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# Fatal Couplings of Power and Difference: Notes on Racism and Geography

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To study the complexities of race and geography, research and analysis should center on the fatally dynamic coupling of power and difference signified by racism. The author considers briefly the theoretical and methodological implications of key frameworks geographers used during the past century to account for racialized power differentials. To illustrate the political, economic, and cultural capacities that historical materialist geographical inquiry ought to consider, the author outlines the background for a new project—a case study of the U.S. during a period of unusually intense state-building in the mid-twentieth century. The article concludes that the political geography of race consists of space, place, and location as shaped simultaneously by gender, class, and scale. **Key Words:** racism, difference, power, political geography, twentieth-century U.S.

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## Who Am I?

I locate my work within the broad areas of social theory, political economy, and labor and social movements. In my research and writing, I investigate, largely in the U.S. context, overdeterminations of race, gender, class, and power. The geographical impulses shaping my analyses are deliberately counterintuitive. What I wish to do is disarticulate commonsense couplings of sites and struggles and disrupt assumptions such as the idea that politics happens in the milieu of the state, or that value comes from wage-controlled workplaces. At the same time, I am not throwing out the historical materialist baby with the well-used bathwaters of three decades of Marxist geography.

My goal is to emulate the work of engaged scholars who try to find in the organizational foundations of social movement-building something other than perpetual recapitulation of ongoing place-based struggles that are displaced but never resolved (Robinson 1983; Sivanandan 1983; Pulido 1996; Fernandes 1997; Woods 1998; Kim 2000; Gilroy 2000). By “place” I mean, following Neil Smith’s (1992) typology of scale, the *range of kinds of places*—as intimate as the body, and as abstract, yet distinctive, as a productive region or a nation-state.<sup>1</sup>

For the past decade, I have focused my scholarly energy on several projects that developed from ongoing political activism. I am finishing a book called *Golden Gulag*, a study of California’s remarkable prison growth, and the oppo-

sition to it, during the last two decades of the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> I embarked on *Golden Gulag* and pursued it relentlessly because women in a grassroots organization whose loved ones are in prison asked me to find out: (1) what work does prison do? (2) for whom? and (3) to what end? Those three initial questions prompted a subsequent pair of interrelated questions, which *Golden Gulag* asks and answers. How does the state-in-crisis discipline surplus workers, and how do workers organize against their abandonment within and across oppositional spaces delimited by race, gender, class, region, and violence?

The second project examines how underdevelopment and environmental racism constitute two sides of a single coin (Pulido 1996), by looking specifically at how environmental justice activism can be a sturdy bridge between grassroots activists stuck in urban and rural landscapes of disaccumulation. As in the case of justice work, I find that women take the lead in everyday struggles against toxicities. They join forces not only as petitioners to the state in the name of injuries sustained but also—and more provocatively—as petitioners to communities of similar people in the name of reconstructing place so that concepts of “safety” and “health” cannot be realized by razor-wire fences or magic bullet cures.

Women’s restless activism sent me down a third research path. In this new project, tentatively called “Political Geographies of Recognition in the Age of Human Sacrifice,” I will

attempt to piece together a geographical genealogy of radicalism by tracing the development and movement of several mature women activists across territories shaped by state and state-sanctioned racist terror (Nazi death camp, Mississippi lynch mob, El Salvador death squads). My observation of the ways that the women have become materially and discursively able to recognize each other across many contemporary divides demands reconsideration of the historical geography of the present (Pred 2000). All projects investigate the present's lived structural antecedents in the long twentieth century (Arrighi 1994) toward the end of detailing how that century, which I call the age of human sacrifice, also produced subjects whose ideological and material agency moved in counterpurpose to "fatal couplings of power and difference" (Hall 1992, 17).

The urgency of all three projects begins with the crisis of the capitalist (Negri 1988) racial state (Omi and Winant 1986). Such investigation neither derives from nor leads to either a monolithic view of the state or an "essentialist"<sup>3</sup> view of race. Rather, my purpose is to use research techniques to piece together a complex (and not necessarily logical) series of abstractions in order at once to analyze and produce a multiscalar geographical object of analysis.<sup>4</sup> States are territorial resolutions of crisis (see, e.g., Tilly 1985; Mann 1988). Capitalist states displace and contain highly differentiated moments of class struggle in many ways. As Marx observed, tax struggle is class struggle. The abstraction of class conflict from the multiple sites of production (including sites of reproduction) to state milieux does more than produce a free-floating—or even an interest-group-defined—squabble over the appropriate disposition of public resources (see Gilmore 1998b). Indeed, the state's mediation is both constitutive of and constituted by extra-state relations. Changing ideological and material infrastructures—institutions—of actual states widen (or narrow, and sometimes both at once) the distance between categories of social actors and their capacity to realize their own freedom.<sup>5</sup>

If race has no essence, racism does. Racism is singular because, whatever its place-based particularities, its practitioners exploit and renew *fatal* power-difference couplings. Fatalities—premature deaths (Greenberg and Schneider 1994)—are not simply an objective function

of any kind of power differential. There is no difference without power, and neither power nor difference has an essential moral value (Foucault 1977). Rather, the application of *violence*—the cause of premature deaths—produces political power in a vicious cycle (Feldman 1991). What, then, are nonfatal power-difference couplings? Mutuality for one. For another, my undergraduate students always say "the family"; and while we debate how and why different kinds of contemporary families are structured as they are, and to what extent patriarchy is still a family rather than state affair (see Brown 1995), and how the concept of family defines normative sexuality, there's something in the answer to work with (see, e.g., Collins 1990; Fortunati 1995; Gilmore 1999b).

Racism is a practice of abstraction, a death-dealing displacement of difference into hierarchies that organize relations within and between the planet's sovereign political territories. Racism functions as a limiting force that pushes disproportionate costs of participating in an increasingly monetized and profit-driven world onto those who, due to the frictions of *political* distance, cannot reach the variable levers of power that might relieve them of those costs. Indeed, the process of abstraction that signifies racism produces effects at the most intimately "sovereign" scale, insofar as particular kinds of bodies, one by one, are materially (if not always visibly) configured by racism into a hierarchy of human and inhuman persons that in sum form the category "human being" (Agamben 1999).

The violence of abstraction produces all kinds of fetishes: states, races, normative views of how people fit into and make places in the world. A geographical imperative lies at the heart of every struggle for social justice; if justice is embodied, it is then therefore always spatial, which is to say, part of a process of making a place. For researchers, purpose and method determine whether one reifies race and state—chasing down fetishes—or, rather, discovers dynamic processes that renovate race and state (Gramsci 1971). When I started to work on *Golden Gulag*, I realized that prisons were a consequence of state failure; I had yet to learn that they are a project of state-building. Prisons are geographical solutions to social and economic crises, politically organized by a racial state that is itself in crisis. The complex dynam-

ics of politically organized institutional shifts that reconfigure the economic, cultural, and reproductive landscapes of everyday life are necessarily contradictory. In placing prisons at the center of a multiscalar analysis of contemporary crisis, I found it necessary (1) to chart dynamics of change that articulate landscapes of accumulation and disaccumulation (Gilmore 1998a, 1998b) and (2) to document how racism works even when it is officially “over” (cf. Balibar and Wallerstein 1992). These twinned goals then set into stark relief the ways that relatively powerless social actors—e.g., prisoners’ mothers and families—renovate and make critical already existing activities, categories, and concepts to produce freedom from surplus capacities. As a result, starting from race and state yields, necessarily rather than additively, an analysis that cannot be complete at any level of abstraction without attending to gender, class, and culture in the simultaneous processes of abstracting and reconstructing geographies of liberation.

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### Where Have We Been?

In the long, murderous twentieth century, geographers used three main frameworks to study race: environmental determinism (see Mitchell 2000), areal differentiation (see Harvey 1969), and social construction (see, e.g., Jackson and Penrose 1993; Gilmore 1999a, 1999b, forthcoming b; Liu 2000). While these three approaches span an astonishing political spectrum, from racist eugenics to antiracist multiculturalism, all (at least implicitly) share two assumptions: (1) social formations are structured in dominance within and across scales; and (2) race is in some way determinate of sociospatial location. In other words, having marched a long way, geographical inquirers into race perhaps have not gotten as far as we might wish. Contradiction was as fundamental to the earliest as the latest twentieth-century work.

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### Where Should We Go?

As I have suggested, race is not only contradictory but also—necessarily—overdetermined as well. That is, the recognition that power and structure are mutually dependent requires that we understand dynamic distributions of power throughout a structure. The object is to figure

out what (including “who”—i.e., deal with agency in a nonvoluntaristic sense) makes oppressive and liberatory structures work, and what makes them fall apart. At the most general level of abstraction, we know that structures change under conditions of power redistribution—i.e., during times of crisis. In times of crisis, dynamics are peculiarly apparent, and insofar as we can catch historical or contemporary shifts on the fly, we might recognize something powerful about race and freedom.

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### For Example?

In my newest project, I am trying to sort out the ways in which organizing is always constrained by recognition (see also Gilmore 1999b). Women who lived through political terror as youth have, in their mature years, become political activists seeking to formulate “public policies” for social movements. They work in the context of the short-lived and weak U.S. welfare state’s dismantling and the rise of a punitive postwelfare state that, like its predecessor, ideologically and materially depends on the legitimacy of militarism or warfare (Gilmore 1998b). In this political, economic, and cultural geography, premature death is an unfortunate given rather than an intolerable failure. What is the historical geography of the present in which these women’s work proceeds? What institutional shapes of twentieth-century human sacrifice produced power through killing and terror sufficient to keep women, for many years, from living whole ways of oppositional life? And why fight now?

The capacities for particular historical blocs to secure local, regional, national, or imperial domination depend in part on the skill and extent to which the blocs socialize the costs of such domination (especially since, as every smart anticolonialist has pointed out, coercion is expensive—see Fanon 1961). They reduce their own financial and ideological exposure by externalizing such costs to collective structures—i.e., to the state. The benefit to such externality lies not only in tapping the public purse but also in expanding lower-cost consent by developing the ideological state apparatuses (Althusser [1971] 1996).

In Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s New Deal regime, social welfare apparatuses took shape as Progressive-era bred reformists used the

state's power to resolve the Great Depression's antagonisms. They did so in order both to restore general health to the economy and to disarm radical alternatives such as communism (McWilliams [1939] 1969; Faue 1990; Kelley 1990; Mitchell 1996; Dowd 1997; Woods 1998). The programs spread guaranteed effective demand by redistributing wealth, but did so unevenly, to the point that, while labor achieved a modicum of security against economic disasters, lawmakers and agencies of the nascent Keynesian state reworked and made critical the very U.S. hierarchies that activists were fighting to deconstruct in radical organizing. Thus, under the New Deal, white people fared well compared with people of color, most of whom were deliberately excluded from opportunities and protections (Kelley 1990; Mink 1995), men received automatically what women had to apply for individually (Faue 1990; Amott and Matthaehi 1991; Gordon 1994), and normatively urban, industrial workers secured rights denied agricultural field workers even to this day (Edid 1994; Woods 1998).

The uneven development of the New Deal's "creative government" (Baldwin 1968) resulted not only from the uneven capitulations of capital to a massive social wage, but also—and perhaps more—from the desperately dense relationships between Southern and Northern Democrats. The Southerners' congressional seniority gave them secure legislative foundations from which to engineer limits to any centralized power that would disrupt the region's peculiarly fatal couplings of power and difference.

Both resident and absent planters (Egerton 1994; Woods 1998), who derived enormous fortunes from sharecroppers and tenant farmers, and regional and carpetbagger capitalists, who funded the South's competitive mine-and-mill-based (steel, cotton, lumber) industrialization, depended on the expansion, consolidation, and enforcement of Jim Crow rule to keep labor cheap and disciplined (Lewis 1994; Woods 1998). Indeed, securing the capacity to produce power through racist terror—lynching—symbolized the metaphorical and material line that separated the South from, and thus connected it to, the rest of the United States. Here, then, we have to understand that the anomaly that emerged in the 1930s was not federal reticence to condemn lynching in contrast

with the building of institutions of social welfare, but rather the extension to the federal scale—through differentiations of protections from calamity and opportunities for advancement—of the South's apartheid practices.

Although authorized, the New Deal social welfare institutional forms were never fully operationalized. However, in order to execute the World War II buildup, the Department of War appropriated from the political and institutional milieu of social welfare powerful bureaucracies, central planning, and control over large sums of finance capital (Hunt and Sherman 1972; Hooks 1991; Markusen and Yudken 1993). Starting in 1938, these formerly underutilized capacities were transformed into the structures of the national security state (Hooks 1991), and the postwar Department of Defense became a fortress agency, shielded from public scrutiny (Cook 1962; Melman 1974; Piven 1992). The wealth produced in large part by federal expenditures for the maintenance and expansion of Pentagon research and development, equipment, installations, and personnel—5–15 percent of the annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP)—effectively underwrote the postwar welfare state; redistribution of wealth in the golden age was made palatable by general prosperity. Meanwhile, in the context of the cold war—in other words, as an arm of "defense"—the codification of business unionism in the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act narrowed labor's realm of activism (James 1980; Lichtenstein 1982; Davis 1986). Thus, "military Keynesianism" designates the socio-economic "welfare warfare" (O'Connor 1973) system practiced in the United States.

At the same time, the war against racism was also a racist war, in that it renovated the U.S. racial state on several fronts. The U.S. state deliberately, self-consciously, and repeatedly declined to intervene in the extermination of Jews by Nazis; it willfully ignored dispatches detailing what the Nazis were doing to Jews (and, I can only presume, to non-Jews who were communists and homosexuals, to Romani, to Africans stuck in Europe, and to the other five million or so industrially killed in the camps; Wyman 1984). The racist exclusion of European Jews from U.S. shores, effected by obstacles one State Department official named "paper walls" (Wyman 1968), particularized the racial front to the East, even as, in the West,

the coast-long “security zone” provided the pretext for expropriating Japanese and Japanese Americans and deporting them to concentration camps (Weglyn 1976).

The evidence shows how the War Department and members of FDR’s administration worked diligently to define the security zone so that it would maximize capture of the “enemy race” (as Japanese/Japanese Americans were named in one of many memos) and minimize capture of others (Germans, Italians) with whom the U.S. was at war. Death stalked the West as much as the East and the South. As this project progresses, I will argue, rather than merely assert, that the security zone provided the pretext for FDR’s successor to drop the bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The internment camps discursively signified and materially produced civil and quasisocial death, which then enabled (or perhaps even required) state terror to obliterate the enemy “over there” whose racial difference (whether understood biologically or understood culturally) could only be dissolved by physical death (Yamazaki 1995).

In sum, then, by trying to reconstruct the U.S. the activist women moved into and across, I found that my project became thematically and empirically concerned with how the U.S. racial state renovates and makes critical already existing activities in times of crisis. Through forcefully twinned processes of articulation and abstraction, lived narratives of difference become singularly dramatized as modalities of antagonism, whose form of embodied appearance is the overdetermined (racialized, gendered, nationalized, criminal) enemy. Indeed, the central point here is best summarized by Orlando Patterson’s (1982, 44) elegant statement summarizing slavery’s commonsense justifications, which attribute the logic of social death to a mutable object of adversity: “One fell because he was the enemy; the other became the enemy because he had fallen.”

The U.S. urban welfare state institutionalized particular gendered dramas of race and class. The most radical tendencies of the African-American civil rights movement’s “second reconstruction” (Marable 1991; cf. Du Bois [1935] 1992) coalesced during the World War II fight against racism and fascism (James 1980). We have already seen that Black veterans returning from the front, and their families,

were determined not to relive the intensified lynching that punctuated the end of World War I (Ginzburg [1962] 1988). Nevertheless, it was a bloody time. However, while radical tendencies persisted until they were crushed by the state during the next quarter century (Jackson 1970; A. Davis 1981; Donner 1990; Newton 1996), they were also displaced by success in the struggle for access to social welfare programs and equal educational opportunity. This was especially the case in cities outside the South to which Black people had migrated during the century to work in Fordist war and peacetime industries, if almost always at their margins (Marks 1989; Marable 1991; Sonenshein 1993; cf. Stack 1996). The “urban pact” was an outcome of reformist struggles characterized by the formation of political coalitions through which Black people achieved access to public resources and employments and wielded relative electoral power (Marable 1991; Sonenshein 1993).

The welfare state came under sustained attack when military—or “bastard” (Turgeon 1996)—Keynesianism failed to prevent the mid-1970s economic crisis that featured both high inflation and high unemployment (Shaikh and Tonak 1994). Why the failure? In economic terms, Keynes’ short-run remedy was not up to the challenge of a long-run crisis. Countercyclical investment and guaranteed effective demand were powerless against the key crisis: an apparently secular, rather than cyclical, post-1967 decline in the rate of profit created by excessive capitalist investments in productive capacity (Brenner 2001). While military buildup in Vietnam temporarily cured the 1970 recession, extreme measures taken by Washington’s rising monetarist elite at the Federal Reserve Bank—manipulation of interest rates, abandonment of the gold standard, and devaluation of the dollar (Dickens 1996)—worsened conditions for ordinary people in the U.S. However, it was the welfare state, military Keynesianism’s *social* face, rather than capitalism’s surplus-generated crisis, that bore popular political blame for economic turmoil. In particular, urban dwellers of color who had seized a portion of public resources began to weather the long attack on their right to share in the social wage. At about the same time, decent individual-wage jobs, especially in labor market segments disproportionately filled by

modestly educated Black and brown men, began the late twentieth-century urban outmigration, producing the deindustrialized city cores that in turn yield most prisoners today (Grant, Oliver, and James 1996; Gilmore 1998b, 1999a, forthcoming b).

Has the delegitimization of Keynesianism produced a post-Keynesian tendency to domestic militarism? Why not simply post-Keynesian monetarism or neoliberalism? Is the domestic state really more coercive, or merely more neglectful? Let us approach the tendency toward militarism via my attempt to theorize the normative aggression of U.S. responses to crisis in terms of the nation's violent history and habits (Gilmore 1999b). The domestic turn of the national security state derives from a standard of aggression specific, if not peculiar, to the U.S. Thus, while the postwar national security state emerged from crisis conditions and absorbed means and methods designed for peaceful purposes in order to build up the most extensive warfare apparatus in the history of the world (Hooks 1991; Markusen and Yudken 1993), the ideological preconditions for the behemoth post-1945 Pentagon lie in the centrality of state and state-sanctioned violence to the American national project.

In my view, the founding moments of U.S. nationalism, well rehearsed in mainstream histories, are foundational to both state and culture. First, the U.S. was "conceived in slavery" (Jones 1992, 292), and christened by genocide (Stannard 1992). These early practices established high expectations of state aggression against enemies of the national purpose—such as revolutionary slaves and indigenous peoples—and served as the crucible for development of a military culture that valorized armed men in uniform as the nation's true sacrificial subjects (DuBois [1935] 1992; Stannard 1992; Englehardt 1995). Large-scale, coercive institutions—prisons and reservations—were established to control freedmen in the postbellum South, and dispossessed Native Americans throughout the country. Second, the high incidence of war waged by the U.S. correlates with high levels of violence, particularly homicide, experienced in the social formation of the U.S. as compared with 114 other nation-states. Every time the U.S. goes to war and wins—as happened in 1991—the homicide rate goes up, indicating that the state, in particular the warfare state,

models behavior for the polity (Archer and Gartner 1984). Third, the national exculpatory standard for murder committed in "self-defense" is remarkably aggressive. Indeed, in the culmination of nearly fifty years of case law involving white men killing white men, the Supreme Court overturned the murder conviction of a man who pursued a retreating combatant, with Chief Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes explaining that "[a] man is not born to run away" (Howe 1953, 335–36; Brown 1991).

It is plausible to argue that these three points have sedimented weight, not as remnant ideology, but rather as ballast for commonsense notions of everyday dangers and alternatives to them. In particular, I believe they help to explain the promotion and acceptance of expanded punishment and the attendant apparatuses of criminal justice in the contemporary period, according to the following scheme. First, the legitimate domestic U.S. state is the national security, or defense, or warfare state. Second, the local world is, and has always been, a very dangerous place: indeed, at the very moment when the nation is basking in foreign victory, the domestic turns hostile. Finally, the key to safety is aggression (cf. Foucault 1977; Feldman 1991; Bartov 1996).

But it is more complicated than this. If the legitimate state is the defense or warfare state, and domestic militarism is properly deployed to intervene between—and thereby define—wrongdoers and law-abiding citizens, how else can we characterize these antagonists? I have already noted the importance of chattel slavery and the premeditated murder of indigenous peoples as foundational to U.S. economic and territorial growth. These twinned legacies, plus the colonization of Mexico and Puerto Rico (Barrera 1979) and the differentiation of both immigrants and nationals according to hierarchies of origin and religious belief (DuBois [1935] 1992; Stannard 1992; Saxton [1971] 1995; Almaguer 1994), are central to the production of the U.S. master-race (Roediger 1990; Allen 1994). Justice Holmes' "man" was actually and normatively white. And, insofar as Holmes' "man" individualized the nation state at the scale of his body, he was also the figure of the citizen. Thus, while the power of the state could be, and was, used against white men as workers (Roediger 1990), the relatively early universal extension of suffrage to Euro-American

males established government as their milieu and state power as their instrument (Katznelson 1985). The development of the U.S. “herrenvolk democracy” (Roediger 1990; cf. Saxton 1990) or “dictatorship of white men” (Winant 1994) both depended on and fostered a connection between and among masculinity, state power, and national belongingness, with everyone else thus characterized as to some degree alien.

In other words, the warfare state is also the gendered racial state (Omi and Winant 1986). Intranational conflicts around inclusion and exclusion require this state to “fix” difference in order to maintain internal pacification (Mann 1988). The “fix” follows two general trajectories. In good times, the state remedies exclusion by recognizing the structural nature of racism and institutionalizing means for combating its effects—by, for example, extending the vote, banning discrimination in public-sector employment, or constructing the legal apparatuses through which injured persons may seek courtroom remedies (Omi and Winant 1986). Such racial state remedies were the order of the day for African Americans starting roughly in 1948, when President Harry S Truman desegregated the military, and diminished from the late 1960s onward (Marable 1991). In bad times, when deepened differentiation pacifies widespread insecurity among the herrenvolk, the “fix” formalizes inequality. Examples of the latter include: the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act; Jim Crow (U.S. apartheid) laws throughout the early twentieth century; the Roosevelt White House refusal to attack lynching, even rhetorically, in the 1930s and 1940s; the use of deportation, asset theft, and concentration camps to alienate and control Japanese Americans during World War II; and the extensive criminalization and imprisonment of people of color today (Gilmore 1998b).

The oscillation between reformist and repressive “fixes” is not a simple binary movement but rather overdetermined at the source. A key aspect of the U.S. state’s “infrastructural coordination” (Mann 1988)—its relational power throughout society, manifested in such social goods as laws, currency, education, roads, and so on—is its reliance on racial hierarchy (Omi and Winant 1986). That is, toward the end of securing or maintaining hegemony (Gramsci 1971), the state reproduces racial hier-

archy through its capacity to wield despotic power over certain segments of society—whether the decree is to promote a Black woman, put her on workfare, or send her to prison for being a bad, drug-addicted, mother.

The contemporary racial state’s aggressively punitive stance is made clear in recent revisions to law and jurisprudence, which occurred in spite of a preponderance of evidence that once produced different results. Take the death penalty. During the height of the civil rights movement in the 1960s, when petitioners persuaded the U.S. Supreme Court to review the racist excesses of the various states’ death-dealing zeal, probability mattered. “Scientific” approaches could prove (rather than justify) racism, and policy analysts from the social sciences made a veritable industry of producing the most highly mathematized representations showing whom the state kills, when, and why. Signs mattered. Thus, the evenhanded “objectivity” numbers presented to the policymaker consolidated and made actionable anti–state-racism struggles waged in other arenas. Thirty years later, trial, appellate, and supreme courts are generally unmoved by the arguments that were so persuasive not very long ago (Zimring 1993).<sup>6</sup> Probability does not matter anymore, in legal terms. As the punishment system is currently constituted, the fact that a Black person is more likely to be arrested, tried, convicted, sentenced, imprisoned, and executed than are others is, in the words of a prominent criminologist emeritus, “inequality, but not injustice” (van den Haag 1996).

The context of fatalities for the women whom I am studying was a capitalist racial state-in-crisis that invested in and rewarded diligently revised norms of the applied (legal, medical) disciplines (Bartov 1996). Such work had the *policy* effect of producing the “inhuman” side of the contradictory unity “human being” (Agamben 1999) through processes of gendered criminalization and racialization that accompany, and indeed ease, the ordinary destructive violences that “appear” to be not structural—all the sites of premature death in the U.S. urban and rural regions that have been abandoned by capital and state in the seismic upheavals we call “globalization,” even when the dough and the power are only relocated down the road. Teetering on the verge of the new millennium, we are ready to fall back into



the end of the *nineteenth century*—the era of Jim Crow, of *Plessy v. Ferguson*. Or else, we leap into the future.

### What Is the Conclusion?

Geographers should develop a research agenda that centers on race as a condition of existence and as a category of analysis, because the territoriality of power is a key to understanding racism. The political geography of race entails investigating space, place, and location as simultaneously shaped by gender, class, and scale. By centering attention on those most vulnerable to the fatal couplings of power and difference signified by *racism*, we will develop richer analyses of how it is that radical activism might most productively exploit crisis for liberatory ends. The usefulness of such an approach enables reconsideration of historical geographies, radical examination of transitional geographies, and the difference between the neutral fact of unequal power and its fatal exploitation. Thus, in this view, the focus on race neither fixes its nature nor asserts its primacy. Rather, the focus demands examination of the subjective and objective nature of power and difference as articulated and naturalized through racism; one can follow the reasoning, and adjust the methods, for studying interrelated fatalities. In other words, we must change aspects of both the forces and the relations of knowledge production in order to produce new and useful knowledges. ■

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> For example, all nation-states are at the same scale, though they are highly varied in geometric size, wealth, demographics, military might, urbanization, integration by global capital, and so on.

<sup>2</sup> For an earlier version of *Golden Gulag*, see Gilmore (1998a).

<sup>3</sup> Geographers, and social scientists in general, tend to overblow the threat of “essentialism.” The debates about race that loomed large in the 1980s in cultural theory—especially among Marxists such as Stuart Hall (1990), Gayatri Spivak (1988), and A. Sivanandan (1983)—have been taken up and awkwardly inserted into geography without much of the nuance that informed the earlier debates. The primary fear seems to be reification, which then leads to, or deepens, fragmentations along the lines of “identity politics.” Analytically, those lines can only lead into a cul-de-sac, since identity politics stands

in for a range of subjective and objective categories and concerns. The obsessive dismissal of identity politics misses the principal mark that schooling in historical materialism should make apparent. One works with what is at hand; the problem is not the “master’s tools” (Lorde 1984, 110) as objects, but the effective control of those “tools” (Gilmore 1993). One can and should be able to analyze “Black” materially—which is to say, with contingent accuracy. Such a claim hardly signifies that “Black” then always refers to the same cultural or biological object. Blackness is a spatially and temporally differentiated produced, and *real*, condition of existence and category of analysis.

<sup>4</sup> Academic disciplines crudely summarize these abstractions in one direction, by separating objects of study into disciplines with peculiar methods and boundaries. At the same time, the levels of generality appropriate to different aspects of a single analysis indicate another way in which abstraction cross-cuts the questions we ask.

<sup>5</sup> “Freedom” is shorthand for the object of history.

<sup>6</sup> Such change should not be ascribed to rotation of personnel. Judges can be the same people who wrote completely different opinions years earlier. Supreme Court Justice Roger Taney powerfully exemplifies such a shift. In 1841, he wrote the decision delivering from bondage the captured Africans of the *Amistad* slave ship, who had killed the crew that was taking them to be sold. The decision concurred with their position that they had been wrongfully enslaved and therefore did not constitute property under U.S. law. In 1857, as the Court’s Chief Justice, Taney wrote the landmark *Dred Scott* decision that included the immortal words: “A [Black] man has no rights that a white man is bound to respect” (*Scott v. Sandford*, 60 U.S. 393 [1856]).

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