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“Precedence and Warning: Global Apartheid and South Africa’s Long Conversation on Race with the United States”

Kirk B. Sides

This paper brings together histories of race, both in the United States and in South Africa, in order to think about how slavery, segregation, and apartheid, as well as responses to these, have shaped ideas about national identity and belonging. In it I explore the ways these two histories of racial oppression – both slavery and segregation in the U.S., as well as segregation and apartheid in South Africa – share not only common and overlapping discursive histories, but can be seen as part of larger transatlantic dialogues on race, racial governance, and the boundaries of national belonging. The paper attempts to chart a history of exchange, between South Africa and the U.S., of ideas on racial policy and race thinking. This different genealogy for crossing the Atlantic will offer ways to think together events such as the shootings in Ferguson in the U.S. and the shooting of miners at Marikana in South Africa, as related instances of how race – as defining feature of neoliberalism – continues to function in both places.

Keywords: Segregation, Apartheid, US South, Jim Crow, South Africa,

Neoliberalism

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“Precedence and Warning: Segregation, Apartheid, and South Africa’s Long Conversation on Race with the United States”

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This essay brings together two histories of race, both in the United States and in South Africa, in order to think about how the racist technologies of segregation and apartheid have shaped ideas about national and racial belonging in each context. First, I argue that engaging these two histories together works against the persistent imaginings of exceptionalism in South Africa and the US. In doing so, I believe there is a case to be made – though it is mostly beyond the scope of this article – for thinking about the contemporary dynamics of race in both countries, each a nodal point of violence in an unfolding, global crisis of racism. Moreover, I will begin to gesture towards ways in which demands for redress in each space resonate as part of a shared critique of this racialist modernity. My larger point is that thinking South Africa and the US together, whether it be in relation to the expansive platform of Black Lives Matter and the Fees Must Fall Movement, or in relation to postapartheid reconciliation and discourses about reparations for slavery, should be seen as part of a transatlantic history of relation and exchange between the two countries that spans at least the whole of the twentieth century. Thus while these are some of the contemporary stakes of what I am trying to bring together, much of the focus of the article will be to show how these two histories of racial oppression – both post-slavery reconstruction and segregation in the United States, as well as segregation and apartheid in South Africa – share not only common and overlapping discursive histories, but can be seen as part of a geographically broader and and historically longer transnational conversation about racial governance and the discontents of modernity, what I am marking out as a history of ‘global apartheid’.

In what follows I will pay particular attention to ways in which the US formed a racial horizon of both precedence and warning for a newly formed South Africa, and especially as the latter developed a national platform of segregation that would later be officially codified under the rubric of apartheid. I want to suggest that current attempts to exorcise the racial pasts in both spaces can offer us a way to view how race and racism function in contemporary political configurations. It must be said that I recognize, along with others who caution against such comparison, that postapartheid South Africa and what we might tentatively name post-slavery America do not share identical racial histories, configurations, or dispensations. Indeed, the racial logic of each society today varies widely. The point I am trying to make is based instead on a genealogical approach in the sense that if we start by exploring an earlier moment in the exchange of racial ideas between the two countries, rather than beginning with the contemporary moment of what looks like incommensurability, we might begin to see the unfolding – admittedly in sometimes widely divergent directions – of a conversation on race and racial governance between the US and South Africa that spans more than a century.

Race Across the Atlantic: Common Grounds?

Because there has been much equivocation about the possibilities and dangers of comparison between the US and South Africa, it is important to consider some of the stakes involved in thinking about these two spaces together. Leigh Anne Duck, a critic of Southern (US) literature, warns that “[c]omparison of the US South with South Africa not only poses the danger of resuscitating problematic spatial paradigms, but also threatens to return each field to a focus on racial segregation, at a moment

when such analysis could be outdated.”¹ Duck also writes that “comparison between any system and South African apartheid is also, inevitably, fraught with complication.”² While I am certainly not trying to forego comparative rigor, I find two problems with much of the equivocating around the possible relation of South African apartheid to other racialist technologies—and especially to American forms (institutionalized and otherwise) of segregation. The first is the obvious and most egregiously committed problem of re-inscribing a South African exceptionalism. This paradigm refuses to compare apartheid, or rather to see it as part of and indeed resultant from a global dialogue comprised of various racialist imaginaries, and even structurally and materially based upon precedent systems, precisely like those of Southern, Jim-Crow segregation. This in turn suggests the second aporia created from apprehension around this comparison, that historically, American policies on race, and especially those that were made to bear structural significance in processes of US national formation (the Native American reservation system, Slavery, Jim Crow Segregation), were in many ways pioneer technologies of racial governance and served as precedents and examples for the larger colonial world.

South African literary critic Rita Barnard expresses many of the same anxieties of comparison in her otherwise cautionary article “Of Riots and Rainbows: South Africa, the US, and the Pitfalls of Comparison.”³ Barnard’s article both warns those who would make transatlantic comparisons between South Africa and the US, as well as offers methodological recommendations for the “brave souls who wish to

¹ Duck, “Apartheid, Jim Crow, and Comparative Literature,” 39.

² *Ibid.*, 40.

³ Barnard, “Of Riots and Rainbows: South Africa, the US, and the Pitfalls of Comparison,” 401.

compare South African and US culture [and] the difficulties of such an enterprise.”⁴ I want to explore the equivocations behind Barnard’s warnings, though I want to make it clear that Barnard is not unique in expressing these comparative concerns; I cite her article here precisely because of her critical reach as an analyst of both spaces. Firstly, Barnard cites Jacques Derrida’s famous essay on the inhospitable and hence untranslatable word “apartheid.” Derrida’s essay, “Racism’s Last Word,” I argue, is somewhat dangerous for the same reasons that discourses on postraciality are dangerous: they implicitly chart a teleology of progress along an axis supposedly marking the societal erasure of racism. Derrida expresses the hope that “APARTHEID may...remain...the unique appellation for the ultimate racism in the world, the last of many.”⁵

I take issue with Derrida’s essay for a number of reasons. Firstly, the hyper-exceptionalizing of apartheid as the “unique” and “last” racism of the planet reinforces the view of South Africa as a space of *incomparable* and *ultimate* racism and violence. I find this exceptionalism dangerous precisely because one of its animating assumptions seems to be that if, or when, apartheid has finally been worked through, racism must come to some kind of end. As Barnard writes, “once the drama of racial conflict ceases to be the animating concern for students of post-apartheid South Africa (as it gradually must), the US will increasingly seem an unlikely comparative partner.”⁶ I wonder just how much we can hold to such a statement a little more than a decade after its writing, particularly in light of the ways both countries have re-emerged on the global stage as spaces of highly visible racial violence as well as of extreme racial neoliberalism, but also for the ways in which

⁵ quoted in Barnard, “Of Riots and Rainbows,” 401.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 402.

racism and xenophobia continue to animate the political (and economic) imaginaries of both countries.⁷ Even if we bracket the last decade, I would still argue that such ideas of incommensurability are complicit in erasing the histories of exchange and dialogue between South Africa and the US.

Rob Nixon, in his otherwise path-breaking study *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood* (1994), while convincingly mapping nearly half a century of entangled cultural, political, and social imaginaries between the United States and South Africa, equivocates precisely around the question of race, its various taxonomical systems, and the problem of their “illusory sense of mutual intelligibility.”⁸ The construction of race is uniquely dependent upon both the historical moment as well as the cultural, political, and socio-economic context in which the construction takes place; indeed, the modes and tropes for representing race vary and shift according to the variegations of the cultural topography of a given place. Race moves, in other words. In other words still, race is a global phenomenon continually *made* local. As David Theo Goldberg writes:

The conceptions and comprehensions as well as the
institutional arrangements and exclusionary expressions
no doubt are deeply local in the exact meanings and
resonances they exhibit as well as the effects and

⁷ Think here of Dylann Roof, who self-identified with the old South African and Rhodesian regimes, choosing to use both as potent markers of whiteness; Roof was convicted of shooting nine black members of a church in South Carolina in a self-proclaimed act of white supremacist murder. Think, too, of the continued relationship between the Black Lives Matter and the Fees Must Fall/Rhodes Must Fall and larger Decolonize movements. From the discourse on land redistribution in South Africa to the recent declaration of reparations for descendants of slaves sold by Georgetown University, we have in just the last two years witnessed a strange resurgence of something like a return of a transcolonial racist imaginary as well as a transnational consolidation of the responses to these racist aggressions.

⁸ Nixon, *Homelands, Harlem, and Hollywood: South African Culture and the World Beyond*, 3.

implications to which they in the end give rise. But these local resonances nevertheless are almost always tied to extra- or trans-territorial conceptions and expressions, those that circulate in wider circles of meaning and practice.⁹

While on some level I agree with Nixon when he writes that “[t]he inevitably partial character of the connections” between the two countries “becomes particularly manifest in the unstable zone of ethnic and racial discourse: the terms black, African, ‘colored,’ nonracial, multiethnic, multicultural, pluralist, and minority have quite different valences and implications in the U.S.A. and South Africa,” I argue that the semiotics and semantics of race particular to the US and South Africa do not tell the whole story.¹⁰ This is at least partly the case because, and Nixon is hardly alone in this, the story (of race) does not reach back far enough. Nixon is concerned largely with the period of apartheid itself, and the cultural flows between spaces such as Harlem and Sophiatown from the 1950s onwards. Similarly to Derrida’s preclusion of apartheid’s comparability discussed above, the grounds for comparison are inevitably bounded by the historiographical fence of apartheid itself. This in turn sets the terms – quite literally, in the case of Derrida’s piece – for any possible commensurability. I want to argue that rather than looking for one-for-one correlations, we can map more expansive regions of critique by instead focusing on racial/racist imaginaries, ones that include the US and South Africa in a long conversation. Moreover, if we think beyond the apartheid boundary of history to an earlier pre-history of colonial and segregationist racial technologies, then other genealogies, influences, and resonances,

⁹ Goldberg, “Racial Comparison, Relational Racisms: Some Thoughts on Method,” 1273.

¹⁰ Nixon, *Homelands...*, 3.

begin to emerge. We begin to see a map outlining a history of a certain racial modernity of the Atlantic between South Africa and the United States. Ultimately, I maintain that the persistent equivocation around comparison distracts from what might otherwise be productive critiques of both shared histories, as well as for how looking at these two spaces might tell us something about how race operates, and has been operationalized in our current planetary dispensations of racial neoliberalism, about which I will focus on more below.

It is precisely, and perhaps only, through a study of the relations between these two spaces and the discursive flows across their racial histories that we might disenchant ourselves of the aura of exceptionalism hovering around each. I suggest further that it is the historical legacies of transatlantic slavery as well as the southern African experience of apartheid that continue to mark the boundaries and chart the terrain of a racialized global modernity, a modernity reverberating across the Atlantic, from Ferguson to Marikana.¹¹ Pushing against the exceptionalism of regionalist histories, Paul Gilroy makes the claim that, “[i]n a sense then, geo-politics has itself been reordered along the lines of old South Africa.”¹² Outside of the nation-state of Israel, this is perhaps nowhere better exemplified than in the United States. Gilroy gestures towards precisely what David Theo Goldberg refers to as a form of “racial

¹¹ ‘Ferguson’ refers to the events of August 2014 in Ferguson, Missouri following the fatal shooting of Michael Brown, a black man by a white police officer, Darren Wilson. Though only one moment in a vast landscape of black deaths at the hands of police officials, Ferguson is a significant moment in the recent history of violence against blacks in the U.S., not only for its highlighting of an increased militarization of police forces across the country, but also for how the incident has acted as catalyst for solidarity against state-sanctioned police brutality since the event. ‘Marikana’ refers to the killing of mine workers by the South African security forces following a strike by the miners and subsequent stand off over the course of 10 days during August 2012. The tragedy occurred at the Marikana platinum mine outside of Rustenburg, and resulted in the death of over 40 miners. It has been described as one of the deadliest uses of state force in South African history.

¹² Gilroy, 289.

south africanization.”¹³ Apartheid and segregation have become world-organizing systems, their logics extended to the planet through economies of outsourcing and offshoring, and within ideologies of privatization and neoliberalism.

Re-constructing the Nation: The ‘Southern Voice’ of Maurice Evans’s *Black and White in the Southern States*

I turn now to look at several historical examples of the conversations on race and racial policy that animated the early relationship across the Atlantic between South Africa and the United States. While these are by no means exhaustive, I believe that they give a glimpse into the texture of the dialogue, its ideological stances towards segregation and assimilation, and most importantly, the ways in which the white South African racial imaginary in the early twentieth century was influenced by the figure of the post-Reconstruction Southern United States, one that loomed large for the budding South African nation, both precedent and warning. Maurice Evans was an outspoken South African liberal segregationist who traveled to the United States in 1914 and wrote a lengthy study on his time there. Titled *Black and White in the Southern States. A Study of the Race Problem in the United States from a South African Point of View*, Evans’s study is perhaps the first comparative look at the race situations of both South Africa and the United States and reads like a sociological appraisal of the southern US half a century after the end of the American Civil War. What is particularly peculiar about Evans’s text is not the ethnographical comparison of the two spaces, but rather the ways in which the author maps an imaginary geography in which the racial modernities of the two nations are linked. He begins by locating his study within a cartography in which the Atlantic recedes; looking out

¹³ Goldberg, “A Political Theology”

from the shores of the Southern states, Evans sees the horizon of a segregationist future in South Africa. “Notwithstanding the markedly different experiences through which each country has gone since European settlement first began”, Evans writes,

the visitor from South Africa to the Southern States sees much that is familiar. Every now and then some experience brings vividly to his mind the country he left. It was one of the pleasures of my visit to find, so far away, how often the very conditions I had left were reproduced before my eyes, the thousands of miles melted away, and Africa was before me.¹⁴

I have quoted this passage elsewhere in *Safundi*,¹⁵ but I argue it begs a revisiting precisely for the ways in which Evans’s imaginary topography maps not just a collapsing geography of the racial/racist Atlantic, but also a teleology in which American racial technologies first served as templates for the development of what later became apartheid. Mahmood Mamdani captures this development succinctly, noting how South African homelands “had first been created in North America half a century before. The American reservation became the South African reserve.”¹⁶

For Evans and other South Africans,¹⁷ the post-Civil War Reconstruction of the United States served as ideological and practical warning. Indeed, much of

¹⁴ Maurice Evans, *Black and White*, 4.

¹⁵ Kirk B. Sides, “Ecologies of Relation: Post-slavery, Post-apartheid and Rethinking Race Across the Atlantic in Zakes Mda’s *Cion. Safundi*, 17.1 2016.

¹⁶ Mamdani, “Settler Colonialism,” 608.

¹⁷ It should be noted that Evans was not unique, neither for espousal of segregation and anti-assimilation stances, nor for his articulation of these subsequent to travel in the United States. A revealing number of popular advocates of segregation in South Africa had indeed traveled in the United States, and the South in particular. In addition to Evans, there are C.T. Loram, Edgar Brooks, Hendrik Verwoerd, and others.

Evans's text reads like an allegorical diagnosis of the racial and social dimensions of South Africa, from the ideological position of the US. Evans warns South Africans explicitly against, "those ...who, for the sake of economic advancement, would not hesitate to bring the native people into surroundings in which they would be brought into industrial competition with the whites..."¹⁸ Not only does Evans claim that such economic and social intimacy would "inevitably lead to race conflict and race hatred," but he sites the history of the United States as exemplary and instructive, writing that: "Such contact in America has neither led to the true advance of the black, nor the advance of the white, nor to racial peace." He goes on to say that

The wisest friend of the American Negro, both white and black, after all these years of contact, would welcome a separation of the races such as is still possible to us in South Africa...We still have our black States. We still have Basutoland, Bechuanaland, Swaziland, the Transkei, the large reserves in Zululand and the locations in Natal and the Transvaal, and yet short-sighted ones would break them up...To such [short-sighted ones] the experience of the South should act as a warning.¹⁹

For South African commentators on the American South, the temporality of thinking about Jim Crow Segregation as template for South Africa was a curious 'always already too late' example for the future. While Evans and others supported the segregationist efforts of the American South, they largely believed that it was too late for their own region. The historical experience of slavery and the project of

¹⁸ Evans, *Black and White*, 269.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

assimilation they saw as forced upon the South by the victorious North after the Civil War had effected a level of cultural, economic, and racial mixture that could not be undone. Noting how South Africa ran a decade or two behind the project of the American South, John Cell writes: “The apparent failure of segregation in America might conceivably have led white South Africans to conclude that the problem of race relations in their country might require a fresh approach.” Instead, he continues, “[t]hey thought the South had not begun soon enough. Its segregation had not been sufficiently thorough...the prescription of white South Africans for remedying the faults of segregation was...more segregation.”²⁰ The banner of racial modernity was to be picked up where the South had left it, and carried into the future by a newly formed, modern South African nation. The racial future of the twentieth century was to be a carrying forward across the Atlantic of an American project of violent racial governance.

It is equally important to say something about Evans’s views on race in general, especially for the ways in which his opinions on the immutability of ‘racial character’ shaped his political positions on race in both the US and South Africa. At first blush Evans’s conceptions of race read as largely in step with many (mostly white) liberal commentators of his day. He begins with a characteristically universalist belief in the what he calls the “brotherhood of man,” claiming that “widely as the races differ, the resemblances are far greater than the differences, that human nature is much the same all the world over.”²¹ Evans continues to make clear his historical and anthropological positions on race and the claims for the unity of “human nature,” espousing a belief in monogenesis (the unitary origin of the human species). He also claims that this common origin is the source of similar responses “to

²⁰ Cell, *The Highest Stage*, 195.

²¹ Evans, *Black and White*, 12.

the same stimuli”; that humans “respond...under given provocation, love and hate, desire and accumulate, in much the same way.”²² Framing his comments on race in this way, Evans is careful not to appear in any way as racist. This is a label never directly ascribed to him, and one he would probably have opposed vehemently. If the reader is lulled into a narrative of racial harmony, based on shared species origins and notions of shared emotional “natures,” then Evans just as quickly contradicts himself and spends the rest of this chapter staging elaborations on the fundamental, even foundational, differences between races. Why the contradiction? The answer, I argue, has everything to do with Evans trying to reconcile his ideological position on race with his political one, a rhetorical trap in many ways definitional to the ‘liberal segregationism’ defining the Atlantic racial modernity I have been gesturing towards.

Common origins and common emotional responses – those traits shared out across the human spectrum – “vary enormously”, according to Evans, and “become very much attenuated when we compare the Bushmen, the Veddah, or the Andaman Islander with the Englishman or the German.”²³ The reasoning for this difference, Evans claims, rests on the spatial and teleological analogy of (racial) diffusionism, where “resemblances become less or more in proportion to the length of time which has elapsed since they diverged from a common stock.”²⁴ To be sure, this is a fairly common philosophy of (racialist) world history, where even when a common origin for human beings is admitted,²⁵ the idea is that races perceived to be different both moved away from this origin at different (historical) velocities, but also become deterministically limited or advantaged according to their supposed “racial genius” or

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 12-13.

²⁴ Ibid., 13.

²⁵ This was of course not a given, and the debate between monogenesis and polygenesis is the key debate here.

racial characteristics. Evans couches the whole idea of racial difference in a geological metaphor whereby race identity is the result of the sedimentation of racial character over the *longue durée* of “geological time”, producing the “adamant of...race genius, formed by gradual accretion from thousands of long forgotten ancestors.”²⁶ The solidity and immutability of Evans’s racial metaphor is meant to serve as relief against which notions of “civilization,” “progress,” “education,” and most importantly “assimilation”, are dashed and thus seen to be “ephemeral” (as Evans suggests). Again, why would Evan equivocate so within this text? I want to suggest that he is walking something of a line here, making it clear that he does not support a platform of out-and-out racism, while simultaneously laying the literal and metaphorical groundwork for his ideological and legislative recommendations for South African forms of segregation at the end of his text.

Evans is at pains to make it clear that his evaluation of various races is not quantitative, but rather qualitative. In other words, “that while one may not be superior to the other, the races have special powers and special limitations, and are essentially different.”²⁷ It is precisely upon this carefully mediated line, between a blatant racism and a liberal humanist patronizing, that Evans is able, ultimately, to clear the ground for a platform of segregation – which is both prescription and proscription for South Africa. And here Evans is more than clear; segregation is to be the only hope for South Africa, and his study of the American South’s experiment with Reconstruction and Black enfranchisement as well as its experience of assimilation is the ‘proof’ Evans feels his South African audience requires. The South African future and the American precedent are linked by the responsibility laid at the feet of the former by Evans. Among a host of other “specific lessons” Evans feels he

²⁶ Ibid., 13-14.

²⁷ Ibid., 272.

has garnered from the history of the American South, the paramount one is that “[t]he races are so different that to reduce antagonism and give each its full opportunity for race development, a conscious and reasoned attempt at race separation should be made.”²⁸ Evans admits that while it may be too late for the South,

in the strengthening and wise adjustment of this policy of separation, guardianship, and wise control [is] the greatest hope for the races in South Africa. Had this policy been adopted in the United States at the time of emancipation, when it was practicable, some at least of the present tension might have been avoided.²⁹

If Evans begins in the universalizing tones of a common humanity, then his liberal humanism is sacrificed (or is it sacralized?) in the crucible of economic and pragmatic racism. The US and South Africa for him are two nodal points in the mapping of an Atlantic racial modernity unfolding across the twentieth century. The perceived failures of Reconstruction, as well as the supposed sin of racial “miscegenation” (“debauchery” in Evans’s words), were to be rectified and rearticulated in the building of a modern South African nation. America’s racial sins, in other words, could be cleansed across the waters of the Atlantic.

Writing just on the cusp of Unification in South Africa, another prominent proponent of segregation, Howard J. Pim, imagines specifically how non-white enfranchisement might be approached. Perhaps not surprisingly, he also employs the example of the post-Reconstruction United States. Pim’s ideas about enfranchisement crescendo into a dramatic world vision of how, in the face of what we today might

²⁸ Ibid., 281.

²⁹ Ibid., 277.

call globalization, to maintain what segregationists termed “national” (read: racial) integrity. According to Pim’s vision of a racist future (which is almost identical to Evans’), “What we can look forward to and strive for is a self-supporting white community in South Africa, dealing justly with its coloured neighbors who live under the same sovereignty.”³⁰ Pim points directly to the ways in which the racial horizon of the US served as both precedent and warning for South Africa:

I often wonder whether the enormous developments in our methods and means of locomotion during the last 100 years have not unduly shifted the standpoint from which we view the world as a whole. Physical barriers between nations have well-nigh disappeared, and a good many things appear to have been done on the assumption that differences of race disappeared with them. This is not so. These differences, even between white nations, extend far down into the foundations of society; *and though at present the great cauldron of the American Union may seem to be an exception, I am convinced that they will reassert themselves, and that the future will lie with those nations that keep themselves clean, independent, self-sufficing and self-contained.*³¹

What strikes one here is the notion that in the articulation of a world vision, a post-industrial notion of globalization, there is the persistent marking out of an idea of

³⁰ Pim, “The Question of Race,” 7.

³¹ Ibid., emphasis added.

modernity, decidedly a racist one; a racist modernity that consistently *thinks through* the examples of the United States and South Africa.

South African J. E. Holloway, writing on the proceedings of the 1933 Native Economic Commission in South Africa, frames his analysis of the Commission's decision to adopt an "adaptationist" policy towards race relations with this succinct appraisal. "The progress among the American Negroes of assimilation, the stages which it has completed and the difficulties in the way of its complete fulfillment, are of great interest to the study of race relations in South Africa", he writes.³²

Holloway's essay, entitled "The American Negro and the South African Abantu – A Study in Assimilation" and originally read as a speech at the meeting of the Pretoria Branch of the Economic Society of South Africa in 1933, lays out an argument for the perceived dangers of an assimilationist approach to race relations as witnessed in the United States, and in the South specifically. Holloway notes that the Native Economic Commission, rather than adopting an assimilationist approach, "affirmed their adherence to an adaptationist approach to the handling of the problems which concern the Native."³³ Adaptationism, Holloway explains, purports to "take out of the Bantu past what is good, and even what is merely neutral, and, together with what is good of European culture for the Abantu, building up a Bantu future."³⁴ Not simply a racist historiographical re-envisioning of the past, this program – what amounts to racial and social engineering – is explained through a series of botanical and biological metaphors whereby, "The adaptationist aims at transforming, at giving shape and direction to what is growing, or, to vary the metaphor, at grafting on the existing

³² Holloway, "The American Negro and the South African Abantu," 423.

³³ *Ibid.*, 421.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

stock. His view of human beings is essentially evolutionary.... Their reactions are largely conditioned by their racial past and are therefore difficult to destroy.”³⁵

The remainder of Holloway’s treatise details the nature and extent to which assimilation – delineating between economic, social, and racial forms of assimilation – had progressed within the United States, as well as the possible lessons to be learned and, indeed, warnings to be heeded from what is ultimately viewed as the failed project of assimilation in the United States. Holloway, like Evans and many other South Africans, felt that the segregation of the South, while lauded by many across the Atlantic, was ‘too little, too late.’ Slavery was blamed for a level of assimilation that precluded the future effectiveness of a regime of separate development. Noting that the US was not only a slaving society but also a settler colonial one, Holloway distinguishes the relationship between the “American Negro” and the “American Indian” and each group’s respective relationship to the US state. Whereas “the institution of slavery made it an easy matter to destroy their [slaves] primitive economic conceptions and substitute therefor the more advanced conceptions of their masters...The Red Indian, being a free man, was not subjected to this process.”³⁶ Leaving alone any number of problems with these statements, I want to highlight the comparisons Holloway is mapping out between various racial policies of governance between the US and South Africa, making the comparison quite explicit: “Our [South African] blacks, like the American Reds, have never been slaves.”³⁷ Indeed, this is key for Holloway and others who would cite the American example as potentially formative for a young South African state. That is, unlike Black slaves in the US, indigenous, First Nation peoples of the US, much like the

³⁵ Ibid., 422.

³⁶ Ibid., 425.

³⁷ Ibid., 426.

indigenous peoples of southern Africa, were perceived to be less effected by European culture and thus somehow ‘closer’ to their own, and thus a process of separating them out from the national body (politic) was made infinitely easier. The Native American Reservation System – wherein, Holloway notes, “their [Native Americans] rights as free individuals were recognized” – was key to this proposed commensurability with the South African “Abantu,” also perceived to be closer to an autochthonous, and thus supposedly free, state of being.

With less of the rhetorical flourish and bucolic nostalgia of Evans, Holloway is pragmatic and explicit in his recommendations based on this transatlantic comparison. He notes that while “[t]he Americans...have followed a policy of assimilation of Negroes...[they] are as far from a solution to the problem of social and racial assimilation as we are in South Africa.”³⁸ Despite nearly a century and a half of an assimilationist experiment, Holloway notes the lack of progress this approach had affected, as well as the perceived problems it has produced in the United States.³⁹ If the example set by the US is clear, so to are the proposed paths leading from this warning for South Africa. Holloway is clear when he writes that either a country be willing to accept the “ultimate and complete” assimilation of white and black elements or this course should be totally avoided. Moreover, his prescription for South Africa based on the experience of the US offers another uncanny prefiguration of apartheid, especially for its resonance with Hendrik Verwoerd’s later “separate development” platform. Holloway writes that “[a] Bantu community developed” – and let his word *developed* be stressed – “on the basis of its own cultural heritage may

³⁸ Ibid., 431.

³⁹ Holloway spends a long digression on the difficulty, when speaking of racial assimilation in the US, to accurately ‘decipher’ the amount of ‘mixed’ blood in the population. Clearly this type of creolization presented as anathema to the increasingly taxonomical policy paradigms informing the construction of the South African state.

in time *become a separate, homogeneous civilized group living in peace and contentment and full opportunity for progress next to but apart from the White man.*"⁴⁰ Holloway ends in a prophetic pitting of segregation against assimilation by quoting popular African-American intellectual Booker T. Washington's famous hand metaphor and again "warning of the danger of pursuing a policy of assimilation in this country [South Africa]."⁴¹

Maurice Evans also prophesizes in the opening line of his text that, "Many signs and portents are in the air showing that among the many questions calling for solution...that of the relations of the races hitherto regarded as civilized with those we have been accustomed to consider backward, will be the world-wide and important one."⁴² And within this global vision, the racist platforms of the US and South Africa loomed as harbingers of sorts, precisely because of how the racial dynamic in each country was viewed: "The Union of South Africa" Evans claims, "is the country in which the problem (of race) is most nearly like what it is in the Southern States."⁴³ Envisioning the problem as simultaneously quite cosmic – unfolding as part of a world historical process – and quite grounded, determined by and determining of racial relationships to land, he writes that "[t]he question the Fates have set both countries is this – How to ensure that two races so different, yet living in the same land, shall each have opportunity for its full development, without clashing and *without fusion.*"⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Ibid., 431-2; emphasis added.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Evans, *Black and White*, 1.

⁴³ Ibid., V.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 4; emphasis added.

In a strange triangulation of advice and moral precedent on the racial governance front, Evans reverses the ‘flow’ of advice and precedent and offers the South the

words of an English man: The running of a tropical Colony is of all tests the most searching as to the development of a nation that attempts it; to see helpless people and not oppress them, to see great wealth and not confiscate it, to have power and not abuse it, to raise the natives and not sink yourself – these are the supreme tests of a nation’s spirit.⁴⁵

What this triangulation points to is not only the influence and affinity – if largely unacknowledged – between the US and South Africa, and especially where issues of racial policy were concerned, but it also more explicitly and accurately figures the United States as not only a participant in the application of colonial and racist technologies, but as an innovator and pioneer of those very technologies influencing the larger colonial world. While much of the history of the US is reluctant to admit that colonial practices were part of its statecraft and foreign policy, Evans’s and others’ statements reveal the extent to which the US actually played a formative role in the development of technologies structuring the intensification of imperialism in the early twentieth century. I argue that this history, of the globalizing force of technologies of racial governance emanating from the US during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, lays the common ground for a discussion of not only apartheid and segregation across these two contexts, but also for the after-effects of more than a century of racist dispensations in both. It is crucial to understanding

⁴⁵ Ibid., 279.

how recent claims for reparative justice against racism, whether in the US or South Africa, continue to be informed by this shared history of the forces of a globalizing modernity, a decidedly racist one.

It should also be noted here the intense affinity which Hendrik Verwoerd himself displayed towards the American social sciences in general and the disciplines of psychology and sociology in particular. Roberta Miller chronicles an often forgotten aspect of the apartheid politician's earlier life and career as an academic, most notably at the University of Stellenbosch. Verwoerd was first a Professor of Psychology and then served as the head of South Africa's first Department of Sociology and Social Work, also at Stellenbosch. Prior to his appointments as Professor, Verwoerd turned down a bursary to study at Oxford and instead took up post-graduate study in Germany, and upon his return voyage home traveled through the United States, visiting "psychology laboratories" at Harvard and other institutions. Miller notes that "Verwoerd's brief visit to the United States on his return trip to South Africa was far more important to his intellectual development than was his much longer stay in Germany."⁴⁶ It is also interesting to note that while Verwoerd does not explicitly refer to the scientific management or social engineering of Taylorism, popular in both corporate America and schools of social scientific thought during the time of Verwoerd's trip to the US, his "later racial policies, particularly apartheid, are widely referred to as 'social engineering.'"⁴⁷ Whether or not Verwoerd's role in the design of apartheid – as a project of social engineering – can be linked to the influence of Taylorism specifically, the influence of American social science on both his academic career and his later life as a politician is clear. By the end of his of his time as a Professor at Stellenbosch, "Verwoerd became recognized

⁴⁶ Miller, "Science and Society," 640

⁴⁷ Ibid., 641.

not only as an expert in American social science but also as a proponent of American social welfare systems, and his department at Stellenbosch was known as the place where one could learn about American social welfare.”⁴⁸ As a project that attempted to map a racial/racist modernity across the social, cultural, and economic landscape of South Africa, apartheid found roots and resonances across the Atlantic in both the construction of the American nation-state as well as notions of industrial and social engineering. It seems accurate to say that within both the imagination and practical training of Verwoerd – ‘the architect of apartheid – that the American social landscape loomed quite large, forming a horizon of racial modernity and precedent for what would become the future of South Africa for most of the twentieth century.

These ideas of a racial modernity resonating across the Atlantic are imperative for Evans and others. Indeed, much of this image of modernity will later come to form the backbone of Afrikaner nationalism as well as apartheid ideology. For all of these so-called ‘liberal’ segregationists, the paramount warning was embodied by US assimilation: the “great sin of the white man against the black,” writes Evans, “lay not in slavery, nor in economic exploitation, but in the debouchment of the race by illicit sexual intercourse.”⁴⁹ Above and beyond all the ills and violence perpetrated by the practices of slavery, and the systemic disenfranchisement of generations, Evans and others are unwavering in their claims that violating the sanctity of each races’ supposed uniqueness amounts to the greatest moral as well as national transgression. The material trappings of race, or rather the infrastructural models to which racial ideas are able to attach vary greatly according to the expedients of the moment and the place. However, what Evans in particular distills into a quite unmistakable essential

⁴⁸ Ibid., 646.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 281.

fear lurking behind these (political, economic) systems, is recognizable across and within each context. The idea being that these affinities would be in the service of a shared racialist future.

Racial Neoliberalism: Racism in/as the Private Sphere

I want to turn now to think about contemporary racial and ideological dispensations as a way to map the continuing resonances between the US and South Africa. David T. Goldberg's recent book offers a titular provocation: *Are we Postracial Yet?* To which he has responded with the revealing equivocation of: "Yes, but not in the way we think." "Postracial," Goldberg explains, is "The claim we today inhabit – or have come close(r) to inhabiting – a postracial society embeds the insistence that key conditions of social life are less and less now predicated on racial preferences, choices and resources."⁵⁰ In short, crossing the threshold of the postracial, perhaps ironically or contradictorily, opens up a new panoramic dispensation of race. The postracial is the rebirth of raciality. The postracial is a function of the ideology of "racial neoliberalism," which Goldberg expounds upon in his earlier volume *The Threat of Race*, and in which early forms of racism are seen to actually morph into a diffuse and pervasive social agent within political and economic configurations as the state publically disavows racism in order to move beyond its national racist past. Goldberg explains how under the current neoliberal dispensation – now planetary in scope – that race and racism have "been placed behind a wall of private preference expression, of privatized choice."⁵¹ He goes on to say that

Neoliberalism...does not reduce the state sphere of

⁵⁰ Goldberg, *Are We Postracial Yet?*, 2

⁵¹ Goldberg, *The Threat of Race*, 334.

government regulation and intervention altogether. It dramatically shifts the relation of state to private sphere...In doing so it thus also ensures a space for extending socio-racial interventions – demographic exclusions, belittlements, forms of control, ongoing humiliation, and the like – difficult or impossible any longer for the state to carry out baldly in its own name.⁵²

Moreover, racial neoliberalism, or rather, the privatization and decoupling of racism from the state, has historiographical implications in that it serves to quarantine the state (politically) and the nation (mythologically) from its racist past. Goldberg writes elsewhere that “[p]ostracialism is reduced to reinstating a sociality of purity only now superficially scrubbed of its explicit pernicious terms of characterization. In its name racisms are manufactured and manifested more silently, informally, expressions of private preference schemes rather than of formalized state policy.”⁵³ This is largely the danger with so-called “postracial” dispositions; the nation is resacralized, baptized in the waters of privatization, and thus are its racist sins washed away. To be clear, racism doesn’t disappear; it’s just no longer the state’s business, so to speak. I want to add here the provocation that nowhere are these logics of racial neoliberalism more evident than in South Africa and the United States. This is partly a result of the trajectories of race in both countries; that is, from race explicitly forming the state projects of both nations, to a ‘post-racial’ state project of denialism of race as operative in either state ideology or state functions. This more global history that I am trying to map, between South Africa and the US, asks us to think about how in the

⁵² Ibid., 334-5

⁵³ Goldberg, “A Tale of Two of Obamas,” 211.

present moment of both spaces (The Black Lives Matter movement, the Fees Must Fall movement, the Marikana Massacre of miners by the South African state and events in Ferguson, MO and increasingly more places in the US) are related. As well as how these events might be addressed as part of a global crisis of racism rather than specifically national ones. How, I want to ask, are solidarities between the Black Lives Matter and the Fees/Rhodes Must Fall movements articulated within a long history of racism and resistance between the US and South Africa?

Conclusion: Decolonization and “Imagining a new country”

I want to conclude with another short quote from Mamdani, who, in writing about America’s contemporary dispositions towards race, offers an uncanny description of post-Apartheid South Africa. He writes:

If America’s greatest social successes have been registered on the frontier of race, the same cannot be said of the frontier of colonialism. If the race question marks the cutting edge of American reform, the native question highlights the limits of that reform. The thrust of American struggles has been to deracialize but not to decolonize. A deracialized America still remains a settler society and a settler state.⁵⁴

We need to think seriously about just how far this term “deracialized” carries us across the racial topographies of the US, as well as South Africa for that matter. If by deracialized we mean that racism as an overt practice of violence against another individual is no longer condoned by the state, then I believe the comparison with South Africa is a productive one. Neither country, whether in its political doctrines or its actual legislation, officially condones practices of racism. Thinking about

⁵⁴ Mamdani, “Settler Colonialism,” 12.

processes of “deracialization” also exposes precisely the distance between the ideology of the state, which sees itself as non-racial, or past, or post its racial historical moment, and the realities of how race and racism operate everyday on the ground. The idea of a deracialized America reveals the extent to which the US has failed to decolonize fully, and in this way I believe the resonances with South Africa are particularly vital.

Mamdani is right to emphasize America’s continuing colonial nature. It is within the historical aporia of indigenous rights/justice in the US that the American narrative of postraciality has been allowed to grow. Postraciality, a discourse based in and continuing to emanate from the experience of the Civil Rights moment, is an alibi for both a continued, if sublimated and coded, racism, as well as for the denial of a persistent colonial character within the American social and political psyche. As an active, often violent, debate about the myriad forms of decolonization still necessary in South Africa continues to shape the social and political landscape in this country, the decolonial discussion has not been part of the mainstream discourse in the US. Indeed, the discussion of race – whatever its other inadequacies at various moments might be – continues to eclipse, or perhaps preclude, an acknowledgement of the colonial nightmare serving as relief against which the American dream is imagined. The tenor of the contemporary discourse on decolonization in South Africa on the other hand demonstrates how far these political and social rectifications still need to move. I want to suggest that there are also some moments within South Africa’s transition that resonate with discussions of race in the United States. For instance, in 1999, then President Thabo Mbeki writes of South Africa that

an illegitimate state was imposed upon the majority of
the people – a state whose codified system of injustice

the international community justly declared a crime against humanity. It is this reality of a state founded on conquest that led to the gross violations of human rights whose investigations constitutes the heart of the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).⁵⁵

What Mbeki points to is the context into which the TRC was tasked: an imperative that at its heart was fundamentally about re-imagining a new nation, carving out a common ground for ways of being and national identity. Mbeki's emphasis on van Riebeeck's now decrepit "thorn-bush hedge" meant to delineate colony from the "African hordes" highlights the fact that the TRC was also meant to re-imagine the very landscape of the nation itself. Decolonization is predicated upon investment in and imagining of a de-colonial space; it also emphasizes how a truly decolonial national position is predicated upon this fuller view of history. This is a point for which Mbeki has been taken to task, too. Similarly, South Africa's Fees Must Fall movement increasingly positions itself as having political aims which exceed the horizon of free higher education, advocating for a complete structural readjustment of South African society at a very fundamental level, something most young people today believe to be a continuing failure of the post-apartheid dispensation.

We can and certainly must call to account the successfulness of this process of radical re-imagining. Speaking about the TRC, Goldberg puts it quite succinctly: "Reconciliation, restoration, reconstruction, one might say, pretty much without redistribution or recompense."⁵⁶ He could just as easily be referring to the United States' relationship to its own history of slavery and segregation, where the material is sacrificed on the altar of the symbolic. Ta-Nehisi Coates is interesting here for the

⁵⁵ Mbeki, "Haunted by History," 95.

⁵⁶ Goldberg, *The Threat of Race*, 308.

ways in which his recent book *Between the World and Me*, in its antiracial stances, articulates a certain justice-based philosophy of history. In this epistolary text addressed to his son, Coates writes:

You must struggle to remember this past in all its nuance, error, and humanity.

You must resist the common urge toward the comforting narrative of divine law, toward fairy tales that imply some irrepressible justice. The enslaved were not bricks in your road, and their lives were not chapters in your redemptive history. They were people turned to fuel for the American machine. Enslavement was not destined to end, and it is wrong to claim our present circumstance – no matter how improved – as the redemption for the lives of people who never asked for the posthumous, untouchable glory of dying for their children.⁵⁷

Slavery – or the struggle to end it, for that matter – does not culminate inevitably in the Civil Rights movement any more than in the presidency of Barack Obama. To think so is an act of historical narrative making, the projection of redemption back into the archive of lived experience. Coates reminds his son, the intended of this long epistolary address, that appropriating the narrative of slavery as the “redemption song” of Blacks in the US today runs the risk of dehumanizing those very people who died under this vicious system. Not only have their bodies been historically “transfigured... into sugar tobacco, cotton and gold,” as Coates says, but the narrative which takes for granted the end of slavery in some grand march towards

⁵⁷ Coates, *Between the World and Me*, 70.

freedom, further transfigures these bodies into metaphors of struggle; historically dehumanizing them further.

According to Coates, Black success today cannot be read as the inevitable or the direct result of the sacrifices of these slave bodies, because as he writes, “Our triumphs can never compensate for this.” And, he continues, “[p]erhaps our triumphs are not even the point. Perhaps struggle is all we have because the *god of history is an atheist, and nothing about the world is meant to be.*”⁵⁸ What Coates articulates here is a philosophy of history devoid of historical acts of redemptive revisionism. The struggle against slavery was never *meant* to culminate in anything; comfortably believing so is a denial of the daily danger that still defines our racial realities in the US today. *Historical atheism* precisely because it rejects the belief that a culmination means disenchanting ourselves of an eschatological narrative structure to struggle. Eschatology is both belief in a future and projection into the past; that each moment of struggle is cumulative and tending towards an end point of “irrepressible justice” or irrevocable freedom; daily our news feeds remind us of how this is not true. Coates is able to hold both the *longue durée* of the “never-ending night” of being Black in the US simultaneously with the ability to resist the grand narrative of redemption. There is no redemption in a place where Black people are many times more likely than whites to be killed by police in 2016. To put this the other way around, the historical experience of slavery has everything to do with the racial violence we see today across the US, it permeates all the minutiae of each act of racism. Quarantining slavery to the past, moving towards one side of the historical spectrum which is otherwise marked by the inertia of inevitable justice not only metaphorizes slavery but it also constructs a particular view of historical movement which is the same

⁵⁸ Ibid., 70-71; emphasis added.

version animating ideas of “postraciality”. Race no longer matters, thus racism no longer exists. Slavery has been fought and overcome in the long historical past, and therefore it does not haunt our racial reality today.

Coates and others argue that the ghost of racial slavery has never been more present, never more haunting of our national house, than when we name ourselves enlightened and disenchanted of our racial and racist pasts. The end of slavery, Coates suggests, signifies just that: the end of the institution of slavery. It signifies neither the end of institutional racism, nor a paradigmatic shift in American society whereby race ceases to be integral and operative. Keeanga Yamahtta-Taylor captures this historical process of contradiction, writing that “Black people were not freed into an American dream, but into what Malcom X described as an “American nightmare” of economic inequality and unchecked injustice.”⁵⁹ Yamahtta-Taylor continues to claim that

[f]or those who consider mastery of American politics and Black political representation as the highest expression of inclusion in the mainstream, then we are surely in the heyday of American ‘race relations.’ Yet, paradoxically, at a moment when African Americans have achieved what no rational person could have imagined when the Civil War ended, we have simultaneously entered a new period of Black protest, Black radicalization, and the birth of the new Black Left.⁶⁰

This has also been the terrain of the Rhodes/Fees Must Fall movements: both a calling to account for the how little transformation has been effected, but also a subjecting of this contemporary deficit to a much longer historical analysis in order to

⁵⁹ Yamahtta-Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter*, 192.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 193

see the persistent post-apartheid structural inequalities of South Africa as not solely an apartheid narrative but as part of the history of colonization. Likewise, the United States, as Mamdani points out, has largely failed to recognize or admit its historical – much less its contemporary – colonial character. This has been a connection repeatedly made by the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, which is one of the reasons it continues to stand at the vanguard of imaginative change in the US. Recent official statements made by BLM in solidarity with the Sioux groups protecting water rights at Standing Rock, North Dakota, declare that “We are in an ongoing struggle for our lives and this struggle is shaped by the shared history between Indigenous Peoples and Black people in America, connecting that stolen land and stolen labor from Black and brown people built this country.”⁶¹ This connection, between American coloniality and institutional racism demands to be made clear, especially for the ways in which this long history continues to frame the struggles of the present. As the BLM writers argue, “there is no Black liberation without Indigenous Sovereignty.”⁶² These forms of trans-struggle solidarities, I argue, are prerequisite for a meaningful and paradigmatic shift in the nature of race and racism in America, and South Africa as well. They are also part of the historical processes requisite for the imagining of a new country, and a distinctly de-colonial/de-colonized one.

I end with another quote from Ta-Nehesi Coates who suggests that precisely what American needs is to

imagine a new country...What I’m talking about is more than recompense for past injustices – more than a handout, a payoff, hush money, or a reluctant bribe. What I am talking about is a national reckoning that would lead to a

⁶¹ <http://blacklivesmatter.com/solidarity-with-standing-rock/>

⁶² Ibid.

spiritual renewal...Reparations would mean a revolution of the American consciousness, a reconciling of our self-image as the great democratizer with the facts of our history.⁶³

If the transition from apartheid positioned South African at the vanguard of a non-racial modernity in the 1990s, one in which the country at least started down the path of imagining a new nation, then some twenty years on we can say that the same contradictions and possibilities haunting the South African context continue to plague the American one.

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⁶³ Coates, "The Case for Reparations," 53.

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