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Racism and Biopower

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Introduction: Confusion and Silence

While ignorance, or at least a lack of clear and distinct experience, does not seem to have stopped our predecessors from philosophizing about all manner of things from matter to immortal souls, in the latter half of the twentieth century North American philosophers became increasingly timid about advancing propositions based primarily not on logic informed by material evidence but on intuition, creative imagination, and passionate desire. By the 1960s our generation's teachers and mentors, perhaps battered by the McCarthy years or humbled by the dazzling successes of their colleagues in the "hard" sciences, had redrawn the disciplinary boundaries tightly enough to make almost any speculative work fall outside the realm of legitimate philosophy and into the realm of liberal politics or sociology (read: soft-headed nonsense) or that of literature (read: girl stuff). In this way they sought to purify and legitimate the discipline. Even still, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, North American continentalists labor under and around these intellectual and institutional (and highly gender-coded) dividing practices and defensive barriers; much of our work is still considered by about 90 percent of our Anglo-American philosophical contemporaries to be irrational poeticizing or manipulative politicizing. And of course in most circles our masculinity is still in serious doubt.

Nevertheless, we carry on. We write about cultural and political issues; we take history seriously; we critique logic as well as social structures; and we often do so with unabashed passion. Some of us are avowed feminists, and a few are flagrantly female. Clearly we are willing to take some pretty big risks. So why is it that, until very recently, we have had so little to say about racism? Surely we have noticed it. We may have even suffered from it. Most likely we have abhorred it and denounced it on our campuses and in our communities. But with a few exceptions we have not written about it. Why not?

I can't answer for anybody but myself—and really I don't think I can explain myself terribly well either—but one reason, I think, is that I am deeply confused about racism and have been so virtually all my life, even while encountering and experiencing it daily. Michael Omi and Howard Winant suggest that most North Americans are similarly confused. "Since the ambiguous triumph of the civil rights movement in the mid-1960s," they write, "clarity about what racism means has been eroding."¹ Given their periodization, this process of conceptual erosion has been going on just about ever since I became aware of the world. I have never lived in a time when there was widespread agreement about what racism is.

Prior to the mid-1960s, Omi and Winant continue, "the problem of racial injustice and inequality was generally understood . . . as a matter of prejudiced attitudes or bigotry on the one hand, and discriminatory practices on the other" (69). But by the late 1960s, a significant and widely observed theoretical shift had taken place. A large number of social critics, especially many within social justice movements, had begun to locate racism less in the individual psyche than in institutional structures: "Discrimination, far from manifesting itself only (or even principally) through individual actions or conscious policies, was a structural feature of U.S. society, the product of centuries of systematic exclusion, exploitation, and disregard of racially defined minorities" (69). While a structural conception perhaps better reflected some of the realities of the late twentieth century, the 1970s saw a neoconservative appropriation of the rhetoric of civil rights, and a concomitant return to the ideal of a color-blind society and to a conception of racism as injuries done to individuals by individuals. Given these twists and turns, by the 1990s, after thirty years of epistemological contestation, the concept of racism had entered what Omi and Winant term "an overall crisis of meaning. . . . Today, the absence of a clear 'common sense' understanding of what racism means has become a significant obstacle to efforts aimed at challenging it" (70).

In fact, that absence is a significant obstacle to thinking systematically about race and racism at all. It is difficult to philosophize about something if you don't know what it is. Not that such ignorance gives us permission not to try, but it does make the job a lot more difficult and daunting than it might otherwise be. Couple the enormity of the undertaking itself with the professional risks of venturing into a relatively uncharted philosophical terrain and the emotional risks of closely examining phenomena that have shaped and scarred us all since early life, and you may have a partial answer to why so few of us have made much of an attempt. The prospect is just plain scary.

There is a further reason as well, I think, which is that by definition continental philosophers focus on European philosophy, mostly European philosophy produced in the twentieth century. We rarely philosophize about anything without a text to depart from (or, more often, to stay right with, reading *closely*), a text authored by someone with either a French or a German last name. So we end up more or less stuck discussing the topics those people thought were important. Not very many of them had anything at all to say about racism in North America. As long as we let our texts set the agenda, we probably won't have a whole lot to say about it either.

In the next section of this chapter, I will briefly examine some of the very few "canonical" twentieth-century continental texts that do deal with racism, namely, some works by Sartre, Horkheimer, and Adorno. I will argue that these analyses are inadequate for thinking through North American racism and the concept of race operative here. Then I will turn my attention to some texts—especially two late works by Michel Foucault—that do not directly address North American racism but, I believe, hold a great deal of promise for such a project. I will examine part V of *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, *An Introduction* and several chapters of "*Society Must Be Defended*"²² in conjunction with works by U.S. historians to give a sketch of a genealogy of Anglo-American racism. I will contend that cultivating a genealogical awareness of the racism that shapes our society and our selves is a powerful beginning on the way toward diminishing our confusion about race and racism, and, even more important, toward overcoming our racist culture and our racist selves.

Continental Resources: Some Philosophers with French and German Last Names Who *Did* Write About Racism in North America

Jean-Paul Sartre is an apparent exception to the resounding European silence on the issue of racism. His most systematic philosophical exploration of bigotry is his *Anti-Semite and Jew* (first published in France in 1946 under the title *Reflexions sur la question juive*). This very readable volume offers a provocative analysis of the existential psychology of anti-Semitism as a personal choice rooted in a bad faith disavowal of the human condition of radical freedom. Unfortunately, in the end it does not tell us much about racism. Sartre writes, "For the anti-Semite, what makes the Jew is the presence in him of 'Jewishness,' a Jewish principle analogous to phlogiston or the soporific virtue of opium. We must not be deceived: explanations on the basis of heredity and race came later; they are the slender scientific coating of this primitive

conviction.”³ Anti-Semitism is a reifying strategy; it is a way of making the world be still, of keeping everyone in his or her carefully delineated place so that new circumstances will not arise in which new choices will have to be made. Sartre writes: “The existence of the Jew merely permits the anti-Semite to stifle his anxieties at their inception by persuading himself that his place in the world has been marked out in advance, that it awaits him, and that tradition gives him the right to occupy it. Anti-Semitism, in short, is fear of the human condition. The anti-Semite is a man who wishes to be pitiless stone, a furious torrent, a devastating thunderbolt—anything except a man” (54). The underlying issue is not anti-Semitism, then, or even racism in general; it is bad faith.

Sartre did produce some work on antiblack racism in the United States, which one might think would be of more help to U.S. continental philosophers. Since he claims that antiblack racism, too, is a but another line of flight from freedom, one of the many apparently interchangeable guises of bad faith rather than a phenomenon to be studied in itself, however, his descriptions of the U.S. situation offer no more insight than what we can glean from *Anti-Semite and Jew*. As Julien Murphy has pointed out in her essay “Sartre on American Racism,” Sartre fails to develop any analysis that gets at what is particular about racism in the United States.⁴ Even when writing on horrific housing conditions in Chicago’s black ghettos, Sartre does not distinguish racism from any other form of oppression; instead, he subsumes African Americans into the international proletariat and insists that the interests of African Americans are identical with the interests of workers in a socialist revolution;⁵ racism is just an outgrowth of capitalism.⁶ Thus, strangely enough, using Sartre’s work to understand racism very quickly leads us away from any analysis of racism. Racism as a primary object of inquiry dissolves in a critique of capitalism and of individual subjectivity in bad faith.⁷

A similar limitation characterizes another apparent exception to European philosophers’ silence on the issue of race, namely, Horkheimer and Adorno’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, together with the Frankfurt School’s massive empirical study *The Authoritarian Personality* (authored by Adorno and others). Whereas Sartre maintains that the motive for anti-Semitism and racism is the fear of radical freedom and the responsibility it entails (it is a kind of metaphysical cowardice), the Frankfurt School authors take a less moralistic tack, holding that the motive is merely the satisfaction of certain psychological needs.⁸ These two accounts could be reconciled, though, if we construe “need” to include the desire to conceal from oneself one’s feelings

of fear and inadequacy in the face of what Sartre calls “the human condition.” That done, the two descriptions are remarkably similar. Both accounts take anti-Semitism to be the most prevalent and virulent form of bigotry in the modern West, but both construe anti-Semitism as just a particular version of a more general phenomenon that is, or includes, all forms of racism. Thus, according to the Frankfurt theorists, an analysis based on anti-Semitism should be adequate to account for antiblack racism as well. Say the authors of *The Authoritarian Personality*, “Evidence from the present study confirms what has often been indicated: that a man who is hostile toward one minority group is very likely to be hostile against a wide variety of others” (Adorno et al., 9). And as Horkheimer and Adorno assert in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, “It is not so much that such people react originally against the Jews as that their drive-structure has developed a tendency toward persecution which the ticket [meaning the party in power] then furnishes with an adequate object.”⁹ In other words, anti-Semitism is an expression of a kind of personality under certain social conditions; under other social conditions that same kind of personality would express itself in antiblack racism, hatred of Mexicans or Arabs, or even hatred of homosexuals or Catholics (Adorno et al., 142–45).

Hence, like Sartre’s analysis, that of the Frankfurt School turns out on close inspection not to be an analysis of *racism per se*. In fact, chapter 4 of *The Authoritarian Personality* critiques the very concept of “race,” asserting that it is inadequate for any classification of human beings (Adorno et al., 103); instead of “racism,” therefore, this critical study addresses itself to “ethnocentrism.” To be ethnocentric means “to be rigid in [one’s] acceptance of the culturally ‘alike’ and in [one’s] rejection of the ‘unlike’” (Adorno et al., 102). The concept of ethnocentrism represents an improvement over the concept of racism, we are told, in that it enables study not only of race hatreds but also of hatred directed toward groups not classifiable as races under any schema; the text mentions zoot-suiters and Okies in particular. Once again, the framework offered does not purport to be a framework for analyzing racism, except insofar as racism is a symptom of or a disguise for something else.

These analyses share many assumptions with what Omi and Winant term the pre-civil rights era view of racism, wherein racism was understood as a function of individual action and belief—individual prejudice against and deliberate mistreatment of other individuals. Both analyses focus on subjectivity as the locus of racism and the appropriate focus of opposition to it. This attention to subjectivity is typical, of course, not only of understandings of racism in the first half of the twentieth century but also of European philosophy in general. Phenomenology—out of which

Sartrean existentialism comes—is all about subjectivity as the ground on which sense is to be made of the world. It is a legitimate heir to Hegel, Kant, and Descartes. So it should come as no surprise to us that this strain of continental philosophy would founder in the face of the kinds of structural analyses of racism that began to come out of the Black Power movement, for example, by the late 1960s. Nor is it any surprise that philosophical Marxism, which one might think could help generate structural analyses, also failed to produce an analysis of racism that did not dissolve it in a more generic global struggle for economic ascendancy.

This leaves continental philosophers in the United States facing an enormous issue without clearly applicable philosophical models. We who are so unremittingly textual in our orientation—who can barely utter a sentence without a European author's name attached—find ourselves on a distinctly American frontier without a legible map. Nevertheless, I don't think we are completely without continental resources—just not models or theoretical frameworks premade for use in our geopolitical context. I want to use the rest of the space allotted to me here to make a case for the importance of Foucault's thought for the work we have to do.

Race and History

History shows no shortage of group-based animosity. People have hated other people and have gone so far as to torture and massacre them in droves for all sorts of reasons—their religion, their morals, the language they spoke, because they were Saracens or Croats or Romans or damn Yankees or vagabonds or infidels. The point was they just weren't *us*, and they had something we wanted or posed a threat to us either materially or psychologically. To call all these phenomena instances of racism, it seems to me, would be to dilute the meaning of the term wantonly, without any conceptual gain. Whatever racism is, it has something to do with whatever it is that we call *race*. Where there is no concept of race, where differences between people are not identified as racial differences, animosity, hatred, oppression, and genocide might be very bad things, but they are not racist.

The first known use of the term *race* in English occurred in 1508; it, like its French and German equivalents, derives from the Italian *razza*, which is not much older.¹⁰ Thus, given my stipulation that group animosities not rooted in racial divisions are not racisms—even if their adherents point to morphological traits as indicative of group membership—whatever racism

is, it did not exist among English-speaking peoples any earlier than the sixteenth century.

Nevertheless, racism did not necessarily come into existence when the concept of race did. The concept of race is no more essentially racist than the concept of sex is essentially sexist. On the contrary, early uses of the term *race* are so different from familiar racist uses of the word that it is very unlikely that the concept was first used as a tool for making broad and unjust political, economic, or moral distinctions among human beings. In the sixteenth century, the term *race* occurs most often in reference to groups of animals and plants—what we might call subspecies, breeds, strains, or varieties. There is no clear scientific definition until the late eighteenth century. This very early use of the term persists in present-day bird-watching manuals. Robert Burton, writing for the National Audubon Society in 1999, elaborates on his description of the Northern Flicker: “There are three races, showing variations in color under the wings and tail. The red-shafted, west of the Rockies, has red, and the gilded flicker, of the southwest, is golden. The yellow-shafted, east of the Rockies, has yellow, with red on the back of the head, and a black mustache.”¹¹ I have no reason to think that Mr. Burton holds one or another of these races of birds to be inferior or superior, insofar as they are red-shafted, yellow, or golden, mustachioed or clean-shaven. Nor is there reason to believe that the birds have established some sort of racist hierarchy among themselves or hold one another in racist contempt. As this example shows, classification of beings into races is not necessarily a racist practice. Presumably that could be true even if the beings so classified were human, as they were in the English-speaking world by 1580.¹² Only after 1580 did the concept of race somehow enable or begin to play a role in practices that most people would call racist. Clearly racism, whatever it is, is not a natural phenomenon, an ahistorical given; racism emerges in history.

European philosophers of the twentieth century may have neglected to say much about racism, but they have had a lot to say about history and the historicity of things often taken to be ahistorical. Accordingly, insofar as we take racism to be a historical phenomenon, we continentalists may be in a very good position to develop some understanding of it. Foucault’s thought stands out in this regard, both because he produced so much work that investigates the concrete genealogies of cultural realities—like mental illness, criminality, sexuality, and so forth—thus giving us a set of tools for undertaking such investigations ourselves, and because he actually did some work on the history of European racisms himself, most notably in part V of *The*

History of Sexuality, vol. 1, *An Introduction* (1978) and in his 1976 lecture series at the Collège de France, “*Society Must Be Defended*” (2003). I will spend the rest of this chapter exploring the use of these works as a basis for developing a genealogical account of modern racism in the United States.

Raciality as a *Dispositif*

Foucault tells a genealogical story about racial discourse that begins in England around 1630, fifty years after the concept of race began to be used to classify groups of human beings. Foucault’s is a story not of racism but rather, as he terms it, of race war. The story goes like this: Various factions in English society, principally those more or less disempowered and humiliated by what they called the Norman government of James I, claimed that the Stuart monarchy was illegitimate. Oppressed by a king and court that had blood and religious ties to a foreign country and that conducted state affairs in a foreign language, a self-proclaimed Saxon underclass began to speak of themselves as an indigenous race aligned against a race of conquering aliens.¹³ The laws these aliens brought with them and imposed were not a means to peace (as laws are allegedly supposed to be) but a weapon of continued subjugation of the general populace, the rightful inhabitants of the land. What underlay and pervaded all of seventeenth-century English society, according to these thinkers and rebels, was war—“basically, a race war” (Foucault, 2003, 60), one that had been ongoing since 1066.¹⁴

Thus the concept of race as race war emerges in the English-speaking world, Foucault maintains, first as a means of locating and underlining the existence of ongoing and egregious injustice. It surfaces among the Puritans, circulates in modified form among the Parliamentarians, and erupts in the demands of the Diggers and Levellers. In each case, different though they may be, it operates as a wedge for separating the people from the sovereign, the better to lay hold of an alternative conception of the nation, not as the sovereign’s property but as a kind of popular hereditary home. The concept of race thus makes its first explicitly political appearance not on the side of a powerful oppressor group but on the side of the oppressed. It enables a counterhistory. It rallies a people for revolutionary action.

This is decidedly not the same discursive formation that supported the biologicistic conceptions of race that circulated in the twentieth century: “Although this discourse speaks of races, and although the term ‘race’ appears at a very

early stage, it is quite obvious that the word 'race' itself is not joined to a stable biological meaning" (Foucault, 2003, 77). Instead of groups of different types of bodies with different capacities for development, race at this time typically named groups that differed in language and religion; it was therefore allied with lineage, ritual, and custom, but was not essentially determined by heredity or necessarily marked by morphological traits. Race did not mean in 1630 what it came to mean in the nineteenth century and what it often still means now. Nor was racial animosity and hatred the same phenomenon as our post-Darwinian racism. That is not to say, however, that the discourse of race war was solely the property of the downtrodden: "It should in fact be immediately obvious that it is a discourse that has a great ability to circulate, a great aptitude for metamorphosis, or a sort of strategic polyvalence" (Foucault, 2003, 76). The discourse of race war was a wonderful way, in all kinds of political contexts, for distinguishing between "us" and "them." Once invented, it was available as a means for rallying forces for reactionary as well as revolutionary acts of expulsion or extermination of those deemed alien ("them"). It was used by just about everybody. Foucault goes on to trace the career of race war discourse in transmuted form in late seventeenth-century France among an aristocracy battling both a tyrannical monarch and a rising underclass. But we need not examine that history here, since our concern is with the genealogy of racism in Anglo-America.

It should be an easy matter for historians to trace the migration of race war discourse from England to the Anglo-American colonies. Although the Plymouth Puritans arrived in New England before 1630, plenty of English dissenters found themselves in the "New World" after the discourse became current in England; they would have heard the racial rallying cries before they got on the boat. During Cromwell's rule in the 1650s, Puritan factions held power in a number of American colonial governments, including Virginia and Maryland.¹⁵ After the Restoration of the Stuart monarchy in 1660, Charles II sent a number of Cromwellians into bond-servitude in the Virginia colony.¹⁶ Since Anglo-America was a handy repository for royal enemies, it is quite likely that a great many of the "settlers" (most of them chattel bond-laborers) in Virginia and elsewhere were well acquainted with the dissenter rhetoric of race war between the Saxons and the Norman usurpers.¹⁷

Beyond giving a voice to seething resentment toward the Stuart king who bound and exiled his enemies to the malarial marshlands of the Chesapeake, however, such a discourse might have had little application in colonial territories like Maryland, Virginia, and Carolina. Who, after all, was being conquered

there? Clearly not the Saxons. There it was native peoples who were placed under laws that operated more like weapons against them or were killed or sold by the thousands into slavery in the colonies of the Caribbean. The Puritan discourse of race war does not seem especially applicable, except possibly in reverse. Therefore it does not seem to have given rise in any direct way to the racial discourses that eventually came to characterize the incipient United States of America. Benjamin Franklin's and Thomas Jefferson's racial discourses are not reminiscent that of seventeenth-century dissenter race war; the concept of race itself had undergone significant change by their time, and they write from out of a very different political milieu.¹⁸ What happened, and what differences did it make?

According to Foucault, there are two major points of historical transformation in racial discourse on the European continent after the seventeenth century. The first is what he calls "an openly biological transition," when race becomes a biological concept. This occurs in the latter half of the eighteenth century and reaches full articulation very early in the nineteenth. Foucault correlates this move—which he sees as politically highly ambiguous—with "nationalist movements in Europe and with nationalities' struggles against the great State apparatuses (essentially the Russian and the Austrian)," and with eighteenth-century policies of colonization (2003, 60). I would venture to say that it is highly likely that Anglo-Americans participated fully in this development, possibly influencing Europeans' thinking as much as European thinking influenced theirs, and certainly helping to create the concepts and theories from which later Americans would draw. Anglo-Americans had a lot to gain from reworking the concept of race and using it to divide an often-rowdy population into distinct groups according to both custom and law. I doubt they waited to *follow* European trends, even if they did eventually incorporate a great deal of European racial thinking into their own.

Historian Theodore Allen's 1997 work *The Invention of the White Race* is very suggestive along these lines. He argues that the "white race" was a North American invention of the eighteenth century, to a great extent deliberately produced by a capitalist elite as a means of controlling a rebellious labor force made up of bond-laborers from all over the world. Allen marshals pages and pages of evidence to show that the colonial labor force was in fact extremely rebellious and prone to act with solidarity across what we now perceive as racial lines.¹⁹ He documents numerous examples of European and African bond-laborers escaping their masters together, many of them running for asylum to neighboring native communities that sheltered and eventually

incorporated them. Many planters found it necessary to separate European and African bond-laborers from native slaves (and many objected to having native laborers at all, preferring to sell them to dealers for shipment out of the colony), because the natives, with their knowledge of the local geography and environment, were apt to be successful at escaping into the hinterland and frequently took their European and African comrades along.²⁰ There are also many examples of seventeenth-century resistance to individual masters, and to bond-servitude in general, where European and African laborers cooperated with one another without any apparent racist discord. Allen's central example of this is Bacon's Rebellion in the Virginia Colony in 1676, wherein hundreds of bond-laborers of both European and African descent united, took up arms, and fought to destroy the institution of chattel slavery in the Virginia Colony.²¹

Unlike production of sugar in the colonies of the Caribbean, which required a lot of capital for equipment and a highly skilled labor force, production of tobacco required little more than land and hands. Anyone who could get land and force enough people to work for him could, theoretically, get rich. But if the hands came as indentured servants to whom land was owed after a certain number of years of servitude (and if those indentured servants actually lived longer than their term of service, which rarely happened in the first decades of the Virginia Colony), the number of landowners among whom tobacco profits had to be shared would grow (because the price would drop as production increased), and the number of people available to use as laborers would decrease. Lifelong bond-servitude looked like a good solution from the perspective of propertied profit seekers; if bond-laborers were never set free, no freedom dues (land and tools) would be owed and the cost of labor would stay at a minimum (corn mash and an occasional suit of clothes). Allen shows that there were many attempts on the part of Virginia landowners to reduce their European labor force to the status of chattel slaves, and in many instances they succeeded. But these efforts were clearly out of keeping with British law and difficult to reconcile with emerging classical liberal political principles. Once the British chartered the Royal Africa Company in 1667 to exploit their newly acquired direct access to African coasts following the Second Anglo-Dutch War, it was much easier to enforce lifelong servitude on laborers with no indenture papers and no ties to European governments that might protect their rights or interests. Why fight with the authorities over the status of European laborers when the same work could be wrung out of people with no government to protect their interests?

Still, if European bond-laborers or small-claims freedmen identified with the plight of the African life-term bond-laborer or understood their economic interests to be compromised by the rise of this source of cheap labor,²² elite capitalist control of the population would remain very difficult. Hence, Allen argues, the colonial government in the tobacco colonies, and later the U.S. government as an extension of those colonial governments, deliberately sought to drive an ideological wedge between African American laborers and those whose ancestors came from European lands. They did this by more or less systematically degrading not chattel slaves but *free Africans* and African Americans through legal and economic means, while setting up a contrasting and higher legal status for European Americans. The legal code of Virginia was revised in 1705, at which time the General Assembly created a number of new laws to lower the status of free African Americans and simultaneously raise the status of European American bond-servants. More such laws were enacted over the next two decades, and Allen notes that not only did these laws change the status of free African Americans from its previous level of civil equality with free European Americans, but, further, “the ruling class took special pains to be sure that the people they ruled were propagandized in the moral and legal ethos of white-supremacism.” Allen continues:

For consciousness-raising purposes (to prevent “pretense of ignorance”), the laws mandated that parish clerks or churchwardens, once each spring and fall at the close of Sunday service, should read (“publish”) these laws in full to the congregants. Sheriffs were ordered to have the same done at the courthouse door at the June or July term of court. If we presume, in the absence of any contrary record, that this mandate was followed, we must conclude that the general public was regularly and systematically subjected to official white-supremacist agitation. It was to be drummed into the minds of the people that, for the first time, no free African-American was to dare to lift his or her hand against a “Christian, not being a negro, mulatto, or Indian” (3:459); that African-American freeholders were no longer to be allowed to vote (4:133–34); that the provision of a previous enactment (3:87 [1691]) was being reinforced against the mating of English and Negroes as producing “abominable mixture” and “spurious issue” (3:453–54); that, as provided in the 1723 law for preventing freedom plots by African-American bond-laborers, “any white person . . . found in company with any [illegally congregated] slaves” was to be fined (along with free African-Americans or Indians so offending)

with a fine of fifteen shillings, or to "receive, on his, her, or their bare backs, for every such offense, twenty lashes well laid on" (4:129).²³

If European Americans *already* considered African Americans their inferiors, *already* discriminated against them by custom socially and economically, and *already* disdained their company and ignored their interests and needs, why would such laws have been enacted and why would such care have been taken to make sure European Americans were reminded of their existence three times per year? Why were these actions taken if not to divide an as-yet *undivided* working class in such a way as to cripple or preclude at the outset any movement that might challenge the rich planters' control? For the colonial capitalists' purposes it was necessary, Allen argues, not just to enslave African Americans for their entire lives and bind their children into life-term servitude as well, but also to convince European Americans to tolerate a system that ran counter to their English traditions, their emotional ties, and their economic interests, and even to help uphold it by keeping surveillance over slave populations and taking up arms to defend the planters against African American rebellions. "Thus," Allen concludes:

was the "white race" invented as the social control formation whose distinguishing characteristic was not the participation of the slaveholding class, nor even of other elements of the propertied classes; that alone would have been merely a form of the "beautiful gradation" of class differentiation prescribed by Edmund Burke. What distinguished this system of social control, what made it "the white race," was the participation of the laboring classes: non-slave-holders, self-employed small-holders, tenants, and laborers. In time this "white race" social control system begun in Virginia and Maryland would serve as the model of social order to each succeeding plantation region of settlement.²⁴

The white race was thus an element in what Foucault could call a *dispositif*, a vast institutionalized apparatus of power. Its creation was not masterminded by one small group of people or brought into existence by one official act, but rather was a historical creation that served a great many confluent interests.

Racial whiteness, a form of embodiment, became a form of subjectivity—a form of citizenship, a form of social status, and a form of personal identity in North America over the course of the eighteenth century. Whereas earlier racial discourse tended to emphasize lineage and language above physical

appearance, now physical appearance was paramount. And whereas before racism might consist in animosity or violence among races, now it tended to consist in universalized hierarchical rankings and the oppression that such rankings were deemed to justify. By the late eighteenth century, race had become something much more like a biological concept.

Still, as Foucault points out and as many other writers have as well, until the nineteenth century race was not a salient *scientific* concept. While race had a kind of quasi-biological existence outside the science of biology, it did not become a significant category for biologists, and for political discourses ostensibly predicated on biology, until a bit later. And, according to Foucault, this development, when it occurred, enabled the creation of what he calls "state racism," the most extreme form of which is exemplified in the Third Reich.

Foucault maintains that this second transformation in the concept of race emerges in nineteenth-century Europe just as popular discourse of class struggle begins to supplant race discourse altogether. I think this part of his European story diverges somewhat from the account we would have to give of the career of race in North America, but before addressing that issue, I will simply recount Foucault's narrative.

Foucault asserts, "At the time when the notion of race struggle was about to be replaced by that of class struggle . . . it was in fact only natural that attempts should be made by one side to recode the old counterhistory not in terms of class, but in terms of races—races in the biological and medical sense of that term" (Foucault, 2003, 80). To retain control over their labor forces and to reassert their power and moral authority, the ruling classes developed their own racial counterdiscourse (in opposition to the discourse of race war and to the emerging discourse of class struggle), but their reactionary version stripped racial discourse of its historical dimension and its emphasis on battles and conquests, substituting a "postrevolutionist theme of struggle for existence . . . the differentiation of species, natural selection, and the survival of the fittest species" (80). From that time on, as Foucault points out, European nations were not conceived as divided into two (or more) conflicting groups with different lineages, languages, and laws, but rather as one biological entity, one body, threatened in its biological continuity by heterogeneous elements that must be purged to maintain its health and insure its survival: "Hence the idea that foreigners have infiltrated this society, the theme of the deviants who are this society's by-products" (81). These people, both alien "germs" and indigenous "cancers," had to be identified and eliminated before the contamination they constituted could weaken and destroy "our" society.

In the earlier European discourses of race war, the state was seen as the enemy of justice, the weapon in the ongoing war of the alien conquerors over the native race. In this new European discourse of race as biological contamination, "the State is no longer an instrument that one race uses against another: the State is, and must be, the protector of the integrity, the superiority, and the purity of the race" (81). This is a ruling class discourse, then, one that could only be perpetrated by a group already in control of the state apparatus and ready to use it to contain and neutralize their enemies.

This is where Foucault locates the origin of modern racism: "I think that racism is born at the point when the theme of racial purity replaces that of race struggle. . . . At the moment when the discourse of race struggle was being transformed into revolutionary discourse [meaning, here, something like a Marxist discourse of class struggle], the revolutionary project and revolutionary propheticism now began to take a very different direction. Racism is, quite literally, revolutionary discourse in an inverted form" (81). It is this racial discourse—that of the state's imperative to purify the race of the contaminants that threaten its biological existence and continued viability in a post-Darwinian world—that leads to fascism, elements of which persist in every modern nation-state throughout the twentieth century.

This is Foucault's genealogy of race and racism. The story begins in England in 1630, where race is conceived nonbiologically in terms of language, lineage, law, and conquest. The discourse undergoes a transformation as it becomes part of a biological discourse in the late eighteenth century, and then a further transformation when that biological discourse becomes a tool in the hands of capitalists and state officials in the nineteenth century who seek control over national populations, especially laborers. I will leave it to students of European history to examine the details of this account. My concern is with North America, where history unfolds somewhat differently.

Speculations on the Genealogy of Race in North America

Foucault, as was said above, sees two shifts in European racial discourse after its inception as race war. First there is the shift in the meaning of the term *race* from a loose designation of cultural affiliation to a description of heritable morphology. This occurs in the late eighteenth century, according to Foucault, and subsequent scholarship has suggested that it may achieve its most systematic expression in the work of Immanuel Kant between 1775 and 1788.²⁵ Second is the incorporation of race into biological science, eugenic

policy, and technology beginning in the mid-nineteenth century. In this latter move the idea of race as heritable morphology is incorporated into a biological science that emphasizes function and development over anatomy and structure. In this new context, heritable race encompasses not only physical appearance (and not even necessarily that) but also characteristic physiological processes and functions, including sexuality, cognitive development, and vulnerability to degenerative disease.

In work that predates his study of race by at least a decade, Foucault described the advent of biological science at the very beginning of the nineteenth century. Biology, he maintains, eclipses its older rival natural history when scientists first isolate and define the concept "life" as an object of study. Natural historians gave accounts of plants and animals that focused on the visible body, the appearance and architecture of entities. Some, like Linnaeus, were interested in classifying beings as like or unlike other beings in form. Others, like Kant (who was primarily a geographer rather than a natural historian), insisted on taking history seriously as the medium in which form arises, but still the accounts produced concentrated on visual appearances or structural forms. As Foucault put it, "The naturalist is the man concerned with the structure of the visible world and its denomination according to characters. Not with life."²⁶ Life, as biologists began to understand it, was in effect process; it was the process of material assimilation and growth, the process of reproduction, the process of aging and deterioration, even the process of death. Living beings were organisms made up of functional systems whose processes were both cyclic (like respiration and digestion) and longitudinal (like sexual maturation). Organisms do not simply exist; they develop, and eventually decay.

These processes that, taken together, make up *life* can be normed—that is, their speed and trajectories can be measured and data compiled so that it becomes possible to say what rate and type of development is normal in a given type of organism. For example, on average female human beings become fertile between (say) ten and fifteen years of age. A girl who reaches menarche at seven or at twenty is unusual; her development deviates from the norm, and she can be classified as abnormal in a certain specifiable degree. The nineteenth century ushered in an age of statistics wherein virtually every phenomenon is normalized, every event rendered knowable by means of its degree of deviation from some norm.

As this new scientific life began to operate as an organizing principle in an ever-widening circle of theoretical undertakings, European racial theories underwent alteration. No longer was race simply an observable morphological

phenomenon that might (or might not) signify a metaphysical difference; race became a mark of deviance explicable in terms of the process of human development, the development of civilization.²⁷ There was only one normal developmental path from savagery to civilization. Some human groups were either dallying along that path—retarded in their development—or had deviated from it and were either permanently arrested at a primitive stage or retrogressing toward savagery. Everyone who was not a _____ (depending on the theorist, in this blank would be written English, Saxon, Caucasian, Aryan, etc.) was either a racial retard or a racial degenerate. Either way, race had become, inherently, a matter of both hierarchy and health.

We see the same two major trends in racial discourse in Anglo-America. The first shift may have occurred somewhat more rapidly in the tobacco colonies, predating Kant's work certainly and even influencing it—particularly his changing conception of the racial status of native North Americans between 1775 and 1785. (Kant insists in his earlier work that Americans do not constitute a fully formed race but are the imperfectly adapted progeny of "Hunnish"—he also calls them Mongol or Kalmuck—peoples once living in northeastern Asia. In his later work, he holds the Americans to be a separate "red" race, distinct from the "yellow" races of the East. This change may have come as a result of reading Anglo-American sources, since the idea that Native Americans are red apparently originated with Native Americans themselves or within verbal encounters between them and Anglo-Americans; in fact, Native Americans do not have red skin, and no Anglo-American spoke of natives as red before the 1720s.²⁸) Whatever the conceptual status of the morphological concept of race in North America relative to Europe, it is clear that Anglo-Americans were far more willing much earlier to use morphological race as the basis of political dividing practices. In 1723 the Virginia General Assembly passed "an Act directing the trial of Slaves, committing capital crimes; and for the more effectual punishing conspiracies and insurrections of them; and for the better government of Negroes, Mulattos, and Indians, bond or free." Shortly thereafter, British attorney general Richard West made inquiry as to why free Negroes, mulattoes, and Native Americans were to have no right to vote in any election in the colony, a clear departure from English law and from previous colonial statutes. West wrote, "I cannot see why one freeman should be used worse than another, merely upon account of his complexion."²⁹ Colonial governor William Gooch explained that free Negroes and mulattoes would undoubtedly remain sympathetic to slaves—as they apparently had in a recent slave uprising—and thus must have affixed to them "a perpetual Brand . . . by excluding them

from that great Privilege of a Freeman."³⁰ It should be noted that Gooch evinces no small amount of class consciousness when he points out that mulattoes in particular were troublesome, "as most of them are the Bastards of some of the worst of our imported Servants and Convicts." Race (or a sort of ingrained or habitual racism) was obviously *not* the fundamental reason for racial distinction in law, according to Gooch; the fundamental reason was political and strategic. Because of their personal histories and affiliations, such people simply could not be trusted to act as loyal subjects of the Crown. The easiest way to contain them was to create law that marked their race as an underclass. Thus was the morphological concept of race shaped and extended more or less deliberately through the mechanism of colonial law.³¹

Pigmentation was the premiere morphological mark of race, replacing the older conception of race as cultural or linguistic affiliation and lineage, although obviously pigmentation was believed to be heritable and thus a concomitant of lineage. There were certainly other morphological considerations, such as head shape, hair color and texture, and facial features. But pigmentation was the easiest to see at a distance, which was important in tracking fugitive servants and slaves and spotting hostile natives. For the most part, then, in Anglo-America pigmentation was paramount; it was the difference that could most readily be used to make a difference. Studies of the other aspects of racial morphology were generally only needed to bolster later claims that racial hierarchy was somehow natural rather than simply politically expedient.

The prevailing theoretical view of race in eighteenth-century Anglo-America seems to have been something like what Samuel Stanhope Smith offered in his 1785 address to the American Philosophical Society (which was later published as *An Essay on the Causes of the Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species* in 1787). Rev. Smith claimed that there was but one original human pair from which all living persons are descended, and that pair was white.³² Some of their progeny, however, migrated to lands where the environmental conditions changed their skin, giving rise to peoples of black, tawny, and yellow complexions that were inherited by successive generations. Smith was very familiar with European racial theories of his time and drew on them freely in his essay. His view differed from that of his contemporary Immanuel Kant in that Smith believed as races migrated into new lands, their pigmentation and other features would gradually alter further, according to climate; Kant, of course, believed that once the original "germs" had matured into racial types, people of each

type lost the ability to produce children with features carried by the other germs, so races were now fixed regardless of the climate inhabited.

Smith's monogenetic view of the etiology of race prevailed in North America for about fifty years. By that point it was clear that dark-skinned people were not lightening, light-skinned people were not darkening, and neither Europeans nor Africans were turning tawny, olive, yellow, or red like the native groups (depending on which observer one consults). By the 1830s, with the work of Charles Caldwell (*Thoughts on the Original Unity of the Human Race*, 1830) and Samuel George Morton (*Crania Americana*, 1839), Anglo-American thinking began to change dramatically; by 1851 Morton was openly declaring what he had only implied twelve years earlier, namely, that each of the five races (he held there were five, as did Blumenbach, but this was subject to debate; Kant had said there were four) were separate species with separate origins.³³ Although Morton's work was controversial—in part because it contradicted the idea that species could be distinguished on the basis of whether cross-progeny were fertile, which clearly mulattoes and mustees were³⁴—from midcentury on, polygenist views held sway in the United States, finding voice and reinforcement in the work of George Gliddon, Josiah Nott, and Louis Agassiz.³⁵

Samuel Stanhope Smith's work coincides with the beginning of the national debate about whether to abolish slavery. At that point, according to Michael Banton, "Only a handful of pro-slavery writers asserted that blacks were inferior; most pointedly rejected such views except in so far as they contended that only Negroes could work in extreme heat."³⁶ (It is not self-evident that heat tolerance is a sign of inferiority; in this age of perforated ozone, heat and sun tolerance may be the trait that marks those fittest for survival. But Thomas Jefferson among others suggested that this trait in the Negro indicated fitness for manual as opposed to mental labor.³⁷) Slave traders' testimony in parliamentary inquiries on the subject amounted to "detailed information which revealed mistrust and ethnocentric contempt but no assumptions about permanent superiority and inferiority."³⁸ The debate was not primarily over whether Africans were inferior to whites but over whether enslavement of human beings was morally permissible. Smith's essay was often used by abolitionists as a foundation for arguments against slavery. In 1810, two years after abolition of the slave trade, Smith's essay was reprinted, so it was still enjoying wide popularity, but the days of monogeny's ascendancy in the United States were numbered. The subsequent rise of polygeny theory coincided with a period in which the only legal way to increase

the slave population was to impregnate African American women. Black men could be used for that purpose, but very often slave owners took the duty on themselves or delegated it to their sons—which of course meant that large numbers of enslaved individuals in the years following 1808 were of European as well as African descent. As the actual hereditary lines between Americans of varying pigmentation became indistinct, the theoretical biological lines between American races were sharpened.

Following the abolition of racial slavery in 1863 and the conclusion of the Civil War in 1865, a new era began in the United States, especially in the once politically dominant South. While the imperialistic nations of Europe were honing their management skills in the creation of technological bureaucracies, the United States was trying to build an economy virtually from the ground up. Except for a few cities like Richmond where negotiation prevented outright razing, the South's urban infrastructure and transportation system was utterly destroyed by fire, looting, and four years of violence and neglect. Much of the labor force was displaced. Thousands of former slaves simply marched along behind the liberating armies for lack of any idea where to go or what to do; military leaders managed to feed and resettle some of them, but many were left without any provision at all. One out of every four white Southern males above the age of twelve had died in battle or of starvation, exposure, or disease between 1861 and 1865. In fields outside Petersburg, Virginia, alone, thirty thousand bodies lay scattered; most would never be identified.

There is no economy without a labor force. But within the defeated Confederacy most of the laborers in 1865 were either displaced or dead, and those who remained or could be rounded up were destitute, unruly, largely unskilled, and filled with high expectations and intense fears and suspicions. This posed a huge administrative problem, but it also presented a variety of interesting opportunities. In any case, the South constituted an enormous laboratory for experimentation in the management of populations, which set the North American stage for the widespread development of what Foucault calls "biopower."

Biopower

The science of life aided two parallel governmental developments, which Foucault describes in both part V of *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, and "*Society Must Be Defended*." The first is that of normalizing disciplinary

control of individuated bodies, familiar to readers of Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*. Normalizing discipline takes shape in the late eighteenth century in response both to increasing numbers of individuals requiring management in institutions like the military, schools, hospitals, and factories and to the requirements of technological innovations in mechanized production and weaponry. This Foucault calls "an *anatomo-politics of the human body*" (Foucault, 1980, 139). The second governmental development, which began to take shape in the nineteenth century, "focused on the *species body*, the body imbued with the mechanisms of life and serving as the basis of the biological processes: propagation, births, and longevity, with all the conditions that can cause them to vary" (139). This involved a series of interventions and regulatory controls, as opposed to normalizing disciplines. Foucault terms this "*a biopolitics of the population*" (139). These two poles of development in governmental practice and institutional power structures constituted "an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations, marking the beginning of an era of 'bio-power'" (140). As European nation-states become modern technological bureaucracies, biopower emerges and extends its reach through groups now defined as *populations*. It justifies itself and broadens its purview on the basis of its claim to manage life processes (health) at the level of the social body. Its institutions and practices purport to work for the good of the people, its subjects, as a collective mass. Government's job becomes not simply defending and perhaps enlarging the sovereign's territory and wealth but, and much more important, protecting and strengthening the nation, conceived as a people or race.

Biopower is Foucault's word for the mechanisms and institutions, policies and procedures, that officials created in pursuit of that goal. These have included such things as programs for public hygiene, mandatory inoculation or quarantine, "managed" health care, insurance regulation, campaigns to promote marriage and fertility or to achieve zero population growth or put an end to the consumption of dangerous substances (from alcohol to marijuana to tobacco), state regulation of reproductive technology, institutional efforts to improve the public morals, public surveillance to reduce crime or prevent masturbation or identify bioterrorists, and on and on. The main, or at least the ostensible, point of such efforts is to strengthen the nation considered as a living population rather than as individuals, so that restrictions on liberty for individuals are considered to be largely justified. But the issue is not so much what people decide to do and how to entice them to do

what meshes with the aims of power structures; the issue is, at least very often, who people are, what deviant groups they belong to or identify with. Deviance may weaken the nation; pathology, perversion, and all forms of degeneracy contaminate it and threaten its life. The state has become the great administrator of the national *bios*, which means that it must act as the great divider, the mechanism for purifying the public body of contaminants by excluding or eliminating those "elements" that the body cannot healthfully assimilate.

What—or who—count as internal contaminants? In European nations answers could vary—in fact, answers have varied a great deal across national boundaries and over time. But it is no surprise that the usual suspects include the "idle," the poor, the sick, the criminal, and the stupid, as well as anyone else who refuses to adhere to the standards of productivity, hygiene, lifestyle, and reproduction set by the state.

Morphological racism was already entrenched in most European societies in one form or another by the nineteenth century, so persons of races other than whatever was allegedly best (be it white, Caucasian, Saxon, Nordic, Aryan, etc.) were already members of an underclass, usually economically deprived and evincing the effects of that deprivation (illness, the filth of poverty, thievery and violence, illiteracy and ignorance, and so on). Entire morphologically defined races were easily subsumed into this new category of biological degenerates held responsible for the disease and corruption of an otherwise-healthy social body. As a thoroughly biologized concept, as a category of normalization, race came to operate as one way—but a major way—of identifying degenerates. Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century studies of racial physiology dovetailed nicely with similar studies of the physiology of criminals, alcoholics, morons, and sexual perverts. And all these social contaminants—physiologically defined and morphologically identified—could be held to be pathogens in the public body, and therefore enemies of the state.

This was an especially valuable tool for European colonial administrators who could, under the auspices of the authority of a state committed to enhancing life, kill thousands upon thousands of the people under their control. Without the new scientific theories of race as arrested development or deviance, a glaring contradiction would have threatened the authority and legitimacy of imperialistic national governments. If government's job is to maintain the health of populations, should it not treat its colonial populations as groups in need of purification in relation to the motherland? If race had simply meant morphological difference, European administrators

should have taken the same approach to rooting out impurities—criminals, imbeciles, madmen, perverts—in the colonial territories as their counterparts did in Europe. Instead, the entirety of colonial populations were treated as biological threats to European peoples. Thus, Foucault asserts, the kind of racism that operates in the twentieth century, the kind we all grew up with and know from intimate experience, “first develops with colonization, or in other words, with colonizing genocide. If you are functioning in the biopower mode, how can you justify the need to kill people, to kill populations, and to kill civilizations?” (2003, 257). Modern, scientific theories of race created a set of developmental distinctions that allowed colonial governments to exterminate their own colonial populations or deprive imported colonial workers of basic necessities, not to mention basic rights. Racism, Foucault writes, “is primarily a way of introducing a break into the domain of life that is under power’s control: the break between what must live and what must die” (258). It is a way of marking out, in biological terms, those individuals who pose an alleged threat to the corporate *bios*—that is, the life, health, strength, and longevity—of the nation (255). Hence state racism—which interlocks with scientific racism—is a virtual inevitability, Foucault insists, in a nation that constitutes itself by means of the techniques of biopower; to function and extend itself, biopower requires biologically based dividing practices that justify—in fact dictate—that some people will be sacrificed either by direct elimination from the population or by deprivation of vital resources. To protect its life, it will be argued, the population must be made secure against various internal (or annexed and internalized) contaminants.

As we have seen in the previous section of this chapter, the United States (perhaps unlike European nations) practiced state racism from its inception. Racism—and not just racial slavery—was enshrined in its laws from the very beginning.³⁹ Our laws and governmental institutions have never been “color-blind,” have never operated in the absence of racial dividing practices. If Anglo-America was perhaps a step ahead of Europe in producing a concept of race as heritable morphology, it may also have been at the forefront of the development of racist population management.

In a U.S. context, we must make a distinction that Foucault does not make: we must distinguish between state racism and scientific racism (which came later and was used extensively by the state once it was articulated). But the basic distinction that Foucault draws still holds: there is a crucial difference between race conceived as heritable morphology and race conceived as heritable physiological functioning. The development of the latter concept—which

enabled the kind of administration of populations that now characterizes the industrialized West—required a major shift in scientific thinking, which Foucault locates at the turn of the nineteenth century with the demise of natural history (the rubric under which Kant's work on race clearly fits, as he himself adamantly asserts) and the rise of biology (the rubric under which Darwin's work and the work of the eugenicists following Galton clearly fit). State racism requires nothing more than some kind of racial dividing practice that enables oppression of one or more racially defined groups. Scientific racism—which I would agree with Foucault is what we today understand and experience as modern racism—amounts to a major expansion of the tools of state racism in nineteenth- and twentieth-century America.

So Racism Is *What*?

It is hard for any philosopher to resist the Platonic imperative to define everything. I have argued here that, whatever else it might be said to be, racism is a *dispositif*, a vast apparatus of repeating, self-reinforcing power relations that emerges in the English-speaking world in the seventeenth century. It functions to divide people—first primarily laborer from laborer—and to apportion resources such as health care, insurance, police protection, education, and personal wealth unequally. While it is true that racism requires the concept of race, it did not require a very precise or stable concept; as racism has evolved in conjunction with global economic and technological change, it has produced racial sciences that have given the world concepts of race different from those that enabled its initial founding. Neither race nor racism is a historical constant, much less a natural constant.

I have argued, further, that the concept of race operative in modern racism is not primarily a morphological concept as it was in eighteenth-century racism, but is instead a physiological concept rooted in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century knowledges and practices that Foucault calls “normalization.” It is an aspect or type of development—or the lack, arrest, or deviant trajectory thereof. Thus it is almost impossible to classify people racially in the twentieth century without importing into that practice some presumption of abnormality or pathology.

Racism persists regardless of whether the concept of race it employs is scientifically delineated, historically stable, or officially acceptable. It persists because it is the way that U.S. society was organized from its inception. But its persistence is not an indication that it is a permanent psychological (let alone

biological) feature of human beings. Rather, its persistence is an indication that our society is deeply invested in maintaining economic inequality and extending the range and depth of mechanisms of social control. Racism has served these ambitions well for three hundred years. What all this means is that racism is not about to go away just because some geneticists have told us—and have been telling us since the 1940s—that our divisions of human beings into skin-color groups have no scientific basis. Racism can adapt to changes in the popular conception of what race is. If *race* comes to mean something like collections of statistical norms within larger gene pools that allegedly reproduce certain morphological and behavioral regularities in populations, racism can continue unabated. Recent moves to map many of society's so-called ills onto our genes—alcoholism, violent behavior, homosexuality, and so forth—testify to the commodious nature of the concepts of physiological racism. (I suspect that by the late 1940s U.S. racism was in fact already transforming and expanding, as genetic theory was gaining ground, to include these various kinds of deviant physiologies—which may be one reason why mid-century theorists like Sartre and Adorno saw racism as so multifaceted, as having so many target groups, and also as so stubborn.)

What, then, shall we do? As Foucault points out, there is no outside to power, and biopower is the name of the game in our age. But just as Foucault taketh away—our belief in social progress, our belief in the fundamental autonomy of the individual—he also giveth. And what he giveth is the idea that power is never monolithic. For a regime of power to persist, millions of what he calls “capillary” relationships must persist unchanged—that is, they must repeat themselves—from day to day. And there is always the chance that they won't.

We can enlarge that chance. We can disrupt capillary circuits of repetition. No, we can't hijack the whole system and make it fly at another altitude or crash it into the ground. There is no central control that we could commandeer. But each one of us can find points in the circulations of power that shape our lives where a refusal to act as we have in the past, an experimental move where before a habituated response would have been given, might begin to make a difference in our lives and the lives of those around us. Foucault refuses to give anybody a “right answer” to the question of what to do about any kind of injustice, but every word he ever wrote urges us to *try*. What emerges in history can disappear in history as well. Foucault was Nietzschean enough to believe that absolutely anything could—and would—one day be overcome. Progress is not inevitable, but change is. And what we do, consciously or not, creates that change.

What Philosophical Difference Any of This Makes or: Why This Is Philosophy and Not Just “Soft-Headed Girl Stuff”

What have I done in this chapter besides recount the work that some excellent U.S. historians have already done and relate it to some things a dead French guy once said about European history? Have I clarified a philosophical puzzle? Have I solved a philosophical problem? How can this enlargement on Foucault's work be construed as continental *philosophy*?

Foucault's friend and colleague at the Collège de France Pierre Hadot describes Hellenistic philosophy not as a body of knowledge or even a method for producing and verifying truth, but rather as a practice, a “way of life.”⁴⁰ Philosophy, Hadot writes, was once something people did—and not just on occasion; it was something they did from dawn till dusk in everything that they undertook. It was a form of self-cultivation and self-governance. Foucault was very attracted by that idea, and so am I. I became a philosopher not because I wanted to solve puzzles but because I wanted to be better, in some indefinable way, than I was.

Twenty years later “better” remains underdefined, but my desire persists. Now it is a desire to explore possibilities rather than reach some imagined goal like Platonic Beauty or Truth. As Foucault has said, “In what does [philosophy] consist, if not in the endeavor to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating [or attempting to realize] what is already known?”⁴¹ I want to think differently from how I have been taught to think, from how my racist, sexist society has constrained me to think. And this thinking differently is not a mere matter of changing my mind, restructuring or purifying my system of beliefs. This thinking is a practice; it lives in the actions that I take and the way that I live. When I say I want to think differently, I mean I want to live differently, and that means dismantling old habits and developing new ways of behaving and moving and interacting and perceiving. I very strongly believe that that concerted effort to think—to act, to be—differently *is* philosophy.

Genealogical exhumation of the ways our thinking was shaped, its predecessors, its differences from its own past that it often tries to pass off as inevitabilities rather than options, can help us think differently. It can “free thought from what it silently thinks”;⁴² it can break the intellectual, emotional, and behavioral bonds that hold us within a world shaped by the greed, the fears, and the desires of so many of our ancestors; it can estrange us from the habits and mores that heretofore seemed normal and therefore right. It can be a step toward becoming different people, people who can create a

future different from our past. As Grace Hale puts it, "American history in its broadest sense—what has happened, how we have represented to ourselves what has happened, and how we will continue in this intersecting of making and telling—is vitally important here. If we understand the past as always having been only black and white, what will be the catalyst that makes the future different? the epiphany that erases the bloody divisions?"⁴³ Philosophy is about opening ourselves toward change, toward a future beyond what we are and know, a future that we do not dictate in advance. As such it is antithetical to the normalization and the management projects of our bioracist culture. Foucaultian genealogies, perhaps American-style, are tools we can use to effect some of those openings and, we may dare to hope, create a nonracist future. And this work of change (while neither hardheaded nor unambiguously masculine!) has absolutely everything to do with philosophy.

NOTES

1. Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States from the 1960s to the 1990s*, 2d ed. (New York: Routledge, 1994), 69.

2. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, *An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1980); "*Society Must Be Defended*": *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–76*, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003).

3. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, trans. George Becker (New York: Schocken Books, 1948), 37–38.

4. Julien Murphy, "Sartre on American Racism," in *Philosophers on Race: Critical Essays*, ed. Julie K. Ward and Tommy L. Lott (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 222–40. Murphy lists four works by Sartre that focus on antiblack racism in the United States: his 1946 play *The Respectful Prostitute*; his unfinished essay on "Revolutionary Violence," published posthumously as an appendix to *Notebooks for an Ethics* (1992) and a piece of which was published in 1949 in *Combat*; as well as two untranslated reports he wrote in 1945 for *Le Figaro*.

5. Lewis Gordon, who has made the most use one could probably make of Sartre's work for an analysis of U.S. racism, has this to say about Sartre's equation of the proletariat with oppressed people of African descent: "It is not, as one might be inclined to think, that Sartre attempts to reduce blacks to the proletariat. It is instead that Sartre seeks to *elevate* blacks to such a level. Sartre appears to have been aware of the 'under-class' status of blacks." Gordon makes these comments in the context of a discussion of Sartre's *Black Orpheus*. See Lewis Gordon, "Bad Faith and Antiblack Racism," in Ward and Lott, *Philosophers on Race*, 251. See also Murphy, "Sartre on American Racism," 227.

6. It might seem that making racism a result of individual bad faith and, simultaneously, making it an effect of capitalism results in a logical quagmire, but these approaches are easily reconciled if we consider the final section of *Anti-Semite and Jew*. There Sartre says that the only way to end anti-Semitism as a social and political force (short of usurping the freedom of all those who choose it for themselves) is to restructure the situation in which people make personal choices. We need to construct a social and political field wherein the choice of anti-Semitism (or antiblack racism or any type of bigotry) is impossible. Sartre suggests that "anti-Semitism is a mythical, bourgeois representation of the class struggle, and that it could not exist in a classless

society" (149); further, it is founded on a certain conception of property that will "be cut at its roots" when the revolution comes (150). So, if we want to end bigotry, we should work for the revolution. Until the revolution comes, however, Sartre insists that we must work with the then newly forming Jewish League against anti-Semitism (151–52), or presumably with whatever twenty-first-century equivalents there might be. Not insignificantly, however, he does not say what it is that the Jewish League or its contemporary counterparts should actually do.

7. Of course I am aware that Lewis Gordon has worked hard to adapt Sartre's work as an analytic tool in a North American racial context. My contention is not that Sartre's work is impossible to use, only that it does not easily lend itself to the effort without a lot of alteration and critique, and it has serious limitations other than its lack of attention to racism per se, as I will detail below. For a lengthy sample of Gordon's extensive work, see his *Bad Faith and Antiracist Racism* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1995).

8. Theodor W. Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Daniel J. Levinson, and R. Nevitt Sanford, *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York: Harper, 1950), 9.

9. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 171.

10. This information is widely available, but see, for example, David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 62.

11. Robert Burton, *The Audubon Backyard Birdwatcher: Birdfeeders and Bird Gardens* (San Diego: Thunder Bay Press, 1999), 84.

12. Again, I am relying on Goldberg's etymology, *Racist Culture*, 63.

13. Actually they spoke of themselves as conquerors of longer standing. They were quite aware that the Saxons had not originated on the island, but had massacred and driven back the peoples there before them—notably the Celts, the ancestors of the Scots, the Welsh, and the Irish, who had retreated to the north and west. So their claim was not that conquest itself never constitutes a legitimate claim to land, but that the Norman laws were weapons aimed at them and should not be obeyed. Perhaps it was not that conquest was illegitimate but that the Norman Conquest was as yet incomplete and could still be turned back. The Normans may have agreed with at least part of this account. As Foucault points out, until the sixteenth-century rule of Henry VII, English political ritual stated that the king ruled by right of conquest. See Foucault, "Society Must Be Defended," 99.

14. Footnote 22 of Foucault's February 4, 1976, lecture reads as follows: "The theory of the 'Norman yoke' (or 'Norman bondage') had been popularized in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by political writers (Blackwood, et cetera), by the 'Elizabethan Chroniclers' (Holinshed, Speed, Daniel, et cetera), by the Society of Antiquarians (Selden, Harrison, and Nowell), and by jurists (Coke, et cetera). Their goal was to 'glorify the pre-Norman past' that existed before the invasion and Conquest." See Foucault, "Society Must Be Defended," 113.

15. See Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550–1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 87.

16. In 1663 a number of these men helped foment what historian Theodore Allen calls "the largest, most widespread insurrectionary plot of bond-laborers" in North American history. This occurred at Gloucester, Virginia, in September 1663 but was betrayed to authorities before it could get seriously underway. Most of the rebels escaped, however, and of those caught only four were hanged. See Theodore W. Allen, *The Invention of the White Race: The Origin of Racial Oppression in Anglo-America* (London: Verso, 1997), 152.

17. There is disagreement in historical texts about whether Europeans and Native Americans were colonial chattel slaves. This disagreement hangs, I suspect, on how one defines chattel slavery. If a person is purchased or somehow forced against his or her will to labor without remuneration for life, is that person a chattel slave? My intuition would tell me yes. If so, there were thousands of European and Native American chattel slaves in North America by the end of the seventeenth century. The first were perhaps the English women (loosely designated since many were but girls) brought to Jamestown in 1619 by the Virginia Company to be sold as wives to

planters there. They were purchased, forced to labor for another without remuneration, and bound for life (though most did not live more than a year). A similar situation obtained with regard to juvenile "apprentices." Many children as young as eight were more or less abducted from the streets of London and sold for a term of years to Virginia planters to work in the tobacco fields. Most of these children died before the end of their contracted servitude. Adult and adolescent indentured servants were brought—often forcibly—from England, Ireland, Scotland, and elsewhere and bound to labor without remuneration for a certain number of years, usually between four and seven. Most of them died before the end of their term of service, so in effect they served for life. Further, at the end of their term, if they could not produce their indenture papers and cajole their masters to go with them to court to have the term of indenture officially recognized as at an end, they could not cease their servitude. Finally, punishment for various sorts of infractions—from running away to fornicating with other indentured servants—often involved lengthening of term of service. In some cases servitude for life was the sentence pronounced. In effect, especially in the early years of the Virginia Colony, indentured servitude did not differ in any notable way from life-term slavery. English law forbade servants from being sold or bequeathed, which distinguished them from chattel property. But as Theodore Allen is at pains to show, this system broke down very quickly in the tobacco colonies, and bond-laborers became a circulating commodity. (Allen gives ample evidence of this; see Allen, *Invention of the White Race*, chap. 6.) So, was there slavery in Anglo-America before there was racial slavery? Were non-Africans in large numbers ever chattel? I think the answer is yes, and so do Allen and others, but many historians do not. It is certainly true that the chattel slavery system that developed in Anglo-America differed from anything that had come before it, and was thoroughly racialized by the early eighteenth century. But that does not mean that it was racialized from the beginning and that non-Africans were not treated, as Africans certainly were, as chattel. Hence my probably rather controversial use of the term. For a relatively brief history of slavery in Europe before the sixteenth century, see Robin Blackburn, "The Old World Background to European Colonial Slavery," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 54 (January 1997): 66–102.

18. It would be interesting to do a systematic comparison of the two men's writings on race. Jefferson devotes most of his attention to the kind of morphological race characteristic of discussions of racial slavery. Franklin seems to work with a morphological idea of race—identifying skin color as a mark of race—but he sees skin color differences where before Europeans would have simply have seen the old distinction of lineage, religion, and language. For example, he refers to the Pennsylvanian Germans, whose overwhelming numbers he deplored, as a tawny race. See Jordan, *White over Black*, 254.

19. In addition to his book, Allen develops his thesis in an article, "'... They Would Have Destroyed Me': Slavery and the Origins of Racism," *Radical America* 9 (May–June 1975): 41–63, esp. 44.

20. Most captured or purchased natives were sold to dealers and shipped out of the colonies, although in 1708 South Carolina held 1,400 native American bond-laborers (500 men, 600 women, and 300 children), amounting to about 25 percent of the total lifetime hereditary bond-labor force. See Allen, *Invention of the White Race*, 41.

21. *Ibid.*, 214–15.

22. There is good evidence that many did at first understand that the institution of slavery compromised their economic interest as free laborers. Georgia was founded in 1732 with a principle of no slavery. South Carolina planters wanted the opportunity to develop the land with slave labor (as they had in their home state) and began agitating to repeal the rule. Allen quotes one Savannah citizen objecting with the claim that free laborers would be impoverished by such a move. See *ibid.*, 252–53.

23. *Ibid.*, 251.

24. *Ibid.* Winthrop Jordan also notes that the term *white* first begins to appear in place of the terms English or Christian in about 1680. See Jordan, *White over Black*, 95.

25. Robert Bernasconi has argued that Kant is the progenitor of our modern concept of race, although Kant's ideas developed within a context very different from our own. See Bernasconi,

"Who Invented the Concept of Race? Kant's Role in the Enlightenment Construction of Race," in *Race*, ed. Robert Bernasconi (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2001), 11–36. For more discussion of Kant's role in the formation of this concept, see Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, "The Color of Reason: The Idea of 'Race' in Kant's Anthropology," in *Postcolonial African Philosophy: A Critical Reader*, ed. Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 103–40; Phillip R. Sloan, "Buffon, German Biology, and the Historical Interpretation of Biological Species," *British Journal for the History of Science* 12, no. 41 (1979): 109–53 ("The entry of Immanuel Kant into this discussion in the 1770s was crucial for the establishment, clarification, and amplification of the taxonomic concepts originally developed by Buffon" [125]); Mark Larrimore, "Sublime Waste: Kant on the Destiny of 'Races,'" in *Civilization and Oppression*, ed. Catherine Wilson (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1999), 99–125. For an account of how Kant's definition both informed and differed from what developed in nineteenth-century Europe, see Ladelle McWhorter, "Sex, Race, and Biopower: A Foucaultian Genealogy," *Hypatia* 19, no. 3 (2004): 38–62.

26. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Science*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), 161.

27. For more discussion of this, see Ladelle McWhorter, "Scientific Discipline and the Origins of Race: A Foucaultian Reading of the History of Biology," in *Continental and Post-modern Perspectives in the Philosophy of Science*, ed. Babette Babich, Debra Bergoffen, and Simon Glynn (Aldershot, UK: Avebury Press, 1995), 173–88.

28. Kant would have had two obvious sorts of sources for his view of Native Americans—travelers' reports of various kinds and the work of Linnaeus, who had mapped his delineation of race onto the doctrine of the four humors, which dictated that one must be red. Kant was, of course, criticizing Linnaeus's approach, since the latter merely described, so Kant says, rather than making any attempt to explain; therefore there is no reason for him to have accepted Linnaeus's idea that there is a red race. In fact, in his 1775 essay "On the Different Races of Man," Kant does not speak of a red race and holds Americans to be descendants of Asians. So it may well be that the change we see by 1785 has more to do with Kant's reading of Anglo-American sources than with the influence of Linnaeus. (Kant's 1775 essay is translated and published in Eze, *Postcolonial African Philosophy*, 38–48. A 1788 essay that holds there to be a red American race is translated and published as "On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy," trans. Jon Mark Mikkelsen, in Bernasconi, *Race*, 37–56. For my own purposes I have had the generous use of Professor Mikkelsen's drafts of translations of three of Kant's essays—the above-mentioned two, plus "Defining the Concept of a Human Race" from 1785, all of which will be published in a forthcoming collection of German writings on race translated and edited by Jon Mark Mikkelsen.) We must remember, however, that Kant did not read English. He would have had to wait until the English writings were available in German before he could incorporate them into his view of Americans. Early encounters between English and native North Americans seem to have left most of the English with the impression that they were encountering people like themselves but pagan—not a distinct race, and certainly not a "red" people. Reports of the color of the natives usually employ words like "tawny," "yellow," or, frequently, "olive." Later on, as antagonisms developed and racial discourse became more systematic and organized, Anglo-Americans were much harsher in their appraisals of Native Americans and much more interested in setting them apart from themselves, with the help of racial categories. But why call them red? There is evidence that Cherokees—with whom tobacco colonists had many dealings and on whom they often depended for protection from more hostile tribes farther south and west—called themselves "red" people because they painted themselves red when they prepared for war. Gradually the Anglos began to refer to Cherokees as red people and slowly to all native tribes as "red." The first known uses of the term red to describe natives begin to surface around 1725. It would have taken a while before "red" was applied to all natives indiscriminately. It begins to appear in French diplomatic language and correspondence "as a generic label for Indians" in 1729, according to historian Nancy Shoemaker. In the southeastern colonies the English began to use the term broadly in the 1750s. See "How Indians Got to Be Red," *American Historical Review* 102 (June 1997):

625–44, esp. 628. It is quite possible that Kant did not encounter this usage, or was not persuaded of its descriptive accuracy, until the late 1770s. For a critique of Kant's rather unscholarly use of sources, see Eze, "The Color of Reason," 127–28. Bernasconi also remarks on Kant's unscholarly use of sources in his essay "Kant as an Unfamiliar Source of Racism," in Ward and Lott, *Philosophers on Race*, 148–49.

29. See Allen, *Invention of the White Race*, 241. The English were not only puzzled and skeptical but also positively outraged at the Anglo-Americans' use of castration as legally mandated punishment for slaves (and sometimes for free African Americans as well). Jordan writes, "In towering indignation, English officials called castration 'inhumane and contrary to all Christian laws,' 'a punishment never inflicted by any Law [in any of] H.M. Dominions,' and 'such as never was allowed by or known in any of the Laws of this Kingdom'" (*White over Black*, 156).

30. Quoted in Jordan, *White over Black*, 127.

31. Allen uses this letter of Gooch's to show that the process of legal racial marking was a conscious choice on the part of many colonial administrators and not an "unthinking decision," as Jordan would have it. Allen insists that morphologically based racism was a deliberate strategy on the part of colonial elites to divide and conquer their huge populations of impoverished and rebellious laborers of all races.

32. Jordan notes that there were Anglo-Americans who believed that the first race was tawny. See *White over Black*, 247–48.

33. See John S. Michael, "A New Look at Morton's Craniological Research," *Current Anthropology* 29 (April 1988): 349. According to George Stocking, polygeny (the view that there were numerous separate acts of creation and, thus, that humans beings are not all descended from one pair) was first advanced in a book called *Pre-Adamite* in 1655 by Isaac de la Peyrère. It was popularized by Lord Kames, a Scottish jurist, in a 1774 book titled *Sketches of the History of Man*. See Stocking, *Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology* (New York: The Free Press, 1968), 39.

34. The word *mustee* is similar in function to the word *mulatto*, indicating a child of parents of different races. In the case of a *mustee* one parent is Native American and the other either Negro or white. The word seems usually to have been applied to the child of a Native American and a Negro and has since dropped out of North American usage.

35. Wiegand, 1995, 34.

36. See Michael Banton, "The Classification of Races in Europe and North America: 1700–1850," *International Social Science Journal* 39 (February 1987): 50.

37. See Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze's introduction to excerpts from Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* in his edited volume *Race and the Enlightenment: A Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 95.

38. Banton, "Classification of Races," 50. Jordan's work reinforces Banton's assessment. See Jordan, *White over Black*, 231, 239, 259.

39. Most historians seem to mark the 1790 decision to restrict the right to acquire citizenship by naturalization to white people as the point at which racism per se became part of U.S. law.

40. See esp. Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, trans. Michael Chase (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

41. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 2, *The Use of Pleasure*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1985), 9.

42. *Ibid.*

43. Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890–1940* (New York: Pantheon, 1998), 10–11.