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## Case

#### Aff is the best reading of North Korea – they empirically ONLY respond to U.S. military threats

Grover 20 – Korean Studies fellow at the Center for the National Interest. He visited Seoul to interview nine experts on South Korean military policy for this piece.

John Dale Grover, “Deterrence First: Why Some Koreans See Military and Economic Pressure as the Solution to North Korea,” *The National Interest*, 11 May 2020, https://nationalinterest.org/blog/korea-watch/deterrence-first-why-some-koreans-see-military-and-economic-pressure-solution-north

North Korea’s Behavior is Offensive

Deterers do not generally think of South Korea’s military capabilities as destabilizing or threatening. North Korea might claim they are, but Pyongyang’s own history of provocations undercuts the argument they are sincere. As Dr. Min Gyo Koo flatly stated to TNI, Pyongyang’s complaints “are just North Korean rhetoric” that “we don’t have to worry about.” If anything, “They are not consistent—their only consistent logic is their own survival.”

Most Deterers see North Korean statements as pure propaganda. As Dr. Min Gyo Koo explained, “They are not bound by what they say. I don’t think South Korean military capabilities will threaten or have threatened North Korea and pushed them away from cooperation. This is because Pyongyang still has not officially dropped the idea of unifying the Korean peninsula on its own terms. So they’ll just keep complaining about South Korean military capabilities because they impede Pyongyang’s goal of unifying and running the country.”

Dr. Sung-han Kim thinks the administration of President Moon Jae-in is misguided and is being taken advantage of. “I think we have become so vulnerable by being obsessed with this so-called appeasement policy on North Korea for the past couple of years.” For instance, he points to Pyongyang’s missile tests in 2017 as proof that North Korea was emboldened. According to Dr. Sung-han Kim, Pyongyang only stopped after America got tough. “We have to remember North Korea, for the first time, responded to two things. One of them was real economic sanctions; the other one was fire and fury, meaning political and military pressure by the United States.”

In his view, a return to maximum pressure is necessary. He thinks Kim Jong-un made two huge mistakes: testing too many missiles in too short of a time span and not making a deal at the Hanoi summit with America. For example, consistent missile tests caused Beijing to lose face as Pygonyang’s patron at the United Nations Security Council. As a result, “when the U.S. provided a draft resolution, China couldn’t oppose it.” That meant a new level of economic sanctions never seen before were implemented to really squeeze North Korea, causing Kim Jong-un to seek a way out at the Hanoi summit.

“Kim Jong-un should have hidden his real intentions,” reflected Dr. Sung-han Kim. “But he didn’t have a lot of experience. He raised sanctions relief as the first and the last agenda item at Hanoi. He could have brought up liaison offices or a peace regime so the United States would not catch his plan. But he put sanctions relief on the table and persisted. And then-National Security Adviser John Bolton and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said something to President Donald Trump, who walked away the next day. I think it was the right decision. He was praised by both parties when he came back to Washington. No deal with better than a bad deal.”

Deterers aren’t necessarily against talking with North Korea—they are just very skeptical. As a nonpartisan reporter, Ms. Jeongmin Kim aptly explained that Pyongyang’s proclamations should be taken with a grain of salt but also properly understood. “If we look at North Korean state media, they keep condemning Seoul—and recently also the United States—for the capacities South Korea has and for joint drills. But North Korea knows South Korea can’t get away from the U.S. alliance. So when Pyongyang says they condemn South Korea for all these capacities, which we see as deterrence, I don’t think it means North Korea is actually telling South Korea to just withdraw everything. They’re just using it as rhetoric and leverage while they’re doing negotiations with the United States. Also, they’re pushing South Korea to assume a more proactive role—such as by pressuring America to lift sanctions—if they don’t want to get all these condemning statements. So we shouldn’t take those proclamations at face value.”

All of this means that while South Korea maintains both its defenses and attempts diplomacy, it would be wise to be wary of Pyongyang. As Ms. Jeongmin Kim elaborated to TNI, “North Koreans are hardcore realists, and if they see no good coming out of interacting with South Korea, they just won’t talk—they’ll push South Korea away. But then if South Korea gets ahead of itself by talking about a peace economy [when North Korea is not interested], they may be destabilizing the situation on the Korean peninsula on their own. Because if they do that, North Korea has no choice but to push out more hostile commentary because South Korea is getting nowhere with sanctions relief. From the North Korean point of view, if South Korea can’t really persuade the United States when it comes to sanctions or redefining the definition or range of denuclearization, they don’t really see any point in talking to South Korea.”

#### Fighting nuclear war is good – distinct impact, doesn’t require denying everyday antiblackness

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Vincent Intondi, “Reflections on Injustice, Racism, and the Bomb,” *Arms Control Today*, vol. 50, no. 6, July/August 2020, https://search.proquest.com/docview/2425622578?pq-origsite=gscholar&fromopenview=true.

The moment in August 2005 is seared into my memory. The train pulled up to the Hiroshima station from Kyoto. I stepped out with my mind full of images from 60 years ago, when the United States dropped the first atomic bomb on this pristine city of 340,000 people. (Hiroshima had been one of the few cities that escaped the fire-bombing campaign of Japan's major cities led by U.S. Air Force General Curtis LeMay.) Initially, I was taken aback by what I saw: a modern city, filled with restaurants, hotels, shops, and lots of people, much like any other in the industrialized world.

Suddenly, everything changed. Clearly, I was not ready; and before I could prepare myself, I was standing in front of the iconic Atomic Bomb Dome-one of the few structures still standing in its original form near the hypocenter. Throughout my life, I had seen photos of the dome standing alone amid the total destruction wrought by the 15-kiloton atomic blast. But it was different being there in person. I could feel myself starting to change.

The next two days were filled with conversations with atomic bomb survivors (hibakusha), museum visits, and retracing the places about which John Hersey wrote in his historic work, Hiroshima. On the night of August 6, I saw thousands of Japanese citizens gathered at the Motoyasu River. People reflected on those who lost their lives, making paper floating lanterns and putting them in the water.

That night, with a few of my new Japanese friends (I was a student at the time at American University, which partnered with Ritsumeikan University), I put our lantern into the water. I still remember what I wrote on our lantern: "I will dedicate my life to making sure this never happens again." As it floated away, I began to look around and think that 60 years ago, everyone here was dead. I thought of the human suffering that had taken place, and all of my anger, guilt, and sorrow boiled over as tears rolled down my face. At that moment, Koko Tanimoto Kondo, a hibakusha with whom I had grown close, immediately came over to console me.

When I returned to the United States, friends, family, and colleagues began hearing me talk about abolishing nuclear weapons. Many were perplexed. I had been known as an activist who fought for civil rights. I had become conscious when the phrase "Free Mumia" was dominant. I had spent my time protesting the murder of Amadou Diallo and the police assault on Abner Louima. "Who cares about nuclear weapons?" I heard. "Nukes will always be there...no one is crazy enough to use them," and "That's an issue for old, white dudes."

But I could not forget what I learned, who I met, or how I felt in Hiroshima. Regardless if I was fighting for civil rights; against the inequities perpetuated by the World Trade Organization and International Monetary Fund; for justice for the indigenous people of Chiapas, Mexico; or to stop the U.S. war in Iraq, I kept coming back to one thought: What does any of this matter if we were all dead from nuclear war?

To me, it was simple. These were not separate issues. Jobs, racial equality, climate change, war, class, gender, and nuclear weapons were all connected and part of the same fight: universal human rights, with the most important human right being the freedom to live.live free from the fear of nuclear war.

Of course, this thinking is not new. Contrary to the narrative that nuclear disarmament has been and remains a "white" issue, since 1945, the anti-nuclear movement has included diverse voices who saw the value in connecting all of these issues. Moreover, the nuclear disarmament movement has been most successful when it left room for diverse voices and combined the nuclear issue with social justice.

The movement to abolish nuclear weapons began even before the first bomb was dropped. Among the earliest critics of nuclear weapons were the atomic scientists, members of the Roman Catholic Church, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, and many in the Black community. Specifically, regarding African Americans, for some, nuclear weapons were directly linked to racism.

Many African Americans agreed with Langston Hughes' assertion that racism was at the heart of President Harry Truman's decision to use nuclear weapons in Japan. Why did the United States not drop atomic bombs on Italy or Germany, Hughes asked. The Black community's fear that race played a role in the decision to use nuclear weapons only increased when the U.S. leaders threatened to use nuclear weapons in Korea in the 1950s1 and Vietnam a decade later. For others, the nuclear issue was connected to colonialism. From the United States obtaining uranium from Belgian-controlled Congo to the French testing a nuclear weapon in the Sahara, activists saw a direct link between those who possessed nuclear weapons and those who colonized the nonwhite world. For many ordinary citizens, Black and white, however, fighting for nuclear disarmament simply meant escaping the fear of mutually assured nuclear destruction and moving toward a more peaceful world.

Today, many people love to quote Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., especially his "I Have a Dream" speech, while also ignoring the full title and focus of the march: "Jobs and Freedom." Throughout his life, King made the connections of what he called the "triple evils" of capitalism, racism, and militarism.

King was not alone among civil rights activists in making these connections. To put it in today's context, to singer, actor, and activist Paul Robeson, "Black Lives Matter" meant not only speaking out about racism in the United States but also highlighting where the United States obtained its material to build nuclear weapons. To W.E.B. Du Bois, Black Lives Matter meant not only forming the NAACP or writing Souls of Black Folk, but also getting millions to sign the "Ban the Bomb" pledge to stop another Hiroshima in Korea. To civil rights leader Bayard Rustin, Black Lives Matter meant not only organizing the March on Washington but also traveling to Ghana to stop France from testing its first nuclear weapon in Africa. To Lorraine Hansberry, Black Lives Matter meant not only A Raisin in the Sun, but Les Blancs, her last play, about nuclear abolition. To Representative Ronald Dellums (D-Calif.), Black Lives Matter meant not only bringing jobs and education to Oakland, California, but also making sure President Ronald Reagan did not build the MX missile.

The prominent Black writer James Baldwin put it best on April 1, 1961, when he addressed a large group of peace activists at Judiciary Square in Washington. Baldwin was one of the headlining speakers for the rally, titled "Security Through World Disarmament."

When asked why he chose to speak at such an event, Baldwin responded, "What am I doing here? Only those who would fail to see the relationship between the fight for civil rights and the struggle for world peace would be surprised to see me. Both fights are the same. It is just as difficult for the white American to think of peace as it is of no color.... Confrontation of both dilemmas demands inner courage." Baldwin considered both problems in the same breath because "racial hatred and the atom bomb both threaten the destruction of man as created free by God."

The power of diversity in the nuclear disarmament movement was perhaps most evident in the 1980s. With Reagan's rhetoric of a "winnable nuclear war" and massive budget increases for nuclear weapons while cutting social programs that hurt the most vulnerable, the antinuclear movement grew exponentially. The nuclear freeze movement emerged.

New groups such as the Women's Actions for Nuclear Disarmament, Feminists Insist on a Safe Tomorrow, Performers and Artists for Nuclear Disarmament, Dancers for Disarmament, and Athletes United for Peace formed. Established organizations such as Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy, the Union for Concerned Scientists, and Physicians for Social Responsibility all saw their membership skyrocket.2

For some, ending the nuclear arms race was and still is linked to their religious faith. Others saw a direct link between the amount of money being spent on nuclear weapons and eliminating badly needed social programs that benefited the poor. Many viewed and still view nuclear weapons as part of the overall military industrial complex, which included U.S. intervention in Central America and the Middle East, while for others, there was a genuine fear that the United States and Soviet Union would start a nuclear war.

This new sense of awareness, fear, and action culminated in the June 12, 1982, demonstration in New York's Central Park, in which 1 million people of different races, genders, class, and religions marched and rallied for nuclear disarmament. As Randall Forsberg, one of the principal authors of the proposal for a nuclear weapons freeze, said in her speech to the throngs that day, "Until the arms race stops, until we have a world with peace and justice, we will not go home and be quiet. We will go home and organize."

The rally, combined with other actions of the 1980s, contributed to the Reagan administration changing course on nuclear weapons, effectively showed the power of grassroots organizing, challenged the idea that the movement was not diverse, and paved the way for a new generation of activists committed to saving the world from nuclear annihilation.

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#### Evaluating consequences is key to ethics

David Runciman 17, Politics, Cambridge University, “Political Theory and Real Politics in the Age of the Internet,” The Journal of Political Philosophy, Volume 25, Issue 1, March 2017, Pages 3–21

Contemporary political realism carries echoes of this line of argument and of Bentham's shift from the weaker to the stronger version of it, even though Bentham's direct influence is rarely in evidence. Critics of the current ubiquity of the language of human rights often point out that in the absence of a robust account of the power relations that are needed to underpin any rights regime—in particular, an answer to the question of who does the enforcing—all such talk is a massive distraction from the real business of improving the situation on the ground to which human rights are meant to apply.9 But for more radical critics the emptiness of human rights talk is too convenient to be merely a confusion: it serves as the perfect cover for the sinister interests of those engaged in neo-colonial projects of exploitation and expropriation.10 However, these two poles of the Benthamite case against moralism—from inadvertent confusion to deliberate deception—do not exhaust the range of explanations for what is wrong with it. There is another answer, drawn from an alternative intellectual tradition, which appears more frequently in the current realist literature. This is the Weberian idea that moralism does not so much obscure what politicians are really up to, as conceal the truth about their personal motives from political actors themselves. In other words, political moralism is less a form of deception than of self-deception: it lets politicians avoid looking political reality squarely in the face because it allows them to believe they have their eyes set on something higher. Conviction politicians think they can transcend the messy reality of politics. That belief is dangerous because their response when they encounter the messy reality is to deny it, or to ignore it, or to insist they can mould it to their higher purposes, which only makes the mess worse. Weber's case against allowing an ethic of conviction to trump an ethic of responsibility in politics—which requires, among other things, that politicians face up to the unintended consequences of what they do—remains compelling.11 But it does not map onto any sharp distinctions between realism and moralism. That is because the convictions that can breed self-deception are not necessarily moralistic beliefs; they can be beliefs about anything, including beliefs about how contingency trumps moral certainty. On the Weberian account it is not what you believe but how you believe it that makes the difference. Realists, too, can be self-deceived, because the strength of their convictions against moralism produces its own self-deceptions and blind spots. This is the case that can be made against Bentham, who was so thoroughly dogmatic about the vapidity of all talk of rights that it served to blind him to what was missing from his own understanding of politics. Macaulay made the point in his celebrated takedown of the Benthamites published in the Edinburgh Review in 1829: ‘They surrender their understandings … to the meanest and most abject sophisms, provided these sophisms come before them disguised with the externals of demonstration. They do not seem to know that logic has its illusions as well as rhetoric—that a fallacy may lurk in a syllogism as well as a metaphor.’12 Bentham was insufficiently sensitive to the ways in which the attempt to ground political argument in the language of force neglects the capacity of other sorts of arguments to move people successfully. Conviction politics is not simply the preserve of the moralisers. Likewise, it is not the case that moral political philosophy is itself incapable of seeing the merit of arguments that point towards the unavoidability of unintended consequences. Just as realists can be blind to contingency, so moralists can be alive to it. Take the example of Robert Nozick, the most prominent early critic of Rawlsian political philosophy from within the discourse of rights. Nozick's ‘Wilt Chamberlain example’ was designed to highlight the inability of Rawlsian schemes of justice to accommodate the unintended consequences of cumulative instances of contingent rightful action on the part of individuals (in this case, their willingness to hand over small amounts of their own money to watch the best basketball player around ply his trade, which would generate unjustifiable inequalities of wealth—Chamberlain becomes very rich—unless the state intervenes to circumscribe their choices).13 The challenge to Rawls is to adapt his patterned view of justice to a world in which events inevitably take place that will break up the pattern. But this challenge does not come from a realist; it comes from a moralist (and a self-professed utopian to boot). There are many possible ways to push back against the apparent force of the Wilt Chamberlain example.14 A realist response would be to challenge the assumptions behind the case itself. We live in societies that enrich leading sportspeople on a scale that even Nozick might have found hard to imagine (Nozick envisages Chamberlain earning $250,000; his contemporary equivalent—LeBron James—earned more than $50,000,000 in 2015). But the players’ wealth is not simply the cumulative consequence of the unfettered choice of large numbers of people to hand over small amounts of money to watch them play. Any such relationship—between fans and performers—is mediated by vast institutional structures of commodification and exchange, which make it very hard to follow the money from individual consumers to the pockets of the superstars. It passes through the hands of many others—broadcasters, agents, advertisers, and administrators—such that the path of justice may be at best obscured and more likely undermined (recent revelations about how FIFA operates do not inspire confidence that this is a transparently just business). A further iteration of the realist response would indicate that an example drawn from the world of sports is itself a misleading one. Though polling evidence suggests that in our increasingly unequal societies it is sporting celebrities and their like who are widely believed to be reaping the most outsize rewards—on the assumption that there is at least some correlation between reward and measurable talent—most of the superrich in fact come from the financial services industry, where visible talent is much harder to identify.15 Tracing the just transfer of money in Nozick's terms from individual consumers to the pockets of bankers would be a thoroughly thankless task. In that sense, the Wilt Chamberlain example appears designed to play into our unwarranted presuppositions about the workings of the free market. It serves as a smokescreen. So realists can respond to Nozick's argument about contingency with some contingencies of their own. But so too can Rawlsians. It is possible to turn Nozick's argument on its head. He purports to grant Rawls his ideal society in order to show that no political ideal can survive eventualities for which it was not designed. But what if Nozick is granted his ideal society—his utopia—in which there is no political eventuality that cannot be justified in terms of the underlying individual rights that must remain un-breached for any social arrangement to count as just. That society will also be subject to unforeseen contingencies, including emergent monopolies and other market failures. Correcting for those failures will require breaches of rights in Nozick's terms; but sitting back and doing nothing will make the preservation of the conditions of justice—which includes the ability to track the distribution of wealth through a series of free exchanges—much more difficult. There is a real world variant of this argument that illustrates what can be at stake. Critics of the most urgent demands to address the threat of climate change tend to argue that pre-emptive responses will preclude the sort of market innovation that offers the best chance of finding a solution.16 In other words, patterned state intervention forecloses the opportunities provided by being open to unforeseen contingencies. But equally, openness to contingency can be its own form of limitation, if it forecloses the opportunities provided by state intervention in the face of failure. Putting one's faith in an unforeseen future to generate outcomes that will in due course solve the problems of the present rules out the possibility of an unforeseen future that requires action in the present to solve its looming problems. Those whose convictions blindly favour contingency and the free exchange of ideas can be as self-deceived in Weber's sense as those who want to intervene in the name of a better politics. All convictions, however adaptable, have an edge of fatalism to them.17

#### Discussing fiated policy action is uniquely valuable – forces engagement and transcends the limits of modern political discourse

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(Neal, “Books, Debate, Specificity,” Michigan Law Review, Vol. 117, Issue 6)

I never thought I’d say this, but it turns out that policy debate was a lot more focused and realistic than last year’s presidential political discourse. How could a bunch of naive high schoolers—obsessed with winning through extreme and escalating arguments—somehow end up more grounded? The books being reviewed in this issue begin to point to an answer. In short, critical to the advancement of ideas is a discourse of specifics, not generalities. When a specific person advances a claim, one can refute that specific claim and contextualize it within other claims made by that same individual. The upshot is a far more productive democratic dialogue.

We can see this with virtually any book being reviewed in this issue. Erwin Chemerinsky and Howard Gillman’s Free Speech on Campus is notable because it takes seriously specific proposals to restrict campus speech, instead of just condemning a mushy “safe spaces” movement.6 The upshot is a much more nuanced description of the debate over speech on campus today and a solution that attempts to balance competing, serious concerns. Readers may disagree over where the line should be struck, but one comes away knowing that the authors took the specific animating concerns of both sides seriously.

Or, take another example of a tract being reviewed in this issue, the great Apology of Socrates by Plato.7 The Apology is Plato’s defense of Socrates. But the defense is not written as an attack on some broad, undifferentiated accusations against Socrates. Rather, it is specifically a rejoinder to attacks by Lycon, Anytus, and Meletus.8 The trio of accusers levy concrete charges against Socrates: he has corrupted the youth and preached impiety (ignoring the gods recognized by the Greek State and inventing new gods).9 The defense is a specific, point-by-point rebuttal of each: “[F]irst, I will reply to the older charges and to my first accusers, and then I will go on to the later ones.”10 A ten-page rebuttal follows:

I have said enough in my defence against the first class of my accusers; I turn to the second class who are headed by Meletus, that good and patriotic man, as he calls himself. And now I will try to defend myself against them: these new accusers must also have their affidavit read. What do they say? Something of this sort:—That Socrates is a doer of evil, and corrupter of the youth, and he does not believe in the gods of the state . . . . [L]et us examine the particular counts.11

In writing this way, Plato creates a real debate between warring camps. It is, I suspect, not surprising to anyone that such specificity enables a true clash of ideas. That is the genius of our adversarial system. But a subtler point follows: the dialectical tradition helps explain the unique niche that fiction can occupy in political debate as well.

At its best, fiction is a mechanism for us to understand paradigms fundamentally different from our own daily lives. This understanding sharpens dialogue and provides the concreteness necessary to imagine alternate worlds. Consider, for example, the one book of fiction being reviewed in this issue, Mohsin Hamid’s Exit West. 12 It is one thing to attack, as President Trump does, a Democratic Party belief in “open borders.”13 Such a claim set up Donald Trump’s inane counterproposals, such as the Wall and the Muslim Ban. An impoverished debate resulted, with the President attacking something that Democrats never believed. The upshot was predictable, silly policies.

Sometimes the only way to have a vibrant debate is through the lens of fiction. Some ideas are so radical that they are not susceptible to easy political debate—instead they need to be recast through the lens of a fictional world. Science fiction at its best does that.14 And, at times, even the opposite of science fiction—history—can be best illuminated through fiction. Just think about the brilliant Underground Railroad by Colson Whitehead15 three years ago. Whitehead brings the reader back to antebellum days, with gruesome depictions of the sexual slavery and absolute deprivations of rights that slaves endured. Reading about it in a history book, or even some sort of nonfiction analysis, can’t easily bring us into the minds of those who lived it every day. Absent contemporary written accounts (and there were few because so many slaves could not write and it was a crime to teach writing),16 it needs fiction.

That brings us to Exit West. Hamid imagines a world where magic doors appear and provide portals from one continent to another. He begins with a description of a couple, Saeed and Nadia, who meet in an unspecified city “swollen by refugees.”17 Ultimately a magic door appears that takes them to Greece. Later doors take them to London and Marin, California.18 Native Londoners are aghast with the influx of refugees. No wall can stop them—for the doors operate interstitially—permitting refugees to waltz into the UK from distant lands. Police are called, and they raid the houses that the refugees find themselves squatting inside. The refugees themselves start organizing politically to protect themselves and their rights.19 The nativists do not sit by silently either, resorting to physical attacks on the new refugees.20

Ultimately, the government cuts electricity with the aim of stopping the violence.21 As any student of architecture could have guessed,22 the plan backfires because lighting is essential to fighting crime. “[M]urders and rapes and assaults” take place, with nativists blaming the refugees and vice versa.23 And the characters in the book begin to appreciate that there is not one undifferentiated mass of “refugees” who speak with one voice and have one set of traditions—but rather a plethora of different approaches and people from different lands.

The different traditions are felt in Saeed and Nadia’s own lives—with Saeed increasingly embracing the culture of his former country and the beliefs of some of the radicalized refugees, including even at one point taking possession of a gun.24 Nadia, by contrast, becomes alienated from the tribal violence that pits refugees against nativists. “The fury of those nativists advocating wholesale slaughter was what struck Nadia most, and it struck her because it seemed so familiar, so much like the fury of the militants in her own city.”25 Yet Nadia pulls back from the thought, for “around her she saw all these people of all these different colors in all these different attires and she was relieved, better here than there.”26

Not every Londoner is upset by the emergence of the doors. Some realize that all of the insistence on borders has trapped them in lives that are unfulfilling. In one vignette, a British accountant tries to commit suicide as his means of escape from the London environment around him, only to realize a black door has opened up.27 He takes the door and arrives in Namibia. Later we learn that he has sent texts to his daughter telling her not to worry because he is on the beach and “felt something for a change.”28 Open borders turns out to be liberation for some Westerners, instead of the reverse.

Hamid’s work forces us to imagine a world of true open borders and who the winners and losers would be. The current political debate, by contrast, has no language for such a world, which is why it ultimately devolves into name-calling. But Hamid makes us reflect on what such a world—which may be inevitable as technology grows and globalization continues apace— would do. What is the moral case for closing our borders to those from distant lands who are suffering? Why should the accident of birth decide so much in our lives? Do we win when borders are closed? Or do we lose? And if open borders are ultimately inevitable, what does a society do to ease the transition to it?

CONCLUSION

2018 was a year of tremendous change in our political order. And as the remarkable collection of books being reviewed in this issue demonstrates, it was also a banner year for legal scholarship. Justin Driver has written a deeply important book about the ways in which the federal judiciary has largely abandoned constitutional protections in schools.29 Adam Winkler has penned a lengthy analysis of whether corporations truly are persons.30 And the list goes on.

Yet I’ve chosen to focus my few words here on a work, Exit West, that isn’t one of legal scholarship; indeed, it’s not even a work of nonfiction. To hard-nosed litigators, whose world I also inhabit, it is odd to think that a work of fiction can illuminate much about the law. But Exit West reminds us that the artifice of fiction can allow us to glimpse the possibility of other worlds—and that the messy facts of today sometimes will obscure our contemporary consciousness about the changes that, one day, will come.

#### Aff is a DA to the alt – imperative of survival requires that we invest in institutions – that outweighs

Burke et al., Associate Professor of International and Political Studies @ UNSW, Australia, ‘16

(Anthony, Stefanie Fishel is Assistant Professor, Department of Gender and Race Studies at the University of Alabama, Audra Mitchell is CIGI Chair in Global Governance and Ethics at the Balsillie School of International Affairs, Simon Dalby is CIGI Chair in the Political Economy of Climate Change at the Balsillie School of International Affairs, and, Daniel J. Levine is Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of Alabama, “Planet Politics: Manifesto from the End of IR,” Millennium: Journal of International Studies 1–25)

8. Global ethics must respond to mass extinction. In late 2014, the Worldwide Fund for Nature reported a startling statistic: according to their global study, 52% of species had gone extinct between 1970 and 2010.60 This is not news: for three decades, conservation biologists have been warning of a ‘sixth mass extinction’, which, by definition, could eliminate more than three quarters of currently existing life forms in just a few centuries.61 In other words, it could threaten the practical possibility of the survival of earthly life. Mass extinction is not simply extinction (or death) writ large: it is a qualitatively different phenomena that demands its own ethical categories. It cannot be grasped by aggregating species extinctions, let alone the deaths of individual organisms. Not only does it erase diverse, irreplaceable life forms, their unique histories and open-ended possibilities, but it threatens the ontological conditions of Earthly life.

IR is one of few disciplines that is explicitly devoted to the pursuit of survival, yet it has almost nothing to say in the face of a possible mass extinction event.62 It utterly lacks the conceptual and ethical frameworks necessary to foster diverse, meaningful responses to this phenomenon. As mentioned above, Cold-War era concepts such as ‘nuclear winter’ and ‘omnicide’ gesture towards harms massive in their scale and moral horror. However, they are asymptotic: they imagine nightmares of a severely denuded planet, yet they do not contemplate the comprehensive negation that a mass extinction event entails. In contemporary IR discourses, where it appears at all, extinction is treated as a problem of scientific management and biopolitical control aimed at securing existing human lifestyles.63 Once again, this approach fails to recognise the reality of extinction, which is a matter of being and nonbeing, not one of life and death processes.

Confronting the enormity of a possible mass extinction event requires a total overhaul of human perceptions of what is at stake in the disruption of the conditions of Earthly life. The question of what is ‘lost’ in extinction has, since the inception of the concept of ‘conservation’, been addressed in terms of financial cost and economic liabilities.64 Beyond reducing life to forms to capital, currencies and financial instruments, the dominant neoliberal political economy of conservation imposes a homogenising, Western secular worldview on a planetary phenomenon. Yet the enormity, complexity, and scale of mass extinction is so huge that humans need to draw on every possible resource in order to find ways of responding. This means that they need to mobilise multiple worldviews and lifeways – including those emerging from indigenous and marginalised cosmologies. Above all, it is crucial and urgent to realise that extinction is a matter of global ethics. It is not simply an issue of management or security, or even of particular visions of the good life. Instead, it is about staking a claim as to the goodness of life itself. If it does not fit within the existing parameters of global ethics, then it is these boundaries that need to change.

9. An Earth-worldly politics. Humans are worldly – that is, we are fundamentally worldforming and embedded in multiple worlds that traverse the Earth. However, the Earth is not ‘our’ world, as the grand theories of IR, and some accounts of the Anthropocene have it – an object and possession to be appropriated, circumnavigated, instrumentalised and englobed.65 Rather, it is a complex of worlds that we share, co-constitute, create, destroy and inhabit with countless other life forms and beings.

The formation of the Anthropocene reflects a particular type of worlding, one in which the Earth is treated as raw material for the creation of a world tailored to human needs. Heidegger famously framed ‘earth’ and ‘world’ as two countervailing, conflicting forces that constrain and shape one another. We contend that existing political, economic and social conditions have pushed human worlding so far to one extreme that it has become almost entirely detached from the conditions of the Earth. Planet Politics calls, instead, for a mode of worlding that is responsive to, and grounded in, the Earth. One of these ways of being Earth-worldly is to embrace the condition of being entangled. We can interpret this term in the way that Heidegger66 did, as the condition of being mired in everyday human concerns, worries, and anxiety, to prolong existence. But, in contrast, we can and should reframe it as authors like Karen Barad67 and Donna Haraway68 have done. To them and many others, ‘entanglement’ is a radical, indeed fundamental condition of being-with, or, as Jean-Luc Nancy puts it, ‘being singular plural’.69 This means that no being is truly autonomous or separate, whether at the scale of international politics or of quantum physics. World itself is singular plural: what humans tend to refer to as ‘the’ world is actually a multiplicity of worlds at various scales that intersect, overlap, conflict, emerge as they surge across the Earth. World emerges from the poetics of existence, the collision of energy and matter, the tumult of agencies, the fusion and diffusion of bonds.

Worlds erupt from, and consist in, the intersection of diverse forms of being – material and intangible, organic and inorganic, ‘living’ and ‘nonliving’. Because of the tumultuousness of the Earth with which they are entangled, ‘worlds’ are not static, rigid or permanent. They are permeable and fluid. They can be created, modified – and, of course, destroyed. Concepts of violence, harm and (in)security that focus only on humans ignore at their peril the destruction and severance of worlds,70 which undermines the conditions of plurality that enables life on Earth to thrive.

#### The alt interprets historical foundations of capitalism as inevitable – that overdetermines human actions in a changeable system – the alt abdicates the responsibility of political commitment

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Afropessimism grew into an influential area of black thought by the second decade of the new millennium. The term “Afropessimism,” as I am using it here, came out of “Afro-pessimism.” The elimination of the hyphen is an important development since it dispels ambiguity and in effect announces a specific mode of thought. Should the hyphen remain, the ambiguity would be between pessimistic people of African descent and philosophical or theoretical pessimism.1 The conjoined, theoretical term is what proponents of that intellectual movement often have in mind in their diagnosis of what I shall call “the black condition.”

The appeal to a black condition is peculiarly existential, though it is done in this context in ironic ways. Existentialists, after all, as is well known, reject notions of human “nature,” on the grounds that human beings live in a world of possibility, which makes an essentialist notion such as “nature” a matter, at least for such realities, always in the making.2 In the classic formulation, human reality exists prior to its essence. For each human being, essence is, as it were, an appointment whose actuality is not always fulfilled. Such a task does not mean that human beings lack anchorage. Everyone has to start from somewhere and that or those are conditions of possibility for a human world. Existentialists, thus, often prefer to speak or write of “human condition” or conditions for these reasons. What human beings produce is manifold, but key in every instance is a mode of life, a world, so to speak, in and through which human beings could emerge as human. Human beings thus, for the most part, produce human realities and worlds (whether good or bad). Such realities and worlds offer a network of relations and relationships through which many other things are produced, all of which are constellations of meaning. Again, what comes about could be appreciated or rejected, but either is valuable or not in terms of how meaningful it is for ongoing human projects. There is, thus, also a very pragmatic dimension to this existential portrait of what is also called “human reality.”

Critics of existentialism often reject its human formulation. Heidegger, for instance, in his “Letter on Humanism,” lambasted Sartre for supposedly in effect subordinating Being to a philosophical anthropology with dangers of anthropocentrism.3 Yet, as I have argued in a variety of writings, a philosophical understanding of culture raises the problem of the conditions through which philosophical reflections become meaningful.4 Though a human activity, a more radical understanding of culture raises the question of the human being as the producer of an open reality. If the human being is in the making, then “human reality” is never complete and is more the relations in which such thought takes place than a claim about the thought. Additionally, what Heidegger fails to understand is, as Keiji Nishitani reminds us, Being is not all it is cracked up to be, as it also covers over instead of reveal reality.5 That includes human reality.

The etymology of existence already points to these elements. From the Latin ex sistere, “to stand out,” it also means to appear; against invisibility in the stream of effects through which the human world appears, much follows through the creative and at times alchemic force of human thought and deed.

Quarrels with and against existential thought are many. In more recent times, they have surfaced primarily from Marxists, structuralists, and poststructuralists, even though there were, and continue to be, many existential Marxists and even existentialists with structuralist and poststructuralist leanings and tendencies.6

I begin with this tale of philosophical abstraction to contextualize, at least in philosophical terms, Afropessimism. Its main exemplars, such as Jared Sexton and Frank Wilderson III, began their careers with training in academic literary theory, an area dominated by poststructualism since the 1970s through recent times in the Northern academies, even in many cases that avow “Marxism.” Sexton and Wilderson divert from a reductive poststructuralism, or at least attempt to do so, through examining important existential moves inaugurated, as Daniel McNeil observed, by Frantz Fanon and his intellectual heirs.7

The critical question that Afropessimism addresses in this fusion is the viability of posed strategies of Black liberation. (I am using the capital “B” here to point not only to the racial designation “black” but also to the emancipatory one “Black.” Afropessimists often mean both, since blacks and Blacks have a central and centered role in their thought.) The world that produced blacks and in consequence Blacks is, for Afropessimists, a crushing historical one whose Manichaean divide is sustained contraries best kept segregated. There is not only epistemic apartheid, as Reiland Rabaka would formulate it, but also ontological apartheid.8 Worse, any effort of mediation leads, in their view, to confirmed Black subordination and, worse, erasure. Overcoming this requires purging the world of antiblackness, although achieving such would be futile where the black remains since, for them, the black would by definition not “be” there, or, for that matter, anywhere.9

Where cleansing the world is unachievable, an alternative is to disarm the force of antiblack racism. Where whites lack power over Blacks, they lose relevance—at least politically and at levels of cultural and racial capital or hegemony. This is a position I have argued since my first book Bad Faith and Antiblack Racism.10 Wilderson joins me in that critique through exploring my concept of “an antiblack world” to build similar arguments. Sexton makes similar moves, although with a focus on the thought of the sociologist Orlando Patterson, in his discussions of “social death.”11 The rest of this chapter is an exploration of some nonexhaustive criticisms I have of the Afropessimist versions of these arguments, which may be of some use for readers interested in this area of thought.

The first is that “an antiblack world” is not identical with “the world is antiblack.” The latter is an antiblack racist project. It is not the historical achievement of such. Its limitations emerge from a basic fact. Black people and other opponents of such an enterprise fought, and continue to fight, against it. The same argument applies to the argument about social death. Such an achievement would have rendered even those authors' and the reflections I am offering here stillborn. The basic premises of the antiblack world and social death arguments are, then, locked in performative contradictions. They fail at the moment they are articulated. Yet, they have rhetorical force. This is evident through the continued growth of its proponents, literature, and forums devoted to it, in which all lay claim to stillborn status.

In Bad Faith and Antiblack Racism, I argued that there are forms of antiblack racism that are also offered under the guise of love. I was writing about whites who exoticize blacks while offering themselves as white sources of black salvation. It was a response to those who regard racism exclusively as acts of demonization. There are also racist forms of valorization. Analyzed in terms of bad faith, where one lies to oneself in an attempt to flee displeasing truths for pleasing falsehoods, exoticists romanticize blacks while affirming white normativity and themselves as principals of reality. These ironic, performative contradictions are features of all forms of racism, where one group is elevated to a godlike status and another is pushed below or outside that of human despite both claiming to be human.

Antiblack racism offers whites self–other relations (necessary for ethics) with each other but not so for groups forced in a “zone of nonbeing” below or outside them. Although to be outside is not necessarily to be below, it is so in a system of hierarchy in which above is also interpreted as being within. There is asymmetry where whites and any designated racially superior groups stand as others who look downward to those who are not their others or their analogs. Antiblack racism is, thus, not a problem of blacks being “others.” It is a problem of their not-being-analogical-selves-and-not-even-being-others.

Fanon, in Black Skin, White Masks, reminds us that Blacks among each other live in a world of selves and others. It is in attempted relations with whites under circumstances where whites control the conditions that these problems of dehumanization and subordination occur. Reason in such contexts, as he observes, has a bad habit of walking out when Blacks enter. What are Blacks to do? As reason cannot be forced to recognize Blacks because that would be “violence,” they must ironically reason reasonably with such forms of unreasonable reason. Contradictions loom. Racism is, given these arguments, a project of imposing nonrelations as the model of dealing with people designated “black.”12

In The Damned of the Earth, Fanon goes further and argues that colonialism is an attempt to impose a Manichean structure of contraries instead of a dialectical one of ongoing, human negotiations of contradictions. The former segregates the groups; the latter is produced from interaction. The police, he observes, is the primary mediator between the two models, as their role is the use of force/violence to maintain the contraries instead of the human, discursive one of politics and civility requiring the elimination of separation through the interactive, and ultimately intimate, dynamics of communication. Such societies draw legitimacy from Black nonexistence or invisibility. Black appearance, in other words, would be a violation of those systems. Think of the continued blight of police, extra-judicial killings of blacks and Blacks in those countries.13 The ongoing model of fascist white rule as the daily condition of blacks is to prevent the emergence of Blacks.

An immediate observation of many postcolonies is that antiblack attitudes, practices, and institutions are not exclusively white. Black antiblack dispositions make this clear. In addition to black antiblackness taking the form of white hatred of black people, there is also the adoption of black exoticism. Where this exists, blacks simultaneously receive avowed black love alongside black rejection of agency. Many problems follow. The absence of agency bars maturation, which would reinforce the racial logic of blacks as in effect wards of whites. Without agency, ethics, liberation, maturation, politics, and responsibility could not be possible. This is because blacks would not actually be able to do anything outside of the sphere of white approbation and commands.

Afropessimism endorses the previous set of observations, but this agreement is supported by a hidden premise of white agency versus black and Black incapacity. They make much of Fanon's remark that “the Black has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white.”14 Fanon's rhetorical flare led many unfortunate souls to misread this remark. As he had already argued that racism is a socially produced phenomenon, his point was that those who produced it take it to be ontological. In other words, such people—in this case whites—do not take seriously that blacks have any ontological resistance to white points of view. Fanon was not arguing that blacks are ontologically beings, or even nonbeings, of that kind. If this were so, he would not have pointed out, in numerous sections of that book, black and Black experiences with each other. The whole point of the chapter in which that remark is made, “The Lived-Experience of the Black,” is to explore blacks' and Blacks' points of view. This is a patent rejection of an ontological status while pointing to the presumed ontological status of a skewed perspective.

Proponents of Afropessimism might respond that their position on white agency and black incapacity comes from Fanon's famous remark that though whites created le Nègre—the French term for, depending on the context, “negro,” “nigger,” and “black”—it was les Nègres who created Négritude.15 Whites clearly did not create Afropessimism, which Black liberationists should, in agreement, celebrate. We should avoid the fallacy of confusing the source with the outcome. History is not short of bad ideas from good or well-intentioned people. If intrinsically good, each person of African descent would become ethically and epistemologically a switching of the Manichean contraries, which means in effect only changing the players instead of the racist game. We come, then, to the crux of the matter. If the goal of Afropessimism is Afropessimism, its achievement would be attitudinal and, in the language of old, stoic—in short, a symptom of antiblack society.

At this point, there are several observations that follow. The first is a diagnosis of the implications of Afropessimism as a symptom. The second pertains to the epistemological implications of Afropessimism. The third is whether a disposition counts as a political act and, if so, is it sufficient for its avowed aims. There are more, but for the sake of brevity, I will simply focus on these.16

An ironic dimension of pessimism is that it is the other side of optimism. Oddly enough, both are connected to nihilism, which is, as Nietzsche showed, a decline of values during periods of social decay.17 It emerges when people no longer want to be responsible for their actions. The same problem surfaces in movements. When one such as the Black Liberation movement is suffering from decay, nihilism is symptomatic. Familiar tropes follow. Optimists expect intervention from beyond. Pessimists declare that relief is not forthcoming. Neither takes responsibility for what is valued. The valuing is what leads to the second, epistemic point. The presumption that what is at stake is what can be known to determine what can be done is the problem. If such knowledge were possible, the debate would be about who is reading the evidence correctly. Such judgment would be a priori—that is, prior to events actually occurring. The future, unlike transcendental conditions such as language, signs, and reality, is ex post facto; it is yet to come. Facing the future, the question is not what will be or how do we know what will be but instead the realization that whatever is done will be that on which the future will depend. Rejecting optimism and pessimism, there is a supervening alternative, as we have seen throughout the reflections offered throughout this book—namely, political commitment.

The appeal to political commitment is not only in stream with what French existentialists call l'intellectuel engagé (the committed intellectual) but also in what reaches back through the history and existential situation of enslaved, racialized ancestors. Many were, in truth, an existential paradox of commitment to action without guarantees. The slave revolts, micro and macro acts of resistance, escapes, and returns to help others do the same, the cultivated instability of plantations and other forms of enslavement, and countless other actions, were waged against a gauntlet of forces designed to eliminate any hope of success. The claim of colonialists and enslavers was that the future belonged to them, not to the enslaved and the indigenous. Such people were, in colonial eyes, incapable of ontological resistance. A result of more than 500 years of “conquest” and 300 years of enslavement was also a (white) rewriting of history in which African and First Nations' agency was, at least at the level of scholarship, practically erased. Yet there was resistance even in that realm, as Africana and First Nation intellectual history and scholarship attest; what, after all, are Africana, Black, and Indigenous Studies? What, after all, are those many sites of intellectual production and activism outside of hegemonic academies? Such actions set the course for different kinds of struggle today.

Such reflections occasion meditations on the concept of failure. Afropessimism, the existential critique suggests, suffers from a failure in their analysis of failure. Consider Fanon's notion of constructive failure, where what does not initially work transforms conditions for something new to emerge. To understand this argument, one must rethink the philosophical anthropology at the heart of a specific line of Euromodern thought on what it means to be human. Atomistic and individual-substance-based, this model, articulated by Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, John Stuart Mill, and many others, is of a nonrelational being that thinks, acts, and moves along a course in which continued movement depends on not colliding with others. Under that model, the human being is a thing that enters into a system that facilitates or obstructs its movement. Under this model, the human being is actually a being. An alternative model, shared by many groups across southern Africa, Asia, South America, and even parts of Continental Europe, is a relational version of the human being as part of a larger system of meaning. Actions, from that perspective, are not about whether “I” succeed but instead about “our” unending story across time. Under this model, no human being is a being simpliciter or being-in-her-or-himself-or-themselves. As relational, it means that each human being is a constant negotiation of ongoing efforts to build relationships with others, which means no one actually enters a situation without establishing new situations of action and meaning. Instead of entering a game, their participation requires a different kind of project—especially where the “game” was premised on their exclusion. Thus, where the system or game repels initial participation, such repulsion is a shift in the grammar of how the system functions, especially its dependence on obsequious subjects. Shifted and shifting energy afford alternatives. Kinds cannot be known before the actions that birthed them. Participation, understood in these terms, is never in games but acts of changing them.

Abstract as this sounds, it has much historical support. For example, Evelyn Simien, in her insightful political study Historic Firsts, examines the new set of relations established in the United States by Shirley Chisholm's and Jesse Jackson's U.S. presidential campaigns.18 There would have been no President Barack Obama without such important predecessors affecting the demographics of voter participation. Simien intentionally focused on the most mainstream example of political life to illustrate this point. Though no exemplar of radicalism or revolution, Obama's “success” came from Chisholm and Jackson's (and many others') so-called “failure.” Despite the appalling reactionary response of a right-wing majority in the 114th Congress during the second term of Obama's presidency and the election of Donald Trump, whose obsession with erasing Obama's legacy exemplified a form of psychoanalytical little man's trauma, the historic fact remains that Obama took the helm of a mismanaged executive branch and gave it a level of dignity and intelligence matched by few of its white exemplars. His successors claim for a restored greatness only reveals the joke that is, in fact, any project on which the term “supremacy” is built: the naked racism and mediocrity that followed—there is an amusing photograph of a Klansman holding up a sign declaring his race's “superior jeans!”—reveal the folly and terror of white megalomania. Beyond presidential electoral politics, there are numerous examples of how prior, radical so-called “failures” transformed relationships that facilitated other kinds of outcome. The trail goes back to the Haitian Revolution, which offered a vision of Black sovereignty that garnered the full force of Euromodern colonial and racist alliances to stall, and back to every act of resistance from Nat Turner's Rebellion in the USA, Sharpe's in Jamaica, or Tula's in Curaçao, and so many other efforts for social transformation to come.19

In existential terms, then, many ancestors of the African diaspora embodied what Kierkegaard calls an existential paradox. All the evidence around them suggested failure and the futility of hope. They first had to make a movement of infinite resignation—that is, resigning themselves to their situation. Yet they must simultaneously act against that resignation. Kierkegaard, as we have seen, called this seemingly contradictory phenomenon “faith,” but that concept relates more to a relationship with a transcendent, absolute being, which could only be established by a “leap,” as there are no mediations or bridge to the Absolute whose distant is, as Kierkegaard put it, absolutely absolute. Ironically, if Afropessimism appeals to transcendent intervention, it would collapse into faith. If the Afropessimist's argument rejects transcendent intervention and focuses on committed political action, of taking responsibility for a future that offers no guarantees, then the movement from infinite resignation becomes existential political action.

At this point, the crucial meditation would be on politics and political action. An attitude of infinite resignation to the world without the leap of committed action would simply be pessimistic or nihilistic. Similarly, an attitude of hope or optimism about the future would lack infinite resignation. We see here the underlying failure of the two approaches. Yet ironically, there is a form of failure at failing in the pessimistic turn versus the optimistic one, since if focused exclusively on resignation as the goal, then the “act” of resignation would have been achieved, which, paradoxically, would be a success; it would be a successful failing of failure. For politics to emerge, there are two missing elements in inward pessimistic resignation to consider.

The first is that politics is a social phenomenon, which means it requires the expanding options of a social world. It must transcend the self. Turning away from the social world, though a statement about politics, is not in and of itself political. As we have seen, the ancients from whom much Western political theory or philosophy claimed affinity had a disparaging term for an individual resigned from political life—namely, idiōtēs, a private person, one not concerned with public affairs, in English: an idiot. I mention “Western political theory” because that is the hegemonic intellectual context of Afropessimism; I have not come across Afropessimistic writings on thought outside of that framework. We do not have to end our etymological journey in ancient Greek. Recall that extending our linguistic archaeology back a few thousand years we could examine the Middle Kingdom (2000 BCE–1700 BCE) of Kmt's Mdw Ntr word idi (deaf). The presumption, later taken on by the ancient Athenians and other Greek-speaking peoples, was that a lack of hearing entailed isolation, at least in terms of audio speech. The contemporary inward resignation of seeking a form of purity from the loathsome historical reality of racial oppression, in this reading, retreats ultimately into a form of moralism (private, normative satisfaction) instead of public responsibility born of and borne by action. The nonbeing to which Afropessimists refer is also a form of inaudibility.

The second is the importance of power. Politics makes no sense without it. As we have seen throughout our earlier reflections on power, Eurocentric etymology points to the Latin word potis as its source, from which came the word “potent” as in an omnipotent god. If we again look back farther, we will notice the Middle Kingdom Mdw Ntr word pHty, which refers to godlike strength. Yet for those ancient Northeast Africans, even the gods' abilities came from a source. In the Coffin Texts, HqAw or heka activates the ka (sometimes, as we have seen, translated as soul, spirit, womb, or “magic”), which makes reality.20 All this amounts to a straightforward thesis on power as the ability with the means to make things happen.

There is an alchemical quality of power. The human world, premised on symbolic communication, brings many forms of meaning into being, and those new meanings afford relationships that build institutions through a world of culture, a phenomenon that Freud, we should recall, rightly described as “a prosthetic god.” It is godlike because it addresses what humanity historically sought from the gods—protection from the elements, physical maledictions, and social forms of misery. Such power clearly can be abused. It is where those enabling capacities (empowerment) are pushed to the wayside in the hording of social resources into propping up some people as gods that the legitimating practices of cultural cum political institutions decline and stimulate pessimism and nihilism. The institutions in Abya Yala and in Northern countries, such as the United States and Canada, very rarely  attempt to establish positive relations to blacks, and Blacks the subtext of Afropessimism and this entire meditation.

The discussion points to a demand for political commitment. Politics is manifested under different names throughout the history of our species, but the one occasioning the word “politics” is, as we have seen, from the Greek pólis, which refers to ancient Hellenic city-states. It identifies specific kinds of  activities conducted inside the city-state, where order necessitated the resolution of conflicts through rules of discourse the violation of which could lead to (civil) war, a breaking down of relations into those appropriate for  “outsiders.” Returning to the Fanonian observation of selves and others, it is clear that imposed limitations on certain groups amount to impeding or blocking the option and activities of politics. Yet, as a problem occurring within the polity, the problem short of war becomes a political one.

Returning to Afropessimistic challenges, the question becomes this. If the problem of antiblack racism is conceded as political—where antiblack institutions of power have, as their project, the impeding of Black power, which in effect requires barring Black access to political institutions—then antiblack societies are ultimately threats also to politics defined as the human negotiation of the expansion of human capabilities or, more to the point, appearance, speech, and freedom.

Antipolitics is one of the reasons why societies in which antiblack racism is hegemonic are also those in which racial moralizing dominates; moralizing stops at individuals at the expense of addressing institutions the transformation of which would make immoral individuals irrelevant. As a political problem, it demands a political solution. It is not accidental that blacks continue to be the continued exemplars of unrealized freedom and against whom violence is waged against appearance and speech. As so many from Ida B. Wells-Barnett to Angela Y. Davis, Michelle Alexander, Angela J. Davis, Noël Cazenave have shown the expansion of privatization and incarceration is squarely placed in a structure of states and civil societies premised on the limitations of freedom (Blacks)—ironically, as seen in countries such as South Africa and the United States, in the name of freedom.21

That power is a facilitating or enabling phenomenon, a functional element of the human world, a viable response must be the establishment of relations that reach beyond the singularity of the body. I bring this up because proponents of Afropessimism might object to this analysis because of its appeal to a human world. If that world is abrogated, the site of struggle becomes that which is patently not human. It is not accidental that popular race discourse refers today to “black bodies” instead of “black people,” for instance. As the human world is discursive, social, and relational, this abandonment amounts to an appeal to the nonrelational, the incommunicability of radicalized singularity, and appeals to the body and its very limited reach, if not isolation. At that point, it is perhaps the psychologist, psychiatrist, or psychoanalyst who would be helpful, as turning radically inward offers the promise of despair, narcissistic delusions of divine power, and, as Fanon also observed, madness.22 Even if that slippery slope were rejected, the performative contradiction of attempting to communicate such singularity or absence thereof requires, at least for consistency, the appropriate course of action: silence.

The remaining question for Afropessimism, especially those who are primarily academics, becomes this: Why write?

It is a question for which, in both existential and political terms, I do not see how an answer could be given from an Afropessimistic perspective without the unfortunate revelation of cynicism. The marketability of Afropessimists in predominantly white institutions—perhaps as an exotic phenomenon that affirms white standpoints as ontological sites of legitimacy—is no doubt in the immediate and paradoxical satisfaction in dissatisfaction it offers. Indeed, if Afropessimists were correct, their only solace would be in black institutions, but that, too, would pose a problem since the argument is that such institutions lack agency because, as black, they are absent. This is not to say that critical black and Black thinkers should not do their work in predominantly white spaces. It is simply that the argument of the impossibility of their doing so makes their location in such places patently contradictory. We are at this point on familiar terrain. As with ancient logical paradoxes denying the viability of time and motion, the best option, after a moment of immobilized reflection, is, eventually, to move on, even where the pause is itself significant as an encomium of thought.

#### The world is not inevitably structured by “white vs. black” logics – different attributes can be more or less salient, and aren’t fixed around race, but malleable

Sapolsky 19

Robert Sapolsky, American neuroendocrinologist and author, currently a professor of biology, and professor of neurology and neurological sciences and, by courtesy, neurosurgery, at Stanford University, “This Is Your Brain on Nationalism,” Foreign Affairs. March/April 2019.

TURBANS TO HIPSTER BEARDS

For all this pessimism, there is a crucial difference between humans and those warring chimps. The human tendency toward in-group bias runs deep, but it is relatively value-neutral. Although human biology makes the rapid, implicit formation of us-them dichotomies virtually inevitable, who counts as an outsider is not fixed. In fact, it can change in an instant.

For one, humans belong to multiple, overlapping in-groups at once, each with its own catalog of outsiders—those of a different religion, ethnicity, or race; those who root for a different sports team; those who work for a rival company; or simply those have a different preference for, say, Coke or Pepsi. Crucially, the salience of these various group identities changes all the time. Walk down a dark street at night, see one of “them” approaching, and your amygdala screams its head off. But sit next to that person in a sports stadium, chanting in unison in support of the same team, and your amygdala stays asleep. Similarly, researchers at the University of California, Santa Barbara, have shown that subjects tend to quickly and automatically categorize pictures of people by race. Yet if the researchers showed their subjects photos of both black and white people wearing two different colored uniforms, the subjects automatically began to categorize the people by their uniforms instead, paying far less attention to race. Much of humans’ tendency toward in-group out-group thinking, in other words, is not permanently tied to specific human attributes, such as race. Instead, this cognitive architecture evolved to detect any potential cues about social coalitions and alliances—to increase one’s chance of survival by telling friend from foe. The specific features that humans focus on to make this determination vary depending on the social context and can be easily manipulated.

Even when group boundaries remain fixed, the traits people implicitly associate with “them” can change—think, for instance, about how U.S. perceptions of different immigrant groups have shifted over time. Whether a dividing line is even drawn at all varies from place to place. I grew up in a neighborhood in New York with deep ethnic tensions, only to discover later that Middle America barely distinguishes between my old neighborhood’s “us” and “them.” In fact, some actors spend their entire careers alternating between portraying characters of one group and then the other.

This fluidity and situational dependence is uniquely human. In other species, in-group/out-group distinctions reflect degrees of biological relatedness, or what evolutionary biologists call “kin selection.” Rodents distinguish between a sibling, a cousin, and a stranger by smell—fixed, genetically determined pheromonal signatures—and adapt their cooperation accordingly. Those murderous groups of chimps are largely made up of brothers or cousins who grew up together and predominantly harm outsiders.

Humans are plenty capable of kinselective violence themselves, yet human group mentality is often utterly independent of such instinctual familial bonds. Most modern human societies rely instead on cultural kin selection, a process allowing people to feel closely related to what are, in a biological sense, total strangers. Often, this requires a highly active process of inculcation, with its attendant rituals and vocabularies. Consider military drills producing “bands of brothers,” unrelated college freshmen becoming sorority “sisters,” or the bygone value of welcoming immigrants into “the American family.” This malleable, rather than genetically fixed, path of identity formation also drives people to adopt arbitrary markers that enable them to spot their cultural kin in an ocean of strangers—hence the importance various communities attach to flags, dress, or facial hair. The hipster beard, the turban, and the “Make America Great Again” hat all fulfill this role by sending strong signals of tribal belonging.

Moreover, these cultural communities are arbitrary when compared to the relatively fixed logic of biological kin selection. Few things show this arbitrariness better than the experience of immigrant families, where the randomness of a visa lottery can radically reshuffle a child’s education, career opportunities, and cultural predilections. Had my grandparents and father missed the train out of Moscow that they instead barely made, maybe I’d be a chain-smoking Russian academic rather than a Birkenstockwearing American one, moved to tears by the heroism during the Battle of Stalingrad rather than that at Pearl Harbor. Scaled up from the level of individual family histories, our bigpicture group identities—the national identities and cultural principles that structure our lives—are just as arbitrary and subject to the vagaries of history.

#### The Symbolic Order is contingent, not a permanent and unchanging matrix of cultural meaning and symbols --- they’re wrong about the grammar of anti-Black violence being unmovable and fixated on the slave.

Hudson 14 Peter Hudson - senior lecturer in politics with research interest in social and political theory and South African studies at Wits Institute of Social and Economic Research—2014 (The State and Colonial Unconscious, *Social Dynamics: A Journal of African Studies*, 39.2: 263-277,266).

Thus the self-same/other distinction is necessary for the possibility of identity itself. There always has to exist an outside, which is also inside, to the extent it is designated as the impossibility from which the possibility of the existence of the subject derives its rule (Badiou 2009, 220). But although the excluded place which isn’t excluded insofar as it is necessary for the very possibility of inclusion and identity may be universal (may be considered “ontological”), its content (what fills it) – as well as the mode of this filling and its reproduction – are contingent. In other words, the meaning of the signifier of exclusion is not determined once and for all: the place of the place of exclusion, of death is itself over-determined, i.e. the very framework for deciding the other and the same, exclusion and inclusion, is nowhere engraved in ontological stone but is political and never terminally settled. Put differently, the “curvature of intersubjective space” (Critchley 2007, 61) and thus, the specific modes of the “othering” of “otherness” are nowhere decided in advance (as a certain ontological fatalism might have it) (see Wilderson 2008). The social does not have to be divided into white and black, and the meaning of these signifiers is never necessary – because they are signifiers.

To be sure, colonialism institutes an ontological division, in that whites exist in a way barred to blacks – who are not. But this ontological relation is really on the side of the ontic – that is, of all contingently constructed identities, rather than the ontology of the social which refers to the ultimate unfixity, the indeterminacy or lack of the social. In this sense, then, the white man doesn’t exist, the black man doesn’t exist (Fanon 1968, 165); and neither does the colonial symbolic itself, including its most intimate structuring relations – division is constitutive of the social, not the colonial division.

“Whiteness” may well be very deeply sediment in modernity itself, but respect for the “ontological difference” (see Heidegger 1962, 26; Watts 2011, 279) shows up its ontological status as ontic. It may be so deeply sedimented that it becomes difficult even to identify the very possibility of the separation of whiteness from the very possibility of order, but from this it does not follow that the “void” of “black being” functions as the ultimate substance, the transcendental signified on which all possible forms of sociality are said to rest. What gets lost here, then, is the specificity of colonialism, of its constitutive axis, its “ontological” differential. A crucial feature of the colonial symbolic is that the real is not screened off by the imaginary in the way it is under capitalism. At the place of the colonised, the symbolic and the imaginary give way because non-identity (the real of the social) is immediately inscribed in the “lived experience” (vécu) of the colonised subject. The colonised is “traversing the fantasy” (Zizek 2006a, 40–60) all the time; the void of the verb “to be” is the very content of his interpellation. The colonised is, in other words, the subject of anxiety for whom the symbolic and the imaginary never work, who is left stranded by his very interpellation. “Fixed” into “non-fixity,” he is eternally suspended between “element” and “moment”– he is where the colonial symbolic falters in the production of meaning and is thus the point of entry of the real into the texture itself of colonialism.

Be this as it may, whiteness and blackness are (sustained by) determinate and contingent practices of signification; the “structuring relation” of colonialism thus itself comprises a knot of significations which, no matter how tight, can always be undone. Anti-colonial – i.e., anti-“white” – modes of struggle are not (just) “psychic” but involve the “reactivation” (or “de-sedimentation”)7 of colonial objectivity itself. No matter how sedimented (or global), colonial objectivity is not ontologically immune to antagonism. Differentiality, as Zizek insists (see Zizek 2012, chapter 11, 771 n48), immanently entails antagonism in that differentiality both makes possible the existence of any identity whatsoever and at the same time – because it is the presence of one object in another – undermines any identity ever being (fully) itself. Each element in a differential relation is the condition of possibility and the condition of impossibility of each other. It is this dimension of antagonism that the Master Signifier covers over transforming its outside (Other) into an element of itself, reducing it to a condition of its possibility.

#### The alt’s recognition that white supremacy is an antitrust violation is a reason to reinvest in antitrust as a remedy – the alt forecloses antimonopoly activism in favor of racial justice

Greer and Rice 21 – Jeremie Greer and Solana Rice are Co-founders and Co-executives of Liberation in a Generation, a national movement-support organization working to build the power of people of color to transform the economy.

Jeremie Greer and Solana Rice, “Anti-Monopoly Activism: Reclaiming Power Through Racial Justice,” *Liberation in a Generation*, March 2021, pp. 3-14, https://www.liberationinageneration.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Anti-Monopoly-Activism\_032021.pdf.

Unfortunately, though the start of the 20th century saw robust anti-monopoly government action, the government rapidly retreated from anti-monopoly enforcement in the second half of the century. Since, the federal government and the federal courts have aided—not prevented—the exponential growth in monopoly power in nearly every sector of our economy, including technology, telecommunications, food supply chains, banking, and health care. In 2015, for example, the US saw a record number of corporate mergers, totalling $3.8 trillion in merger and acquisition activity.5 Mergers that year involved massive companies, such as Time Warner Cable, AnheuserBusch, and Berkshire Hathaway, becoming more massive. In 2020, T-Mobile—the third-largest wireless carrier in the US— acquired Sprint,6 and Morgan Stanely acquired online stock trading company E-Trade.7

The economic problems created by monopoly power have been widely studied, and many solutions to curtail it have been developed by experts. Unfortunately, like so many large-scale and so-called “race-neutral” policy efforts, anti-monopoly policy ideation and implementation have left people of color behind. In researching this paper we found limited research or policy ideation on the impact of monopoly power on people of color. We believe that the absence of grassroots leaders of color in anti-monopoly policy conversations can be attributed to this disconnect.

It is critical that grassroots leaders of color are positioned to lead on anti-monopoly policy, as they are uniquely positioned to understand its impact on people of color at the household, community, and societal levels. This gives them a unique perspective in policy ideation efforts that should be valued and validated. These leaders also possess the unique skills to mobilize the people and public power that are necessary to force the government to reclaim its historic role of reining in runaway corporate monopoly power.

We at Liberation in a Generation believe that the power to change our economic systems rests with the organizers of color who are building the political strength of communities of color. Anti-monopoly research and advocacy need to better quantify, center, and reflect what people of color are experiencing and the ways that they are being harmed by monopoly power’s reach. These efforts should also better connect anti-monopoly policy and advocacy as tools to advance the existing priorities of leaders of color, such as the Green New Deal, Medicare for All, closing the racial wealth gap, and a Homes Guarantee. This paper aims to contribute a major step in the long journey of bridging the divide between anti-monopoly researchers and policy advocates and grassroots leaders of color. The first step on that journey is knowledge.

Recognizing that anti-monopoly work is a new policy issue to many grassroots leaders of color, this paper will serve as a primer to 1) educate grassroots leaders on the issue of corporate concentration, 2) connect the issue to racial justice, and 3) recommend a path forward for grassroots leaders as well as the researchers and advocates who need to embrace them. Our hope is that this paper provides a foundation of knowledge that grassroots leaders of color can use to build race-conscious solutions and mobilize for action to rein in runaway corporate monopoly power. To that end, the paper is organized into six sections.

SECTION 1 Monopoly Power Is Corporate Power Magnified and Maximized

In 1975, millions flooded theaters to see the blockbuster thriller Jaws. The story follows a police chief in a small resort town as he risks his life to protect beachgoers from a monstrous man-eating great white shark.

Monopolies are a lot like the shark in Jaws. While enormous, ruthless, dangerous, and scary, the movie’s monster is just a shark, and the police chief uses tools and community to defeat it. Comparatively, while also enormous, ruthless, dangerous, and even scary, monopolies are just corporations, and we, together, can confront them. Their massive power controls the wages we earn, the prices we pay, and the actions of the politicians who are supposed to represent us in DC, the statehouse, and city hall. In a representative democracy, we the people are at the top of the food chain, and it is within our power to make these monopolies fear us— and end their existence in the first place.

Grassroots leaders of color are highly experienced and uniquely skilled at challenging corporate power, and these capacities can and should be used to curb monopoly power. For example,8 the Athena Coalition has successfully leveraged grassroots power to challenge the monopoly power of Amazon, and Color of Change9 has effectively used grassroots digital organizing to challenge the monopoly power of social media platforms such as Facebook. Putting monopolies in the crosshairs of organizers is critical because they best understand the real human and structural devastation caused by monopoly power, which is otherwise all too easily neglected.

Though we believe that grassroots leaders of color have the experience and expertise necessary to challenge monopoly power, the question remains: Why should they lead this fight? Grassroots leaders of color are already engaged in high-stakes battles with the forces of corporate power on fundamental issues, including environmental justice, worker justice, housing justice, prison and police abolition, and voter and democratic justice. We believe that these efforts can be bolstered if anti-monopoly policy development and advocacy were incorporated into these existing efforts but then followed the lead of organizers. For example, the primary opponents of prison and police abolition are private prison monopolies, such as GEO Group and CoreCivic, which profit from the arrest and incarceration of Black and brown people. Opponents of the Green New Deal include energy monopolies BP and ExxonMobile, whose profits are derived from polluting Black and brown communities.10 Finally, opponents of the Homes Guarantee, and its call for creating 12 million units of social housing outside of the for-profit housing market, include big banks that profit from the commodification of affordable and low-income housing. Challenging these opponents by diminishing their monopoly power could prove to be a powerful weapon in the fight to dismantle unchecked corporate power and its real-life economic impact on people of color.

How Corporate Monopolies Show Up in Today’s World

The distinguishing features of monopolies, when compared to your run of the mill corporation (large or small), are the reach and intensity of the corporate power that they wield. Monopoly power turbocharges the ills of corporate power and creates a wider impact of the overlapping consequences for people. In many ways, monopolies are created when corporate power becomes governing power.11 Their sheer size and market dominance allow them to govern markets, and their expansive wealth gives them the power to manipulate prices, crush workers, and steamroll governments. Ultimately, monopolies’ extreme economic power—which they use to gain outsized political power and then more economic power—undermines the collective power of workers, consumers, small businesses, local communities, and governments.

It has become difficult, and inadequate, to rely on legal definitions to identify monopolies. The legal definition of monopolization is highly technical and complicated by centuries of conflicting jurisprudence. It's been narrowed to exclusively focus on the negative impact that anticompetitive actions have on consumers.12 This narrower focus intentionally shielded monopolies from any accountability for anticompetitive harm inflicted on workers, the environment, local communities, government, and democracy. Federal enforcement of monopoly power is confined to the highly specialized legal practice of antitrust law enforcement.13 However, centuries of political power wielded by corporate monopolies and their acolytes (e.g., universities, think tanks, trade associations, and major law firms) have rendered much of antitrust law enforcement toothless.14

In the late 19th and early 20th century, the definition of monopoly was much wider and comprehensive. In this paper, we will expand the definition as well. Recognizing that this definitional work is in many ways a work in progress, we offer our definition as a point of discussion and debate for the larger field of anti-monopoly advocates.

In this paper, we define monopoly as a corporate entity (a single corporation or a group of corporations) whose sheer size and anticompetitive behavior grant it disproportionate economic power and governing influence. This negatively affects the well-being of workers, consumers, markets, local communities, democratic governance, and the planet.

Below are a few major industries that reveal how corporate concentration and monopolistic industries harm the economic lives of workers, consumers, and communities of color.

Big Tech

Four corporations comprise what has come to be known as “Big Tech”: Amazon, Apple, Facebook, and Alphabet (the parent company of Google). Each of these technology firms dominate an enormous share of their respective technology markets. Google, for example, controls 90 percent of the internet search market, and it controls the largest video sharing platform on the internet through its ownership of YouTube. Apple controls 50 percent of the cellphone market,15 and Amazon controls 50 percent of all ecommerce. Facebook and its many subsidiaries (such as WhatsApp and Instagram) dominate the social media and online advertising marketplace.16 Other technology firms, including Uber, Lyft, Microsoft, and Netflix, also demonstrate monopolistic, anticompetitive behavior in their respective markets. In many ways, these companies, and the people who control them, are the “robber barons” of our time.

Big Pharma

The world's largest pharmaceutical corporations, including Johnson & Johnson, Pfizer, Merck, Gilead, Amgen, and AbbVie, together comprise “Big Pharma.” These monopolies build their profits by controlling the prices of critical life-saving pharmaceuticals (e.g., insulin, drugs that regulate blood pressure, and critical antibiotics) and life-altering medical devices (e.g., heart stents and joint replacement devices). Between 2000 and 2018, a disproportionately small number of pharmaceutical companies made a combined $11 trillion in revenue and $8.6 trillion in gross profits.17 In 2014, the top 10 pharmaceutical companies had 38 percent of the industry’s total sales revenue.18 Much of these profits were gained driving up the price of critical drugs , extorting research and development (R&D) funding from the government, and leveraging Big Pharma’s political influence to weaken government oversight of the industry.19

Big Agriculture

Big Agriculture, or “Big Ag,” refers to monopolies that control major aspects of the global food supply chain. This includes companies such as Cargill, Archer Daniels Midland Company (ADM), Bayer, and John Deere. Though once a diffuse network of small farmers and supply chain companies, recent mergers have created a system comprising a small number of corporations that are crowding out smaller, family-run companies including small farms. Similar to Big Pharma, government subsidies are a massive component of the obscene profits made by Big Ag. Further, as often the largest employer in many small rural towns, these corporations often ruthlessly wield their monopoly power to drive down wages and benefits to workers, skirt government safety regulations, and bully (and even buy out) small farmers.

Big Banks

Known as the “Big Five,” five banks control almost half of the industry’s nearly $15 trillion in financial assets: JPMorgan Chase, Bank of America, Wells Fargo, Citigroup, and US Bancorp. Their collective importance to the nation’s financial system has led some to consider them “too big to fail.”20 In fact, in response to the financial crisis of 2008, the federal government provided trillions of dollars in relief to ensure that they did not collapse under the weight of the crisis.21 The Big Five have an incredible influence over the flow of money throughout our economy. They finance critical goods and services, such as housing, higher education, infrastructure, and renewable energy. They also finance extractive elements of our economy, such as fossil fuels and private prisons. But, most importantly, they set the rules for who can and cannot access loan capital, and their exclusionary practices have been widely linked to the growth of racial wealth inequality (as described in Section 3).

These are just four examples of industries that have been taken over by monopolies, but they are in no way exclusive. Many other critical industries in our economy have been corrupted by monopolies, including the energy, health insurance, hospital, for-profit college, and delivery service industries.

One note of caution on monopolies: While all corporate monopolies are harmful, some government monopolies can be critical to providing essential programs and services. Examples of government monopolies include public K–12 schools, publicly owned utilities, and the United States Postal Service (USPS). In fact, the USPS is codified in the US constitution to ensure that all people—even those in remote rural areas—can send and receive mail. Today, the USPS is an important employer to people of color, particularly Black people, in providing competitive wages and quality health and retirement benefits.

The predation of corporate monopolies creates racial wealth inequality. Low-wage employers that employ people of color, such as Walmart—the nation’s largest private employer—often set the wage floor for local communities and the nation.22 Agribusinesses and pharmaceutical monopolies set prices at a “poverty premium” where people of color pay more for food and life saving drugs. Also, bank monopolies set the prices that people of color pay for basic financial services, and they provide capital to predatory lenders, including payday and car title lenders.

#### Refusal is depoliticizing --- it views Blackness as calcified, ignoring the shifts, interruptions, and complexities that characterize any human history --- only institutions map a path forward.

Spillers 18

Hortense J. Spillers, Gertrude Conaway Vanderbilt Professor of English at Vanderbilt University, “Or Else…,” The A-Line. August 30, 2018. <https://alinejournal.com/convergence/or-else/>

The three amendments, aka the “citizenship amendments,” are nested like matryoshka dolls, as ratification of the Fourteenth was made by the Republican majority grounds for readmission to the Union; by early 1868, enough states, via force and cajolery in some cases, had approved the law that became a part of the U.S Constitution, but Republican Radicals, White contends, “did not trust the South” and consequently “drafted the Fifteenth Amendment, which would prohibit states from ever restricting suffrage on the grounds of ‘race, color, or previous condition of servitude.’ “(White 94) Again, ratification, with reference to states still under military control, was mandated for readmission; the bill was submitted to the states in 1869 and ratified in 1870. A review of these complex maneuvers over a period of five years –we know, too, that access to the ballot would hound African-American community well into the Twenty-First Century—suggests that the vote has never been either a gift to black people, or at any point a flat-out certainty. Acquired within shouting distance of war’s end, the ballot would exact so severe a cost to the freedman and his/her children that we think of its troubled legacy today as an act of citizenship signed and sealed in blood.

Ironically, however twisted a standard of measure, we might gauge how far we’ve come by the degree of doubt expressible toward the efficacy of voter registration and electoral politics, as have a couple of my fellow writers in this issue. Even though I regard this argumentative posture as a strategic error of near-fatal proportions, I think I understand how we got here: basically, there are two related, but contrastive, founding propositions on black life and thought in modernity that critics have consistently elaborated since “time immemorial,” and by that, I mean the time that the student of history marks down as the beginning of her sense of crisis that initiates “blackness” in the Western context; as I understand it, Afrocentric views, for instance, elide “blackness” and Africanity which concept is driven back into the ancient world so that transatlantic slavery—relatively recent in light of an ancient human past—is not the origin—or more precisely, the prime time— of black personality’s historical identity, but, rather, an interruption of it. The diasporic, or (for lack of a better word) creolized reading of blackness lends weight to the term itself, insofar as blackness on this view defines a new historical apprenticeship, kin to Africanness, but distinct from it in its particular and stressful formation, instaurated by the trade. One “becomes” black –neither a phylogeny nor an ontogeny—by virtue of his/her interpellation in total Western Economy. These portions of discursive content imply discrete spatiotemporal registers, as the putative subjects of each overlap, but are not entirely conformable (even if they look exactly alike), and there’s the rub.

In the former instance, one discovers as many occasions as possible to establish and sustain symbolic contact with an imagined past, long receded, so that emphasis comes to rest on the power and porosity of myth and its ceremonial/ritualistic determinations wherever possible. Whether the Afrocentric sense eventuates in a vision of strategic movement toward a putative origin (as in “return” narratives/actualities of black politics of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries), or of ideological movement toward it (“ancestral” ceremonies, ritual celebrations), this reading seems to engender a politics that is cultural, that looks “otherworldly”—the place of the ego-ideal—in its valorized reference to an imagined ancestral field. We would anticipate that electoral politics in its uninspirational mundaneness might actually be beneath it. In the latter instance, focus comes to rest on the conditions that make blackness possible in the first place and what several diasporic thinkers, Frantz Fanon, prominent among them, describe as “disalienation,” or the process of undoing the deleterious effects of slavery and colonization; because the diasporic view installs the latter as efficient cause of historic black movement, its political projects are charged with a sense of urgency as they resonate the era of their appearance with unmistakable identitarian markings. David Walker’s, Anna Julia Cooper’s, and W.E.B.Du Bois’s respective discourse, for example, could never be mistaken for a different time/cultural period, which means that such discourses are organically linked to their own “now.” Consequently, the political protocols of a diasporic commitment tend to reflect the sense of crisis that characterizes blackness as an emergent category of human possibility. Because blackness in the diasporic reading runs parallel to modernity, blackness is cut away from the idea of Africa—perhaps we could say more precisely that the idea of Africa is bracketed in this ideological outline, rather than jettisoned as it might have been a century ago—as the idea of blackness itself assumes the name of a virtually absolute origin. If we think of these concurrent strands of ideas as postures, then we realize the extent to which they determine not only how one stands, but where, as well as why.

This enormous conceptual legacy, one way or another, accounts, I believe, for the lion’s share of African-American theoretical production and might be said to proffer a rich example of the problem of being/becoming and time. In its impressive variations and combinations, recombinations and iterations, black theory-making has engendered its fullest efflorescence in my view in the post-sixties period with regard to both thematic variedness and complexity and the democratic and demographic distribution of its practitioners; it is also true that any one of these postures and/or variations on it might evince at any given moment a kind of intellectual sclerosis which would induce in turn a conservative politics. If, for example, a theory governed by a diasporic view of black history from which to commence its narrative reifies slavery and colonization as inherent properties in a subject, then the theoretical posture no longer serves as an intellectual technology, or a heuristic device, but, rather, comes to advance an ontological valence. In my own work, for instance, I attempt to advance a theory of flesh/body as a strategy to differentiate historical positionalities in confrontation with the modern world. But if this idea has any usefulness, it proposes the theory as an opening into a closure; a torque that kicks off movement or rotation in static properties. But I should hope not to lose sight of the human potential that the subject of the flesh embodies; perhaps another way to say this is that the enfleshed subject inscribes an opening in a chain of necessity rather than a last word. The theory does not exhaust the subject that it would address, but attempts to highlight it. To hold to the view that the enfleshed subject is actually chattel or property—which we cannot say, insofar as we have merely established a subject possibility in this case—defeats the purpose of discriminating in the first place between a conceptual device on the one hand and a speaking (even if barred) subject on the other.

I have taken, then, the long way around in order to say that the ballot does not lose efficacy when it is wielded by black personality because the latter was once defined as anomie, as chattel. In other words, to premise the future of blackness on its past is to be mired in timelessness, which is precisely to be bereft of historicity, of differentiation, of progression. But moreover, it confuses a conceptual narrative, or a position in discourse, with an actual narrative that will always exceed it. To disparage the black vote is not a sophisticated, or radical, response to anything, but reverberates instead, without meaning to, we might suppose, a long-standing hatred of black people and their aspirations. To express doubt about the vote, especially this election season, in light of what we face now is beyond criticism: it is quite simply to embrace the inevitability of violence, and one should avoid flirtation with violence unless she is willing to put herself in its path. Anything less is an act of bad faith; I would go so far as to say that the failure to cast a vote at the coming midterms is an immoral act for at least two reasons that might go without saying, but bear repeating nonetheless: the meaning of suffrage for generations of African-Americans and the suffering that it has exacted over the decades and the certain danger that the current presidency and a treasonous, complicit Republican congressional majority pose to the United States and the world. Do we need to count the ways that we are doubtless threatened?

When I was a child, I not only spoke as one, but imagined like a child, too—a sauce pan, for instance, turned upside down made a really great hat—shining and irrepressible, cocked upside the head to the left, or the right; fabulous for a stately procession; the family’s beautiful mahogany console housed a radio with a green light in it, and if you squeezed yourself behind the device and examined the exposed radio tubes in it, you watched as they were suddenly dissolved in your mind’s eye into the skyline of a good-size city that you were taking in from a bird’s eye-view; if you stood a mop head up and drew a face on its handle, you had a pretty good doll for a day, especially if your father, or a sibling, whittled down the handle. In this world of discovery and surprise and everyday objects charged with magic, a word like “treason” signaled a remoteness light years away; in fact, it was a “school” word about as close to a little four- to seven -year old black girl’s reality as eighteenth-century images of white guys in tri-cornered hats, crossing the Delaware (wherever that was!), except that one of them was oddly named “Benedict Arnold,” who was not a very nice guy, we were told, and nowhere near “George Washington,” “who never told a lie.” Somebody cut down a cherry tree and, asked about it, ‘fessed up. (Or was that Abe Lincoln?) But this “treason” business started growing up, too, not unlike its young host body, as its next iteration was closer in both time and space to that of the school children—it was the Civil War and “seceding” states from the “Union.” Why would “they,” including the state where our young lady lived then and now, do that? Ah! And she learns that “history hurts.” And at that precise moment, one put away childish things, even though Emmett Till, my contemporary, was child enough. One day, long after, the end of a line in the presidential oath of office caught my attention, in fact, it quite astonished me—to defend the United States against “all enemies, foreign and domestic.” But is it possible for the “enemy” to be domestic? And what if it is? I thought I’d never live to see the day when I would have to ask myself that question and to wonder what the citizen’s duty might be in the realization that it is not only possible, but under certain circumstances, as appears to be the case at present, quite likely. And here we are, faced with the actual possibility now that the long-deferred democracy we have labored toward is poised to take a blow that could permanently end it. If voting could stave it off, who would refuse? Hold that thought.

#### Political hope is essential to combat structural racism – they conflate hope with certainty and inverts meaningful efforts to challenge white supremacy – we can be hopeful without being optimistic

Rogers, Associate Professor of Political Science at Brown University, ‘17

(Melvin, “Keeping the Faith,” November 1, <http://bostonreview.net/race/melvin-rogers-keeping-faith)>

But when the United States selects its eloquent spokesperson on the “race issue”—as it always does—all other voices become mere noise, and the complexity of our political traditions and our lived experiences are flattened out. In Coates’s view, for instance, Harriet Tubman, Ida B. Wells, and Martin Luther King Jr. were all failures. They performed the same script, they failed to move their audience to action, and they never reshaped U.S. life and culture. “All of these heroes,” Coates insists, “had failed to cajole and coerce the masters of America.” In Coates’s telling, fine historical distinctions disappear, time stands still, and the past and future collapse into the political horrors of the present.

This is what happens when we listen only to a single voice; no conversation is possible. We are disabled from speaking thoughtfully and accurately about political and cultural transformation on racial matters.

But there is a sleight of hand in Coates’s “black atheism”; it conflates hope with certainty, and hope becomes our fatal flaw. Yet we don’t need to believe that progress is inevitable to think that, through our efforts, we may be able to move toward a more just society. We can, however, be sure that no good will come of the refusal to engage in this work.

There is much in this that should concern us. Coates describes the pain visited on black bodies and engenders white guilt. He erodes the idea that who we are need not determine who we may become. He obstructs rather than opens any attempt to reckon with our racial past and present in the service of an inclusive future. And he participates in a politics where words and actions can never aspire to change the political community in which we live, and for that reason they only fortify our indignation and deepen our suspicion—namely, that as black Americans, we are as alien to this polity as it is alien to us. The aspiration to defend a more exalted vision of this country’s ethical and political life is taken as the hallmark of being asleep, dreaming in religious illusions. To be alive to an unvarnished reality, to be woke, is to recognize that no such country is possible.

This runs roughshod over that thread in the grand tradition of U.S. struggles for justice—a tradition in which hope and faith are forged through political darkness. Hope involves attachment and commitment to the possibility of realizing the goods we seek. Faith is of a broader significance, providing hope with content. Faith, the black scholar Anna Julia Cooper suggested in 1892, is grounded in a vision of political and ethical life that is at odds with the community one inhabits. It is a vision that one believes ought to command allegiance, for which one is willing to fight, and in which one believes others can find a home. Faith looks on the present from the perspective of a future vision of society, and uses the vision as a resource to remake the present. And so faith, the philosopher and psychologist William James explained in 1897, is “the readiness to act in a cause the prosperous issue of which is not certified to us in advance.” In other words, faith has never been exhausted by the political reality one happens to be living in.

Political faith has always rested on the idea that we are not finished, a thought that Coates rejects out of hand. In the nineteenth century, Ralph Waldo Emerson called this capacity for human renewal “ascension, or the passage of the soul into higher forms.” In our political life this means, as James Baldwin well knew, that both our liberal democratic institutions and its culture “depends on choices one has got to make, for ever and ever and ever, every day.”

Faith has always been a loving but difficult commitment precisely because it makes politics about maybes rather than certainties. One of the greatest dangers of U.S. exceptionalism, for instance, is that it has habituated us to think about the structure of political life as necessarily progressing. Writing in the wake of the Montgomery bus boycott—a successful nonviolent campaign against racial segregation—King sought to chasten the obvious excitement: “Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable. Even a superficial look at history reveals that no social advance rolls in on the wheels of inevitability.”

Yet Coates appears simply to invert U.S. exceptionalism, replacing it with the equally fatalistic idea that the United States is fundamentally broken. In a world where the good or bad is fated to happen, faith and hope have no foothold. This ultimately weakens our resolve and undermines our ability to take seriously the idea of an “American experiment.”

Black activists have not forged their faith with the stone of U.S. exceptionalism. Rather, they have used their darkest hours to “make a way out of no way”—to address the triple crises of exclusion, domination, and violence. Abolitionists such as David Walker faced it in the form of the enslavement of black folks. Frederick Douglass encountered it with the rise and crash of reconstruction. Wells faced it as she confronted the horror of lynching and the disposability of black life. And in our own time, Black Lives Matter (BLM) activists are reminded of a similar disposability of black life that goes unpunished.

And yet, they are keepers of the faith, recognizing that its vitality is not exhausted by the reality they struggle against. In her recent New York Times article, “Black Lives Matter Is Democracy in Action,” Barbara Ransby narrates a powerful account of BLM activists creating contexts for collective leadership and using those opportunities to transform the power of voice into actions that meet the needs of ordinary people. This effort would be impossible for people who accept Coates’s perspective. Their efforts may not win the day, but they certainly won’t win the day without the faith that winning is a possibility.

Faith does not deny the present, but refuses to be defined by it and sink into it. We now face a president who seeks to colonize every waking moment of our lives with feelings of dread, thus arresting our ability to imagine a reality beyond television, social media feeds, and newspapers. The illusion of our present moment is not expressed in political faith, but in the belief that we can respond constructively without such faith. Political faith is fully realistic about the present disasters and rejects illusions about assured future progress, while also insisting that we are not certain to fail. It is hopeful without being optimistic.

We may falter, and the material, psychological, and political goods of white supremacy may deplete our desire to transform. We know the history—from the 1880s to the 1960s—of white backlash in response to a more expansive racial justice. In fact, we are living through one such backlash given the ascendancy of Trump. But our political community is what it is because we have made it this way. It is not fated to be. Believing otherwise makes white supremacy something more than a collection of choices, habits, and practices—it makes it part of human nature itself. Coates wants us to face the facts and embrace black atheism. But throughout the book he often slides from working in the historical register to speaking in the idiom of philosophical metaphysics—at one moment he stands in time and at another he stands outside of it, confidently telling us how history will end. For this reason, Coates doesn't dismantle white supremacy; he ironically provides it with support.

Please understand my concern. Coates is right: he doesn’t have a “responsibility to be hopeful or optimistic or make anyone feel better about the world.” We must, as he has often done, speak the truth. But we must not claim to know what we cannot possibly know. Humility creates space for hope.

#### Empirics prove that racism is contingent, and progress is possible

Omi and Winant 13 Michael Omi and Howard Winant. Omi is an Associate Professor at UC Berkeley andWInant is a Professor of Sociology at the University of California, Santa Barbara “Resistance is futile?: a response to Feagin and Elias,” Ethnic and Racial Studies, Vol. 36, Issue 6. 2013

Their essay has an overly tendentious tone and sometimes misreads and misinterprets our book. Still there are many points of agreement between the racial formation and systemic racism theories. Where we disagree most strongly is over our respective understanding of racial politics. Feagin and Elias focus so intensely on racism that they lose sight of the complexities of race and the variations that exist among and within racially defined groups. In their ‘systemic racism’ account white racist rule is so comprehensive and absolute that the political power and agency of people of colour virtually disappear. Indeed, the ‘white racial frame’ (Feagin 2009) is so omnipotent that white racism seems to usurp and monopolize all political space in the USA. Yes, ‘counter framing’ is present, but it appears marginal at best, unable effectively to challenge the pervasiveness, persistence and power of white racism. Since Feagin and Elias dismiss ideas of ‘racial democracy’ tout court, their perspective makes it difficult to understand how anti-racist mobilization or political reform could ever have occurred in the past or could ever take place in the future. They see racism as so exclusively white that any notion of white anti-racism is virtually ignored and completely unexplained. Despite Feagin and Elias's good intentions of linking their analysis to anti-racist practice, we believe their views have quite the opposite effect: without intending to do so, they dismiss the political agency of people of colour and of anti-racist whites. In Feagin/Elias's view, ‘systemic racism’ is like the Borg in the Star Trek series: a hive-mind phenomenon that assimilates all it touches. As the Borg announce in their collective audio message to intended targets, ‘Resistance is futile’. We have a smaller space than the main essay, so we'll dispense with a point-by-point refutation of their understanding of racial formation theory. We assume readers of Racial Formation and of our other work know that we are not closet neocons, that we consider racism a foundational and continuous part of US history (and indeed modern world history), that we agree that whites have been the primary creators and beneficiaries of racist institutions and practices, and that we not only respect but also situate ourselves in the black radical tradition, especially the Duboisian tradition. We will focus on our fundamental point of disagreement with Feagin and Elias – how we respectively understand the very nature of racial politics in the USA. Here we will engage Feagin and Elias on a few important questions that will highlight both where we agree and where we disagree. Our topics are as follows: • What is the relationship between race and racism? • What is distinctive about our own historical epoch in the USA – from post-Second World War to the present – with respect to race and racism? • What are the political implications of contemporary racial trends? We discuss these questions with the intent of clarifying racial formation theory as well as sharpening the debate with the systemic racism perspective. We appreciate the opportunity to do so. What is the relationship between race and racism? In Racial Formation we suggest that the concepts of race and racism should be distinguished and not be used interchangeably (Omi and Winant 1994, p. 71). Some have argued that race is solely a product of racist domination; on that account race does not exist outside of racism. As readers of Ethnic and Racial Studies well know, many writers place quotation marks around race (‘race’) to distinguish their use of the concept from popular biological notions of human variation. This is meant to designate the wobbly social scientific status of the race concept. In contrast to this perspective, we consider race to be real because it is ‘real in its consequences.’1 Our ideas about how the meaning of race is produced are basically Duboisian and Jamesian: we all make our racial identities, though we do not make them under circumstances of our own choosing. Race and racism do not exist merely because of white domination, but also because of resistance and independent action: what C. L. R. James called ‘self-activity’ (James, Lee, and Castoriadis 2005 [1958], p. 99). The process of making and remaking race – racial formation – is fundamentally political. It is about the ‘freedom dreams’ (Kelley 2002) that shape racial conflict as much as the white racism emphasized by Feagin and Elias. As Feagin and Elias acknowledge, we have developed a fairly detailed approach to racial politics, centred on the constant and cumulative interaction of what we call ‘racial projects’. In our account, racial formation proceeds through such projects, which both signify upon race (representing it, interpreting it) and reciprocally structure social relationships (of power, inequality, solidarity, etc.) according to race. If there is a disagreement with Feagin and Elias here, it seems to be about how much power people of colour have in this process of race-making, this racial formation process. In their account, the very meaning of race is overwhelmingly, if not totally, shaped by a ‘white racial frame’. By contrast, we believe that people of colour have a lot of power in the production of racial meanings, much more than Feagin and Elias are willing to concede. OK, what about racism? There are points of agreement and difference between Feagin and Elias's perspective and ours. We provide a hard-core definition and extensive discussion (Omi and Winant 1994, pp. 69–76), defining racism as a racial project that combines essentialist representations of race (stereotyping, xenophobia, aversion, etc.) with patterns of domination (violence, hierarchy, super-exploitation, etc.). Racism ‘marks’ certain visible characteristics of the human body for purposes of domination. It naturalizes and reifies these instrumental distinctions. Racism is the product of modern history: empire and conquest, race-based slavery, and race-based genocide have shaped the modern world; they have been met with resistance and sometimes revolution, also race-based in crucial ways. This is where race comes from: the drive to rule, and the imperative to resist. Feagin and Elias think (white) racism shapes race. Although they read us quite selectively and negatively here, they recognize that we also identify whites as the most comprehensive practitioners and by far the greatest beneficiaries of racist practices. We agree that racism is a ferocious force, a deeply structured-in dimension of US (and world) society. But this is apparently not enough: Feagin and Elias also want to confine racist agency to whites and whites alone. We argue that not all racism is white, and that people of colour can practise racism as well. Let us look more deeply at this question. Who is white? Beyond the question of the contingent and highly porous boundaries of this group lies the question of whether there are any ‘positive’ dimensions of white identity or whether it is a purely ‘negative’ quality, signifying only the absence of ‘colour’.2 Then there is the ‘white privilege’ question, which builds on Du Bois's analysis (1999, p. 700) of the ‘psychological wage’ received by poor whites in virtue of their race. While we are in substantial agreement with the ‘privilege’ argument regarding whites’ ‘possessive investment’ in racism (Lipsitz 1998), there are problems there too. How do we account for white anti-racism if we understand privilege as the source of racism? Is white anti-racism even possible, if racism is envisioned as an economistic zero-sum game in which clear winners and losers are demarcated? We think that race is so profoundly a lived-in and lived-out part of both social structure and identity that it exceeds and transcends racism – thereby allowing for resistance to racism. Race, therefore, is more than ‘racism’; it is a fully fledged ‘social fact’ like sex/gender or class. From this perspective, race shapes racism as much as racism shapes race. Racial identities (individual and group), and other race-oriented concepts as well, are unstable. They are not uniforms; races are not teams; they are not defined solely by antagonism to one another. They vary internally and ideologically; they overlap and mix; their positions in the social structure shift; in other words they are shaped by political conflict. In Feagin and Elias's account, white racist rule in the USA appears unalterable and permanent. There is little sense that the ‘white racial frame’ evoked by systemic racism theory changes in significant ways over historical time. They dismiss important rearrangements and reforms as merely ‘a distraction from more ingrained structural oppressions and deep lying inequalities that continue to define US society’ (Feagin and Elias 2012, p. 21). Feagin and Elias use a concept they call ‘surface flexibility’ to argue that white elites frame racial realities in ways that suggest change, but are merely engineered to reinforce the underlying structure of racial oppression. Feagin and Elias say the phrase ‘racial democracy’ is an oxymoron – a word defined in the dictionary as a figure of speech that combines contradictory terms. If they mean the USA is a contradictory and incomplete democracy in respect to race and racism issues, we agree. If they mean that people of colour have no democratic rights or political power in the USA, we disagree. The USA is a racially despotic country in many ways, but in our view it is also in many respects a racial democracy, capable of being influenced towards more or less inclusive and redistributive economic policies, social policies, or for that matter, imperial policies. What is distinctive about our own epoch in the USA (post-Second World War to the present) with respect to race and racism? Over the past decades there has been a steady drumbeat of efforts to contain and neutralize civil rights, to restrict racial democracy, and to maintain or even increase racial inequality. Racial disparities in different institutional sites – employment, health, education – persist and in many cases have increased. Indeed, the post-2008 period has seen a dramatic increase in racial inequality. The subprime home mortgage crisis, for example, was a major racial event. Black and brown people were disproportionately affected by predatory lending practices; many lost their homes as a result; race-based wealth disparities widened tremendously. It would be easy to conclude, as Feagin and Elias do, that white racial dominance has been continuous and unchanging throughout US history. But such a perspective misses the dramatic twists and turns in racial politics that have occurred since the Second World War and the civil rights era. Feagin and Elias claim that we overly inflate the significance of the changes wrought by the civil rights movement, and that we ‘overlook the serious reversals of racial justice and persistence of huge racial inequalities’ (Feagin and Elias 2012, p. 21) that followed in its wake. We do not. In Racial Formation we wrote about ‘racial reaction’ in a chapter of that name, and elsewhere in the book as well. Feagin and Elias devote little attention to our arguments there; perhaps because they are in substantial agreement with us. While we argue that the right wing was able to ‘rearticulate’ race and racism issues to roll back some of the gains of the civil rights movement, we also believe that there are limits to what the right could achieve in the post-civil rights political landscape. So we agree that the present prospects for racial justice are demoralizing at best. But we do not think that is the whole story. US racial conditions have changed over the post-Second World War period, in ways that Feagin and Elias tend to downplay or neglect. Some of the major reforms of the 1960s have proved irreversible; they have set powerful democratic forces in motion. These racial (trans)formations were the results of unprecedented political mobilizations, led by the black movement, but not confined to blacks alone. Consider the desegregation of the armed forces, as well as key civil rights movement victories of the 1960s: the Voting Rights Act, the Immigration and Naturalization Act (Hart- Celler), as well as important court decisions like Loving v. Virginia that declared anti-miscegenation laws unconstitutional. While we have the greatest respect for the late Derrick Bell, we do not believe that his ‘interest convergence hypothesis’ effectively explains all these developments. How does Lyndon Johnson's famous (and possibly apocryphal) lament upon signing the Civil Rights Act on 2 July 1964 – ‘We have lost the South for a generation’ – count as ‘convergence’? The US racial regime has been transformed in significant ways. As Antonio Gramsci argues, hegemony proceeds through the incorporation of opposition (Gramsci 1971, p. 182). The civil rights reforms can be seen as a classic example of this process; here the US racial regime – under movement pressure – was exercising its hegemony. But Gramsci insists that such reforms – which he calls ‘passive revolutions’ – cannot be merely symbolic if they are to be effective: oppositions must win real gains in the process. Once again, we are in the realm of politics, not absolute rule. So yes, we think there were important if partial victories that shifted the racial state and transformed the significance of race in everyday life. And yes, we think that further victories can take place both on the broad terrain of the state and on the more immediate level of social interaction: in daily interaction, in the human psyche and across civil society. Indeed we have argued that in many ways the most important accomplishment of the anti-racist movement of the 1960s in the USA was the politicization of the social. In the USA and indeed around the globe, race-based movements demanded not only the inclusion of racially defined ‘others’ and the democratization of structurally racist societies, but also the recognition and validation by both the state and civil society of racially-defined experience and identity. These demands broadened and deepened democracy itself. They facilitated not only the democratic gains made in the USA by the black movement and its allies, but also the political advances towards equality, social justice and inclusion accomplished by other ‘new social movements’: second-wave feminism, gay liberation, and the environmentalist and anti-war movements among others. By no means do we think that the post-war movement upsurge was an unmitigated success. Far from it: all the new social movements were subject to the same ‘rearticulation’ (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, p. xii) that produced the racial ideology of ‘colourblindness’ and its variants; indeed all these movements confronted their mirror images in the mobilizations that arose from the political right to counter them. Yet even their incorporation and containment, even their confrontations with the various ‘backlash’ phenomena of the past few decades, even the need to develop the highly contradictory ideology of ‘colourblindness’, reveal the transformative character of the ‘politicization of the social’. While it is not possible here to explore so extensive a subject, it is worth noting that it was the long-delayed eruption of racial subjectivity and self-awareness into the mainstream political arena that set off this transformation, shaping both the democratic and anti-democratic social movements that are evident in US politics today.

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**Deferential stances in the name of identity lead to cooption by white elites who posit identity as justifying problematic political commitments.**

**Johnson 17** Cedric Johnson. Cedric Johnson is the author of Revolutionaries to Race Leaders: Black Power and the Making of African American Politics and editor of The Neoliberal Deluge: Hurricane Katrina, Late Capitalism and the Remaking of New Orleans. He is also a representative for UIC United Faculty Local 6456. “The Panthers Can’t Save Us Now.” Catalyst. Volume 1, Issue 1, Spring 2017. <https://catalyst-journal.com/vol1/no1/panthers-cant-save-us-cedric-johnson>

Many on the Left have taken a deferential posture toward Black Lives Matter. Some have celebrated this upsurge of activism as the return of black left militancy after decades of movement implosion and stagnancy. Even where they might disagree, many white leftists and some established black figures are clearly uncomfortable airing their ideological and strategic disagreements with millennial black activists for fear of being portrayed as insensitive or unsympathetic.

Those who assert that liberal anti-racism is a necessary phase en route to a more viable working-class left politics either suffer from bad faith or are engaging in the worst form of pandering — namely, supporting black-led political tendencies **uncritically as a means of demonstrating one’s anti-racist commitments**. Those who trade in such patronizing behavior either have not taken the time to study the history of black political life since the sixties or are simply willing to ignore the class contradictions that black communities share with the wider population. Those who cling to liberal anti-racism and defer to essentialist arguments about black interests fail to see that a politics that builds broad solidarity around commonly felt needs and interests is a form of anti-racism, one that we desperately need right now if we are to have any chance of ending the policing crisis and creating a more civilized society.

The hegemony of identitarianism has reshaped the terms of left political debate and action in at least three detrimental ways. First, it has engendered popular confusion about political life, **leading many to falsely equate social identity with political interests**. Second, it has distorted how we understand the work of building alliances not on identity as such, but on shared values and demonstrated commitment. Third, the practice of relying on racial or other identities as a means of **authorizing speakers** has had **a** **corrupting effect on left political struggles.** The result is a degraded public sphere where all manner of landmines prohibit honest discussion and impose limits on political constituency and left imagination, such as notions of “epistemic deference,” “mansplaining,” arbitrary stipulations about “being an ally,” and so forth.