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E D I T E D B Y

M O O N - K I E J U N G A N D

J O Ñ O H . C O S T A V A R G A S

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In solidarity with Black freedom struggles
for the abolishment of this world
and
with deep gratitude to all whose efforts—
political, theoretical,
practical, artistic, editorial, personal—
made this book possible

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I N T E R O -
D U C T I O N

ANTIBLACKNESS OF THE SOCIAL AND THE HUMAN

JOÃO H. COSTA VARGAS / MOON-KIE JUNG

“The brutality with which Negroes are treated in this country simply cannot be overstated. . . . For the horrors of the American Negro’s life there has been almost no language.” Of the approaching centenary of the Emancipation Proclamation, James Baldwin noted, “You know, and I know, that the country is celebrating one hundred years of freedom one hundred years too soon” (1962, 22, 94–95). In the past decade, the U.S. public was made aware of certain spectacular brutalities presently borne by Black people, owing largely to numerous video-recorded police and vigilante killings and the Movement for Black Lives. Reaching a tipping point in 2020, a series of such murders—of Ahmaud Arbery (February 23), Breonna Taylor (March 13), and, above all, George Floyd (May 25)—set off an unprecedented wave of protests; the violent deaths of Black trans people—Nina Pop (May 3), Tony McDade (May 27), Brayla Stone (June 25), Merci Mack (June 30), Shaki Peters (July 1), and Bree Black (July 3)—generated far less outrage.¹ This ongoing moment has been important, but, as is too often missed in academic as well as non-academic discussions, these cruelties, the latest additions to a vast and uncatalogued archive, were not exceptional but of a piece with a long history of global scale. Even those who sought to take full measure of the horrors continually understated them: some things, maybe many things,

needed fixing, but surely, it was no longer 1963, much less 1863. There was still almost no language.

This book grew out of our dissatisfaction with not only liberal but also most leftist analyses that failed to contend, unflinchingly, with *antiblackness*—its enduring depth, breadth, and violence. Wishing to address this failure collectively and interdisciplinarily, we reached out to scholars whose work we hold in utmost respect and asked them to engage with antiblackness without compromise—to summon the necessary language. As the following chapters suggest, such an endeavor entails a thoroughgoing critique and a fundamental overhaul of the social sciences and the humanities. For our part, in this introduction, we posit and think through the constitutive antiblackness underpinning the foundational categories of the modern world, the Social and the Human.² As a corollary, we then draw a conceptual distinction between antiblackness and racism, the latter proving to be inapt and inadequate in capturing the former.

* * *

To conclude *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation*, historian William Sewell Jr. returns to a most basic question: “So, then: What is ‘the social’ in social science?” (emphasis in original). Distilling a lifetime of interdisciplinary work across the social sciences, he answers, “The social is the complex and inescapable ontological ground of our common life as humans.” In the modern “disenchanted world,” the Social is the foundation of collective human existence and the “foundational term” for the scientific study of it (Sewell 2005, 325, 329, 369). Yet the social sciences fail to grasp what W. E. B. Du Bois (1935, 727) refers to as “the most magnificent drama in the last thousand years of human history”: the transoceanic, transcontinental enslavement of Africans. For example, the broadest of the social sciences that likewise claims the entirety of the Social, the modern social world, as its domain, sociology, despite thriving subfields on race and historical sociology, almost completely ignores racial slavery (Jung 2019). Even when the social sciences do acknowledge it and document it empirically, their theories of the Social—that is, social theories—inexorably misrecognize and euphemize it, most typically as a variety of coerced labor. In short, the social sciences—disciplines born of modernity that theorize, empirically investigate, and, indeed, do their part in constructing modernity—either do not or cannot comprehend arguably the most decisive and defining development in modern history.

How do we make sense of this wholly unnoticed yet fundamental paradox? A profoundly *antisocial* condition, slavery breaches the bounds of the Social, the social sciences' self-defined limits. The Social is not common ground for all. That slavery presents such an "extreme antisocial situation" (Steinmetz 2016, 101–2) is prefigured by the work of Orlando Patterson, ironically a sociologist, whose *Slavery and Social Death*, though influential outside his discipline, has had little theoretical impact within it. In the book, he carries out a comprehensive historical survey of slavery and identifies its "constituent elements": "slavery is the permanent, violent domination of natally alienated and generally dishonored persons." The enslaved is "a socially dead person" or, alternatively, "a social nonperson" (Patterson 1982, 1, 5, 7, 13). In other words, to be enslaved is to have no recognized social existence: in and against the social world but not of it.

Articulated to transoceanic trade, empire building, and capitalism, the modern enslavement of Black people, racialized through enslavement as Black, assumes global scale and significance, distinguishing it from pre-modern cases of slavery. In an earlier publication, Charles Mills (2013, 35), one of this book's contributors, reflects on the singular position of Black people in the modern world:

The peculiar experience of Africans under Western modernity, which originally turned them into "negroes" (lowercase), creating a race where previously none had existed, impressed a forced diaspora on them that took them to Europe and the Americas . . . , made the extraction of their labor central to the making of the modern world, . . . while still leaving them globally identifiable as the people who were appropriately designated a "slave race" in modernity, the very period when slavery was [otherwise] dead or dying in the West.

Taking the Social for granted as the universally shared ontological ground, social theories cannot but fail to see enslavement for what it is. A social nonperson is not a type of dominated social person among others, and social death is not a form of social injury among others. The "life" of the enslaved is radically, incommensurably insecure. They have no legitimate standing in the social world. They have no legitimate claims to power or resources, including their very "own" selves. For example, in the antebellum United States, the enslaved were subject to sale, and the ever-present threat of sale, and the internal slave trade forced the relocation of over two million, half of them "involv[ing] the break up of a family" (Johnson 1999, 5–7; 2013, 14). As Hortense Spillers alerts us, *kinship* or

family, as well as all other categories that constitute and make sense of social life, “loses meaning” in social death “*since it can be invaded at any given and arbitrary moment by the property relations*” (2003, 218, emphasis in original). The point is not that the enslaved always, continuously suffer such invasions. Constant terror does not require constant violation. Rather, “the fact of its possibility [is] experienced as an ever-present sense of impending doom that shadow[s] everything, every thought, every moment of [the enslaved’s] existence.” Basic needs of humans as social beings—such as senses of belonging, trust, and efficacy—are under relentless, “prolonged assault,” and “all ties [are] precarious” (Patterson 2018, ix). What we are suggesting is that relative to such extreme antisocial conditions, we must continually doubt the adequacy of and rethink all social categories of practice and analysis, including, as we discuss below, racism.

This state of abjection does not end with formal emancipation. Against the predominant narrative of progress and freedom across the humanities and the social sciences, Saidiya Hartman (2002, 757) argues that the “time of slavery” has yet to pass, that the present is still in its grip. Chattel slavery may be, for the most part, no more (Patterson and Zhuo 2018), but what follows in the wake of the “nonevent of emancipation” is the “afterlife of slavery”: “Slavery had established a measure of man and a ranking of life and worth that has yet to be undone. . . . Black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago” (Hartman 1997, 116; 2007, 6). Antiblackness, part and parcel of racial slavery and its afterlife, remains the extreme antisocial condition of possibility of the modern social world. To those who would dismiss out of hand a homologous continuity between racial slavery and the present, the stranglehold of the former on the latter, and insist upon a categorical break, we pose the questions: When did Black life start mattering? When were Black people freed from the ever-present sense of impending doom?

Since the dawn of modernity, Black people have been progressively, singularly positioned—materially and symbolically—as the “slave race” around the globe. By the end of the seventeenth century, for instance, slavery in the Spanish Empire, from the Americas to Asia, was abolished for all—in law, if not fully in practice—with the sole exception of Black people, which mirrored the contemporaneous hardening of Black enslavement in the English colonies (Seijas 2014; van Deusen 2015). Further, the ever-expanding antiblackness underwrote white as well as other nonblack claims to Humanity and freedom the world over (Buck-Morss 2000), in-

cluding in contexts without Black people, such as precolonial Korea (see chapter 7). Of the various color lines that have crisscrossed the planet, the one closing off Blackness, we contend, has been the most decisive and definitive, marking the outer boundary of the Human.

At the conclusion of the nineteenth century, in *The Philadelphia Negro*, Du Bois ([1899] 1996, 386–87) made a profound, underappreciated observation:

And still this widening of the idea of common Humanity is of slow growth and today but dimly realized. We grant full citizenship in the World-Commonwealth to the “Anglo-Saxon” (whatever that may mean), the Teuton and the Latin; then with just a shade of reluctance we extend it to the Celt and Slav. We half deny it to the yellow races of Asia, admit the brown Indians to an ante-room only on the strength of an undeniable past; but with the Negroes of Africa we come to a full stop, and in its heart the civilized world with one accord denies that these come within the pale of nineteenth century Humanity.

What Du Bois claimed about the nineteenth century, we affirm and extend to the twentieth and the twenty-first, and it is still precisely this “core concept of ‘the human’ that anchors so many humanities disciplines—history, literature, art history, philosophy, religion, anthropology, political theory, and others” (Lowe and Manjapra 2019, 23). The Human is to the humanities what the Social is to the social sciences: their foundational concept, the declared and assumed universality of which is ultimately belied and bounded by its “full stop” antiblackness. The Human, the modern human, defines itself in opposition to the Black (alleged) nonbeing: “The distaste must be for her. . . . Her blackness is static and dread,” as Toni Morrison writes of Pecola in *The Bluest Eye* ([1970] 2007, 49). Frantz Fanon (1967a) places this fear and hatred of Black people at the core of what he describes as the modern collective unconscious. The hatred of Black people is the hatred of the nonbeing, of the placeless, of the alleged nonhuman. As Rinaldo Walcott (2014, 93) notes,

What it means to be Human is continually defined against Black people and Blackness. The very basic terms of social Human engagement are shaped by anti-Black logics so deeply embedded in various normativities that they resist intelligibility as modes of thought and yet we must attempt to think them. . . . This global anti-black condition produced in the post-Columbus era, still and again manifests itself in numerous ways that have significantly

limited how Black people might lay claim to human-ness and therefore how Black people might impact on what it means to be Human in a post-Columbus world.

* * *

Following Baldwin, Spillers, Hartman, and others, we call attention to the perpetual, if unnoticed and ignored, theoretical incoherence generated by the deep-seated antiblackness of modernity. Applied to the plight of Black people, concepts and theories meant to index *social* domination and *human* suffering invariably falter and fall short. Under racial slavery, for instance, “the captive female body . . . could be converted into cash, speculated and traded as commodity, worked to death, taken, tortured, seeded, and propagated like any other crop, or murdered,” Hartman reminds us. “The work of sex and procreation was the chief motor for reproducing the material, social, and symbolic relations of slavery [that] . . . inaugurated a regime of racialized sexuality that continues to place black bodies at risk” (Hartman 2016, 168–69). In apperceiving such antisocial, antihuman conditions, even the most radical theories of the Social and the Human, much less their mainstream counterparts, cannot but misrepresent. What conceptual vocabulary is up to the task? Exploitation or primitive accumulation? Patriarchy or misogyny? Hegemony or subalternity? Relative to antiblackness, such categories “are all thrown in crisis” (Spillers 2003, 221). Misrecognition and euphemism are inevitable.

There are at least two possible readings of the passage from *The Philadelphia Negro* quoted above. Humanity can be imagined as a continuum, with the full inclusion of the “Anglo-Saxon” on one end and the full exclusion of the “Negroes of Africa” on the other. One could then read hope into the phrase “widening of the idea of common Humanity” and envisage the ultimate inclusion of Black people. Explicitly and implicitly, this reading is manifest in more than a century of social-scientific research since the publication of what is now increasingly considered a foundational text of social science: Black people’s continued position on the wrong end of countless social measures, yoked to an enduring hope, or at least possibility, of eventual equality and freedom. Even if unuttered, the hope is ingrained in the analytical assumption that the same social theories, concepts, models, and variables must obtain from one end to the other of any posited continuum.

A second, alternative reading, which this book puts forth, is to take seriously the nature of the difference that the “full stop” denotes and, as the

ensuing chapters demonstrate, the character of the “one accord” that “denies” Blackness from the pale of Humanity. Even when viewed through radical social theories, all the world is a continuum, and Black people are not excepted. For instance, their enslavement is most frequently conceptualized as one, if the most extreme, regime of modern labor exploitation among others. Adopting and adapting Marxism, Du Bois himself would later, in *Black Reconstruction in America*, conceive of the Black enslaved as the “Black worker,” and in between the enslaved Black worker and the “white worker” is arrayed a range of racialized and coerced workers—the other members of the “dark proletariat” (1935, 15–17). Unsurprisingly, the “worker” here is “as a category absent gender and sexual differentiation” (Hartman 2016, 166).³ Still, even on its own terms, Du Bois’s Marxism, and its central figure of the worker, could not but come up against its intrinsic limitations as it sought to make the Black (male) enslaved legible to the world: “No matter how degraded the factory hand, he is not real estate. . . . In this vital respect, the slave laborer differed from all others of his day. . . . It was a sharp accentuation of control over men beyond the modern labor reserve or the contract coolie system” (Du Bois 1935, 10–11).⁴ Not an anomalous appurtenance to sameness or similarity, this vital difference is *the* difference that makes all the difference in and for the world. For Blackness and Black people, to be rendered recognizable to the Social and the Human is to be misrecognized beyond recognition. Like Du Bois’s pale of Humanity, analytical categories of the Social and the Human do not extend to the antisocial, antihuman condition of antiblackness without being overstretched, and analogies and appeals to antiblackness, such as *wage slavery*, to represent nonblack suffering and domination register as overwrought.

The incongruity, the conceptual crisis, bespeaks the incommensurability of antiblackness and the need to distinguish antiblackness from racism.⁵ The analytical and political imperative of establishing a break from the social concept of racism emanates from the recognition of antiblackness as an ontological condition of possibility of modern world sociality, whereas racism is an aspect of that sociality. A world without racism requires deep transformations in social practices and structures. A world without antiblackness necessitates an entirely new conception of the social, which is to say a radically different world altogether.

A framework of antiblackness stresses the uniqueness of Black positionality and experiences relative to those of nonblack social groups. It proposes that the defining antagonism of modernity is Black-nonblack (Wilderson 2010). Deriving from theoretical efforts and historical and

sociological analyses, such a perspective suggests that Black people (a) are not only exceptionally and systematically excluded socially—from housing markets, quality education, effective health care, safety, and life—but (b) are the nonbeing that underpins and engenders modern nonblack subjectivities. These propositions assume a logic of social and ontological abjection, rather than domination or subjection, of Black people. Such logic is antiblackness.

Whereas from the perspective of racism, racial and other related and intersecting forms of oppression can be eliminated, or at least ameliorated, from the perspective of antiblackness such an assumption, or hope, is suspended relative to Black people.⁶ Antiblackness suggests that rather than with a set of social and institutional practices, the problem lies with the very notions of the Social and the Human underlying these practices and their constitutive rejection of Blackness and Black people. What would be the effect of reforming social and institutional practices if the basic assumptions authorizing such practices are left untouched? Or, to put the problem more directly, how would we go about proposing an entirely new type of sociality or humanity? How would we go about rejecting Humanity without rejecting the modern world, the Social?

Fanon emphasizes the singular positionality of the Black, who “has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man” (1967a, 110). In an antiblack world, the Black nonsubject is constitutive of an asymmetrical social space of positionalities from which she is excluded. The Black nonsubject provides the fixed point against which all other positionalities attain social freight and legibility, yet her presence is negated, erased, ignored. Put differently, per our reading of the passage from *The Philadelphia Negro*, while Black people fall outside the continuum of Humanity, they generate and define the continuum precisely because they are its constitutive, asymptotic other—the alleged nonbeings who delimit the social world but are not of it. By contrast, though subject to various types of combined oppressions, nonblack subjects of varied racial categories, genders, sexual orientations, social classes, and nationalities nonetheless occupy legible positions on the continuum of Humanity. Having any, even minimal, ontological resistance in the eyes of the white cisheteronormative propertied man is an all-important difference from having none—“the total absence of human recognition” (Morrison [1970] 2007, 48)—a difference in kind that is continually misrecognized as a difference in degree.

Antiblackness is an antisocial logic that not only dehumanizes Black people but also renders abject all that is associated with Blackness.⁷ This

generalized abjection helps us grasp the ways in which, historically and contemporarily, Black people's embattled bodies, spaces, knowledge, culture, citizenship, and humanity have served as the counterpoints to safety, rationality, belonging, and life. Unlike racism, which tends to focus on analogous experiences of oppression, antiblackness stresses the singularity of Black people's dehumanization, antihumanization.

To fully engage with this perspective's implications and consequences, it is important that we avoid a common and understandable tendency: the identification of counterexamples that affirm Black people's humanity. Of course, we know of countless examples, historical and contemporary, of a radical Black humanity—a vital humanity that exceeds the present social world, one that operates according to ethical and aesthetic principles not reducible to normative parameters, one that categorically rejects dehumanization. It is the humanity of “the commodity who speaks,” of those who inhabit the space of the fantastic and “refuse victimization.”⁸

Black humanity is never in question. The point of stressing antiblackness is not to negate Black people's humanity or accept Black a-humanity. Rather, it is to locate in the globally shared notion of the Human the source of Black people's dehumanization, suffering, and death. It is not to negate or dismiss Black people's agency, but rather to reframe Black agency as necessarily and always engaging the fundamentally antiblack world as it is and projecting radically alternative conceptions of what it is to be human and live in society.

* * *

“Slavery is with us still. We are haunted by slavery. We are animated by slavery,” Anthony Paul Farley, one of this volume's contributors, argues in an earlier publication. Antiblackness “is slavery *and* segregation *and* neosegregation *and* every situation in which the distribution of material or spiritual goods follows the colorline” (Farley 2005, 221; emphases in original). The persistence, multiplicity, and interconnectedness of diasporic antiblack forces that trace to racial slavery are impossible to negate, given the greatly disproportionate presence of Black people in spaces of dispossession and death, physical and social. Singular in their extensiveness and intensiveness, such antiblack dynamics include the targeted criminalization and industrial warehousing of people in jails, prisons, immigration detention centers, juvenile facilities, and foster care institutions; intensifying protocols of punishment and confinement of ostensibly uncoercive institutions,

such as schools, universities, hospitals, and welfare; intractable levels of unemployment and subemployment; absurd deficit in wealth accumulation; hypersegregation in housing and schools, as well as looming gentrification; blocked access to quality education; exposure to environmental toxins leading to birth defects, chronic illnesses, and death; premature death by preventable causes, including treatable cardiovascular, stress, and birth-related conditions; the AIDS/HIV pandemic; and ever-outlying rates of homicide, domestic violence, and other forms of state and nonstate coercion. This litany is but a sample of the afterlife of slavery that characterizes the Black diaspora.⁹

The essays assembled in this book examine antiblackness across expansive coordinates of time, across the modern era. Antiblackness, they find, fundamentally structures the past and the present, from nineteenth-century slavery to the 2020 U.S. Census, from precolonial to colonial to postcolonial formations of state, empire, nation, and civil society. The chapters collectively disrupt the deeply taken-for-granted assumption of an inexorable, if halting, march through history toward recognition and rights for all, including Black people. Rather than a relic, anomaly, or contradiction being gradually overcome, antiblackness is conceptualized as foundational to modernity.

The essays likewise span vast coordinates of space, from Great Britain, France, and the United States to Haiti, India, Korea, Palestine, and South Africa, from the White House to plantations, convict lease camps, prisons, and schools. Across such disparate geographies, we find a coherent pattern of antiblackness, as modern subjects—not only Europeans or whites but also various nonblack subalterns—define themselves and construct a world, the modern social world, in opposition to the Black nonsubject. The challenge, which the contributors confront head-on rather than sidestepping, is to grapple with the common fact of antiblackness while attending to the specific inflections of particular historical moments and contexts.

The present book is unique in bringing together scholars in and beyond Black studies. Black studies scholars provide robust retheorization of antiblackness and novel empirical investigations. Deployed to trouble seemingly critical or liberatory categories such as democracy, mass incarceration, feminism, and citizenship, antiblackness gains conceptual complexity as it reveals essential but previously hidden dimensions of theoretical discourses, everyday interactions, and institutional processes, historical and contemporary.

Placing antiblackness at the center, contributors whose primary specialization is not Black studies scrutinize anew apparently unconnected histories and peoples. Antiblackness shapes and haunts plantation agriculture in colonial India in the nineteenth century, Koreans' Declaration of Independence in 1919, Indigeneity and settler colonialism in the contemporary United States and Palestine, and politics over the racial categorization of Latinx. What the authors glean are not merely overlooked stories and data to be assimilated into existing literatures but fundamental reorientations. In heterogeneous contexts far and wide, antiblackness structures and bounds the Social and the Human.

What holds this book together is not theoretical consensus. Not every contributor would wholly agree with this introduction or all of the other chapters. Rather, the gathered authors each consider antiblackness from their particular vantage points but with the common goal of pushing past accepted understandings. Working in a humanities discipline that is starkly devoid of and hostile to Black people and Black thought (Botts et al. 2014; Curry and Curry 2018), philosopher **CHARLES W. MILLS** contends that Black philosophy, born of "racial subordination in modernity," is singularly positioned to illuminate the workings of race and modernity as "the position of Blacks is unique among all the groups racialized as nonwhite by the modern West": "For no other nonwhite group has race been so enduringly constitutive of their identity, so foundational for racial capitalism, and so lastingly central to white racial consciousness and global racial consciousness in general." Interweaving theory and autobiography, **FRANK B. WILDERSON III** provides a precis of Afropessimism and illustrates it with personal experiences that, in part, inspired it. Recalling white comrades in the African National Congress and a Palestinian friend in Minneapolis, he lays bare the "ruse of analogy" at play in even revolutionary politics and social theories as they relate to Blackness and Black people. In critical dialogue with Afropessimism, **IYKO DAY** takes up the question that, according to Patrice Douglass (2018, 116), is being insistently asked of it—"does Afro-pessimism adequately deal with the question of black gender?"—and ultimately answers in the negative through a heterodox Marxist critique of racial capitalism. Juxtaposing Marx, Freud, the Gospels, Goethe, Wittgenstein, C. L. R. James, and others, legal scholar **ANTHONY PAUL FARLEY** outlines a general theory of antiblackness that, among other things, posits "the rule of law [as] nothing other than the endless unfolding of the primal scene of accumulation" of the Middle Passage.

The next set of chapters ground their analyses in histories of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Focusing on the production and cir-

culatation of Carolina rice, **ZACH SELL** narrates a global history of racial capitalism and colonial empires, linking settler slavery of antebellum Georgia and South Carolina to the mills and markets of England to colonial plantations of British India. At bottom, antiblackness was the “foundation stone” (Du Bois 1935, 5) not only in the form of enslaved labor but also in the form of “negative recognition,” of the enslaved’s indispensable but overlooked knowledge of rice cultivation without which colonial efforts to introduce Carolina rice production in India were predestined to fail.¹⁰ Hartman’s generative concepts of the nonevent of emancipation (1997, 116) and the afterlife of slavery (2007, 6) are vividly borne out in **SARAH HALEY**’s account of Black women ensnared in the Jim Crow carceral regime. Under ever-present conditions of physical and sexual terror, they were compelled to materially and symbolically “reproduce white life at the detriment of their own” and forced to engage in “a form of perverse social reproduction”: the reproductive labor of their own incarceration—“activity that maintains the barest life . . . for the maintenance and naturalization of the category of Black prisoner and the maintenance of a system of captivity that extracted industrial and agricultural labor to the point of human expiration.” Studying a context halfway around the globe from the U.S. South, **JAE KYUN KIM** and **MOON-KIE JUNG** make sense of Black people’s persistent presence in the public discourse of, despite their physical absence in, precolonial Korea at the turn of the twentieth century. Buffeted by closing imperial forces, Koreans managed their intense colonial vulnerability and imagined their place in the modern world through the figure of its absolute other, the enslaved African, to lasting colonial and postcolonial consequences.

Exploring dimensions of captivity as political subjugation, the four subsequent chapters provide analytical insights into the carceral logics of antiblackness. **DYLAN RODRÍGUEZ** examines the ways in which the term “mass incarceration” has been politically domesticated to conform to a reformist agenda. Such an approach ultimately fails to address incarceration as a fundamentally antiblack logic and methodology of social management. Focusing on the experiences of a Black woman in Britain who for decades fought against police abuse in London, and providing a genealogy of the repression against African Caribbean women contesting state violence in postcolonial Britain, **MOHAN AMBIKAIPAKER** shows how gendered antiblackness is at the core of Western liberal juridical rule. **CONNIE WUN** presents an analysis of the narratives of six Black girls disciplined in their high school and argues that antiblackness includes everyday forms of surveillance and punishment en-

acted in accordance with institutional protocols. As part of a larger structure of carcerality, schools draw from and reproduce antiblack logics according to which captivity is policy. Framing Sally Hemings, Michelle Obama, and Deborah Danner as *captive maternals*, **JOY JAMES** argues that their experiences, including survival strategies, suggest the limits of democracy. Their experiences as feminized bodies link antiblackness, violence, and presidential powers. Despite the different historical periods they inhabit, the three women share vulnerabilities traceable to global racial slavery.

The final part of the book is composed of studies of contemporary dynamics that unsettle received narratives, assumptions, and theories to reveal the breadth and depth of antiblackness. **CRYSTAL M. FLEMING** asserts that in France, antiblackness is both quotidian and structurally embedded—it is part of what it means to be French. Yet, in the French context, antiblack racism is seldom related to chattel slavery. Such denial, or what Charles Mills (1997) calls “epistemology of ignorance,” makes it difficult to grasp historical and structural aspects of antiblack racism, including the ways in which European whites continue to benefit from it. Analyzing U.S. as well as Latin American census information, **TANYA KATERÍ HERNÁNDEZ** argues that antiblack racism and its corresponding aversion to Blackness explain Latinxs’ strong preference for the white racial category, regardless of one’s physical characteristics. Thus, the proposal to collapse “Hispanic” ethnicity into a single racial category—replacing the current two-part question about “Hispanic” ethnicity and racial identity—would make it even more difficult to collect data on Black Latinxs and effectively render them invisible. Drawing from Joy James’s (2016; this volume) theorizations of the womb and the captive maternal, **SARAH IHMOUD** contends that Zionist settler violence against Palestinians in occupied territory is energized by an antiblack logic that seeks to preserve the Jewish body from the imagined threat of contamination. Grappling with seemingly irreconcilable critiques of settler colonialism and antiblackness, **JODI A. BYRD** reflects on “how Indigeneity situates itself in and benefits from antiblackness” and proposes that “choosing a return to what remains will allow us to turn away from nationhood, sovereignty, and jurisdiction and toward governance, relationality, kinship, and land.”

Notes

- 1 This book went into production in early 2020, before the protests.

- 2 We capitalize the Social and the Human to specify their modernity.
- 3 Hartman goes on to demonstrate how “gender” and “sexual differentia-
tion” as social concepts lose coherence when applied to “the captive female
body”: “Depending on the angle of vision or critical lexicon, the harnessing
of the body as an instrument for social and physical reproduction unmakes
the slave as gendered subject or reveals the primacy of gender and sexual
differentiation in the making of the slave” (2016, 168).
- 4 For a more detailed analysis of the enslaved and the worker in relation
to Du Bois’s *Black Reconstruction in America*, see Jung (2019). In rela-
tion to Gramsci, see Wilderson (2003).
- 5 In our view, the dominant way of thinking about antiblackness has been to
conceptualize it, whether explicitly or implicitly, as a synonym for antiblack
racism. Our own previous work, including earlier versions of this chapter,
has not been clear on this point.
- 6 Derrick Bell’s writings, of course, are an exception to the assumption that
racism can be eliminated (see, e.g., Bell 1995).
- 7 Here we reference Fred Moten’s longer discussion of Black abjection. It is
important to note that in Moten’s work, Black people object to their abjec-
tion in multiple ways, including aesthetic practice (see Moten 2003).
- 8 “The commodity who speaks” is, of course, Fred Moten’s (2003, 8) formu-
lation. The space of the fantastic is Cedric Robinson’s rendition of Black
spaces, expressed at an event at the Southern California Library in 2012
(see Vargas 2018). Joy James (this volume) has written on the refusal to be
victimized. See also Jared Sexton’s (2011) “The Social Life of Social Death.”
- 9 Especially in officially postracial contexts, we could speak of saturation
points beyond which antiblack processes spill onto and affect even non-
blacks (Vargas 2018).
- 10 With regard to the cotton industry of the same period, Du Bois (1935, 5)
wrote, “Black labor became the foundation stone not only of the South-
ern social structure, but of Northern manufacture and commerce, of the
English factory system, of European commerce, of buying and selling on a
world-wide scale.”

P A R T I

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0 N E

CHARLES W. MILLS

No discipline in Western thought is more centrally linked to the general ideal of enlightenment, as well as to modernity's specific historical Enlightenment, than philosophy, the oldest discipline of them all. The metaphor of bringing light into darkness, of illuminating blackness, is most famously expressed, after all, in Plato's celebrated Allegory of the Cave, from the book generally seen as one of the foundational texts of the Western tradition, the *Republic* (Plato 2012, bk. 7). Analogized to the sun, the Form of the Good (uppercase because for Plato it's a transcendental entity) has the capacity to illuminate the cave dwellers' world of shadows with both factual and moral insight, knowledge of what actually is the case and of what, accordingly, should be done. Moreover, light is, of course, paradigmatically associated with whiteness, and—in the standard array of synonyms and antonyms to be found in any dictionary or thesaurus—opposed to blackness. In terms of actual electromagnetic radiation, any physicist will be happy to inform us that white light already includes all the colors of the visible spectrum, whereas blackness turns out to be not really a color at all, but the absence of all light and color. Given the racialization that accompanies modernity, it is then unsurprising that metaphor, color symbolism, and Euro-identity all fuse: whiteness becomes the identity of both enlightenment and of the human bearers of enlightenment. Whiteness is light; whiteness is all-encompassing; whiteness is the universal; whiteness is Euro-illumination. So how could enlightenment possibly be Black,

considering that this is the very color, or noncolor, of the darkness we want illuminated and eliminated? Don't any metaphors drawn from this realm automatically foredoom the enterprise?

And the obvious answer is . . . it all depends on how you choose your metaphors (Lakoff and Johnson 2003).

Consider another way of looking at things, another set of linked metaphors—though still within the realm of the visual—drawn from a very different text, one classic in its own way as a representation of the racialized optics of modernity: Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* ([1952] 1995, 5). Here we are given a very different perspective on whiteness and enlightenment: whiteness as glare, whiteness as dazzle, whiteness as blinding, whiteness as “Monopolated Light & Power.” In the prologue to Ellison's novel, his nameless Black narrator—surrounded in his secret basement by 1,369 lightbulbs—tells us, “I've illuminated the blackness of my invisibility—and vice versa” ([1952] 1995, 13). But the illumination he has attained over the novel's quest (as he looks back in a prologue that is really a postscript) has been achieved despite, not with the help of, the Jim-Crowed white power source represented by Monopolated, and its attempted totalitarian control of his vision. Whiteness here is constructed not by inclusion of the other colors but by their official exclusion, an “Optic White” for “Keeping America Pure,” even if an unacknowledged Black base lies at the heart of its “purity” (Ellison [1952] 1995, 196, 212–18). Figuring whiteness in this way demystifies its chromatic pretensions and the related illusions of the Eurocentric worldview that has biased objective inquiry into the workings of the world. Through this alternative prism, whiteness is a willed darkness; whiteness is segregated investigation; whiteness is the particular masquerading as the universal (Alcoff 2015). So, from this reversed perspective, it is not Blackness that needs illumination but Blackness that does the illuminating. The meaning of my title—assuming you, the reader, took it the conventional way—has been shockingly inverted.

Periodizing “Black” Philosophy

In this opening chapter, I want to explore the concept of a Black Enlightenment, in philosophy and more generally, that has historically been aimed at illuminating the darkness of whiteness. By now it is a familiar criticism that the definite article in “the Enlightenment” is misleading (Outram 2005). There are multiple Enlightenments, demarcated, for example, by geog-

raphy, chronology, and political orientation. Thus, we have the standard lineup, both within and outside continental Europe (though not outside the European world order), of, for instance, the Scottish, Dutch, German, French, and Ibero-American enlightenments, each with their respective timings. External to that world (at least in conventional cartographies) we have the less familiar Islamic Enlightenment, whether of eighteenth-century modernity onward (de Bellaigue 2017), or—challenging standard periodizations as well as standard mapmaking—in the Arab influence on the putatively self-created, springing from its own brow, earlier European Renaissance (al-Khalili 2012). Then there are political categorizations, as in Jonathan Israel's (2001) contrast between conservative/moderate and radical enlightenments. So the potential plurality of reference of the concept must be borne firmly in mind: the space, time, and politics of enlightenment are all variable.

Here I am urging us to formally recognize a variety not only not usually included in these accepted taxonomies, but indeed—as just indicated above—likely to appear oxymoronic in its very conception: the Black Enlightenment, linked with Black philosophy. But obviously I need to clarify how I understand the latter term, and since this is a contested issue, my discussion will be not just a reporting of different usages, but will be in part stipulative, making a case for what I think is the most appropriate one.

First, a quick reminder. Since humanity as a whole comes out of Africa, the philosophy produced by Afro-descendant populations really includes all philosophy. So—as an ironic twist on the opening section—far from whiteness being in a position to exclude Blackness, whiteness (including all the European Enlightenments) would have been subsumed into Blackness from the start. But that would just be a glib debating point. Obviously, the reference is to the populations of the sub-Saharan continent conventionally characterized as Black today, not those who left it thousands of years earlier, whose Afro ancestry is from a different epoch.

However, at least in my recommended usage, Black philosophy does not include all the philosophizing of the former group either. Blackness for me denotes not just a particular range of skin colors and phenotypical features, a designation that can be applied by us to populations in past epochs independently of how these populations actually thought of themselves, but to populations racialized as Black, and (generally) identifying themselves as such. As I am suggesting we use the term, then, Blackness is a racial category, not just a physical description, and as such it cannot exist before racial Blackness exists, and thus not before race exists. Given

the stigmatization of Afro-descendant populations as intellectual inferiors, certainly in modernity but possibly in premodernity also, one can completely understand why some scholars would want to insist on a tradition of Black philosophy that goes all the way back to antiquity, including ancient Egypt. See, for example, *I Am Because We Are: Readings in Black Philosophy* (Hord and Lee 1995). The rationale is obvious. People categorized as white today take pride in the achievements of classical Greek and Roman civilization, identifying the luminaries of the period as their white ancestors regardless of whether they thought of themselves that way or not. So the idea is to establish a comparable genealogy of age and prestige of Black thought. For our purposes, though, the crucially defining features of Blackness and the Black Enlightenment do not have this transhistorical character but arise specifically in opposition to racial subordination.

Thus at least three necessary conditions have to be met: the existence of race as a social category, the existence of Blackness as one of the extant racial categories, and the subordination of Africans and Afro-descendant populations under that designation. Suppose, to begin with, that race (race-thinking, racism) is a product of the modern period, as many historians of race have contended, such as Ivan Hannaford (1995), Nell Irvin Painter (2011), and George Fredrickson (2015). They recognize, of course, that the premodern world, like our own, was filled with prejudices and bigotries of all kinds—tribal, ethnic, national, religious—but deny that any of them, singularly or in synthesis, mutated into a racial form. It is really only with modernity, and the simultaneous developments of the European taxonomizing of the world and the European voyages of discovery of the world (or, less euphemistically, conquest), that racialized categorization and racialized stigmatization begin. So Black philosophy (as shaped by racial Blackness) cannot exist because race does not exist. Thinkers in the Africa of, say, 1000 CE would not have been Black, and so would not have been doing Black philosophy when they philosophized. Rather, they would have been philosophizing as Yoruba, Akan, Kikuyu, and so forth.

However, this short periodization of race has come under increasing challenge in recent decades. A new body of work in medieval studies—for example, that of Debra Higgs Strickland (2003) and Geraldine Heng (2018)—is arguing that Christian iconography in the Middle Ages involved representations of enemy populations that at least approached, and possibly became, racialization, albeit not in modern terms. For Strickland (2003), as indicated by her title (*Saracens, Demons, and Jews*), the inclusion of actual human beings (Jews, “Saracens” [Muslims], “Ethiopians” [Africans], and

Mongols) among the “monstrous races” inherited from Pliny the Elder’s *Natural History* had the effect of creating a human teratology of the bestial alongside the one-legged, one-eyed, and dog-headed demonic creatures of myth and nightmare. Heng (2018) adds Gypsies and “Skraelings” (North American Indians) to the list of stigmatized groups. So, the point would be that long before what we now think of as the birth of modern scientific Enlightenment racism, Christian culture had demarcated, among the ranks of humanity, those whose humanity was at best questionable, at worst untenable. And as noted, “Ethiopians” (the designation for Africans in general) were part of this derogated group of subhumans.

Strickland points out “the interchangeability of demons and Ethiopians” in these texts, with Ethiopians often “number[ing] among Christ’s tormentors in Passion imagery,” “based primarily on one physical characteristic: blackness” (2003, 81–83). As she summarizes things:

The central idea in these writings is the symbolic equation of black with spiritual darkness, implying the concomitant equivalence of white with spiritual enlightenment, as expressed in the Gospel verse . . . “God is light and in him there is no darkness.” . . . In effect, the blackness of the Ethiopians obliterated their humanity, paving the way for the abstract understanding necessary for ethnic stereotyping. That is, Ethiopians were transformed from living humans into symbols [of the demonic]. (2003, 84, 86)

Similarly, Heng writes:

Within Christianity the color black accrued a slate of negative significations that yoked the “abstraction” of blackness . . . to sin, ignorance, shame, error, and the state of unredemption preceding forgiveness and salvation, as well as—more perniciously and unforgivingly—to the devil, the demonic, the infernal, and the damned. . . . A more troubling development was the visualization of *black skin in tandem with a sub-Saharan phenotype*, in the portrayals of torturers and executioners, especially the killers and tormentors of revered people such as John the Baptist and Christ. (2018, 186–87)

Unquestionably, then, we have here a religiously based, antiblack ethnocentrism of a premodern kind. But do we yet have racialization and racism? Strickland (2003) does not take that step—indeed, the term “race” does not even appear in her index. But in the later work by Heng (2018), any theoretical ambivalence and ambiguity are removed, as boldly announced in her title, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*. We need, in Heng’s opinion, to recognize the protean character of race

and not tie ourselves to the biologicistic concept associated with modernity. Thus, for her the established short periodization is mistaken and needs to be extended to the medieval period.

But an even more radical challenge comes from a cohort of classical scholars. Agreeing that dominant conceptions of race and racism in the literature are tendentious, they reject both the short and what could be designated the medium periodization for a long one. Here the crucial text is Benjamin Isaac's (2004) *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*, that—in another unequivocal title—backdates the origins of race and racism long beyond Heng's medieval periodization, indeed beyond the birth of Christianity, all the way to the classical world. In fact, Isaac (2004, 172–81) argues that the pioneering racist theorist of the Western tradition is none other than Aristotle. Though Aristotle concedes that no visible markers identify the “natural slaves” he discusses in the *Politics*, the fact that he links them with non-Greeks, particularly Persians, is, for Isaac, sufficient for this to count as racialization (Aristotle 2013, bk. 1). Indeed, part of the point of Isaac's book is to contest what he sees as the question-begging conception of races presupposed by race-as-modern theorists (color-coded populations—white, Black, brown [sometimes “yellow” also], red—originating from different continents or subcontinents). For Isaac, such a conceptualization turns the question of the periodization of race into a stipulative verbal exercise rather than an open-ended empirical historical investigation, since terms are being so defined that only modern race will be recognized as race. Instead, we should work with a nontendentious definition that focuses on the essentials (unalterable group hierarchy, in his view) rather than accidental traits like skin color.

A later conference volume coedited with other like-minded scholars, *The Origins of Racism in the West*, further explores the implications of such a revisionist view for various human groups (Eliav-Feldon, Isaac, and Ziegler 2013). And once again it turns out—see the chapter by Goldenberg—that negative “racial” representations of Blacks (as, once more, “Ethiopians”) can be found in the period, in Greco-Roman antiquity, before even the Christian epoch (CE), and inherited by the Church Fathers, such as Origen (Goldenberg 2013). Moreover, as Goldenberg documents in his own earlier book, *The Curse of Ham*, the biblical story in Genesis (9: 18–25) of Noah's curse on Ham, supposedly dooming his son Canaan's descendants to perpetual slavery, would come to be interpreted in both the Arab and Christian worlds as referring to Africans, thereby becoming “the single greatest justification for Black slavery for more than a thousand years” (Goldenberg 2003, 1).

In sum, if the argument in these works of revisionist racial scholarship is vindicated, it would mean that antiblack racialization at the ideological level does indeed long predate modernity, fundamentally shaping the iconography and eschatology of Christianity. So two of my suggested three necessary conditions would have been met. But still, they alone would not suffice for the emergence of Black philosophy as I am proposing we conceptualize it. What is also required is that such stigmatizing representations be part of material structures of racial domination, racializing Africans ontologically, and thereby shaping an oppositional Black consciousness, in which this imputed demeaning identity is resisted and Blackness revalorized.

In other words, people from the classical pagan Greco-Roman world and the later medieval Christian world could have had such negative views about “Ethiopians” without in general also having the power to inflict them in the form of group-subordinating institutions. Africans could have been completely out of reach, in African nations beyond Greco-Roman or medieval Christian European power, completely oblivious to the fact that they were being so racialized and stigmatized. Or it could be that even as minority African inhabitants of these polities, they were subject only to individual discriminatory acts, not systemic race-based oppression. Ancient and medieval slavery in the West, for example, is generally seen as raceless, both because of the aforementioned conventional judgment that this was a preracial epoch, and because people from all ethnic groups and communities were enslaved. So even if—in the light of this new body of revisionist scholarship—we do now need to entertain the possibility of premodern racialized slavery, it does not, on the evidence, seem to have targeted Blacks as such.

(Slavery in the medieval Islamic world is another story, and some scholars have contended that differential treatment of Black slaves can indeed be found here [Lewis 1992; Segal 2002]. The fact that the Arabic word for Blacks, *abīd*, is the same as the word for slaves is certainly linguistic testimony to such a connection [Hardy 2002]. So this would be a possible example of premodern Black racial subordination in the non-Western world, which might have generated oppositional texts that meet our definition. But our focus in this chapter is on what has come to be characterized as the Western world.)

My claim, then, is that even if the existence of premodern Western racism, including antiblack racism, can be established, it is only with Western modernity that we begin to get the systematized racial subordination of

Africans as Blacks, and the corresponding experience of such subordination, that lays the grounds for Black philosophy in my recommended sense, and the possibility of a Black Enlightenment. So modernity remains crucial in my preferred periodization; Black philosophy would constitute one component of what has recently come to be termed “Afro-modern political thought” (Gooding-Williams 2009; Hanchard 1999). As against negative but socially impotent characterizations in the distant Euro-world, or isolated discriminatory transactions within the Euro-world, it is the advent of the Atlantic slave trade at a time when European enslavement of its own population was dying out, and the later colonial conquest of Africa, that racializes Blacks as a group, that indeed creates Blacks as a category. Only then can we talk about material and ideological circumstances pervasive and enduring enough to act as the ground for the development of Black philosophy.

But possibility must be distinguished from actuality. Even after the emergence of Blackness as a racial social category and institutionalized reality in particular geographical locations, it seems dubious to me to categorize all the philosophizing of Blacks in these locations as Black philosophy. If the mere identity of the practitioners constituted a sufficient condition, then work by Blacks in mainstream metaphysics, epistemology, logic, philosophy of language, value theory, history of philosophy, and so on that is in no way informed by Blackness or race or the African American experience would count as Black philosophy even if it were indistinguishable from work in these areas produced by mainstream European and Euro-American philosophers. Clearly such a conclusion is quite counterintuitive. So we need to differentiate the identity of the philosophers from the identity of the philosophy and separate the question of who they are from the question of what it is. Think of the analogy of women philosophers, some of whom take gender as their primary theme, others of whom do not. Blackness, as I am suggesting we understand it, is to race as feminism is to gender (though there will be non-Black critical racial philosophies also). Black philosophy will, of course (at least at the present), be done predominantly by Black philosophers—this is not a contingent correlation. But it cannot be turned into a definitional truth. And by the same token, just as men can be feminists and do feminist philosophy, so other people of color, and indeed whites, can do Black philosophy. The crucial criteria are not identity based but content based: philosophical engagement with a particular set of problems, a certain body of literature, a historical tradition, a distinctive outlook on the world.

Black Philosophy and Black Enlightenment

So what is that tradition and outlook? In my opinion, the best way to conceptualize the defining features of Black philosophy is as the philosophy that develops out of the distinctive experience of racial subordination in modernity—a philosophy that, in its effort to understand and end that subordination, has the potential for illuminating modernity more thoroughly and relentlessly, more free from illusions, than its (typically) white antagonist. (I emphasize “potential” because, although my own sympathies are with the radical strain in Black philosophy, the term cannot be so narrowly defined as to exclude Black conservative thinkers also grappling, from their opposed political perspective, with the problem of race.)

Here, of course, I am presupposing a familiarity with the claims of standpoint theory—the general thesis, arguably first articulated in Marxism, and then subsequently developed by feminism—that in a system of subordination, or interlocking and overlapping subordinations, the perspective of those at the bottom is more likely to be the foundation of an objective assessment of its workings than the perspective of those more favorably located. In other words, material advantage comes at an epistemic cost: the likelihood that, because of one’s unrepresentative group experience and vested interests in the established order, one will find it more difficult to see that order as it really is. One will be more prone to illusions, more susceptible to rationalizations and denials of its injustice. Those at the bottom are certainly not thereby guaranteed a veridical view of the social structure. But the mere fact of having no group interest in its perpetuation is a great cognitive advantage, while the everyday experience of oppression will make them less likely to accept dominant accounts that deny or gloss over the ugly realities on which it is based. If social subordination affords one distinctive insights, this means that Blacks have been peculiarly well placed to theorize, from the underside (think of Ellison’s narrator in his basement), the actual material and normative topography of this racialized world. So Blackness really indicates not a particular band of wavelengths but a particular societal position, and not just any subordinated nonwhite position but a peculiar location within the nexus of multiple oppressions created by white supremacy. In comparison to the Euro-Enlightenments discussed at the start, the geography in this case is not limited to a particular national or even continental region, but is literally global. For it is shaped first by the forced diaspora of modern Atlantic slavery that transported captured Africans to the Americas (Canada and

the United States, the Caribbean, Latin America) and Europe—what Paul Gilroy (1993) famously designated the “black Atlantic”—and then by the resulting transnational stigmatization of this population across the planet, even in countries without such a history—producing what Lewis Gordon (1995) has termed “an anti-black world.”

From this perspective, we can appreciate how a philosophy coming out of Blackness could actually be better situated to carry out the Enlightenment project than its designated legitimate representatives, whose supposedly illuminating vision was (and is) darkened in various ways by their commitment to the existing racial order. Pronouncements about general human equality all too often stopped at the global color line. Being more centrally shaped by social oppression than any of the earlier listed Euro-Enlightenments, the Black Enlightenment is—unsurprisingly—more potentially radical than any of them. (Israel’s [2001] examples of the “radical Enlightenment,” whether his controversial main candidate, Spinoza, or even in the anti-imperialism he finds in such French *encyclopédistes* as Diderot, are all European thinkers, with the limitations one would correspondingly expect in the depth of their challenges to the global order.) The Haitian Revolution was more genuinely universalist, more consistently a realization of (ostensible) enlightenment values, than either the American or French Revolutions, and precisely for that reason it has generally been written out of the European Enlightenment narrative (Nesbitt 2008; Trouillot 2015). The diasporic experience of Black racial subordination, enduring into the postemancipation period, indeed enduring until today, generates a distinctive perspective on modernity that, though overlapping in part with the general experience of people of color under Euro-domination, is marked by peculiar features unique to it. Hence the idea of a Black Enlightenment, a “black light” analogous to a penetrating X-ray vision into the workings of Euro-created polities and related patterns of Euro-cognition, both factual and moral. Think of it as W. E. B. Du Bois’s ([1903] 1997, ch. 1) “second sight” extrapolated from its specific U.S. context to the diaspora in general. Metapositioned with respect to the European white Enlightenment, drawing on the higher (Black?) frequencies beyond the visible spectrum, it tracks the chiaroscuro of light and darkness of white normative exclusions, moral and conceptual and juridico-political, and their consequences across multiple different geographical borders and white political ideologies. The very invisibility of Blacks as human equals has helped to make visible for them ongoing structures of inequality taken for granted by the whites privileged by them, even

when the pretensions of their political philosophies have been radical. And given the historic gender hierarchies within Blackness, we would likewise expect that Black women—at the bottom of the bottom—would be differentially and more favorably positioned to recognize intraracial inequities unperceived by Black males (Guy-Sheftall 1995; Taylor 2017).

Consider the big three of structural social oppression: gender, class, and race. Of these, both gender and class clearly predate the modern period, in patriarchal systems of various kinds stretching back to the early formation of the species, and in class societies evolving in separate continents out of hunter-gatherer communities. But race is different. As just argued, even if race as ideology, discourse, and iconography is older than the conventional postwar narrative claimed, race as a planetary system is unambiguously modern. It is European expansionism in the modern period that internationalizes race, creating—through colonialism, imperialism, white settlement, and racial slavery—a white supremacy that becomes global by the early twentieth century (Du Bois [1903] 1997; Lake and Reynolds 2008; Mills 1997; Winant 2001). So at the very same time that liberalism as the putatively most important political ideology of modernity is supposedly eliminating premodern social hierarchies, it is establishing new modern hierarchies of race. As George Fredrickson points out in his short history of racism:

What makes Western racism so autonomous and conspicuous in world history has been that it developed in a context that presumed human equality of some kind. . . . If equality is the norm in the spiritual or temporal realms (or in both at the same time), and there are groups of people within the society who are so despised or disparaged that the upholders of the norms feel compelled to make them exceptions to the promise or realization of equality, they can be denied the prospect of equal status only if they allegedly possess some extraordinary deficiency that makes them less than fully human. (2015, 11–12)

So race is ontologized in a way that it is not in premodernity because inherited discourses of racial stigmatization, whether secular or Christian, now have coercive power behind them in the form of the racial state (Goldberg 2002; Mills 2020). (Note: If the defenders of the existence of premodern racial ideologies can also make a case for their institutionalization, then premodern racial states could exist also, and in fact Heng [2019] later argues that the first Western racial state is actually a premodern one, twelfth–thirteenth-century England oppressing its Jewish population.

However, such racialization would still be local rather than global, and not in sharp contrast to declared universal equality, as with the modern racial state.) Race becomes ontological—and thus an appropriate subject for philosophical inquiry—because race becomes the signifier of full or diminished humanity, a signifier that is enforced by material practices in a modern racialized world. In affirming their racial identity, whites are in effect affirming their humanity and distancing themselves from the less-than-human. Insofar as philosophy is supposed to investigate, at the most foundational level, the human condition, race then needs to be taken up philosophically, since it will henceforth shape social reality, the (differentiated) experience of social reality, conceptions of the ethically right and the aesthetically beautiful, and the norms of belief: in short, ontology, phenomenology, value theory, and epistemology.

But the critical distancing on race necessary to denaturalize it, and to develop such a philosophy, will be very difficult to attain for the Europeans privileged by this new system. Their new whiteness will act as a cognitive barrier. The mainstream (class-privileged white male) Enlightenment's complicity with colonialism, imperialism, white settlement, and racial slavery is, after several decades of decolonial exposé, a completely familiar story by now. But the point is that even white radical theory, such as class theory and feminism, will also be affected. For though class and gender are, of course, also part of this matrix of interlocking oppressions generated by empire, race is the element that is new and whose synthesizing and catalytic effects shape the transmutation of these premodern categories into their distinctively modern forms. To the extent that white supremacy gradually spreads, in material structures and overarching norms, across the planet, it henceforth ceases to be possible to speak simply of class and gender, for these identities will now be racialized.

And this means, as the disproportionately Black and female pioneering theorists of intersectionality have taught us, that insofar as white racial identity tends to trump gender and class—with the white woman and the white worker generally making common cause with the white male bourgeois directors of the colonial project rather than with their sisters and brothers of color in resistance to it—both white class theory and white feminism will be cognitively handicapped (Collins 2019; Crenshaw 2020; Guy-Sheftall 1995). The white working class is, of course, still oppressed and exploited by capitalism. But it is central to the Marxist narrative that—unlike the subordinated classes of premodernity—the (white) wage worker attains equal normative status within the liberal polity and

the capitalist system. That is why, in *Capital*, volume 1, Marx (1976) sees himself as facing, and successfully meeting, the challenge of explaining where the capitalist's profits come from, considering that in the wage relationship equivalents are being exchanged with each other. And though white women are certainly subordinated by white patriarchy, they attain at least a virtual personhood through their relation to white males (fathers, husbands, brothers, coracials in general) that is denied to people of color.

So in general the white working class and white women will find it harder to recognize, condemn, and theorize racial oppression, from which they benefit psychically (as the official full humans) and materially, whether through the land and resources from Indigenous expropriation in white settler states, the racial exploitation of African slavery and the subsequent post-Emancipation social denial of equal opportunities to freed Blacks, or the privileged European citizenship of the imperial powers dominating the planet. This is not to deny the existence of that historic handful of white progressives, male and female, who have overcome their socialization to demand an end to all forms of subordination. But the reality is that white racial privilege has generally distorted the clarity of vision one would have hoped for from those experiencing intrawhite gender and class oppression. It is not in general the case that white workers and white women as a group have joined forces with those people of color trying to abolish white supremacy. So while white Marxism and white feminism have produced distinctive and invaluable insights as oppositional bodies of thought within the Western tradition, they have usually failed even to see white supremacy as an oppressive system in itself, let alone sought to theorize and overturn it. (Recognizing racism as individual belief, behavior, and transaction is not the same as recognizing the existence of a structure of racial domination that can continue to function even in the absence of most whites having racist sentiments and beliefs.) It is people of color who become the unqualified subpersons, those "less than fully human," of modernity, precisely at the time, as Fredrickson (2015) emphasizes, when equality becomes the general epochal norm, as trumpeted in the slogans of the American and French Revolutions, and the new egalitarian philosophy of liberalism. As George Mosse (1997) argued decades ago, the most important and influential political ideology of modernity actually turns out to be not liberalism but racism.

Black philosophy, then, particularly in its intersectionalist rather than its dominant Black male form, emerges as the philosophy of those at the bottom of this interlocking set of oppressions. And I would suggest that the