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## Introduction

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The essays in this volume reflect and engage the profoundly contradictory role of the university in constructing, naturalizing, and reproducing racial stratification and domination. Stretching from the racially specific projects of the past to the colorblind conventions of academic performance today, leading scholars in the social sciences, law, and humanities reveal in this book how disciplinary frameworks, research methodologies, and pedagogical strategies have both facilitated and obscured the social reproduction of racial hierarchy. The indictment of the knowledge-producing industry contained in these pages uncovers the chapters of racial history that remain undisturbed behind the walls of disciplinary convention and colorblind ideology. At the same time, the conditions of possibility out of which these essays were produced situate the university as a site in which antiracist projects can be seeded and developed. The disciplines not only produce racial power and inhibit racial knowledge, they also offer discursive tools and analytic moves that, properly contextualized, enable and enhance the telling of race and the reimagining of racial justice. In grappling with this duality, this collection embodies the twin objectives of the Countering Colorblindness project: to unpack and disrupt the racial foundations of the disciplines, and to aggregate and repurpose disciplinary insights into an alternative understanding of the social world.

This volume amplifies the methods and challenges that are foundational to critical race projects that interrogate the epistemic parameters of racial power in order to enable emancipatory possibilities both within the academy and in the social world beyond. Countering Colorblindness transcends the institutional and discursive boundaries that contain racial knowledge in multiple ways. The project is first and foremost transdisciplinary. The story it tells about the foundations of racial hierarchy and its contemporary disavowals

across the university—in particular the traveling and uptake of particular orientations toward race between disciplines—can only become fully legible through the aggregated sum of its disciplinary parts. One cannot, for example, understand the narrowed ways in which racism has come to be imagined within law as the bigotry of specific individuals without engaging similar containments within sociology, social psychology, and the like.

Countering Colorblindness, however, transcends not only boundaries within the university, but boundaries between the university and civil society more broadly. The contemporary social conditions shaped by histories of white supremacy—education, health, criminal justice, employment, housing—are linked to the construction and disavowal of race within the academic disciplines themselves. Most institutions are now formally organized around the untested assumption that colorblindness is the exclusive measure of a fair and just organizational practice, an assumption that is predicated on and enabled by the privileging of colorblind solutions to color-bound problems within scholarly disciplines. Questions of racial discrimination, inequity, and injustice are typically framed as problematic only to the extent that the troubling conditions can be attributed to contraventions against the colorblind ideal. This resort to colorblindness is not solely an institutional-level response. As Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's work has long documented, individuals now defend themselves against the slightest intimation that their preferences or decisions might be racially inflected with the all-purpose disclaimer that they neither see race nor take it into account.<sup>1</sup>

As a political project, colorblindness derives from a seeming naturalness and inevitability. It resonates with time-honored practices and ideals in Western thought and social relations. A long history of artistic expression and humanities scholarship has grounded aspirations for social justice in the elision of difference. The market subject of classical capitalist theory, the citizen subject of liberalism—and even the universal worker of Marxism and the universal woman of feminism—all rest upon an ideal of interchangeability wherein differences are said not to matter. These traditions teach that similarity should trump difference; that beneath the surface the appearance of “otherness” masks a common human condition.

Although many humane and egalitarian projects in history have been based on humanist concepts of liberal interchangeability, contemporary scholars have raised questions about the dangers of ignoring fundamental differences, particularly distinctions linked to social position, vulnerability, and power. While conceding that all of our fates are linked and acknowledg-

ing the sordid histories of parochial particularism, these scholars contend that some important differences do not disappear simply by affirming sameness. Furthermore, the identities celebrated as universal by the standards of humanism and liberalism are almost always actually dominant particulars masquerading as universals. Indeed, the abstract assertions of human interchangeability in law, economics, and politics tend to serve as mechanisms for occluding the seemingly endless differentiations, inequalities, and injustices of existing social relations.

In postulating a common human experience, many great traditions in art, law, and politics celebrate the symbolic transcendence of difference without offering or even suggesting the need for access to equitable opportunities or conditions. In these settings, differences become contaminated with a menacing otherness, an otherness that threatens the promise of an ideal egalitarian future. People *with* problems thus become identified *as* problems; and the members of groups who object to social inequality then become castigated for calling attention to differences that matter in their lives.

These perspectives make colorblindness seem a laudable goal. They make it appear as though the solution to vexing problems of difference is to simply stop acknowledging such differences. In this way, they cover over embodied inequalities with a disembodied universalism. Perhaps most importantly, they locate questions of social justice in a stark choice between egalitarian universalism on the one hand and a putatively parochial and prejudiced particularism on the other.

Against this deep philosophical background, today's colorblindness easily trumps race-conscious interventions as more appealing and ultimately morally just. As a consequence, efforts to sustain investment in race-conscious research and policy face an uphill battle. A telling example of the malaise that exists in social justice discourse can be found in the ineffective efforts of social justice advocates to push back against colorblindness with concepts and strategies that are at best anachronistic. Moreover, much of the policy that is the object of policy debates bows to the colorblind imperative in the final analysis. As the legal scholar Mark Golub explains, "Anti-racist criticism too often has been defined by the object of its critique, and so offers inadequate tools for resisting it. Even when it is rejected, that is, color-blindness discourse sets the terms of debate, defines normative goals, and limits the scope of legitimacy for alternative formulations of racial justice."<sup>2</sup> In his exemplary research, however, Golub deploys careful, critical, and detailed analyses of landmark Supreme Court cases to reveal how the ideal of

colorblindness as the default position for social justice actually functions as a color-conscious tool crafted to protect white preferences and privileges.

As colorblindness becomes increasingly entrenched as the common denominator in efforts to deny and transcend racial power, the parameters of racial discourse between the university and the general public reveal an interdependent relationship that is far closer than scholars often acknowledge. Colorblindness operates as the default intellectual and ethical position for racial justice in many corners of the academy and in public policy, imposing profound limitations on scholars, students, and the wider public. The compromised capacity of disciplines to respond effectively to the wide set of political, economic, and social problems that mark public life today demand new strategies that situate a critical understanding of race and racism at the center of knowledge production and public engagement.

Despite colorblindness's appearance as a commonsense value and practice, it is an idea sustained more by the repetition of its use and by the power of those who invoke it than by a firm basis in reality, research, theory, or for that matter, the Constitution. Indeed, scholars from a variety of disciplines have produced powerful studies that contest its viability as a definitive determinant of social justice. This research disproves some of the central claims made for colorblindness, and casts considerable doubt about how a future wrapped around this ideal will unfold.

Yet even apart from this research, colorblindness at the most basic level mobilizes a metaphor of visual impairment to embrace a simplistic and misleading affirmation of racial egalitarianism. Its emphasis on color imagines racism to be an individualistic aversion to another person's pigment rather than a systemic skewing of opportunities, resources, and life chances along racial lines. The blindness part of the metaphor presumes that visually impaired people are incapable of racial recognition and that recognition itself is the problem that racism presents. Yet as the research of Osagie K. Obasogie establishes, visually impaired people hold the same understandings of race that sighted people possess. They are neither more nor less likely to engage in racist judgments.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, visually impaired people who are white enjoy the unfair gains, unjust enrichments, and unearned status of whiteness, while those who are people of color experience the artificial, arbitrary, and irrational impediments caused by racism and social prejudices against disability. Not only must the logic and salience of colorblindness as a metaphor be rejected, but so must the presumptions about normativity and disability that underwrite it.

Given the slender reed upon which the weighty denial of racial power rests, one might think that a powerful antidote to the widespread use of colorblindness might arise fully activated from the knowledge-producing industry. But despite the depth of scholarly understanding about the inadequacies of colorblindness as a theory, policy, cognitive possibility, or constitutional principle, this canon has gained little traction in efforts to draw attention to the racist realities that the colorblind perspective works to obscure. Consequently, the wealth of information produced in the academy pertaining to race—historical, economic, sociological, psychological, literary, and legal—has yet to converge into a coherent commonsense understanding of the world that we live in. Indeed, far from countering colorblindness, the prevailing practices around which privileged knowledge is produced and authorized operate to enhance the stabilizing dimensions of colorblind discourse. Thus, countering colorblindness requires an interrogation into the disciplinary, cultural, and historical dynamics that sustain a disaggregated, partial, and parochial knowledge base about one of the most vexing societal problems of our time.

The failure of the disciplines to produce a collective accounting of the realities of race in contemporary society occludes the more fundamental indictment upon which countering colorblindness rests. Behind the colorblind façade of the existing disciplines is the historical role that knowledge production has played in creating and fortifying racial projects ranging from slavery and segregation to imperialism and genocide. Historically situated against this backdrop, colorblindness thus becomes a series of moves and investments that conceal the fingerprints of the university in constructing the very conditions that colorblind frameworks refuse to name.

### SEEING AND UNSEEING RACE IN THE ACADEMY

Every established discipline in the academy has an origin that entails engagement and complicity with white supremacy. In the age of conquest, colonization, Indigenous dispossession, and empire, Europeans' vexed confrontations with peoples from Africa, Asia, and Latin America whom they perceived to be "other" gave rise to anthropology's interest in "primitive" civilizations and geography's impetus to map the world.<sup>4</sup> Scholars of philosophy, history, sociology, political science, and economics turned to biology in explaining how and why European empires came to dominate the world, attributing that

dominance to evolution and “the survival of the fittest” instead of systematically investigating the brutality of conquest and the cruelties of expropriation and exploitation.<sup>5</sup> Invocations of biological difference imbued racism with a seemingly scientific inevitability, positioning whites as the winners in a fair struggle while displacing people of color from the realm of history and positioning them in the domain of nature.<sup>6</sup> This displacement provided the organizing logic for the seemingly endless depictions of monstrous uncivilized primitives in Euro-American literature, painting, theater, and film.<sup>7</sup>

The social sciences took form as nomothetic enterprises committed to discovering general scientific laws governing social structure and organization. This search for general laws through discrete and particular methods of study tended to disaggregate the unified totality of social relations into detached and disconnected practices. The binary opposition between race and class, for example, presumes a racial system that is not classed and a class system that is not raced. Moreover, this search for “universal” principles in sociology, political science, history, and economics was conducted almost exclusively in just five nations—Germany, France, Italy, Great Britain, and the United States—and the practices dominant in those places were judged to be applicable to all of humanity.<sup>8</sup> The search for a putatively authentic human culture in populations presumed to be previously untouched by European contact led ethnographers to position the Indigenous and colonized people they studied in Africa, Asia, and the Americas as “people without history” rather than coinhabitants of the modern world.<sup>9</sup> This denial positioned Europe as the center of modern progress while viewing inhabitants of the global south as premodern and therefore rationally and ontologically deficient.<sup>10</sup> Political science and sociology came into being as managerial sciences promising to promote the efficient and orderly administration of nations and empires while providing mechanisms for controlling the social discontent and discord that they attributed to people characterized as different, deviant, delinquent, defective, or dependent.<sup>11</sup>

For example, Robert Vitalis demonstrates that the formation of International Relations as a scholarly field in the early twentieth century was intimately tied to U.S. expansion and imperialism.<sup>12</sup> Columbia’s John Burgess, considered one of the founders of the field, stated plainly that “American Indians, Asiatics and Africans cannot properly form any active, directive part of the political population which shall be able to produce modern political institutions.” After the U.S. military helped to overthrow the Hawaiian monarchy in 1894, the new provisional government appealed to

Burgess seeking his counsel in establishing a new “republican government.” Burgess replied: “I understand your problem to be the construction of a constitution which will place the government in the hands of the Teutons, and preserve it there, at least for the present.” Burgess then offered a series of recommendations related to representation and voting requirements in order to sustain white rule in Hawaii.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps not surprisingly, the discipline’s first scholarly journal was titled the *Journal of Race Development*. Published continuously since 1910, it was renamed *Foreign Affairs* in 1922, the title it carries today.<sup>14</sup> Academics like Burgess and many of his contemporaries, including historian Lothrop Stoddard and naturalist Madison Grant, played central roles in elaborating the white supremacist commitments of U.S. immigration and foreign policy across the twentieth century.<sup>15</sup>

Perceptions of innate human difference led scholars in the emerging physical and natural sciences in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to labor tirelessly to generate scientific theories of racial difference and hierarchy. Physical and cultural anthropologists continued to pursue and publish such studies well into the 1960s.<sup>16</sup> Many of the key tools of the social sciences were developed in the early twentieth century by sociologists, psychologists, and other social scientists as methods of statistical evaluation that were designed to measure innate and hereditary group-based differences in cognitive abilities.<sup>17</sup> Despite centuries of devastating critiques of the core premises and presumptions of this research, some contemporary social statisticians remain trapped in the underlying logic of racial reason by treating race as a biological category rather than a social construct and by attributing life outcomes to the racial identities of individuals rather than to the racist practices of systems and structures.<sup>18</sup> While some antiracist scholars make excellent use of statistical methods, the seeming neutrality of statistical research design often masks unacknowledged ideological predispositions.<sup>19</sup> As Leah Gordon, a contributor to this volume, demonstrates in her insightful book *From Power to Prejudice*, a commitment to methodological individualism has often functioned to render racism a private matter rather than a public concern. She shows how seemingly neutral decisions about research design skewed scholarship on race to privilege the idea of prejudice over power. Gordon argues that because the validity of statistical findings depends on submitting significant numbers (*n*) to analysis, researchers came to privilege surveys of the attitudes of individuals which contained a large “*n*” (as many numbers as there were individuals) over the study of groups where each group could consist of only one “*n*.” This provided a methodological impetus to focus on individual

prejudice rather than collective power, not because prejudice was more important, but merely because it was easier to measure.<sup>20</sup>

The emergence of economics as a discipline separate from its previous locus inside moral philosophy suppressed the study of socially constructed institutions. Economic activity would be assessed as simply the sum total of autonomous actions by universally interchangeable rational and self-interested acquisitive subjects.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, as Nancy MacLean has shown, particular subfields of economics, such as the “public choice” paradigm developed at the University of Virginia in the 1950s and 1960s, linked attacks on a broad range of public institutions (especially public education) with the preservation of American apartheid. Here, the core logic of an entire academic subfield was implicitly constituted around assumptions of white supremacy, even as it disavowed any racial intent and animus.<sup>22</sup>

The humanistic disciplines coalesced around idiographic inquiries focused on the particularities of difference. Yet by presuming that the dominant particulars of Europe represented the apex of human achievement and aspiration through what Sylvia Wynter terms the project of man, the humanities falsely aggregated all of humanity into a disembodied universalism said to be the only alternative to parochial particularisms. This legacy has structured the study of difference largely on axes of margins and centers rather than axes of domination and oppression, leaving the humanities ill-suited in respect to race to discern which differences make a difference and why.<sup>23</sup>

Within the humanities, since the Renaissance, scholars of religion, ethics, philosophy, history, literature, and the arts have shaped their inquiries around what Walter Mignolo describes as the “*humanitas*” model of the bourgeois Western subject—the self-possessed individual uniquely capable of logic, rationality, and contemplation.<sup>24</sup> A clear racial bias governed the ways in which the disciplines studied the civilizations of antiquity. Classics departments venerated the literature, history, and philosophy of ancient Greece and Rome as part of a continuous history that culminated in modern Europe. Great civilizations in China, India, and Egypt, however, were studied separately in disciplines like Oriental Studies. They were presumed to have no influence on the modern world.<sup>25</sup> The Maya-Aztec, Tawantin-suyo, and Nok, Nri, and Oyo Benin societies were not studied as civilizations, but rather as parts of a premodern primitivism that belonged more to nature than to history. Anthropologists might have been expected to engage in nomothetic generalizations, but their study of allegedly primitive peoples led them to emphasize particularity and difference through idiographic epistemologies.

*Humanitas* lives in opposition to the “*anthropos*,” embodied in the range of colonized peoples alleged to stand outside of modern history and whose labor, land, and bodies become resources for the advancement of civilization itself. Like the prodigious theorists of scientific racism, humanists also played a central role in justifying the modern epoch of colonization, slavery, and genocide. Europe’s most prominent theorist of human freedom, John Locke, not only justified chattel slavery, but invested in the slave trade himself and helped South Carolina’s slave owners write the constitution that secured their control over the humans they held in bondage. Immanuel Kant constructed philosophical arguments about morality from the vantage point of a person who believed that “humanity is at its perfection in the race of the whites.” He argued that only white Europeans were capable of mastering the arts and sciences, and advised that administering beatings to Black servants required a split cane rather than a whip because of the thick skin of the Negro. Kant dismissed a statement made by an African on the grounds that “the fellow was quite black from head to foot, a clear proof that what he said was stupid.”<sup>26</sup> Similarly, G. W. F. Hegel constructed a theory of change over time in which the “true theatre of history” existed only in the temperate zone in which he lived, leaving Africa as “no historical part of the world” because that continent allegedly lacked any “movement or development.”<sup>27</sup>

The canonization of national literatures and efforts at purification of national languages in Europe functioned as instruments of class rule at home and of imperial domination abroad. In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, John Locke took time out from savoring the profits he made from the slave trade to advance the idea of purified national languages as the key to modernity. Locke considered “impure” speech as the domain of the peoples of Asia and the Americas, laborers, the poor, and women. Unregulated discourse led to factionalism, conflict, and disorder, in his view. He argued that language had to be separated from society, purified of ties to social positions and interests. Just as he had done for the subject of the contract in law, Locke emphasized the abstraction, decontextualization, and generalization of language, imagining that each individual needed to be trained to speak from within an autonomous self. This concept of language represented knowledge as monologic, rational, individual, and universal and replicated in expressive culture a preference for the self-regulating autonomous individual of contract law and economic theory.<sup>28</sup> Yet the autonomous individual posited by Locke always remained haunted by the enslaved “other” whose bondage made possible the profits garnered by contracting free subjects. The novel

became a key mechanism for universalizing this individual subject, not by depicting unfettered agency but instead by constituting the subject as besieged and frightened, always on the verge of engulfment by the social aggregate, an aggregate often made up of dark faces from the global south and their surrogates in the metropolis, rendered through depictions of nightmares, hallucinations, and incidents of horror.<sup>29</sup>

In her innovative, insightful, and enormously generative research on the discursive construction of colorblindness in essays and literary works created in Panama, South Africa, Brazil, and the United States, Marzia Milazzo demonstrates how even intellectuals from the colonized global south came to embrace the epistemology of disavowal in regard to race. Milazzo reveals how Olmedo Alfaro, for example, deployed racist attacks against West Indians in Panama as a means of advancing nationalist ideals about that nation as a paragon of Iberian-American civilization while disavowing any racist intent. Alfaro celebrated Panama as a multiracial democracy threatened by the presence of West Indian immigrants through a series of subterfuges central to the toolkit of colorblind racism. He used the Spanish language and Latin civilization as proxies for Panamanian whiteness while asserting that because West Indian Blacks were indistinguishable (to him) from American Blacks they were carriers of the U.S. imperial project suppressing Panamanian nationalism. Milazzo notes that this kind of white nationalism, now ascendant in Europe, the United States, and beyond, requires demonization of racial others, even while it purports to be about national culture, religion, language, citizenship, and virtually anything but race.<sup>30</sup>

In short, during their emergence and initial development, most academic disciplines had no difficulty “seeing” race. The logic of racial hierarchy and colonialism structured the very foundations of their research and teaching paradigms. Their development was coextensive with the emergence of imperialism, slavery, and modern racism. These institutional relationships have surfaced explicitly in the recent wave of campus protests at universities—including Yale, Princeton, Brown, and others—over the participation by those institutions in various parts of the slave economy and their continued veneration of the champions of slavery and genocide in the naming of buildings.

Contemporary humanists and social scientists generally believe that the disciplines have come a long way since their origins in the era when Europe was solidifying its colonial empires. Most humanists would not endorse the claims about Africa and Africans that Hegel and Kant declared. Very few

social scientists openly embrace eugenics, even as academic efforts to claim a biological or genetic foundation for race in some quarters remains stubbornly persistent.<sup>31</sup> Yet changes in the disciplines with respect to race have been more cosmetic than substantive. The history of the disciplines leaves them suffused with unacknowledged and uninterrogated premises and practices that preserve the patterns of the past and impede progress in the present and future.

Disciplinary knowledge, then, is more than the sum of separate inquiries in discrete areas of knowledge. It is part of a historically specific body of knowledge, an episteme, that contains premises, presumptions, and practices that work together to hide the workings of racialized power.

### RESISTANCE AND DISAVOWAL

Beginning in the early twentieth century, the academy's complicity with racial domination faced rising opposition, evident in the interventions of scholars such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Anna Julia Cooper, Ida B. Wells, Zora Neale Hurston, and Carter G. Woodson. Du Bois's magisterial *Black Reconstruction in America*, for example, took specific aim at historiographical narratives depicting Reconstruction and the postbellum period as a disastrous experiment in multiracial democracy. Du Bois understood that the imperative to upend and remake such paradigms of scholarship was central to the broader task of antiracist freedom movements.<sup>32</sup>

As these challenges became linked to broadening social movements in the mid-twentieth century, higher education itself became a central locus in the struggle for racial justice. The academy could no longer claim to be a neutral observer of the problem of the color line. As Roderick Ferguson explains, the Third World students that marched on the halls of San Francisco State, Cornell, UCLA, and hundreds of other campuses during the 1960s and 1970s carried a vision of education and knowledge production based on the "idea that everything could be rewritten, knowledge could be reorganized, and institutions could be changed for the good of minoritized communities."<sup>33</sup> These conflicts fueled critical institutional transformations, evident in the establishment of Black Studies, ethnic studies, and women's and gender studies programs and the arrival of a new generation of students from groups that had long been excluded from the academy. Children of the *anthropos* found places in the halls of *humanitas*.<sup>34</sup>

While this period of insurgency discredited some of the more odious intellectual defenses of white supremacy, the disciplines and their keepers remained unwilling to interrogate many of the foundational commitments of their fields. Mainstream disciplines largely abandoned the explicit use of racist language, referents, and claims in favor of a discourse of racial colorblindness. Paralleling what Neil Gotanda calls the “racial non-recognition” that was unfolding within the broader legal and political culture, this modality of racial performance in academia became the implicit norm and standard of antiracism.

In the main, disciplines replaced their investments in flagrantly racist modes of inquiry and knowledge production with a refusal to apprehend and engage racialized histories, structures, identities, and contexts. An alternative that stopped short of outright denial of race was to assign such projects to marginalized subfields—for example, “Racial and Ethnic Politics.” Incorporating race as a bounded and peripheral topic that may be relevant only in some situations or for some people left the white supremacist origins of the disciplines undisturbed. The emergence of a subfield paradigm—dominant across the social sciences and humanities—depoliticizes the meaning and implications of racialized difference through putative strategies of inclusion. In this way, it reproduces the colorblind framework by treating minoritized scholarship as an object of disciplinary study (e.g., the study of Black political participation) rather than as a foundational framework for the disciplines as a whole. Race and racism are rendered as marginal to the fundamental intellectual concerns of research and pedagogy, reproducing the notion of the white subject as the normative standard or “reasonable person” in academic, legal, and public policy discourse. As the groundbreaking Trinidadian theorist C. L. R. James explained in an interview in 1970 to *The Black Scholar*—one of the first academic journals explicitly oriented toward antiracist scholarship—emerging fields such as Black Studies had a far-reaching intellectual imperative: “Black Studies require[s] the complete reorganization of the intellectual life and the historical outlook of the United States, and world civilization as a whole.” Yet while James believed that the institutional autonomy of formations like Black Studies was important, he did not imagine it as a disciplinary subfield. Instead he argued that for scholars it was “a chance to penetrate more into the fundamentals of Western civilization, which cannot be understood unless Black studies is involved.”<sup>35</sup>

Thus, during a period of growing intellectual and activist insurgency, disciplines that for more than a century had explicitly recognized race and

utilized it to justify the legitimacy of racial hierarchy decided to resist the implications of their racial investments in terms of a sensory limitation: colorblindness. By thoroughly disclaiming the racial contours of the disciplinary project in response to the insurgency, they sought to describe their preferred mode of inquiry in a way that valorized their capacity to ignore race and racism. Yet colorblindness is inadequate to the task at hand, not only to repudiate the racial projects around which the disciplines were built, but also to make plain the contemporary practices that continue to discipline knowledge about racial power and contain resistance to it. The challenge is not simply to disrupt the discourse of colorblindness. It is also to comprehend and critique how contemporary disciplinary practices enable racial structures and inhibit the means to dismantle them.

Colorblindness is a wide-ranging technology of power, fundamental to all disciplinary formations, that functions within the prevailing university structure to sustain a disaggregated knowledge base about one of the most troubling societal problems of our time. Disciplinary knowledge exudes epistemic whiteness, thus refusing to assess and transform relationships of domination and inequality across the social field. One dimension of contemporary practice can be seen in the way that the separation of knowledge inquiries into discrete disciplines produces both unjust aggregation and destructive disaggregation. When we need to account for the particularities of individual and collective experience, prevailing patterns of research design falsely aggregate antagonistic populations into seemingly harmonious universal totalities. At the same time, a facile aggregation appears in the embrace by psychologists and economists of the experimental techniques that rule research in biology, physiology, physics, and math. This dynamic promotes proclamations of putatively universal principles about psychic and economic life that ignore the crucial specificities of time and place. Similarly, the market subject of capitalism, the individual interior subject of psychology, and the rights-bearing subject of law are all presumed to embody universal human traits, rather than being the products of a particular history in one part of the world.

When we need to see the interconnectedness and totality of human relationships, prevailing patterns of research design study them separately and often incommensurably. A destructive disaggregation emerges when historians focus on specialized monographs about discrete times and places that ignore larger patterns of social history. Scholarship premised on the specialized tasks of biology, psychology, and physiology that assess human life in isolation from the social forces that shape it results in laws that treat social

institutions as unconnected atomized entities. In this setting, discriminatory acts by school boards, real estate agents, corporate polluters, employers, and urban planners can only be adjudicated separately, rather than interactively and dynamically, rendering their aggregated racial costs as curious societal disparities having no legal consequence. In both the social sciences and humanities, colorblindness relies on an interrelated process of abstraction and decontextualization, emphasizing the ontological priority and primacy of the private interiority of the individual (and individual feeling) detached from context. Methodologically, many disciplines conceptualize social relations as merely the sum of many different and easily identifiable actions, imagining universality as something that can only be structured on solidarities of sameness rather than dynamics of difference.<sup>36</sup>

The task of countering colorblindness is thus not merely to see race again, but to reenvision how disciplinary tools, conventions, and knowledge-producing practices that erase the social dynamics that produce race can be critically engaged and selectively repurposed toward emancipatory ends.

#### SEEING RACE AGAIN

A generation after the passage of landmark civil rights legislation, scholars from numerous fields documented the ways in which the reproduction of racial power and domination required particular forms of disavowal and denial. In the 1980s, legal scholars in the field of Critical Race Theory (CRT), such as Kimberlé Crenshaw, Mari Matsuda, Neil Gotanda, Charles Lawrence, Cheryl Harris, and Gary Peller, interrogated the doctrinal basis of “racial nonrecognition,” which transforms race into a matter of skin color and then demands formal symmetry as the embodiment of equal treatment under the law. Having thus reduced the ways in which racism takes place to the use of racial classifications, a broad range of social, economic, and political asymmetries become sequestered from legal review, essentially constitutionalizing relationships of racial domination. CRT scholars charted the Supreme Court’s deployment of this impoverished conception of “equal protection,” which is now utilized by the Court to restrict the remedial uses of race while maintaining a very high bar against challenges to a wide array of practices that burden and disempower minoritized communities.

Thus, equal protection protects unequally, strictly scrutinizing race classifications that limit the constitutionality of race-conscious remedies, yet

utilizing exceedingly narrow interpretations of what constitutes discriminatory effects against racialized minorities. As a result, untold numbers of discriminatory practices against historically aggrieved communities are allowed to continue unabated.

Critical race scholarship has also articulated the need to use racial position as an epistemological perspective from which to better apprehend the reality of all topics, not just “race-relevant” ones. Similar interventions have emerged across the numerous disciplines. In the 1990s, influential work by sociologists Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, Leslie Carr, Stephen Steinberg, Tukufu Zuberi, Ruth Frankenberg, and others revealed the ways that white subjects evaded their complicity with racism by invoking colorblind tropes. In the humanities, scholars including Toni Morrison, Gayatri Spivak, and Edward Said similarly recognized the foundational imperative to remake the conventions and frameworks of disciplinary knowledge production in order to unfetter the possibilities for more widespread political transformations.

The academic resistance to the conventional modes of racial disavowal stretched into the early decades of the twenty-first century as generative work has explored the deployment of colorblindness within criminal justice, genetics and medicine, education, political history, media studies, visual arts, literature, public policy, and many other fields. These and other critical interventions reveal that disciplinary knowledge is more than the sum of separate inquiries in discrete areas of knowledge. It is part of a historically constituted episteme that contains premises, presumptions, and practices that together hide the workings of racial power.

The chapters in this volume build upon an important body of scholarship on the emergence of racial colorblindness within and outside the academy. The demand that underscores this volume challenges scholars and the disciplines to see race again. The task it urges is to confront the underlying logic and assumptions of the colorblind paradigm that dominates so many disciplines today. It describes, analyzes, and interprets exemplary efforts by researchers and teachers to contest commitments to colorblindness within their respective fields. In the process, it identifies an array of methodologies, pedagogies, and theoretical approaches that use race as a central analytic and framework to reimagine and invigorate their disciplines, their research, their teaching, and their public engagement. As Kimberlé Crenshaw has observed, there is an opportunity now for “scholars across the disciplines not only to reveal how disciplinary conventions themselves constitute racial power, but also to provide an inventory of the critical tools developed over time to

weaken and potentially dismantle them.” Indeed, because the conventions of colorblindness enacted within the university have far-reaching effects, Crenshaw argues that an unprecedented opportunity exists “to present a counter-narrative to the premature societal settlement that marches under the banner of post-racialism.”<sup>37</sup> The Countering Colorblindness project could not be a more timely answer to this call.

### RECLAIMING THE UNIVERSITY

In an essay in 1971 describing the “vocation” of the Black scholar in a moment of political and social upheaval, the writer and political strategist Vincent Harding noted the ways in which the “American university” has become “so regularly filled with misleading calls to the mystic, universal fellowship of objective, unpigmented scholarship (or with more crassly formulated invitations to respectability and a certain safety, in exchange for the abandonment of our real question).” Like the many scholar activists working from the frameworks of feminists of color, Indigenous studies, and other critical fields, Harding argued that scholarship and pedagogy must always be responsive to the political, social, and economic conditions that constitute the university and its conditions of possibility. As with Harding, for us the answers to the “real question” must “emerge hard and thorny out of the ancient, ever-present struggles of our community towards freedom, equality, self-determination, liberation” in an effort to secure “the essential reality we seek.”<sup>38</sup>

Following Harding, Roderick Ferguson has argued that critical interdisciplinary work attending to race must acknowledge and pursue opportunities afforded by not only the *formalization* of such programs (e.g., the departmentalization of programs such as Ethnic Studies, Chicano/a Studies, etc.) but also the *informalization* of critical strategies that aspire to “redraft and reclaim the university” around principles of social and epistemological redistribution. For Ferguson such strategies must activate and deploy the critical insights and energies of race-conscious modes of scholarship “without presuming that we need formal authorization and certification to do so.”<sup>39</sup>

This volume and the broader Countering Colorblindness project aspire to the interventions framed by Ferguson. Challenging disciplinary adherence to colorblind strategies must take place in an array of formalized and institutionally recognized spaces: new courses, pedagogy, and syllabi; publication projects; and initiatives within disciplinary organizations and conferences.

But institutional recognition and incorporation is not the ultimate horizon of possibility. As Ferguson explains, the broader imperative is to produce “institutional spaces within and outside the academy that can disrupt the various economies that attempt to narrow the possibilities of minority existence.”<sup>40</sup>

Thus, in the process of challenging and destabilizing various disciplinary iterations of the colorblind paradigm, we must also, in Ferguson’s words, “remake and remobilize energies for the reorganization of knowledge and the transformation of institutions.”<sup>41</sup> To counter colorblindness is to contribute to the urgent task of reorienting the contemporary university to engage a wider set of social crises, taking seriously the forms of hierarchy, violence, and dispossession that mark our world. This project accompanies a broader effort in which scholarship and teaching that explicitly engage issues of racial power, domination, and resistance form the groundwork for new possibilities and imaginaries that can make contemporary academic disciplines relevant rather than cynical, democratizing rather than constraining.

#### NOTES

1. E.g., Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and Racial Inequality in Contemporary America*, 3rd ed. (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009).

2. Mark Golub, *Is Racial Equality Unconstitutional?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 5.

3. Osagie K. Obasogie, *Blinded by Sight: Seeing Race through the Eyes of the Blind* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), esp. 3, 124, and 126.

4. Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, “The Color of Reason: The Idea of ‘Race’ in Kant’s Anthropology,” in *Postcolonial African Philosophy*, ed. Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 105, 107. In *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (London: Zed Books, 1983), Cedric Robinson demonstrated that this stratification had already been racialized in Europe even before its colonial contacts with Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

5. Immanuel Wallerstein et al., *Open the Social Sciences: Report of the Gulbenkian Commission on the Restructuring of the Social Sciences* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 29.

6. George Stocking, *Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays on the History of Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

7. Esther Lezra, *The Colonial Art of Demonizing Others: A Global Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2014); Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971); Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London and New York: Routledge,

1994); Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, *Extremities: Painting Empire in Post-Revolutionary France* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002); Laura Wexler, *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Nancy Armstrong, *Fiction in the Age of Photography: The Legacy of British Realism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

8. Wallerstein et al., *Open the Social Sciences*, 20.

9. Eric R. Wolff, *Europe and the People without History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

10. Wallerstein et al., *Open the Social Sciences*, 22.

11. Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 46; Wallerstein et al., *Open the Social Sciences*, 19, 20.

12. Robert Vitalis, *White World Order, Black Power Politics: The Birth of American International Relations* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015).

13. Cited *ibid.*, 36.

14. *Ibid.*, 18–20.

15. Lothrop Stoddard, *The Rising Tide of Color: The Threat against White World-Supremacy* (New York: Scribner, 1920); and Madison Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race*, 4th ed. (New York: Scribner, 1936).

16. Audrey Smedley, *Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a Worldview* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993), 269–91.

17. Tukufu Zuberi and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, “Toward a Definition of White Logic and White Methods,” in *White Logic, White Methods: Racism and Methodology*, ed. Tukufu Zuberi and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 5–12.

18. Politically influential scholarship by James Q. Wilson, Charles Murray, and the late Samuel P. Huntington retains many of the racist premises and presumptions of eugenics research. Yet even scholars who understand the illegitimacy of treating race as a biological concept still deploy it as causal explanation. See Tukufu Zuberi, “Deracializing Social Statistics: Problems in the Quantification of Race,” in Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva (eds.), *White Logic, White Methods*, 127–34.

19. William P. Darity and Patrick L. Mason, “Evidence on Discrimination in Employment: Codes of Color, Codes of Gender,” in *African American Urban Experience: Perspectives from the Colonial Period to the Present*, ed. Joe Trotter, Earl Lewis, and Tera Hunter (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 156–86; Shelley Lundberg and Richard Startz, “Private Discrimination and Social Intervention in Competitive Labor Markets,” *American Economic Review* 73, no. 3 (June 1983): 340–47; Gary A. Dymksi, “Racial Exclusion and the Political Economy of the Subprime Crisis,” *Historical Materialism* 17, no. 2 (2009): 149–79.

20. Leah Gordon, *From Power to Prejudice: The Rise of Racial Individualism in Midcentury America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 53–77.

21. Wallerstein et al., *Open the Social Sciences*, 17.

22. Nancy MacLean, *Democracy in Chains: The Deep History of the Radical Right’s Stealth Plan for America* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2017).

23. Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, after Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003): 257–37.
24. Walter Dignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 81–86.
25. Wallerstein et al., *Open the Social Sciences*, 23.
26. Immanuel Kant, "Of the Different Races of Man," in *Race and the Enlightenment: A Reader*, ed. Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (Cambridge, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 1997), 138–40; Eze, "The Color of Reason," 116, 117, 119.
27. G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of History* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1956), 90.
28. Richard Bauman and Charles Briggs, *Voices of Modernity: Language Ideologies and the Politics of Inequality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 29, 31, 35, 38.
29. Nancy Armstrong, *How Novels Think: The Limits of Individualism from 1719–1900* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 11.
30. Marzia Milazzo, "White Supremacy, White Knowledge, and Anti-West Indian Discourse in Panama: Olmedo Alfaro's *El peligro antillano en la América Central*," *Global South* 6, no. 2 (2012): 65–86.
31. For an example of a recent argument for race as a biologically grounded concept, see Jiannbin Lee Shiao, Thomas Bode, Amber Beyer, and Daniel Selvig, "The Genomic Challenge to the Social Construction of Race," *Sociological Theory* 30, no. 2 (2012): 67–88. For a critique of this work, see Daniel HoSang, "On Racial Speculation and Racial Science: A Reply to Shiao et al.," *Sociological Theory* 32, no. 3 (2014): 228–43.
32. W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America: An Essay toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in an Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860–1880* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1935).
33. Roderick A. Ferguson, "University," *Critical Ethnic Studies* 1, no. 1 (2015): 49.
34. See, e.g., Asafa Jalata, "Revisiting the Black Struggle: Lessons for the 21st Century," *Journal of Black Studies* 33, no. 1 (2002): 86, 94; and Ibram X Kendi, *The Black Campus Movement: Black Students and the Racial Reconstitution of Higher Education, 1965–1972* (New York: Palgrave, 2012).
35. C. L. R. James, "Interviews: C. L. R. James," *The Black Scholar* 2, no. 1 (1970): 41–43.
36. Wallerstein et al., *Open the Social Sciences*.
37. Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, "Twenty Years of Critical Race Theory: Looking Back to Move Forward," *Connecticut Law Review* 43, no. 5 (July 2011): 1262.
38. Vincent Harding, "The Vocation of the Black Scholar and the Struggles of the Black Community," in *Education and the Black Struggle: Notes from a Colonized World*, ed. Institute of the Black World (Atlanta: Institute of the Black World, 1974), 5, 9.
39. Ferguson, "University," 51.
40. *Ibid.*, 50.
41. *Ibid.*, 51.