

Historically White Universities and Plantation Politics: Anti-Blackness and Higher Education in the Black Lives Matter Era

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Abstract

In this article, the authors argue that U.S. colleges and universities must grapple with persistent engagements of Black bodies as property. Engaging the research and scholarship on Black faculty, staff, and students, we explain how theorizations of settler colonialism and anti-Blackness (re)interpret the arrangement between historically White universities and Black people. The authors contend that a particular political agenda that engages the Black body as property, not merely concerns for disproportionality and inequality, is deeply embedded in institutional policy and practice. The article concludes with a vision for what awareness of anti-Black settler colonialism means for U.S. higher education.

Keywords

race, identity, postsecondary education, programs, public higher education, activism, social

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Introduction

In his groundbreaking text, *The Racial Contract*, Charles Mills (1997) argues that race is the foundation on which Western society's sociopolitical organization is built. The perfunctory agreement that establishes expectations for moral agents in a civil society—the social contract—is predicated on an understanding that White is human, and conversely non-Whites are equivalent to nonhumans, and are therefore excluded from participation in civil society. Mills defines this precursory exclusion as the racial contract. For Western society's social contract to thrive, for Whites to be subjects of the contract, non-Whites must serve as objects of the contract. Fundamental to the maintenance of U.S. society is an ontological relationship with the non-White body as property. This social arrangement was solidified through the establishment of the settler colonial state.

Drawing on Mills's (1997) analytical contributions, the authors recognize the present national unrest that has coalesced and found direction in the Black Lives Matter Movement as primarily a collective resistance to the racial contract. Embedded in notions of positionality is an ontoepistemological perception that one's life is object (Black) in relation to subject (White). Campus unrest that mirrors the national climate of resistance can be understood as ideological tributaries of the Black Lives Matter Movement, inasmuch as they reflect the Movement's commitment to exposing the nation's insistence on situating Black bodies as objects void of humanity. Black student, faculty, and staff experiences that have ignited these protests reflect higher education's investment in maintaining an institutional and social relationship of ownership with people of color and Black people in particular. Therefore, the experiences of Black people on historically White campuses are best understood as "continuities of colonial preoccupations" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1989, p. 2).

The history of U.S. higher education reflects a deep commitment to Black degradation as fundamental to the maintenance of a colonial order (Dumas, 2016; King, 2014; Wilder, 2013). Recognizing these facts, what does it mean to be a human in contemporary higher education? U.S. colleges and universities must grapple with its participation in the process by which humanity is constructed within a settler colonial state. Settler colonialism is a practice of direct global domination, which involves the subjugation of one people to another (Fanon, 1961). The term settler colonialism is frequently used to describe the European settlements of North America, Australia, New Zealand, Algeria, and Brazil. Settler colonialism describes a process in which colonialists emigrate(d) with the express purposes of building a new community through territorial occupation (Russell, 2001). Eliminating Indigenous people,

pilfering land, and creating new wealth systems from the built and rebuilt environment are fundamental organizing principles of the settler colonial project (Wolfe, 2006). European settlers colonized the United States vis-à-vis a number of terrorist acts on aboriginal inhabitants including disease, broken treaties, and outright massacre (Mills, 1997). Settler colonization was a process driven by capitalist impulses, which also sought to institute settler political, cultural, and economic hegemony, managed vis-à-vis a network of relations between “metropolitan officials” (Veracini, 2010).

While humanization and dehumanization were more clearly articulated in the settler colonial state, the same distinctions are continually reinforced today, albeit by less direct and more ontoepistemological avenues (Baszile, 2006; King, 2014). The academic model is still essentially a colonial one. For instance, several scholarly publications argue that what U.S. colleges and universities count as knowledge devalues Black scholars and scholarly products, particularly those that center silenced voices, name systems of oppression, and endorse resistant and revolutionary practices (Dancy & Jean-Marie, 2014; Garcia, 2000; Morris, 2015; Wood & Turner, 2008). National rhetoric may have shifted to publicly disavow discrimination and injustice; however, the lack of shift in foundational values and design exposes the propagandized nature of “liberty and justice for all.”

In this article, we theorize anti-Blackness as constitutive to the U.S. settler colonial state, a tool and driving strategy in the racial contract, and essential postcolonial legacy. This article’s focus on historically White institutions situates the analysis on the institutional type foundational to settler colonial color-caste systems. We explain how theorizations of colonialism and anti-Blackness (re)interpret the arrangement between these universities, in particular, and Black bodies. Three dimensions of anti-Blackness manifest within higher education support the analysis: (a) interpretations of Black labor through colonial arrangements; (b) relationship between labor, ownership, and education; and (c) institutionalization of Black suffering. Each reveals the settler colonial project scholars are “hooded into,” which is fundamentally committed to a sociopolitical vision of domination via anti-Blackness. By theorizing a system of organization, as opposed to a limited focus on the practices of individuals, we acknowledge the robustness of enslavement and freedom; a robustness that can practice epistemic murder of Black humanity, while supporting celebrations of multiculturalism (Dumas, 2016). An exploration of broader systems offers a better lens through which to consider common understandings of justice work as actually reinforcing of the settler colonial order. This understanding of the academy also provides room for recognition of anti-Blackness embodied by non-White bodies.

Theoretical Foundations: Settler Colonialism and Anti-Blackness

Upon their arrival, the settler colonialists raised questions about whether all were members of the same human species or “family of man” (Omi & Winant, 2010, p. 14). Europeans used interpretations of Judeo-Christian doctrine to devalue Indigenous humanity and assume spiritual void (Omi & Winant, 2010). This interpretation drove the philosophy behind who should be free, who should own, who should be eliminated, and who should be enslaved (Omi & Winant, 2010). The Europeans distinguished human beings from “others,” or “humanoids,” through seizing land, the denial of political rights, the introduction of indentured servitude, enslavement, other forms of coercive labor, and complete extermination.

While the U.S. settler colony saw a period of White indentured servitude, Blackness became a formal marker of chattel enslavement. Servants considered White experienced limited loss of liberty, but people considered Black were enslaved for life. While servant status could not descend to offspring, Black children took the enslaved status of the mother. In *Capitalism and Slavery*, Williams (1994) elaborates that skin color and phenotype differences made it easier to justify and rationalize Black enslavement, “to exact the mechanical obedience of a plough-ox or a cart-horse” (p. 19), and to subjugate Black people using the various oppressive tools that made “slave labor” possible. The enslavement of Black people must also be understood in the context of capitalist motivations. Williams (1944) adds, “. . . the colonies needed labor and resorted to Negro labor because it was cheapest and best” (pp. 19-20).

Mills (1997) discusses the emergent color-caste system and its legacies in terms of the racial contract, or the set of relationships and conditions that must occur to maintain White supremacy, or the White settler colonial state. All Whites are beneficiaries of the contract, though some Whites are not signatories to it. At the center of this contract are agreements that define a White class as superior and various subsets of human beings as “non-White” and therefore a different, inferior status. The general purpose of the contract is always the differential privileging of White people as a group among non-Whites and the exploitation of their bodies, land, and resources.

Anti-Blackness is essential to the colonial aim and a central concern and proposition within Afro-pessimism (Dumas, 2016). Afro-pessimism issues a critique on Black domination as unresolvable through “reforms” and only called into question with “absolute violence” (Fanon, 1961, p. 37). Afro-pessimism theorizes that Black people exist in a structurally antagonistic

relationship with humanity (Wilderson, 2010). The Black cannot be human and is not simply an “other,” but is other than human. Hence, matters of exploitation and alienation are not central ways of knowing “The Black” as those positionalities preserve humanness. Rather, Blackness is predicated on “modalities of accumulation and fungibility” (the collection and manageability of property or things). In conversation with postcolonialism’s theorization of colonialism as uncured (Ashcroft et al., 1989), anti-Blackness names the ways in which the technologies and imaginations that allow a social recognition of the humanness of others systematically excludes this possibility for Black people (Dumas, 2016). The violence of the Middle Passage and the slave estate have not ended; rather, the violence “[recomposes] and [reenacts] their horrors upon each succeeding generation of Blacks” (Wilderson, 2010, p. 3). This condition of Black “life” means Jim Crow, the ghetto, the prison industrial complex, and school-to-prison pipelines comprise a continuum of structural violence.

Anti-Blackness is reproduced through two specific institutional arrangements that enable Black subjugation (enslavements): the extraction of labor from the Black body without engaging the body as a laborer, but as property, and the mechanisms (e.g., stereotypical narratives) that institutions use to police, control, imprison, and kill. U.S. institutions do not structure work as an organic principle for “a slave” (Wilderson, 2010). To be “free,” to be a worker, laborer, or any combination of the two, was negatively defined in relation to the “slave” (R.L., 2013). Following emancipation, Black bodies were still situated outside the constraints of wage labor. Coercive and enforced arrangements that institutions used to assert consent assumed “the slave” was still in need of labor discipline. During the period of U.S. industrialization in the 19th century, labor contracts with an impoverished, submissive, Black working class maintained slave-owning labor management techniques (Hartman, 1997). Hence, industries and factories sustain lines of continuity from the plantation system.

Anti-Blackness holds that the Black is not a relational being but is always-already property. The *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (1856) decision is clear: Property status does not change simply because one’s “owner” relinquishes property rights. Black people remain property whether or not an individual owns them. Justice Daniel’s concurring opinion that Black people remain property also reflects an understanding of Africa as ontologically colonized or always-already the property of Europe, which erases Africa as a land of nations colonized by Europe. As Smith (2014) notes, the narrative that Africa is always the property of Europe consequently constructs Black people in the United States and their struggles against the colonial state as always the colonizer’s internal property.

Settler colonial constructions of labor and property are essential to understanding anti-Black systems as irrational. The rationales in *Johnson v. McIntosh* (1823) and *Lowe v. United States* (1902) established Indigenous peoples as “incompetent,” “savages,” and nondiscoverers of themselves who did not constitute workers, hence they could not create property, nor acquire a domicile. It is here that Black people’s existential reality poses a fundamental contradiction for the settler colonial state (Smith, 2014). The justification for colonialism was predicated upon an understanding that settlers labored but Indigenous people did not. Not only does this decision erase Indigenous labor, it also erases Black labor by defining Whites as the laborers at the same time they relied on an unseen, unrecognized Black labor. Accordingly, the decisions in both court cases suggest that Black people’s work cannot constitute labor under settler colonialism because only labor can create property. The labor of Black people, who were already defined as property, cannot therefore create property for Black people (Smith, 2014).

Anti-Blackness as a framework also extends beyond the construction of the Black body as property. The notion of Black fungibility describes the ways in which settler colonialists use Black bodies as symbols, signifiers, and means to settle space and expand territories. The space-making practices of settler colonialism require the production of the Black body as a fungible (exchangeable or replaceable) form of property. In *Scenes of Subjection*, Saidiya Hartman (1997) argues that the enslaved embody the abstract “interchangeability and replaceability” that is endemic to the commodity (p. 21). Furthermore, what Hartman names as “figurative capacities of blackness,” allows the Settler-Master to conceptualize Blackness as the ultimate sign for expansion and unending space within the symbolic economy of settlement (Hartman, 1997, p. 7). Blackness is much more than labor within both slavery’s and settler colonialism’s imaginaries; it signals opportunities for domination.

Black fungibility also manifests violence in the positionalities of Black and White people (Hartman, 1997). As Wilderson (2010) notes, the spectacles of the plantation “slave” parties and weddings, musical performances of the enslaved for “masters,” scenes of “intimacy” and “seduction” between Black women and White men cannot be disentangled from the “gratuitousness of violence” that structures Black suffering (p. 46). From discursive acts of “love” or “respect” to whippings and rapes, White engagement of the captive Black body is always sutured to a structural suffering in which Black people’s speech and mobility are incapacitated. Because the Black body is fungible, or exchangeable and adaptable, the engagement can appear loving, even humane, but the White psyche still engages the Black body as property. We engage this idea more deeply in a theorization of colleges and universities through anti-Black settler colonial frames.

Sites of Anti-Blackness: Colleges and Universities in the Settler Colonial State

U.S. colleges and universities embed the legacies of the anti-Black settler colonial state (Anderson, 1988; Thelin, 2004). In fact, the explicit function of the university was to operate within (and in service to) the new colonial establishment (Thelin, 2004). Created to educate the offspring of colonizers, the colonial university acted as a preserver of social inequality by only serving White “elite” males (Thelin, 2004). In addition to preparing ministers, lawyers, doctors, and “men of affairs,” the colonial university also functioned to educate the developing nation’s White male descendants about the methods of controlling classes (Palmieri, 1987; Solomon, 1985). The colony envisioned White women as domestics and reproducers who both supplied and served generations of White male colonialists (Palmieri, 1987). The colony dictated the relationship of the enslaved and indigenous to the colonial university, which was consistent with state doctrine. In *Ebony and Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America’s Universities*, Wilder (2013) dispels the notion that there were no Black people in colonial colleges. In fact, enslaved Black people outnumbered faculty, administrators, and trustees at a number of Ivy League colleges (Wilder, 2013). Black people erected the buildings, cooked the food, and cleaned the dormitories and yet were not understood as laborers, but as property. Colonizers advocated (from college campus podiums) for the inhumane treatment of Black people everywhere, and violence was a common experience for the enslaved on college campuses. Colonial college trustees (many of whom were ministers) tortured and murdered enslaved Black men, women, and children in the most sadistic ways.

College presidents, many of whom were “slave masters,” used enslaved Black people as personal attendants and as house servants to maintain the president’s mansion. Harvard President Increase Mather (from 1692 to 1701) used an enslaved man “gifted” to him by his son Cotton Mather, to run errands for the college. Harvard President Benjamin Wadsworth (1725-1737) brought an enslaved man named Titus, who lived with his family, to the college and “bought a Negro Wench” two days before arriving on campus. Benjamin Franklin, founder of the College of Philadelphia; the first eight presidents of the College of New Jersey (Princeton); and Georgetown presidents Fathers Louis William Valentin DuBourg (1796-1798) and Stephen L. Dubuisson (1825-1826), all accumulated enslaved Black people for their own personal service during their tenures as the top college administrator (Wilder, 2013).

Inducing the humiliation and suffering of Black people for sport comprises the early student life in the colonial colleges. These practices were

necessary to mark White subjecthood and the separation between Black people and Whites. For example, several college students seeking recreation at Harvard (who were all White and male) forced the intoxication of an enslaved Black man almost unto death. One of these men was John Hancock, future governor and signer of the Declaration of Independence and the rest became ministers, doctors, and lawyers (Wilder, 2013). At one of the Yale campuses, the record shows that the early students raped Black women so frequently that the college removed them from the students' presence except the cook whom the students also terrorized. At Williams College, students forced a Black man to smash his own head into wooden boards and barrels. On other early college campuses, college students shot at Black enslaved children to satisfy their boredom when out of class (Wilder, 2013). Enslaved people at the University of North Carolina were often subjected to "pranks" that, in one case in 1811, involved students running wild while attacking their Black servants. Black people endured whippings, dismemberments, brandings, sexual assault, and secret sales that disrupted family units—all on the college campus (Wilder, 2013). This resulted in emotional trauma, leading some Black people to commit suicide. The next section details studies that expose recomposed and reenacted colonial preoccupations.

Colonial Preoccupations, Black Labor, and U.S. Universities

Several scholars have explored the differentiated labor expectations placed on Black academics (Brown, 2012; Burgess, 1997; Gregory, 1999; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001). These expectations come in the form of increased mentoring, advising, and committee work, among other demands. As previously mentioned, there is clear evidence and discussion of "discriminatory" practice. Only a few scholars have connected these discrepancies to colonial design (Dancy, 2014; Edwards, 2010, 2013; Wagner, Acker, & Mayuzumi, 2008; Wane, Jagire, & Murad, 2013). Recognizing anti-Black settler colonialism reveals not simply a trend of exclusionary practice, but also a performance of inclusion that reasserts the colonial order and engages the Black body as property.

The labor expectations placed on Black women in academia are not just comparatively excessive, but they are also reflective of domestic servitude and eroticism (Austin, 1995; Edwards, 2014; Harley, 2007). Black women academics are expected to attend to the caregiving needs of not only students of color, but also White students and faculty. They are also regularly called upon to attend to the failures of Whites, or "clean up behind," through interim positions, promotion following scandal, and committee leadership. These colonial labors are often uncompensated and unseen. When Black women

insist on the recognition of their labor or resist accommodating White student mediocrity, they are summarily punished as defiant Sapphires (Austin, 1995).¹ Black women's theoretical contributions are also rarely acknowledged. When they are, it is within very narrowly defined curricular parameters, and is often experienced by White audiences as provocative and momentarily titillating, but not central to U.S. higher education mission and purpose (Edwards, 2014; Fasching-Varner, 2009).

Black male bodies on college campuses are seen as primarily generators of income and properties of entertainment (Dancy, 2012; Rhoden, 2006; R.L., 2013). The testimonies of Black male non-student-athletes attest to the academy's rejection of Black men as intellectual and unwelcome in the classroom. Furthermore, Black males across historically White campuses lament the regular assumption that their admission is predicated on their athletic prowess (Dancy, 2012; Harper, 2015; Palmer, Wood, Dancy, & Strayhorn, 2014; Strayhorn, 2008). For a Black man to exist within higher education as a thinking being is oxymoronic in the White psyche. A comparative analysis of political commentary regarding legacy, athletic, and affirmative action admissions confirms the academy's commitment to White entitlement, Black male bodies as commodity, and the rejection of Black intellect (Charles, Fischer, Mooney, & Massey, 2009). Perhaps nowhere are these concepts more evident than in revenue-generating athletics.

Black Athletes, Labor, and Policing

Institutions of higher education, borrowing from Hartman's (1997) idea of allegory, adapt or mutate tools of domination in service to their colonial preoccupations. Racial integration as a sociological project requires enforcement to maintain Black subjections. For instance, the enforcement of collegiate desegregation (Brown, 1999) results in the continued destabilization of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs; Samuels, 2004). Although indirectly, Brown's (2002) work on transdemographic enrollments suggests that historically White collegiate expansions accumulated Black athletes following desegregation, while larger federal and state practices reappropriated HBCU settings. Desegregation was pivotal in establishing the "labor contract" in which Black male athletes became the "workhorses" for historically White athletic departments across the nation (Hawkins, 2013, p. 116). Several scholars and thinkers have argued that Black male labor in particular has elevated historically White intercollegiate athletics to its commercial level today (Hawkins, 2013; Rhoden, 2006).

While scholars and media pundits alike have disdained a "slave" discourse to underscore historically White institutional accumulation of Black bodies

(Branch, 2011; Touré, 2011), their conception of enslavement primarily structures slavery as a historical economic arrangement that requires a primary focus on “exploitation” and “alienation” today. However, the ability to accumulate and exchange bodies is a primary marker of slavery (not exploitation and alienation). Furthermore, the slavery institution is not strictly economic but social. More specifically, slavery as a system of power relations may undergird forced labor or render people socially dead (void of relationality). Consequently, because we argue that Black athlete bodies are accumulated and fungible within historically White institutions, a Master/Slave model lays bare the ways in which, slavery is “cathedralized,” or memorialized, in the current moment (Wilderson, 2010, p. 18). This framework advances the word slavery from a condition that could subject anyone, to a word “which reconfigures the African body into Black flesh” (Wilderson, 2010, p. 18). Slavery is therefore not only the experience of Africans and African Americans in chattel enslavement but also the continued banishment from ontology. The Black is (still) the slave and other than human.

The public stance that contends athletes “choose participation in intercollegiate athletics” and hence “consent” to this kind of arrangement (Mitchell, 2014) functions as a kind of “post-racial” construction that does not account for various techniques of coercion utilized against Black people to enforce “consent” for free labor contracts (R.L, 2013). Because chattel enslavement informs the principles of labor discipline (techniques of coercion), Black people’s “emancipation” still relied on industry tools of compulsion used against unemployed, vagrants, and beggars (Hartman, 1997, p. 18). As settler colonial institutions developed with the institution of slavery, slave owner labor management techniques transferred to collegiate industrialists (administrators).

Under this arrangement, Black people are set apart from Whites and other “races” through the insistent narrative that Black people pursue sport labor as a way out of poverty. For instance, Eitle and Eitle’s (2002) research on the effects of family socioeconomic status, structure (two-parent vs. single-parent household), and cultural and educational resources found that Black families are far more likely than similarly situated White families to goad athlete aspirations onto Black boys. Consequently, inadequate access to educational opportunities further coerces families to pursue sport as an escape from the problems of pauperism. One study on “athletic identity” suggests that many Black boys immerse themselves in the sports world with a narrow focus on becoming professional athletes at the expense of developing other identities (Johnson & Migliaccio, 2009). Another study found that participants perceived family, role models, community, and the media as accentuating athletic achievement over academic achievement (Beamon, 2010). These study

findings require a grappling with Black mass representation on sports teams as a function of labor coercion, not coincidence, and certainly not “consent” or “choice.”

Police power is essential to the construction and maintenance of the labor contract, which requires differential sets of social and material realities between Blacks and Whites, whether rich or poor (Hartman, 1997). Patrolling was a duty and obligation for all Whites, whether they were enslavers of Black humans or not. This arrangement undergirded settler colonial constructions of the Black body as always-already property. What is regarded more generally as police power responds to a formalized structure. However, “white people are not simply ‘protected’ by the police, they are the police” (Wilderson, 2010, p. 82). One tool Whites use to police Black mobility is public perception narratives about compensating college athletes for labor. In March 2015, 65% of U.S. Americans did not think college athletes in top men’s football and basketball programs should be paid (Wallsten, Nteta, & McCarthy, 2015). However, these attitudes vary by race. In every survey to date, Black people are far more likely to support paying college athletes when compared with Whites. In a recent study, 53% of Black/African American people backed paying college athletes—more than double the support expressed by Whites (22%; CCES, 2014). According to National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA; 2014) data, Black people constitute the majority of players in college football and basketball and are the two sports most U.S. Americans associate with college athletics. A recent study found that “negative views about Black people” was the single most important predictor of White opposition of paying college athletes (Wallsten et al., 2017). These findings align with decades of research and studies documenting White reproduction of practices that socially ostracize Black people (DuBois, 1903; Fryer & Levitt, 2004; Hartman, 1997; Hill, 2016; Mills, 1997; Morris, 2016; Peffley & Hurwitz, 2002). Accordingly, when Whites believe a policy mainly helps Black people, their opinions are colored by their feelings toward Black people as a group. Social ostracization (in this case via “public opinion”) conjoins with the institutional extraction of Black athlete labor. Here, inclusion within anti-Black settler colonial institutions of higher education is not simply the experience of discrimination, but also primarily White insistence on the practice of enslavement that implicates matters of labor and ownership.

Labor, Ownership, and Education

Settler colonialism requires an explicit connection between land and citizenship. The original arbiter of full participation in the colonial political

economy was not White manhood. Several White men in the colony lived as indentured servants, share croppers, or otherwise dispossessed. Their agency within the colonial arrangement was barely above the Black enslaved (Williams, 1944). The lynchpin to citizenship was land, or property ownership. This connection between land ownership and citizenship created a fundamental link between ownership and humanity. This link continues to bear much consequence for Black education today.

Education funding at the K-12 level is largely determined by property taxes. Children who live in neighborhoods with higher property values benefit from the resources available at well-funded schools. Children who live in poorer neighborhoods endure underresourcing, high teacher turnover, overcrowded classrooms, and a milieu of additional challenges to their educational access. Unsurprisingly, neighborhood school funding is highly racialized and historical. Steering potential Black homeowners to areas with lower property values, government collusion in the obstruction of Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) home loans dispensed to Black veterans, and “White flight” have all worked to consolidate large segments of the Black population to impoverished neighborhoods and subsequently underresourced schools. All of these realities work to concretize notions of mattering and humanity. These realities are even more intriguing when one considers Anderson’s (1988) assertion that universal public education, particularly in regard to iterations forged in the U.S. South, is a Black idea. When analyzed through the lens of organizational or political theory, the challenges of public education can appear unfortunate, possibly evidence of the ills of capitalism, if one were a Marxist.² However, through the lens of anti-Blackness, these regulatory failures can be understood as White supremacy’s response to Black agency with reassertions and reminders that “The Black” is “slave.”

Public education, the institution designed to prepare students for higher education, is predicated on anti-Blackness. If one is not an owner or the progeny of an owner, one is not entitled to an adequate education. Public education funding is a direct model of plantation politics. The maintenance of a public education system dependent on property taxes institutionalizes a social arrangement of dispossession. It also serves as an anti-Black filter for higher education. Refusal on the part of higher education to substantively respond to the failures of public education reflects its complicity in anti-Blackness.

Institutionalization of Black Suffering

Relegating Black people to labor that models colonial arrangements or reasserts linkages between ownership and humanity perpetuates a system of anti-Blackness, but in some ways, these arrangements can be understood as

resultant. One of the defining principles of anti-Blackness is the negation of Black humanity by way of violence. Dumas (2016) argues,

Black people exist in a structurally antagonistic relationship with [white frames of] humanity . . . antiblackness marks an irreconcilability between the Black and any sense of social or cultural regard . . . [antiblackness necessitates] utter contempt for, and acceptance of violence against the Black. (p. 13)

White humanity is dependent on its ability to harm Black life. To avoid violence against Black people would place White humanity in question because, in an anti-Black polity, White humanity is predicated on Black inhumanity. Black enslavement was maintained by physical, sexual, and psychological brutality. Similarly, the reign of Jim Crow was established through the terrorization of Black communities.

Within higher education, there are similar configurations of anti-Black violence. While physical insecurity is less evident, psychological and economic vulnerabilities persist. Microaggressions, tokenism, impostorship, and racial battle fatigue attest to the psychological torment regularly visited upon Black humanity in higher education (Dancy, 2014; Dancy & Hotchkins, 2017; Dancy & Jean-Marie, 2014; Smith, 2014). Contemporary Black student protest against the culture of White antagonism on college campuses has been largely in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter Movement (Johnston, 2015). The continued defunding of HBCUs reflects a sordid commitment to the elimination of Black enterprise. It also undergirds the relationship of trauma between Blackness and the educational system, a relationship HBCUs play a protective role in fighting against. In many ways, HBCUs are the contemporary manifestation of Underground Railroad safe houses.³ While not beyond a critique of settler colonial strivings, they have also protected and supported Black students along their journey to educational and economic freedom amid a dangerous environment. Defunding HBCUs exposes the state's commitment to Black vulnerability.

In these settler colonial relationships, Black resistance and despair is understood as not only a nuisance but also a public display of Black suffering for the consumption of a White audience (Alexander, 1995). As discussed earlier, while Whiteness may understand "the Black" as having sentient capacity (ability to perceive or feel), there is not relational capacity (ability to interact; Wilderson, 2010). Thus, Black suffering merely decorates the landscape of White humanity. It cannot be responded to with understanding and empathy. Instead it is Black full intellectual participation in higher education that is illegible, accumulated (collected),

exchangeable, and openly vulnerable (Anzaldúa, 1981; Wilderson, 2010). Black academics are not subalterns but the property (slaves) of their colleagues (Wilderson, 2010).

Policy responses to anti-Black violence reveal higher education's commitment to the maintenance of Black trauma. The standard institutional approach is to establish protocol for racial bias incidents (Hughes, 2013). If the campus is progressive, the particular incident (such as a noose displayed in a quad, Black-face party, or fraternity song celebrating the lynching of Black men) will be swiftly addressed and repudiated. Punishment will be summarily delivered to the individuals clearly responsible, and the campus will publicly disavow the incident. For several reasons, this process supports anti-Blackness. As Hughes (2013) argues, higher education's insistence on characterizing anti-Black violence as incidental or anomalous functionally erases the history of trauma experienced by Black bodies on White campuses (Wilder, 2013). It frames White perpetrators as foolish and ignorant, possibly even racists, but not as terrorists enacting violence against Black life. In addition, the *modus operandi* prioritizes the public image of the White institution not the assault on Black humanity.

Higher Education Practice and Radical Possibilities

The article began by framing the Black Lives Matter Movement and its ideological manifestations on college campuses as a collective recognition of the racial contract. While the authors stand by this contention, the demands and expectations of those in the Movement also reflect an assumption of possibility, and hopeful naiveté. Protestors not only instinctively recognize the racial contract, but they also see the benefits of the social contract being conferred upon its White subjects. Ongoing protests, such as their historical counterparts, namely, the Civil Rights and Abolitionist Movements, are essentially demands for the right to partake as (White) subjects in the social contract. Protestors are demanding the right to be seen as human by the subjects of the contract. Unfortunately, such a vision may ultimately prove futile. What is clear through this article's examination of anti-Blackness, settler colonialism, and Black existence intercollegiate athletics is the necessity of non-White objects for the social contract to persist. There is virtually no way for the social order to continue without White subjects maintaining a transactional relationship to Black flesh. In light of these revelations, it is necessary to (re) imagine a future that stands outside of the bounds of the social contract, outside of the bounds of settler colonial logics.

What would it mean for Black people to abandon a hope in ultimately partaking in the White social contract? What would it mean for Black people

to refuse to exist as object or subject in settler colonial arrangements? The present article concludes by challenging the reader to consider the possibilities of Black divestment. A project that abandons attempts at liberation that do not take seriously the centrality of the racial contract and anti-Blackness to the current social order would constitute radical self-determination.

At the conclusion of her expansive volume critiquing White ideology, Marimba Ani (1994) offers an important charge to the African descended reader. She states,

Now that we have broken the power of their ideology, we must leave them and direct our energies toward the recreation of cultural alternatives informed by ancestral visions of a future that celebrates our Africaness and encourages the best of the human spirit. (Ani, 1994, p. 570)

Radical self-determination requires both a departure from the White social contract, and directed investment in the creation of Black counterintellectual and economic spaces. The only way to establish Black human agency is to exit the system that insists upon Black dehumanization. Black counterintellectual and economic spaces would prioritize the survival and edification of all Black people. These spaces would center African ways of knowing and being in the world, as well as an exploration of the theoretical and technological legacies of African descended peoples. A substantive and unapologetic critique of settler colonial logics predicated on anti-Blackness will also be present. These are just initial imaginations of an emancipated Black future. The principal characteristics of Black divestment and radical self-determination are the severing of all sociopolitical relationships with Whiteness for the protection of Black humanity. This seems a small price to pay for freedom.

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Notes

1. Austin (1995) describes the Sapphire stereotype as “tough, domineering, emasculating, strident, and shrill” (p. 426). This particular caricature of Black femininity is based on the character with the same name from the long-running 1940s and 1950s Black sitcom *Amos & Andy*.

2. Marxism is a critique of capitalism and the economic arrangement of private ownership, specifically as it supports the maintenance of a ruling or “bourgeoisie” class. It critiques economic relations that alienate the laborer, “proletariat,” from the product of her labor. Marx argues that this ongoing alienation will eventually incite a revolution that results in the establishment of a socialist and ultimately communist state, where ownership of the means of production is socially as opposed to privately held (see Marx & Engels, 2005).
3. The Underground Railroad was a secret network of routes and private homes used by enslaved Black peoples during the 19th century to escape “slave-states” primarily in the U.S. South to “free-states” located in the Northeast region of the United States and Canada.

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