

# Introduction

## TOWARD A RELATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS OF RACE

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In April 1963, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. composed his celebrated “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” a retort to a group of Alabama clergymen who had publicly denounced the nonviolent civil disobedience that Dr. King had helped bring to the city. These clergymen, Dr. King explained, had dismissed the civil rights protests as the work of “outsiders coming in,” an unwarranted intrusion into local affairs. Dr. King rejected the premise of this charge and the firm boundaries on social and political worlds that it inscribed. It was, he countered, the “inter-related structure of reality” that compelled him to leave his home in Atlanta to join the demonstrations in Birmingham. “Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”<sup>1</sup> Four years later, Dr. King would expand the geographic reach of this “inescapable network of mutuality,” condemning the U.S. war in Vietnam and linking the fate of the civil rights movement in the United States to the freedom and self-determination of the Vietnamese people (see figure 0.1). Particularized struggles against domination and exploitation—from the cotton fields of the Mississippi Delta to the coal mines of Appalachia to the hollowed-out villages of Southeast Asia—could not be understood in isolation. They necessitated instead “allegiances and loyalties which are broader and deeper than nationalism.”<sup>2</sup>

Dr. King’s understanding of the “interrelatedness of all communities and states” frames the political and intellectual bearing of this volume. Scholarship across the humanities and social sciences now commonly conceptualizes race as a social construction shaped in specific historical, social, and political contexts. The dominant paradigm of this work examines the experiences, struggles, and characteristics of subordinated groups (e.g., African Americans, Native Americans, Latino/as, and Asian Americans) and their standing within white supremacist and colonial structures of power.



**FIGURE 0.1.** Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. marches arm in arm with (from left) Dr. Benjamin Spock, Wallace Black Elk, and Monsignor Rice, at the Spring Mobilization to End the War in Vietnam, New York City, April 15, 1967. The march took place a few days after Dr. King's "Beyond Vietnam" speech, in which he laid out the connection between the struggle for self-determination for all peoples, the fight for civil rights, and the war's toll on America's poor.

Groups are studied primarily in relationship to whiteness and through a white/nonwhite binary. By contrast, the essays brought together in *Relational Formations of Race* consider the racialization and formation of subordinated groups in relation to one another. These studies conceptualize racialization as a dynamic and interactive process; group-based racial constructions are formed in relation not only to whiteness but also to other devalued and marginalized groups. By studying race relationally, and through a shared field of meaning and power, scholars can make visible the connections among such subordinated groups and the logic that underpins the forms of inclusion and dispossession they face.

For example, Chinese immigrant communities on the West Coast in the late nineteenth century shared some distinct characteristics of class organization, diasporic identifications, and language, family, and gender formation. But from the moment they arrived in the United States in significant numbers, they entered a field of racialization that was shaped by many different

social forces: abolitionist politics and worldviews; the consolidation of white political identity in relation to both capital and nonwhite labor; the changing relationship of Mexico and its economy to the United States; the military conquest of Native lands and the assertion of Native sovereignties; and imperial expansion across the Pacific, including in the Philippines, Hawai‘i, and Alaska. Thus, to understand how Chinese migrants became “excludable” subjects ineligible for citizenship, one must also attend to the formation of other racialized groups.

The collection of scholarship brought together in this volume helps to define, map, and formulate a set of theoretical and methodological touchstones for the relational study of race. The volume builds on a growing body of work—generated from American studies, ethnic studies, history, sociology, cultural studies, and literary studies—that emphasizes the relational dimensions of race making in the United States. The Further Reading section at the end of this volume captures a measure of this growing scholarship.

Following Dr. King, scholars employ a relational understanding of race to trace the “inter-related structure of reality” in ways that exceed prevailing theoretical and disciplinary boundaries. The modes of exploitation, control, and hierarchy developed in the last five hundred years could not have been secured through a single or unitary regime of racialization. For example, the logics undergirding Black racialization (the “one drop” rule) and Native racialization (“blood quantum”) in the United States are in one sense antithetical. But as Patrick Wolfe and Kimberley TallBear have demonstrated, the conjoined imperatives of labor exploitation and territorial expansion make these modes not only fully compatible but also mutually dependent. While the legacies of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century racial science and contemporary practices of enumeration condition us to think of racial categories as discrete, independent, and bounded, a relational approach reveals them to be coproduced and coconstitutive, and always dependent on constructions of gender, sexuality, labor, and citizenship.<sup>3</sup> Colonialism and white supremacy have always been relational projects. They rely on logics of sorting, ranking, and comparison that produce and naturalize categories of racial difference necessary for the legitimation of slavery, settler colonialism, and imperial expansion.

As several of the essays make clear, this work has a long history, both in terms of scholarly analysis and political practice; relational frameworks themselves are not new. A relational framework lies at the heart of a long history of women of color scholarship and political practice centered on relational

understandings of race, featured most notably in collections such as *This Bridge Called My Back*, first published in 1981, as well as Vicki Ruiz and Ellen Carol DuBois's *Unequal Sisters* anthologies, first published in 1990. Other works from that period anticipate many of the themes of this volume, works such as Jack Forbes's *Africans and Native Americans: The Language of Race and the Evolution of Red-Black Peoples* (1993); Tomás Almaguer's *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (1994); and Evelyn Hu-DeHart's investigations into the racialization of Asians in Mexico and Latin America. More recently, there have been edited volumes by Roderick Ferguson and Grace Hong and by Alyosha Goldstein,<sup>4</sup> the journal *Kalfou: A Journal of Comparative and Relational Ethnic Studies*, and a growing body of critical scholarship associated with the critical ethnic studies formation. Relational frameworks are also an important component of the broadly transnational and diasporic turn within U.S. ethnic studies and American studies, as well as Indigenous studies ascendant in the last twenty years.

We can trace commitments to a relational study of race, as a political practice, within an expansive tradition of Black internationalist and anti-imperialist politics. Richard Wright's book *The Color Curtain*, reporting on the conference of representatives of Asian and African nations gathered in Bandung, Indonesia, in 1955, offered an early articulation of Third World solidarities within a relational framework, a connection explored in more detail in Roderick Ferguson's essay in this volume. And more than a half century before that, the Black press generated incisive critiques of U.S. imperialism through a logic of relationality. Consider this excerpt from an 1899 editorial in the *Coffeyville (Kansas) American* newspaper, which opposes the U.S. occupation of the Philippines and understands imperial expansion in relation to racialized violence against Black, Chinese, and Native people:

The matter of the treatment of these people who belong to the dark-skinned races is a matter which concerns us. The conduct of men in the future can only be determined by observing their conduct in the past. Experience and not promises weighs more potently in these matters, and the treatment which the Indians, the Chinese, and the Negroes have received at the hands of white Americans speaks in no uncertain tone—it would be deplorable to have inhabitants of the Philippine Islands treated as the Indians have been treated or the people of Cuba or Puerto Rico ruled as the Negroes of the South have been ruled. . . . This kind of civilization has very little to commend it and it is doubtful whether it ought to be extended to our newly-acquired territory. It is the plain duty of this government to remedy our own scandalous abuses rather than to extend the system under which they have arisen to other people.<sup>5</sup>

The commitment to understand and relate the specificities of racialized experiences to other modes of racial domination expressed so powerfully here animates a growing body of contemporary scholarship within critical ethnic studies and American studies. As we detail in this introduction, *Relational Formations of Race* makes three critical interventions in this developing body of work. First, it advances theoretical work on race and racialization, and the insights produced when racial formation is examined within a relational framework. Second, the essays draw on and help develop a shared methodological framework for the relational study of race across multiple disciplines. Third, the volume stakes out the political and ethical commitments emphasized in relational studies of race, and the important oppositional and liberatory commitments they bear.

### THEORIZING RACE RELATIONALLY

In 1899, W. E. B. Du Bois published his classic work *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*, deploying a theoretical framework that would become ubiquitous to a tradition of “community studies” within sociology, anthropology, political science, history, and ethnic studies. Du Bois surveyed a sample of the city’s Black residents to understand patterns of housing, education, family life, work, health, and political participation in the context of systematic white discrimination and exclusion. By collecting, aggregating, and analyzing this data, Du Bois made visible the particular experiences, traits, and characteristics that made Philadelphia’s Black community distinct from the city’s white majority, or what he described as “the real conditions of this group of human beings.”<sup>6</sup>

Thousands of invaluable studies have followed in this tradition, documenting the particular experiences, practices, insights, and worldviews of racialized groups in diverse locations: in the segregated neighborhoods of Detroit and Cleveland; the barrios of Chicago and New York; within World War II internment camps and nineteenth-century Chinatowns; and in Native American boarding schools and reservations. And while Du Bois himself would go on to produce a wide-ranging body of scholarship and analysis that was often international and relational in its orientation, the dominant research and teaching paradigms continue to be organized around the model of examining racialized groups in isolation and in relation to whiteness. The approach stems in part from the ways that fields of ethnic

studies developed from the distinct social movements each group waged in the 1960s in order to bring greater recognition to their particular and distinctive experiences and histories. Thus, many introductory and survey courses on race are organized around discrete group-based rubrics, introducing the experiences of Asian Americans in one week and those of African Americans in another. Thematic courses in many disciplines follow similar conventions, explicating the literary archives of Mexican American writers in one seminar and those of Native American authors in another. These race-based “sub-fields” (e.g., “Asian American sociology” or “Latino/a history”) have played a central role in pluralizing many disciplines in the last forty years.

Even in the interdisciplinary field of ethnic studies, this framework predominates. While ethnic studies scholars have traced the relationships between dominant systems of power, such as slavery, colonialism, imperialism, and genocide, group-based experiences are typically examined within distinct units or courses. Thus, in studying a topic like “the peopling of the Americas,” the material might cover colonialism and genocide (Native Americans); slavery and abolition (African Americans); and immigration and restriction (Asian Americans and Latinos). Such approaches allow students to understand social relations and their histories not only from the “bottom up” but also from the perspective of different groups.

The specialized forms of knowledge, practice, and analysis undergirding this scholarship are invaluable; they have admitted and made legible a broad range of histories, experiences, and struggles long excluded from mainstream academic discourse and public knowledge. At the same time, these paradigms can reproduce a theoretical understanding of race in which racialized groups are conceptualized as discrete and atomized entities that possess internally determined essences and characteristics. Researchers may thus preconstitute a particular group (e.g., “Asian Americans”) as their object of inquiry, conceptualizing race as a “thing” or a property. This framework, described by social theorists in other contexts as rooted in a “substantialist” perspective, presumes that racialized groups are intrinsic entities that bear singular, unitary, and distinctive attributes.<sup>7</sup>

As the scholars in this volume demonstrate, racialized meanings, identities, and characteristics are always constituted through relationships and are always dependent on a shared field of social meaning; they are never produced in isolation. Race is not legible or significant outside a relational context. From this perspective, race does not define the characteristics of a person; instead, it is better understood as the space and connections between people

that structure and regulate their association. To inhabit, claim, or be ascribed a particular racialized identity or grouping is to be located in an assemblage of historical and contemporary relationships. For example, sociologist Michael Rodríguez-Muñiz has elsewhere argued that the “focus on individual groups encourages a conception of ethnoracial politics populated by isolated and autonomous constituencies—as if racial projects, such as the Black Lives Matter movement and Latino civil rights advocacy, arise in an ethnoracial and political vacuum.”<sup>8</sup> By contrast, he explains herein, a relational approach “does not presume the existence of independent, already formed groups” but “holds that ethnoracial boundaries, identities, and political affiliations do not precede, but rather are the *effects* of these relations.”

This relational understanding of race draws heavily from Michael Omi and Howard Winant’s theory of racial formation, which conceptualizes the production of racial meaning and identity as “always and necessarily a social and historical process.”<sup>9</sup> Omi and Winant foreground the role of particular “racial projects” within both micro and macro settings that become generative of racial meaning and power. Racial projects, they explain, “connect what race *means* in a particular discursive practice and the ways in which both social structures and everyday experiences are racially *organized*, based upon that meaning.”<sup>10</sup> From this perspective, race can never be isolated from the contextual processes and relationships that shape its meaning. Racialization describes the formation and reformation of these relationships, legible through a range of cultural categories including sexuality, bloodlines, propriety, innocence, fitness, violence, citizenship, savagery, morality, and freedom.<sup>11</sup>

An understanding of racial formation as constituted through different racial projects is fundamental to understanding race as a relational concept. When distinct racial projects are analyzed within the same field of meaning and power, new insights are revealed about the nature of those projects and the broader field of racial formation in which they take shape. As Tiya Miles explains in her essay in this volume, “Uncle Tom Was an Indian: Tracing the Red in Black Slavery,” “if we look at African American history and Native American history side by side rather than in isolation, we will see the edges where those histories meet and begin to comprehend a fuller and more fascinating picture. At the intersections of Black and Native experiences, we gain greater understanding of the histories of both groups.”

George Lipsitz similarly argues in the roundtable discussion (chapter 1) with George Sánchez and Kelly Lytle Hernández that examining the relationships and articulations between and among subordinated groups requires

scholars “to break with this notion of a one-at-a-time relationship with whiteness for each aggrieved group.” For Lipsitz, relational frameworks can disrupt “an uninterrogated privileging of whiteness” that typically asks, “How does each group deal with the white center?” rather than exploring the ways that “polylateral relations among aggrieved communities of color” develop and cohere.

As Natalia Molina demonstrates in her essay, a relational framework of analysis is not necessarily the same as a comparative one. A comparative treatment of race typically compares and contrasts the characteristics and experiences of different racialized groups, often treating their boundaries as stable and produced independently. For example, comparative models have sought to chart the similarities and differences in the patterns of racial hierarchy and formation between different nations, or to chart such similarities and differences between minoritized groups in the United States.<sup>12</sup> An important tradition of scholarship has relied on this comparative framework, including transnational studies by George Fredrickson, Anthony Marx, and Howard Winant.<sup>13</sup> But by taking inventory of the particular attributes or experiences of a group or across differing contexts, such frameworks can reify the assumption that racialized groups are operating in autonomous and distinct social, political, and cultural spheres and within isolated, self-contained worlds. Relational frameworks, by contrast, often incorporate but go beyond the logic of comparison to examine the intersections and the mutually constitutive forces between/among what is compared. To study race relationally is to acknowledge the limits of examining racialized groups in isolation. As sociologist Matthew Desmond contends, “Locality must be ancillary to relationality.”<sup>14</sup>

A relational treatment of race thus conceptualizes racial formation as a mutually constitutive process; racial meanings, boundaries, and hierarchies are coproduced through dynamic processes that change across time and place. Thus, popular discourses on race that appear on the surface to be autonomous and self-generating are in fact legible only through a relational understanding of race. The political scientist Claire Jean Kim has noted that even when scholars attend to the differential trajectories of racialized groups, they can nonetheless “impute mutual autonomy to respective racialization processes that are in fact mutually constitutive.” Thus, Kim explains, the “respective racialization trajectories” of different “groups are profoundly interrelated.”<sup>15</sup>

In this volume, Perla Guerrero extends this argument by examining the racialization of Vietnamese refugees in Arkansas since the 1970s, charting



how American nationalism and militarism, discourses of Christian benevolence, and the long-standing dynamics of Black/white racialization produce particular representations and understandings of Vietnamese refugees. Guerrero argues that this process “explain[s] the elasticity of racialization, as a single group can be defined in shifting and competing ways.” Similarly, political scientist Julie Lee Merseeth explores the racialization of Arab and Muslim Americans since September 11, 2001, a process that was made legible through their relational positioning in the field of U.S. racial and ethnic politics. The essays by Guerrero, Merseeth, Ferguson, and others also reveal the transnational and global underpinnings of the relational study of race.

### METHODOLOGY

In academic discourse, the researcher’s authority is often established by satisfying or demonstrating mastery or expertise in a particular field. Such conventions of expertise and authority are important to the collective process of building academic fields and shared knowledge, establishing research norms, and generating a shared language to advance collective projects of learning and research. But they can also limit the kinds of questions that can be posed when our objects of study and research questions do not obey the boundaries of our areas of expertise. Scholars employing relational frameworks of race often forgo a claim to expertise to develop a methodology guided by inquiry, rather than expertise, in pursuing research questions that take them beyond their credentialed areas of expertise.

Such new orientations take time. This methodology inherently requires scholars to push beyond their areas of expertise, acknowledging that one can make important contributions to particular research areas without demonstrating mastery of them. George Sánchez observes in the roundtable discussion in this volume that such work “means you have to really enmesh yourself into historiographies, into literatures, traditions that you may not have been trained in. And for many of us, that’s a real limitation. It doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t do it; it just means that to be serious about it is going to take some time.” As sociologist Laura Enriquez notes in her essay, “Border-Hopping Mexicans, Law-Abiding Asians, and Racialized Illegality,” research questions drive these shifts. Enriquez explains that she found her way to the relational study of race

because of the questions I was asking about the role of race in the lives of undocumented immigrants. Most of the literature on undocumented youth focuses on Latinas/os and the structural limitations created by their immigration status; few discuss how intersecting social locations, like race, differentiate experiences of illegality. To fill this gap, I sought to assess how race emerges to structure and differentiate the experiences of Latina/o and API undocumented students. I found that a relational framework was a productive tool for imagining the dynamic and multifaceted production of racialized illegality.

Relational studies of race are thus not limited to studying the interactions of stigmatized groups with one another. Relational frameworks can provide purchase and insight even when different groups are not in frequent or direct contact. These groups share social fields and participate in and react to mutual social processes and practices even as they might inhabit distinct positions within shared structures. As Molina puts it,

We need to ask who else is (or was) present in or near the communities we study—and what difference these groups' presence made (or makes). This is no less than what Chicana/o historians have been asking those who study the mainstream to do for decades. Just as the prevailing version of U.S. history was incomplete without an examination of the influence of racialized groups, the study of any single racialized group calls for an understanding of the impact of the experiences of other similarly situated groups.

As Lisa Lowe demonstrates in *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, the structure of the historical archive itself often makes such work challenging by masking the relational interdependencies and connections of different groups and places, requiring scholars to read against such absences. Lowe explains,

The organization of the archives discourages links between settler colonialism in North America and the West Indies and the African slave trade; or attention to the conjunction of the abolition of slavery and the importing of Chinese and South Asian indentured labor; or a correlation of the East Indies and China trades and the rise of bourgeois Europe.

Lowe finds that “in order to nuance these connections and interdependencies, one must read across the separate repositories organized by office, task, and function, and by period and area, precisely implicating one set of preoccupations in and with another.”<sup>16</sup>

Many of the essays in this volume take up this imperative, pushing back against the inherent logic of categorization and typology that organizes the

archive to reveal such dependencies. For example, Alyosha Goldstein's essay, "Entangled Disposessions: Race and Colonialism in the Historical Present," considers how African Americans and Native Americans experienced land dispossession and its redress under the Claims Resolution Act of 2010. As Goldstein explains, "The scope and logic of juridical settlement strive to make illegible the interconnections of the colonial taking of Native peoples' lands, the genocide and displacement of Native peoples, the abduction and enslavement of African peoples, and the constitutive force of differential racialization and anti-Blackness as primary social, economic, and political conditions of the United States." Thus, he contends, "studying racial formation as material practices of relational racialization rather than as distinct taxonomies provides a way of confronting how white supremacy in the United States continues to sustain colonial possession and the social exploitation and disposability of racially devalued people as mutually constitutive today."

By making these kinds of relational connections, scholars can also comprehend the ways power operates within a much wider framework. For example, in her contribution, "Indians and Negroes in Spite of Themselves: Puerto Rican Students at the Carlisle Indian Industrial School," Catherine Ramírez reconceptualizes the construct of assimilation within a relational framework. Ramírez's background and expertise lie primarily in Latino/a and Latin American studies. But to understand the complexity and nuance of the lives of Puerto Rican students sent to a boarding school for Native students famously organized around the promise to "Kill the Indian, Save the Man," Ramírez draws on analytics in Indigenous studies and history. She explains,

If we approach assimilation as a relational process, one organized around ranking, entering, and being situated in a regime of difference, then we see that assimilation is often one and the same as subordination, marginalization, or even, paradoxically, exclusion (differential inclusion, in other words). By studying the experiences of African Americans, Native Americans, and Puerto Ricans at Carlisle and Hampton in relation to one another, I seek to offer a glimpse of assimilation's prehistory and show that assimilation is more than the process whereby the boundary between mainstream and margin blurs or disappears; it is also the process whereby that boundary is, paradoxically, reinforced.

These insights and observations also apply to the use of relational frameworks in the classroom, as they push instructors to engage material that might be beyond their recognized areas of authority. To make use of a relational framework in this way subverts the notion that instructors are always

the masters of the subjects they teach, modeling instead an ethic of shared inquiry rooted in the social production of knowledge. For example, to engage students in the work of Jeffrey Yamashita's chapter, "Becoming 'Hawaiian': A Relational Racialization of Japanese American Soldiers from Hawai'i during World War II in the U.S. South," requires instructors to enter into dialogue with a diverse array of historical concepts and theoretical constructs, including the complicated histories of European and Asian settler colonialism in Hawai'i, U.S. regimes of militarism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the institutionalization of Jim Crow in the U.S. South in the mid-twentieth century. But the payoff is rich, as students gain new insights about the interdependence of U.S. imperialism abroad and the hardening of racial hierarchies at home.

Another important methodological concern advanced in this volume is the imperative to recognize the distinctiveness and at times singularity of particular racial formations within a relational framework, rather than attempting only to identify commonalities of experience or position. Andrea Smith has argued elsewhere, for example, that white supremacy is structured through discrete pillars of domination rooted in the logics of genocide and land acquisition, labor exploitation and slavery, and war.<sup>17</sup> Here, racial difference is constituted through these distinctive yet mutually imbricated modes of domination. To study race relationally requires one to be attentive to such variance. But even as groups are differently positioned with regard to the logics of slavery, genocide, or war, a relational framework can help illuminate these distinctions and the shared logic that undergirds different modes of racialization.

For example, Steven Salaita's essay, "How Palestine Became Important to American Indian Studies," reveals the generative inquiries made possible when Native studies scholars bring their political and intellectual frameworks to bear on the issue of Palestine. Salaita observes that these possibilities are "tremendously rich and accommodate complicated sites of material politics (by which I mean economic systems, activist communities, electoral processes, educational paradigms, and modes of resistance). Accessing those sites enables us to aspire to relationships that go beyond theoretical innovation by concomitantly emphasizing the practices and possibilities of decolonization."

Yet Salaita also cautions against simplistic analogies or comparisons to Native experiences, which can erase the specificity of Indigenous struggles in the United States, particularly when they are invoked to legitimize the subordination of another group. Thus, contributors across the volume outline

the ways that relational frameworks must always be grounded in the unevenness of differential racial formations, attentive to what Cherrié Moraga has described as “the danger . . . in failing to acknowledge the specificity of the oppression.”<sup>18</sup>

A final methodological emphasis concerns the ways that the relational study of race must remain attentive to the distinctive labor of gender and sexuality through intersectional readings of racial formations. Following the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw, scholars using such frameworks understand all racialized groupings as marked by internal distinction and hierarchy related to gender and sexuality, which are coconstitutive of racial meaning and power.<sup>19</sup> As Ferguson notes in his essay herein, such relational frameworks have long been at the center of women of color politics and practice. In their volume *Strange Affinities: The Gender and Racial Politics of Comparative Racialization*, Ferguson and coeditor Grace Hong explain that women of color feminism and queer of color critique “reveal the ways in which racialized communities are not homogenous but instead have always policed and preserved the difference between those who are able to conform to categories of normativity, respectability, and value, and those who are forcibly excluded from such categories.”<sup>20</sup>

#### REENVISIONING POLITICS AND SOLIDARITY THROUGH RELATIONAL FRAMEWORKS OF RACE

A final emphasis of many of the essays in this volume concerns the new political and ethical insights revealed through the relational study of race. If racism, colonialism, and white supremacy are understood as relational in their logic and operations, effective antiracisms must also operate from a relational premise. Relationality here works through an understanding of both similarity and difference. Audre Lorde explains that “unity does not mean unanimity—Black people are not some standardly digestible quantity. In order to work together we do not have to become a mix of indistinguishable particles resembling a vat of homogenized chocolate milk. Unity implies the coming together of elements which are, to begin with, varied and diverse in their particular natures.” Relational antiracisms are most generative when they are rooted in the difficult labor of what Lorde describes as the “unromantic and tedious work necessary to forge meaningful coalitions . . . recognizing which coalitions are possible and which coalitions are not.”<sup>21</sup>

With Lorde, previous work has demonstrated the challenges, insights, and dynamics of this work at a variety of theoretical and historical sites. For example, geographer and ethnic studies scholar Laura Pulido has examined key groups in the Third World left movement in Los Angeles representing African Americans, Chicana/os, and Asians, including the Black Panther Party, the Center for Autonomous Social Action, and East Wind, beginning in the 1960s. Her interviews reveal the ways participants in one movement learn from participants in other movements. Relationality can thus operate at a more intimate scale and can serve as a resource when engaging in larger social and political acts.

In his essay, “The Relational Revolutions of Antiracist Formations,” Ferguson discusses both the Third World politics that arose from postcolonial nations in the 1950s and 1960s as well as the long history of writing and analysis by women of color, and how these relational frameworks bear important oppositional and liberatory commitments. Ferguson argues that a genealogy “for a relational understanding of race came out of the great social movements of anticolonialism and antiracism in the twentieth century.” In the “histories and literatures of national liberation and women of color feminist formations,” Ferguson finds “models for antiracist relational analyses and politics, models that were not comparing discrete cultural groups but the implementation and effects of racial processes on various communities within the Global North and the Global South.” Ferguson sees a “shift toward relations and connectivity” driven by these formations that “represents one of the great epistemic shifts in the politics and study of race.”

Vijay Prashad’s 2001 monograph, *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity*, similarly foregrounds the ways in which anticolonial struggles led by African and Asian diasporic communities have always been intertwined and mutually constituted. These cultural and political traditions have never been discrete, thus requiring scholars to trace out these relationships and interconnections rather than presuming the existence of fixed primordial histories. Prashad analyzes the realm of cultural production, including the heterogeneous roots of reggae music in Jamaica, as one important mode through which these intertwined histories and contexts are made visible. Other scholars, including Gabriel Solis, Sohail Daulatzai, Loren Kajikawa, and Gaye Theresa Johnson, have similarly demonstrated the role of music as a particular site of relational antiracist consciousness and solidarity.<sup>22</sup> Theater studies scholars such as Diana Paulin have tracked similar connections in relation to Black drama and fiction.<sup>23</sup>

The volume contributes to a growing body of scholarly work and political activism that traces the connections between and among differentiated processes of colonization and racialization. Such work, for example, puts insights from analyses of settler colonialism in dialogue with interrogations of transnational migration in both the Atlantic and Pacific worlds. It also considers the connections between the assertions of immigrant rights and claims for justice in the United States and conceptualizations of Black subordination and freedom.

These connections must be made with care and attention to historical and political difference if they are to produce new political imaginaries. For example, Tiffany Willoughby-Herard critiques the limitations and closures produced by facile and shallow comparisons between slavery and the contemporary struggle for immigrant rights. A rich and sophisticated tradition of Black-led freedom struggles and abolitionist thought all too often becomes flattened though such comparisons by unwittingly trading in “that old canard of modernity that Black political consciousness . . . is too outmoded for contemporary politics.” Willoughby-Herard envisions a relational politics in which “we can articulate our serious concern for the plight of undocumented workers, deported students, people who can secure citizenship only by serving in American military misadventures, the millions residing in immigrant detention centers, and immigrant laborers—and witness and name the violent murder and criminalization of Black people in every arena of social experience through the enduring nature of slavery, lynching, convict lease conditions, and the sexual violence that links them.”

Implicit in the analysis of Ferguson, Willoughby-Herard, and other contributors to the volume is a commitment to move within and across differing political traditions, histories, and frames of analysis. M. Jaqui Alexander has described this process in regard to the formation of women of color politics as the need to become “fluent in each another’s histories . . . to unlearn an impulse that allows mythologies about each other to replace knowing about one another . . . [and] to cultivate a way of knowing in which we direct our social, cultural, psychic, and spiritually marked attention on each other.” She sets this ambition plainly: “We cannot afford to cease yearning for each other’s company.”<sup>24</sup>

Situating one’s experiences and struggles in this way yields new relations of solidarity and horizons of justice by showing how racial discourses and projects inform one another, and by denaturalizing and exposing the logics of violence and dispossession that undergird diverse forms of racial

subordination. We don't live isolated lives; these relationships and articulations already exist. As Lorde explains, "Our struggles are particular, but we are not alone." Racism is always already relational. The question is whether our scholarship and politics attend to this relationality—in all its challenges and complexity—and take seriously the ways it operates in our world.

## ORGANIZATION OF THE VOLUME

The volume is divided into four parts. The first, "Theorizing Race Relationally," considers a set of theories and methods used to study race relationally, as well as the new analytic insights produced through these frameworks. The second part, "Relational Research as Political Practice," uses a relational framework to make broader interventions into the critical study of race and distinct fields within ethnic studies, foregrounding the distinct political insights and analyses that can be produced through this work. The third part, "Historical Frameworks," examines relational formations of race across time, foregrounding the ways that particular historical forces and events contest and transform racial meanings, identities, and power through relational frameworks. The essays in this part disrupt more familiar histories of discrete racialized groups by examining the coproductive character of racial formation. The essays in the final part, "Relational Frameworks in Contemporary Policy," are rooted in social scientific traditions and conventions that examine relational race in contemporary settings. The essays also demonstrate the ways that a relational framework can be brought to bear on different qualitative methodologies within the social sciences, including content analysis, interviews, and studies of racial group formation.

## NOTES

1. Martin Luther King Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail," in *Why We Can't Wait* (New York: Signet, 1963), 65.

2. Martin Luther King Jr., "Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence," April 4, 1967, Riverside Church, New York City, archived at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, Stanford University, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/beyond-vietnam>.

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