Introduction

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The Antiblackness of Slavery and Abolition: Beyond the Political Economy of Capitalist Work

Labor historiography in the contexts of modern racial slavery and emancipation has long placed changes in the status of work at the core of the very meaning of captivity and freedom, their epochal watersheds, and institutionalized or unintended overlaps.[1] Reviewing, in this journal's pages, recent scholarship on the relations between slavery and capitalism, James Oakes summarized that the "crucial differences between the political economy of slave and free labor … ultimately led to a catastrophic Civil War and one of the most violent emancipations in the hemisphere."[2] The literature Oakes critically discussed exemplifies the growing academic interest in the multifarious functionality of coerced production for the development of global capitalism. The resulting picture reaches much further than mere questions of economic causality, or whether chattel slavery did kick-start the profitability of capitalism, rather than the other way around. At stake are explanations of how racial captivity—which liberal economic, political, and moral discourse deems an anachronism—shapes the very productive, financial, social, institutional, and philosophical foundations of the global present.[3] Historic and contemporary activist resistance to recurring and ubiquitous waves of antiblack violence, as well as the increasingly self-confident affirmation of white supremacy across Western states and civil societies has rendered such dilemmas in starker terms, asking whether persistent echoes of racial slavery are symptoms that the system is "built this way" rather than being just "broken."

Among economic, social, and labor historians, questions of slavery and racism have been compelling enough to reopen discussions that liberal theorists of emancipation and market-centered consensus had hoped to adjudicate by consigning to the trash heap Eric Williams' classically anticolonial treatment of slavery's place in the making of modernity or, for that matter, any radical insistence that racial enslavement finds its ultimate opponent in black refusal and revolution, rather than white empathy and benevolence.[4] Opening a recent international conference on "Slavery and Its Afterlife," Nicholas Draper remarked that dominant academic historiography—for example in the United Kingdom—has been engaged in a prolonged work of defusing and containing potentially uncomfortable reflections on what the post-Enlightenment

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West owes to the racially defined ownership of humans turned to property, as well as to emancipationist experiments specifically concerned with maintaining black subjugation under changed legal forms.[5] Beyond highly selective and self-serving statistical indicators—such as measures of direct investment by slave-owners in metropolitan economies—used by liberal scholars to minimize such impacts, critical research is shedding light on the many purposes black captivity served as a world-making engine. Analyses, besides Williams', on which the academe's *damnatio memoriae* had seemed to have conclusively fallen, are now supported by multilayered studies documenting the decisive importance of the commerce in enslaved and "thingified" bodies for the development of credit, insurance, and finance, as well as raising wage levels and expanding consumer markets in Europe.[6]

Overall, structural critiques of slavery centered on political economy have led to important advances, countering the sway held by liberal framings of freedom in narrowly legalistic terms, emphases on national pacification as the fulfillment of abolition, and assumptions that individual rights and market-based civil society make any structural, systemic, or *longue-durée* criticism superfluous, when not pernicious and ideologically suspect. Radical scholarship on black enslavement and its aftermath has brought up thorny questions on the incompleteness, omissions, and contradictions of emancipation. The divide between "freedom" and "unfreedom" now appears blurred by the narrowing of the former into a nonwhite laboring status that the latter overshadows through coercion into employment contracts underscored by violence and sanctions revealing a hierarchical vision—at once racialized and gendered—of the social order. Rather than a progressive force, or the harbinger of working-class solidarity and emancipation, then, wage labor has been exposed as practically and discursively central to the vast arsenal with which politicians, bureaucrats, capitalists, experts, and social reformers cast blackness as, in W.E.B. Du Bois' memorable image, "a problem" to be managed. The identification of freedom with work allowed the perpetuation of black captivity along the continuum from the labor market to black communities. Black households are thus demanded to conform to the bourgeois gendered roles and family norms of uplift through "respectable" breadwinning, the enforcement of which is kept under relentless, pervasive surveillance and the ever-present threat of punishment.[7] Emancipation through work also suppressed black demands for reparation and self-determination by positing hardworking frugality and responsible patience as virtuous paths for the formerly enslaved to repay the putative debt of freedom. The normativity of capitalist work finally allowed a transatlantic projection of black subjugation, as the "dignity of labor," preached by abolitionist discourse, provided ammunition to legitimize the white colonization of Africa.[8]

Historiographical shifts have, nonetheless, orbited around political economy's questions, concepts, and concerns in ways that have limited their horizons on the injuries of black, indigenous, and colonized people to the registers Frank Wilderson dissects as capitalist "exploitation" and subjective

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"alienation."[9] In other words, for the inquiries such conversations generate, the racially enslaved and problematically "freed" black person *must* be—before and after emancipation—primarily a worker, perhaps differentially gendered as such.[10] As a result, political economy crowds out, or, at best, merely alludes to, questions that are essential to theorizing the world black enslavement made. Slavery, as a paradigm of antiblack violence, to begin with, is not defined by its economic functionality; it could indeed be capitalistically counterproductive, despite its putting black people to work. The structural positionality of blackness, as one of violently enforced captivity, decoupled value extraction from actual work, or indeed life itself. The enslaved Africans murdered on the ship *Zong* (1781) proved as useful to capital—namely financial circuits backed by the nascent insurance industry[11]—as their contemporary counterparts stacked in the dungeons of state and privatized carcerality, or precarious survival in hyper-policed urban "zones of non-being."[12] Although irreducible to the categories of political economy, antiblack violence—as action or omnipresent possibility authorized by chattel status, or praxis condoned by civil society's conventions—is, nonetheless, always central to the institutional and psychic reproduction of the power of the entire white community (slaveowners and not, capitalists and workers, prosperous and impoverished) over the entire black population (enslaved or free, regardless of social status.) Antiblack violence belies the idea that the plantation is, after all, just a workplace, thus governed by the historically shifting machinations of productivity and hegemony, rather than a non-place made globally homogenous in a structural sense, across time and space, by direct racial domination. Not only does antiblack terror question the stability of class as a universal term of oppression, it also undermines the avowed conceptual coherence of gender, since the sexual violence done to black women—the hallmark of the slaveowners' absolute power, as well as the force that defines black femaleness—enables patriarchy within white society.[13] The structural preeminence of antiblack violence over black exploitation—and the related ontological salience of the black slave over the black worker—also disturbs imaginations of agency and resistance. Black subversion of capitalist discipline—as epitomized by C.L.R. James' penetrating observation on Haiti's revolutionary slaves, "if they destroyed much it was because they had suffered much"[14]—cannot be simply read as longings to "liberate" labor, but rather reveals absolute antagonism to white-defined humanity. Progressive scripts that define opposition to slavery as a political cause are steeped in the optimistic assumption that black captivity is fundamentally opposed to the natural freedom of the human, a Rousseauian stance two generally contrasting analyses like Oakes' and Drescher's endorse.[15] As a consequence, countless enslaved generations choosing not to translate visions of freedom and "dreams of action"[16] into overt, organized, and political resistance—which normally faced obliteration by potentially unlimited lethal response—are cast as irrelevant to "history with a capital H" (as Edouard Glissant memorably put it.)[17] Even more disturbingly, the celebration of the slaves' overt "agency" and collective resistance along class lines is at risk of

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abetting the argument that those who did not rebel were in fact predisposed to remain enslaved.[18] Avoiding such slippages is made difficult by the extent to which the facticity of slave labor's "agency" for the historian is tributary to archival records that take notice of black agency as a white problem, while otherwise systematically expunging black voices and experiences as evidence made inadmissible by property status. Collective resistance itself birthed a problematic offspring, such as desires for postcolonial black working-class sovereignty, the institutionalization of "civil rights," or the belief of having been "eight years in power."[19] The language of liberation uttered in such imaginative and political outcomes grated against, and perhaps obscured, continued black social death or employment in the service of corporate capital, neoliberal governance, and imperialist militarism in the devastation of nature and indigenous societies, as well as black people refusing the imposition of commodified work.[20]

Despite its epistemological broadening, labor history still reflects the dilemmas of political economy, since it bestows ontological prominence on work as the terrain from which something globally essential, not just situationally contingent, can be enunciated about the meaning of freedom, indeed on the very definition of the human. As a result, to the extent labor history is open to the possibility—far from granted in the current climate of historiography as a discipline—of finding structural determinants, those are likely to be sought in class and gender. Blackness is at most confined to the realm of discourse or the place-specific ethnography of cultural identities. The possibility that antiblackness as racial violence, not economic exploitation, elucidates—structurally, epistemically, and ontologically—how slavery makes the world and continues to do so long after its legal overcoming remains, on the contrary, confined to the "position of the unthought."[21] It is a place visible everywhere in the long-duration concurrence of blackness and captivity, yet hardly acknowledged by those in search of slavery's politico-economic "rationale" and capitalistic usefulness. Once the structural salience of the race-violence nexus is disavowed, Denise Da Silva writes, racism is narrowed down to an "improper aid" of capital's power to control and divide those it exploits, in a tautology that assumes, rather than explains, the capacity of antiblack ideas to produce, across centuries, such results in a wide range of capitalist and precapitalist societies.[22] A structural analytic centered on race would, instead, apprehend the white subject of modern humanism as the source of both claims to objective socio-historical knowledge of difference and the power to produce hierarchy as the principle that validates racial knowledge of difference, by placing its white subject at the pinnacle through the violence of enslavement and colonization. The theoretical tradition of black metacritique requires precisely, as the rest of this introduction shows, a shift of analytical perspective toward antiblack violence as the structural or ontological determinant—which precedes and exceeds the political economy of capital—of racially captive labor.[23]

The contributions to this issue of ILWCH have different disciplinary origins, theoretical concerns, and geographical, or temporal, focus. They all

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engage, however, the idea that a historical analysis of laboring blackness after the formal abolition of slavery has to confront antiblackness and racial violence as structural, and not merely discursive, experiential, or contingent. Black Studies have increasingly insisted on this point in what is sometimes referred to as a novel "theoretical turn"[24] or growing interest in political ontology.[25] Black metacritique has long maintained a deeply skeptical outlook on what work and production actually mean to struggles for black liberation.[26] Radical and feminist conceptualizations of the positionality of black women within systems of bondage have emphasized that working while black generates antagonism to labor, which exceeds notions of either the working class or a gendered reproduction of the workforce. *Excess* is the key word here. Already in the early 1970s, Angela Davis had examined how the violent imposition of a multiplicity of labors on the enslaved woman had "annulled" her femininity while forcing the performance of sexual functions, to which the visibility, and even the limited protections granted to nonblack women along gender lines, were denied.[27] Rizvana Bradley comments that, as a consequence, black female corporeality itself becomes elusive, "discursively empty and materially full" at the same time, a position whose devastation by white violence through the circuits of capitalism is absolutely incommensurable with the notion of "exploitation" and thus can find neither a stable referent nor a prospect of redemption in the progressive promise of a dialectical transcendence of exploitation by the productive subjectivity it hatches.[28] Bradley writes that such aporetic simultaneity of "fullness" and "emptiness"

> has direct implications for the way in which historically, the black woman has been biopolitically constructed, pathologized and held captive by slavery and capital, and excluded from the realm of symbolic power. The black woman is the figure that crystallizes the arrangement between capital and the event of captivity.

Hortense Spillers' work elaborated the seemingly paradoxical and undefinable place of black women in Atlantic capitalism in her inquiry into the continuity between the violence of enslavement and the techniques of objectification in current liberal social policy. Such "American grammar," in Spillers' words, "ungenders" blackness by homogenizing violated black women's and men's "flesh" as "vestibular"—a walled-off entry point—to the properly *human* world of production and culture. Excommunicated from labor politics, black flesh can only stand against the world in a position of insurgency and revolution.[29] Equally important to our argument is Saidiya Hartman's recent, powerful elaboration of the excess in black women's work as a condition of nondialectical antagonistic refusal.[30] Slavery inaugurated the institutionalization, destined to last well after abolition, of black women's work as "male" and "female" at the same time, meaning that black women toiled along the full spectrum of production, reproduction, and care activities, as totalizing violence underpinned workplace and domesticity.[31] Hartman follows Spillers in writing that, under such conditions, black women's strategies verged on escape from the plantation

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and refusal of labor, practices that sit uncomfortably with celebrations of the agency of the "striking worker." It is then impossible to ennoble black women's labor through progressive narratives that equate abolition with the liberation of work or, more precisely, the refiguring of the black from slave into worker. Labor progressivism is, therefore, no less prone than pathologizing social policy discourse—of which the Moynihan Report and the myth of the "welfare queen" are notable examples—to "imagine the future produced by such labors as anything other than monstrous."[32] Black women's critique is then feared as a criminally deviant, sexually disquieting, socially apocalyptic defiance not only of the world slavery made, but of the reassuring stability of the ethical dilemmas and conflicts sustaining the Left's and liberal ethos.

When, more than two decades ago, Saidiya Hartman daringly wrote that the "nonevent of emancipation"[33] did not end black subjugation, she was not merely blaming the institutions of "free labor" for betraying their promise of restoring full black humanity. Nor was she reclaiming the optimistic temporality of deliverance as giving sense to how much is still to be done. Hartman rather indicted how the framing of "freedom," according to the values of work and the norms of liberal individuality, is an updated modality of black enslavement, a phenomenologically momentous, yet ontologically inessential shift in a timeless paradigm of antiblack violence, which, if anything, abolitionist historiography's obsession with "victories," turning points, and new beginnings makes invisible and undetectable by silencing black practices of refusal and grammars of suffering.[34] Black enslavement cannot be reduced to exploitation and alienation, and black slaves are not defined by being workers, despite the fact that slaves do work and slavery does serve the extraction and expanded reproduction of value. Rather, following Hartman and Jared Sexton, we contend that black enslavement is central to a paradigm of "structural vulnerability to appropriation, a perpetual and involuntary *openness*,"[35] a paradigm Hartman characterizes as "accumulation" and "fungibility," the "unredressed injuries" emancipation did not heal. Frank Wilderson specifies that the violence, which defines black enslavement, is, in the first ontological instance, uniquely premised not on its surely abundant economic or political usefulness but on its *gratuitousness* as violence that does not require any prior transgression or motivation.[36] Gratuitous antiblack violence—being exempted from which ultimately secures the coherence of the nonblack community as distinct from the social Death of the slave—also ensures the continuation of antiblackness as a paradigm of racial captivity beyond the juridical suppression of chattel slavery. If abolition is, then, merely a moment in the temporality of antiblackness, black labor history, or, perhaps, the history of how black liberation came to be framed into a reclamation of labor time and the fruit of work, has to be read in its relationships with, and inadequacy to undo, structures of antiblack violence. As the following section will show, such concerns have been central to black critiques of racial capitalism and antiblackness, especially in their conversation with Marxism.

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The "Inadequacies of Marxism," or Black Labor's Pessimism

> If slavery persists as an issue in the political life of black America, it is not because of an antiquarian obsession with bygone days or the burden of a too-long memory, but because black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago. This is the afterlife of slavery—skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment.[37]

In his landmark work, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, political theorist Cedric Robinson addresses the particular excess that is blackness within political economy. He argues two fundamental things about capitalism as a social formation and the ways in which we study it: The first is that racism is not a contradiction or outcome of capital but an essential and pre-existing element that facilitates its structure of accumulation. The second is that radical thinkers, such as C.L.R. James and James Padmore, among others, not only realized the role that antiblackness played in capital accumulation. By seeking to address both racism's role in capital formation and black ante- and anti-colonial resistance to it, they also developed, in the radical tradition, a more accurate account of capitalism and resistance that exceeds traditional accounts of political economy. Since the 2000 reissue of *Black Marxism,* with an introduction by Robin D.G. Kelley, there has been renewed interest in Robinson's work, organized under the analytic of racial capitalism, a term that Robinson first uses in *Black Marxism*, as a way of suturing and making visible capital's central noncontradiction and mode of accumulation: race. Robinson writes that "the development, organization, and expansion of capitalist society pursued essentially racial directions, so too did social ideology. As a material force then, it could be expected that racialism would inevitably permeate the social structures emergent from capitalism."[38] He goes on to write that his deployment of the term "racial capitalism" is meant to refer to the central place that race holds in the development of capital. In elaborating the role that race has played in the entirety of capital's history he suggests that we stop thinking of race/racialism as either mere ideology or as a pseudo-scientific strain of thought that emerged in the nineteenth century. Indeed, political economy fails when it does not articulate race as an anterior, structuring element of capitalist regimes of accumulation. Moreover, it is race that always makes explanatory tools, such as traditional Marxism, "inadequate" and blind to the reality of the mechanisms of capitalist reproduction and exploitation. The critique of political economy is, in short, always in need of the "stretching" suggested by Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*.[39]

However, the tradition that Robinson writes within and makes visible for us as a whole remains dialectical and phenomenological, much like Fanon's approach to black struggle in *The Wretched of the Earth*, as it recovers or engages blacks *as* political subjects. Even though David Hart has argued that

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Robinson "may be the first person to explicitly construe the relationship between capitalism and antiblackness as an ontological question," the tradition that emerged from his work is still restricted.[40] It does not tackle black Death itself as a formal structure of racialist modes of accumulation and what political ontologists of blackness see as the absolute inability for blacks to inhabit categories of agency (politico-economic subjects, proletarians) premised on possibilities for "ontological resistance."[41] In other words, if we again understand this using Fanon, the phenomenological remains at odds with the ontological (*Black Skins, White Masks*). The problem is therefore time and its ontological closures. Afropessimists recognize that the categories for political subjecthood are co-extensive with the evolution of *homo politicus* into *homo economicus* as a putatively biological being, whose hierarchies of blood and phenotype come to index relationships to capital and the products of work. According to Sylvia Wynter, *homo economicus* is based on the narratological concept of "man" *as* biological.[42] As Fred Moten argues, this evolution posits the figure of man as always first a political being. Moten writes,

> …biopolitics is already given in the figure of the political animal; that the move from natural history to biology is a held trajectory; that the regulation of generativity is already given in the idea of a natural kind….What's interesting and implicit here, what Immanuel Kant is always working toward and through, is the political subject as a natural kind, the political subject as the subject of natural history, natural history as a field that is presided over by the political animal.[43]

What Moten, Wynter, and others also recognize is that not only are blacks excluded from these categories or subject positions. They also affirm that this positing of man as a political subject is also dependent upon, and thus impossible without, black difference and negation in specific spaces (such as the dungeon or the slave ship), functioning as the initial displacement that is essential for man's move from *politicus* to *economicus.* Modern political subjecthood is thus contingent upon the absolute otherness of blacks. Moreover, blacks are therefore not true political subjects because they become such only after the hold, only after the "disappearance," only after, in Saidiya Hartman's work, their categorical Death, or absolute negation.[44] Hartman writes, "in the [trading] company's view, the dungeon was a way station for human refuse and a cocoon for laborers. The miracle of the slave trade was that it resuscitated useless lives and transformed waste into capital."[45] The dungeon, like the hold, is, in other words, a key element in the transformation of blacks because it strips them of what devalues them, their indigeneity, their ontologies. It is essentially the Death of their indigenous selves that they undergo, and when they emerge from the hold or the dungeon, it is this death that, in fact, *adds value* to their bodies.[46] Death of this type is an essential, accumulative function premised on the transmutation from being to commodity; it is not merely a biopolitical category. For true biopolitical subjecthood, death may be an outcome (as in Giorgio Agamben's concept of *homo sacer*) but not a starting point.[47] Hartman's

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elaboration of slavery's "afterlife" thus signals an ongoing, perpetual, absolutely peculiar relationship of Death to value, within which value can accrue on or within the black body, even if that body itself cannot accumulate wealth.[48] All political-economic categories then would fail in the attempt to grapple with blackness because they are meant to capture the "after" of normative political subjecthood, not of a parallel. The Death that blacks experience has no ontological equivalent within western metaphysics because it is the death that produces what Fred Moten refers to as the absolute or categorical "paraontological" difference between the western human and the black inhuman.[49] Moten elaborates this position by addressing the limits of biopolitics for gauging the terrain of blackness when he writes that biopolitics rests on a conceptualization of man as a "political animal," while blackness is conceived in the break rather than the suture of these terms. Referencing Nahum Dimitri Chandler's work, he writes that

> …blackness is the anoriginal displacement of ontology…. What I assert is this: that black life—which is as surely to say life as black thought is to say thought—is irreducibly social; that, moreover, black life is lived in political death or that it is lived, if you will, in the burial ground of the subject by those who, insofar as they are not subjects, are also not, in the interminable.[50]

Keeping in mind Moten and others in the afropessimist/black optimist tradition, Hartman's conceptualization of blackness as the "afterlife" of slavery means that Robinson's stretching of the Marxian tradition will always open onto an unbridgeable gap between the ontological and the phenomenological, a gap we call "black labor's pessimism." Robinson challenged the universalism of capitalism by positing its racialism. He also affirmed blackness, through his focus on culture and historicity, as what survived Death—or the indigeneity that, in other words, could not be fully erased and survived through its perpetual re-creation. However, where the radical tradition affirms black proletarian actors, even as it seeks to attend to the cultural and political excess that is blackness, it still needs to grapple with the fundamental antiblackness of labor itself, its categories, and its forward motion in history. Moreover, the black radical tradition still needs to address the ways in which the assertion of rights for blacks through labor can also be anti-indigenous within the diaspora, because it resuscitates the structure of the land-labor interface central to both franchise colonialism and settler colonialism, which positions black bodies and labor against indigenous lands and bodies.

Hartman's own concept of the "afterlife of slavery" grapples with ongoing attempts at violent erasure of blackness and the simultaneous impossibility of representation wrought by an original time, to reference Moten, to which blacks are always subjected. Yet, it also resists an accounting of the accumulated things produced by "cargo," as Hartman refers to black chattel.[51] It resists the world that emerged as an effect of Death, as Death's permanent and objective form. In using Hartman's term of the "afterlife" to situate this volume's

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approach to black political economy, we seek to think that mummified disappearance in Hartman that affirms itself as an absolute ontological lack *together with* accounts of black political subjecthood in the radical tradition. We seek to work, in other words, in the im/possibility of categorical closures. We address blackness as both *difference* and difference within the radical tradition and retain the "afterlife" as a conceptual term that gestures to the problem that blackness poses for political economy, and at the same time needs to open back unto labor and what political death accomplishes. What happens if black political economy takes as its starting point political death? What happens to afropessimist thought if it directly engages labor and phenomenological blackness? We theorize the afterlife of slavery as (black) Death's productive mode. Because contemporary and spectacular antiblack violence is not simply a contingent mode of disciplining that is antagonistic to capitalist productivity but is the very operational logic of racialized capital under neoliberalism. Moreover, continuing critical elaboration of racial capital must account not just for antiblackness, but this specific form for which even biopolitics proper remains inadequate. By organizing itself around Hartman's concept, this volume on blackness and labor seeks to work through what remains invisible in understandings and articulations of black labor.

Overview of Contributions

In conceptualizing this issue of *International Labor and Working-Class History*, we have, to some extent, elaborated on questions from our earlier work, especially as they engage and are informed by research and theoretical debates on blackness and labor in slavery's afterlife. Most importantly, we have aimed at facilitating a diverse range of contributions. These combine reflections on the long-lasting structural dynamics of race with innovative empirical documentation of such forces at work in specific contexts of enduring black captivity, inscribed in labor regimes and norms, from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries. A common thread guiding us is the necessity for labor studies and labor history to respond and be accountable to the political, ethical, and intellectual demands of black metacritique.

The issue is opened by Sara-Maria Sorentino's analysis—"The Abstract Slave: Antiblackness and Marx's Method"—of how the development of Marx's critique of capitalism was haunted by antiblackness, which shaped the method and theory of the author of *Capital*, as he grappled to make sense of racial slavery in the historical development of emancipation. Sorentino argues against a merely philological or periodizing approach to Marx's reflections, rather centering his strategy of "real abstraction" as a method for the knowledge of history's structural and ontological formations. By making "labor" the object of his abstraction, Sorentino continues, Marx nonetheless disavows racial slavery as a paradigm of antiblack violence that is in excess of labor, explains its historical or phenomenological mutations, and survives its normative reconfigurations following abolition. In opposition to an affirmative politics of

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workers' solidarity, which would perpetuate the Marxian disavowal, Sorentino proposes the antagonistic negativity of the "abstract slave."

Tryon Woods' "Marronage, Here and There: Liberia, Enslavement's Conversion, and the Settler-Not" advances a theoretical reinterpretation of the founding of Liberia through close readings of philosophical and political debates in the age of emancipation, as well as testimonies of abolitionists and former slaves engaged in Liberia's colonization and independence. In his critical engagement with indigenous and settler colonial studies, Woods argues that the Liberian experiment should be read neither as the establishment of an Afro-descended colonial society across the Atlantic, nor as a moment in the incipient Western expansion on the African continent, with the associated enforcement of colonial capitalist labor systems. Woods instead regards Liberia as an episode in the transatlantic restructuring of antiblackness and racial captivity. By centering the dilemmas of radical black theorists and activists arguing for a return to Africa, Woods highlights that, to the extent they endorsed actual physical migration to the continent, such strategies resulted not in black freedom or political power, but a predicament of marronage, with all the profound ambiguities such a term implies. The reprieve from racial domination in the United States afforded former slaves in Liberia, came, therefore, at the heavy price of being enlisted in a globalized antiblack system. Liberian colonization devastated, in the name of modern labor practices and production norms, indigenous African societies already marked by a long history of racial captivity.

Three contributors return to the mechanisms of control of black labor in the first half of the twentieth century in the United States, its territories, and other overseas interests. In her essay, "The 1941 Local 313 Southeast Missouri Sharecroppers' Strike Against Rehabilitation and the Starvation Wage," Kasia Kalina examines the pamphlet "Down with Starvation-wages!" produced by sharecroppers of Local 313 in Missouri. In a novel reading of the text, which has been the subject of sustained analysis by C.L.R. James, she argues that it "anticipates" formulation of biopolitics by later writers from Foucault to Agamben. These workers, Kalina suggests, not only protested against the double extraction of labor power through work and debt in direct contradiction to their well-being. They were also critically aware of the ways in which the political mechanisms of government control, particularly the "rehabilitation programs" for rural workers, were, in fact, designed to not only manage their productivity but deliberately effect their suffering as a function of the maintenance of white supremacy.

Benjamin D. Weber, in "The Strange Career of the Convict Clause: US Prison Imperialism in the Panama Canal Zone," charts the use of the "convict clause" of the Thirteenth Amendment to extend US mechanisms of bound and unfree labor to overseas possessions, such as the Panama Canal Zone, in the early twentieth century. The clause, Weber finds, was critical not only in perpetuating black slavery but also as a strategically important mechanism by which US imperialism worked. Weber's analysis of the way in which the

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clause allowed a racialized control of labor in road construction across the region shows how settler colonialism, slavery, carcerality, and the criminalization of blackness inform the history of black labor in contexts that are more often than not transnational. Moreover, Weber demonstrates that black resistance was, far from being singularly nationalist, necessarily both antiracist and anti-imperial.

Jorell A. Meléndez-Badillo turns to the US territory of Puerto Rico in the essay "Mateo and Juana: Racial Silencing, Epistemic Violence, and Counterarchives in Puerto Rican Labor History." He examines Puerto Rican labor history not through its official archives but through what he terms its "counterarchives," the stories of men and women of color who were both workers and organizers in the early twentieth century. Meléndez-Badillo's examination of the contribution to the labor movement by the landowner Mateo Pérez Sanjurjo and the cigar maker and healer Juana Colón goes beyond an exploration of antiblackness in the nationalist project informing organized labor's archive. It instead asks us to think about labor not only as constitutive of agency but also as a cause of the fissures between performance and ideological articulation. In short, it suggests we pay critical attention to both black labor and, as the radical tradition does, the problematic means by which it is made visible or invisible. Moreover, Meléndez-Badillo focuses on the way in which the intersection of gender and race informs the representation of black labor and black resistance to oppression.

Finally, Karina Cespedes' contribution, "Beyond Freedom's Reach: An Imperfect Centering of Women and Children Caught within Cuba's Long Emancipation and the Afterlife of Slavery," critically addresses silences in the historiography on Cuba's gradual abolition and on the persistent subjugation of black women and children. Rather than being merely explainable as inattentiveness on the part of the discipline, Cespedes shows that such gaps and omissions have served the purpose of sanitizing the nation's official self-image by obscuring the never ending and seldom documented antiblack terror visited on women and children in spaces, especially domestic, eschewed by progressive abolitionist narratives. The essay focuses, in particular, on the disavowal and reproduction of antiblack violence in a labor-centered culture of respectability as it was incorporated by mainstream middle-class anticolonial feminism.

Overall, in challenging how we see and interpret black labor and resistance, the articles in this volume defamiliarize labor history by analyzing how antiblackness haunts the labor archive, destabilizing its representations and exposing its erasures.[52] What's at stake for the contributors to this volume is more than just a well-rounded account of black labor and its productive or organizational outcomes. It is also a call to theorize black labor's pessimism, or the racialized excess for which the imagination of labor, be it productive and emancipatory or exploitative and oppressive, cannot account.

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NOTES

1. See, for example: Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877* (New York, 1988); Rebecca J. Scott, *Slave Emancipation in Cuba: The Transition to Free Labor, 1860–1900* (Pittsburgh, PA, 2000); Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, MA, 2005); Moon-Ho Jung, *Coolies and Cane: Race, Labor and Sugar in the Age of Emancipation* (Baltimore, MD, 2009); David Roediger, *Seizing Freedom: Slave Emancipation and Liberty for All* (London, 2014).

2. James Oakes, "Capitalism and Slavery and the Civil War," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 89 (2016): 195–220. The books reviewed by Oakes are: Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York, 2014); Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge, MA, 2014); Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York, 2014); Calvin Schermerhorn, *The Business of Slavery and the Rise of American Capitalism, 1815–1860* (New Haven, CT, 2015).

3. In addition to the references in note 2, see Sven Beckert and Seth Rockman, eds., *Slavery's Capitalism: A New History of American Economic Development* (Philadelphia, PA, 2016) and Peter J. Hudson, "The Racist Dawn of Capitalism: Unearthing the Economy of Bondage," *Boston Review*, March 14, 2016 (http://bostonreview.net/books-ideas/peter-james-hudson-slavery-capitalism, accessed August 1, 2018).

4. On the liberal mainstream, see Seymour Drescher, *Abolition: A History of Slavery and* Antislavery (Cambridge, 2009) and Thomas Bender (ed.), *The Antislavery Debate: Capitalism and Abolitionism as a Problem in Historical Interpretation* (Berkeley, CA, 1992). On the "Williams thesis" and its recent revival, see Eric E. Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (London, 1944) and Dale Tomich, "*Capitalism and Slavery* Revisited: Remaking the Slave Commodity," in *The Legacy of Eric Williams: Into the Postcolonial Moment*, ed. Tanya L. Shields (Jackson, MS, 2015), 172–85.

5. Nicholas Draper, "Keynote: Legacies of British Slave Ownership," presented at "Slavery and Its Afterlives: Blackness, Representation, Social Justice Vision," Tenth International Conference of the Centre for Caribbean and Diaspora Studies at Goldsmiths, University of London, July 8, 2019. An impressive tool to track present continuities of British slavery is the database "Legacies of British Slave Ownership," a project coordinated by Nicholas Draper and Catherine Hall at the University College, London (https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/).

6. This is the case, for example, of Joseph E. Inikori, *Africans and the Industrial Revolution in England: A Study in International Trade and Economic Development* (Cambridge, 2002); see Catherine Hall, Nicholas Draper, and Keith McClelland, "Introduction," In *Legacies of British Slave-Ownership: Colonial Slavery and the Formation of Victorian Britain*, ed. Catherine Hall et al. (Cambridge, 2014), 1–32. See also Ian Baucom, *Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History* (Durham, NC, 2005) and Ned Sublette and Constance Sublette, *The American Slave Coast: A History of the Slave-Breeding Industry* (Chicago, 2015). The notion of "thingification" is, of course, from Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York, [1950] 2000).

7. Tom Brass and Marcel van der Linden, eds., *Free and Unfree Labour: The Debate Continues* (Bern, 1997); Yann Moulier Boutang, *De l'esclavage au salariat: Économie historique du salariat bride* (Paris, 1998); Frederick Cooper, Thomas C. Holt, and Rebecca J. Scott, *Beyond Slavery: Explorations of Race, Labor, and Citizenship in Postemancipation Societies* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2000); Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830–1867* (Chicago, 2002); Demetrius L. Eudell, *The Political Languages of Emancipation in the British Caribbean and the U.S. South* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2002); Robin Blackburn, *The American Crucible: Slavery, Emancipation, and Human Rights* (London, 2011).

8. David Roediger and Elizabeth D. Esch, *The Production of Difference: Race and the Management of Labor in U.S. History* (New York and Oxford, 2012); Elizabeth D. Esch, *The Color Line and the Assembly Line: Managing Race in the Ford Empire* (Berkeley, CA, 2018).

9. Frank B. Wilderson, III, *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (Durham, NC, 2010).

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10. Harold Cruse reproached, along these lines, white Marxist historian Herbert Aptheker's critique of Booker T. Washington's moderation. For Cruse, Aptheker's position illustrated the cul-de-sac facing left analyses regarding as bourgeois "sellouts" blacks who failed to be either part or allies of the revolutionary proletariat. In this way, Cruse continued, anticapitalist critique is incapable of accounting for black *practices* (to refer to an expression that informs the work of Saidiya Hartman discussed in this introduction) specifically responding—without necessarily becoming accommodationist—to structural oppression that is not reducible to economic exploitation. See Harold W. Cruse, "Revolutionary Nationalism and the Afro-American," *Studies on the Left* 2/3, 12–25.

11. Diana Leong, "The Salt Bones: '*Zong!*' and an Ecology of Thirst," *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 23 (2017): 798–820. See also Baucom, *Specters.*

12. Jaime A. Alves, *The Anti-Black City: Police Terror and Black Urban Life in Brazil* (Minneapolis, MN, 2018); Tryon P. Woods, *Blackhood against the Police Power: Punishment and Disavowal in the "Post-Racial" Era* (East Lansing, MI, 2019).

13. See Jennifer Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia, PA, 2004) and Cecily Jones, *Engendering Whiteness: White Women and Colonialism in Barbados and North Carolina, 1627–1865* (Manchester, United Kingdom, 2007). Morgan and Jones (as well as Hartman's *Scenes*) emphasize the role of the Americas' slave law in defining the subordinate "protected" status of white women within a patriarchal ordering of gender. Sexual violence was defined as a crime only when suffered by free human subjects, not legally enslaved and racially defined objects of property. White women survivors faced, if anything, a higher credibility bar, if they had a reputation of associating with black people. For a critical discussion of white feminism as historically and philosophically developing through a discourse of gender premised on the rejection of blackness, consciously or unconsciously identified with slaveness, see Sabine Broeck, *Gender and the Abjection of Blackness* (Albany, NY, 2018).

14. C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York, 1989 [1938]), 88.

15. James Oakes, *Freedom National: The Destruction of Slavery in the United States, 1861–1865* (New York, 2013) and Drescher, *Abolition.*

16. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York, [1961] 2004), 15.

17. Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville, VA 1989 [1981]), 64, 75–76.

18. For a brilliant critique of how natural-law analyses of slavery and freedom in the footsteps of Jean-Jacques Rousseau end up reinforcing the "natural slavery" notion, see Patrice D. Douglass, "The Claim of Right to Property: Social Violence and Political Right," *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 65 (2017): 145–60.

19. Ta-Nehisi Coates, *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy* (New York, 2018).

20. We have addressed this question from different angles in our earlier works, see Shona N. Jackson, *Creole Indigeneity: Between Myth and Nation in the Caribbean* (Minneapolis, 2012) and Franco Barchiesi, *Precarious Liberation: Workers, the State, and Contested Social Citizenship in Postapartheid South Africa* (Albany, NY, 2011).

21. Frank B. Wilderson, III, "The Position of the Unthought: An Interview with Saidiya V. Hartman", *Qui Parle* 13 (2003): 183–201.

22. Denise Ferreira Da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race* (Minneapolis, MN, 2007), xxiv. Da Silva's criticism specifically targets Etienne Balibar, Stuart Hall, and the "racial formation" approach proposed by sociologists Michael Omi and Howard Winant as key positions reducing racialized power to a matter of discourse, imagination, hegemony and exclusion rather than domination and violence, which are deeply and structurally woven in the connection between Western modes of humanist knowledge, philosophical meditations on what constitutes human subjectivity, and the paradigm of European expansion, colonization, and enslavement.

23. "Black metacritique" means here the black critique of critical theory, especially to the extent critical theory centers questions of political economy, ideology, hegemony, or alienation, which elude the structural significance of blackness and antiblack violence.

24. For example, a recent conference at Columbia University, "Free to Be Anywhere In the Universe: An International Conference on New Directions in the Study of the African

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Diaspora" (April 25–27, 2019), had a section on "The Theoretical Turn" in Black Studies, the introduction to which mentions that "in recent years Black Studies has been enlivened by engagements with a variety of theoretical resources that have yielded multiple trajectories (i.e., Afro-Futurism, Afro-Pessimism, Black Performance, Black Queer studies, to name just a few)." See http://iraas.columbia.edu/Event/free-be-anywhere-universe-international-conference-new-directions-study-african-diaspora.

25. In this regard, Jared Sexton defines blackness *qua* political ontology as "not a metaphysical notion, because it is the explicit outcome of a politics and thereby available to historic challenge through collective struggle. But it is not simply a description of a political status either, even an oppressed or subjugated political status, because it functions as if it were a metaphysical property across the longue durée of the pre-modern, modern and now postmodern eras." See Jared Sexton "'The Curtain of the Sky': An Introduction," *Critical Sociology* 36 (2010): 18.

26. Paul Gilroy has emphasized the centrality, in transatlantic black cultural practices and discourse, of a persistent "political and philosophical critique of work and productivism." See Paul Gilroy, "*There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack": The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (Chicago, [1987] 1991), 233. See also the discussion of the "infrapolitics of the black working class" as diverging from not only capitalist discipline, but also labor organizing in Robin D.G. Kelley, "Introduction: Writing Black Working-Class History from Way, Way Below," in *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York, 1994), 1–16.

27. Angela Davis, "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves," *The Massachusetts Review* 13 (1972): 81–100.

28. Rizvana Bradley, "'Living in the Absence of a Body': The (Sus)Stain of Black Female (W)holeness," *Rhizomes: Cultural Studies in Emerging Knowledge* 29 (2016), https://doi.org/10.20415/rhiz/029.e13.

29. Hortense J. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17 (1987): 64–81; on the revolutionary implications of "ungendering" in Spillers, see Selamawit D. Terrefe, "Speaking the Hieroglyph," *Theory and Event* 21 (2018): 124–47.

30. Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (New York: Norton, 2019).

31. On the connection between antiblack violence, sexualized terror, labor, and domesticity see also Christina Sharpe, *Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post-Slavery Subjects* (Durham, NC, 2009).

32. Saidiya Hartman, "The Belly of the World: A Note on Black Women's Labors," *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society* 18 (2016): 166–73.

33. Hartman, *Scenes*, 116.

34. Hartman has addressed the multifaceted antiblackness in abolitionist narratives of "victory"—centered as they are on the idealization of a Western "freedom principle" that dismisses both black practices of subversion and the persistence of black captivity—in her review of Seymour Drescher's *Abolition, American Historical Review*, 115 (2010): 1103–06.

35. This is the definition of antiblackness provided in Jared Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes: Antiblackness and the Critique of Multiracialism* (Minneapolis, 2008), 149.

36. Wilderson, *Red, White & Black*. This point is central to the perspective, discussed below, Wilderson terms "afro-pessimism."

37. Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York, 2008), 6.

38. Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill, NC, [1983] 2000), 2.

39. Robinson, *Black Marxism*, xxx. Robinson refers to the "inadequacies of Marxism"; see also Fanon, *The Wretched,* 40.

40. William David Hart, "Constellations: Capitalism, Antiblackness, Afro-pessimism, and Black Optimism," *American Journal of Theology & Philosophy* 39 (2018): 5–33, 15.

41. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, transl. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 110. In *The Black Jacobins*, C.L.R. James, like other historians of the period, does mention that blacks died in large numbers during slavery, particularly in Haiti, the focus of his work. However, he, like others in the radical tradition, is not interested in theorizing death but is instead concerned with what black enslaved and post-slavery workers accomplished. This is the distinction that we foreground here.

42. See Katherine McKittrick (ed.), *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis* (Durham, NC, 2015).

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43. Fred Moten, "Blackness and Nothingness (Mysticism in the Flesh)," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 112 (2013): 737–80.

44. Death is capitalized here to distinguish it as a structure of all black life after slavery, as opposed to death as an occurrence within all life or a reality of differently situated political subjects.

45. Saidiya Hartman, *Lose*, 111.

46. This material on black indigeneity and the addition of value to black bodies is developed in Shona Jackson's manuscript in progress, *Marxism, Method, and Indigenous Sovereignty.*

47. See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA, 1998).

48. See Hartman, *Lose*, 6.

49. For more on the ways in which Moten theorizes black paraontology, see his trilogy for Duke University Press, collectively titled "Consent Not to Be a Single Being": Fred Moten, *Black and Blur* (Durham, NC, 2017); Fred Moten, *Stolen Life* (Durham, NC, 2018); Fred Moten, *The Universal Machine* (Durham, NC, 2018).

50. Moten, "Blackness and Nothingness," 739.

51. Hartman (*Lose*, 17) writes: "… I searched for the traces of the destroyed. In every line item, I saw a grave. Commodities, cargo, and things don't lend themselves to representation, or at least not easily. The archive dictates what can be said about the past and the kinds of stories that can be told about the persons cataloged, embalmed, and sealed away in box files and folios. To read the archive is to enter a mortuary; it permits one final viewing and allows for a last glimpse of persons about to disappear into the slave hold."

52. For a discussion of defamiliarization as a methodological strategy, see Hartman, *Scenes*, 3–5.

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