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# Racialization

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In contrast to keywords such as "race" and "racist," "racialization" is relatively new to American studies and cultural studies. The term has a diverse lineage but is most often associated with the work of Michael Omi and Howard Winant ([1986] 1994), who helped make the concept of racialization a central analytic within both fields. Omi and Winant utilize the term to "signify the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice or group. Racialization is an ideological process, an historically specific one" (64). In contrast to static understandings of race as a universal category of analysis, racialization names a process that produces race within particular social and political conjunctures. That process constructs or represents race by fixing the significance of a "relationship, practice or group" within a broader interpretive framework. Working within this paradigm, scholars have investigated processes and practices of racialization across a wide range of fields, including electoral politics, music, literature, sports, aesthetics, religion, public policy, and social identity.

Any use of the term "racialization" requires some account of the theoretical status of race within popular culture and mainstream social science. Inherent in Omi and Winant's definition are three assumptions common to much of the critical scholarship on race in the United States since the 1970s: race functions as a signifier of social identity, power, and meaning rather than as a biological or hereditary characteristic; racial meaning is a dynamic, fluid, and historically situated *process* of social and political ascription (James Lee 2009); and race can be generative of diverse ideological frameworks that justify many forms of social hierarchy and power. Response to this definition has been varied. On the one hand, some sociologists and historians have questioned race as a theoretical concept and a category that can explain social outcomes, suggesting that any use of the term "race"—or "racialization"—as an explanatory category ultimately serves to reify or legitimate it as a fixed and stable category of human existence (Das

Gupta et al. 2007; Fields 1990; Gilroy 2000; Loveman 1999; Miles and Torres 2007). On the other hand, scholars such as Cornel West (1994) and Kimberlé Crenshaw (1990) reason that race cannot be abandoned as an analytical concept, since, as Winant notes, “U.S. society is so thoroughly racialized that to be without racial identity is to be in danger of having no identity” (1994, 16).

All of these deployments of the term “racialization” draw on and diverge from earlier usages that carried different theoretical and normative assumptions regarding the basis of racial hierarchies. As early as 1899, one can find references to the term “deracialization,” a process described as the removing or eradicating of racial characteristics from a person or population. A coinage that emerged from social Darwinism, this usage of the term locates parochial or retrogressive traits as expressions of racial difference that could be eliminated through education, acculturation, or the mixing of populations, thus rendering a “deracialized” group or subject. By the early 1930s, this notion of deracialization as a process of homogenization and incorporation gave way to uses of “racialization” that referenced a process of bodily differentiation capable of explaining the development of distinct “racial stocks” to which different groups of Europeans allegedly belonged. For example, Sir Arthur Keith, a prominent physical anthropologist, conceptualized “race-feeling” as “part of the evolutionary machinery which safeguards the purity of race” (1928, 316). Keith and his colleagues theorized that nature embedded race within human populations as a means toward the betterment of humankind through differentiation. Racialization thus described a positive and necessary process by which Anglo and Nordic racial supremacy and biological purity could be sustained and reproduced (Barot and Bird 2001, 602–6).

As the scientific imprimatur to claims of white supremacy withered in the aftermath of World War II and the state racism of Nazi Germany, references to “racialization” receded from academic and popular discourse. The term then reemerged in Frantz Fanon’s influential *The Wretched of the Earth* ([1963] 2004). Writing in the context of anticolonial struggles in North Africa, Fanon contrasted social conditions that were “racializing” against those that were “humanizing,” demonstrating how racial oppression organizes and constrains a universal recognition of human capabilities (Essed and

Goldberg 2000; Barot and Bird 2001; Fanon [1963] 2004). In Fanon's usage, racialization, or the hierarchical production of human difference through race, is posed as a necessary precondition for colonial domination and a hindrance to the process of internal self-making among Black subjects. The influence of Fanon's equation of racialization and dehumanization is apparent in a wide range of scholarly work that interrogates the social construction of race, especially in postcolonial scholarship (Said 1978; Bhabha 1994; Rabaka 2010). This work has exposed the legacies of racialized colonial discourses, noting the ways that racial meaning structures the construction of "the Orient" in western European artistic, literary, and political discourse and interrogating how the emergence of the United States as an empire has depended on an array of racial formations: the historical racialization of Asians as dangerous threats to the nation; the contemporary racialization of the same population as "model minorities"; and the post-9/11 racialization of the "uncivilized" Muslim/Arab as an object of racial terror and as a population requiring US intervention, supervision, and domination (Prashad 2007; Lee and Lutz 2005; Razack 2012).

In a parallel use of the term, scholars of social policy have examined the ways in which debates over issues such as welfare, immigration, crime, reproductive rights, and taxes in the United States have become thoroughly racialized since the 1960s. As the civil rights movement effectively challenged formal policies of race-based segregation and discrimination, the concept of racial "color blindness" became the dominant principle within official legal and political discourse (Gotanda 1991). Within this framework, discriminatory practices and ideals are supposedly inadmissible in policy debates and legal deliberations. But public controversies about whether the government should provide cash assistance to low-income families (Fujiwara 2008; Quadagno 1994) or militarize national borders or cover abortions in publicly financed health-insurance programs (E. Gutiérrez 2008; K. Baird 2009; Richie, Davis, and Traylor 2012) or raise property taxes to improve schools (Edsall and Edsall 1992) or prosecute a "War on Drugs" (Michelle Alexander 2010) all draw on and produce a dense set of racial meanings. The simultaneous withdrawal of public funding for social welfare programs, along with the systematic reduction of property and income taxes perceived to support those programs, is often tied to assumptions about the racial identities

of the beneficiaries of those policies. In this sense, these debates are racialized.

Contemporary scholarship has also complicated our understanding of processes of racialization by attending to the intersections of gender, class, age, and sexuality and by venturing beyond the national boundaries and Black/white dichotomy that has long dominated the literature on race (Crenshaw 1995). Along these lines of inquiry, the meanings attached to the racialized body have led to wide-ranging questions. How can the concept of racialization challenge the double or triple vulnerability of Muslim immigrant women with disabilities (Dossa 2009)? What do the debates surrounding US immigration policies reveal about the racialization of the “illegal immigrant” as a displaced nonperson who embodies criminality (T. Sandoval 2008)? How has the racialization of Black women in the United States depended on notions of the pregnant Black woman’s body as representative of the “undeserving poor” (Bridges 2011)? How does religion structure and articulate processes of racialization for followers of Islam and Judaism and for Hindus (Joshi 2006)? Comparative and intersectional analyses of the colonization of indigenous peoples in a number of regions and the colonization of nations in Africa and the Caribbean similarly link processes of racialization and globalization (Das Gupta et al. 2007). Work in this vein has focused on topics including the globalized production of knowledge about race, the cultural dimensions of globalization, transnational migration, feminism and the politics of decolonization, consumption, and global economies (M. Jacqui Alexander 2005; Appadurai 1996; De Genova 2005; Ferreira da Silva 2007; C. Freeman 2000; Gilroy 1993; Thomas and Clarke 2006).

A promising trajectory within the current scholarship on racialization explores the ways in which the hierarchies of humanity that the concept of race has historically signified increasingly become articulated through the logics of neoliberalism, militarism, and security. In a discussion of the post–World War II global shift toward official antiracisms, Jodi Melamed has argued that the “trick of racialization” is that it displaces differential valuations of humans into global ordering systems that yield new, more covert expressions for privileged racializations such as “liberal,” “multicultural,” and “global citizen,” alongside stigmatized racializations such as “unpatriotic,”

“monocultural,” and “illegal” (2011, 2). The state’s formal antiracism becomes pressed into service to defend or justify unbridled US military occupation, widening economic inequalities, muscular immigration enforcement, and the expansion of prisons and police authority within the United States (Cacho 2012; De Genova 2012; Singh 2012). These diverse usages of the term “racialization” across a range of fields and disciplines—including sociology, ethnic studies, anthropology, cultural studies, and American studies—will continue to be foundational to conveying relations of power and authority within and beyond US political culture, even as its referents change and evolve.

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# Slavery
Walter Johnson

"Slavery has never been represented, slavery never can be represented," said the novelist, antislavery lecturer, and former slave William Wells Brown in 1847 ([1847] 1969, 82). Brown referred, in the first instance, to the world-making violence of the system of kidnapping, dispossession, and labor extraction that emerged in the fifteenth century and persisted almost to the dawn of the twentieth. But he referred in the second instance to a sort of epistemological violence, a murderous, forcible forgetting of the history of slavery. Only slavery's victims—if it is possible to use the word "only" in the context of so many millions of stolen lives—might have truly told the story he wanted to tell. Brown reminds us that we approach the history of slavery by way of whispers and shadows, where truth has often been hidden in half truth in order to be saved away for the future. We approach it, that is to say, across a field of argument in which the history of slavery has often been conscripted to the economic, political, and imperial purposes that have hidden inside the word "freedom."

Over the four centuries of Atlantic slavery, millions of Africans and their descendants were turned into profits, fancies, sensations, and possessions of New World whites. The vast majority of the enslaved were agricultural workers whose lives were devoted to the production of staple crops (sugar, tobacco, indigo, coffee, and cotton). Their labor provided the agricultural base of European mercantile capitalism and much of the surplus capital that, by the late eighteenth century, was being invested in the development of European industry. North America was alone among New World slave societies in having a self-reproducing slave population. Elsewhere, particularly in the Caribbean and Brazil, the murderous character of the slaveholding regime (the life expectancy of Africans put to work cultivating sugar in the Americas was seven years from the time they stepped ashore) meant that slaveholders depended on the Atlantic slave trade as a replacement for biological reproduction.

The history of New World slavery was characterized by daily resistance on the part of the enslaved, terrific brutality on the part of the enslaving, and frequent military conflict between the two. Daily forms of resistance took the form of everything from mouthing off and shamming sickness to flight, arson, and assault. The slaveholders' violent responses, which seem at first to emblematize the license of unchecked power, upon closer inspection reveal the brittleness of their control; mastery had constantly to be—could only be—shored up through brutality. Everyday forms of resistance helped slaves come to trust one another enough to plan a hemisphere-wide series of insurgencies—some on a very small scale, some mobilizing thousands at a time—which varied widely in their ideology and aspiration but which continually presented the possibility that the "Atlantic World" might be remade as a "Black Atlantic" (C. James [1938] 1989; Genovese 1979; Stuckey 1987; Gwendolyn Hall 1992; Gilroy 1993; da Costa 1994; Sidbury 1997; Berlin 1998; W. Johnson 2002; Dubois 2004; Jennifer Morgan 2004). Indeed, the military and diplomatic history of the New World was distilled in the alembic of black revolt. From the Maroon Wars in Jamaica to the Haitian Revolution to the American Revolution, the Civil War, and the Cuban Revolution, armed and insurgent blacks (and the almost unspeakable threat they represented to white leaders) decisively shaped the course of European and American history.

The foundational role of African and African American labor and resistance in the history of European imperialism and the economic growth of the Atlantic economy was reflected in the institution's role in shaping Atlantic culture. Institutions of law and governance, structures and styles of authority, religious faith and medical knowledge, cultural forms ranging from popular amusements to sentimental novels and autobiographies: all of these emergent forms of European modernity bore the stamp (often forcibly obscured) of slavery. So, too, did the ongoing identification of blackness with the condition of dispossession and the disposition to insurgency.

The long nineteenth century, beginning with the Haitian Revolution in 1792 and culminating with the legislative emancipation in Brazil in 1888, marked the passing of slavery from the governing institutional solution to problems of labor, empire, and difference, to a residual social form (persisting to this day, it should be said) with tremendous discursive power.

The end began with the idea that the opposite of slavery was neither redemption (as the Christian emphasis on sin as a form of slavery would have it) nor mastery (as the idea of history as a sort of race war would have it) but "freedom." The emergent antislavery version of enslavement was one that tried to demonstrate the ways in which slavery deformed the course of right and history by specifying its evils: its epochal barbarities and quotidian tortures, its corruptive tyranny and degrading license, its economic and moral backwardness, its unfreedom. And over the course of the nineteenth century, this new view increasingly contested a proslavery argument that slavery itself represented the unfolding course of "freedom": the alignment of social institutions with natural (racial) history, the propagation of the earth for the benefit of its masters, the temporal manifestation of an institution that was both ancient in provenance and providential in design. Beginning with the Haitian Revolution, it was the antislavery argument about slavery that won: African American slavery came to be seen as the antithesis of "freedom."

Though the term "slavery" referred over the course of that century-long argument to a condition that was historically specific to black people, it came to serve as a sort of switchboard through which arguments over the character of "freedom" could be routed and defined: the archaic pendant to the emergent future. By using the word "slavery" to describe institutions ranging from wage labor and marriage to prostitution and peonage, nineteenth-century reformers sought to extend the moral force of the argument against African American slavery to other sorts of social relations. Their efforts were generally met with an insistence that slavery was a condition that was (or had been) unique to African Americans, who were, with emancipation, presumed to be experiencing "freedom."

The framing of slavery as archaic and freedom as emergent has a complex history in Western political economy. In both Smithian and Marxian thought, slavery remained an almost wholly unthought backdrop to the unfolding history of capitalism in Europe. For Adam Smith, slavery was destined to fall away before the superior capacity of wage labor to motivate workers through their own self-interest; the inferior motivation of bonded labor was in the Smithian tradition taken as a given rather than recognized (and theorized) as the result of the resistance of enslaved people (Oakes 2003). For Karl Marx, slavery was a moment in the history of primitive accumulation—the initial

process of dispossession out of which capitalist social relations were subsequently built. It was the past to the present of “capitalism” (understood here as that system of social relations characterized by “free” labor and the factory mode of production) with which he was primarily concerned (Marx [1867] 1976, 1:667–712; W. Johnson 2004). To this day, much of the scholarship on slavery done in each of these traditions—so radically opposed in so many other ways—shares the common metanarrative shape of outlining a “transition” from slavery to capitalism.

The marking of slavery as an archaism, destined to be superseded by the emergent history of freedom, even as it provided the term with enormous critical potential, made it (and the history of the millions of martyrs it contains) useful to those who defined freedom in terms of national belonging or economic license. In this usage, as found in nineteenth-century reform and political economy, the relationship between slavery and freedom is figured as one of temporal supersession. The United States is no longer figured as a place where the contest between the two is to be fought out but as a place where it has been uniformly and once and for all completed. As George W. Bush put it in his 2001 inaugural address, the history of the United States is “the story of a slave-holding society that became a servant of freedom.” He went on to elaborate this claim, asserting that “the very people traded into slavery helped to set America free” through their struggle against injustice (2003). In the historical vision expressed by (but certainly not limited to) Bush’s addresses, the history of slavery has been turned into a cliché, a set of images that have been emptied of any authentic historical meaning through their sheer repetition in connection with their supposed extinction at the hands of “freedom.” The history of slavery in this usage exists in a state of civil servitude to the idea of “American freedom.”

A countercurrent within mostly Marxist and black radical thought—notably W. E. B. Du Bois ([1935] 1998), C. L. R. James ([1938] 1989), Eric Williams ([1944] 1994), Stuart Hall (2002), Sidney Mintz (1985), David Brion Davis (1975), and Cedric Robinson ([1983] 2000)—has insistently contested the temporal framing of the relationship of slavery to freedom as one of linear progress. By insisting on the place of slavery in the history of European and American capitalism—on the way that the palpable experiences of freedom in Europe and the Americas and the narrowness of an

idea of freedom defined as the ability to work for a wage both depended on slavery—they have framed the relationship between the two terms as being one of dynamic simultaneity. They have, that is to say, insistently pointed out practices of servitude at the heart of the history of freedom, a set of insights that gives new and subversive meaning to Bush's phrase "servant of freedom."

The idea of the simultaneous coproduction of slavery and freedom lies at the heart of the case for reparations for slavery. This ongoing case has a history in the United States that dates to Reconstruction, and it represents a powerful (if also powerfully stigmatized by the intellectual and cultural mainstream) refiguration of the relationship of capitalism, slavery, freedom, past, and present. By reworking the history of the exploitation of Africans in the Americas—by whatever means, under whatever mode of production, mystified by whatever Western category of analysis—as a single extended and ongoing moment of time, the heterodox historiography of reparations calls on us to recognize slavery as an element not of the national (or hemispheric) past but of the global present.

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