

CHAPTER 9

The Space Traders

1 January. The first surprise was not their arrival. The radio messages had begun weeks before, announcing that one thousand ships from a star far out in space would land on 1 January 2000, in harbors along the Atlantic coast from Cape Cod to North Carolina. Well before dawn on that day, millions of people across North America had wakened early to witness the moment the ships entered Earth's atmosphere. However expected, to the watchers, children of the electronic age, the spaceships' approach was as awesome as had been that earlier one of three small ships, one October over five hundred years before, to the Indians of the island of Santo Domingo in the Caribbean.¹

No, the first surprise was the ships themselves. The people who lined the beaches of New Jersey where the first ships were scheduled to arrive, saw not anything NASA might have dreamed up, but huge vessels, the size of aircraft carriers, which the old men in the crowd recognized as being pretty much like the box-shaped landing craft that carried Allied troops to the Normandy beachheads during the Second World War.

As the sun rose on that cold bright morning, the people on the shore, including an anxious delegation of government officials and media reporters, witnessed a fantastic display of eerie lights and strange sound—evidently the visitors' salute to their American hosts. Almost unnoticed during the spectacle, the bow of the leading ship slowly lowered. A sizable

party of the visitors—the first beings from outer space anyone on Earth had ever seen—emerged and began moving majestically across the water toward shore. The shock of seeing these beings, regal in appearance and bearing, literally walking on the waves was more thrilling than frightening. At least, no one panicked.

Then came the second surprise. The leaders of this vast armada could speak English. Moreover, they spoke in the familiar comforting tones of former President Reagan, having dubbed his recorded voice into a computerized language-translation system.

After the initial greetings, the leader of the U.S. delegation opened his mouth to read his welcoming speech—only the first of several speeches scheduled to be given on this historic occasion by the leaders of both political parties and other eminent citizens, including—of course—stars of the entertainment and sports worlds. But before he could begin, the principal spokesperson for the space people (and it wasn't possible to know whether it was man or woman or something else entirely) raised a hand and spoke crisply, and to the point.

And this point constituted the third surprise. Those mammoth vessels carried within their holds treasure of which the United States was in most desperate need: gold, to bail out the almost bankrupt federal, state, and local governments; special chemicals capable of unpolluting the environment, which was becoming daily more toxic, and restoring it to the pristine state it had been before Western explorers set foot on it; and a totally safe nuclear engine and fuel, to relieve the nation's all-but-depleted supply of fossil fuel. In return, the visitors wanted only one thing—and that was to take back to their home star all the African Americans who lived in the United States.

The jaw of every one of the welcoming officials dropped, not a word of the many speeches they had prepared suitable for the occasion. As the Americans stood in stupefied silence, the visitors' leader emphasized that the proposed trade was for the Americans freely to accept or not, that no force would be used. Neither then nor subsequently did the leader or any other of the visitors, whom anchorpersons on that evening's news shows immediately labeled the "Space Traders," reveal why they wanted only black people or what plans they had for them should the United States be prepared to part with that or any other group of its citizens. The leader only reiterated to his still-dumbfounded audience that, in exchange for the

treasure they had brought, they wanted to take away every American citizen categorized as black on birth certificate or other official identification. The Space Traders said they would wait sixteen days for a response to their offer. That is, on 17 January—the day when in that year the birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr., was to be observed—they would depart carrying with them every black man, woman, and child in the nation and leave behind untold treasure. Otherwise, the Space Traders' leader shrugged and glanced around—at the oil slick in the water, at the dead gulls on the beach, at the thick shadow of smog that obscured the sky on all but the windiest days. Then the visitors walked back over the waves and returned to their ships.

Their departure galvanized everyone—the delegation, the watchers on the beach, the President glued to his television screen in the White House, citizens black and white throughout the country. The President, who had been advised to stay in the White House out of concern for his security, called Congress into special session and scheduled a cabinet meeting for the next morning. Governors reconvened any state legislatures not already in session. The phones of members of Congress began ringing, as soon as the millions of people viewing the Space Traders' offer on television saw them move back across the water, and never stopped till the morning of 17 January.

There was a definite split in the nature of the calls—a split that reflected distinctly different perceptions of the Space Traders. Most white people were, like the welcoming delegation that morning, relieved and pleased to find the visitors from outer space unthreatening. They were not human, obviously, but resembled the superhuman, good-guy characters in comic books; indeed, they seemed to be practical, no-nonsense folks like regular Americans.

On the other hand, many American blacks—whether watching from the shore or on their television screens—had seen the visitors as distinctly unpleasant, even menacing in appearance. While their perceptions of the visitors differed, black people all agreed that the Space Traders looked like bad news—and their trade offer certainly was—and burned up the phone lines urging black leaders to take action against it.

But whites, long conditioned to discounting any statements of blacks unconfirmed by other whites, chose now, of course, to follow their own

perceptions. “Will the blacks never be free of their silly superstitions?” whites asked one another with condescending smiles. “Here, in this truly historic moment, when America has been selected as the site for this planet’s first contact with people from another world, the blacks just revert to their primitive fear and foolishness.” Thus, the blacks’ outrage was discounted in this crisis; they had, as usual, no credibility.

And it was a time of crisis. Not only because of the Space Traders’ offer per se, but because that offer came when the country was in dire straits. Decades of conservative, laissez-faire capitalism had emptied the coffers of all but a few of the very rich. The nation that had, in the quarter-century after the Second World War, funded the reconstruction of the free world had, in the next quarter-century, given itself over to greed and willful exploitation of its natural resources. Now it was struggling to survive like any third-world nation. Massive debt had curtailed all but the most necessary services. The environment was in shambles, as reflected by the fact that the sick and elderly had to wear special masks whenever they ventured out-of-doors. In addition, supplies of crude oil and coal were almost exhausted. The Space Traders’ offer had come just in time to rescue America. Though few gave voice to their thoughts, many were thinking that the trade offer was, indeed, the ultimate solution to the nation’s troubles.

2 January. The insomnia that kept the American people tossing and turning that first night of the new century did not spare the White House. As soon as the President heard the Space Traders’ post-arrival proposition on television, his political instincts immediately locked into place. This was big! And it looked from the outset like a “no win” situation—not a happy crisis at the start of an election year. Even so, he had framed the outline of his plan by the time his cabinet members gathered at eight o’clock the next morning.

There were no blacks in his cabinet. Four years before, during his first election campaign, the President had made some vague promises of diversity when speaking to minority gatherings. But after the election, he thought, What the hell! Most blacks and Hispanics had not supported him or his party. Although he had followed the practice of keeping one black on the Supreme Court, it had not won him many minority votes. He owed them nothing. Furthermore, the few black figures in the party always seemed to

him overly opportunistic and, to be frank, not very smart. But now, as the cabinet members arrived, he wished he had covered his bases better.

In the few hours since the Space Traders' offer, the White House and the Congress had been inundated with phone calls and telegrams. The President was not surprised that a clear majority spontaneously urged acceptance of the offer.

"Easy for them to say," he murmured to an aide. "I'll bet most of those who favor the trade didn't sign or give their names."

"On the contrary," the assistant replied, "the callers are identifying themselves, and the telegrams are signed."

At least a third of the flood of phone calls and faxes urging quick acceptance of the offer expressed the view that what the nation would give up—its African-American citizens—was as worthwhile as what it would receive. The statements accurately reflected relations at the dawn of the new century. The President had, like his predecessors for the last generation, successfully exploited racial fears and hostility in his election campaign. There had been complaints, of course, but those from his political opponents sounded like sour grapes. They, too, had tried to minimize the input of blacks so as not to frighten away white voters.

The race problem had worsened greatly in the 1990s. A relatively small number of blacks had survived the retrogression of civil rights protection, perhaps 20 percent having managed to make good in the increasingly technologically oriented society. But, without anyone acknowledging it and with hardly a peep from the press, more than one half of the group had become outcasts. They were confined to former inner-city areas that had been divorced from their political boundaries. High walls surrounded these areas, and armed guards controlled entrance and exit around the clock. Still, despite all precautions, young blacks escaped from time to time to terrorize whites. Long dead was the dream that this black underclass would ever "overcome."

The President had asked Gleason Golightly, the conservative black economics professor, who was his unofficial black cabinet member, to attend the meeting. Golightly was smart and seemed to be truly conservative, not a man ready to sing any political tune for a price. His mere presence as a person of color at this crucial session would neutralize

any possible critics in the media, though not in the black civil rights community.

The cabinet meeting came to order.

“I think we all know the situation,” the President said. “Those extraterrestrial beings are carrying in their ships a guarantee that America will conquer its present problems and prosper for at least all of this new century.”

“I would venture, sir,” the Vice President noted, “that the balance of your term will be known as ‘America’s Golden Age.’ Indeed, the era will almost certainly extend to the terms of your successor.”

The President smiled at the remark, as—on cue—did the cabinet. “The VP is right, of course,” the President said. “Our visitors from outer space are offering us the chance to correct the excesses of several generations. Furthermore, many of the men and women—voters all—who are bombarding us with phone calls, see an added bonus in the Space Traders’ offer.” He looked around at his attentive cabinet members. “They are offering not only a solution to our nation’s present problems but also one—surely an *ultimate* one—to what might be called the great American racial experiment. That’s the real issue before us today. Does the promise of restored prosperity justify our sending away fifteen percent of our citizens to Lord knows what fate?”

“There are pluses and minuses to this ‘fate’ issue, Mr. President.” Helen Hipmeyer, Secretary of Health and Human Services, usually remained silent at cabinet meetings. Her speaking up now caused eyebrows to rise around the table. “A large percentage of blacks rely on welfare and other social services. Their departure would ease substantially the burden on our state and national budgets. Why, the cost of caring for black AIDS victims alone has been extraordinary. On the other hand, the consternation and guilt among many whites if the blacks are sent away would take a severe psychological toll, with medical and other costs which might also reach astronomical levels. To gain the benefits we are discussing, without serious side effects, we must have more justification than I’ve heard thus far.”

“Good point, Madame Secretary,” the President answered, “but there are risks at every opportunity.”

“I’ve never considered myself a particularly courageous individual, Mr. President.” It was the Secretary of the Interior, a man small in stature but

with a mind both sharp and devious, who had presided over the logging of the last of the old-growth timber in the nation's national forests. "But if I could guarantee prosperity for this great country by giving my life or going off with the Space Traders, I would do it without hesitation. And, if I would do it, I think every red-blooded American with an ounce of patriotism would as well." The Secretary sat down to the warm applause of his colleagues.

His suggestion kindled a thought in the Secretary of Defense. "Mr. President, the Secretary's courage is not unlike that American men and women have exhibited when called to military service. Some go more willingly than others, but almost all go even with the knowledge that they may not come back. It is a call a country makes on the assumption that its citizens will respond. I think that is the situation we have here, except that instead of just young men and women, the country needs all of its citizens of African descent to step forward and serve." More applause greeted this suggestion.

The Attorney General asked for and got the floor. "Mr. President, I think we could put together a legislative package modeled on the Selective Service Act of 1918. Courts have uniformly upheld this statute and its predecessors as being well within congressional power to exact enforced military duty at home or abroad by United States citizens.² While I don't see any constitutional problems, there would likely be quite a debate in Congress. But if the mail they are receiving is anything like ours, then the pressure for passage will be irresistible."

The President and the cabinet members heard reports from agents who had checked out samples of the gold, chemicals, and machinery the Space Traders had brought. More tests would be run in the next few days, but first indications were that the gold was genuine, and that the antipollution chemicals and the nuclear fuel machine were safe and worked. Everyone recognized that the benefits to the country would be enormous. The ability to erase the country's debt alone would ease the economic chaos the Federal Reserve had staved off during the last few years only by its drastic—the opposition party called it "unscrupulous"—manipulation of the money supply. The Secretary of the Treasury confirmed that the Space Traders' gold would solve the nation's economic problems for decades to come.

“What are your thoughts on all this, Professor Golightly?” asked the President, nodding at the scholarly-looking black man sitting far down the table. The President realized that there would be a lot more opposition to a selective service plan among ordinary citizens than among the members of his cabinet, and hoped Golightly would have some ideas for getting around it.

Golightly began as though he understood the kind of answer the President wanted.

“As you know, Mr. President, I have supported this administration’s policies that have led to the repeal of some civil rights laws, to invalidation of most affirmative action programs, and to severe reduction in appropriations for public assistance. To put it mildly, the positions of mine that have received a great deal of media attention, have not been well received in African-American communities. Even so, I have been willing to be a ‘good soldier’ for the Party even though I am condemned as an Uncle Tom by my people. I sincerely believe that black people needed to stand up on their own feet, free of special protection provided by civil rights laws, the suffocating burden of welfare checks, and the stigmatizing influence of affirmative action programs. In helping you undermine these policies, I realized that your reasons for doing so differed from mine. And yet I went along.”

Golightly stopped. He reached down for his coffee mug, took a few sips, and ran his fingers through his graying but relatively straight (what some black people call “good”) hair. “Mr. President, my record of support entitles me to be heard on the Space Traders’ proposition. I disagree strongly with both the Secretary of the Interior and the Attorney General. What they are proposing is not universal selective service for blacks. It is group banishment, a most severe penalty and one that the Attorney General would impose without benefit of either due process or judicial review.

“It is a mark of just how far out of the mainstream black people are that this proposition is given any serious consideration. Were the Space Traders attracted by and asking to trade any other group—white women with red hair and green eyes, for example—a horrified public would order the visitors off the planet without a moment’s hesitation. The revulsion would not be less because the number of persons with those physical

characteristics are surely fewer than the twenty million black citizens you are ready to condemn to intergalactic exile.

“Mr. President, I cannot be objective on this proposal. I will match my patriotism, including readiness to give my life for my country, with that of the Secretary of the Interior. But my duty stops short of condemning my wife, my three children, my grandchildren, and my aged mother to an unknown fate. You simply cannot condemn twenty million people because they are black, and thus fit fodder for trade, so that this country can pay its debts, protect its environment, and ensure its energy supply. I am not ready to recommend such a sacrifice. Moreover, I doubt whether the Secretary of the Interior would willingly offer up his family and friends if the Space Traders sought them instead of me and mine.” He paused.

“Professor Golightly,” the Secretary of the Interior said, leaning forward, “the President asked you a specific question. This is not the time to debate which of us is the more patriotic or to engage in the details of the sacrifice that is a necessary component of any service for one’s country.”

Golightly chose to ignore the interruption. He knew, and the President knew, that his support—or, at least, his silent acquiescence—would be critical in winning undecided whites over to the selective service scheme. For their purposes, the President’s media people had made Golightly an important voice on racial policy issues. They needed him now as never before.

“Mr. President,” he continued, “you and your cabinet must place this offer in historical perspective. This is far from the first time this country’s leaders have considered and rejected the removal of all those here of African descent. Benjamin Franklin and other abolitionists actively sought schemes to free the slaves and return them to their homeland. Lincoln examined and supported emigration programs both before and after he freed the slaves. Even those Radical Republicans who drafted the Civil War amendments wondered whether Africans could ever become a part of the national scene, a part of the American people.

“As early as 1866, Michigan’s Senator Jacob Merritt Howard, an abolitionist and key architect of the Fourteenth Amendment, recognized the nation’s need to confront the challenge posed by the presence of the former slaves, and spoke out on it, saying:

For weal or for woe, the destiny of the colored race in this country is wrapped up with our own; they are to remain in our midst, and here spend their years and here bury their fathers and finally repose themselves. We may regret it. It may not be entirely compatible with our taste that they should live in our midst. We cannot help it. Our forefathers introduced them, and their destiny is to continue among us; and the practical question which now presents itself to us is as to the best mode of getting along with them.³

“Now, Mr. President, after receiving your invitation to this meeting, I had no difficulty in guessing its agenda or predicting how many of you might come down in favor of accepting the Space Traders’ offer, and so looked up Senator Howard’s speech. I have prepared copies of it for each of you. I recommend you study it.”

Golightly walked around the large table to give each cabinet member a copy of the speech. As he did so, he pointed out, “The Senator’s words are grudging rather than generous, conciliatory rather than crusading. He proposed sanctuary rather than equality for blacks. And though there have been periods in which their striving for full equality seems to have brought them close to their goal, sanctuary remains the more accurate description of black citizenship.”

Returning to his place, Golightly continued. “This status has provided this nation an essential stability, one you sacrifice at your peril. With all due respect, Mr. President, acceptance of the Space Traders’ solution will not bring a century of prosperity to this country. Secretary Hipmeyer is correct. What today seems to you a solution from Heaven will instead herald a decade of shame and dissension mirroring the moral conflicts that precipitated this nation into its most bloody conflict, the Civil War. The deep, self-inflicted wounds of that era have never really healed. Their reopening will inevitably lead to confrontations and strife that could cause the eventual dissolution of the nation.”

“You seem to assume, Professor Golightly,” the Secretary of the Interior interrupted again, “that the Space Traders want African Americans for some heinous purpose. Why do you ignore alternative scenarios? They are obviously aware of your people’s plight here. Perhaps they have selected them to inhabit an interplanetary version of the biblical land of milk and honey. Or, more seriously,” the Secretary said, “they may offer your people a new start in a less competitive environment, or”—he added, with a slight smirk in the President’s direction—“perhaps they are going to give your

people that training in skills and work discipline you're always urging on them."

No one actually laughed, but all except Golightly thought the Secretary's comment an excellent response to the black professor's gloomy predictions.

"I think we get your point, Professor," the President replied smoothly, concerned not to alienate a man whose support he would need. "We will give it weight in our considerations. Now," he said, rising, "we need to get to work on this thing. We don't have much time." He asked the Attorney General to draw up a rough draft of the proposed legislation by the end of the day, and told the rest of his cabinet that his aides would shortly be bringing them specific assignments. "Now let's all of us be sure to keep to ourselves what was said at this meeting"—and he glanced meaningfully at Professor Golightly. "Well, that's it for now, people. Meeting adjourned."

Long after the others had departed, Gleason Golightly sat at the long conference table. His hands were folded. He stared at the wall. He had always prided himself as the "man on the inside." While speaking in support of conservative policies, those were—he knew—policies that commanded enough support to be carried out. As a black man, his support legitimated those policies and salved the consciences of the whites who proposed and implemented them. A small price to pay, Golightly had always rationalized, for the many behind-the-scenes favors he received. The favors were not for himself. Golightly, a full professor at a small but well-endowed college, neither wanted nor needed what he called "blood money." Rather, he saw that black colleges got much-needed funding; and through his efforts, certain black officials received appointments or key promotions. He smiled wryly when some of these officials criticized his conservative positions and called him "Uncle Tom." He could bear that, knowing he made a contribution few others were able—or willing—to make to the racial cause.

Booker T. Washington was his hero and had been since he was a child growing up in a middle-class family in Alabama, not far from Tuskegee, the home of Tuskegee Institute, which Washington had founded in 1881. He had modeled his career on old Booker T., and while he did not have a following and had created no institutions, Golightly knew he had done more

for black people than had a dozen of the loud-mouthed leaders who, he felt, talked much and produced little. But all of his life, he had dreamed of there coming a moment when his position as insider would enable him to perform some heroic act to both save his people great grief and gain for him the recognition and the love for which, despite his frequent denials, he knew he yearned.

Now, as he sat alone, he feared that this morning's meeting was that big chance, and he had failed it. The stakes, of course, were larger than he would have ever imagined they might be, and yet he thought he'd had the arguments. In retrospect, though, those arguments were based on morality and assumed a willingness on the part of the President and the cabinet to be fair, or at least to balance the benefits of the Trade against the sacrifice it would require of a selected portion of the American people. Instead of outsmarting them, Golightly had done what he so frequently criticized civil rights spokespersons for doing: he had tried to get whites to do right by black people because it was right that they do so. "Crazy!" he commented when civil rights people did it. "Crazy!" he mumbled to himself, at himself.

"Oh, Golightly, glad you're still here. I want a word with you." Golightly looked up as the Secretary of the Interior, at his most unctuous, eased himself into the seat beside him.

"Listen, old man, sorry about our differences at the meeting. I understand your concerns."

Golightly did not look at the man and, indeed, kept his eyes on the wall throughout their conversation. "What do you want, Mr. Secretary?"

The Secretary ignored Golightly's coldness. "You could tell in the meeting and from the media reports that this Trade thing is big, very big. There will be debate—as there should be in a great, free country like ours. But if I were a betting man, which I am not because of my religious beliefs, I would wager that this offer will be approved."

"I assume, Mr. Secretary, that to further the best interests of this *great, free* country of ours, you will be praying that the Trade is approved." Golightly's voice deepened ironically on the crucial words.

The Secretary's smile faded, and his eyes narrowed. "The President wants you to say whatever you can in favor of this plan."

"Why don't we simply follow your suggestion, Mr. Secretary, and tell everyone that the Space Traders are going to take the blacks to a land of

milk and honey?”

The Secretary’s voice hardened. “I don’t think even black people are that stupid. No, Gleason, talk about patriotism, about the readiness of black people to make sacrifices for this country, about how they are really worthy citizens no matter what some may think. We’ll leave the wording to you. Isn’t sacrifice as proof of patriotism what your Frederick Douglass argued to get President Lincoln to open up the Union army to black enlistees?”

“And then?” Golightly asked, his eyes never moving from the wall.

“We know some blacks will escape. I understand some are leaving the country already. But”—and the Secretary’s voice was smooth as butter—“if you go along with the program, Gleason, and the Trade is approved, the President says he’ll see to it that one hundred black families are smuggled out of the country. You decide who they are. They’ll include you and yours, of course.”

Golightly said nothing.

After a moment of hesitation, the Secretary got up and strode to the door. Before leaving, he turned and said, “Think about it, Golightly. It’s the kind of deal we think you should go for.”

3 January. The Anti-Trade Coalition—a gathering of black and liberal white politicians, civil rights representatives, and progressive academics—quickly assembled early that morning. Working nonstop and driven by anxiety to cooperate more than they ever had in the past, the members of the coalition had drafted a series of legal and political steps designed to organize opposition to the Space Traders’ offer. Constitutional challenges to any acceptance scheme were high on the list of opposition strategies. Bills opposing the Trade were drafted for early introduction in Congress. There were plans for direct action protests and boycotts. Finally, in the event that worse came to worst, and the administration decided to carry out what gathering participants were calling the “African-American kidnapping plot,” a secret committee was selected to draft and distribute plans for massive disobedience.

Now, at close to midnight, the plenary session was ready to give final approval to this broad program of resistance.

At that moment, Professor Gleason Golightly sought the floor to propose an alternative response to the Trade offer. Golightly’s close

connection to the conservative administration and active support of its anti-black views made him far from a hero to most blacks. Many viewed his appearance at this critical hour as an administration-sponsored effort to undermine the coalition's defensive plans and tactics. At last, though, he prevailed on the conference leaders to grant him five minutes.

As he moved toward the podium, there was a wave of hostile murmuring whose justification Golightly acknowledged: "I am well aware that political and ideological differences have for several years sustained a wide chasm between us. But the events of two days ago have transformed our disputes into a painful reminder of our shared status. I am here because, whatever our ideological differences or our socioeconomic positions, we all know that black rights, black interests, black property, even black lives are expendable whenever their sacrifice will further or sustain white needs or preferences."

Hearing Golightly admitting to truths he had long denied, served to silence the murmuring. "It has become an unwritten tradition in this country for whites to sacrifice our rights to further their own interests. This tradition overshadows the national debate about the Space Traders' offer and may well foretell our reply to it."

Oblivious of the whites in the audience, Golightly said, "I realize that our liberal white friends continue to reassure us. 'This is America,' they tell us. 'It can't happen here.' But I've noticed that those whites who are most vigorous in their assurances are least able to rebut the contrary teaching of both historic fact and present reality. Outside civil rights gatherings like this, the masses of black people—those you claim to represent but to whom you seldom listen—are mostly resigned to the nation's acceptance of the Space Traders' offer. For them, liberal optimism is smothered by their life experience.

"Black people know for a fact what you, their leaders, fear to face. Black people know your plans for legislation, litigation, and protest cannot prevail against the tradition of sacrificing black rights. Indeed, your efforts will simply add a veneer of face-saving uncertainty to a debate whose outcome is not only predictable, but inevitable. Flying in the face of our history, you are still relying on the assumption that whites really want to grant justice to blacks, really want to alleviate onerous racial conditions."

“Professor Golightly,” the chairman interrupted, “the time we have allotted you has almost expired. The delegates here are weary and anxious to return to their homes so that they can assist their families through this crisis. The defense plans we have formulated are our best effort. Sir, if you have a better way, let us hear it now.”

Golightly nodded. “I promised to be brief, and I will. Although you have labored here unselfishly to devise a defense against what is surely the most dangerous threat to our survival since our forebears were kidnapped from Africa’s shores. I think I have a better way, and I urge you to hear it objectively and without regard to our past differences. The question is how best to counter an offer that about a third of the voters would support even if the Space Traders offered America nothing at all. Another third may vacillate, but we both know that in the end they will simply not be able to pass up a good deal. The only way we can deflect, and perhaps reverse, a process that is virtually certain to result in approval of the Space Traders’ offer, is to give up the oppositional stance you are about to adopt, and forthrightly urge the country to accept the Space Traders’ offer.”

He paused, looking out over the sea of faces. Then there was a clamor of outraged cries: “Sell-out!” “Traitor!” and “Ultimate Uncle Tom!” The chairman banged his gavel in an effort to restore order.

Seemingly unmoved by the outburst, Golightly waited until the audience quieted, then continued. “A major, perhaps the principal, motivation for racism in this country is the deeply held belief that black people should not have anything that white people don’t have. Not only do whites insist on better jobs, higher incomes, better schools and neighborhoods, better everything, but they also usurp aspects of our culture. They have ‘taken our blues and gone,’ to quote Langston Hughes⁴—songs that sprang from our very subordination. Whites exploit not only our music but our dance, language patterns, dress and hair styles as well. Even the badge of our inferior status, our color, is not sacrosanct, whites spending billions a year to emulate our skin tones, paradoxically, as a sign of their higher status. So whites’ appropriation of what is ours and their general acquisitiveness are facts—facts we must make work for us. Rather than resisting the Space Traders’ offer, let us circulate widely the rumor that the

Space Traders, aware of our long fruitless struggle on this planet, are arranging to transport us to a land of milk and honey—a virtual paradise.

“Remember, most whites are so jealous of their race-based prerogatives that they oppose affirmative action even though many of these programs would remove barriers that exclude whites as well as blacks. Can we not expect such whites—notwithstanding even the impressive benefits offered by the Space Traders—to go all out to prevent blacks from gaining access to an extraterrestrial New Jerusalem? Although you are planning to litigate against the Trade on the grounds that it is illegal discrimination to limit it to black people, mark my words, our ‘milk and honey’ story will inspire whites to institute such litigation on the grounds that limiting the Space Traders’ offer to black people is unconstitutional discrimination against whites!

“Many of you have charged that I have become expert at manipulating white people for personal gain. Although profit has not in fact motivated my actions, I certainly have learned to understand how whites think on racial issues. On that knowledge, I am willing to wage my survival and that of my family. I urge you to do the same. This strategy is, however, risky, our only hope.”

The murmurs had subsided into stony silence by the time Golightly left the podium.

“Does anyone care to respond to Professor Golightly’s suggestion?” the chairman finally asked.

Justin Jasper, a well-known and highly respected Baptist minister, came to the microphone. “I readily concede Dr. Golightly’s expertise in the psychology of whites’ thinking. Furthermore, as he requests, I hold in abeyance my deep distrust of a black man whose willing service to whites has led him to become a master minstrel of political mimicry. But my problem with his plan is twofold. First, it rings hollow because it so resembles Dr. Golightly’s consistent opposition in the past to all our civil rights initiatives. Once again, he is urging us to accept rather than oppose a racist policy. And, not only are we not to resist, but we are to beg the country to lead us to the sacrificial altar. God may have that power, but Dr. Golightly is not my god!”

The Reverend Jasper was a master orator, and he quickly had his audience with him. “Second, because the proposal lacks truth, it insults my

soul. In the forty years I have worked for civil rights, I have lost more battles than I have won, but I have never lost my integrity. Telling the truth about racism has put me in prison and many of my co-workers into early graves.

“The truth is, Dr. Golightly, that what this country is ready to do to us is wrong! It is evil! It is an action so heinous as to give the word *betrayal* a bad name. I can speak only for myself, but even if I were certain that my family and I could escape the threat we now face by lying about our likely fate—and, Dr. Golightly, that is what you’re asking us to do—I do not choose to save myself by a tactic that may preserve my body at the sacrifice of my soul. The fact is, Dr. Golightly, until my Lord calls me home, I do not want to leave this country even for a land of milk and honey. My people were brought here involuntarily, and that is the only way they’re going to get me out!”

The Reverend Jasper received a standing ovation. Many people were crying openly as they applauded. After thanking them, the minister asked everyone to join in singing the old nineteenth-century hymn “Amazing Grace,” which, he reminded them, had been written by an English minister, one John Newton, who as a young man and before finding God’s grace, had been captain of a slave ship. It was with special fervor that they sang the verse:

*Through many dangers, toils, and snares,
I have already come.
‘Twas grace that brought me safe this far,
And grace will lead me home.*⁵

With the hymn’s melody still resonating, the coalition’s members voted unanimously to approve their defensive package. The meeting was quickly adjourned. Leaving the hall, everyone agreed that they had done all that could be done to oppose approval of the Space Traders’ offer. As for Golightly, his proposal was dismissed as coming from a person who, in their view, had so often sold out black interests. “He’s a sad case. Even with this crisis, he’s just doing what he’s always done.”

Again, as after the President’s cabinet meeting, Golightly sat for a long time alone. He did not really mind that none of the delegates had spoken to him before leaving. But he was crushed by his failure to get them to

recognize what he had long known: that without power, a people must use cunning and guile. Or were cunning and guile, based on superior understanding of a situation, themselves power? Certainly, most black people knew and used this art to survive in their everyday contacts with white people. It was only civil rights professionals who confused integrity with foolhardiness.

“Faith in God is fine,” Golightly muttered to himself. “But God expects us to use the common sense He gave us to get out of life-threatening situations.”

Still, castigation of black leadership could not alter the fact. Golightly had failed, and he knew it. Sure, he was smarter than they were—smarter even than most whites; but he had finally outsmarted himself. At the crucial moment, when he most needed to help his people, both whites and blacks had rejected as untrustworthy both himself and his plans.

4 January. In a nationally televised address, the President sought to reassure both Trade supporters that he was responding favorably to their strong messages, and blacks and whites opposed to the Trade that he would not ignore their views. After the usual patriotic verbiage, the President said that just-completed, end-of-century economic reports revealed the nation to be in much worse shape than anyone had imagined. He summarized what he called the “very grim figures,” and added that only massive new resources would save America from having to declare bankruptcy.

“On the face of it, our visitors from outer space have initiated their relationship with our country in a most unusual way. They are a foreign power and as such entitled to the respect this nation has always granted to the family of nations on Earth; it is not appropriate for us to prejudge this extra-planetary nation’s offer. Thus, it is now receiving careful study and review by this administration.

“Of course, I am aware of the sacrifice that some of our most highly regarded citizens would be asked to make in the proposed trade. While these citizens are of only one racial group, there is absolutely no evidence whatsoever to indicate that the selection was intended to discriminate against any race or religion or ethnic background.

“No decisions have been made, and all options are under review. This much seems clear: the materials the Traders have offered us are genuine and

perform as promised. Early estimates indicate that, if these materials were made available to this nation, they would solve our economic crisis, and we could look forward to a century of unparalleled prosperity. Whether the Trade would allow a tax-free year for every American, as some of our citizens have hoped, is not certain. But I can promise that if the Trade is approved, I will exercise my best efforts to make such a trade dividend a reality.”

Early that morning, the leaders of Fortune-500 businesses, heads of banks, insurance companies, and similar entities boarded their well-appointed corporate jets and flew to a remote Wyoming hunting lodge. They understood the President supported the Trade, despite his avowals that no decision had been made. They had come to discuss the Trade offer’s implications for big business.

5 January. Not content with just closing the doors on their meeting as the Anti-Trade Coalition had, the corporate leaders of America gathered for an absolutely hush-hush meeting. They were joined by the Vice President and some of the wealthier members of Congress. The surroundings were beautiful, but the gathering of white males was somber. Corporate America faced a dilemma of its own making.

Media polls as well as ones privately funded by businesses all reported tremendous public support for the Trade—unhappy but hardly unexpected news for the nation’s richest and most powerful men. First, blacks represented 12 percent of the market and generally consumed much more of their income than did their white counterparts. No one wanted to send that portion of the market into outer space—not even for the social and practical benefits offered by the Space Traders.

Even those benefits were a mixed blessing. Coal and oil companies, expecting to raise their prices as supplies steadily decreased, were not elated at the prospect of an inexhaustible energy source; it could quickly put them out of business. Similarly, businesses whose profits were based on sales in black ghetto communities—or who supplied law enforcement agencies, prisons, and other such institutions—faced substantial losses in sales. The real estate industry, for example, annually reaped uncounted millions in commissions on sales and rentals, inflated by the understanding that blacks would not be allowed to purchase or rent in an area. Even these

concerns were overshadowed by fears of what the huge influx of gold to pay all state debts would do to the economy or to the value of either the current money supply or gold.

Though seldom acknowledging the fact, most business leaders understood that blacks were crucial in stabilizing the economy with its ever-increasing disparity between the incomes of rich and poor. They recognized that potentially turbulent unrest among those on the bottom was deflected by the continuing efforts of poorer whites to ensure that they, at least, remained ahead of blacks. If blacks were removed from the society, working-and middle-class whites—deprived of their racial distraction—might look upward toward the top of the societal well and realize that they as well as the blacks below them suffered because of the gross disparities in opportunities and income.

Many of these corporate leaders and their elected representatives had for years exploited poor whites' ignorance of their real enemy. Now, what had been a comforting insulation of their privileges and wealth, posed a serious barrier to what a majority saw as a first priority: to persuade the country to reject the Trade. A quick survey of the media and advertising representatives present was not encouraging. "It would be quite a challenge," one network executive said, "but we simply can't change this country's view about the superiority of whites and the inferiority of blacks in a week. I doubt you could do it in a decade."

Even so, the corporate leaders decided to try. They planned to launch immediately a major media campaign—television, radio, and the press—to exploit both the integration achieved in America and the moral cost of its loss. White members of professional and college sports teams would urge rejection of the Trade "so as to keep the team together." Whites in integrated businesses, schools, churches, and neighborhoods would broadcast similar messages. The business leaders even committed large sums to facilitate campaigning by pro-choice womens' groups who were strongly anti-Trade. In a particularly poignant series of ads, white spouses in interracial marriages would point out that the Trade would destroy their families, and beg the public not to support it.

Newspaper and magazine publishers promised supportive editorials, but the Vice President and other government representatives argued that the

immediate political gains from accepting the Trade would translate into business benefits as well.

“With all due respect, Mr. Vice President,” he was told, “that argument shows why you are in politics and we are in business. It also shows that you are not listening very closely to those of us whose campaign contributions put you in office.”

“We need your financial support,” the Vice President admitted, “but our polls show most white voters favor the Trade, and the administration is under increasing pressure to do the same. And, as you know, pro-Trade advocates are promising that with all government debts paid, every American would get a year without any taxes. Believe it or not, some liberal environmentalists are thinking of giving their support to the Trade as the lesser of two evils. Of course, the prospect of heating and air-conditioning homes without paying through the nose is very appealing, even to those who don’t care a hoot about the environment.”

“However enticing such benefits of the Trade may be,” interjected a government census official, “the real attraction for a great many whites is that it would remove black people from this society. Since the first of the year, my staff and I have interviewed literally thousands of citizens across the country, and, though they don’t say it directly, it’s clear that at bottom they simply think this will be a better country without black people. I fear, gentlemen, that those of us who have been perpetuating this belief over the years have done a better job than we knew.”

“I must add what you probably already know,” the Vice President broke in, “that the administration is leaning toward acceptance of the Space Traders’ offer. Now, if you fellows line up against the Trade, it could make a difference—but, in that case, the President may opt to build on the phony populist image you provided him in his first election campaign. He knows that the working-and middle-class white people in this country want the blacks to go, and if they get a chance to express their real views in the privacy of a polling place, the Trade plan will pass overwhelmingly.”

“Bullshit!” roared a billionaire who had made his fortune in construction. “I’m sick of this defeatist talk! We need to get off our dead asses and get to work on this thing. Everyone says that money talks. Well dammit, let’s get out there and spend some money. If this thing goes to a public referendum, we can buy whatever and whoever is necessary. It sure

as hell will not be the first time,” he wound up, pounding both fists on the long conference table, “and likely not the last!”

The remainder of the meeting was more upbeat. Pointedly telling the Vice President that he and the administration were caught in the middle and would have to decide whose support they most wanted in the future, the business leaders began making specific plans to suspend all regular broadcasting and, through 16 January, to air nothing but anti-Trade ads and special Trade programs. They flew out that night, their confidence restored. They controlled the media. They had become rich and successful “playing hard ball.” However competitive with one another, they had, as usual, united to confront this new challenge to their hegemony. It was, as usual, inconceivable that they could fail.

6 January. Although the Television Evangelists of America also owned jets, they understood that their power lay less in these perks of the wealthy than in their own ability to manipulate their TV congregations’ religious feelings. So, after a lengthy conference call, they announced a massive evangelical rally in the Houston Astrodome which would be televised over their religious cable network. They went all out. The Trade offer was the evangelists’ chance to rebuild their prestige and fortunes, neither of which had recovered from the Jim and Tammy Bakker and the Jimmy Swaggart scandals. They would achieve this much-desired goal by playing on, rather than trying to change, the strongly racist views of their mostly working-class television audiences. True, some of the preachers had a substantial black following, but evangelical support for the Trade would not be the evangelists’ decision. Rather, these media messiahs heralded it as God’s will.

The Space Traders were, according to the televised “Gospel,” bringing America blessings earned by their listeners’ and viewers’ faithful dedication to freedom, liberty, and God’s word. Not only would rejection of these blessings from space be wrong, so the preachers exhorted; it would be blasphemous. It was God’s will that all Americans enjoy a tax-free year, a cleaned-up environment for years to come, and cheap heating forever. True, a sacrifice was required if they were to obtain God’s bounty—a painful sacrifice. But here, too, God was testing Americans, his chosen people, to ensure that they were worthy of His bounty, deserving of His love. Each

preacher drew on Scripture, tortuously interpreted, to support these statements.

A “ministry of music” quartet—four of the most popular television evangelists, all speaking in careful cadences like a white rap group—preached the major sermon. It whipped the crowd into a delirium of religious feeling, making them receptive both to the financial appeals, which raised millions, and to the rally’s grande finale: a somber tableau of black people marching stoically into the Space Traders’ ships, which here resembled ancient sacrificial altars. Try as they might, the producers of the pageant had had a hard time finding black people willing to act out roles they might soon be forced to experience, but a few blacks were glad to be paid handsomely for walking silently across the stage. These few were easily supplemented by the many whites eager to daub on “black face.”

The rally was a great success despite the all-out efforts of the media to condemn this “sacrilege of all that is truly holy.” That night, millions of messages, all urging acceptance of the Space Traders’ offer, deluged the President and Congress.

7 January. Groups supporting the Space Traders’ proposition had from the beginning taken seriously blacks’ charges that acceptance of it would violate the Constitution’s most basic protections. Acting swiftly, and with the full cooperation of the states, they had set in motion the steps necessary to convene a constitutional convention in Philadelphia. (“Of course!” groaned Golightly when he heard of it.) And there, on this day, on the site of the original constitutional convention, delegates—chosen, in accordance with Article V of the Constitution, by the state legislatures—quickly drafted, and by a substantial majority passed, the Twenty-seventh Amendment to the Constitution of the United States. It declared:

Without regard to the language or interpretations previously given any other provision of this document, every United States citizen is subject at the call of Congress to selection for special service for periods necessary to protect domestic interests and international needs.

The amendment was scheduled for ratification by the states on 15 January in a national referendum. If ratified, the amendment would validate amendments to existing Selective Service laws authorizing the induction of

all blacks into special service for transportation under the terms of the Space Traders' offer.

8 January. Led by Rabbi Abraham Specter, a group of Jewish church and organizational leaders sponsored a mammoth anti-Trade rally in New York's Madison Square Garden. "We simply cannot stand by and allow America's version of the Final Solution to its race problem to be carried out without our strong protest and committed opposition." Thirty-five thousand Jews signed pledges to disrupt by all possible nonviolent means both the referendum and—if the amendment was ratified—the selection of blacks for 'special service.'

"Already," Rabbi Specter announced, "a secret Anne Frank Committee has formed, and its hundreds of members have begun to locate hiding places in out-of-the-way sites across this great country. Blacks by the thousands can be hidden for years if necessary until the nation returns to its senses.

"We vow this action because we recognize the fateful parallel between the plight of the blacks in this country and the situation of the Jews in Nazi Germany. Holocaust scholars agree that the Final Solution in Germany would not have been possible without the pervasive presence and the uninterrupted tradition of anti-Semitism in Germany. We must not let the Space Traders be the final solution for blacks in America."

A concern of many Jews not contained in their official condemnations of the Trade offer, was that, in the absence of blacks, Jews could become the scapegoats for a system so reliant on an identifiable group on whose heads less-well-off whites can discharge their hate and frustrations for societal disabilities about which they are unwilling to confront their leaders. Given the German experience, few Jews argued that "it couldn't happen here."⁶

9 January. Responding almost immediately to the Jewish anti-Trade rally, the Attorney General expressed his "grave concern" that what he felt certain was but a small group of Jews would, by acting in flagrant violation of the law of the land, besmirch the good names of all patriotic American Jews. For this reason, he said, he was releasing for publication the secret list, obtained by undercover FBI agents, of all those who had joined the

Anne Frank Committee. He stated that the release was needed so that all Americans could easily distinguish this group from the majority of patriotic and law-abiding Jewish citizens.

Retaliation was quick. Within hours, men and women listed as belonging to the committee lost their jobs; their contracts were canceled; their mortgages foreclosed; and harassment of them, including physical violence, escalated into a nationwide resurgence of anti-Semitic feeling. Groups on the far right, who were exploiting the growing support for the Trade, urged: “Send the blacks into space. Send the Jews into Hell.” The Jews who opposed the Trade were intimidated into silence and inaction. The leaders of Rabbi Specter’s group were themselves forced into hiding, leaving few able to provide any haven for blacks.

10 January. In the brief but intense pre-election day campaign, the pro-ratification groups’ major argument had an appeal that surprised even those who made it. Their message was straightforward:

The Framers intended America to be a white country. The evidence of their intentions is present in the original Constitution. After more than a hundred and thirty-seven years of good-faith efforts to build a healthy, stable interracial nation, we have concluded—as the Framers did in the beginning—that our survival today requires that we sacrifice the rights of blacks in order to protect and further the interests of whites. The Framers’ example must be our guide. Patriotism, and not pity, must govern our decision. We should ratify the amendment and accept the Space Traders’ proposition.

In response, a coalition of liberal opponents to the Space Traders’ offer sought to combine pragmatism and principle in what they called their “slippery Trade slope” argument. First, they proclaimed the strong moral position that trading away a group of Americans identifiable by race is wrong and violates our basic principles. The coalition aimed its major thrust, however, at the self-interest of white Americans: “Does not consigning blacks to an unknown fate set a dangerous precedent?” the liberals demanded. “Who will be next?”

In full-page ads, they pressed the point: “Are we cannibals ready to consume our own for profit? And if we are, the blacks may be only the first. If the Space Traders return with an irresistible offer for another group, the precedent will have been set, and none of us will be safe. Certainly not the minorities—Hispanics, Jews, Asians—and perhaps not even those of us

identifiable by politics or religion or geographic location. Setting such a precedent of profit could consume us all.”

Astutely sidestepping the Trade precedent arguments, the pro-Trade response focused on the past sacrifices of blacks. “In each instance,” it went, “the sacrifice of black rights was absolutely necessary to accomplish an important government purpose. These decisions were neither arbitrary nor capricious. Without the compromises on slavery in the Constitution of 1787, there would be no America. Nor would there be any framework under which those opposed to slavery could continue the struggle that eventually led to the Civil War and emancipation.

“And where and how might slavery have ended had a new government not been formed? On what foundation would the post—Civil War amendments been appended? Sacrifices by blacks were made, but those sacrifices were both necessary and eventually rewarding to blacks as well as the nation.”

In countering the anti-Trade contention that the sacrifice of black rights was both evil and unprecedented, pro-Traders claimed, “Beginning with the Civil War in which black people gained their liberty, this nation has called on its people to serve in its defense. Many men and women have voluntarily enlisted in the armed services, but literally millions of men have been conscripted, required to serve their country, and, if necessary, to sacrifice not simply their rights but also their lives.”

As for the argument that the sacrifice of black rights in political compromises was odious racial discrimination, pro-Trade forces contended that “fortuitous fate and not blatant racism” should be held responsible. Just as men and not women are inducted into the military, and even then only men of a certain age and physical and mental condition, so only some groups are destined by their role in the nation’s history to serve as catalyst for stability and progress.

“All Americans are expected to make sacrifices for the good of their country. Black people are no exceptions to this basic obligation of citizenship. Their role may be special, but so is that of many of those who serve. The role that blacks may be called on to play in response to the Space Traders’ offer is, however regrettable, neither immoral nor unconstitutional.”

A tremendous groundswell of public agreement with the pro-Trade position drowned out anti-Trade complaints of unfairness. Powerful as would have been the notion of seeing the Space Traders' offer as no more than a fortuitous circumstance, in which blacks might be called on to sacrifice for their country, the "racial sacrifice as historic necessity" argument made the pro-Trade position irresistible to millions of voters—and to their Congressional representatives.

11 January. Unconfirmed media reports asserted that U.S. officials tried in secret negotiations to get the Space Traders to take in trade only those blacks currently under the jurisdiction of the criminal justice system—that is, in prison or on parole or probation. Government negotiators noted that this would include almost one half of the black males in the twenty-to twenty-nine-year-old age bracket.* Negotiators were also reported to have offered to trade only blacks locked in the inner cities. But the Space Traders stated that they had no intention of turning their far-off homeland into an American prison colony for blacks. In rejecting the American offer, the Space Traders warned that they would withdraw their proposition unless the United States halted the flight of the growing numbers of middle-class blacks who—fearing the worst—were fleeing the country.

In response, executive orders were issued and implemented, barring blacks from leaving the country until the Space Traders' proposition was fully debated and resolved. "It is your patriotic duty," blacks were told by the White House, "to allow this great issue to be resolved through the democratic process and in accordance with the rule of law." To ensure that the Trade debate and referendum were concluded in a "noncoercive environment," all blacks serving in the military were placed on furlough and relieved of their weapons. State officials took similar action with respect to blacks on active duty in state and local police forces.

12 January. The Supreme Court, citing precedent dating back to 1849, rejected a number of appeals by blacks and their white supporters whose legal challenges to every aspect of the referendum process had been dismissed by lower courts as "political questions" best resolved by the body politic rather than through judicial review.⁹

The Supreme Court's order refusing to intervene in the Space Trader proposition was unanimous. The order was brief and *per curiam*, the Court agreeing that the Space Trader litigation lacked judicially discoverable and manageable standards for resolving the issues.¹⁰ The Court also noted that, if inducted in accordance with a constitutionally approved conscription provision, blacks would have no issues of individual rights for review. Even if the Court were to conclude that rights under the Fourteenth Amendment were deserving of greater weight than the authority of the new constitutional amendment up for ratification, the standards of national necessity that prompted the Court to approve the confinement of Japanese Americans during the Second World War,¹¹ would serve as sufficient precedent for the induction and transfer of African Americans to the Space Traders.

While not claiming to give weight to the public opinion polls reporting strong support for the Trade, the Court noted that almost a century earlier, in 1903, Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes had denied injunctive relief to six thousand blacks who petitioned the Court to protect their right to vote.¹² The bill alleged that the great mass of the white population intended to keep the blacks from voting; but, in view of such massive opposition, Holmes reasoned that ordering the blacks' names to be placed on the voting list would be "an empty form" unless the Court also mandated electoral supervision by "officers of the court."*

14 January. With the legal questions of the Trade resolved, the U.S. government announced that as a result of intensive negotiations with the Space Trader leaders, the latter had agreed to amend their offer and exclude from the Trade all black people seventy years old, and older, and all those blacks who were seriously handicapped, ill, and injured. In addition, a thousand otherwise-eligible blacks and their immediate families would be left behind as trustees of black property and possessions, all of which were to be stored or held in escrow in case blacks were returned to this country. Each of the thousand black "detainees" was required to pledge to accept a subordinate status with "suspended citizenship" until such time as the "special service inductees" were returned to the country. The administration selected blacks to remain who had records of loyalty to the conservative

party and no recorded instances of militant activity. Even so, many of those blacks selected declined to remain. “We will, like the others,” said one black who rejected detainee status, “take our chances with the referendum.”

15 January. Many whites had, to their credit, been working day and night to defeat the amendment; but, as is the usual fate of minority rights when subjected to referenda or initiatives,¹⁴ the outcome was never really in doubt. The final vote tally confirmed the predictions. By 70 percent to 30 percent, American citizens voted to ratify the constitutional amendment that provided a legal basis for acceptance of the Space Traders’ offer. In anticipation of this result, government agencies had secretly made preparations to facilitate the transfer. Some blacks escaped, and many thousands lost their lives in futile efforts to resist the joint federal and state police teams responsible for rounding up, cataloguing, and transporting blacks to the coast.

16 January. Professor Golightly and his family were not granted detainee status. Instead, the White House promised him safe passage to Canada for all his past services even though he had not made the patriotic appeal the President had requested of him. But, at the border that evening, he was stopped and turned back. It turned out the Secretary of the Interior had called to countermand his departure. Golightly was not surprised. What really distressed him was his failure to convince the black leaders of the anti-Trade coalition to heed their own rhetoric: namely that whites in power would, given the chance, do to privileged blacks what, in fact, they had done to all blacks.

“I wonder,” he murmured, half to himself, half to his wife, as they rode in a luxury limousine sent, in some irony, by the Secretary of the Interior to convey them to the nearest roundup point, “how my high-minded brothers at the conference feel now about their decision to fail with integrity rather than stoop to the bit of trickery that might have saved them.”

“But, Gleason,” his wife asked, “would our lives have really been better had we fooled the country into voting against the Trade? If the Space Traders were to depart, carrying away with them what they and everyone else says can solve our major domestic problems, wouldn’t people increasingly blame us blacks for increases in debt, pollution, and fuel

shortages? We might have saved ourselves—but only to face here a fate as dire as any we face in space.”

“I hope your stoic outlook helps us through whatever lies ahead,” Golightly responded as the car stopped. Then guards hustled him and his family toward the buses being loaded with other blacks captured at the Canadian border.

17 January. The last Martin Luther King holiday the nation would ever observe dawned on an extraordinary sight. In the night, the Space Traders had drawn their strange ships right up to the beaches and discharged their cargoes of gold, minerals, and machinery, leaving vast empty holds. Crowded on the beaches were the inductees, some twenty million silent black men, women, and children, including babes in arms. As the sun rose, the Space Traders directed them, first, to strip off all but a single undergarment; then, to line up; and finally, to enter those holds which yawned in the morning light like Milton’s “darkness visible.” The inductees looked fearfully behind them. But, on the dunes above the beaches, guns at the ready, stood U.S. guards. There was no escape, no alternative. Heads bowed, arms now linked by slender chains, black people left the New World as their forebears had arrived.

* In 1990, the figure was 24 percent, according to Justice Department data contained in a study funded by the Rand Corporation.⁷ The National Center on Institutions and Alternatives reported that 42 percent of the black men in the District of Columbia, aged eighteen through thirty-five, were enmeshed in the criminal justice system on any given day in 1991.⁸

* Justice Holmes wrote: “Unless we are prepared to supervise the voting in that state by officers of the court, it seems to us that all the plaintiff could get from equity would be an empty form. Apart from damages to the individual, relief from a great political wrong, if done, as alleged, by the people of a state and the state itself, must be given by them or by the legislature and political department of the Government of the United States.”¹³