

# Philosophy and the Black Experience



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APA NEWSLETTER ON

# Philosophy and the Black Experience

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STEPHEN C. FERGUSON II AND DWAYNE TUNSTALL, CO-EDITORS

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## FROM THE EDITORS

Stephen C. Ferguson II  
NORTH CAROLINA A&T STATE UNIVERSITY

Dwayne Tunstall  
GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY

We would like to say that it is an honor to assume, as new editors, the helm of the *APA Newsletter on Philosophy and the Black Experience*. For nearly fifteen years, editors John McClendon and George Yancy have done a tremendous job of providing us with articles and reviews that reflect the importance of African-American philosophers and the philosophy of Black experience. We thank them for their commendable efforts. As the new editors, we hope to continue their efforts.

We don't conceptualize African-American philosophy as only or primarily concerned with philosophy of race. Indeed, we make a conceptual distinction between the works of African American philosophers concerned with philosophy in the broad sense and works concerned with the philosophy of Black experience. We truly believe that such an approach enhances and enriches the normative framework that makes up Africana philosophy. We strongly encourage potential authors and book reviewers to submit their work for possible publication. We also encourage any suggestions that you think might help make the newsletter more philosophically rigorous and engaging.

Lastly, we have decided that we will capitalize the word "Black" when referring to Black Africans and people of African descent. As a proper noun, we capitalize it like *Negro* or *African American*. Over many generations, there was a consistent fight to capitalize the word "Negro" as a way of establishing racial respect and dignity. Since "Black" has now come to replace "Negro" as the contemporary convention, we follow in that tradition with the capitalization of "Black." As Robert S. Wachal observes: "The failure to capitalize Black when it is synonymous with African American is a matter of unintended racism, to put the best possible face on it."<sup>1</sup>

We are happy to have contributions from Clevis Headley, Clarence Sholé Johnson, Devon R. Johnson, Charles F. Peterson, John Torrey, and Naomi Zack. Our issue begins with Clevis Headley's discussion of the metaphilosophical issues surrounding Afro-Caribbean philosophy. Following in the footsteps of Paget Henry, "On Afro-Caribbean Philosophy: Metaphilosophical Inquiry and Black

Existence" explores the metaphilosophical implications of viewing Afro-Caribbean philosophy as a discursive practice that investigates the Afro-Caribbean experience. Naomi Zack follows with a philosophical discussion of Cornel West's concept of the Black Prophetic Tradition and its contemporary relevance. She seeks to deepen our understanding of West's legacy and its importance for what Raymond Williams calls "The Long Revolution." Next, Charles Peterson explores philosophical issues in the Cinemax's dramatic series *The Knick*. Peterson argues that the character of Dr. Algernon Edwards serves as an important and timely representative of the complex intersectionality in which the tensions of race, class, and gender in Black male life are placed on display for society to consume. Through the prism of W. E. B. DuBois' concept of "double consciousness" and contemporary hegemonic constructions of masculinity, Dr. Edwards is examined as an example of the conflicted and porous nature of the social-cultural demands placed on subaltern subjects. Next, John Torrey offers a discussion of the normative dimensions that inform the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. He discusses the ways in which non-canonical philosophical works have informed the BLM movement. In addition, he offers a critique of the limitation of Western philosophy, particularly the canon, with respect to understanding the value of Black lives, particularly in contemporary times. Devon Johnson offers a "philosophical rumination" on Africana philosophy, anti-Black racism, and nihilism. Lastly, Clarence Johnson provides us with a review of Naomi Zack's recent work, *White Privilege and Black Rights: The Injustice of U.S. Police Racial Profiling and Homicide*.

For submissions to the *APA Newsletter on Philosophy and the Black Experience*, articles and book reviews should be emailed to either Stephen C. Ferguson or Dwayne Tunstall at [apa.pbe.newsletter@gmail.com](mailto:apa.pbe.newsletter@gmail.com). The deadline for submissions for the fall issue is May 1, 2017.

### NOTES

1. Robert S. Wachal, "The Capitalization of Black and Native American," *American Speech* 75, no. 4 (2000): 365. For a further discussion of this issue, see John H. McClendon, "Black/Blackness: Philosophical Considerations," in *Encyclopedia of the African Diaspora: Origins, Experiences, and Culture*, Vol. 3, edited by Carol Boyce Davies (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2008), 198–203; and Richard B. Moore, "The Name 'Negro' – Its Origin and Evil Use," in *Richard B. Moore, Caribbean Militant in Harlem: Collected Writings, 1920–1972*, edited by W. Burghardt Turner and Joyce Moore Turner (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988), 223–39.

## SUBMISSION GUIDELINES AND INFORMATION

The *APA Newsletter on Philosophy and the Black Experience* is published by the Committee on the Status of Black Philosophers. Philosophers are encouraged to submit original articles, book reviews, and letters to the editor on any topic in philosophy that makes a contribution to philosophy and the black experience broadly construed. In addition to traditional articles and book reviews in African American and Africana philosophy, and as long as the article or book review is in dialogue with the black experience broadly construed, this includes articles and book reviews that explore topics from within the analytic tradition, the continental tradition, and within the history of Western/non-Western philosophical traditions. This also includes articles on the profession of philosophy.

All articles undergo anonymous peer review; submissions should be prepared accordingly. Publication decisions are made by the co-editors, typically within three months. All submissions should be limited to 5,000 words and must follow the APA guidelines for gender-neutral language and *The Chicago Manual of Style* formatting. Submissions should be accompanied by a short biographical summary of the author. Please send submissions electronically to the editors at the addresses below.

### DEADLINES

Fall issues: April 1  
Spring issues: November 1

### CO-EDITORS

Stephen C. Ferguson II, [drscferg@gmail.com](mailto:drscferg@gmail.com)  
Dwayne Tunstall, [tunstald@gvst.edu](mailto:tunstald@gvst.edu)

### FORMATTING GUIDELINES

- The *APA Newsletters* adhere to *The Chicago Manual of Style*.
- Use as little formatting as possible. Details like page numbers, headers, footers, and columns will be added later. Use tabs instead of multiple spaces for indenting. Use *italics* instead of underlining. Use an "em dash" (—) instead of a double hyphen (--).
- Use endnotes instead of footnotes. Examples of proper endnote style:

John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 90.

See Sally Haslanger, "Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them To Be?" *Noûs* 34 (2000): 31–55.

## ARTICLES

### *On Afro-Caribbean Philosophy: Metaphilosophical Inquiry and Black Existence*

Clevis Headley

FLORIDA ATLANTIC UNIVERSITY

There is no exaggeration in claiming that philosophy, among other things, is in the midst of a metaphilosophical turn. Although metaphilosophical concerns are not alien to the history of philosophy, the recent popularity of metaphilosophical concerns indicates the ongoing implosion of the dominant paradigm of philosophy. But this implosion need not be construed as destined to culminate in the demise of the discipline of philosophy. Indeed, in the midst of this current implosion, there exist abundant opportunities for the exploration of alternative areas of philosophical inquiry. More importantly, the current implosion of the dominant paradigm of philosophy invites a radical rethinking or critical engagement with philosophy itself. Accordingly, the current situation of philosophy is poised to facilitate pluralism rather than disciplinary homogeneity. The focus of this brief essay is Paget Henry's inaugural conception of Afro-Caribbean philosophy. The tradition of Afro-Caribbean philosophy, a subtradition of Africana philosophy, is presented as a discursive<sup>1</sup> project informed by Black experience—in this context, the Afro-Caribbean experience. As a philosophy informed by the experiential parameters of race and Black identity, metaphilosophical concerns infuse its theoretical reach.

The idea of Afro-Caribbean philosophy probably strikes many as an unmitigated category mistake. This conclusion emerges in reaction to claims that Afro-Caribbean philosophy is a highly complicated affair due to the complexity of the idea of "Afro-Caribbeanness," on the one hand, and the concept of "philosophy," on the other hand. This double contestability, however, need not be construed as a problem but, rather, as characteristic of the semantic flexibility deeply embedded in language itself. While dominant traditions of philosophy view philosophy as a distinctively a priori discipline, Afro-Caribbean philosophy more closely resembles a naturalized philosophy, precisely because Afro-Caribbean philosophy has borrowed much from less formalized disciplines. We can also further construe Afro-Caribbean philosophy as a creolized philosophy since it is not dependent upon maintaining a priori purity. Rather, Afro-Caribbean philosophy is a philosophical discourse that renders itself vulnerable to influence and change from its interactions with other disciplines. Indeed, Afro-Caribbean philosophy represents an interdisciplinary model of philosophical praxis; it is the focal point of a constellation of overlying marginalities and overlapping intertextualities. This site of confluence reveals the struggle by Afro-Caribbean philosophy to claim disciplinary identity, institutional visibility, discursive autonomy, and epistemological credibility.

Nonetheless, there is the lingering assumption that the circumstances of Caribbean history preclude the possibility of philosophy taking root in the Caribbean. As Naipaul declares, "The history of the islands can never be satisfactorily told. Brutality is not the only difficulty. History is built around achievement and creation; and nothing was created in the West Indies."<sup>2</sup> Indeed, one implication of Naipaul's position is that there is no Afro-Caribbean philosophy.

## CONTEXTUALIZING AFRO-CARIBBEAN PHILOSOPHY

Although we must guard against strategies of simplistic reductionism directed at Afro-Caribbean philosophy, it is important to appropriately situate Afro-Caribbean philosophy. Afro-Caribbean philosophy emerges from the scars and trauma of Caribbean history. Accordingly, we must acknowledge the discursive dilemmas of Afro-Caribbean philosophy precisely because of its origins. Chamberlin writes:

Blacks in the West Indies are not the only people with a history of oppression. But theirs is a special history, bringing with it a grim inheritance of someone else's images of difference and disdain, images that for five hundred years have conditioned their special and sometimes desperate need to determine for themselves who they are and where they belong.<sup>3</sup>

And, finally, Orlando Patterson underscores the unique facticity of Caribbean societies by calling attention to the historically unprecedented project that shaped the daily existence of Afro-Caribbean subjects. According to Patterson, Caribbean societies represent "one of the rare cases of a human society being artificially created for the satisfaction of one clearly defined goal: that of making money through the production of sugar."<sup>4</sup>

Afro-Caribbean philosophy seeks to work through the dense complexity of this historical reality. Hence, Afro-Caribbean philosophy cannot claim a pure origin but must be seen as philosophical activity situated within the Caribbean legacy of racism, slavery, and colonialism. Such a contested inheritance offers us an intercultural model of philosophy beyond the traditional binary of particularity and universality.

## AFRO-CARIBBEAN PHILOSOPHY AND THE NATURE OF PHILOSOPHY

Engaging Afro-Caribbean philosophy requires critical involvement with metaphilosophical inquiry regarding the nature, origin, scope, and objectives of philosophy. On this view, even if certain styles of philosophy involve making hairsplitting distinctions and positing formal metaphysical abstractions, efforts to limit philosophy exclusively to pure conceptual analysis or linguistic analysis are premature. We must resist the rhetoric of the "simplifying seduction" that proper philosophy is formal analysis. Attempts to render philosophy totally independent of the practical problems and concerns emergent from human existence fail to

appreciate the extent to which philosophy can legitimately engage human existence.

From another perspective, there is no exaggeration in holding that Afro-Caribbean thinkers share Randall Collins's insights about the connection between the history of philosophy and philosophy itself. Collins states that the "history of philosophy is to a considerable extent the history of groups. [N]othing but groups of friends, discussion partners, close-knit circles that often have characteristics of social movements."<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, historical circumstances have rendered Afro-Caribbean philosophy dependent upon theoretical infusion from nontraditional sources of philosophy. Accordingly, Afro-Caribbean philosophy's indebtedness to literature and history explains its interpretive struggles over literary and historical texts. Paget Henry has insightfully maintained that Afro-Caribbean philosophy "has largely been social and political in nature and concerned with problems of cultural freedom, political freedom, and racial equality." And he adds that "history and poetics assume an ontological status as the domains in which Afro-Caribbean identities and social realities are constituted."<sup>6</sup>

Resisting efforts to pursue a formal definition of philosophy facilitates the emergence of critical discourse or, rather, metaphilosophical inquiry into Afro-Caribbean philosophy. The attempt to go formalistic or procedural will seem irresistible since, on the traditional view of things, philosophy seeks to reveal the necessary and sufficient features of things. Similarly, any formal definition of philosophy should manifest its necessary and sufficient characteristics. Hence, once we have settled upon these necessary and sufficient conditions of application of the term "philosophy," we can then determine whether there is an Afro-Caribbean philosophy answering to these conditions. The strategy here is as follows: let us first define philosophy and then easily supplement this formal definition with the appropriate ingredients that would transform it into an Afro-Caribbean philosophy. Inevitably, the notion of the universality of philosophy leads many to define philosophy as the rational pursuit of certain perennial questions about the nature of truth, justice, reality, and ethics. Of course, it should be noted that even on a universalistic conception of philosophy, it is possible to call into question the existence of Afro-Caribbean philosophy. Here, Afro-Caribbean subjects are viewed as lacking epistemic credibility since, historically, they have been the victims of what Miranda Fricker (2007) calls "testimonial injustice," lacking the appropriate resources to describe their style of existence.

Nevertheless, defining philosophy in universalistic terms privileges the traditional conception of philosophy with its bias against the contingent and the temporal. Uncritically supporting this conception of philosophy threatens to make us unwilling participants in the violent project of treating a specific particularity as a normative universalism. As Tsenay Serequeberhan writes, regarding the progressive pretensions of the dominant tradition:

In the name of the universality of values, European colonialism violently universalized its own singular particularity and annihilated the historicity of the colonized. . . . Western philosophy—in the guise of a disinterested universalistic, transcendental, speculative discourse—served the indispensable function of being the ultimate *veracious buttress* of European conquest.<sup>7</sup>

We are now well positioned to articulate the way in which understanding the possibility of an Afro-Caribbean philosophy leads to a reconsideration of philosophy in the very act of identifying Afro-Caribbean philosophy. Afro-Caribbean philosophy shares with Deweyan pragmatism the idea that reconstruction allows for the successful practicing or doing of philosophy, where the idea of reconstruction in philosophy suggests sober questioning of traditional conceptions of philosophy. Furthermore, this deliberate questioning will also be a decisive metaphilosophical exercise that questions the enterprise of philosophy itself. Such reconstruction, then, will be a critique of the institution of philosophy and not a misguided demand for the rejection of philosophy. Indeed, it is a call for philosophy to open itself to the advent of the Other, a call for philosophy to become more hospitable in its disciplinary practice and less authoritarian. Since these concerns are metaphilosophical, I contend that Afro-Caribbean philosophy will be, to some extent, metaphilosophical precisely because it must critically engage questions about the origins, nature, and the goals of philosophy. Once again, it seeks to liberate the institution of philosophy from the hegemony of its totalizing identity and its phantom claims of universality and objectivity.

### PAGET HENRY ON PHILOSOPHY AND AFRO-CARIBBEAN PHILOSOPHY

Henry appropriately situates philosophy within the drama of human existence. Hence, he views philosophy as one among many intertextually constituted cultural projects. Not surprisingly, he situates Afro-Caribbean philosophy outside the closed discursive space of universalistic conceptions of philosophy. Clearly, he does not believe that mathematical models of thinking can uncontroversially provide answers to existential philosophical questions. Philosophy, he claims, “is neither absolute nor a pure discourse. It is an internally differentiated and discursively embedded practice, the boundaries of which will continue to change as work in other fields requires the taking up of new philosophical positions.”<sup>8</sup> Unlike thinkers who seek to defend the immaculate purity of philosophy, to guard it from cultural contamination, to segregate it to the sterile realm of reason, as well as to protect it from being kidnapped by those who lack the necessary sophistication to handle its analytical rigor, Henry offers a deflated and more “profane” account of philosophy. Here, philosophy does not escape involvement with the other, less cognitively demanding areas of culture. But philosophy’s fraternizing with these other “bastard” areas of culture does not compromise its institutional integrity. Indeed, philosophy’s entanglement with these epistemologically suspect areas of culture is its very strength. Such discursive fraternizing by philosophy, then, leads to the positive development

whereby philosophy itself can be construed as a narrative of liberation.

Hence, Henry’s construal of Afro-Caribbean philosophy does not fall prey to any insidious particularism that threatens to “ghettoize” Afro-Caribbean philosophy or render it the profane ranting of an insidious ethnic chauvinism. While advocating for an intertextual strategy, Henry appropriately situates Afro-Caribbean philosophy, stating that it will participate in the project of decolonization. Accordingly, he writes that Afro-Caribbean philosophy is “a radically decolonized philosophical practice that [should] adequately meet the current postcolonial demands of the region.”<sup>9</sup> The emphasis on an Afro-Caribbean philosophy being a decolonializing practice is significant precisely because the expectation is that such a philosophy will be concerned with a decolonialization of Caribbean consciousness. Here, the significance of decolonialization should be understood as efforts to decenter ways of thinking premised upon alien assumptions of life as well as axioms of existence. Likewise, decolonization should also take the form of encouraging the exploitation of indigenous metaphorical resources emergent from the lived reality of Caribbean peoples. Furthermore, Henry construes the process of decolonialization, assigned to Afro-Caribbean philosophy, as focused on emancipating traditional African thought from “cloud[s] of colonial invisibility.”<sup>10</sup> Henry correctly maintains that a strategic retrieval of traditional African thought can contribute much by aiding in the understanding of both ego genesis and ego formation. Such a contribution is bound to be significant given that the phenomenon of ego constitution in the Caribbean has been formally captive to the dictates of colonial and/or imperial regimes of power.

Consequently, Henry articulates three important technical reforms that must be undertaken to further the flourishing of Afro-Caribbean philosophy. First, he suggests that we change the patterns of creolization characteristic of Caribbean philosophy. To this end, he favors a process of creolization that is agreeable with the aim of creating “a creole [hybrid] philosophy whose identity is closer to those of Caribbean literature, dance, theatre, calypso, reggae and other creole formations.”<sup>11</sup>

Clearly, Henry supports greater dialectic interaction between philosophy and the arts. Indeed, he claims that an Afro-Caribbean philosophy stands to gain much from the arts precisely because of the “creative and transformative forces” of the arts.<sup>12</sup> Obviously, then, Afro-Caribbean philosophy will not seek to exploit the bogus opposition of reason versus intuition. However, in light of its situatedness, it will gladly exploit the spontaneous creativity and imagination characteristic of the arts. The idea emergent from the preceding considerations is that there are certain innovative capacities of the arts which can function as transformative capabilities to legislate new styles of human existence.

Second, Henry does not run the risk of engaging in unconstructive ideological posturing in his take on Afro-Caribbean philosophy. He demands that it should be “capable of thematizing its own concerns, making distinct discursive contributions to knowledge production

in the region," while realizing that "[t]he time has come for Caribbean philosophy to declare its independence from its historic intertextual subordination to ideological production."<sup>13</sup>

Third, Henry demands that we change the intertextual address of Afro-Caribbean philosophy by making it a new critical writing. As a new critical writing, Afro-Caribbean philosophy will "help to link the founding categories of the subject in disciplines such as political economy and history to those of the arts, making dialogue and translation possible along these and other lines."<sup>14</sup> While seemingly exaggerated, I will develop this last construal in such a way as to connect it with the issue of subjectivity. I interpret Henry as, in part, demanding that an Afro-Caribbean philosophy should focus on the question of subjectivity and creative human agency in the Caribbean. Certain popular notions of subjectivity tend to favor accounts that theorize subjectivity in terms of recognition. On this view, awareness of subjectivity emerges from a hostile struggle between two opposing parties. The self and other do not result from mutuality of purpose or mutual reciprocity, but from an antagonistic and violent struggle. This conception of subjectivity that is premised on domination and violence and that makes subjectivity captive to the dialectics of recognition is a pathological subjectivity precisely because it requires violent struggle to be actualized. Put differently, one's subjectivity becomes dependent upon recognition from opposing consciousness. Given the Caribbean history of colonialism and imperialism, it would indeed be tragic if the subjectivity and agency of Caribbean peoples were dependent upon recognition from their former colonial masters. Hence, efforts to investigate and explore the contours of Afro-Caribbean subjectivity cannot legitimize the antagonistic conception of subjectivity as paradigmatic of subjectivity. One challenge for Afro-Caribbean philosophy, then, is to theorize subjectivity and agency beyond the horizon of a subjectivity premised on the erasure of the other. So Henry, in delicately balancing the divide between intercultural and intracultural conceptions of philosophical activity, describes Afro-Caribbean philosophy as "an intertextually embedded discursive practice, and not an isolated or absolutely autonomous one. It is often implicitly referenced and engaged in the production of answers to everyday questions and problems that are being framed in nonphilosophical discourses."<sup>15</sup> This description of Afro-Caribbean philosophy can accommodate the unique historical and cultural circumstances that have shaped and influenced human existence in the Caribbean. Alternatively, an Afro-Caribbean philosophy can be understood as a discursive practice dedicated to investigating the Afro-Caribbean collective "center of gravity," while resisting "hermeneutical imperialism,"—the assumption that culturally specific interpretations of human existence are valid for all human beings.

Finally, such a philosophy will also investigate the process of Afro-Caribbean people caring for their cares. Notice, then, that Henry is not interested in sanctioning a hegemonic discourse premised on vague notions of authenticity. In seeking both to articulate as well as to systematize the numerous voices of Afro-Caribbean philosophy, Henry clearly underscores the internal debates constitutive of the

Afro-Caribbean philosophical landscape. Consequently, Henry identifies two schools of Afro-Caribbean philosophy: poeticism and historicism.

The poeticist tradition denotes a group of thinkers (Sylvia Wynters, Wilson Harris) who claim that questions of identity, ego formation, and self must be resolved before there can be any constructive change in Afro-Caribbean society. The historicist tradition, on the other hand, (Frantz Fanon, C. L. R. James) argues that external institutional change must be antecedent to any meaningful transformation of consciousness of self within Afro-Caribbean societies. Poeticists favor projects attentive to the immateriality of consciousness, whereas historicists favor projects focused on overhauling the material structures of production, distribution, and consumption.

Before considering others matters, it is imperative to reach some understanding about the philosophical concerns that will occupy the attention of Afro-Caribbean philosophy. Indeed, these concerns will serve partly as textual reference points in the effort to gain a more critically informed understanding of the very canonicity of Afro-Caribbean philosophy. Questions that are destined to attract the attention of Afro-Caribbean will not focus on developing global theories of knowledge, truth, or reference. Rather, they will focus on, without being limited to, matters of identity, freedom, liberation, agency, subjectivity, philosophies of culture, and philosophies of history, as articulated by Wilson Harris.

A significant idea emergent from this critical reflection on Afro-Caribbean philosophy is the importance of recognizing that "concepts lose their meaning and significance for people when it is assumed that they are universally accepted and taken for granted."<sup>16</sup> We can augment this insight by acknowledging that Afro-Caribbean philosophy champions the importance of recognizing that our practices, language, history, etc., not only affect but indirectly constitute the ways we interpret the world. This idea further reinforces the metaphilosophical insight regarding the historical and cultural embeddedness of philosophical practice.

Implicit in the idea of an Afro-Caribbean philosophy is the notion of human thought and existence claiming intelligibility against the background of a shared form of life. This idea builds on Charles Taylor's account of human beings as self-interpreting beings. Self-interpretations generate self-constitutive commitments that render a person's life intelligible since such commitments emerge from one's desires, interests, intentions, etc. Contrary to universalist construals of philosophy that inevitably place it in conflict with our being-in-the-world, philosophy, grounded in the task of self-understanding and existential intelligibility, plays a decisive role in enabling human beings to achieve a certain existential intelligibility. Such existential intelligibility is achieved by making sense of our categorical desires, namely, our basic commitments, concerns, and emotions. This approach to philosophy and its role in human interpretation and understanding, then, sheds light on the styles of existence common to human existence. Here, styles of existence are the basic modes of existence not answerable to the dictates of those who seek

to impose evidentiary demands on human existence at the price of intelligibility.

Some traditionally minded philosophers will certainly raise questions regarding the normativity of philosophy. Such critical concerns may very well take the form of addressing the importance of logic and rationality to human life. On this traditional view, thinking which is not rationally grounded in neutral principles of logic or neutral epistemic criteria of truthfulness and justifiability is either confused or false. I want to offer two responses to this challenge. First, Henry's construal of Afro-Caribbean philosophy is not a blind and arrogant rejection of rationality. Rather, there is critical acknowledgement that symbolic logic, with its basis in notions of mathematical rigor, analysis, proof, and clarity is not necessarily applicable to all areas of inquiry regardless of context. Furthermore, the point here is that we should be on guard against attributing unnecessary importance to the ontological commitments and assumptions of the formal, logical, and set-theoretic tradition by uncritically buying into the idea that all thinking is abstract. Consequently, Afro-Caribbean philosophy remains both "normatively subservient" to reason and the existential weight of lived experience.

Stephen Toulmin (1958) has argued that we should not allow formal logic to colonize all aspects of human existence. Toulmin appeals to the idea of an "argument field," stating that practical argumentation is used in a variety of fields, and that certain aspects of argumentation differ from field to field. By contrast, other features of arguments are field-invariant; these formal and abstract features hold regardless of the argument field in question. The trouble with uncritical deployments of formal logic is the assumption that all aspects of arguments are field-invariant. Rationality is not the problem. The problem is the conviction that formal logic defines the universal standards of every instance of "good" thinking. This style of thinking categorically exiles imagination as void of any cognitive significance to human praxis. However, the appeal to the context sensitivity of thought need not entail surrendering critical thinking. Hence, it should not come as a surprise to learn that Henry refers to Afro-Caribbean philosophy "[a]s a rational discourse that examines the human subject, its epistemic strategies and its objects of knowledge."<sup>17</sup>

Second, the narrow hyper-rational construal of human thought betrays a certain inattention to the fact that much conflict in human life does not relate to matters of consistency and rationality. Rather, conflict emerges because of antagonizing and irresolvable incommensurability between cultures and individuals. Resolving epistemic, existential, and cultural incommensurability is not simply a question of appealing to neutral frameworks and bringing formal argumentation to bear on the situation. It is precisely because such basic existential disagreements are cognitively underdetermined that new metaphorical structuring of things and new frames of interpretation offer new possibilities of existence. Hence, philosophy can contribute to the restoration of commensurability in the face of conflicting self-interpretations by, among other things, overhauling and restructuring our narrative identities, while discouraging blind dogmatism and the paralyzing inertia of

existential complacency. Indeed, there is no escaping the finite ground of our everyday existence in order to make our life intelligible from the perspective of the "view from nowhere." This is precisely because our understanding of ourselves as human beings depends upon a shared form of life, and not on grasping eternal logical relations among disembodied forms, or mechanically assenting to a set of abstract propositions. All of these considerations emerge from Henry's idea of philosophy as a form of intertextuality informed by lived experience. The notion of intertextuality need not be construed as implying that Afro-Caribbean philosophy is a linguistic idealism. Rather, the notion of intertextuality underscores the extent to which Afro-Caribbean philosophy is embedded in clusters of interdisciplinary texts.

In conclusion, I have presented a sympathetic yet critical account of Afro-Caribbean philosophy along the lines of that advocated by Paget Henry. I have also concentrated on describing a conception of philosophy agreeable with the kind of philosophical project being pursued by Henry. It is hoped that some headway has been made in making the case for an alternative tradition of philosophy, one that any reconstructive metaphilosophical project would enthusiastically accommodate and, moreover, embrace.

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#### NOTES

1. The term "discursive," in this context, connotes the interdisciplinary status of Afro-Caribbean philosophy, namely, the fact that it is not exclusively informed by efforts to engage in a priori reflection to answer perennial problems regarding truth, reality, knowledge, etc.; rather, Afro-Caribbean philosophy is, among other things, deeply informed by and embedded within the multiple intellectual practices constitutive of the Afro-Caribbean intellectual tradition.
2. Naipaul, *The Middle Passage*, 29.
3. Chamberlin, *Come Back to Me My Language*, 28.
4. Patterson, *The Sociology of Slavery: An Analysis of the Origins, Development, and Structure of Negro Slave Society in Jamaica*, 9.

5. Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies*, 3.
6. Henry, "CLR James, African and Afro-Caribbean Philosophy," 12.
7. Serequeberhan, "African Philosophy: The Point in Question," 4–5.
8. Henry, *Caliban's Reason: Introducing Afro-Caribbean Philosophy*, 3.
9. Henry, "Philosophy and the Caribbean Intellectual Tradition," 25.
10. Henry, *Caliban's Reason*, 21.
11. Henry, "Philosophy and the Caribbean Intellectual Tradition," 25.
12. Henry, *Caliban's Reason*, 259.
13. Henry, "Philosophy and the Caribbean Intellectual Tradition," 26.
14. *Ibid.*, 27.
15. Henry, *Caliban's Reason*, 2.
16. Wisdo, *The Life of Irony and the Ethics of Belief*, 27.
17. Henry, "Philosophy and the Caribbean Intellectual Tradition," 27.

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## *The Long Revolution, Cornel West's Black Prophetic Tradition, and Temporal Perspective*<sup>1</sup>

Naomi Zack

UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

Raymond Williams was a twentieth century English cultural critic who seems to be largely unknown to U.S. philosophers of race who write about social justice. He was one of the founders of the British *New Left Review*, but his ideas were a site of contention for more orthodox Marxists, because he was skeptical of economic analyses that did not take lived cultural experience into account. Williams believed that masses, and also perhaps classes, did not literally exist, except for how theorists defined and viewed them. He also anticipated later feminist emphases on "nutritive and generative" aspects of lived experience as a major social institution on a par with the economy and politics. Williams was considered most influential for his ideas that all members and groups in society contribute to its *structured feelings* at any given time and for his idea of *The Long Revolution* that recurred throughout his writing, but was first fully introduced in a 1961 book of the same title.<sup>2</sup>

The Long Revolution named by Williams was a process of social change toward democracy that began in modernity in the late eighteenth century with the French Revolution, which he called "the mould in which experience was cast."<sup>3</sup> By experience in this context, Williams meant the experience of writers and poets, and he believed that what was expressed in literature both reflected feelings in society and influenced them. The structured feeling of the Long Revolution is centered on goals of universal human recognition, for all members of society, as whole human beings. Everyone is to be accepted for what they are in the system to come after capitalism: "There can be no acceptable human order while the full humanity of any class of men is in practice denied."<sup>4</sup>

In disagreement with contemporary Marxists, Williams was skeptical of the ability of socialism or state control that would entail complex bureaucracy to realize the goal

of universal humanity: "We seem reduced to a choice between speculator and bureaucrat and while we do not like the speculator, the bureaucrat is not exactly inviting either."<sup>5</sup> His proposed solution was a form of self-rule based on open discussion and voting, with representatives to larger governing bodies responsible to their constituents. Williams has been interpreted as advocating that "the people" rule themselves, but he is not usually associated with anarchism.<sup>6</sup>

It is very difficult for a theorist to decide how big a picture to consider, how long a period of history to take as a unit for long-term trends. Since we cannot successfully intervene in a global system, and the same facts can usually be explained by more than one theory, there is little that can or should interfere with a long-term view that is tilted toward optimism. The temporal perspective introduced by Williams, although he probably would not have described it in these terms, permits us to think about history as extending into the future as well as the past.<sup>7</sup> Suppose that there is a Long Revolution and there are Wide Humanistic Values to match it, which preclude racism because the full humanity of all human beings will be recognized, eventually. It might be useful, as a matter of sanity as well as hope, to see the present conditions of American anti-Black punitive racism as a relatively short span of events within those lengths. Such events need to be endured, and the hope is that they will pass into the past at some stage in the future of the Long Revolution. About hope, Williams wrote the following at the end of *Towards 2000*:

It is only in a shared belief and insistence that there are practical alternatives that the balance of forces and chances begins to alter. . . . Once the inevitabilities are challenged, we begin gathering our resources for a journey of hope. If there are no easy answers there are still available and discoverable hard answers and it is these that we can now learn to make and share. This has been, from the beginning, the sense and impulse of the Long Revolution.<sup>8</sup>

The term "racial climate" has a history of meaning "micro-aggressions" based on race, small cuts, insults, and slights that can have a cumulative effect of individual harm.<sup>9</sup> In using the term "racial atmosphere," reference may be made to other issues of harm to people of color, such as ignorance of Black history and contemporary racism or discrimination in career advancement.<sup>10</sup> The implication of these meanings is that the micro-aggressions add up to what is perceived as a general predisposition of white people to treat people of color in unjust ways. But, at this time, ideas of racial atmosphere and climate also work as metaphors for what is unknown about race relations and attitudes to capture the vagueness and unpredictability of racial prejudice and discrimination that occur in a society where nonwhites remain disadvantaged, even though there is formal equality. This "vague weather" aspect of atmosphere and climate is an epistemological condition of indecision that may or may not constitute a lasting crisis, although some syndromes of political injustice should be viewed as crises.

A crisis is a period of indecision and uncertainty that requires a resolution before life can go on. Will Blacks and other people of color achieve more equality with whites, or is the United States—and, with it, the world, because U.S. racism is exported with business practices, tourism, and entertainment products—on the brink of a new era of explicit and direct oppression against people of color? Are most white Americans, whose race-neutral economic and social activities have racist effects on nonwhites, genuinely ignorant of how the system in which they operate works, or are they secretly but knowingly hearts-and-minds racists? It is not clear that this indeterminate aspect of present racial atmosphere (and smaller climates) must be resolved now. We do not know if life (in a general sense) can go on if it is not resolved or what it means for life to go on, or not. We do not even know if the putative crisis can be resolved at this time because there is as yet no sustained, impassioned, liberatory discourse for our condition of ambiguity, a time with a Black president and police killing with impunity of unarmed Black youth, a time of voting rights for everyone but new restrictions and requirements that disproportionately affect African Americans.<sup>11</sup> Academics have much to write and say about contemporary issues at this time, but the light of their disputatious discourse shines in a windowless tower with a semi-captive audience of colleagues and students and no reliable means for it to illuminate the real world. The public media yield few constant intellectuals, and progressive pundits speak to those who already agree with them on public radio and via specialized electronic outlets. American discourse of racial liberation is thereby at a standstill, which means that it drifts in the river of history. *We do not know what is going to happen from day to day or in the long term.*

### CORNEL WEST'S PARADIGM OF THE BLACK PROPHETIC TRADITION

It is important to keep Cornel West's protean background in mind for consideration of his major philosophical claims. West has had a very productive career, publishing fifteen or twenty books and maintaining a schedule of two or three talks a week for decades. His academic credentials are impeccable. He studied at Yale University, taught at Union Theological Seminary, Harvard University, Princeton University, and, most recently, back to Union. His academic positions have been in departments of religion and African American Studies, but many philosophers of race have claimed him also, and he has not completely repudiated that disciplinary ascription, although unlike most philosophers, he says about himself: "I'm a blues man in the life of the mind. I'm a jazz man in the world of ideas. . ."<sup>12</sup>

West has been recognized as a public intellectual by people of all races and is one of the most well-known African Americans of arts and letters in his generation, regularly presenting his thought in television and radio interviews.<sup>13</sup> West's speech and writing are highly erudite, spanning the whole Western humanist tradition and stylized by his encyclopediac knowledge of Black history, appreciation of Black popular music, and insistence on Christian spirituality as a source of individual dignity. He has recorded hip-hop music, both solo and with a band called "Cornel West Theory"; he played the role of "Councilor West" in the

movies "Matrix Reloaded" and "Matrix Revolutions." West's mode of address consistently has the cadenced grandeur of a prophet of his times.<sup>14</sup> His writing reverberates in his speech and after a while, in reading his prose, one hears him speaking. The content of West's discourse is literally reiterated throughout his publications, talks, and critical exchanges. Overall, he seeks to alleviate and redignify conditions of human suffering by proceeding from the experience of African Americans. His advocacy of socialism is motivated by an ethical interpretation of Marxism combined with the ultimately altruistic selfless love of others exemplified by Jesus Christ. But his resultant "radical democracy" is grounded on the suffering of African Americans. West describes himself as a "Chekovian Christian" because human death and other tragedies are unavoidable, and he constructs and draws on the tradition of Black prophecy to develop a dignified stance of hope in the face such gloom and doom.<sup>15</sup>

Similar to many liberatory theories, West's paradigm of the Black Prophetic Tradition is both descriptive and normative. West has been developing this paradigm at least since the early 1980s, and he is aware both of the nature of his own work as discourse and of historical vicissitudes in real life politics that result in uneven progress toward racial justice in reality. In his first book, *Prophesy Deliverance!: An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity*, he wrote:

The object of inquiry for Afro-American critical thought is the past and the present, the doings and the sufferings of African people in the United States. Rather than a new scientific discipline or field of study, it is a genre of writing, a textuality, a mode of discourse that interprets, describes, and evaluates Afro-American life in order comprehensively to understand and effectively to transform it. It is not concerned with "foundations" or transcendental "grounds" but with how to build its language in such a way that the configuration of sentences and the constellation of paragraphs themselves create a textuality and distinctive discourse which are a material force for Afro-American freedom.<sup>16</sup>

West's expressed intention here—and nothing that he has done since then would cause one to infer that he has ever waived from that intention—is to create a form of speech that can become a real causal force for black liberation in the United States. In other words, West is here explicit about his belief in the power of cabalistic rhetoric and the existence of "magic words." In this way, he is like many other academics who write and speak as though that is all they need do for reality to change. But West is also unlike them because his messages have religious overtones. There is an even greater distance between West and other philosophers. It seems reasonable to assume that a philosopher constructing a Black tradition would refer to the texts of past Black philosophers as a main source of inspiration as well as reference. West instead turns to music and claims that the thought of Alain Locke, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Sylvia Winters is not in the same league of genius as the *intellectual* (not experiential) work of Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, and, above all, Sarah Vaughan.<sup>17</sup> West has

made it clear that he “ironically nurtured in the academy” his interest in literature as opposed to philosophy and there is no reason to believe that the same is not true of his interest in music.<sup>18</sup>

### TIME AND TIMING

However, West understands that the timing between prophecy and what it delivers is difficult to predict. West staged an event in Riverside Church in November 2014, in dialogue with Bob Avakian, the chairman of the Radical Communist Party, USA. The result was the 2015 film, “Religion and Revolution: A Dialogue between Cornel West and Bob Avakian.” West there says that the ruling class “won” over the past thirty years, but that progress is often interrupted by regress, so that after the breakthrough of the Civil Rights Movement, when a small number succeeded, there has been regress.<sup>19</sup> In his *Black Prophetic Fire* discussion with Christa Buschendorf about Ella Baker, West distinguishes between immediate events in “market time” and “democratic time,” which in Raymond Williams’s terms constitutes a “long revolution.”<sup>20</sup> We should understand that prophecy for West is not prediction of the future: The prophetic has little or nothing to do with prediction. Instead, it has to do with identifying, analyzing, and condemning forms of evil and forging vision, hope, and courage for selves and communities to overcome them. Radical democracy is visionary plebidity—the grand expression of the dignity of the doxa of the suffering demos.<sup>21</sup>

West himself regularly performs prophecy as a certain stance toward injustice and human suffering, that is, an willingness and ability to speak the truth about what for us mortals is evil. In his address to 3,000 people at Riverside Church in New York City, for a 2011 event commemorating the fortieth anniversary of the 1971 riot in Attica Prison, West said about courage at the present time:

The condition of truth is to allow suffering to speak. If you don’t talk about poverty, you’re not telling the truth. If you’re not talking about working people being pushed against the wall, with corporate profits high, you’re not telling the truth. If you’re not talking about the criminal activity on Wall Street and not one person gone to jail yet, you’re not telling the truth. Don’t tell me about the crime on the block with brothers and sisters and Jamal and Latisha out taken to jail, and yet gangsters who are engaged in fraudulent activity, insider trading, market manipulation, walking around having tea at night.<sup>22</sup>

But prophetic inspiration also comes from the past, for West. He said about Ida B. Wells in his 2014 interview/conversation with Christa Buschendorf:

She stands between Frederick Douglass and W. E. B. Du Bois and she knew both men personally. Wells was the pioneering figure in the anti-lynching campaigns of her day, and the way in which she courageously and undauntedly took up a difficult and dangerous struggle against prejudices about the “bestly nature” of the Black man, certainly renders her a worthy candidate in our series

of long-distance freedom fighters in the Black prophetic tradition. . . . Ida B. Wells, in so many ways, teaches us something that we rarely want to acknowledge: that the Black freedom movement has always been an anti-terrorist movement, that Black people in America had a choice between creating a Black al-Qaeda or a movement like Ida B. Wells’s, which was going to call into question the bestiality and barbarity and brutality of Jim Crow and American terrorism and lynching, but would do it in the name of something that provided a higher moral ground and a higher spiritual ground given her Christian faith . . . she said: “We want a higher moral ground, but I’m going to hit this issue head-on.”<sup>23</sup>

Not only is timing the fulfillment of Black prophecy impossible, but there is no guarantee it will be fulfilled. At the close of his Attica address, West indicated that the willingness to continue the fight might be more important than winning:

We’re going to have a new wave of truth telling. We’re going to have a new wave of witness bearing. And we’re going to teach the younger generation that these brothers didn’t struggle in vain, just like John Brown and Nat Turner and Marcus Garvey and Martin King and Myles Horton and the others didn’t. And we shall see what happens. We might get crushed, too. But you know what? Then you just go down swinging, like Ella Fitzgerald and Muhammad Ali.<sup>24</sup>

The title of West’s Riverside Church address, “Attica Is All of Us,” was cashed out in this talk and subsequent talks and publications. For West, Attica is all of us after 9/11 because it was the beginning of the “niggerization” of all Americans. He has repeatedly claimed, following Malcolm X, that the oppression of a people is equal to what they will accept without resistance:

America been niggerized since 9/11. When you’re niggerized, you’re unsafe, unprotected, subject to random violence, hated for who you are. You become so scared that you defer to the powers that be, and you’re willing to consent to your own domination. And that’s the history of Black people in America.<sup>25</sup>

However, it is not only American Black people who have been niggerized, according to West, but all post-9/11 Americans who live in fear:

The Black prophetic tradition has never been confined to the interests and situations of Black people. It is rooted in principles and visions that embrace these interests and confront the situations, but its message is for the country and world. The Black prophetic tradition has been the leaven in the American democratic loaf. When the Black prophetic tradition is strong, poor and working people of all colors benefit. When the Black prophetic tradition is weak, poor and working

class people are overlooked. On the international level, when the Black prophetic tradition is vital and vibrant, anti-imperial critiques are intense, and the plight of the wretched of the earth is elevated. What does it profit a people for a symbolic figure to gain presidential power if we turn our backs from the suffering of poor and working people, and thereby lose our souls?<sup>26</sup>

The symbolic figure who has gained presidential power, to whom Cornel West repeatedly refers in these terms is, of course, President Barack Obama, "the first black president of the United States."<sup>27</sup> At first, West sounded hopeful about Obama, disclosing after his 2008 election: "I hope he is a progressive Lincoln, I aspire to be the Frederick Douglass to put pressure on him."<sup>28</sup> In other words, Black prophecy might require the human agency of those inspired by it in order to activate "the material force for Afro-American freedom." If this is a correct inference, then West does not fully believe that the discourse of the Black prophetic tradition can directly cause change and that would reduce this discourse to a form of secular rhetoric and persuasion.

In recent controversies with other Black intellectuals, public figures, and activists, West's criticism of President Barack Obama's political, military, and economic policies has been operative: "Ferguson signifies the end of the age of Obama" because of the injustice of the "Jim Crow U.S. prison system that does not deliver justice to black and brown people."<sup>29</sup> In claiming to represent global suffering in the tradition of Frantz Fanon, West has referred to Obama's "empty neutrality, moral bankruptcy, and political cowardice."<sup>30</sup>

**PHILOSOPHICAL ASPECTS OF WEST'S PROPHECY**

"My existential soulmates and intellectual sources are more life-wrestling artists than academic philosophers."<sup>31</sup> It is easy to understand what West rejects about academic philosophy, its cold abstraction and dryness. He works in a number of dimensions, writing and speaking for academics, college students, and general readers, and delivering public discourse for wider audiences. His thought is available on an official website and a *YouTube* channel with over 80,000 entries.<sup>32</sup> His public prophecy and public political criticism have the same content as his writing and speech on college campuses. Therefore, West's writings about the Black prophetic tradition and his public political criticism can be taken together as part of a cognitive structure that is grist for abstract and dry philosophical criticism. West's basic historical insight is that Black Americans have suffered unjustly, from pain and death inflicted by whites, as well as from their own nihilism, a spiritual failure to use the strength from their belief in God to face up to their ills courageously, and with dignity. Talking about Black history and current battles is in itself, according to West, a valuable and worthy activity. However, his ideas and reaction to their rejection, taken together, indicate that he does not hold participation in this discourse to be morally optional, but, rather, that it is obligatory for certain people, namely, Black men in power. West expresses bitterness and rage when those in political office and activists such as Reverend Al Sharpton, who he thinks should join him in the Black prophetic tradition, choose not to do so. Such castigation may be part of the exhortation that goes along with the

preacherly aspect of West's role as a public prophet, but it is problematic for those of us who value the detachment of academic philosophy.

But what if West is right about the wrongness of the American path in moral humanistic terms? Rightness or wrongness makes no difference if others choose not to live within the Black prophetic tradition, whether they do so in order to remain addicted to drugs, or to preserve their political careers, or because it does not fit into their lifestyles. The point is that in not being willing to accept disagreement or lack of interest from some people, West has turned a profound construction of an historical liberatory Black tradition into an insistent ideology. West does not have the usual defense of the intellectual who claims that what he does as a person should not be used as an attack on his ideas. Because West, as a public prophet for a people, has made himself an integral part of the content of the prophecy he preaches, he has become like Midas in making Black prophecy inert and lifeless in its impermeability to those who may not be with him but are not necessarily against him.

Not all advocates of Black liberation within the United States or critics of the racial imbalance of the U.S. criminal justice system agree that it is necessary to change American foreign policy or the structure of global finance in order to correct the ills of racial bias. But the globally holistic nature of West's critique does make it seem as though such fundamental institutions must be overthrown for the correction of social injustice. For a specific example, homicide resulting from police racial profiling would be reduced if police had more cautious rules of engagement for approaching suspects.<sup>33</sup> This is not to say that a full understanding of contemporary racism in the United States does not require or would not be facilitated by a sweeping analysis such as West's ethical Marxism, but that correction of specific conditions of suffering may not. It is an empirical question whether some things can be fixed without overthrowing everything, but West's insistent ideological stance blocks such questions from being asked.

However, such academic criticism of West's paradigm of the Black prophetic tradition is not the end of the story. By over-reaching into real life public political discourse, from history, religion, and alleged philosophy all rolled up into one, West forces political philosophers to think about new subjects that include what thinkers who exceed the academy say and the boundaries between truth and freedom. This provides a new dimension to contemporary political philosophy as well as it reaffirms the power of spoken discourse within its own realm. West's written and spoken utterances remain on the verbal side of discourse, but in taking the contemporary world as a subject, he has opened a window out of the academy for cultural analysis and criticism. When West refers to historical Black figures in constructing the Black prophetic tradition, he brings accounts of their lives and ideas into the "magic word" aspect of his own discourse, which is also a new approach to intellectual history.

To do philosophy or present other complex thought in public, and for the public, is not an easy task because it calls for

communication skills and non-specialized language, which many academic philosophers have not yet developed. The degree of controversy centered on matters of race in which West has immersed himself, in a public auditorium with many reactionaries, probably carries personal risks and stresses that would be beyond the capability to sustain, of even the most highly skilled ninjas of academic politics.<sup>34</sup> Time will tell whether others who identify or are claimed as philosophers successfully emulate West's kind of project. If enough of them do, West's prophetic discourse may come to symbolize their endeavors.

Cornel West has written that for real change to occur, leaders have to be willing to act in public, to be arrested, and to be killed. It helps if they are charismatic and if members of the group they represent love them. Martin Luther King, Jr., was a prime example of a charismatic organic intellectual in West's sense.<sup>35</sup> However, West's stated conditions for becoming an organic intellectual are an empirical claim about what is necessary, although not sufficient. If the Left did indeed lose in the decades following the Civil Rights Movement, as West has also claimed, then that in itself would indicate that these necessary conditions are not sufficient for lasting, sustainable change.<sup>36</sup> West contrasts the contributions of Ella Baker to those of King, describing her as "an unassuming person who helps the suppressed to help themselves." Baker's organizing work included her service as secretary of the NAACP, executive director of the Southern Christian Leadership Council, and co-founder of the Student Non-violent Co-ordinating Committee. Baker knew both Du Bois and King and was skilled at grassroots organizing, but she did not write essays or books or produce mesmerizing speeches. She talked about humility and service alongside everyday people and insisted that members of a movement motivate themselves.<sup>37</sup>

To conclude, for the time being, we need public prophets for inspiration. There are dramatic events and stoic day-to-day disciplines. It may not be necessary to change everything that should be changed in order to correct specific injustices.

## NOTES

1. This article is a slightly different version of my discussion of West as well as racial atmospheres and climates in *Applicative Justice: A Pragmatic Empirical Approach to Racial Injustice* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield), 131–43.
2. Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (Cardigan, UK: Parthian, 2011).
3. Raymond Williams, "The Romantic Artist," in *Romanticism*, ed. Robert F. Gleckner and Gerald E. Enscoe (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1974), 261–86, quote p. 270. I'm referring to the whole passage of which the quote is a part.
4. Raymond Williams, *Modern Tragedy*, ed. Pamela McClellum (Peterborough, Ontario, Canada: Broadview, 2006), 102.
5. Williams, *The Long Revolution*, 387.
6. Ibid. See also the foreword by Anthony Barnett, xvii.
7. I first introduced this idea of a history of the future in my *Inclusive Feminism: A Third Wave Theory of Women's Commonality* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 121 ff.
8. Raymond Williams, *Towards 2000* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), 268–69.
9. Tara J. Yosso et al., *Harvard Educational Review* 79, no. 4 (Winter 2009): 659–90.
10. See, for instance, this discussion of white student ignorance about black history and current racism in Jamicia Lackey, "Exposing Duke's Racial Atmosphere," *The Chronicle*, February 2, 2002, <http://www.dukechronicle.com/articles/2002/02/21/exposing-dukes-racial-atmosphere#.VQdLGLI0zcs>. Concerning discrimination in career advancement, see the use of "atmosphere" in Richard Prince, "CNN's Racial 'Atmosphere' Worries NABJ," Richard Prince's Journal-isms, *Maynard Institute*, October 8, 2014, <http://mije.org/richardprince/cnn-atmosphere-worries-nabj>
11. Darryl Pinckney, *Blackballed: The Black Vote and U.S. Democracy* (New York, NY: New York Review of Books, 2014), 56–74.
12. Aphorism appearing on "Dr. Cornel West: Official Website," as "Lover of Music: I'm a blues man in the life of the mind. I'm a jazz man in the world of ideas . . ." <http://www.cornelwest.com/index.html#.VRjkU7I0zcs>, accessed March 29, 2015.
13. The Cornel West Site: Youtube.Com had 87,300 entries on March 29, 2015. <http://bit.ly/2mSIJM4>
14. For intellectual biographic information on Cornel West, see *Cornel West: A Critical Reader*, ed. George Yancy (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 1–6; "Cornel West – Biography," The European Graduate School, <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/cornel-west/biography/>; Cornel West with Christa Buschendorf, *Black Prophetic Fire* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2014), 1–9.
15. Cornel West, "Afterward: Philosophy and the Funk of Life," in *Cornel West*, ed. George Yancy, 246–62.
16. Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance!: An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1982), 15.
17. Cornel West, "Afterward: Philosophy and the Funk of Life," in *Cornel West*, ed. George Yancy, 349–50. West makes these comparative claims in his response to Lewis Gordon's article in the same volume. See Lewis R. Gordon, "The Unacknowledged Fourth Tradition: An Essay on Nihilism, Decadence, and the Black Intellectual Tradition in the Existential Pragmatic Thought of Cornel West," in *Cornel West*, ed. Yancy, 38–58.
18. Ibid., 361.
19. See excerpt from 2015 film, "Religion and Revolution: A Dialogue between Cornel West and Bob Avakian," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=72EfAuUFD0E>
20. Cornel West with Christa Buschendorf, *Black Prophetic Fire*, (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2014), 100 ff.
21. Cornel West, "Afterward: Philosophy and the Funk of Life," in *Cornel West*, ed. Yancy, 351.
22. Amy Goodman and Juan González, "Attica Is All of Us: Cornel West on 40th Anniversary of Attica Prison Rebellion," *Democracy Now!: A Daily Independent Global News Hour*, [http://www.democracynow.org/2011/9/12/attica\\_is\\_all\\_of\\_us\\_cornel](http://www.democracynow.org/2011/9/12/attica_is_all_of_us_cornel)
23. West with Buschendorf, *Black Prophetic Fire*, 139 and 141.
24. Goodman and González, "Attica Is All of Us: Cornel West on 40th Anniversary of Attica Prison Rebellion."
25. Ibid.
26. West with Buschendorf, *Black Prophetic Fire*, 165.
27. Overlooked in Obama's status is the mixed race identity with which he began his campaign in 2007. For discussion of issues related to that transformation, which would only confuse matters to being into the current text, see Naomi Zack, "The Fluid Symbol of Mixed Race," *Hypatia*, 25th Anniversary Issue, 25, no. 4 (Fall 2010): 875–90.
28. Amy Goodman and Juan González, "Cornel West on the Election of Obama," *Democracy Now!: A Daily Independent Global News Hour*, November 19, 2008, [http://www.democracynow.org/2008/11/19/cornel\\_west\\_on\\_the\\_election\\_of](http://www.democracynow.org/2008/11/19/cornel_west_on_the_election_of)
29. West has been involved in ongoing controversy within the African American intelligentsia concerning federal programs that he believes harm the poor and fail to support Black people.

"Ferguson Signifies the End of the Age of Obama," *CNN News International*, November 27, 2014, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0PD\\_ixQlrvc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0PD_ixQlrvc)

30. Ibid.
31. West, "Afterward: Philosophy and the Funk of Life," in *Cornel West*, ed. Yancy, 347.
32. See notes 27 and 28, supra.
33. See Ian Ayres and Daniel Markovits, "Ending Excessive Police Force Starts with New Rules of Engagement," *The Washington Post*, December 25, 2014, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/ending-excessive-police-force-starts-with-new-rules-of-engagement/2014/12/25/7fa379c0-8a1e-11e4-a085-34e9b9f09a58\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/ending-excessive-police-force-starts-with-new-rules-of-engagement/2014/12/25/7fa379c0-8a1e-11e4-a085-34e9b9f09a58_story.html)
34. For a tortured and petty account of the "court politics" aspect of West's relationship to Obama, see Michael Eric Dyson, "The Ghost of Cornel West," *The New Republic* 246, no. 4 (May 2015): 54–67. Accessed April 19, 2015. <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/121550/cornel-wests-rise-fall-our-most-exciting-black-scholar-ghost>
35. West with Buschendorf, *Black Prophetic Fire*, 104–5.
36. See excerpt from the 2015 film "Religion and Revolution: A Dialogue between Cornel West and Bob Avakian," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=72EfAuUFD0E>
37. West with Buschendorf, *Black Prophetic Fire*, 90.

## Walking the Scalpel's Edge: Identity, Duality, and (Problematic) Black Manhood in "The Knick"

Charles F. Peterson  
OBERLIN COLLEGE

W. E. B. DuBois, in 1903, proclaimed that the Negro is "Always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in bemused contempt and pity."<sup>1</sup> This assertion accurately describes the sociological and phenomenological relationship of African Americans to the Euro-American mainstream. Yet, as DuBois writes at the dawn of the technological innovations contained within the creation of "moving pictures," his insight takes on a more literal meaning. The development of film and later television makes DuBois' concept of "double consciousness" a dramatic experience wherein the tensions of Black life are concentrated in the actions of specific characters that can become archetypal in the popular perception of the complexities of Black life. Within these characterizations, the audience is allowed to witness the range of images and ideas that serve the white supremacist construction of African-American identity. Whether informed by hegemonic ideas of race, class, gender, or culture, or, more recently, and in greater examples, through the presentation of African Americans created or created by others, counterhegemonic projections of Black personality, cinematic culture and its child, television, have a powerful effect on the way in which popular culture presents and projects the images and issues that inform Black life. This article will examine, as an example of a counter-hegemonic characterization of an African American male in the character of turn of the twentieth century African-American physician Dr. Algernon Edwards from Cinemax's dramatic series, *The Knick* (2014-). This examination will argue the character

of Algernon Edwards serves as an important and timely representative of the complex intersectionality in which the tensions of race, class, and gender in Black male life are placed on display for society to consume. Through the prism of W. E. B. DuBois' concept of "double consciousness" and contemporary hegemonic constructions of masculinity, the character will be examined as an example of the conflicted and porous nature of the social-cultural demands placed on subaltern subjects.

The history of twentieth century popular culture is a visual carnival of White America's visions of Afri-U.S. peoples. From the dusty-footed, chicken-eating elected officials of D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915) to the minstrel-like antics of comedian Jimmy Walker's character, James Evans Jr. ("JJ") on CBS's 70s sitcom "Good Times" (1974–1979), Black movie and television characters have been projections of white supremacy's veil distorted imaginings of Black (non)-personhood. These images have served as a part of a larger structure of hegemonic inculcation/indoctrination that transmitted white supremacist projections of race, gender, and class to viewers around the world. These characters/visualizations have shaped and reinforced ideas about who African Americans are: past, present, and future. An exception to this pervasive trend can, arguably, be found in the television depictions of Afri-U.S. medical professionals. From the 1960/70s onward, highlighted by the American Medical Association officially desegregating in 1968,<sup>2</sup> the gradual presence of Afri-U.S. medical professionals in mainstream American medical institutions has been vaguely reflected in U.S. television entertainment. These characters have been indicators of the expanding recognition of Black social movement or, as Chris Rock would articulate it, White American social-cultural maturation.<sup>3</sup> The "doctor" as character serves as a vehicle to heighten the presentation of African-American humanity and achievement. Doctors are granted a specific type of social-cultural capital from the public as their work lends them immediate credibility in the areas of intellectual, ethical, and moral ability. The public believes "doctors" as a whole to be good, honest, and talented people and the presentation of them, on the whole, in film and television reinforces that belief. Thus, the character of a Black doctor makes an assertion about Black ability that challenges those made by white supremacist stereotyping. From Diahann Carroll, as a nurse in the NBC television series *Julia* (1968–1971), to Denzel Washington's Dr. Philip Chandler on NBC's *St. Elsewhere*, (1982–1988), to Chandra Wilson's Dr. Miranda Bailey on ABC's *Grey's Anatomy* (2005–2015), these characters also serve as vehicles by which the iconic image of the doctor is given depth and complexity through their experience of race in the social worlds of the television show. In this compelling line is the character of Dr. Algernon Edwards (Andre Holland) in the Cinemax series *The Knick*. This essay argues the character of Dr. Algernon Edwards represents a demanding process of intersectional tension within a DuBoisian framework, as the character exists in jagged racial, gendered, and classed environments in which he consciously attempts to project environment-specific constructions of himself that reflect a proactive, self-determined consciousness, interactive but not dependent on external dynamics or, as DuBois states, a "self-conscious manhood."<sup>4</sup>

W. E. B. DuBois' early twentieth century assertion of "double consciousness" as endemic to "Negro" life is a tremendous model for considering the fractures in Black material and mental life. The DuBoisian subject wrestles with the marginalization resulting from Jim Crow segregation/white supremacist projections that alienate Negroes from their native country and encases them in a mask upon which white supremacist assumptions about Black life and identity are fixed. *The Knick's* character of Algernon Edwards is an embodiment and example of this DuBoisian subject. Purposefully, the show's creators, Jack Amiel and Michael Begler, crafted Edwards as an echo of DuBois' thoughts as a critic of race and experiences<sup>5</sup> as a highly trained professional oftentimes isolated in his career circumstances. Like DuBois, Edwards earned a Harvard degree, studied in Europe, and was one of the first Blacks to hold a position at a mainstream institution. The fictional Algernon Edwards broke the color line at The Knickerbocker Hospital, and W. E. B DuBois "integrated"<sup>6</sup> The University of Pennsylvania department of sociology.

Set in a turn of the twentieth century fictional hospital, located on the lower east side of Manhattan, Edward is the only Black credentialed professional on staff of a segregated hospital, The Knickerbocker, from which the series' title is taken. Appointed as the deputy chief of surgery, Edwards is the beneficiary of the support of the hospital's primary financial supporters, in whose kitchen his mother and father continue to work. Despite his impressive *résumé*—Harvard Medical School graduate, a surgical Residency in Paris, France (!), and a published author—Edwards struggles to gain the acknowledgement of his presence and the respect for his training from his fellow surgeons. His alienation from Director of Surgery John Thackery (Clive Owens) and his staff rests upon their notions of Edwards' Negro inferiority, the heightened arrogance of their professional bearing and the intrusive/disruptive nature of his presence in their all-white, all-male fraternity. Edwards' expectation is that his entrance into the life of "The Knickerbocker" would be challenging considering the racial politics of the time, yet in the field of scientific knowledge and surgical expertise he would gain acceptance, respect, and recognition from his colleagues. Edwards' beliefs in the possibilities of reason, logic, and truth as spaces that can erase the stains of racial prejudice are echoed by the thinkers of the character's time. As Anna Julia Cooper states,

She [educated women] can commune with Socrates about the *daimon* he knew and to which she too can bear witness; she can revel in the majesty of Dante, the sweetness of Virgil, the simplicity of Homer, the strength of Milton. She can listen to the pulsing heart throbs of passionate Sappho's engaged soul, as she beats her bruised wings against her prison bars and struggles to flutter out into Heaven's æther, and the fires of her own soul cry back as she listens. "Yes; Sappho, I know it all; I know it all." Here, at last, can be communion without suspicion; friendship, without misunderstanding; love without jealousy.<sup>7</sup>

DuBois, echoing Cooper over a decade later, states,

I sit with Shakespeare and he winces not. Across the color line I move arm in arm with Balzac and Dumas, where smiling men and welcoming women glide in gilded halls. From out the caves of Evening that swing between the strong-limbed earth and the tracery of the stars, I summon Aristotle and Aurelius and what souls I will, and they come all graciously with no scorn nor condescension. So, wed with Truth, I dwell above the Veil.<sup>8</sup>

It is this belief in knowledge/education as a) the definer of humanity, b) display of civilizational capability, c) the bridge over which the tensions of racial difference can be traversed, and d) in the context of the male-dominated world of medicine, proof of Manly qualities (i.e., masculine privilege) which drives Edwards to assert himself as worthy of recognition from his (white) peers. Edwards' position places him on the playing field of masculinist white supremacy, motivating him to "conform to the dominant culture's gender role expectations—success, competition, and aggression."<sup>9</sup>

It must be noted, the series shows there to be a network of Black-run and -staffed hospitals in the New York City of the time<sup>10</sup> that would have accepted Edwards and allowed him to work and receive acknowledgement and respect for his abilities without racist degradation. However, there is intentionality and provocation in Edwards' decision to be at The Knickerbocker Hospital. Edwards' unspoken goal is to challenge the segregated nature of knowledge and treatment in turn-of-the-century medicine through deed and example. His experiences in France have raised his expectations regarding his role and place in the medical hierarchy, and it is his intention to achieve a similar position at The Knickerbocker. Edwards' presence in the hospital wards and the surgical theater is challenged in aggressive ways that do not demand he show proof of his possession of the requisite qualities for acceptance into the white male surgical establishment but demand his absence, pure and simple. If, for most of his white colleagues, Edwards is assumed to be the physical embodiment of savagery, primitivism, and animal instincts, "responsible at the same time for [his] body, for [his] race, for [his] ancestors . . . and above all else 'sho good eatin',"<sup>11</sup> then his physical response to displays of physical aggression toward him are traps waiting to be tripped. Edwards must change the terms of the debate and move his demands to different fields of contestation.

In the Season 1, episode, "Where Is the Dignity?," Edwards, who is the only member of staff that has knowledge of a particularly demanding cardio technique, talks his peers through the procedure but at a key step in the surgery, withholds a necessary step from the lead surgeon, Everret Gallinger (Eric Johnson). Edwards plays a game of chicken with Gallinger (Gallinger growls, "We have no time for your nigger tricks!"), while the patient bleeds out. Refusing to budge, Edwards forces Gallinger to surrender the scalpel and completes the procedure. Gallinger, who represents the most extreme resistance to Edwards' presence, at the conclusion of the procedure punches Edwards in the eye in the operating theater. Gallinger's anger is rooted in having been humiliated by the fact that a Black person has

a greater medical knowledge than he, that he had been manipulated into this "humiliation," and that Edwards was appointed to the deputy chief of surgery position, which Thackery had promised to him. Edwards' resistance to striking back against the assault upon his person tells the viewer much about Edwards' understanding of himself and the world he occupies. Edwards makes a conscious choice in his form of engagement and investment in a different articulation of manhood. Edwards' choice was to disrupt the trope that identifies "whites with rationality or mind . . . [and] associated peoples of color with the body"<sup>12</sup> and present himself in the racial-gendered terms he believes will be most convincing to his peers, the terms of rationality versus physicality. By not striking back, Edwards chooses a form of resistance/affirmation that contradicts the "sufficiently manly"<sup>13</sup> response to racial aggression, physical violence. The Edwards character is neither a pacifist nor an obvious adherent to the ideas of Rev. William Whipper.<sup>14</sup> Edwards does not strike back practically, because striking a white colleague would have led to his immediate firing, but strategically, his performance in the surgical theater had already established the terms of his relationship to Gallinger, demonstrated his technical superiority as a surgeon, and defiantly announced these facts to the public in the space of the surgical theater. Moreover, the French medical journal article from which the procedure was adopted, to Gallinger's chagrin, had been co-written by Dr. Edwards. From Gallinger's view, Edwards is a disturbing and frustrating paradox, a "nigger" that has all the "bearing" and "elements" of a white man, yet is irredeemably "Black." Yet that is a part of Edwards' own paradox. By choosing to present himself in terms most relevant to his professional position and his colleagues, a skilled medical professional, he appears to his colleagues as alien and a being unfathomable in their conception of Black identity. In this effort, Edwards functions as a disturbing model of African-American bifurcation. Like many African-American professionals working within predominately white institutions historically and contemporarily, Edwards saw "adapting to mainstream culture as gaining access to opportunity"<sup>15</sup> and has little room to present himself in the fullness of his identity but must present himself only through the narrow prism of his intellectual ability, leaving the deeper complexities of his being behind the partition of American racial orders.

As the series continues, Edwards' medical ability and inventiveness make his skills apparent to the chief of surgery and through a growing professional relationship, Edwards receives the professional regard for which he strives. Via the lens of Gallinger's jealousy and his feelings of inadequacy, Thackery affirms Edwards' rational supremacy in Season 2, Episode 3, "The Best with the Best to Get the Best." When Gallinger asks Thackery why does he "always go [consult] to him [Edwards]?" Thackery responds, "Since he started here, Edwards has invented and improved procedure after procedure, technique after technique."

Edwards' achieving acceptance as doctor and colleague via his technical ability would be a realization of his belief in the transcendent possibilities of knowledge/education as overcoming belief in the supposed subhumanity of the Negro mind. Yet Edwards, for those outside of his technical

fraternity, remains defined by his Black body, and no amount of scientific facility will convince those outside of the fraternity and most within that fraternity that he is as capable as his white colleagues. In episode 3, "The Busy Flea," this view is exemplified by an Irish patient brought into the hospital for rat bites who sees Edwards and shouts, "I need a doctor, not a shoe shine!" Within the realm of medicine, Edwards, at best, exists only as mind, flattened and narrowed, his body, his racial presence, continues to be suspect and the resolution of that duality into a single unified being, untenable.

Outside of The Knickerbocker Hospital, in the eye of the Euro-American beholder, Edwards exists as gross body, stripped of his intellectual possibilities. As the Season 1, Episode 7, "Get the Rope," depicts the 1900 New York Race Riot, Edwards, along with his fellow Black New Yorkers, is a faceless Black body, undifferentiated and constructed by the white mob's racial desires. Yet in Black communities, his apartment house in the Tenderloin District, and neighborhood watering holes, Edwards' capability as a rational being is not in question nor is his fundamental humanity. It is his credible embodiment as a normative [Black] man that is in doubt. Season 1, Episode 2, "Mr. Paris Shoes," unveils a wrinkle in Edwards' construction of his manhood in Black spaces. While standing in line for the water closet in his rooming house, Edwards is accosted by a fellow resident, "Diggs Man", about the make and origin of his shoes. The resident is persistent in his curiosity and incessantly names different shoe stores until Edwards reluctantly tells him.

**Edwards:** L'Observe (sic).

**Diggs Man:** What? Where's that?

**Edwards:** Paris.

**Diggs Man:** Paris?

**Edwards:** France.

**Diggs Man:** I know where Paris is, nigga! (-45:38)

Later that evening, Diggs Man confronts Edwards, refers to him as "Mr. Paris Shoes," steps on his shoes ("a little poor man's shoe polish"), and declares Edwards an "Uppity motherfucker. Think his ass don't stink. You think you better than me?" Edwards appears to submit to the aggression; when Diggs Man relents, he strikes, quickly beating Diggs Man senseless with a series of punches (-5:19). The expression of any experience, traveling to Paris, studying medicine, etc., beyond the common experiences of Black men of the time mark Edwards as culturally different. His tone and bearing are perceived as condescending toward his fellow resident and the cultural affectations read as lacking in the physical substance of Black working-class life. Specifically, Edwards projects cultural/class capital that reveals his emersion in mainstream/white culture. Edwards' childhood development in a bourgeois household, the patronage provided by shipping magnate Captain August Robertson, a Harvard education, and professional maturation in France are the factors that underline his cultural difference.

An example of W. E. B. DuBois' "Talented Tenth," Edwards is a member of a slowly growing African-American elite class, created through birth and education, whose experience of race and class in the United States places them in an

interstitial space between the two worlds, created by American racial, legal, social, and cultural policies and practices. From the perspective of Edwards' neighbors, he has the stink of cultural whiteness and privilege about him, thus making him different, alien, and, in spite of his skin color, a stranger. Whereas in his professional space, Edwards seeks to display the elements deemed to be markers of equality in white male spaces, in working-class, African-American communities, those same elements call into question Edwards' racial identity, cultural allegiance, and communal consciousness. Edwards projects a different image and understanding of what constitutes manhood for working-class Black men. His challenge is to assert himself within African-American, working-class, masculine spaces in ways he believes will suppress the contempt his class and cultural bearing engenders among working-class Black men. Diggs Man's reference to Edwards as a "nigga" is a *negative recognition* of Edwards as it imposes a commonality and commonness upon him, in an attempt to demonstrate to Edwards that his cultural capital, regardless of its supposed meaning in white spaces, does not empower him nor give him higher status in the eyes of working-class Black men. It is an attempt to humble, humiliate, and, in spite of the recognition of difference, impose upon Edwards an aggressive sameness. From the perspective of the defeated Diggs Man, Edwards no doubt appears a paradox, a Harvard accent wrapped around a Hell's Kitchen right cross. Edwards' decision to physically define himself is more than a one-time occurrence.

At the conclusion of Season 1, Episode 3, "The Busy Flea," (-4:25) Edwards sits drunk in a bar after having lost a patient in the after hours clinic he operates for Black patients. Listening to a young suitor attempt to impress his date, Edwards begins to loudly hector the man until he provokes a fistfight.

**Man** (speaking to woman): Yeah, I've been lots of places. Around the world and back again. (laughs)

**Woman**: Like where?

**Man**: Delaware. Yeah, plenty good folk down there. I got kin in Tennessee. I've been there a bunch, too.

**Woman**: Mm-hmm.

**Man**: Mm-hmm.

**Edwards**: Got a real sojourner over here!

**Man**: You know what it's like in Memphis?

**Woman**: No.

**Man**: Hot.

**Edwards**: A regular Rudyard Kipling.

**Man** (addressing Edwards): You have something to say to me?

**Edwards**: No. I just didn't realize that around the world and back again meant anywhere you could get to in a few days on a horse.

**Man**: Shut your mouth. Or I'll shut it for you.

**Edwards**: I'd like to see that. (-4:34)

The fight scene is shot in a hazy, unfocused lens with unbalanced lighting. The shot cuts back and forth between extreme close-ups of Edwards and Edwards' POV. The camera frame moves in woozy fits, approximating Edwards' drunken perception of the fight. The dialogue reveals Edwards consciously provoking the stranger into a back

alley brawl as opposed to his act of self-defense against Diggs Man. In a fevered (drunken) state, Edwards, with brutal intention, establishes agency with his body at the expense of another Black man. The details of exertion and physicality are intimately displayed, as blood and sweat seem to define the very edges of Edwards' being. Edwards carves out his gross being in spaces where his intellectual ability is obvious, his class/cultural presentation suspect, and his body, as a site of empowerment (re: masculinity), is dubious.

In subsequent episodes, these blind challenges become a ritual of sort for Edwards. They serve two seeming functions. The first function is the cathartic release of frustrations experienced in his work life. The incident in "The Busy Flea" happens after Edwards loses a patient in his underground night clinic for Black patients. Edwards' loss of a patient generates a level of tension and frustration, but it must be seen as compounding on the displays of antagonism he receives at his job and repudiating his desire to display his excellence as a physician. This ritual can be understood as a part of the churning psychologic cauldron that is his life and a context for Edwards' aggressive behavior. "Research on African American adults indicates that the expression of anger (Anger out) is an important predictor of life stress."<sup>16</sup> The second function is that Edwards' drunken brawls exhibit a positive sense of bodily empowerment denied him in that same work life, one where his body is not suspect or a monstrosity. These encounters give him a ground to assert his body in deeply problematic but recognizable ways within his community. In these fugue states, Edwards' valued logic and reasoning skills are suppressed and passions unleashed.

The final episode of Season 1, "Crutchfield," depicts a bartender warning Edwards against provoking a fight with a noted boxing champion. He does not listen. In these moments he is aware of himself as a physical body but not as threatening or racialized. An immediate observation would be that Edwards exorcises his workplace anger and humiliations onto unsuspecting bar denizens while simply accepting the workplace insults. However, his confrontations with his white colleagues, specifically Gallinger, do not indicate cowardice as later in Episode 4 he invites Gallinger "outside" if he wanted to "swing at him again." Edwards seeks to gain recognition from his colleagues on terms that disrupt their racist assumptions about him. As well Edwards does not limit himself to his physical being in Black communities as he is shown interacting with other Black professionals with no evidence of his desire to dominate those around him. Edwards' engagement with his fellow members of "The Talented Tenth" does not betray a desire to physically or intellectually dominate those around him based on a distorted perception of him. In the midst of his racial, gender, and class "peers," Edwards is arguably located in an environment where his unified vision of himself as Negro, man, and physician reflected back to him in recognition of a unitary sense of the self, a fully realized manhood is reflected back at him. It is not the transference of anger generated by whites onto working-class Black men, nor is it the flashing of his brilliance before whites because few Black men would value it. Edwards' duality is a conscious choice, affirming that what little control he

has over how he is perceived will be confronted by an exaggerated projection of manhood as it is understood in those discrete spaces.

The DuBoisian approach to the problems of Dr. Algernon Edwards would find resolution in the merger of Edwards' disparate expressions of his consciousness. Ideally, in his work life, Edwards' Negro-ness would be seen as an irrelevant, the intellectual and technical skills that were used to gain respect from (some) of his colleagues seen as expressions of his transcendent human capacity. "The Negro can do math," but of course! In that circumstance, it would not be impossible for Edwards to be a brilliant surgeon and a Negro and have the doors of professional opportunity open wide for him. In his community/social life, this merger would be demonstrated in Edwards' freedom to display hegemonic cultural signifiers, which would be seen as part of a broad vocabulary through which Black masculinity/manhood is expressed, not as an expression of condescension or superiority. However, this is not the case. Dr. Algernon Edwards' shifting circumstances and the floating signifiers of manhood place him on a Mobius strip of identity transitions wherein he is constantly sliding from one extreme to another, rarely finding still spaces where a unified sense of himself can be experienced. Edwards lives in a historic moment where the overt and conspicuous expressions of racial and cultural difference and the codes that betray where a body stands in relation to that difference undermine the possibilities of unified subjectivity and the hope of a unified "self-conscious manhood."

From activists calling for greater respect and regard for Black lives by America's public security forces to the demands by college students for real diversity and opportunity in the halls of academe, the question of the recognition and respect for the humanity of Black people remains grounded in the failure to see Black lives as more than superficial characterizations that reflect the limits of the white imagination. The character of Dr. Algernon Edwards is a representation of the Black male body as the battlefield upon which these failures play out. The depiction of his identity as fractured is reflective of the experiences of the national body as it imposes its self-inflicted duality upon those with the opportunity and desire to bridge the chasm that separates the two worlds of Black and White America. In the experiences of Dr. Algernon Edwards, we are shown the terrible battles that are waged to achieve this goal. At the conclusion of Season 1's finale, we see Dr. Edwards sprawled out in an alley behind a bar, having lost his battle with the champion boxer. Whether Edwards is able to recover from his fight, what injuries he has endured, and what effects they will have upon his future is unknown. There may not be a more apt visual metaphor for this society's long and drawn out war with itself over the question of and the damage that battle has had upon Black men's assertion of their humanity.

**NOTES**

1. W. E. B. DuBois, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," *The Souls of Black Folk*, in *W. E. B. DuBois: A Reader*, ed. David Levering Lewis (Holt Paperbacks: New York, 1995), 29.

2. "The 1964 Civil Rights Act, hospital desegregation rulings in the federal courts, passage of Medicare and Medicaid, the Voting Rights Bill, and the health center movement created a Civil Rights Era in health care for African Americans." Michael W. Byrd, MD, and Linda A. Clayton, MD, MPH, "Race, Medicine, and Health Care in the United States: A Historical Survey," *Journal of the National Medical Association* 93, no. 3 (March 2001).

3. I mean this in reference to Chris Rock's insight, "When we talk about race relations in America or racial progress, it's all nonsense. There are no race relations. . . . White people were crazy. Now they're not as crazy. To say that Black people have made progress would be to say they deserve what happened to them before." "In Conversation with Chris Rock," *The New Yorker Magazine*, <http://www.vulture.com/2014/11/chris-rock-frank-rich-in-conversation.html>

4. DuBois, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," 29.

5. Show creators Jack Amiel and Michael Begler specifically reference the inclusion of a Double Consciousness frame for the character of Algernon Edwards in an interview with actor Andre Holland. "We were on stage with you [Andre Holland] at the Television Critics Association and you [Andre Holland] discussed Double Consciousness and we hadn't discussed with you the fact that we were going to bring in W. E. B. DuBois and . . . all these thinkers of the day who talked about Double Consciousness." *The Knick* podcast, December 19, 2015, 8:00 a.m. (-22:02).

6. In DuBois' case, "integrate" is being used in the loosest sense possible, as Dr. DuBois was commissioned by the University of Pennsylvania to conduct a case study of Black life in Philadelphia's 7th Ward, which became one of the earliest documents of modern quantitative urban sociology, *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899). DuBois, however, was refused the title of professor, was not granted office space in the department, and was not allowed to teach courses for the institution. So DuBois "integrated" the Department of Sociology at the University of Pennsylvania in the most meager sense of the word.

7. Anna Julia Cooper, "The Higher Education of Women," *A Voice from the South* (Xenia, OH: The Aldine Printing House, 1892), 69.

8. DuBois, "Of The Training of Men," *Souls of Black Folk*, 297.

9. Martin R. Pierre, James R. Mahalik, and Malcolm Woodland, "The Effects of Racism, African Self-Consciousness, and Psychological Functioning on Black Masculinity: A Historical and Social Adaptation Framework," *Journal of African American Men* 6, no. 2 (Fall 2001): 20.

10. Season 1, Episode 7, "Get the Rope," depicts a race riot in New York. In an effort to safely transport Black patients away from the besieged Knickerbocker Hospital, Edwards and Thackery smuggle them in a wagon top a nearby Black-run hospital.

11. Frantz Fanon, "The Fact of Blackness," *Black Skin, White Masks*, <http://www19.homepage.villanova.edu/silvia.nagyzekmi/postcol/Fanon%20The%20Fact%20of%20Blackness.pdf>

12. Anthony J. Lemelle, Jr., *Journal of African American Men* 1, no. 2 (Fall 1995): 96.

13. Robin Kelley, "Shiftless of the World Unite," *Race Rebels* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 23.

14. Rev. William Whipper was an African-American abolitionist who argued for moral suasion as a means to abolish slavery and resist white aggression against African Americans. His most noted essay is "Non-Resistance to Offensive Aggression" (1837). <http://www.blackpast.org/1837-william-whipper-non-resistance-offensive-aggression>

15. Pierre et al., "The Effects of Racism, African Self-Consciousness, and Psychological Functioning on Black Masculinity," 25.

16. *Ibid.*, 29.

## *Black Lives Matter's Normativity and the Canon's Inability to Connect with the Movement*

John Torrey  
UNIVERSITY OF MEMPHIS

### WHAT DOES THE "MATTER" IN BLACK LIVES MATTER REFER TO?

Let me begin by offering a number of recent incidents as pieces of a historically mounting pile of evidence that Black lives have little perceived value in this country.<sup>1</sup> Matthew Ajibade, in Savannah, Georgia, was killed while in police custody. He was tazed four times in the groin while tied to a chair and was found dead two hours later still tied to it. The deputies that assaulted him were acquitted of manslaughter.<sup>2</sup> Tamir Rice, in Cleveland, Ohio, was killed by police when he played with a toy gun in the park. The shooting was considered justified. Adding insult to injury, the city of Cleveland filed a \$500 lawsuit against Rice's estate for his ambulance.<sup>3</sup> Johnathan Ferrell, in Charlotte, North Carolina, was killed by police after staggering for help following a car accident. The case went to a mistrial and the officer who killed him received over \$100,000 in back pay.<sup>4</sup> Yvette Smith, in Bastrop County, Texas, was shot and killed by police after opening her front door. Police had inconsistent statements about whether or not she was armed. The case also went to a mistrial.<sup>5</sup> Walter Scott, in North Charleston, South Carolina, was shot and killed by police and had evidence moved closer to his dead body by the officer who shot him.<sup>6</sup> Also in Charleston, nine African Americans attending church were slaughtered by a young white man who was fearful of a race war. He was arrested without violence, including a Burger King trip on his way to jail.<sup>7</sup> Eric Garner, in New York City, was filmed being choked to death by police for selling loose cigarettes while shouting, "I can't breathe." The officers were acquitted of any wrongdoing.<sup>8</sup> Michael Brown, in Ferguson, Missouri, was shot and killed by an officer while he had his hands up. Should you need more contemporary evidence, there is the racial wealth gap,<sup>9</sup> the racial education gap,<sup>10</sup> the racial unemployment gap,<sup>11</sup> the racial homeownership gap,<sup>12</sup> studies showing Black Americans receive unfair treatment with loans, job applications, and job evaluations,<sup>13</sup> and studies showing whites view Blacks as threatening even as children.<sup>14</sup> Lastly, feel free to check the comments section of your favorite website.

Reverend Traci Blackmon, a St. Louis-area pastor and activist, following the killing of Michael Brown commented,

Let me be clear. If it had not been for the fortitude and fierce resilience of the millennials of FERGUSON . . . the ones who have occupied the streets . . . the front lines . . . the jails . . . the Internet over these last four hundred+ days . . . NOT the meetings . . . not the funders . . . not the engagements . . . not the awards . . . not the accolades of anyone . . . not the commission. . . . But because of the ones

who risked it all. . . . That we just watched a panel of white candidates (save 1) who are running for President declare "Black Lives Matter!" Not the slogan . . . but the sacrifice. Before August 10th (the militarization of the police vs. the might of the people) that would not have happened.<sup>15</sup>

There is a new attempt to change this country to acknowledge and redress both historical and contemporary harms against Black people. This begins by recognizing the actual value of Black lives and protecting those lives. "To matter" here seems analogous to "to have value," particularly since my (generous) understanding of the "All Lives Matter" position is to refute the erroneous claim that only Black lives have value by claiming that all lives have value. Value theory, in fact, can be used as a catch-all term for a large number of branches of philosophy that engage in evaluation, e.g., moral philosophy and aesthetics.<sup>16</sup> What does it mean, then, for Black lives to have value? Is it value with regard to humanity (Blacks are humans like everyone else, therefore have the same value as everyone else), or value with regard to rights protection (Blacks are citizens deserving of equal protection under the law)? Because this movement has a largely de-centralized structure, I am interrogating the spirit of the movement regarding the relationship between mattering and having value. The goal of this essay is thus twofold: to explain an understanding of Black lives' value that activists nationwide promote using three non-canonical philosophers often cited by activists; and to note limitations that canonical philosophy displays in lacking usefulness within a contemporary movement founded on a normative ethical position. It should give Black citizens hope for the country that a potential president of the United States agreed that Black Lives Matter and that this position is historically conscious and politically appropriate.<sup>17</sup> It is not clear that Black philosophers should maintain that same hope for philosophy since Black Lives Matter is a normative statement supported by a set of beliefs informed by theorists that are often not considered philosophers.

Black Lives Matter is more than a slogan; it is a normative call to action regarding the treatment of Black people in this country, including LGBTQ members of the Black community who are further marginalized by both society at-large and the Black community.<sup>18</sup> It is not merely a call to white America to recognize systemic inequality and the contemporary perniciousness of racism. It also functions as a call to Black America to recognize their lived experiences as examples of resistance and resilience within a white supremacist framework and that this is a beautiful, valuable, albeit unfortunate, aspect of Black life. It behooves one to genuinely believe this to be the line of normativity when making decisions regarding protest demonstrations and policy formation—for example, will protest X reinforce that Black lives have actual value and if not, why should we do it? Will policy Y improve the conditions of these Black lives and if not, why should we support it? Recognizing Black Lives Matter as a normative ethical statement does not change the philosophical conundrum of understanding what sense of value that "Matter" gestures towards in this context. Discussions of value are rich in the history of philosophy, from Mill's classic intrinsic and extrinsic distinction of

goodness to Elizabeth Anderson's *Imperative of Integration* and its insistence on the social, moral, and political value of integration policies.<sup>19</sup> Given this history, canonical Western philosophy appears to have tools to provide the foundation for any argument regarding the value of Black lives in America. Contemporary Black activists do not cite ancient philosophers like Plato, modern philosophers like Kant, or political philosophers like Rawls. These thinkers are useful in developing fundamental bases of ethical or political systems, but few if any canonical philosophers are utilized to develop the "Matter" in Black Lives Matter. Revolutionary thinkers like Assata Shakur, critical legal scholars like Michelle Alexander, and social and political theorists like bell hooks form the ground upon which the Black Lives Matter understanding of the value of Black lives is built. That speaks poorly for the value that canonical Western philosophy possesses in framing current social and political matters for many young Black people.

### SHAKUR, ALEXANDER, HOOKS: BUILDING A VIEW ON THE VALUE OF BLACK LIVES

Assata Shakur, aunt of famous rapper Tupac, was a member of the Black Panther Party and the Black Liberation Army. Her willingness to use her life to confront state violence that Blacks regularly felt helps constitute the spirit of the current movement. She fled to Cuba in 1984 after escaping prison following a shootout with New Jersey police and has not returned since. Her lived experience is a referendum on the depth of sacrifice many activists share—a desire to use their lives to improve conditions for Black Americans using whatever means they can access. There are two popular maxims of hers amongst activists that demonstrate these means. One, from her autobiography, *Assata: An Autobiography*, ends nearly every action: "It is our duty to fight for our freedom. It is our duty to win. We must love and support each other. We have nothing to lose but our chains."<sup>20</sup> Her language of duty pulls from a deontological framework; it is what one ought to do, whether one wants to or not, because doing so affirms one's humanity. Following this duty to fight for and win freedom is necessary to do because Blacks are human, not to prove Blacks' humanity. She challenges Blacks to affirm their humanity in the face of a world that normally disqualifies their humanity. She maintains the non-ideal conditions of a white supremacist framework as the starting point for articulating an affirmation of the value of Black lives, showing that the notion of value she is designing responds to the bleak conditions many Black Americans find themselves in. Because Blacks are owed freedom, they must continue to push for liberation and equality.<sup>21</sup>

To that end, she says, "Nobody, nobody in history, has gotten their freedom by appealing to the moral sense of the people who were oppressing them."<sup>22</sup> Black Lives Matter is a normative statement, not an open question. This appeal is not based upon moral suasion arguments regarding the humanity of Blacks. As you look at the various rallies, marches, protests, and discussions with policymakers, presidents and future presidents, the appeal to the value of Black lives is centered on a view of Blacks as citizens who are not receiving equal opportunities or equal protection under the law. Though accurate, moral suasion arguments

have not proven useful for consistently achieving gains for Black Americans. Shaming or guiltting white America into changing its position about the treatment of Black Americans likely peaked when mass media showed the brutal police tactics in the 1960s.<sup>23</sup> Instead, they highlight the hypocrisy in this country between the treatment of Blacks and whites by the criminal justice system, expose systemic inequality, and ultimately say that this cannot keep happening.

Michelle Alexander is a legal scholar and civil rights litigator who wrote *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, which established an important set of harms that Black Lives Matter sprang forth from: the disenfranchisement of Blacks through the criminal justice system and its disproportionate targeting of Blacks. Alexander notes, "No other country in the world imprisons so many of its racial or ethnic minorities,"<sup>24</sup> with roughly 2,200 Blacks incarcerated per 100,000 compared to 380 whites per 100,000 for the United States.<sup>25</sup> Her work provides background considerations that demonstrate the level of disenfranchisement Blacks experience from the criminal justice system which should be unconscionable for a country to do to its own citizens. The background considerations that she engages are the legally justified disenfranchisement of Blacks in the creation of the Jim Crow system. State and municipal governments used creative reasons to imprison Blacks and by doing so, removed access to their civil liberties. The Center for Law and Justice describes the premise of her project:

More African Americans are under the control of the criminal justice system today—in prison or jail, on probation or parole—than were enslaved in 1850. Discrimination in housing, education, employment, and voting rights, which many Americans thought was wiped out by the civil rights laws of the 1960s, is now perfectly legal against anyone labeled a "felon." And since many more people of color than whites are made felons by the entire system of mass incarceration, racial discrimination remains as powerful as it was under slavery or under the post-slavery era of Jim Crow segregation.<sup>26</sup>

On her view, the War on Drugs and its disproportionate penalties helped re-create a racial caste that formally existed with Jim Crow.<sup>27</sup> The racial caste system morphed from legal segregation into mass incarceration of Black Americans. This led to the revocation of civil liberties for the incarcerated (such as voting) and the acceptance of civil penalties after serving time, including an inability to gain student loans or live in public housing. This awaits those who survive the school-to-prison pipeline that begins with increased punishments for Black children as early as preschool.<sup>28</sup>

Alexander has her finger on the pulse of Black America's tension with the criminal justice system. Many of the aforementioned were killed for crimes that many whites have either been excused for or arrested without incident. To be sure, working-class whites have not been unscathed in the process of mass incarceration, as they are also a vulnerable economic target in the criminal justice system,

but they have not been the target of mass incarceration. A salient example is the difference between the criminalization of crack users during the 1980s compared to the rehabilitation-based response to the heroin epidemic affecting rural and suburban white communities. The federal government funneled funding to state and local agencies that increase their drug offense arrests, leading to broken window policies, stop and frisk policies, and pulling over as many people as possible. Black citizens are in constant danger that one wrongly interpreted behavior can land them in trouble or, worse, dead. Black citizens being disenfranchised and having a low perceived value in society, however, does not negate their actual value as citizens, and it is a necessary distinction to make. One might consider a disenfranchised group as a group that does not have value in society as demonstrated by the society's willingness to maintain that group's disenfranchised status or the group's unwillingness to empower itself. Working-class whites often feel disenfranchised due to their lack of upward mobility, particularly when there is an economic pinch in America, but their value in society is not tied to any conception of whites as inferior or lesser than. For Blacks, closing an economic gap between wealthy and poor would not absolve them from racial discrimination in the way that a poor white person who becomes wealthy could remove herself from economic disenfranchisement. Given this distinction, it is important to make sense of Blacks as a disenfranchised group considering the development of a class of politically powerful and economically successful Black people (e.g., President Obama, Condoleezza Rice, Clarence Thomas, and John Lewis). Although there are some Blacks who have been able to achieve great success in the face of a society that regularly reminds them that Blacks have very little value, to suggest that Blacks as a whole are not disenfranchised is to focus on a small number of highly successful Blacks while ignoring the day-to-day reality of the average Black American. The average Black American suffers from an inability to earn the same wage as her white counterpart or even Black male counterpart; she suffers from a debilitating lack of reliable public goods and services in her community; and she suffers from limited life prospects that still make it an astounding and historic phenomenon to have Blacks in positions of power in society. In between the perceived value of a group due to its social location and the actual value of a group based on the rights and privileges legally afforded them as citizens are people who are able to achieve a measure of success in the face of incredible odds.<sup>29</sup> What can be drawn from Alexander's work is that even though Blacks are systematically denied what is owed to them, exposing the denials is a necessary step to improving conditions for Black citizens and that Blacks deserve to have their rights as citizens protected for the good of the country.

bell hooks has also been an influence amongst activists, with her notion of love as a transformational ethic and a necessary one for liberation. hooks, born Gloria Watkins, is one of our nation's premier authors and social critics, having published a number of works with a central feature for many of them—love.<sup>30</sup> For hooks, love and domination cannot coexist, which is why love is a necessary feature of liberation. Love helps motivate withstanding oppression and domination and motivates the healing of the world's

wounds. Martin Luther King, Jr., noted a similar position in the "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," that Black people must love their "ill" white brothers and sisters back to health in order to overcome the racial divide in America. But hooks notes that many people are seduced by systems of domination and they maintain the exploitative status quo. Rather than exploiting others, a love ethic centers relations within a context of community to help limit blind spots in our discourses. One blind spot is the sexism in many justice-based movements, a consequence of which is the silencing of Black women's voices. Citing a "black masculinist ethic" that replaced King's love ethic, she believes that gaining a revolutionary approach and losing the love ethic amounted to a pyrrhic victory.<sup>31</sup>

In "Love as the Practice of Freedom," hooks cites M. Scott Peck to define love. He defines love as "the will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth."<sup>32</sup> She later comments, "Acknowledging the truth of our reality, both individual and collective, is a necessary stage for personal and political growth."<sup>33</sup> hooks' position regarding the transformational nature of love (which includes the profound idea of using the pain of one's own life in order to develop both the political and personal) demonstrates Blacks' value in the world. Love, for hooks, is a practice, one that Black people deserve to participate in, as love affirms one's humanity in a world that regularly dehumanizes Blacks. Blacks are not the only people who should practice love, as every person deserves love. If love is universal in that every person should participate in practicing love, then Black lives' value is equal to everyone else's lives insofar as humanity is concerned. Black people's existence as people in the world is valuable on the same grounds that any other group of people's existence is valuable—because Blacks are humans, capable of and deserving of the transformational love hooks champions as necessary to revolutionize the world.

All three thinkers shared the notion that non-ideal conditions are the proper starting point for understanding of the perceived and actual value of Black lives. This location includes beginning with the lived experiences of oppressed people. The claims about the value of Black lives do not center on being valuable in virtue of the mere existence of Black people, rather because of the kinds of people Black people are—humans and citizens. When people chant "Black Lives Matter," they are arguing that Black lives have value because they are the lives of fellow citizens who are being denied rights and opportunities and because they are human lives that are deserving of compassion and love. Shakur, Alexander, and hooks are just a few of the influential thinkers on modern activists.<sup>34</sup> What we should be wondering is why these thinkers are being called upon to help answer the question of value within a society rather than more well-known philosophers who have written extensively on the issue.

## CANONICAL PHILOSOPHY AND THE MILLENNIAL ERA OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

To close, let me offer a review of the Western philosophical canon's inability to connect with a Black millennial audience

engaging in questions of justice. Shakur, Alexander, and hooks are part of a larger discourse that seeks to assert the incontrovertible value of Black lives, and yet they commonly aren't required philosophical material and some would say not even philosophical.<sup>35</sup> The honesty regarding the current scenario for Black Americans painted by all three resonates strongly with young Black leaders and activists. They speak directly to questions that many young Black people have burning on their minds right now. Save for the very recent (and likely not quite canonical but professionally acceptable) development of Africana philosophy, canonical philosophy largely avoids dealing with the problems of being an oppressed minority in society. That said, there is a history of Black philosophers using the canon to address issues of being a minority in society. People like Angela Davis, Bill Lawson, and Leonard Harris have cleared the path for future generations of Black philosophers by doing this, but their work was often considered at the margins of philosophy. This is a shame, as the development of considerations for achieving justice in our non-ideal society is the kind of project philosophers should take up, discuss, and develop. Except, as Charles Mills notes, "race has not traditionally been seen as an interesting or worthy subject of investigation for white Western philosophers,"<sup>36</sup> and the few who take the plunge usually discuss the rights and wrongs of affirmative action.<sup>37</sup> This is because of a limited understanding of what canonical philosophy should be, tucking the ivory tower safely away from the impending storm of diversity. Philosophy (as a discipline with a strict understanding of what is philosophy and who is a philosopher) should be embarrassed at its inability to resonate with a group of people who are grappling with real-world ethical dilemmas rather than thought experiments, people who are crafting policies that redress past and present harms to an actual group rather than a possible world. Unfortunately, this quote from Assata may shed light on what Black Americans feel about the value of philosophy in assisting on these matters: "Before going back to college, I knew I didn't want to be an intellectual, spending my life in books and libraries without knowing what the hell is going on in the streets. Theory without practice is just as incomplete as practice without theory. The two have to go together."<sup>38</sup>

## NOTES

1. I would like to thank the 2015 CSLEE Values and Leadership Conference for the feedback I received on this project.
2. One deputy did get convicted for cruelty to an inmate. The other was convicted of perjury. See McKay, "Deputies Acquitted in Killing of Inmate Matthew Ajibade."
3. They ultimately rescinded the suit after public pressure and scrutiny. Shaffer, "Cleveland Wants Tamir Rice Estate to Pay Ambulance, Life Support Bills."
4. Katz, "Mistrial for Charlotte Police Officer in Death of Unarmed Black Man."
5. Murray, "Dash-cam Video Played in Murder Trial of Former Deputy."
6. Knapp, "Citing 'Persuasive' Evidence, Judge Denies Michael Slager's Bail Request in Walter Scott Shooting."
7. The Burger King trip came after "complaining" of being hungry. McCormack, "Cops Bought Dylann Roof Burger King Hours After Charleston Shooting."
8. A grand jury refused to indict an officer in December 2014. See Siff, Dienst, and Millman, "Grand Jury Declines to Indict NYPD Officer in Eric Garner Chokehold Death."
9. The median income for Blacks is roughly \$5,000—over twenty times fewer than whites. The recent Great Recession exacerbated this gap. See Luhby, "Worsening Wealth Inequality By Race."
10. Although Black women are the most educated demographic in the country (see National Center for Education Statistics), the gap between Blacks and whites of equal education level still exists. Cook, "U.S. Education: Still Separate and Unequal."
11. Cohen, "Racial Wealth Gap Persists Despite Degree, Study Says" and White, "Education Gaps Don't Fully Explain Why Black Unemployment Is So High."
12. Vega, "Black Wealth Not Protected By Home Ownership."
13. A recent one done by Nextions (2015) notes how law firms demonstrate bias in evaluating African-Americans law memos.
14. Another recent study (Todd, Thiem, and Neel, "Does Seeing Faces of Young Black Boys Facilitate the Identification of Threatening Stimuli?") noticed that the dangerous Black male stereotype extends to children.
15. Traci Blackmon, Facebook page, October 13, 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/traci.blackmon/posts/10207349226590275>
16. The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2012) offers this definition of value theory, and it is this sort of broad-based understanding of value that I am using the term.
17. Hilary Clinton and Bernie Sanders have echoed this sentiment, with Sanders saying during the October 15, 2015, Democratic Presidential Debate: "The African-American community knows at any given day, some innocent person like Sandra Bland can get in a car and three days later end up dead in jail. Or their kids will get shot. We need to combat institutional racism from top to bottom and we need major, major reforms in a broken criminal justice system." See Vega, "Black Wealth Not Protected By Home Ownership."
18. See McCready, "Understanding the Marginalization of Gay and Gender Non-Conforming Black Male Students" and Fogg-Davis, "Theorizing Black Lesbians within Black Feminism: A Critique of Same-Race Street Harassment."
19. Anderson's work focuses on the positive arguments for integration given nonideal conditions, emphasizing a genuinely inclusive democracy.
20. Assata, *Assata: An Autobiography*, 52–53.
21. The "nothing to lose but our chains" is reminiscent of similar revolutionary language from Marx's Manifesto of the Communist Party, where he says the proletariat has nothing to lose but its chains.
22. Assata, *Assata: An Autobiography*, 139.
23. In the aftermath of many of the aforementioned killings (many available to watch on the Internet), a significant part of the public response was to believe that officers had no other choice but to kill in these scenarios. I imagine that for many of them, sending the dogs and spraying fire hoses would be justified actions for people who support what must be a criminal since he or she was killed by police.
24. Alexander, *New Jim Crow*, 6.
25. The Prison Policy Initiative (2012) synthesized information provided by a Department of Justice report, "Correctional Populations in the United States, 2010."
26. See the Center for Law and Justice, "Summary of New Jim Crow."
27. Thanks to laws like the 1986 Anti-Drug Abuse Act, crack possession and other drug offenses that were associated with Blacks received much harsher sentences than powder cocaine, which was associated with whites.
28. See NPR, "Preschoolers Far More Likely to Be Suspended," and Anderson, "Why Are So Many Preschoolers Getting Suspended?"
29. An example of the argument: Blacks are responsible for their relative social, political, and economic position due to their own behaviors rather than structural influences; these actions are not

empowering to American citizens for maximizing their potential. Therefore, Blacks earned their disenfranchisement and do not possess much value as citizens. This argument errs in mistaking Blacks' value as citizens as solely their placement on the social totem pole.

30. Notable examples of her work on love include "Love as the Practice of Freedom," from *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations* (1994) and *All About Love: New Visions* (2000).
31. hooks, "Love as the Practice of Freedom," 244–45.
32. *Ibid.*, 247.
33. *Ibid.*, 248.
34. Brittney Cooper, the Crunk Feminist Collective blog, Angela Davis, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Ta-Nahesi Coates are a few of the influences on today's activists.
35. Ignoring the philosophical problems Alexander raises of justice as an oppressed minority in society because she is not a professional philosopher is an example of philosophy's gatekeeping that often rejects problems related to the Black experience.
36. See Charles Mills, "But What Are You Really? The Metaphysics of Race," in *Blackness Visible: Essays on Philosophy and Race* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 41.
37. One could argue that canonical philosophy itself does not lack the tools needed to address these questions. Activists just are not familiar with the appropriate philosophers to help articulate their view. This objection, however, assumes that the specific problems Black Lives Matter addresses are already present in or accessible via the canon. Thanks to Jake Fay for bringing this up.
38. Assata, *Assata: An Autobiography*, 180.

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## *Beyond Tradition: A Short Ruminations on Africana Philosophy and Nihilism in 21st Century America*

Devon R. Johnson  
 RUTGERS UNIVERSITY

An American Philosophical Association newsletter dedicated explicitly to Africana philosophy in the beginning of the twenty-first century is as timely as was W. E. B. Du Bois' famous announcement of the relevance of the problem of color in the beginning of the twentieth century. Within the discipline of Black existentialism there is a particularly important debate going on raising serious questions concerning the prospect of future qualities of life for Black people in a well-documented anti-Black racist United States of America. With an increasing number of cases being brought forward of police officers raping Black women (and men), disturbing amounts of unsuccessful cover-ups of police murders, and brutalization of Black peoples being revealed, alongside emerging information regarding lead-water poisoning in the Black communities of Flint, MI, as a cost-cutting measure for the state, as examples, the phenomenon of nihilism as it is experienced and faced by the inheritors of these lived existential threats and realities induces serious philosophical questions.

Philosophical analyses sometimes tend to focus on questions of Black pessimism and optimism in relation to the ability of American socio-political institutions to address the most pressing needs of Black American life, in addition to ontological questions around the realist nature of anti-black racism's relationship with American culture and its lived experience through Blackness. I have created a philosophical framework that situates these debates within a deeper discussion concerning the philosophical relationship between nihilism and anti-Black racism. I argue that the issues underlying the above-mentioned questions go beyond choices between optimism and pessimism. Furthermore, whether racism is treated as on par with forms of metaphysical reality or not, the question of and answer to what must be done remains the same: one must fight for values beyond these traditions. I distinguish between the concepts of pessimism and nihilism, and further distinguish between the categories of strong, or what Friedrich Nietzsche called active, nihilism, and weak or passive nihilism. In raising the question of whether or not one ought to be optimistic or pessimistic regarding the ability of American sociopolitical and cultural life to address the needs of Black people, one may miss the underlying question of how human existential reality situates us in relation to the processes of transitioning from dying to living values. I argue that anti-Black racism is a form of weak nihilism that ultimately attempts to arrest the existential development of all parties involved, and which requires strong nihilism preceded by a form of pessimism

that avoids some of the idealist pitfalls that may be carried along with certain forms of racial realism in order to be overcome.

Pessimism as a form of racial realism is weak nihilistic in response to the weak nihilism of anti-black racism; it treats the existential phenomena as if it were an ontological and metaphysical reality. A strong nihilistic response to weak nihilism rejects all human values attempting to ontologize themselves. What I am suggesting requires examining the philosophical relationship between the existential category of nihilism and the phenomenological experiences of anti-Black racism. I mobilize the thought of Arthur Schopenhauer, Friedrich Nietzsche, Cornel West, Derrick Bell, and Franz Fanon in articulating the interconnections between race, racism, and nihilism. To do this I develop Nietzsche's understanding of European nihilism as containing both "strong" and "weak" dimensions, further developing Nietzsche's original distinction in terms of being "active" and "passive." I argue that weak nihilism manifests itself in anti-Black racism, and I suggest ways in which one ought to respond.

In a dissertation entitled "A Philosophical Analysis of Nihilism and Anti-Black Racism," I argued that anti-Black racism depends on transcendental philosophies of modern Europe which ultimately conflate rational human cognition with certain modes of European anthropology, comprising an anti-Black racist, white-normative, philosophical anthropology that undergirds Western humanities in a variety of ways up and through this day. In other words, anti-Black racism relies upon the weak nihilism of traditionally modern European understandings of the meaning and value of whiteness in human life, which I call "white nihilism." Anti-Black racism is a form of weak nihilism that conditions the situation of cultural meaninglessness and socio-political invisibility constituting the existential parameters of Black life, which I call "Black nihilism." My research suggests that the active dimensions of Black nihilism responds not only to the meaninglessness conferred onto Black life through the lived situation of anti-Black racism, but also to the weak nihilism of modern European modes of valuing conditioning it. As a result of the implicit nihilism inherent in anti-Black racism, Black existential life occupies a Black nihilistic situation. One can respond to this situation either weakly or strongly. Passive/weak nihilism is the inability to value human phenomenal projections without depending upon metaphysical ideals. Active/strong nihilism is the ability to value human values without depending upon metaphysically situated ideals. I conclude that strong Black nihilism is the healthier response to nihilism and anti-Black racism because it involves a transvaluation of traditional forms of anti-Black racist valuing, which exemplifies a commitment to the language and action of constructing non-decadent human worlds premised upon the limitations of existential freedom and responsibility for all human beings.

My situating of the question of the future potentialities for value productions of meaningfulness in Black life has bearing on the now vibrant debate between what some are calling Afro-pessimism and Afro-optimism. The question of whether Black people ought to view their prospects in the United States of America optimistically or pessimistically is

an old one. However, new and fascinating dimensions of this discussion are underway, some of which engage the writings of Frank Wilderson III. Wilderson's *Red, White, and Black* is an Afro-pessimistic espousal of the structure of race antagonism in America that articulates Blackness as an ontological reality premised upon the idea of social death. Discourses coming from this direction are juxtaposed with Afro-optimist perspectives.<sup>1</sup> Fred Moten, for example, challenges Afro-pessimists that Blackness can be removed as "a kind of pathogen" that has "the potential to end the world."<sup>2</sup> The ensuing debate entails engagement with a long-standing tension in Black radical traditions between, as Moten worded it, "radicalism," and "normative striving against the grain of the very radicalism from which the desire for norms is derived."<sup>3</sup>

I envision a potential third way, which I am in the process of developing into a larger monograph. Where Afro-pessimism misconstrues legitimately pessimistic dimensions of Black life as fundamentally precluding Black social meaning, some Afro-optimism nevertheless tends, in the words of Jared Sexton, to work "away from a discourse of black pathology only to swerve right back into it,"<sup>4</sup> especially where the notion of the Black self is concerned. Sexton's argument that something "new" might be "unfolding in the project or projections of afro-pessimism,"<sup>5</sup> and that, ultimately, "we might create a transvaluation of pathology itself"<sup>6</sup> invokes explicit dimensions of this debate upon which my research bears direct significance. My conception of Black nihilism is one where pessimism and strong nihilism (and thus, an ironic form of optimism) are necessarily related phenomena; each comprise dimensions of healthy existential development in response to anti-Black racism. However, if not disambiguated in the ways my research attempts to make clear, this potential-filled debate may run the risk of a stalemate.

Pessimism involves the rejection of all metaphysical ideals. Nihilism is the attempt to value anew in light of the truths of pessimism. However, the prospect of valuing in light of the truths of pessimism requires strength against potentially debilitating experiences. Attempts to value that rely on metaphysical conceptualizations demonstrate a failure of strength to move beyond that which entails decadence. It is the decadence of anti-Black racist ideals and existential realities that must be moved beyond regardless of whether one considers the nature of anti-Black racism to be idealist or not. For instance, a thinker like Derek Bell's conceptualization of anti-Black racism would be appropriately pessimistic of anti-Black racism in its rejecting of the metaphysical bases upon which the ideals tend to be promulgated. One's prescription for developing legal programs within such realities, as Bell persuasively argues, for instance, must take the reality of anti-Black racism seriously if Black existential life is to be made socio-politically sufferable at all. The point is, however, whether one chooses to treat this sociopolitical reality as permanent in some metaphysical way or not, the question of what it means to value beyond these modes of traditional valuing ultimately remains. My argument is that strong nihilism, through the struggles of pessimism and despair, is the way to healthily move beyond tradition in attempts to do more than cope and/or make the insufferable sufferable.

It may be the case that we have reached a point in Western world history where increased colonial confrontations with "others" have created dimensions unprecedented and utterly exhaustive of the limitations of traditionalist anti-Black racist, as well as anti-racist, Western humanistic traditions. The question of moving forward, realized through discussions of Black nihilism and anti-Black racism, at least in the ways in which I have framed the discussion, can provide a powerful lens for what it may mean to value humanity anew in the twenty-first century and beyond. I hope my subsequent work alongside this short essay serves as a call for thought around the subject of developing critical theoretical frameworks within Africana philosophy and Black nihilism contributing to a forward-looking, non-decadent, global articulation of what it means to fight for the freedom and responsibility of all human beings.

#### NOTES

1. Frank Wilderson III, *Red, White, and Black* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2010).
2. Fred Moten, "The Case of Blackness," *Criticism* 50, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 177–218.
3. *Ibid.*, 177.
4. Jared Sexton, "The Social Life of Social Death: On Afro-Pessimism and Black Optimism," *InTensions* no. 5 (Fall/Winter 2011): 23.
5. *Ibid.*, 24.
6. *Ibid.*, 28.

## BOOK REVIEW

### *White Privilege and Black Rights: The Injustice of U.S. Police Racial Profiling and Homicide*

Naomi Zack (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), pp. ix–134. Hardback, \$47.00; paperback, \$21.00. ISBN: 978-1-4422-5055-0.

Reviewed by Clarence Sholé Johnson  
MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

This book is a timely, focused examination of the recent epidemic of well-publicized extrajudicial killings of young Black men by law enforcement personnel (legal authority) and white vigilante (nonlegal) self-appointed custodians of public order. Ryan Gabrielson et al., citing a ProPublica analysis of federally collected data on fatal police shootings, report that "Young black males in recent years were at a far greater risk of being shot dead by police than their white counterparts—21 times greater."<sup>1</sup> Continuing, the authors provide the following statistics to substantiate their claim: "The 1,217 deadly police shootings from 2010 to 2012 captured in the federal data show that blacks age 15 to 19 were killed at a rate of 31.17 per million, while just 1.47 million white males in that age range died at the hands of police."<sup>2</sup>

By investigating the nature of the sociopolitical and legal climate within which such killings occur, Naomi Zack brings attention to the racial injustice Black men are experiencing in that such killings abridge their constitutional rights simply in virtue of their race. And such injustice runs counter to the ideal of a just and fair society that the U.S. professes in its Constitution. The main thrust of Zack's position is that the policies and practices in the society that allow for, if not explicitly sanction, the homicide of Black men both by law enforcement and by unauthorized others are blatant transgressions of constitutional protections guaranteed to all citizens, including Black men, and so need to be looked into. It is such an examination she undertakes in the three chapters that comprise this book.

In chapter 1, "White Privilege, Entitlements, and Rights," Zack delineates three cardinal concepts in sociopolitical discourse of social justice and brings out their significance for the existential predicament of Black men. These concepts are *privilege*, *entitlements*, and *rights*. In chapter 2, "Black Rights and Police Racial Profiling," Zack takes a critical look at how police racial profiling contravenes a fundamental tenet of the U.S. Constitution, namely, the Innocence Clause, which states that an individual is presumed innocent of a criminal wrongdoing until proven guilty. And in chapter 3, "Black Injustice and Police Homicide," she establishes a causality between police racial profiling and the homicide of Black men. There is an organic link among all three chapters, so in what follows I will elaborate some of the most important issues Zack addresses and comment on her treatment of them.

Zack commences her investigation with a discussion of the concepts *privilege* and *rights* and brings out their implications for the unsavory treatment of Black men by law enforcement personnel in the U.S. Antiracist scholars of social justice issues generally view social inequities in the U.S. as a function of white privilege, a distributive paradigm that favors whites and disadvantages people of color, especially Blacks.<sup>3</sup> So they critique white privilege, disparage and disavow it, and advocate a system that would equalize opportunities for all so that nonwhites too can gain benefits undeterred. In this way, they hope that all persons would be treated fairly. But Zack thinks it is mistake to focus on white privilege because a privilege, she says, is a mere extra benefit, "an extra perk," that a person happens to have (3; also xiii). The individual may have this benefit owing to her/his standing in the society or her/his feeling of superiority in the society, but it is not an entitlement, the denial of which constitutes a violation against that person. Zack's point, put otherwise, is that a person to whom such extra perks are denied does not suffer an injustice even if the rationale for the denial is the person's race, gender, or other characteristics. Undoubtedly, such denial is *morally* repugnant, but it does not constitute an injustice against the denied person. This is because injustice applies only where a right is violated, and since one does not have a right to a privilege, "an extra perk," there is therefore no injustice if a privilege is denied. Zack illustrates this point with an analogy of membership in a golf club or a country club. That a person is privileged to be a member in any such club does not violate any rights of another person to whom such privilege is not extended. In this regard, even

assuming that white privilege violates our moral norms or offends our moral sensibilities, it does not violate the rights of others who are not white and are thus *racially* unprivileged. What, then, is a right?

A right, unlike a privilege, is an entitlement to which a person, *qua* person, lays claim. It is "a moral condition of human life that precedes law and political action" (40). A right may be codified into law, but its existence is prior to its codification. It is this preexisting feature of a right that is sometimes encapsulated in the term "inherent" or "natural" in sociopolitical discourses, such as in the phrase "the right to life." The implication of calling a right "inherent" or "natural" is that the right is inalienable and thus inviolable. All that laws or stated documents do, such as the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, is to make *explicit* these features of a right. Accordingly, when a person is deprived of her/his right because of race, gender, or other modalities, then an injustice has been committed against that person. Such injustice is called a violation of the person's right.

In the context of the racial violence against Black men, especially by law enforcement, Zack's overall aim in distinguishing between a right and a privilege is to show that the concept of white privilege is inadequate to address the fundamental issue at stake in police violence and sometimes killing of Black men, namely, the transgression of the constitutional rights of Black men. The concept *white privilege* is inadequate because, as Zack says, what is sometimes mistakenly referred to as white privilege is, in reality, a right to which whites *and* Blacks are entitled, but which is protected for whites and denied Blacks especially in encounters with law enforcement (4). It is the consequence of this state of affairs in the lived reality of Black men, their homicide by law enforcement in particular, that Zack thus brings out in the succeeding chapters. But before turning to her discussion in these chapters, let me briefly comment on what I consider a grave error that I believe Zack makes in her discussion of white supremacy.

Attendant to the distinction she draws between a privilege and a right, Zack argues that while white privilege advantages whites and disadvantages Blacks (and people of color generally) in the U.S., this state of affairs does not automatically entail white supremacy or justify calling the U.S. a white supremacist society as some would have it. White privilege as described may be racist, she says, but it is certainly not white supremacist (7-8; also 36). This is because racism in the distributive paradigm is a bias towards a person's own race. It is like ethnocentrism, which is a bias that favors a person's ethnic group. White supremacy, on the other hand, is an ideological declaration and characterization of a society as of a particular type, and this characterization is enacted into law and is upheld and enforced by and through various institutions, policies, and practices in the society. Such a state of affairs obtained, for example, in apartheid South Africa and Rhodesia. At an earlier time in U.S. history there were such formal documents and instruments that specified racial boundaries between Blacks and whites, wherein the two groups were designated separate housing, separate public facilities such as schools, restrooms, and the like, and members of both groups were

legally prohibited from entering into marital relations with each other. But this is not the case now. There is no formal document at present that demarcates and separates racial groups or that characterizes the U.S. as a white supremacist society; therefore, the U.S. is not a white supremacist society (35-36).

Zack is correct that there is no formal/ideological declaration that the U.S. is a white supremacist society. However, she cannot deny that *in practice* her position is overwhelmingly belied by the facts of Black experience. Since a condition of receiving the “extra perks” is that one be white, and since the society is structured in such a hierarchical way that power invariably resides among whites who constitute the dominant group, and added to these facts is the pervasive belief among whites that they are superior to people of color, then, clearly, we have white supremacy practically at work insofar as white supremacist beliefs influence the distributive paradigm. On this showing, white privilege is intertwined with and directly follows from white supremacist beliefs.

The ubiquity of white supremacist beliefs can be demonstrated further. Consider the recent killing of nine Black parishioners of the historic Mother Emanuel AME church in South Carolina by a white supremacist, Dylann Roof, during a prayer meeting. As reported in various news outlets, Roof was motivated by white supremacist beliefs.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, every so often Blacks have had to endure and sometimes challenge what they perceive as the expressions or manifestations of white supremacist beliefs by prominent, powerful, and influential white individuals. Examples here include some of the acerbic and unseemly racist insults that have been hurled at President Barack Obama by public figures such as Ted Nugent, Donald Trump, John Sununu, Rush Limbaugh, and others.<sup>5</sup> There is very little doubt that in the minds of such individuals (and their ilk), the U.S. is a white society whose president therefore ought to be white. Accordingly, although not so explicitly articulated, it is contrary to *their* thinking, and to what they consider the norms of the society, for anyone they consider *ontologically inferior to whites* to preside over the nation in which whites comprise the dominant group. There is unquestionably a psychosomatic reaction to seeing a Black man as president; hence they will stop at nothing to delegitimize him. Such a belief is clearly white supremacist!

Finally, even the academy of which we are members is not immune to white supremacist belief and practices, a point demonstrated by Leonard Harris as Zack herself has noted (6-7).<sup>6</sup> So, to distinguish between white supremacy and white racism, as Zack seems to do, is to draw a distinction that is invalidated by the pervasive beliefs and practices of the society. And on this note I should point out that, according to Mark Scoloro and Jeffrey Collins of the Associated Press, since the removal of the Confederate flag from state buildings in South Carolina and Alabama, following the outcry about the Charleston massacre by Dylann Roof mentioned above, there has been an upsurge in the purchasing and displaying of the flag in both Northern and Southern states.<sup>7</sup> We know that for Blacks, this flag is the penultimate symbol of white supremacy. So, on this

particular score, I think Zack is just plainly mistaken. The U.S. may not be a *de jure* white supremacist society, but if the evidence I have adduced holds, then it certainly cannot be denied that the U.S. is *de facto* white supremacist.

Zack’s motivation for the distinction is obviously to highlight the fact that rights violations need not necessarily require or presuppose white supremacy. With this I certainly agree, since not all forms of oppression are racial. Other modalities of oppression are ethnicity, gender, disability, etc. However, since we are talking specifically about the sociopolitical and legal climate within which violence against Black men occurs, I think Zack must accept the brute fact that white supremacist beliefs unfortunately saturate and permeate that climate. It is these beliefs that influence the stereotypical image that is constructed of Black men as violent, unpredictable, and animalistic, and that undergird the brutal racial violence to which they are subject. In fact, it is precisely such beliefs that inform the very racial profiling and the New York Police Department (NYPD) “stop and frisk” policies that Zack discusses in chapter 2. There, she amply demonstrates that those policies abridge both the Fourth and Fourteenth Amendments of the Bill of Rights. The Fourth Amendment proscribes unreasonable searches and seizures, but it is precisely such proscription that is being transgressed when young men of color, but especially Black men, are randomly stopped, detained, and frisked on the *presumption* that they are potential criminals. The Fourteenth Amendment proscribes, among other things, the deprivation of an individual’s liberty “without due process of law.” But, again, it is precisely such proscription that is violated when young men of color are randomly detained on the basis of the subjective perception (or belief) that they may be up to no good. The Innocence Clause mentioned earlier is what is violated here. In this connection, Zack rightly challenges the statistical basis of police use of racial profiling and “stop and frisk” policies as crime-fighting techniques, namely, the high incarceration rate of African American and Hispanic males in the society. The justification usually given for these techniques as crime-fighting instruments is that criminals in the society are largely African-American and Hispanic males, as evidenced by their high numbers in the prison system. Citing the statistics that “1 in every 15 African American men and 1 in every 36 Hispanic men are incarcerated in comparison to 1 in every 106 white men” (55), Zack responds quite appropriately as follows: “What is overlooked is that these figures entail that most African American and Hispanic men, like most white men, *do not* commit the kinds of crimes for which police seek suspects. . . . What this focus leaves out is the majority of people in minority groups, who are law-abiding, but are nonetheless, because of their nonwhite appearance (especially if it is black) more likely than whites to be suspected of crimes. If 14 out of 15 or more than 93 percent of African American men are not “in” the criminal justice system, compared to more than 97 percent of Hispanic men and 99 percent of white men, then racial profiling that relies on the racial proportions of convicted criminals ignores the rights of the overwhelming majority who are law-abiding—in all races” (55; emphasis in the original) I could not agree with Zack more. But this all the more makes it quite puzzling that Zack would deny that such racialization is not owing to white

supremacist beliefs and the prevailing power dynamics in the society wherein power is disproportionately held by whites. Her general reluctance to accept the brutal reality of white supremacy in the polity is undercut by some of her own very observations, such as that while it would be inaccurate to say that American police are overwhelmingly white, yet “the culture and attitude of American police officers inevitably reflect who they think criminals are. And they seem to strongly associate nonwhites, especially blackness, with criminality” (34).

This picture that has emerged about the prevailing beliefs about the race and face of crime in the society explains the nature of the relation between law enforcement and African-American males, a relation that Zack takes up in chapter 3 using a haunting analogy of hunter and prey. With young Black men “criminalized” and “animalized,” they become fitting objects to be hunted down and killed as evidenced in the recent spate of extrajudicial killings already noted. Zack’s use of the analogy of hunter and prey is effective to show why such killings have been acceptable to the society at large. As she says,

The hunting of humans by other humans would be criminal homicide in most other contexts. But in the context of young white police officers killing young black males, it is protected by prosecutors, judges, and juries, and accepted by the majority of the white majority, because of respect for the authority of the police and widespread belief, based on the disproportional imprisonment of blacks, that young black males are likely to be criminals, indeed *dangerous animals* according to long-standing racist mythology. (82; emphasis in the original)

This is a frightening and haunting analogy, but it accurately represents the reality of the relation between young Black men and law enforcement in the society, a relation of which every Black parent, grandparent, and others are all too familiar, and which motivates them to give “the (life-preserving) talk” to their young sons, grandsons, and nephews in order that the young men may not leave home and never return, as was the case with Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Eric Garner, Walter Scott, and others.

Zack has done an admirable job in such a small book by focusing attention on the epidemic of the extrajudicial killings of young Black men in the society by law enforcement and white vigilantes as a violation of the constitutional rights guaranteed to the victims. This focus on rights needs to be taken up further by legal scholars, policy makers, activists, and all those who value and pay homage to the Constitution as the law of the land. For, on the basis of the analysis Zack has advanced, it would appear as if young Black men are existentially situated outside the boundaries of the U.S. Constitution, in which case their lives don’t really seem to matter! Despite my reservations about Zack’s unwillingness to establish a causal relationship between white privilege, white racism, and white supremacy, even as her examination of the issue tends in that direction, I find the work to be absolutely exemplary as it is timely.

## NOTES

1. Ryan Gabrielson, Ryann Grochowski Jones, and Eric Sagara, “Deadly Force in Black and White,” *The Huffington Post*, October 10, 2014, <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/10/10/racial-disparity-police-killings>, retrieved on August 18, 2015.
2. Ibid.
3. See, for example, the essays in Paula Rothenberg, ed., *White Privilege: Essential Readings on the Other Side of Racism* (New York: Worth Publishers, 2012).
4. See, for example, Scott Timberg, “Dylann Roof’s Racist Manifesto: A Funhouse Mirror Reflection of Right-Wing American Politics,” *Salon*, June 23, 2015, [http://www.salon.com/2015/06/23/dylann\\_roofs\\_racist\\_manifesto\\_a\\_funhouse\\_mirror\\_reflection\\_of\\_right-wing\\_american\\_politics/](http://www.salon.com/2015/06/23/dylann_roofs_racist_manifesto_a_funhouse_mirror_reflection_of_right-wing_american_politics/), retrieved on August 21, 2015; Andres Jauregui, “Charleston Church Shooting Suspect Dylann Roof Captured in Shelby, North Carolina,” *The Huffington Post*, June 18, 2015, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/06/18/dylann-roof-captured\\_n\\_7612986.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/06/18/dylann-roof-captured_n_7612986.html), retrieved on June 29, 2015.
5. See, for example, Manny Fernandez, “Ted Nugent Apologizes for Obama Insult,” *The New York Times*, February 22, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/22/us/ted-nugent-apologizes-for-obama-insult>, retrieved on June 24, 2015; Igor Volkov, “John Sununu’s History of Racial Remarks about Obama,” *ThinkProgress.org*, October 26, 2012, <http://www.thinkprogress.org/politics/2012/10/26/1094491/john-sununu-history>, retrieved on June 24, 2015; and Clarence Sholé Johnson, “Pedagogical Contours of Race and Racism,” in *Exploring Race in Predominantly White Classrooms: Scholars of Color Reflect*, ed. George Yancy and Maria del Guadalupe Davidson (New York and London: Routledge, 2014).
6. Leonard Harris, “Believe It or Not or the Ku Klux Klan and American Philosophy Exposed.” *APA Newsletters on The Black Experience, Computer Use, Feminism, Law, Medicine, Teaching, International Cooperation* 95, no. 1 (Fall 1995): 6–8.
7. Mark Scolforo and Jeffrey Collins, “Some Americans Refuse to Give Up On Confederate Flag: How Racist Is the Confederate Flag?” August 2, 2015, <http://www.dailynews.com/general-news/20150802/some-americans-refuse-to-give-up-on-confederate-flag>, retrieved on August 2, 2015.

## CONTRIBUTORS

Naomi Zack, Ph.D., Columbia University, is professor of philosophy at the University of Oregon. Zack’s newest book is *The Theory of Applicative Justice: An Empirical Pragmatic Approach to Correcting Racial Injustice* (2016). Recent books include *White Privilege and Black Rights: The Injustice of U.S. Police Racial Profiling and Homicide* (April 2015) and *The Ethics and Mores of Race: Equality after the History of Philosophy* (2011/2015). Most recent is the fifty-one-essay *Oxford Handbook on Philosophy and Race* (2017). Zack also organizes the project on home and homelessness for the University of Oregon Philosophy Department, including the multimedia website: <http://homelessness.philosophy.uoregon.edu/>.

**John Torrey** is currently a Ph.D. candidate in philosophy at the University of Memphis. He holds a BA in philosophy and Spanish from Morehouse College and an MA in philosophy from the University of Memphis. His interests are in African-American philosophy, specifically the notion of redressing historic harms against African-Americans, social and political philosophy, and philosophy of education. He is a SREB Doctoral Fellow for 2016-2017 and is a coordinator with the precollege philosophy program at University of Memphis, Philosophical Horizons.

**Charles F. Peterson** is an associate professor of Africana studies at Oberlin College. His research interests include Africana philosophy, cultural studies, and political theory. He is a co-editor of *De-colonizing the Academy* (Africa World Press, 2003) and the author of *DuBois, Fanon, and Cabral: The Margins of Anti-Colonial Leadership* (Lexington, 2007).

**Clevis Headley** is currently associate professor of philosophy at Florida Atlantic University. He has served in various positions during his tenure at Florida Atlantic University: chair of the Department of Philosophy, director of the Ethnic Studies Certificate Program, director of the Master's in Liberal Studies, and special assistant to the dean for diversity. Professionally, he was a founding member and served as the first vice president and treasurer of the Caribbean Philosophical Association. Professor Headley has published in the areas of critical philosophy of race, Africana/Afro-Caribbean philosophy, and analytic philosophy.

**Devon R. Johnson** completed his Ph.D. in philosophy at Temple University with specializations in Black existentialism, political philosophy, and continental philosophy in 2014. His dissertation is entitled "A Philosophical Analysis of Nihilism and Antiracism." He is currently a teaching instructor for the NJ-STEP program at Rutgers University (Newark).

**Clarence Sholé Johnson** is professor of philosophy at Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU) in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. He earned his doctorate from McGill University in Canada, concentrating in early modern philosophy and specializing in the philosophy of David Hume. Johnson is author of *Cornel West and Philosophy* (Routledge, 2002), and has also published articles in a variety of major scholarly journals such as *The Journal of Social Philosophy*, *Social Philosophy Today*, *The Journal of Philosophical Research*, *DIALOGUE: Canadian Philosophical Review*, *Metaphilosophy*, *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, *The Southwest Philosophy Review*, and *The Journal of Thought*, to name a few. He is also a contributor to the recently published *Oxford Handbook of Philosophy and Race* (ed.) Naomi Zack and to the *Encyclopedia of Global Bioethics* (ed.) Henk ten Have (Springer, 2015).