

# Marronage, Here and There: Liberia, Enslavement's Conversion, and the Settler-Not

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## *Abstract*

This proposed contribution to the special issue of *ILWCH* offers a theoretical re-consideration of the Liberian project. If, as is commonly supposed in its historiography and across contemporary discourse regarding its fortunes into the twenty-first century, Liberia is a notable, albeit contested, instance of the modern era's correctable violence in that it stands as an imperfect realization of the emancipated slave, the liberated colony, and the freedom to labor unalienated, then such representation continues to hide more than it reveals. This essay, instead, reads Liberia as an instructive leitmotif for the conversion of racial slavery's synecdochical plantation system in the Americas into the plantation of the world writ large: the global scene of antiblackness and the immutable qualification for enslavement accorded black positionality alone. Transitions between political economic systems—from slave trade to “re-colonization,” from Firestone occupation to dictatorial-democratic regimes—reemerge from this re-examination as crucial but inessential to understanding Liberia's position, and thus that of black laboring subjects, in the modern world. I argue that slavery is the simultaneous primitive accumulation of black land and bodies, but that this reality largely escapes current conceptualization of not only the history of labor but also that of enslavement. In other words, the African slave trade (driven first by Arabs in the Indian Ocean region, then Europeans in the Mediterranean, and, subsequently, Euro-Americans in the Atlantic) did not simply leave as its corollary effect, or byproduct, the underdevelopment of African societies. The trade in African flesh was at once the co-production of a geography of desire in which blackness is perpetually fungible at every scale, from the body to the nation-state to its soil—all treasures not simply for violation and exploitation, but more importantly, for accumulation and all manner of usage. The Liberian project elucidates this ongoing reality in distinctive ways—especially when we regard it through the lens of the millennium-plus paradigm of African enslavement. Conceptualizing slavery's “afterlife” entails exploring the ways that emancipation extended, not ameliorated, the chattel condition, and as such, impugns the efficacy of key analytic categories like “settler,” “native,” “labor,” and “freedom” when applied to black existence. Marronage, rather than colonization or emancipation, situates Liberia within the intergenerational struggle of, and over, black work against social death. Read as enslavement's conversion, this essay neither impugns nor heralds black action and leadership on the Liberian project at a particular historical moment, but rather agitates for centering black thought on the ongoing issue of black fungibility and social captivity that Liberia exemplifies. I argue that such a reading of Liberia presents a critique of both settler colonialism and of a certain conceptualization of the black radical tradition and its futures in heavily optimistic, positivist, and political economic terms that are enjoying considerable favor in leading discourse on black struggle today.

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Where is the forum wherein judgment can be had regarding New World Africans “settling” the area of West Africa’s Lower Guinea Coast south of Cape Mount and the Mano River and north of Cape Palmas and the Cavalla River? My endeavor in this essay is geared toward considering the problems that Liberia poses for questions about “black labor,” “settler colonialism,” and slavery’s continued grip on contemporary life. Settler colonialism is a loose discourse, with applications to a wide range of different colonial contexts and articulations with the academic field of indigenous studies that are also somewhat specific to discrete geo-political formations.<sup>1</sup> In the main, I find settler colonial studies muddies more than it clarifies with respect to black existence, and through an examination of the case of Liberia, I will show that there has been one struggle fundamental to all movements for black liberation everywhere and always: that against slavery. The discourse on settler colonialism, its invaluable insights notwithstanding, displaces slavery’s ongoing reality, with dire consequences for our understanding of blackness and labor.<sup>2</sup>

I understand the West African settlement that has become Liberia in terms of marronage—not a colony at all, and nothing like freedom, but rather an annex within a slaveholding regime. Conceptualizing the case of Liberia in this way necessarily challenges the study of black labor across time and space to the extent that most such studies misrecognize slavery as primarily a regime of labor bondage.<sup>3</sup> While labor extraction is a significant feature of enslavement, it is inessential to the formation of slaveholding culture. In other words, slaveholders extracted surplus value from some slaves some of the time, while at other times, or with other slaves, used their human property for status and in any manner they desired, including resolving debts, establishing credit, sexual satisfaction, and controlling their white relatives and white laborers.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, slave trading specifically played an instrumental role in the accumulation of wealth and power that would be necessary for the development of European capitalism, nation-states, and imperial expansion.<sup>5</sup> The usefulness of labor studies for ascertaining aspects of black existence is not in question—quite the opposite: Tracking how black people work amid the struggle for human liberation elucidates that antiblack violence, not labor or the capitalist wage relation, is the basis for ontological status in what we might call the structure of humanity.<sup>6</sup> It is gratuitous violence against black people that is central to how power is structured across the whole of modern society, not simply between slaveholders and the enslaved and irrespective of whether this violence has economic utility or in fact undermines economic efficiency. The nature of black work can thus change from the chattel condition to its various roles within capitalist social formations today without qualitatively altering how black people suffer violence.<sup>7</sup> I spend approximately half of this essay exploring the theoretical dilemmas that slavery poses for assessing black labor and the historical occurrence of black “settlers” in West Africa. The second half of the essay addresses these theoretical questions to the case of Liberia. In the following section, I briefly elaborate on the “structure of humanity” that informs how I deal with the questions of blackness, indigeneity, settler colonialism, and labor in

subsequent sections. Finally, I discuss the case of Liberian colonization through the lens of marronage and how it subtends a critique of “black labor” and the matter of settler colonialism within the world that slaveholding has made in its image.

*The custom of slavery*

I know no national boundary where the Negro is concerned.  
The whole world is my province until Africa is free.

—Marcus Garvey<sup>8</sup>

The trade in black slaves created three components of what it means to be human in the modern world. First, racial slavery enacted a purely gratuitous form of violence on black people as a special class of human beings. Blackness as a product of a permanent structure of gratuitous violence departs profoundly from humanism’s presumption that subjects experience violence only contingently or instrumentally—meaning, violence is presumed to be a response to a transgression of some kind or to shifts in power relations. White people, and then later, all nonblack people, came to realize their humanity, no matter how immiserated, by means of their shared capacity to engage in anti-black violence with impunity.<sup>9</sup> Second, being structurally positioned by gratuitous violence signifies blackness as the defining marker of the non-human.<sup>10</sup> Third, the slave’s general dishonor and natal alienation constitute a culture of politics that rests on black fungibility—that is, the way in which black people enable society’s most pressing debates, and at the same time, are precluded from authorizing such deliberations about social life.<sup>11</sup>

Since the African slave trade has built a structure of humanity that rests on these three components, slavery is not a discrete historical event, nor is it primarily a political economy organizing the accumulation of surplus value. Rather, it is more accurate to understand slavery as a structure that transcends any particular historically bounded political economy and arranges the symbolic universe according to its dictates. The structural positionality of differently racialized human beings, therefore, calls for a different level of analysis from that addressed in questions about consciousness, experience, identity, performance, or representation.<sup>12</sup> This is one reason why black liberation and anticolonial movements, in their opposition to the psychic alienation of antiblackness and institutionalized methods of social control arrayed against black people, have not yet been able to approach the restoration of what has been defined *a priori* as an absence: black standing in the structure of humanity.

Structural analysis of this sort begets an understanding of the qualitatively different degrees of violence black people confront in the world of antiblackness as compared with various nonblack struggles. As the sole objectified nonhumans who enable the subjectivity and historical agency of human beings, black people stand in an antagonistic position vis-a-vis global civil society and its institutions

and subjects, whereas nonblacks face social conflicts and contradictions among each other.<sup>13</sup> Conflicts and contradictions are resolvable within the structure of humanity, while an antagonism is irremediable without altogether obliterating the structure. For instance, the US Civil War presented the historical paradox of a nation founded on and deeply invested in slavery waging a death-match with itself over *how* to conduct black captivity, *not* over whether or not it should continue. Indeed, the war revealed that the structure of humanity is capacious enough to encompass a conflict among its slaveholding class to the tune of over six hundred thousand of its sons dead. The ensuing change in the legal standing of black people, however, did not alter the structural position of blackness, for, while North-South was a social conflict, white-black is a structural antagonism.

Since the Civil War was never meant to fundamentally change the status of, in Anthony Farley's words, "white-over-black," even as the slaves were eventually manumitted, white people essentially slaughtered over half a million of their brothers for the right to control the manner of black social death.<sup>14</sup> Under the conditions of social death, whether in the ship's hold, on the plantation, or after emancipation, there is no reciprocal relation between black and nonblack, as blacks are positioned as "the things against which all other subjects take their bearing."<sup>15</sup> Since gratuitous violence turns the black body into a fungible object and destroys the possibility of relation, the only way that black people can appear to participate in the world alongside human beings is by way of a "structural adjustment" wherein blacks are permitted to act as if they possess ontological capacity—for example, as workers—in exchange for remaining within the agreed upon limits of knowledge and ethics.<sup>16</sup>

This analysis of the structure of humanity opens up the paradoxical reality that the paradigm of slavery, as distinct from its historically transient institutions, could exist without any individual being legally enslaved, and moreover, that slavery could reproduce itself through the very mechanisms ostensibly geared toward its eradication.<sup>17</sup> As Guyora Binder observes, abolition could not excise slavery without scraping every nook and cranny of slaveholding society—"in this sense, abolition of the custom of slavery threatened the legitimacy of custom itself."<sup>18</sup> As set forth here, this analysis of slavery's structuring of human relations suggests that black people, construed as beasts of burden regardless of whether they are enslaved or manumitted, may work but can never inhabit the category of "labor" reserved for those people construed as "human." We would not say that oxen "labor" in the fields, after all. Likewise, antiblackness troubles the proposal that emancipated slaves can ever be "settlers" or "colonists" anywhere in the time of slaveholding.

In this sense, Liberia is a template for excavating the antagonism holding together the world that slaveholding has constructed. Liberian "settlers" included both slaves and "freepersons" alike, exposing emancipation as shackled to humanity's foundational antagonism. Moreover, Liberia encompasses native Africans within this antagonism; all three parties endured slavery's conversion in Liberia. Within the scope of humanity as structured by racial slavery,

then, black existence in the modern world is properly understood in terms of different states of marronage. It is not that the American Colonization Society's (ACS) founding of Liberia was a white supremacist scam or that blacks correctly adduced that there would be no equality in America and chose the lesser of two evils—rather, it is both at once: These are the coerced “options” that antiblackness brooks, and that is as good as it gets in the world that slavery made. It is to this structure that the following analysis of settler colonialism and Liberia is accountable.

*The “Black Settler” and the “Black Native”*

How indeed would a living understanding come to those who have fled knowledge of the source? And those running back to the source in their new desperation, have they not more fear of death's horror than love of life?

—Ayi Kwei Armah<sup>19</sup>

Throughout this essay, I use “settler” and “native” under the same terms of erasure as “freedom” and “choice.” Yes, black emigres to Liberia were “settlers” in the empirical or sociological sense; and yes, Liberia as a nation-state was founded through the geo-political occupation of indigenous African lands and societies. The structural context in which colonization unfolded, however, strikes at the insignificance of this level of analysis. As one discrete manifestation of slavery's conversion between the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth, the question of Liberia looms: can black people ever be settlers, *positionally*? Does not settlement connote institutionality and structural power, capacities that black people, enslaved or “free,” are by definition precluded from possessing? If we are to make inroads on the travesties that settler colonialism has wrought, not to mention enslavement and genocide, is sociological description a necessary but insufficient step toward recognizing what blocks the way ahead? More to the point, perhaps, once the slave trade has indelibly transformed African society into the one place on the planet where people of any race (including black) can go to find the one kind of person known the world over to be eligible for enslavement, can a black person ever, truly, be “native” to Africa again? What would they be “native” to, exactly—the before or the after? The basis of the slave trade was that it jettisoned belonging, demolished origins, and foreclosed the honor of standing or return: What would it mean to be “native” to such a void?<sup>20</sup> Again, these questions are loaded to the problem of structural positionality; they are not meant to discount or diminish the level of lived experience, but merely to challenge how we think about it. I am not suggesting that the many diverse African cultures and peoples have disappeared, or that the slave trade and subsequent colonial and neo-colonial eras have rendered African indigeneity meaningless phenomenologically, experientially, or sociologically. Rather, I seek to pause analytically on slavery's ramifications in the ontological structure of humanity.

I have found settler colonial studies and indigenous studies to be insufficient for grappling with the world of antiblackness that slavery has created. A pointed gloss of the increasing literature that proposes to think settler colonialism and antiblackness together reveals two tendencies at this point. First, a small number of scholars appropriate the recent black studies scholarship on antiblackness and slavery's afterlife towards promulgating a settler colonial studies framework, which the black studies concepts were originally meant to disturb. Iyko Day's essay "Being or Nothingness: Indigeneity, Antiblackness, and Settler Colonial Critique" illustrates this approach.<sup>21</sup> Day argues that racial slavery (enslaved labor) and settler colonialism (expropriation of indigenous land) constitute a dialectical relation, not a causal or historical one in which the former created the conditions for the latter. Day demonstrates a rhetorical tactic recurrent in how some scholars are addressing the recent interventions from black studies: "To be clear, my intentions in this article are not to engage in an evaluation of who the greater victim is—even if this kind of evaluation is precisely the objective of the scholarship under discussion."<sup>22</sup> Much like how systemic critiques of power are dismissed as "conspiracy theories," Day's sentiment functions to silence black studies' analyses critical of the treatment of slavery and antiblackness in settler colonial studies and indigenous studies. Day affirms this censure in her conclusion: "By way of conclusion, I want to question the impetus for an Afro-pessimist or any other attempt to dismantle the validity of settler colonial critique by recourse to the issue of Native sovereignty...[Leading frameworks] have tended to relegate Indigeneity rather than blackness to the 'position of the unthought.'"<sup>23</sup> In other words, Day ends up doing precisely what she said she was not going to do—evaluate who is the greater victim—with the evident intention of quarantining the black studies intervention at hand by incorporating its terms into her settler colonial critique.

Secondly, there is an attempt to balance the analytics of slavery and settler colonialism. For Tiffany Lethabo King, to take one illustrative example of this approach, this balancing act means considering "what it would look like for Black Studies to take up issues of settler colonialism," and in so doing, King labors to elucidate how critical approaches to conquest and indigenous genocide have long been features of the examination of slavery in black studies, *rather than* working to subject both indigenous and settler colonial studies to the distended analysis that antiblackness compels.<sup>24</sup> Day and King's respective approaches to thinking antiblackness and settler colonialism together may be generative at a sociological level, but the potential for productive engagement is constrained by the reality that paradigms do not bend well. To the extent that paradigms, and the deeply drawn political desires they reflect, are hard to reconcile with each other, then either one paradigm must historically prevail over the other (Day), or the sincere effort to balance both cannot go beyond a merely descriptive capaciousness (King). In other words, the antagonism of the world forces a confrontation between two ways of explaining power that are fundamentally at odds with each other—one cannot have it both ways, slavery took that possibility off the table long ago.

Settler colonial and indigenous studies' impoverished grasp of slavery is evident in the work of some of its leading figures. Their work denotes aphasia with respect to black positionality, rendering key concepts in these fields of study problematic. Indigenous scholar Jodi Byrd characterizes African slaves as "arrivants," a term she appropriates from Caribbean poet Kamau Brathwaite at the expense of his meditation on the violence and terror of the Middle Passage.<sup>25</sup> In *The Arrivants*, Brathwaite defines New World blackness in relation to an irredeemable loss:

And on arrival  
 Tell our never-returning ancestors of old  
 That now they have left us  
 The land is unbearably dry  
 Let there be rain<sup>26</sup>

Byrd empties "arrivants" of the historical and ontological specificity underwriting Brathwaite's work in order to construct a native/non-native binary that repositions manumitted slaves alongside the many different kinds of people who currently benefit from and enact the power structure known as slavery—as in, "through the continued settling and colonizing of indigenous peoples' lands, histories, identities, and very lives that implicate all arrivants and settlers regardless of their own experiences of race, class, gender, colonial, and imperial oppressions."<sup>27</sup>

In his book *Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race*, Patrick Wolfe, doyen of settler colonial studies, insists that slavery is primarily a coerced labor regime that develops *through* colonialism, not as its *precondition*. Wolfe also relies heavily on white historiography and social science for understanding slavery and black struggle, leading to grim historical errors, such as the fallacious assertion that there has been no significant black marronage in North America relative to the rest of the hemisphere, and that the trade in African slaves was not fully established until the mid-to-late seventeenth century.<sup>28</sup> Contra Wolfe and the settler colonial studies framework, my argument that the West African settlement of Liberia is not a colony, but merely a mundane moment of marronage in the slaveholding regime's enterprise to convert slavery from a discrete institution into the structure that no longer requires its name, rests on labor's important but inessential place in slaveholding culture (a matter to which I will turn shortly) and on the reality that racial slavery paved the way for colonization.

In order to recognize the slave trade as the precondition for imperial expansion, we must consider that the practice by which blackness became synonymous with the commodified flesh of the slave begins at least as far back as the eighth century under Arab slave traders in the Indian Ocean.<sup>29</sup> The subsequent African slave trade in the Mediterranean region by both Arab and European traders, and down the West coast of Africa prior to the opening of the transatlantic trade routes, was instrumental both in producing the wealth

that would later make possible the European “voyages of discovery” to the so-called New World, beginning in the fifteenth century, *and* in congealing anti-blackness as the basis for the emergent modern world’s culture of politics. The sixteenth-century debates on the moral and theological legitimacy of enslaving indigenous Americans was premised on, and ended up reinforcing, the assumption that only Africans were quintessentially eligible for human commodification.<sup>30</sup> Despite his canonization amongst the ethnic studies and American studies cohort that comprise much of the settler colonial studies field, many readers of Cedric Robinson overlook his discussion of the Italian merchants driving the Mediterranean trade in black slaves. Thanks to this slave trade, the Genoese were in a position to loan erstwhile nation-states like Spain the capital to “discover” the New World. It is worth observing, finally, that both capitalism and the nation-state itself were barely nascent at this historical juncture, and as such, it is the case that both were produced *through* the antiblack violence of the slave trade.<sup>31</sup> The New World’s identification of blackness with the slave was then never destabilized, despite the presence of both free blacks and various nonblacks held in bondage for periods of time here and there.

In my analysis, identifying African Americans in Liberia as “settlers” would be akin to calling their own ancestors in North America “arrivants,” “immigrants,” or “conscripted laborers,” rather than enslaved Africans. The Middle Passage was a very specific sort of “arriving.” Is the return shipment of cargo from North Carolina to Liberia any less violent absent the blood in the water? The discussion of Liberia’s conversion of enslavement is meant to show that there are merely slaves encountering slaves-in-waiting on Africa’s west coast, including those who chose to become slave traders in order to forestall their own enslavement.<sup>32</sup>

### *Rethinking “Black Labor”*

Every free man or woman was a captive on reprieve since at any moment he or she could end up in the slaver’s nets.

— Adama Gueye<sup>33</sup>

Does a slave, the definitive person-displaced, displace the indigenous? A related question concerns the status of black labor: Does a black person who survives the plantation emerge imbued with the attributes of a human, such as the subject of labor? There is a vast critical Black Studies literature exploring at length the inadequacies of “labor” as a category of analysis for explaining black existence, the fallacy of organizing black liberation around a putatively working-class identity, and the practical and theoretical limitations of Marxism, which is all the more notable as it is informed by black people’s long-standing participation in a wide variety of workers’ unions and political organizations.<sup>34</sup> My aim in understanding the place of labor in slavery’s conversion is informed by this archive.



Understanding slavery primarily as forced labor misrecognizes the comprehensive dehumanization that defined enslavement, but it also sets up the assumption that the history of legal and social emancipation is more rupture from than continuity with the chattel condition, on account of the idea that black people were able to regain their standing in the human family through the work they performed. In order for this to be true, the perimeters of the plantation would have to mark the boundaries of antiblackness, and moreover, the plantation would have to be a value-producing space, wherein human objects create value and bank it towards a future when the political economy adjusts itself to their human potential and the plantation is replaced by a global marketplace wherein ex-slaves are now esteemed on precisely one of the very terms (human labor power) for which they were previously dehumanized (beasts of burden). Emancipation has not worked out this way. Indeed, abolition and independence have shown that the plantation was merely one institutionalization of the black hole in the world's symbolic schema, a symptom of the essential anti-value of blackness underwriting modernity writ large—no plantations necessary. Labor is a category of human agency and the slave is a human surrogate. The more blacks labor, the more whites become human—that is the parasitic relation of the surrogate to the human, and in the independence era, it also characterizes the parasitism between the post-colonial black nation-state and the neo-imperialist one in North America or Europe. The more blacks labor, the more the white man is recognized for his industriousness and productivity; the more impoverished and dependent the post-colony becomes, the more the empire claims its status as civilized and magnanimous.<sup>35</sup> Underdevelopment continues because the relations of dominance built by slavery continue.<sup>36</sup> There is no amount, or quality, of labor power that can overcome a condition of categorical degradation because that dehumanized position is the result of purely gratuitous violence. The point that I seek to sharpen here is that you *never* leave the plantation; there is only marronage everywhere. Shona Jackson's study of "creole indigeneity" in Guyana illustrates the problems that arise with an inadequate conception of slavery's onto-epistemic regime of violence. According to Jackson,

blacks become blacks within a set of circumstances that are the product of a Western imperative: the rise of capital and the modern colonial state. The rise of the modern state is coextensive with the teleology of black labor and being in the New World...Although blacks were conceived of as inhuman, their identities were always more allied with the state because of its configuration of labor. In other words, their inhumanity was always conceived *within* the state.<sup>37</sup>

On the contrary, the gratuitous violence of the slave trade was the condition of possibility for the modern state form—in other words, black non-humanity created the state, not the other way around. Jackson explains how modern black neo-colonial governments continue to define indigenous people as the state's antithetical element within, and if we understand this dynamic as a

feature of the custom of slavery, then what is still being sought after is black humanity—only now it is being prosecuted through the oppression of indigent peoples. In the end, black people can no sooner persecute their way to human standing than they can labor their way into humanity. As Walter Rodney observes about his native Guyana, the competition between Africans and Indians there is a deliberate construct of the capitalist order, and “this competition could only be resolved by breaking with that type of production which required that there should always be a large surplus of unemployed.”<sup>38</sup> Without eradicating this type of production, in the least, black labor power can only be an expression of slavery’s persistent institutionality.

Labor is, ultimately, an arbitrary category of analysis for black and indigent standing in the modern world. To borrow from Robinson, since the movement for black liberation long preceded Marxism, it is likely that Marx and Engels themselves were informed by such events, albeit poorly or in a fundamentally mistaken way. It thus becomes necessary, Robinson argues, to approach the categories of thought propounded by Marxism independent of its suppositions and within the penumbra of black struggle.<sup>39</sup> Robinson explains that Marxism was the product of bourgeois intellectuals projecting “the social forces of their own experiences back into their constructions of previous social orders.”<sup>40</sup> First, the emphasis on class as *the* social agency *par excellence* was an expression of the conceits of bourgeois historical consciousness.<sup>41</sup> Second, Marx’s schematic periodization focused only on one segment of the working classes, a political myopia that ignored the revolutionary praxis of slaves and the indigent.<sup>42</sup> Third, despite realizing that capitalism was always transnational, Marx and Engels formulated their theory of national culture in line more with the cultural significations of their time than with empirical reality.<sup>43</sup> In short, Robinson’s study shows that relying on Marxist theory of historical change will inevitably mobilize some of the key ordering terms of the society that needs dismantling.

In order to avoid such pitfalls, my approach to the case of Liberia tacks a different course through labor’s entanglement with slavery. Thinking structurally about the question of labor during slavery’s conversion, brings to the fore other ways of considering black struggle, whereby Liberia’s formation defines a site of marronage within the global regime of slaveholding. Although the Marxist construct of “class” was not applicable to the social relations in Africa across the many centuries during which enslavement transformed the human cultural geography of the continent prior to colonial occupation, the contradictions between African elites and the masses were instrumental in the former’s procurement of slaves to trade for European commodities.<sup>44</sup> The slave trade, which continued on the African continent for decades after the transatlantic commerce in slaves had been abolished, and which produced more slaves in the nineteenth century in Africa than in the Americas, was the original zero-sum cultural and political economy wherein “one could gain only at the expense of one’s neighbors,” and even commoners were compelled to defensively pillage each other to prevent themselves from being sold into

slavery.<sup>45</sup> The coastal regions, including the area that became Liberia, were beset most severely by the toxic social upheaval of the slave trade, in large part because some of the Africans captured for the purpose of sale to the slave traders remained in the service of their African captors for greater or lesser periods, and sometimes forever.<sup>46</sup> A brand-new forced labor regime, thus, arose in the coastal regions, based on the social conflicts internal to African society that drove the procurement of slaves, sowing the seeds for social stratification into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The instructive category of analysis, however, is not labor power but rather antiblack violence.

### *Marronage, Here and There*

There are no tears  
we have no friends  
this is the word

—Jayne Cortez<sup>47</sup>

Although it must be said that blacks have envisioned freedom through a return to Africa, as lore has it, since the first Africans arrived on the shores of the New World, saw what lay in store for them, and promptly flew back home across the ocean, the debate continues as to how to accomplish such a feat.<sup>48</sup> For black leaders in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, African emigration was a hotly contested proposition, with a significant movement by some to advance “an independent emancipatory colonizationist agenda” apart from the machinations of the ACS, the institution that actively advanced the relocation of New World Africans to the Liberia colony beginning in 1816.<sup>49</sup> Nineteenth-century abolitionist David Walker, for one, was vehemently opposed to the ACS’s plans for relocating blacks to Liberia. He saw it as a cover for extending, not undoing, black subjection. Walker arrived in Boston from the Carolinas, where he likely was involved in the Denmark Vesey-led slave rebellion in Charleston in 1822.<sup>50</sup> For Walker, there was little point distinguishing between the North and the South, let alone North America or Africa, arguing that “freedom” anywhere, be it Massachusetts or Liberia, meant little in the midst of a culture of slaveholding. While the reader will readily recognize the repetition of this theme throughout black history, most people fail to perceive it as the mark of marronage.<sup>51</sup>

When emigration is understood as marronage, it makes sense that black insurrectionists featured prominently on both sides of the ACS debate in the late nineteenth century. Walker’s contemporary, Martin R. Delaney, for instance, felt that emigration was the necessary alternative to an untenable life for black people in North America. Delaney’s support for emigration comes with an extraordinary transcript of agitation against slaveholding culture. Prior to the Civil War, he served as co-editor with Frederick Douglass (who did not support African emigration) of the abolitionist newspaper *North Star*, facilitated John Brown’s preparations for the Harper’s Ferry raid in

1859, and led an exploratory party of New World Africans to the Niger River region of West Africa. In addition to these activities, Delaney's 1852 pamphlet *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States, Politically Considered*; his novel about slave rebellion, *Blake*, written as a riposte to Harriett Beecher Stowe's pathological depiction of black docility in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; and his later service in the Civil War and in the postwar Freedman's Bureau left record of a nascent black nationalism, of the intransigence of antiblackness, and of the need for black self-determination—all told, a decidedly sober early analysis of the forces arrayed against black life in the modern era. Above all else, however, it is the ceaseless itinerary of the maroon.

We can discern emigration as marronage when black “freepersons” in North America sought freedom from “freedom,” but instead found Africa. For black emigration to Africa to be marronage, moreover, is to say that Africa is not African; or more to the point, because of the slave trade, Africa stopped being *for* black people. This is why when the newly founded Republic of Haiti sought to recruit North American black immigrants during the 1820s, it was rejected by US authorities.<sup>52</sup> Although Haiti's emigration agents found numerous interested black “freepersons,” and a couple hundred African Americans did settle there, the circulation of fugitive blacks, enslaved and free, around the Caribbean region had already been a well-known factor in the lead-up to the successful Haitian revolt and the ACS was fearful of facilitating these connections.<sup>53</sup> Contrary to the situation it was cultivating in West Africa, the ACS did not like the idea of black relocation to an independent and sovereign black nation, just offshore from American plantations, where slaveholding society would not easily control black life. The fact that President Lincoln was a prominent supporter of colonization prior to *and* after emancipation neither counters nor complicates this assessment of the threat that slaveholding society perceived in the form of the independent black state of Haiti.<sup>54</sup> As Joan Dayan explains, slavery sets up two kinds of narratives: those that would create the servile body, and those that would promise salvation.<sup>55</sup> Colonization shows how both narratives are in fact the same story—although in terms of salvation, perhaps Lincoln appreciated more than most the existential question thrown down by the Haitian revolutionaries: “retreat stolidly from slavery or risk losing everything—including one's life, as in Hispaniola.”<sup>56</sup> Likewise, almost a century later, when Marcus Garvey attempted to connect his United Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League (UNIA-ACL) movement with Liberia, he too was blocked. By this time, a colonization agenda as typified by the ACS had waned and Pan-Africanism had become a cogent ideology and was enjoying a rich political life on both sides of the Atlantic, north and south; in this context, Garvey's plans were threatening to the Western powers in which the Liberia project was now ensconced. The secret surveillance agencies of Britain, France, and the United States had been monitoring Garvey's activities for some time, working to thwart the spread of Pan-Africanism in the colonies.

The president of Liberia eventually succumbed to pressure to reverse his prior decision permitting Garvey to make Liberia the African headquarters of the UNIA-ACL.<sup>57</sup>

Marronage is not a place and it is not a static condition; rather, it indexes the horror of the surrounding society, and as such, every moment of escape is measured by the defining terror. Slavery persists; or, the culture of antiblackness that is the hallmark of slaveholding persists in structuring the world long after emancipation. It is not difficult to trace the chaos of modern-day Liberia back to the ACS and to the slave trade as the essential fount of terror for the present-day nation-state. As Jeremy Levitt explains, the appearance of the American settler community was not a new development for the region, but simply the latest in a succession of migrations into the area.<sup>58</sup> In other words, the upheaval the ACS fomented with the establishment of Liberia was a continuation of the political deconstruction of African society at work for almost four centuries by that point. This fact impacts our conception of “indigenous” and should inform how we understand the kind of power manifesting across the centuries in the form of present-day black nation-states. The indigenous Africans present prior to the arrival of the “Americos” (as the Liberian “settlers” were called initially) were not entirely “traditional” in the sense that indigeneity or “native” usually implies.<sup>59</sup> They were native to the continent, but for nearly fifteen generations they had been consumers of a foreign culture destructive of pre-existing practices and patterns of thought.<sup>60</sup>

African metaphysics began transmuting prior to the Atlantic slave trade due to the incursion of Islam and then the impact of the foreign societies throughout the Mediterranean region, Arabia, Persia, Mesopotamia, India, and even the Chinese Empire that used enslaved Africans. The manner of this transmutation is noteworthy for the questions I am raising here regarding “native” and “traditional.” Although various forms of bondage and service have long been practiced throughout Africa, there is no record of captives being permanently cast out of social relations and deprived of human belonging and what the Western tradition would come to call “liberty.”<sup>61</sup> The spread of Islam within Africa, however, led to cultural changes that contributed to Africa’s vulnerability to the increased demand for black slaves. Cheikh Anta Diop notes that while Islam mostly propagated “peacefully” from white Berber traders to certain black kings and notables, the introduction of Muslim culture brought a renunciation of the traditional African past.<sup>62</sup> Non-African religion, thus, prepared the ground culturally for the slave trade and its accompanying religiously motivated conflicts.<sup>63</sup> By the nineteenth century, as the slave trade slowly gave way to formal colonialism, African societies had been traumatically turned inside out across almost seventeen centuries.

The point I aim to underscore here is how cultural strength and knowledge can mitigate against external encroachments, but when these traditions are weakened, let alone transmuted in sympathy with the external forces themselves (Arab slave traders, in this case), then violence more easily finds its way in until a people do not need to be held at gunpoint—they hold the weapon themselves.

By the time the ACS established Liberia, Africans had overhauled the social basis of their societies, in a deadly march from which black people have yet to recover. As Ayi Kwei Armah writes, “the time will come when those multitudes starting out on the road of death must meet predecessors returning scalded from the white taste of death.”<sup>64</sup> It was inevitable and by design that Liberian “settlers” seeking marronage from “freedom” in North America—their “white taste of death”—would profoundly misrecognize their African counterparts. A former Virginia slave, Peyton Skipwith, wrote his former master after his arrival in Africa: “It is something strange to think these people of Africa are called our ancestors. In my present thinking if we have any ancestors they could not have been like these hostile tribes ... for you may try and distill that principle and belief in them and do all you can for them and they still will be your enemy.”<sup>65</sup> “Doing all you can for them” included acquiring their land, cutting their forests, killing their game, imposing Christianity, and interfering with the slave trade that was by then enmeshed with virtually all African economic activity.

The “natives,” in turn, saw the “settlers” in terms of access to Western commodities: They conducted small nocturnal raids on storehouses and fought to continue their slave trading. Indeed, the “settlers” found that bartering with the “natives” was a far more expeditious way of making a living than farming: Their correspondence to their former slave masters is replete with requests for commodities with which to trade. “Settlers” were thus not newly inserted within capitalism’s commodification of African life as “free labor” in a colonial setting. Rather, in the persons of the “natives” with whom they bartered, they confronted both the effects of their own longstanding objectification as black people and their ongoing subjection to social relations from which they remained structurally excised but were nonetheless forced to interface with economically. This state of affairs is precisely what is meant by enslavement’s “natal alienation” of the slave from all manner of social ties: severed from both ascending and descending generations, positioned within a matrix of human objectification, the slave is forever a “genealogical isolate” in the world of slaveholding.<sup>66</sup> The “native” and the “settler” cannot recognize each other as they are, let alone understand that they are products of the same gratuitous violence; instead, they perceive each other through the antiblack world’s antagonistic relationship to black people, as problems to attack, rather than as people produced through a shared problem. The antagonism places black people outside of human relations; but since “native” and “settler” are human positions, when black people claim them as their own (as in the case of at least some of the black emigrants to Liberia, like Skipwith noted above), they do so in bad faith, which inevitably leads them to also misrecognize other black people.

The violence between “settlers” and “natives” embodies slavery’s conversion—and in this sense, Liberia was *the* advanced state of enslavement in that it redrew the frontier of the antiblack world. Slave masters in North America created “schools of freedom” wherein they anointed a select number of slaves

to be emancipated to Africa; but first, they put them through a training program where they had to prove their fitness for independence. Some of these “freedom schools” lasted years, and most slaves remained enslaved and never “graduated.”<sup>67</sup> The slaveholding class was training their “elite” slaves in the arts of self-subsistence, intolerance, and hierarchy—lessons, of course, they had endured in spades throughout their lives on the plantations. In this sense, for many of these ex-slaves, emancipation amounted to an education in slavery’s conversion, a pedagogy for antiblack liberty. Bonded to their former masters whom they regarded as their “fathers,” the “settlers” expertly performed the basic mythology of colonization: Christian mission to bring light to the darkness; mighty struggles against heathen savages; perseverance borne of industriousness and morality to overcome great hardship; indebtedness to the father who receives letters penned with endearments that recount how his “children” engaged in their own colonial struggle for survival at civilization’s threshold on the dark continent; and so on.<sup>68</sup> Black “settlers” on the newly redrawn antiblack frontier performing an institutional authority they could never embody, but only borrow, on loan from the slaveholding class—and they wielded this borrowed institutionality against the very people from whom, and by whom, they were once and forever stolen.<sup>69</sup>

Emancipating their slaves to Liberia satisfied many slaveholders’ concerns with how to discipline black labor and preserve the social hierarchy. Ex-slaves in North America threatened the status quo by moving about, refusing to enter contracts with former slaveholders, subsisting outside wage labor relations as long as their wants diverged from the demands of commodity production, and generally sought seams of marronage beyond white terror and control. The ad hoc “schools of freedom” created by owners on their plantations were but one example among many from the period in which the slaveholding class sought to levy a discourse of discipline and consent on ex-slaves, mostly by “fashioning obligation” and constructing “the burdened individuality of the responsible and encumbered freedperson.”<sup>70</sup> As Saidiya Hartman explains, “debt was at the center of a moral economy of submission and servitude” and contributed to the production of peonage.<sup>71</sup>

The “settler,” likewise, arrived in Liberia bound to a past fashioned by slavery’s conversion, and in turn, sought to recapitulate black servitude in the “native.” The duties and obligations of “freedom” were strong themes in Liberian “settler” discourse as well. “Settlers” referred to the African captives that they liberated from slave traders as “recaptives,” signifying a proprietary burden for overseeing the passage towards freedom at some later date. The “recaptives,” however, expected liberty to accompany the removal of their shackles in short order: in a letter dated February 11, 1833, “settler” James C. Minor observed to his former master John Minor that the “recaptives” proved to be “somewhat presumptuous at times.”<sup>72</sup> Minor seemed to chafe at the *lack* of gratitude exhibited by those Africans who narrowly escaped the Middle Passage, but who found themselves captives of those whose immediate ancestors had not eluded its grasp. In another letter, Minor described efforts by

the Brazilian government to secure in Liberia “a tract of land to colonize the worn out and unruly Brazilian slaves—a people that we do not want among us at all.”<sup>73</sup> “Settler” sentiments such as these must be read in the context of manumission into another state of unfreedom—a relation of force, not of consent or duty.

The case of the Captain Isaac Ross estate of Jefferson County, Mississippi, underscores the violence of manumission under the auspices of the ACS. Ross died in 1837 and his will provided that his slaves be given the choice of being “freed” and sent to Liberia or being sold along with the remainder of his estate. Ross’s heirs contested the will on the grounds that slaves could not make choices. The ACS brought suit to force compliance with the will; a protracted legal battle ensued; and ten years after Ross’ death, the ACS prevailed in court and the Ross plantation slaves were manumitted to Liberia in 1848.<sup>74</sup> The ACS’s victory in this case contrasts sharply with the outcome of *Bailey v. Poindexter’s Executor*, an almost identical case where John Lewis Poindexter’s will stipulated that, upon his death, his slaves should have “their choice of being emancipated or sold publicly.”<sup>75</sup> Poindexter actually died in 1835, two years before Ross, but the Poindexter case wound its way through the courts for twenty years before the Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals found that slaves have no legal capacity to choose to be free and ordered the Poindexter slaves to become the property of his heirs. The only difference between the two cases is that the latter did not feature manumission to Liberia. It seems likely that the impact of the ACS as the overseer of the Ross slaves’ conversion to Liberian “settlers” was a factor in the earlier case.

### Conclusion

It was not the organization of production...but the organization of oppression which formed the primary basis for revolutionary activity.

—Cedric Robinson<sup>76</sup>

It follows in due course that integration between “settlers” and “natives” never occurred for the entire nineteenth century. Levitt points out that the majority of indigenous villages remained independent as the republic did not have the power to conquer or annex them.<sup>77</sup> What remains obscured in this observation, however, is that it is precisely the wealth that they acquired through the slave trade and their role in the global economy as agents of primitive accumulation on their own people that allowed “natives” to resist subordination to the Liberian state and its Western backers—who were, of course, also the ultimate consumers of the slaves procured by the “natives.” This is slavery’s conversion on lag time: Throughout the slave trade, notes Rodney, African rulers retained political sovereignty as long as they were adept in selling out their neighbors and the masses.<sup>78</sup>



From the early twentieth century, the ACS collaborated with the Firestone Rubber Plantations Company for the promotion of industrial schooling for blacks in Liberia. The ACS adopted the model of industrial education popularized by Booker T. Washington at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. ACS would, in fact, name its Liberian school the Booker Washington Agricultural and Industrial Institute (BWI). The BWI was funded by all of the prestigious philanthropic foundations of the day: Carnegie, Mellon, Morgan, Rockefeller, as well as the Phelps-Stokes Fund.<sup>79</sup> Industrial schooling was at the vanguard of the fight against Reconstruction-era black-led schools, and in Africa, at the turn of the twentieth-century, it was also seen by colonial supporters and universities alike as the antidote to the spread of Garveyism.<sup>80</sup> The twofold purpose of the BWI, then, was to train Africans for work on the Firestone plantation, and in so doing, to dissipate the incipient solidarity among the African masses that was a foot on the continent against the longstanding exploitation by colonial and African elites alike. The school worked to reproduce the social fragmentation spawned by the slave trade over many centuries by employing “settlers” as faculty and only enrolling “natives” as students. As a result, BWI was plagued throughout its existence by widespread sabotage and resistance by students and non-student Africans alike, including high rates of absenteeism, refusal to complete work assignments, and theft of school equipment.<sup>81</sup> The major strike against the Firestone Company in 1966 included numerous BWI students, who in turn, shut down the school in 1974 in protest over what they saw as the Institute’s practice of conscripting them into slave labor on the rubber plantation.<sup>82</sup> The BWI stands as one of the caretakers for slavery’s conversion in Liberia, overseeing its long transition to black-led antiblackness. Again, labor struggle is epiphenomenal here to antiblack violence.

The “settler-native” dichotomy was reflected in the ruling arrangement of Liberia, with “settlers” constituting the ruling class until the 1980 coup when rule became more mixed. After 1989, this dichotomy was no longer the basis by which to distinguish combatants, with ethnicity depoliticized and reconfigured as a result of the civil war.<sup>83</sup> As long as the primary commodity integrating Africa to the world system was human bodies, there was no game in fighting for control over state power; that would only come with slavery’s conversion. The methodology of enslavement (not merely the discrete institution of slaveholding or the commerce in human chattel) is stamped across post-independence Africa today, underscoring that neither national identity nor labor power can rectify the position that black people continue to suffer in the structure of humanity. Certainly, the Liberian case shows that assuming state power or entering the wage relation does not have anything to do with reclaiming what the slave trade destroyed. As the death march continues through internal fragmentation, as is the pattern in postcolonial “black-ruled” states, we can now see that internecine warfare is one sign of slavery’s conversion; that the slave trade should be regarded as proto-colonial; and that genocide almost always appears as suicide in its later stages.

## NOTES

1. Settler colonial discourse addresses itself to contexts as varied as Palestine, Southern Africa, Australia and New Zealand, Latin America, and North America. Given Cedric Robinson's reminder that "Europe" began as a colonized peninsular outpost of the Asian continent, with its much older and more advanced Asiatic and Arabic civilizations, and that European civilization developed through internal colonial processes of invasion, settlement, expropriation, and racial hierarchy, Robin D. G. Kelley, in turn, suggests that we should approach the study of European development within a settler colonial context. See Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000) and *An Anthropology of Marxism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); and Robin D. G. Kelley, "The Rest of Us: Rethinking Settler and Native," *American Quarterly* 69 (2017): 267–76. Indigenous studies largely refers to the study of peoples indigenous to the Americas and Oceania, but not to Africa or to the many Asian societies that also bear histories of conquest, invasion, occupation, and settlement.

2. In this essay, I use "blackness" to refer to that position, and to all human beings and social spaces associated with this position, that represents humanity's negation within the onto-epistemic order created through the slave trade and exported by Western slaveholding societies to the world writ large, as if it were the natural and timeless order of human existence. "Antiblackness," for purposes of this essay, indexes the force of this onto-epistemic structure at work through various kinds of violence. In the context of this essay, "racial slavery," "slavery," "slaveholding," and the "slave trade" are more or less synonymous and used interchangeably as referents for the theft of black people from Africa, and for the onto-epistemic regime for which this heist continues to serve as base. I am well aware of the risks of treating slavery as transhistorical, as fixed over time, and acknowledge that there have been many different slave trades throughout human history, many of which did not involve racialism. This essay is part of a larger endeavor, however, to analyze the racialization of slavery in structural and ontological, not merely historical and contingent, terms. Although the racialization of slavery through time was unstable and in flux, the eventual equation of the slave with blackness in modern world civilization is a function of African enslavement across space and time.

3. The literature on slavery is too vast to cite here. Beginning with the 1944 publication of Eric Williams' *Capitalism and Slavery*, however, there has been ongoing debate as to the place of slavery in the historical development of capitalism. This debate itself is testament to how capitalism and the various intellectual cultures arising from it such as Marxism have set out questions of political economy, labor exploitation, and alienation as the guiding terms for the study of human suffering. For a critical perspective, see David Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Much recent scholarship has reemphasized the centrality of slavery for capitalist development. See Seth Rockman's overview, "Slavery and Capitalism," *Journal of the Civil War Era* online (<https://www.journalofthecivilwarera.org/forum-the-future-of-civil-war-era-studies/the-future-of-civil-war-era-studies-slavery-and-capitalism/>.) Other notable examples of historiographical and social science approaches to historical and contemporary world problems that rely upon framing slavery in narrowly economic or forced labor terms are Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492–1800* (London: Verso, 1997); Julia O'Connell Davidson, *Modern Slavery: The Margins of Freedom* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); and Saskia Sassen, *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014).

4. See Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York, 2014); Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America* (New York, 1997).

5. See Ian Baucom, *Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005); and Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 101–20.

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

7. Recent critical scholarship in Black Studies demonstrates that gratuitous antiblack violence continues despite changes to the slavocracy and to the political economy of capitalism, leading scholars to note that manumission did not mark an end to racial slavery, but rather

its transition into what Hartman has termed an “afterlife.” See, for example, Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2008); Guyora Binder, “The Slavery of Emancipation,” *Cardozo Law Review* 16 (1996): 2063–102; Douglas A. Blackmon, *Slavery By Another Name: The Reenslavement of African Americans from the Civil War to World War II* (New York: Anchor, 2008); and Tryon P. Woods, *Blackhood Against the Police Power: Punishment and Disavowal in the “Post-Racial” Era* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2019).

8. John Henrik Clarke (ed.), with Amy Jacques Garvey, *Marcus Garvey and the Vision of Africa* (New York: Vintage, 1974), xxix.

9. On the importance of this impunity for antiblack solidarity and national belonging, see Steve Martinot, *Rule of Racialization: Class, Identity, Governance* (Philadelphia, 2002) and Martinot and Jared Sexton, “The Avant-Garde of White Supremacy,” *Social Identities* 9 (2003): 169–81.

10. Ronald A. T. Judy, *(Dis)forming the American Canon: African-Arabic Slave Narrative and the Vernacular* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 20–21; Wilderson, *Red, White & Black*, 40.

11. On the general dishonor and natal alienation of the slave, see Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

12. Most approaches to the process of race-making privilege phenomenology over structure. I rather understand “race” as the aftereffect of violence; in other words, racism creates “race,” not the other way around. See P. Khalil Saucier and Tryon P. Woods, “Racial Optimism and the Drag of Thymotics,” in *Conceptual Aphasia in Black: Displacing Racial Formation*, Saucier and Woods, eds. (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016): 1–34.

13. Wilderson, *Red, White & Black*, 35–53. According to Wilderson, the native is positioned in ways similar to, and yet also divergent from, black people. The present essay is a modest contribution towards exploring these connections and disconnections between blackness and indigeneity, but my treatment of this issue is far from exhaustive.

14. Anthony P. Farley, “Perfecting Slavery,” *Loyola University Chicago Law Journal* 36 (2005): 225–56; Binder, “The Slavery of Emancipation,” 2068; Bryan Wagner, *Disturbing the Peace: Black Culture and the Police Power after Slavery* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press: Duke University Press, 2009), 1.

15. Jared Sexton and Huey Copeland, “Raw Life: An Introduction,” *qui parle* 13 (2003): 53.

16. Wilderson, *Red, White & Black*, 38.

17. Binder, “The Slavery of Emancipation,” 2064.

18. Binder, “The Slavery of Emancipation,” 2067.

19. Ayi Kwei Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons* (Penguin, Senegal, 2000), xix.

20. See, for example, Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*.

21. Iyko Day, “Being or Nothingness: Indigeneity, Antiracism, and Settler Colonial Critique,” *Critical Ethnic Studies* 1 (2015): 102–21.

22. Day, “Being or Nothingness,” 102–3.

23. *Ibid.*, 117–18.

24. Tiffany Lethabo King, “New World Grammars: The ‘Unthought’ Black Discourses of Conquest,” *Theory & Event* 19 (2016), n.p. Also see King’s forthcoming book *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019).

25. Jodi A. Byrd, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), xix.

26. Edward Kamau Brathwaite, “Imehri,” *Savacou* 2 (1970): 38; “Rebellion” in *The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy—Rites of Passage, Islands, Masks* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 209; Ayo Kehinde, “Edward Brathwaite’s *The Arrivants* and the Trope of Cultural Searching,” *The Journal of Pan-African Studies* 1 (2007): 184.

27. Byrd, *The Transit of Empire*, 21.

28. Patrick Wolfe, *Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race* (London: Verso, 2016), 63–67. On black marronage in North America, see, for example, Sylviane A. Diouf, *Slavery’s Exiles: The Story of the American Maroons* (New York: New York University Press, 2016); and Daniel O. Sayers, *A Desolate Place for a Defiant People: The Archaeology of Maroons, Indigenous Americans, and Enslaved Laborers in the Great Dismal Swamp* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2016).

29. See, for example, R. W. Beachey, *The Slave Trade of Eastern Africa* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976); Paul Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in*

*Africa*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Ronald Segal, *Islam's Black Slaves: The Other Black Diaspora* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2001).

30. See Judy, *(Dis)forming the American Canon*; and Saidiya V. Hartman and Frank B. Wilderson, III, "The Position of the Unthought," *qui parle* 13 (2003): 183–201.

31. See Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 71–166.

32. The erasure of black positionality makes it possible for settler colonial studies and indigenous studies to argue that enslaved Africans, and their black descendants, displace indigenous peoples from land, sovereignty, and standing. See, for example, J. Kehaulani Kauanui, "Tracing Historical Specificity: Race and the Colonial Politics of (In)Capacity," *American Quarterly* 69 (2017): 257–65. Black participation in indigenous genocide no more displaces the ontology of antiblackness installed by slavery than Native American participation in the African slave trade overrides the structural context of indigenous genocide and settler colonialism. Jared Sexton has addressed this problem in indigenous and settler colonial studies in "The Vel of Slavery: Tracking the Figure of the Unsovereign," *Critical Sociology* 42 (2016): 583–97.

33. Adama Gueye, "The Impact of the Slave Trade on Cayor and Baol: Mutations in Habitat and Land Occupancy," in *Fighting the Slave Trade: West African Strategies*, Sylviane A. Diouf (ed.). (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2003), 53.

34. This point is supported by an immense body of scholarship and political interventions that cannot be adequately cited here. For starters, one might consider the following selections: Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley, CA: California University Press, 1995); Dhoruba bin Wahad et al., *Still Black, Still Strong: Survivors of the War Against Black Revolutionaries* (New York: Semiotexte, 1993); James and Grace Lee Boggs, *Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974); W. E. B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction in America* (New York: Atheneum, 1979); Amy Jacques Garvey, *Garvey and Garveyism* (Baltimore, MD: Black Classic, 2014); Gerald Horne, *White Supremacy Confronted: U.S. Imperialism and Anti-Communism vs. The Liberation of Southern Africa from Rhodes to Mandela* (New York: International Publishers, 2019).

35. The World Bank and the various regional development banks are sources of this discourse today. See, for example, recent World Bank programs "supporting Guyana's reform efforts": <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/489761528122701470/Guyana-First-Programmatic-Financial-and-Fiscal-Stability-Development-Policy-Credit-Project>.

36. On underdevelopment, see Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London, Washington: Howard University Press, 2018); and Wolfgang Sachs, ed., *The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power* (London: Zed Books, 2009).

37. Shona N. Jackson, *Creole Indigeneity: Between Myth and Nation in the Caribbean* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 92.

38. Rodney, *Walter Rodney Speaks: The Making of an African Intellectual* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1990), 77.

39. Robinson, *An Anthropology of Marxism*, 1–2.

40. *Ibid.*, 27.

41. *Ibid.*, 111.

42. *Ibid.*, 15.

43. *Ibid.*, 12–13.

44. Rodney, *A History of the Upper Guinea Coast, 1545 to 1800* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970), 258.

45. Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, 187; Patrick Manning, *Slavery and African Life* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 124 (as cited in Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, 246 note 94). Hartman also cites Martin Klein and Paul Lovejoy, "Slavery in West Africa," in *The Uncommon Market*, ed. Henry A. Gemery and Jan. S. Hogendorn (New York: Academic Press, 1979).

46. Rodney, *A History*, 265.

47. Jayne Cortez, *Festivals and Funerals* (New York: Phrase Text, 1971), 9–11, as cited in Ira Dworkin, *Congo Love Song: African American Culture and the Crisis of the Colonial State* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 247.

48. Toni Cade Bambara, for one, carries on this African oral tradition about the ancestors who could fly in *The Salt Eaters* (New York, 1992) and in her posthumous *Deep Sightings and Rescue Missions: Fiction, Essays, and Conversations* (New York: 1996).

49. Dworkin, *Congo Love Song*, 81.

50. Stefan M. Wheelock asserts that “in all likelihood” Walker was involved with Vesey. See Wheelock, *Barbaric Culture and Black Critique: Black Antislavery Writers, Religion, and the Slaveholding Atlantic* (Charlottesville, VA: The University of Virginia Press, 2016), 104.

51. Perhaps the most well-known version of this principle comes from Martin Luther King Jr.’s April 16, 1963 *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*: “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

52. Claude A. Clegg, III, *The Price of Liberty: African Americans and the Making of Liberia* (Chapel Hill, NC: North Carolina University Press, 2004), 44.

53. Julius S. Scott, *The Common Wind: Afro-American Currents in the Age of the Haitian Revolution* (London: Verso, 2018), 10, 15, 44, 131, 141; Gerald Horne, *Confronting Black Jacobins: The United States, the Haitian Revolution, and the Origins of the Dominican Republic* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2015), 12.

54. See Phillip W. Magness and Sebastian N. Page, *Colonization After Emancipation: Lincoln and the Movement for Black Settlement* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, MO, 2011).

55. Joan Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), 205.

56. Horne, *Confronting Black Jacobins*, 15.

57. Clarke, “Years of Triumph and Tragedy, 1920–1925,” in *Marcus Garvey and the Vision of Africa*, ed. Clarke, with Amy Jacques Garvey (New York: Vintage, 1974), 104.

58. Jeremy I. Levitt, *The Evolution of Deadly Conflict in Liberia: From “Paternalitarianism” to State Collapse* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2005), 25.

59. Levitt, *The Evolution*, 20.

60. See Joseph E. Inikori, *Forced Migration: The Impact of the Export Slave Trade on African Societies* (London: Hutchinson, 1982).

61. Rodney, *A History*, 105–8.

62. Cheikh Anta Diop, *Precolonial Black Africa* (Chicago, 1987), 162–75.

63. Rodney, *A History*, 236–37.

64. Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons*, xvii–xviii.

65. Bell I. Wiley (ed.), *Slaves No More: Letters from Liberia 1833–1869* (Lexington, VA: University Press of Kentucky, 1980), 4.

66. Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 38, 5.

67. Wiley, *Slaves No More*, 34.

68. *Slaves No More*, throughout. It should be noted that Wiley’s editorialship of the letters from Liberia reveals his own fondness for slaveholding culture, if not for slavery itself. His racism should, in the least, remind readers of *Slaves No More* that these were select voices from Liberia, not necessarily definitive ones. There is no analysis of slavery in Wiley’s text, so it remains beyond him that the letters he curates (and the curation itself) are an indictment of slaveholding pathology, not its vindication, as he intimates.

69. On “borrowed institutionality,” see Wilderson, *Red, Black & White*; and “Social Death and Narrative Aporia in *Twelve Years a Slave*,” *Black Camera* 7 (2015): 134–49.

70. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 125, 116–17.

71. *Ibid.*, 131.

72. *Slaves No More*, 16.

73. *Ibid.*, 28.

74. *Ibid.*, 155.

75. Quoted in Colin Dayan, *The Law is a White Dog: How Legal Rituals Make and Unmake Persons* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 141.

76. Robinson, *Black Movements in America* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 134.

77. Levitt, *Evolution*, 3.

78. Rodney, *A History*, 253.

79. The topic of industrial education, Booker T. Washington, BWI, Firestone, colonialism, and the philanthropies warrant an extended discussion that space constraints do not permit here. It is worth noting, however, the role of philanthropic foundations in forwarding political agendas through specific knowledge formation, while crowding out others. Money for research and education today is being spent hand over fist on “implicit bias theory.” Philip Atiba Goff is one of the main figures in the study and dissemination of implicit bias theory and has received funding from a long list of private and state funders, including law enforcement. Goff may well be the twenty-first century’s Booker T. Washington. For an analysis of implicit bias theory,

see Tryon P. Woods, "The Implicit Bias of Implicit Bias Theory," *Drexel Law Review* 10 (2018): 631–72.

80. Donald Spivey, *The Politics of Miseducation: The Booker Washington Institute of Liberia 1929–1984* (Lexington, VA, 1986), 5, 13. Marcus Garvey's project for Pan-African solidarity was informed by his early travels throughout the Americas encountering black labor subjection at every stop. Garvey recounted how the mutilated bodies of black fruit plantation workers in Costa Rica were common sights in the rivers and bush, hacked to death for their meager week's pay; in Panama, where black workers building the Canal were dying by the thousands; and more of the same in Nicaragua, Honduras, Colombia, Venezuela, and Ecuador. Amy Jacques Garvey claims that Garveyism was one of the key factors that set in motion African independence in the mid-twentieth century, paving the way for all of the local leaders who emerged after Garvey's demise. See Amy Jacques Garvey, *Garvey and Garveyism* (Baltimore: Black Classic, 2014), 6–7; and John Henrik Clarke (ed.), "Commentary," in *Marcus Garvey and the Vision of Africa*, (New York: Vintage, 1974), 372.

81. See Spivey, *The Politics of Miseducation*, 42, 45–65.

82. Spivey, *The Politics of Miseducation*, 151.

83. Levitt, *Evolution*, 7.