial narrative touches on many issues central to our understanding of American history: labor and the role of unions, gender roles and their relation to ethnicity, the demise of agrarian whiteness, and the Mexican-American experience.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Neil Foley's *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture* presents a well researched historical account of race relations in the United States in the late nineteenth through the mid twentieth century. Foley follows a clearly structured timeline which makes it easy to trace the effects of Mexican migration on Texan culture. His combination of primary and secondary resources serve as a strong supports of his claims, and his sensitivity to the variety of cultures in southern cotton communities makes his book well-rounded and believable. Foley's clear description of the variety of racial struggles apparent in this time era exposes the reader to many issues often disregarded by general historical overviews. Following trends in Mexican/Mexican-American, Mexican/black, Mexican/white, white/black, and poor white/landowning whites, Foley provides a well-rounded and culturally sensitive illustration of racial interactions and the effect of immigration on social and economic issues. Foley also nicely delineates the differences between Mexican and black workers, using cultural references and statements from landowning whites to bolster his arguments. *The White Scourge* covers many themes often overlooked in immigrant history. Although it might appear that Foley is simply presenting an historical account of the Texan cotton culture, he is, in fact, providing a new sociological and psychological perspective on the complex arena of racial tensions in the United States. Well structured, culturally aware, and extensive in both subjective and objective research, *The White Scourge* is the winner of seven major book awards, and deservedly so.

This is the truth of the big corporate farmers taking advantage of the poor. White, Mexican and black pickers. new deal hurt the sharecropper and small farms. The outright use of humans who had no options but to pick crops. A real story of the legacy of cotton country in Texas. No shame for the treatment of the poor. Superiority over the poor has consequences of lack of education and continued disrespect of Mexicans who still toil under the sun as they pick other crops.

This book addresses a pretty fascinating topic. Foley looks at the cotton fields of Texas during the early 20th century and examines the role of race in that microcosm. African American were quickly pushed out of the sharecropping life in that area, replaced with Mexican labor. Some of this labor was made up of Mexican Americans, while some others were Mexican immigrants. Foley looks at how this unfolded and why Texas farmers often preferred Mexican laborers. Another part of this book looks at the gradual decline of sharecropping and tenet farming in general. These created socioeconomic classes that were pretty rigid and often defined by race. With the introduction of the tractor in the 1930s, sharecropping was mostly replaced with wage labor. The key part of this, which unfortunately Foley doesn't seem to keep central to the narrative, is the complex divide within the white race, between landowning whites and poor whites. These poor whites were seen as a shame to their race, as low, if not lower, than Mexicans or even blacks. This is a fascinating aspect of this culture. The book is interesting, but it is without question focused to academics. Casual readers should steer well clear of this book. There is no narrative voice, simply a dry, academic tone to the writing. It is not an easy read, but it is an interesting one. I would give this book four stars for the importance of Foley's argument, but people who are required to read this (for a college class) won't care about reviews. So for everyone else, I give it three stars.

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